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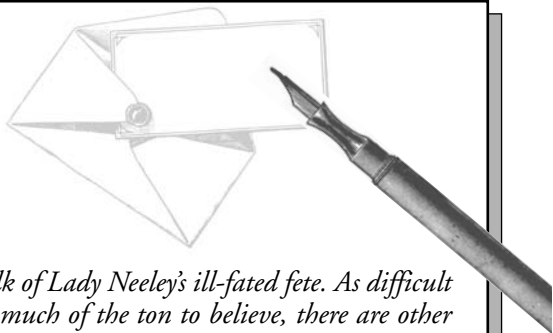
KAREN HAWKINS

MIA RYAN



*Lady  
Whistledown  
Strikes Back*

*You can't keep a good busybody down!*



*Enough talk of Lady Neeley's ill-fated fete. As difficult as it is for much of the ton to believe, there are other subjects worthy of gossip . . .*

LADY WHISTLEDOWN'S SOCIETY PAPERS, 31 MAY 1816

**Passionate glances, barely hidden desires,  
and secret midnight trysts—nothing escapes  
the pen of Society's most revered snoop.**

**Now, by popular demand,  
New York Times bestselling authors—  
JULIA QUINN, SUZANNE ENOCH,  
KAREN HAWKINS, and MIA RYAN—  
deliver four new, never-before-published  
Regency tales of seduction, scandal,  
and heart-soaring romance,  
all scrupulously observed and recorded  
by the inimitable Lady Whistledown!**

*The earl was seen squiring the lady on White Horse Street. It appeared to be an accidental meeting, but as all Dear Readers know, no meeting between unmarried men and women is ever truly accidental.*

LADY WHISTLEDOWN'S SOCIETY PAPERS, 5 JUNE 1816



JULIA QUINN  
SUZANNE ENOCH  
KAREN HAWKINS  
MIA RYAN

*Lady  
Whistledown  
Strikes Back*



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*All Lady Whistledown columns written by Julia Quinn*

*Don't Miss*

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*The First Kiss*



*Julia Quinn*

*For readers everywhere,  
who loved Lady W too much to let her go.*

*And also for Paul,  
even though he took it as a personal victory  
that I managed to involve Star Wars  
in the title of this book.*





## Chapter 1

*This week's most coveted invitation appears to be Lady Neeley's upcoming dinner party, to be held Tuesday evening. The guest list is not long, nor is it remarkably exclusive, but tales have spread of last year's dinner party, or, to be more specific, of the menu, and all London (and most especially those of greater girth) are eager to partake.*

*This Author was not gifted with an invitation and therefore must suffer at home with a jug of wine, a loaf of bread, and this column, but alas, do not feel pity, Dear Reader. Unlike those attending the upcoming gustatory spectacle, This Author does not have to listen to Lady Neeley!*

LADY WHISTLEDOWN'S SOCIETY PAPERS, 27 MAY 1816

Tillie Howard supposed that the night could get worse, but in all truth, she couldn't imagine how.

She hadn't wanted to attend Lady Neeley's dinner party, but her parents had insisted, and so here she was, trying to ignore the fact that her hostess—the occasionally-feared, occasionally-mocked Lady Neeley—had a voice rather like fingernails on slate.

Tillie was also trying to ignore the rumblings of her stomach, which had expected nourishment at least an hour earlier. The invitation had said seven in the evening, and so Tillie and her parents, the Earl and Countess of Canby, had

arrived promptly at half past the hour, with the expectation of being led into supper at eight. But here it was, almost nine, with no sign that Lady Neeley intended to forgo talking for eating anytime soon.

But what Tillie was *most* trying to ignore, what she in fact would have fled the room to avoid, had she been able to figure out a way to do so without causing a scene, was the man standing next to her.

“Jolly fellow, he was,” boomed Robert Dunlop, with that joviality that comes from having consumed just a hair more wine than one ought. “Always ready for a spot of fun.”

Tillie smiled tightly. He was speaking of her brother Harry, who had died nearly one year earlier, on the battlefield at Waterloo. When she and Mr. Dunlop had been introduced, she’d been excited to meet him. She’d loved Harry desperately and missed him with a fierceness that sometimes took her breath away. And she’d thought that it would be wonderful to hear stories of his last days from one of his comrades in arms.

Except Robert Dunlop was not telling her what she wanted to hear.

“Talked about you all the time,” he continued, even though he’d already said as much ten minutes earlier. “’Cept . . .”

Tillie did nothing but blink, not wanting to encourage further elucidation. This couldn’t end well.

Mr. Dunlop squinted at her. “’Cept he always described you as all elbows and knees and with crooked braids.”

Tillie gently touched her hand to her expertly coifed chignon. She couldn’t help it. “When Harry left for the Continent, I *did* have crooked braids,” she said, deciding that her elbows and knees needed no further discussion.

“He loved you a great deal,” Mr. Dunlop said. His voice was surprisingly soft and thoughtful, enough to command Tillie’s full attention. Maybe she shouldn’t be so quick to judge. Robert Dunlop *meant* well. He was certainly good at heart, and rather handsome, cutting quite a dashing figure in his military uniform. Harry had always written of him with affection, and even now, Tillie was having trouble thinking of him as anything other than “Robbie.” Maybe there was a little more to him. Maybe it was the wine. Maybe . . .