

Below, I've posted what is probably my favorite out-take from *The Betrayal of the Blood Lily*. It hurt to cut this scene. Robert and Charlotte— of *Temptation of the Night Jasmine* fame— did, indeed, decide to take their honeymoon trip to India, largely to put a continent between them and the Dowager Duchess of Dovedale. What you may not have known is that Alex, the hero of *Blood Lily*, knows Robert from his India days, back when Robert was plain old “Rob” and not (at least not publicly) his grace, the Duke of Dovedale. In this deleted scene, the two old acquaintances settle down for a manly catch-up.

“Rob?”

“Reid?” Robert Lansdowne jumped to his feet with a smile of pleasure. “Good God, I forgot you were stationed here.

*The last time Alex had seen Rob Lansdowne, he had been on the verge of heading home to England. He had also imparted the mind-boggling information that he was, in fact, a duke and always had been. Alex was still getting his mind around that one. Not that he knew many dukes, but they didn't generally abandon their estates and up and join the army as a mere mister.*

*Rob was looking rather ducal these days. His clothes were simple, but they bore the unmistakable stamp of London tailoring and there was a large, gold stickpin with a worn signet nestled in the folds of his cravat. Next to him, Alex felt travel-stained and scruffy.*

*He apparently looked travel-stained and scruffy, as well.*

“You look like hell,” the duke said, dropping comfortably back into his chair.

“Good to see you, too,” said Alex dryly. “What brings you back to India? I thought you had sold out.”

“I did. I'm on honeymoon. I wanted to show my bride where I used to live. It also,” he added with a mock grimace, “seemed expedient to put several thousand miles between myself and my bride's grandmother.”

“What did you do?” asked Alex, mildly intrigued despite the five thousand other concerns pressing on his attention. “Elope with the girl against the old lady's wishes?”

“Hardly. It's more to keep her from personally monitoring the production of an heir. She would, too,” he added darkly. “It seemed best to flee the country.”

“Wouldn't it have been less bother to install a strong lock on the bedroom door?”

“You've clearly never met the Dowager Duchess of Dovedale,” said Rob drily. “She makes the four horsemen of the Apocalypse seem like friendly, easy-going sorts of chaps. Besides,” he added, propping one booted knee against the opposite leg, “Charlotte has a friend here she wanted to visit.”

*“Rather a long way for a social call, isn’t it?” said Alex idly, leaning a hand against the back of a chair. He really did have to be getting on to James.*

*“This was a special case. The lady had been rather precipitously married and Charlotte was worried about her.”*

*One precipitous marriage came very readily to mind. “You’re talking about Lady Frederick, aren’t you?”*

*Rob raised an eyebrow. “She’s made her mark here, too, I take it?”*

*“You don’t like her,” guessed Alex.*

*Rob never had liked laying his cards on the table. “It’s not that I don’t like her,” he hedged. “My wife is exceedingly attached to her.”*

*“But?”*

*Robert frowned, struggling against a natural distaste for what he considered gossip. After a long moment, he shrugged, saying, “It was nothing terribly damning. Tommy Fluellen—you remember Tommy? He formed an unfortunate attachment to her. It became very uncomfortable for everyone concerned.”*

*“How uncomfortable?” What Alex really wanted to know was how far it had gone.*

*“If you’d ever been on hand for one of Tommy’s epic infatuations, you wouldn’t have to ask,” said the duke drily.*

*“Did they—?”*

*“No.” Alex relaxed at the assured negative. “Staines was already on the scene. Tommy proposed a few dozen times, offering to step into the breach and all that sort of thing, but she wasn’t having it. According to Tommy, she said she wouldn’t drag him down with her.”*

*“That’s my girl,” said Alex softly.*

*The duke’s foot hit the floor with a thump. “Good God, not you, too?”*