Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

No Place for a Lady

Written by Gill Paul

Published by AVON

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

GILL PAUL

NO PLACE FOR A LADY

AVON

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.
The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are
the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to
actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is
entirely coincidental.

AVON

A division of HarperCollins*Publishers*
1 London Bridge Street,
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

A Paperback Original 2015

1

Copyright © Gill Paul 2015

Gill Paul asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-0-00-810212-8

Set in Sabon by Born Group using Atomik ePublisher from Easypress

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publishers.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
(PRINTER)

FSC™ is a non-profit international organisation established to promote
the responsible management of the world's forests. Products carrying the
FSC label are independently certified to assure consumers that they come
from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic and
ecological needs of present and future generations,
and other controlled sources.

Find out more about HarperCollins and the environment at
www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

Prologue

25th October 1854

Mrs Lucy Harvington stands shivering on a hilltop near the coast of Crimea, watching armies massed for battle below, waiting to find out if her husband will die today. Charlie is somewhere in the group to the far left: she has overheard Lord Raglan pointing out the Light Brigade when giving an order and she peers in the direction he indicated to see indistinct figures on horseback, cold sunlight glinting on the steel of their bayonets. All around she can see lines of men standing poised, waiting for the order to rush forward and try to kill each other – men who are sons, nephews, husbands and fathers, even grandfathers. She can hear the impatient whinny of horses and the squawk of a bird high above. It sounds like a warning.

Suddenly it seems incomprehensible that she should find herself in such a situation. In less than a year her entire fortune has turned on its head: she's gone from being a young lady of just seventeen years who lived at home with her father and older sister, to being the wife of an army captain who has followed her husband to war in a remote, inhospitable land. She still can't quite believe the change in her

circumstances. In London she has a wide circle of friends and used to attend balls and soirées wearing fashionable new gowns and the latest hairstyles. Now she has been wearing the same gown for almost a week without the opportunity to wash, her cloak is smeared in mud and her hair hangs in matted coils. She spends most of her time alone while Charlie is out in the field. She is cold, her clothes are damp – they never seem to dry completely – and she is very, very scared.

But her fate has been sealed since that first unforgettable meeting with Charlie Harvington, the beginning of a chain of circumstances that had led her to this godforsaken hillside.

It was a dull November day in 1853, when London was thick with sooty fog and the stench of the Thames. Lucy had called upon the Pendleburys, old friends of her parents, in the hope of seeing their son Henry, whom she knew was home on leave from the army. They'd enjoyed a brief flirtation during his last leave and she was curious to see where it might lead. Unfortunately, Henry was absent and she had to make conversation with his mother and father, a rather staid couple. Once they had run through the usual topics – the weather, plans for the festive season, health of respective family members – Lucy offered to play the pianoforte and sing for them, simply to pass the time until she could decently make her excuses and leave.

She picked a Mozart *lieder* that suited her first soprano voice. Her singing teacher was critical of her pronunciation of the German lyrics, but she was fond of the pretty melody. As she was singing, she heard the drawing-room door open and glanced up to see Henry Pendlebury standing in the doorway with a friend, a very handsome friend, kitted out in a royal blue tunic with gold braid draped over the chest, who was staring directly at her. The attention made her sing

a little more sweetly, play a little more precisely, while she felt herself flush at the unexpected audience.

When she finished, all clapped heartily and Lucy bowed her head.

'Please don't stop. I could listen to you forever,' the stranger said. It appeared he couldn't take his eyes off her.

Henry Pendlebury laughed. 'Miss Gray, meet my army colleague, Captain Charlie Harvington. Charlie, this is Miss Lucy Gray.'

Charlie came forward to take her hand. He raised it to his lips, kissed it, then fell dramatically to his knees. 'I declare in front of all witnesses here present that I volunteer to be Miss Gray's willing slave and do her bidding for as long as she will tolerate me. Please, Miss Gray, tell me some service I might perform for you. I ask nothing in return but the honour of being allowed to remain in the presence of such breathtaking beauty.'

Lucy laughed, startled by his unconventional forwardness. 'Very well. I should like a cup of tea to wet my throat after its exertion.'

There was a pot of tea on a tray by the fire and Charlie bounded over to fetch her a cup, enquiring carefully about her taste for cream and sugar.

'Now I should like you to bring my shawl,' she said, enjoying the game with this lively stranger. She noticed a disapproving look pass between Mr and Mrs Pendlebury and knew she was pushing the boundaries of propriety but couldn't help herself.

Charlie fetched her shawl and as he held it towards her their eyes met. His were a startling blue, an unusual combination with his chestnut hair. He was smiling, but behind the smile she could sense something sad about him. She felt a tug at her heart and knew in an instant, all joking aside,

that she was going to fall in love with him, and he with her. It was as simple as that.

