

Beta Read Sample

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To begin with, it should be noted that the city of Antioch was a notoriously affectionate society.

Yet its people were not. Yes, hugs were typically preferred to handshakes, even amongst politicians, but explicit permission had to be first granted before calling anyone by their first name. No exchange between persons could be considered complete without some form of physical acknowledgement. Whether you were bargaining for reasonably priced produce or debating policy or even hurriedly apologizing to a stranger in the midst of a crowd, neglecting to physically appreciate someone was greatly disrespectful. Indeed, it was almost as disrespectful to *not* touch someone as it was to touch someone whom had explicitly expressed the desire to abstain from such pretenses.

This unspoken rule of society however did not apply to family relations, wherein a brief kiss of some sort was unavoidable excepting the plague. The custom was: on the cheek for bad breath, on both cheeks for cousins, on the forehead for the sick and needy, on the brow for close friends, in the air for the worst possible relations, on the hand for husbands and wives, and for the best of relations, the closest of family, the most precious and honored among you: nothing less than a peck on the lips would do.

As a rule of thumb: great grandparents and young children (family favorites) : lips. On the right cheek for favorite uncles, on the forehead after prayer, on both cheeks for childhood rivals, in the air if you were sisters. So the head, face, shoulders, arms, legs, and back (above waist) were for public consumption. Lips were reserved for family. Autonomy was reserved for criminals and the diseased.

Kissing and touching were the essential modes of life there, and yet the call of dignity

Commented [KV1]: Love the voice! Give agents a little of this in your query and agents will be hooked!

Commented [KV2]: This is a great setup for what's to come, considering what we expect to happen between Eleanor and Prince Lucas. Good job! 🙌

Commented [KV3]: NOTE: Formatting Standards - indent first lines

Commented [KV4]: All of these are intriguing, but could we cut 1 or 2 if we had to for pacing?

Commented [KV5]: The previous paragraph was the perfect amount to convey the point. I'd suggest cutting this one for word count and pacing purposes.

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and inhibited demeanor was the foundation of every interaction. It was a nice balance and it was as good as law in Antioch, every Antiochan would agree. Every Antiochan would know.

All of that to say: Eleanor was from out of town.

The day had started as usual. I arrived ahead of schedule to the Antony-Price estate, Lawrence Manor, and waited outside of the 2nd-in-line's rooms for about an hour. Given the significance of the previous day's date, it was expected that the prince would be in bad spirits and his maltemper would express itself in the usual way of indulgence, distraction, and general inattentiveness. These predictions were accurate.

"Right, so, he's not actually here," The footman sighed, upon exiting the apartment. "He's not actually on the property at all, we think. Breakfast?"

Following a bit of bacon and butter on toast, I sat at the kitchen table and took notes for the formal record just as he was announced. I pretended not to notice the sound of forced cheer in his mumbled apologies, undermined by a drunken slur and slammed doors which rang out like gunshots in the still morning air.

Already late for the service, there was only enough time for him to change clothes as opposed to being properly groomed before setting out to the Royal Palace. I followed in the car behind his out of respect for his grief, surmising he would not be worth quoting in that state.

Our destination changed mid-route— which is always an ordeal for the royal motorcade to navigate— and we were escorted to the Church of Antioch at Brisbane in the historical district as opposed to Peter Chapel on the Palace grounds, arriving at 30 minutes past for the first Sunday service which it is necessary for senior royal family members to attend. We were ushered to a secondary entrance so as to not disturb the service with our approach. I saw him for the first time that day as he stepped out of the car, he was attended to as though not fully conscious, with lines

Commented [KV6]: Oh no! Lol Perfect conclusion to this setup.

Commented [KV7]: NOTE: I initially thought this was a POV switch. It would help to take a moment to introduce who's speaking. Perhaps a bit more interaction with the staff where he's addressed by name before they head to the church. The transition here might be a little less jarring if you created some distance in the previous paragraph by giving Eleanor a formal title: Princess/ Lady Eleanor was from out of town. (Or something like that.) I also would consider including the narrator's name and/or title in the chapter heading.

Commented [KV8]: This adds intrigue. I like the way you're hinting at the prince's wound early on.

Commented [KV9]: Good visual.

Commented [KV10]: The hints at the prince's pain are sprinkled throughout at a good pace.

Commented [KV11]: Was this because they were running late?

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on his face that one less skilled in observing him might mistake for having been impressed there by exhaustion.

“So sorry everyone, I’m sorry. It won’t be like this next week— no, I promise I’m fine, I’m fine. Left at the painting and up the stairs.” He nodded wearily at them with that perpetually fond expression of his, assuring those at his side he could be trusted to see himself to his assigned seat in the corner pew discreetly just before he was separated from the entourage.

I turned back once more before finding my place on the sidelines: he had seemed conscious enough to do as he promised.

