

VERA

Between Dreams and Reality

MAYA



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Chapter 1

Vera

"It has been quite a pleasure for me" He says with a smile and I can't help but feel nauseous. Without wasting another moment I take out my sword and drive it through him. He looks at me with an expression of disbelief as if he didn't expect something so outrageous from a lady like me.

Now that's the fun part, they never expect a lady like me to.....well drive a sword through their heart. I pull out my sword and do it again and again and again until my rage is gone. After stabbing his body I drop it in the lake for the fishes and alligators to eat.

I walk away from the lake and spot a tree at a distance. I walk towards the tree and sit down there and pull out a book that I haven't finished yet. The details are a little blurry and I can't really make out the words so it's pointless to try to read right now. I'll be reading it later when my mind is at the right place. For now I just wish to sit below this tree and enjoy the scenery. This is the place I am happiest at but not to my surprise my peace doesn't last long as I hear my name being shouted like I have committed a murder.

"Vera you must get up right this moment" I hear my sister's voice calling out my name and waking me up from my sweet dream. "What happened to Cecelia?" I ask my sister who has been shouting my name like the house is on fire. "Mother is outraged because you have not woken up yet and Lord Donnelly is about to arrive. She expects him to ask for your hand in marriage today"

I almost threw up at that thought. "Let her stay outraged because he can marry an actual cow for all I care" I say and lie back down on my bed again but Cecelia takes my blanket away. "Do not talk like that Vera. He is a fine gentleman and will keep you happy. Not to mention he is extremely wealthy and will take care of us" She says and I roll my eyes. She notices and starts lecturing me yet again "Vera why must you be so hard. Can you not see how we are suffering financially? We both must get married to a good family so our family does not have to suffer anymore"

She says trying to blackmail me emotionally but to her disappointment it does not work on me. I get up and take her hand in mine. "Cecelia looks at me and has some faith." I point my finger towards my latest novel that I have been writing for over 4 months. "Once I become a famous author I can indeed support our family financially and both of us will not have to get married for money" I say enthusiastically but she looks at me like I'm a fool. Maybe I am dreaming of something like that but it isn't impossible. Cecelia takes away her hand and looks at me like I'm a pitiful creature. "Vera it's good to have dreams but you also have to be realistic. You can not support us financially as a woman. I admit you have a great imagination but the world we live in does not allow women

like us to afford the luxury of having dreams" She says and she isn't completely wrong. I understand where she is coming from but I can not give up on my dreams so easily and I am most certainly not marrying an old lord just so my family can survive.

"Listen, I have almost finished writing that novel and once it's done, I will get it published under a pen name. No one would know it's written by a woman and perhaps it would sell better" I say trying to get a positive reaction out of her but not so surprisingly I fail to get so.

She carresses my cheek with her hand and says "Vera you must think of us before your dreams. We are your family" I am speechless and do not have a word to say to her. When I don't say anything she gets up and tells me to get ready and look presentable. As she's about to leave our youngest sister Ellie walks in. Despite being only 7 she is quite smart and can read a lot already. I have high hopes for her future. I won't let her suffer or get married off for money like so many young ladies nowadays.

"Hey Vera what did you do in your dream tonight? You said last time you-" I cover her mouth before she can say anything further. Cecelia looks at us suspiciously but lets it go. "You two and your weird conversations" She says shaking her head and leaves the room. "Did we not talk about my dreams being a secret last time?" I ask Ellie, still covering her mouth and she nods.

"Do you promise to watch what you say from now on?" I ask her and she nods again so I let go of her. "Vera, is it really true that you are aware of your dreams and can do whatever you

want in it?" She asks me yet again even though I have told her multiple times that yes I can do that. "Yes Ellie I can do that flawlessly" I say, pinching her nose and getting up to get ready.....Not for Lord Donelley but because I have to get ready anyway. "Can you teach me how I can do it too? I want to learn it and eat a mountain of pies in my dreams" She says and I chuckle. "It's not a skill that I can teach Ellie, it just happened to me one day" I say and she pouts again.