When she rose to leave, as the hour was approaching when she must change for dinner, Charlie escorted her to her carriage and asked if he might call on her the following morning.

'What about me?' Henry called from the front door. 'Am I to be forgotten so readily, Miss Gray?'

'You must come too,' she insisted. 'Of course you must.'

But it was Charlie she had eyes for now. It was what the French called a *coup de foudre*, a deep-rooted, certain knowledge that they belonged together.

*

Now, eleven months later, she is standing on a hilltop in the Crimean peninsula, and realising she might never see Charlie alive again. She could even be killed herself, or taken prisoner by the Russians – she's not sure which would be worse.

There is a bright flash down below, then a deafening explosion shakes the ground and she sinks to her knees in terror. 'Dear God,' she prays silently. 'Please save Charlie and please save me. I want to go home again. I want to go back where we belong.'

PART ONE

Chapter One

11th January, 1854

Dorothea Gray watched as Henderson walked slowly round the dining table dispensing devilled kidneys with a clatter of cutlery on a silver serving dish. Her sister Lucy waved him away but Dorothea accepted a modest portion, while their father licked his lips and directed the butler to heap his plate with spoonful after spoonful. The meaty, tangy smell mingled with that of freshly baked rolls and a certain mustiness that permeated the dining room, a mysterious odour no amount of spring-cleaning could shift. The girls' father lifted *The Times,* neatly folded into quarters, intending to peruse the front page as he ate, but was interrupted by Lucy, who lobbed a question across the breakfast table with studied casualness.

'Papa, would it be acceptable if Captain Harvington comes to call on you around eleven this morning? There's something he wishes to discuss with you.'

Dorothea looked up, instantly suspicious.

'What's that? Captain Harvington? Do I know him?' He frowned and peered over the rim of his glasses.

'Of the 8th Hussars. You've met him several times, Papa. He joined us for dinner the evening before last. Remember

he made you laugh with his impression of Lord Aberdeen?'

Still her father couldn't recollect the man and he screwed up his eyes with the effort.

Dorothea interrupted: 'What might Captain Harvington wish to see Father about?' As soon as she said the words, the answer came to her: 'You're not planning on getting engaged, are you? You've only known each other a matter of weeks. Besides, he may have to go to war soon if the Russians don't withdraw from the Turkish territories on the Danube.'

Lucy tilted her chin defiantly. 'No, we're not bothering to get engaged; we plan to marry straight away so that I can sail with him if he has to go to the Turkish lands. He says officers are allowed to take their wives along.'

Dorothea gasped and put down her fork. 'But that's ridiculous! What gentleman would ask his wife to go to war with him? It's an appalling idea.' She glanced at her father but he was savouring a bite of kidney, oblivious to the storm brewing between his daughters.

'We love each other with all our hearts. It's been nine whole weeks since we met and both of us agree we've never felt as sure of anything in our entire lives.' Lucy spoke passionately and in her words Dorothea could hear echoes of the romance novels she loved, full of chaste young girls and brooding heroes.

'What do Captain Harvington's family think of this idea? Surely they'll see that it's silly to rush into marriage while war looms? Everyone says it's inevitable after the Russians destroyed those Turkish ships at Sinope last November. Why not wait till he comes back? It's bound to be over quickly. The Russians are no match for us, especially when we are in alliance with the French. It would make much more sense to wait.' Dorothea cast around for further arguments that would carry weight with her flighty younger sister. 'We could

plan a beautiful ceremony and there would be time to invite all the family members we haven't seen for years. You could have a dress especially made, and use mother's Chantilly lace veil. Think of it, Lucy; a proper wedding, not something rushed and over-hasty …' She tailed off at the determined glint in Lucy's eyes.

'Our minds are made up, Dorothea. Fortunately it's not up to you. It's between Papa and Charlie.' She turned to her father. 'Papa, you will listen favourably to his request, won't you? We are so much in love and he needs me to go with him and care for him. Besides, you don't want to be stuck with *two* old maids on your hands, do you?' She looked pointedly at her sister, unmarried at the age of thirty-one, who tutted at the rudeness of her jibe.

'What's that you say?' their father asked, exasperated that his poor hearing meant he had missed much of their conversation. 'What must I do?'

Lucy spoke slowly and clearly: 'Captain Harvington will come to see you at eleven. When you speak with him, just remember that I love him very much and want to be his bride.'

After breakfast, Dorothea followed her father down the hall to his study, where he liked to spend the morning snoozing over his newspaper. She waited till he was settled in his comfy leather armchair, with a view over the leafless trees of Russell Square, before speaking.

'Papa, I hope you agree that Lucy's ridiculous scheme to get married and go to war with the troops would be disastrous.'

