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Written by Penny Vincenzi

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Into Temptation

The Spoils of Time: 3

Penny Vincenzi



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The Main Characters

LONDON

Lady Celia Lytton, *senior editor at Lyttons publishing house*

Lord Arden, *her new husband*

Giles, *twins Venetia and Adele, and Kit, her children*

Jay Lytton, *their cousin*

Boy Warwick, *Venetia's husband*

Elsbeth Warwick, *their daughter*

Keir Brown, *Elsbeth's boyfriend*

Geordie MacColl, *Adele's husband*

Clio, *their daughter*

Noni and Lucas, *Adele's children by Luc Lieberman, deceased*

Sebastian Brooke, *best-selling author published by Lyttons*

Clementine Hartley, *another Lyttons author*

COUNTRY

Billy Miller, *brother of Barty*

Joan, *his wife, and their sons Joe and Michael*

NEW YORK

Barty Miller, *head of Lyttons New York*

Jenna Elliott, *her daughter by Laurence Elliott, deceased*

Cathy Patterson, *a schoolfriend of Jenna's*

Charlie Patterson, *her father*

Jamie Elliott, *brother of Laurence and Jenna's trustee*

Kyle Brewer, *a literary agent and Jenna's trustee*

Marcus Forrest, *editorial director of Lyttons New York*

Isabella (Izzie) Brooke, *Sebastian's daughter*

Mike Parker and Nick Neill, *copywriters, Izzie's employers*

Part One
'Rich with the spoils of time . . .'

Thomas Gray
'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'

Chapter 1

Lady Celia Lytton had been close to death several times in her long life. Not always literally – although there had been occasions, a cycle ride through a Blitz-torn London night, a long jolting car ride while enduring a miscarriage, when the Grim Reaper had appeared to have her very clearly in his sights – but also by repute. And there was no more outstanding example of the latter than the spring day in 1953, Coronation year, when she announced not only her engagement to her old flame, Lord Arden, but her retirement from the House of Lytton. Most of literary London promptly concluded that she was (at very best) in the early stages of a terminal illness. They then raised their lunchtime glasses of gin and tonic, or Martini, or champagne, to her dazzling memory, expressed their huge regret at the ending of a life that had so enriched the literary and social scene for almost five decades, and settled down to speculate over what the death certificate might eventually say, and who exactly might step into her always elegant shoes.

They were hardly surprising of course, those reports. For as long as anyone could remember, Celia Lytton had declared firmly and publicly that only death would separate her from the publishing house of Lytton, truly the greatest love of her life. This was in addition to another of her favourite maxims: that for her, at any rate, no man could possibly replace work as a source of happiness.

Indeed she *was* Lyttons to most people; she embodied it, with her brilliant innovative mind, her flawless editorial judgement, her unique style, her perfect taste. It had always been so, since she had joined the company almost fifty years earlier as a very young girl; but since the death of Oliver Lytton, her husband, a year earlier, she had become more than a figurehead, more than an inspiration, she was its life force. The younger generation might hold shares in it, care passionately about it, bring skill and talent and a great deal of hard work to it, but they trailed behind her in authority. No major book was acquired or published, no editorial innovation considered, no financial investment made, no senior member of staff hired, without her agreement.

Not even the theoretical requirement to gain the approval of Lyttons New York for all major developments had dented her glassy supremacy; ‘I know what they – or rather she – will feel about it,’ she would say whenever anyone raised the matter, and of course she was perfectly right. There were, as was well known, very good personal as well as professional reasons . . .

Lady Celia herself, who would have greatly enjoyed the furore had she been able to witness it, was sitting on a chaise-longue set in the window of her sitting room in her house in Cheyne Walk, looking, as always, perfectly groomed and extraordinarily beautiful, surrounded by her large family, some of them more visibly distressed than others, with the manuscript of her youngest son’s new book (delivered two months late the previous evening, to her deep displeasure) on the table beside her.

It was Venetia Warwick, one of her twin daughters, who spoke first.

‘Mummy, are you really sure about this?’

‘To what exactly are you referring, Venetia? My engagement or my retirement?’

‘Well – both. But more especially, I suppose, the retirement.’

‘Absolutely.’ Lady Celia’s voice was brisk. ‘Where could there be any doubt? You’ve been working for Lyttons, Venetia, for – what? Fifteen years. With considerable success, I would add. You must agree it’s time I moved over. Even I can see that. Heavens above, you’ve told me so in more ways than one over the past few years. In your position I would feel relief, if not a keen sense of anticipation. Which I am quite sure is what you, Giles, must be feeling. And don’t waste time denying it, because we shall both know you’re lying. Now then, you must all excuse me, I’m going to meet Lord Arden for luncheon. I think I deserve a little fun after the rather dreary morning I’ve had. But I want you all to dine here tonight, so that we can discuss everything more fully.’