"Young lady, you better be ready in a few moments. Lord Donnelly has arrived and we can not have him waiting for too long" I hear my mother shout from outside the Door and I roll my eyes. I put on my worst gown and get ready to head downstairs. "She'll be mad if you wear that" Ellie says and I chuckle. "I know," I say, smiling at her. "He is so ugly do not marry him Vera" Ellie says while pulling the material of my gown. "Don't worry I won't. Now let's get going before I hear her shout again" I say and we head downstairs and as I appear in my mother's view her expression is noteworthy.

She starts glaring at me and I can already hear the lecture I am going to get after this meeting. "Ms. Vera it's a pleasure to see you again" Lord Donnelly looks me up and down and kisses my hand. I already feel nauseous. There is nothing wrong with this man. He is nice and has been a gentleman so far but I don't trust most men and he is in his 40s now so it is hard to see him as a candidate for my husband. "The pleasure is mine Lord Donnelly" I say with gritted teeth and my mother gives the maids and my sisters a look as if to leave us alone. I look at Cecelia with pleading eyes giving her a telepathic message to not to leave me alone but the traitor does that anyway. I didn't expect much from her but it still hurt.

After they left we had a small chat about his work. Correction....he kept talking about his work which bored me to death and in the end, the moment I had feared arrived. He took something out of his pocket and bent down on one knee. Doesn't his knee hurt because of his age? "Ms. Vera Rose Frost, would you give me the honor of marrying you?" He looks at me with hopeful eyes and I even feel bad for a moment for declining his offer but I have to. This isn't the life I want for myself or my sisters.

"Lord Donnelly" I take his hand and help him get up. He looks at me rather disappointed that I didn't immediately say yes. "I appreciate you and your efforts a lot. You have been a wonderful company to have but as much as I respect you and value your feelings, I must regrettably decline" I say and he stumbles back a few steps, I try to catch him but he refuses. "I See" He says and goes quiet for the next few moments. "Lord Donnelly, are you fine?" I ask but he turns around abruptly and walks towards the exit door. "I will remember this insult Ms. Vera " He says and finally walks out of our house. Not a second later My Mother and sisters flood in. Mother was extremely furious and shouting at me.

"Have you lost your mind Vera? Do you know how much of a good candidate he was? He has enough wealth and respect in society that we never would have had to worry about money?" She says furiously. "Mother, he couldn't even get down on one knee properly. I could tell his knees were hurting. You want me to marry a man who could almost be my father's age?" I shout back at my Mother which just adds fuel to the fire. She doesn't say anything for a while and glares at me.

What happens in the next few moments startles me. Mother starts walking towards my room in rage and I am not sure what she is after until something comes to my mind. I ran after her immediately. "Mother, what are you doing?" She enters my room and starts looking for something while throwing my things here and there. I do not understand what she's planning to do at first but horror fills my eyes as she picks up my almost finished novel which I have been working on for 4 months.

"This is the reason you have gone astray" She says and I shout "No Mother it is the reason we can have a different life. Our lives can change Mother. Once my Novel gets published-" Before I can finish my sentence she puts it all into the fire under the teapot. I immediately try to save it and put my hands into the fire to bring it out but Cecelia stops me.

"I'm sorry Vera but Mother is right. Writing has made you into a completely mad person. It was adorable as a hobby at first but you have unfathomable dreams because of it now and we can not afford to have you go astray while you're nearing 20. You must get these ideas out of your head and get married " Cecelia says and I am left dumbfounded. I sit down at the floor and watch months of my work burn down to ashes as both of them leave my room. I didn't even realise I had been crying until Ellie came to wipe my tears. "It's okay Vera you can write it again" She says trying to cheer me up but there is absolutely nothing that can cheer me up right now. I hug Ellie while crying as Cecilia's words repeat in my head.

I always thought Cecelia was harsh on the outside but in her heart she always believed in me and supported me but she clearly proved me wrong today.

As I walk through the park I spot a group of men having fun shooting targets. The sight sickens me. Not because men are playing and having fun but because there is not a woman in sight shooting with them.