'Quite.' Her father nodded in agreement.

Dorothea wasn't convinced that he understood the gravity of the situation, so she continued: 'She and Captain Harvington are both good-natured, happy-go-lucky characters, but neither has a practical bone in their bodies. And Lucy is far too young and giddy for marriage.'

'Yes, indeed.' He opened the newspaper.

'You have to stop them, Papa. I know it puts you in an awkward position, but I have a suggestion. Don't refuse permission outright, but play for time by telling them they can marry on Captain Harvington's return from war. Doubtless Lucy's head will have been turned by some other charming fellow by then and the marriage won't go ahead. Only a couple of months ago she was smitten with Henry Pendlebury, and before that it was Alexander Gwynn Jones. Make them wait and I'm sure this one won't last.'

'I expect you're right. Remind me: what is it that I am to do?'

Dorothea explained again, speaking slowly and clearly until it seemed the message had got through. The carriage clock on the mantel chimed ten, meaning she would be late for her work unless she got a move on. She was a member of the ladies' committee at a small charitable hospital in Pimlico and counted herself fortunate to have an occupation, unlike most ladies of her social class who spent their days sitting idly at home or calling upon friends for tea and gossip. If Chalmers had the carriage ready and traffic was not too heavy around Covent Garden, there was still a chance she could make it on time.

'Thank you, Father.' She leaned in to kiss his brow and he murmured his goodbyes before opening the newspaper and closing his eyes.

Looking back, Dorothea couldn't put her finger on a time when her father's mental acuity had begun to decline. In her youth he had run a thriving bespoke furniture business and was clearly an astute businessman who had earned enough to buy a large house and employ five members of staff, as well as keeping a carriage. Russell Square was not a fashionable area of London but it was convenient for the City, and therefore popular with merchants such as her father. He'd often

been away from home during her childhood, but when he was there he used to regale his girls with tales of explorers such as Christopher Columbus and Captain Cook, a subject that held endless fascination for him. There was a globe in his study on which he showed them the countries to which these pioneers had sailed, some of them right on the other side of the sphere. But since he sold the business – there being no son to inherit – it seemed his brain had shrunk. When had that been? Maybe six or seven years ago, she thought. A couple of years before his wife – Lucy and Dorothea's mother – had lost her long battle with illness. Were these events linked, she wondered? It was hard to remember why he'd made the decision to stop working although still only in his early fifties. Maybe it was grief, or perhaps he already felt his abilities lessening and had bowed to the inevitable. Either way, the man who shuffled around the house, snoozing his days away and rarely receiving company, was a pale shadow of the fine gentleman he had once been.

When Dorothea returned, exhausted, from her work at the hospital, Lucy was sewing by the fireside in the drawing room with a half-smile on her lips.

Dorothea chose a chair closest to the flames so as to warm her frozen fingers.

'Did Captain Harvington call today?'

'Yes.' Lucy looked demure.

'Did he accept Father's decision?'

'He certainly did.' Lucy beamed in triumph, the smile lighting up her face. 'And he's delighted. We plan to be wed as soon as we can arrange it after the reading of the banns.'

'Father consented?' Dorothea felt a kick in the pit of her stomach.

'*Please* be happy for me,' Lucy entreated. 'I know you are opposed to the match, but you can't deny you like Charlie.

Everyone likes him! We're so happy together.' She threw down her sewing and clenched her fists in excitement.

Dorothea was momentarily lost for words. 'I'm not opposed to the match, Lucy. It's just too soon. You scarcely know each other.'

Lucy leapt from her chair and came to kneel at Dorothea's knees, head tilted, her clear blue eyes peering up, her pretty lips pursed with the same endearing expression that must have swayed their father earlier. It always made Dorothea want to kiss the flawless skin of her little sister's cheek and stroke that soft strawberry-blonde hair. Lucy's was a beauty that turned heads in the street and made it hard not to stare.

'Oh, but you're wrong! It's because you've never experienced that glorious feeling of falling in love and finding you already know everything about the other person because you are so perfectly matched. We laugh at the same things, cry at the same things, think the same way about simply *everything* … You're soon going to learn to love Charlie as I do. I *know* you will.'

Dorothea stood abruptly and stepped over her sister's legs, ignoring the disappointment that clouded her expression. 'Forgive me,' she murmured. 'I really must change for dinner. We'll talk more later.'

As she climbed the stairs with leaden feet, one thought was foremost in Dorothea's mind: the marriage must be prevented, one way or another. She was the only responsible guardian the girl possessed, since she could patently wrap their father around her little finger. It was up to Dorothea to take action and she felt the weight of the responsibility keenly. If Lucy wouldn't listen to her, who else could she appeal to?