

### the training at madame de silentio's

Madame de Silentio takes in delinquent ruffians between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and turns them into world-class husbands by the time they are twenty-one. You're admitted to Madame de Silentio's Academy if you answer at least 85% of her entrance exam correctly, and you graduate with a certificate that is respected in every strata of polite society. No one can ever remember any of the questions that were on Madame de Silentio's entrance exam. I know I can't – I tried my best to fail the exam. I preferred not to be educated, fearing it wouldn't suit me. Of course, I know better now. I won't lie, it took me half a year, but I now realise how lucky I am to have this opportunity to become a man of true worth, to have the man I will be intercept the boy that I was.

What is her secret, you may ask. How did Madame de Silentio attain her ranking amongst the great educators of the modern world? It's simple. Madame de Silentio knows what's best for young people. She knows what's appropriate. She refrains from cluttering our minds with information we don't need to know. Here at Madame de Silentio's our textbooks get straight to the point – European history is boiled down to a paragraph, with two sentences each for the histories of Africa, Asia and the Americas. Australasia doesn't count. Young men at Madame de Silentio's Academy learn

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practical skills that set us in good stead for lives as the husbands of wealthy and educated women. Here is a sample of the things we are taught:

Strong Handshakes, Silence, Rudimentary Car Mechanics, How to Mow the Lawn, Explosive Displays of Authority, Sport and Nutrition Against Impotence.

It says in the prospectus that Madame de Silentio's students eat, sleep and breathe good husbandry. That's true. We're taught to ask ourselves a certain question when we wake up in the morning and just before we fall asleep: *How can I make Her happy?* 'Her' being the terrible, wonderful goddess that we must simultaneously honour, obey and rule (she'd like us to rule her sometimes, we're told) – the future wife. In our Words of Love class we learn all the poems of Pablo Neruda by heart, and also Ira Gershwin and Dorothy Fields lyrics. Love Letters, a compulsory extracurricular course of study, involves a close reading of the letters of Héloïse and Abelard. Our Decisive Thinking examinations are conversations conducted before the entire class, and your grade depends not on the answer you give, but on the tenacity with which you cling to your choice. You earn a grade A by demonstrating, without a hint of nervousness or irritation, that you are impervious to any external logic. You earn an A+ if you manage this whilst affecting a mild and pleasant demeanour.

We sleep eight to a dormitory, and our dormitory bed-