

THE SETUP

Previous to this, in Love's Prick Excerpt 1, the Duchess spoke of her former life as a minister to a church, a way of life and a congregation she lost. Later, it was revealed that the Duchess started life as a man named Forrest and has since transitioned to life as a woman. This is something that the character of Duke still doesn't know.

Duke, a policeman, walked into the Duchess' coffee shop, The Forest, in hopes of advancing his investigation into a rash of vandalism in the neighborhood. In Love's Prick Excerpt 7, Duke instead found himself striking up a genial conversation with the Duchess, in which her past job as minister, but not her former male identity, came up. Duke promised to return again soon, and has. Left alone this time, their conversation takes a more intimate turn...

DUKE and the DUCHESS alone in The Forest.

DUKE

So, this past life of yours --

DUCHESS

The ministry?

DUKE

Yes. Did it not suit you?

DUCHESS

In a manner of speaking.

DUKE

Time for a change.

DUCHESS

It was time.

DUKE

Just chucked it all and started your own coffeehouse.

DUCHESS

Not quite so clean a break as that.

DUKE

So you still dabble?

DUCHESS

Old friends do call on me now and again to handle a special ceremony.

DUKE

You like it.

DUCHESS

Why do I feel as if I'm being interrogated all of a sudden?

DUKE

I'm sorry. I didn't --

DUCHESS

I'm teasing you. Half-teasing.

DUKE

It's just -- your face.

DUCHESS

Yes?

DUKE

When we got to the subject of old friends, I could see that you missed it. Some part of it.

DUCHESS

My face has a way of betraying me.

DUKE

Your secret's safe with me.

DUCHESS

No secrets. I find they never do anybody any good, even the supposedly harmless ones.

DUKE

You like them. You miss them. The special occasions.

DUCHESS

Them, most of all. I love getting called out of semiretirement. A chance to say the words again. Weddings, christenings, funerals. All the major events. Very life-affirming. Well, the weddings and christenings. Actually, the funerals, too, if they're done right.

DUKE

My wife's service was like that.

DUCHESS

I'm sorry for your loss.

DUKE

Long time ago. Doesn't seem like it. She was a good woman.

DUCHESS

Children?

DUKE

One. A daughter. Olivia. Growing up way too fast.

DUCHESS

They always do. But we can't keep them in pigtails forever.

DUKE

How many kids do you have?

DUCHESS

Dozens. None of my own, though. We all have a flock to look after.

DUKE

True enough.

Pause.

DUCHESS

I need to tell you something. Something I wasn't sure if I should tell you or not. I'm thinking now that I should.

DUKE

Something about the vandalism?

DUCHESS

No. About me.