It was only when she walked into the dining room of the Ritz, on the arm of her newly affianced, known to his intimates as Bunny, accepting congratulations on her engagement here, expressions of regret at her retirement there, that people began to realise, with a sense of considerable disbelief, it was just possible that not only was she in very good health, but she had actually meant what she said. She was simply going to retire.

◦

The sense of disbelief, both within and without the house of Lytton was hardly surprising. Her office, on the first floor of the new Lytton House, in Grosvenor Square, was still the heart of the company; Giles Lytton, her eldest son, might be Managing Director, Venetia Warwick might be in charge of sales and development and of that strange new science – or was it an art? – marketing, Jay Lytton might be Editorial Director, but it was to Celia they all deferred, with varying degrees of grace. And Giles might grumble and resent that deference, and Jay might kick against it at times, and Venetia might question the need for it in her particular area, but none of them seriously considered setting it aside.

And now here she was, announcing that she was giving it all up, was walking away, not just from Lyttons, but from the thing which had mattered most to her for the whole of her life: her work. And this in order to marry – only a year after the death of her husband and the ending of their legendary, almost fifty-year marriage – to become the Countess of Arden (though she declared she would not entirely relinquish the name of Lytton), to take up residence in Lord Arden's dazzling vast eighteenth-century house in Scotland. Dazzling it might be, said everyone, as this fresh shock reached the ears of literary society, but it was a very long way from London. Of course Lord Arden had a house, and a very fine one, in Belgrave Square, but he spent a lot of time at Glennings, as Glenworth Castle was more familiarly known.

Indeed, since the death of his first wife, with her well-known penchant for stable lads, he spent far more time there than in London. He was a countryman. He liked to ride and hunt and shoot and fish, and although he enjoyed the opera, had a box at Glyndebourne and would even visit La Scala and the Paris Opera to hear the divine Maria Callas sing, he was never actually happier than when standing up to his waist in the freezing water of his own river, in pursuit of salmon, or taking the hideously dangerous fences of his own estate in pursuit of Scotland's foxes. What on earth was she going to do up there, everyone wondered, the pampered, perfectly dressed and coiffed Lady Celia, that most urban of creatures as she seemed to be – forgetting that she had grown up a country girl herself, on her own father's estate, and, indeed, had first met Lord Arden when she was quite a young girl, not in the hothouse atmosphere of a London nightclub but at a house party in Shropshire where she had gone out with the guns in the driving rain and bagged more birds than he had.

Of course there had been other chapters in their saga, which had

taken place in extremely sophisticated and indeed infamous surroundings; but in her late sixties and her new, raw loneliness, Lady Celia Lytton suddenly found herself possessed by a profound longing to return to her roots. And Peter Arden was miraculously able to lead her to them.

‘Want to—?’

‘Of course.’

‘Berkeley Square?’

‘Montpelier would be—’

‘Yes, it would. I’ll follow you.’

The Lytton twins as they were still referred to, despite being married women with a large number of children between them, still communicated thus: in the strange, incomprehensible shorthand speech which they had employed since childhood and which drove all around them, but particularly their husbands and their children, to distraction. It was not purely habit that made them cling to it; it was also extremely useful.

They drew up outside Adele’s house in Montpelier Street at almost the same time, Venetia in her rather stately Jaguar, Adele in the dark-green MG convertible that was currently her pride and joy. The house was quiet; Adele’s two older children were at school, and her small new daughter was out with the nanny.

‘But let’s go up to the studio. They might—’

‘Let’s. You’re so lucky, so peaceful—’

‘Yes, well, if you wanted peacefulness, having six children was not the way to go about it.’

‘I know, I know. Shall we—?’

‘Be nice. I’ll get some. Geordie put a case of Sancerre in the cellar last night. Grab some glasses and go on up.’

Adele’s photographic studio, occupying the whole of the third floor of her house, with its glass roof and uncurtained windows was dazzling in the April sunshine. Venetia grimaced and started pulling blinds down.

‘Can’t cope with this sort of light. Not at my age. Desperately unflattering.’

‘Venetia, you’re so vain. Anyway, no one’s going to see you except me.’

‘Geordie might come up.’

‘He won’t. He’s lunching with some old lady who lived through the First World War. For the latest book.’

'Well he's bound to come back.'

'Not for ages,' said Adele confidently. 'Sure to bump into someone who's heard the news. Here, give me the glasses.'

'It is quite—'

'I know. Truly so.'

'I mean, the thought of Lyttons without—'

'I bet you quite—'

'In a way. In a way truly not.'

Adele looked at her. 'I s'pose. What do you think—?'

'God knows. Tired, maybe?'

'When was Mummy ever—?'

'Never. Ciggys?'

'Mmm, thanks.'

Adele took a cigarette, lit it and inhaled heavily. 'The really big question is—'

'I know. I know. Why—'

'I mean, when—'

'All those years. And Kit and everything.'