I went into the sanctuary and found a pew not yet filled in the section of common seating. I did not manage to sit down before it happened. The prince had not taken the clergy passage which led to his seat in the back row quire with the other royal family members discreetly, nor had he taken the asylum route to appear on the gallery without anyone to know how long he’d been there or how late he’d actually arrived as was routine; he had walked into the middle of the aisle before the pulpit, through the organ case and between the choral risers, in the sight of the entire congregation. Handlers and security staff were on the move in the periphery and I could see those who had just been seated preparing to re-board when the 2nd-in-line for the throne stumbled into the young woman conducting the choir. They were together and then they were apart and then she slanted towards him again and he put his hands on her shoulders to steady her, looking down, when— as though out of habit— he kissed her. On the lips. No one, not even the royal staff, being prepared for this— there was silence.

It was a short kiss, really. Which makes sense, because when he saw her... he was reminded of someone. Someone he had longed to see for a very long, long time. That didn’t make sense, really, because they looked nothing alike but— but, well God works in mysterious

Commented [KV12]: Maybe break this up to provide a little physical description of the prince. Voice is good. I can “hear” him.

Commented [KV13]: Could the prince perhaps interact with some of the family members before they head to the church to make it clear that they all traveled to the church together? Otherwise, I would expect the rest of the family to be at their regular church.

Commented [KV14]: Oh! I didn’t expect it to happen so quickly. Lol

Commented [KV15]: Okay, we have an interesting backstory here. But how do we explain the narrator’s knowledge of this since he is not in the prince’s head?

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ways. The forces which draw us to one another at any time seem irresistibly logical, like fantastically good ideas for no reason at all in the moment, yet when reminisced upon we realize there was no known reason for things to have happened that way except for the fact that they did. Nonetheless, this was why he did what he did where he did it—in the middle of Church. In addition to still being a little drunk, that is. It made perfect sense to him at the time. One might have mistaken it for that kiss which belongs to a favored relative, but it was... not. Something about how long it was (although it was short, really), or how they'd looked at each other when he pulled away. It was... not. Any Antiochan would know. There was something there. Surely that deep seated, uncontrollable platonic feeling of familiarity had given him the audacity, but something else had made him stay. A feeling which changed the kind of kiss it was, as it was happening. A feeling he claims explained much of what was going to happen, before it had taken place. Premonitions such as that were the sort he didn't think twice about staking his life upon. They had yet to betray him.

So, the moment being gone, following that beat of silence in which shocking things must be comprehended, voices seemed to break out from everywhere. They were all whispers of course, they were still in church after all, but they were the loudest whispers of their kind. And so many of them, in every direction, was the sound of wind in a plastic grocery bag.

Before anyone had even realized, being so consumed in speculation, the objects of their excitement were respectively swept away. To the inner rooms with the both of them, though those in the sanctuary might've suspected they absconded elsewhere together— adding to the scandal of it all.

What happened to that man the young woman could not account for, being unclear on whereabouts and what happened to herself for a moment. I could not account for all the

Commented [KV16]: Good point.

Commented [KV17]: Excellent voicing.

Commented [KV18]: Interesting detail. Wondering how this will play into the narrative going forward.

Commented [KV19]: Notes like this are humorous but also bulk up the word count. You may have to cut some of them to achieve standard range. 😊

Commented [KV20]: May want to reword this for clarity, A little difficult to follow.

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whereabouts or happenings of the prince at that time myself, as frenzied as those responsible for him were. All of his people were being hauled off in vans while the 1st-in-line excused himself from the service early, to personally see to his younger brother— a grim prospect indeed. I found myself drifting— not in the direction of the royal brigade but in the direction of that maid who had been spirited away— of an accord that was not entirely my own. As royal biographer to the 2nd prince, such excitement, a decisive turning point in the life I was contracted to document should've been a treat to explore; a new take on the life I had grown tired of observing, an opportunity to provide a more poignant report of the challenges he was met with in life— going beyond the partying and the disruptive effects of childhood trauma.

But as it so happened, the consequence of what occurred seemed to be a sudden and absolute close to my chapter in the prince's narrative. No, I watched that girl stumble out of the band hall and out of the door into the bright afternoon. I stood at the door, being pushed by the raucous crowd of security guards and congregants and bloodthirsty journalists, following that small form of searing Sunday whites and charcoal hair cut through the chaos in a daze. She walked blindly in front of a car while crossing the street and it blew its horn at her before continuing to the roundabout in front— I had been remembered. I resisted the hands of those ushering me so that I might see her disappear into the Monaco building down the street before acquiescing to their will.

“Circle around and drop me off on Chisbon street.” I urged the driver as we began to pull away. That was the moment when I became Eleanor Aaron Jones' biographer and what once was an archive became a story. What follows includes thoughts and feelings too intimate to have been surmised by myself, as well as happenings I could not possibly have been allowed to personally

Commented [KV21]: Perhaps make it clearer that other members of the prince's family are with them as they travel to the church.

Commented [KV22]: This is such a unique perspective. A great hook.

Commented [KV23]: I'm wondering how the journalists knew where they were since they abruptly switched destinations.

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observe; these are the product of the prince and the princess's respective testimonies which they both solemnly swear to be true.

- Archer, Esq. Royal Biographer

Commented [KV24]: Excellent hook and voice. I think you could use a little more setup in regards to your narrator and the circumstances leading to getting the prince to the church. However, this was an entertaining read that would certainly have me wanting to read more.