The women are sitting and watching from aside while I can see in the eyes of two young women that wish to shoot with them but of course they are not allowed to while some men have been passing misogynistic comments about women extremely openly. Even if women are allowed to shoot with the men, they are told to tone themselves down or not to shoot too well for a lady which sickens me more.

Hold on a moment this scenario has happened before. This is from last month when my family went out with Lord Donnelly. Lord heavens I am in a dream again. When did I fall asleep?

However, it's a good thing I did because nothing noteworthy awaits me in reality.

As soon as I become aware that it is a dream I pull out my own shotgun and start shooting. It's just my target aren't the birds like others but the same men who were passing misogynistic comments a few moments earlier. Now of course I can not do something like this in reality hence I fulfill my desires in my own world. I'm sure there are many young ladies who wish to do the same in reality every time they hear something

misogynistic but they can not hence I am here taking out my rage.

It sounds so childish that I am letting out my rage in a dream this way but this is all I have and all I can do to make myself feel better.

As I am about to shoot another one of them, I find myself getting extremely rudely interrupted by a male voice.

"You missed that one" My eyes follow the voice only to land on a Man standing next to a tree while crossing his arms as if he has been watching it all in amusement. He isn't dressed for shooting so I suppose he isn't one of them. Perhaps it's an extra character my mind decided to throw in the dream?

I turn my gun towards him and he surrenders by putting both of his hands up in the air. "M'lady I suggest you put that down" This is new. Most of the time the people in my dreams listen to me and I do whatever I want with them.

"What are you doing?" I ask him and he shrugs while his hands are still up in the air. "what am I doing? What are you doing young lady?" He asks while getting closer, holding the tip of my shotgun and putting it down .

"I mean why are you talking back?" I ask again but he just chuckles. "You mean why am I not letting you shoot me?" He says as if it's the most ridiculous question ever. "Yes" And he laughs again. "Do you realise how incredibly audacious that young lady sounds?" He says and I do realise how it sounds "what I mean is this is my dream and all these people are figments of my imagination so they all listen to me but you

right now are not which has never happened before so yes I am asking you why are you not letting me shoot you?"

I ask with more elaboration this time. "Ohh that....." He says like it's a mundane matter. "Yes I demand an explanation" I say more firmly this time while pointing my gun at him. "How about we get rid of that little guy since you and I both know that it can't actually do any harm to me considering this is all your dream like you said young lady"

He makes a good point so I put down my gun and wait for him to give me an explanation but before he can start talking I suddenly hear Ellie's voice trying to wake me up. I look at him glaring and he just smiles "Next time for sure M'lady" He says bowing down politely. I glared at him before finally waking up "What happened Ellie?" I ask in a sleepy voice.

"Father has finally returned from his business trip" I finally get a surge of happiness hearing that Father has returned. I rush downstairs while smiling and almost tripping but as soon as I reach downstairs my smile falters again as I see my mother. I give Father a hug and he kisses my forehead.

"How has my little girl been? Did you all miss me?" He says and I nod along with Ellie. "She is not so little anymore. She'll be 20 next month and still hasn't secured a good match yet." Mother says while bringing snacks and tea while my Father just chuckles "what's the rush? There are plenty of good matches in London right now. I'm sure my beautiful daughter will have no shortage of proposals" Father says while sipping his tea.

"Now That's the issue is it not, She keeps rejecting all the proposals. Today she rejected Lord Donnelly." Mother says and father stops his tea midway to his mouth and for a

moment I thought he is going to be mad at me but instead his reaction is exactly what I expected. "Thank goodness because that man looked even older than me even though I'm 13 years older than him" Father says and that makes me chuckle. He's the best. The only man I love whole heartedly.

"You have spoiled her with your love and given her so much freedom. The worst thing you ever did was teach her how to read and write. She entertains preposterous ideas like becoming an author and supporting us financially" She says and I'm reminded of what happened this morning again.

"Well you have made sure I can't do that now haven't you?" I say bitterly. And she glares at me once again. "Do not give me that attitude Miss. Do you know what you have lost today?" She says trying to suppress her anger. "An old Nincopoomp?" Ellie says making me and father burst out laughing but once my father stopped he asks me on a serious note "Vera What did you mean that your mother has made sure you can't do that anymore?" I look at my mother bitterly yet again but instead of responding I get up "why don't you ask her yourself" and start walking towards my room.