'Of course,' said Adele, 'he is a real honey.'

'I suppose you should know. Your escape, and everything.'

'Well yes. But still—'

'I know. Still doesn't – Why him? Why not—'

'Well one thing's quite certain,' said Adele, taking a large sip of wine, 'she won't tell us. Or indeed anyone else.'

'Except perhaps Kit.'

'And what about—'

'I wonder if she warned him?'

'Doubt it. My God he'll be—'

'Won't he? Absolutely furious. And so hurt. Poor darling.' Venetia's large dark eyes were heavy with sympathy.

'Poor darling indeed,' said Adele. 'It doesn't make any sense at all, does it?'

'Absolutely none at all.'

Of course it would have been Venetia who was singled out for praise that morning by their mother, Giles thought, as he walked back to Lytton House; no word of praise for him, in his caretaking of Lyttons, his successful steering of the house through the difficult post-war austerity, no mention of his best-selling and unique history of the war, told entirely by the ordinary men and women who had fought in it. Just a tart observation that he must be feeling some relief at her departure.

Which of course he was: they all were, deny it though they might. To be free at last of her presence, however brilliant, her dominance, however well-earned, her direction, however inspired: free to make their own way, their own successes, their own mistakes, even, to depart from the rigid routes she had set for the conduct of Lyttons and its business would be wonderfully liberating. It had been far worse since his father's death; that had seemed to drive her even harder in her conviction that only she could know what was right for Lyttons, what had to be done.

She seemed to have buried, with Oliver and his gentle restraining presence, any degree of self-doubt; before then she had always had to pit her will against his – as strong in its own way as her own. The day after his funeral, she had summoned them all to her office, and faced them with a composure so steely it dared them to offer so much as a word or touch of sympathy or concern, and told them that they must all continue as Oliver would have wished: and then proceeded to do exactly what she wished herself. At first they felt they could not argue with her, lost as she was in her great and undoubted grief; what they had not foreseen was how swiftly their compliance had been taken for granted, accepted as the norm, and how ruthlessly she would trade on it.

Useless for Giles to point out that they were all on the board, in nominally equal positions, all reporting with equal responsibility to New York on major purchases of books and authors' contracts, the twice-yearly budget and senior staff changes. Useless for Venetia to tell her mother that business practice had changed, that autocracy within a company, however inspired, was no longer acceptable and especially one in which she no longer held a controlling share; or indeed for Jay to affirm that the acquiring of books should not be conducted as an entirely personal process of choice; that was how Celia ran Lyttons, had always run it, and she found any suggestion that things might change quite simply absurd.

She was right of course. Giles had felt a strong sense of relief as he read the announcements in *The Bookseller* and *The Publishers' Gazette* – and what a way to tell not only the world but her own family, and without the faintest hint of it beforehand – that she was leaving the world of publishing from that day forward. It had been Venetia who had alerted him to it, to the announcement, had telephoned early that morning, her voice sounding at the same time excited and strained; he had rushed to pick up his own copies, still lying on the breakfast table,

neatly folded with his post by Mrs Parks, the housekeeper, and read them, shaking his head in disbelief before sitting down rather heavily and staring slightly blankly at Helena. Helena had questioned him and then said with a note of satisfaction in her brisk voice, 'And about time too Giles. At last you'll get your chance.' And then most uncharacteristically, had burst into tears.

He had been touched by those tears; Helena had fought most fiercely for him and his right to run the company ever since she had married him over twenty years ago. The fact that her efforts had often been tactless, useless and indeed even counter-productive did not change the basic fact that she loved and admired him and was permanently angry that his talents were not given any proper recognition. Which made Giles forgive her a great deal else; her lack of humour, her overbearing manner, her increasing tendency to treat him like one of the children. It was said that Helena Lytton had even been heard to tell her husband across a dinner party table to talk less and get on with his food.

For some reason, the success of Giles's book, *The People's War*, published by Lyttons in 1949, had not particularly pleased Celia; she saw it as a rather unnecessary distraction for him from the proper business of running the company. In fact, Giles knew that very little he had done properly pleased her (with the possible exception of his Military Cross). It was a very hard thing for him to bear.

He went over to Helena and patted her rather awkwardly on the shoulder; physical contact of any kind between them, not simply sexual, had long since ceased.

'There there,' he said, 'don't cry. No need for that.'

'I know there's no need,' said Helena, sniffing and wiping her eyes on the back of her hand, 'I just can't help it. I'm so happy for you Giles. You've waited so long. Of course you still won't have what is your right but – well, at least, you are the Managing Director. It's marvellous. I wonder who her shares will go to?' she added, the 'her' taking on a vicious note. Helena and Celia had always disliked one another; in the year since Oliver's death, the dislike had turned to something more insidious, more ugly. In both of them.

'God knows.' In fact he had not even thought of them.

'They should go to you. As the senior member of the family.'

'I don't suppose they will. Anyway, we only hold – individually at any rate – such a nominal amount, it's not as if we still owned the company. It hardly matters, does it?'

'But Giles—'

‘Helena, please. Don’t start. Not now. I dare say she will hold on to them. Whatever she says about retirement.’

‘Well she has no right to.’

‘She will think she has every right,’ he said and sighed.

There had been no mention of the shares; no doubt Celia would use them as a weapon to declare her favouritism, to indicate the area she saw as most important. It wasn’t quite true that she held so few they were scarcely worth considering; due to Barty’s considerable generosity, the family still held 32 per cent of the London company shares. Given the great success Lyttons London (as it was now called) had enjoyed over the past five years, those shares were certainly worth having. Thirty-two per cent, the number so easily and charmingly divisible into four: one quarter each for Giles, Venetia, Jay and for Oliver and Celia jointly. It had been most graciously done; so graciously indeed, that Celia, for one, found it easy to overlook the fact that any generosity had been displayed at all.

Giles, all too aware of the need for gratitude, and of the intense discomfort of the situation, still found a wry pleasure in it. Who would have thought, all those years ago, that Barty would come to hold such power over them . . .

He turned his thoughts from Barty and switched back to the present. It would be marvellous; absolutely marvellous without his mother. Of course, he and Venetia and Jay often had their differences of opinion but those differences could now be resolved by discussion, by reasoned, informed debate, taking in factors like profitability, the competition, an author’s track record. As from this afternoon, this very afternoon, he could set up new financial systems, processes of evaluation, long-term planning. Venetia would be pleased, he knew; she found her mother’s conduct within the company anarchic. The only difference between them was that Venetia adored Celia, and fiercely admired and valued her talents. It was a very important difference.

But the greatest puzzle of all, of course, was why Bunny Arden? When everyone had thought, with Oliver dead—

‘Well Cousin Giles.’ Jay walked into his office an hour later. ‘Pretty exciting, isn’t it?’

‘What’s that?’ said Giles cautiously.

‘Oh come on, old chap. We know each other better than that. Celia leaving us to do our job, that’s what. Bloody marvellous. Let’s be

frank. Might even drink to it. I've got a bottle of bubbly next door. How about it?'

Giles nodded slightly wearily, and watched Jay as he went to fetch the champagne. He felt very ambivalent about Jay. Celia adored him, and so did Barty – not that they saw very much of Barty these days of course – and there was no doubt he was everyone's favourite throughout Lyttons. Which was a hard thing to cope with. On the other hand, Giles was unable to dislike him either. Jay was so good-natured, so permanently sunny, his rather bluff manner disguising a brilliant mind and a virtually flawless editorial judgement. He had another quality which made him the company star – an extraordinary ability to win. As well as living out his charmed life at Lyttons as Celia's favourite, he was married to 'one of the most beautiful girls in London' according to *Vogue* where she was frequently featured. Victoria Lytton was tall, slender, blonde, with huge blue eyes and awesomely good legs; as good-natured and charming as Jay, she had already presented him with two sons, and had just embarked on a third pregnancy which she had stated firmly was not only her last, but which would produce a little girl. No one had the slightest doubt that it would.

The extraordinary thing about Jay was that he was not only liked and admired within the company, where his editorial skills combined with a cool financial judgement, and an ability to recognise the strength of business-based arguments, but his authors liked and admired him too. His only fault was that he was inclined to be lazy; life had been too kind to him, too easy, he had long since ceased to be hungry. On the other hand, that very quality gave him an easy, relaxed way with his authors; he always seemed to have plenty of time. He could communicate with them on a deeply sympathetic and instinctive level, and was a most brilliant editor, recognising their sensitivities, valuing their talents, nurturing their hugely individual contribution to the Lytton mix. It was not only the brilliant new young authors – including Kit Lytton himself and a startlingly original female writer called Clementine Hartley, only three years out of Oxford and with two best-selling novels already to her credit – but the older generation too, who found almost to their surprise that they felt valued by and at ease with him: women fiction writers like the great Nancy Arthure, whose success had made Lyttons the envy of the publishing world, Lady Annabel Muirhead, the biographer – and Sebastian Brooke, the venerable elder statesman of the book world, with his elegant time-fantasies written for and loved by children and admired by adults.

Sebastian who had actually had a meeting arranged with Giles and Celia that very afternoon, to discuss the Coronation year edition of his books; Sebastian who had phoned in an appalling rage to enquire why Celia's secretary had seen fit to cancel at half a day's notice so important a meeting; Sebastian who was even now in a taxi travelling to Cheyne Walk, consumed with rage, to elicit an explanation from Celia herself for the true reason behind her announcement; and why she had chosen not to discuss it with him first.