I close my room's door and look at the ashes of the Novel I spent months writing. I feel this unexplainable feeling of hurt inside my chest. I don't know how long I look at the ashes before I hear a gentle knock at my door. I know it's my father.

"Come in" I say. He enters the room and sits next to me silently. "Vera, I'm so sorry for what your mother did, if only I came here a bit early I wouldn't have let this happen" He says in an apologetic tone. "You don't have to be sorry Father. She is the one who should be apologizing not you" I say with the same bitter tone while thinking of what she did.

"I hate her so much sometimes" I say with a suppressing rage "but I also understand her. I understand why she does that and that she doesn't want us to suffer and just wishes a good and comfortable life for us and the fact that I understand is what hurts me even more" I say with tears starting to flow down my cheeks. "Do not mourn what's already lost my child, you'll find yourself sinking deeper into grief, instead think of this as an opportunity to write an even better Novel" Father says while giving me a lot of new paper and ink along with a quill.

I immediately smile while receiving it and give him a warm hug. "Please don't make me marry for money" I say while crying and he gently pats my back. "I love you Father" I say with every emotion I am feeling right now. "I love you too my child" He says and I let go of him.

"Now write a story that makes people question if someone's imagination can actually be that good" He encourages me and I smile. "I will" I say while looking at the supplies he got me. He leaves my room after a few moments and I look at the supplies but the issue is I currently do not have any ideas. I want this story to be exceptional but I don't know where to begin except having thought of the names of the characters. My last work was exceptionally well ... At least I think it was but I don't remember much of it except for the basic plotline and the character's name.

For now I decide to go back to sleep and hopefully I won't find that weird dunderhead again in my dream.



Chapter 2

Vera

I was terribly wrong. That Dunderhead is right in front of me as soon as I enter the dream. "What are you doing here again?" I say with an irritated expression. "M'lady it's terribly rude to say that to someone as soon as you meet them" He says and I can tell he's just making fun of me.

I don't like this dunderhead at all and the fact that I can not control him like I can control others in my dream outrages me. As a man he should just shut up since this is my dream. I don't want to hear a man talking my ear off even in my dream.

"Yeah to an actual person. You're just a figment of my own imagination in my dream so I can be as rude as I want with you."

It already angers me that I have to talk to men politely and submit to their demands while having no rights whatsoever in the real world. I don't want a man talking my ear off even in my dreams." I say while walking towards a cliff with a beautiful view and he follows me. "Your imagination is indeed extremely breathtaking, M'lady" He says looking at the view.

"I have never seen a view like this in real life. This is just what I imagine what it must look like from the top of a cliff." I say looking at the view "But it looks better in real life" He says and I think I heard him wrong. "Did you say something?" I ask him and he looks like he got caught doing or saying something wrong "I meant to say that if this is just from your imagination then it must look even more breathtaking in real life" He says while looking over the view once again.

"Like I said....I wouldn't know what it's actually like since I have never seen a view from top of a cliff" I say with a sad tone. "Really?" He asked once again in disbelief. "Yeah I never got to be outside of London. My family is barely surviving here. My father came to London for a better life when I was 3 and we did get a better lifestyle than our hometown but we are not exactly rich. You can say we are middle class but considering my family's situation right now it won't be long before we will be considered below the middle class" I say explaining which I now realise is extremely weird because why am I talking to a figment of my own imagination in my own dream.

Have I really been so lonely that my mind gave me this figment? I know I always had a good imagination but this seems a little too much. "M'lady don't lose hope. maybe one day you'll finally get to see a view from a cliff in real life." The dunderhead says again, making me smile a little. "Maybe but until then I'm stuck in a nightmare called reality" I say with a bitter tone remembering the day I had today.

"What in real life is troubling you, M'lady? I mean other than the financial condition of your family. " He says he can actually do something about it.

"I don't want to talk about it because it would put me in low spirits and what would you do by knowing anyway?" I say while still admiring the view. "Nothing of course I just thought I might help you feel a little better" He says sitting down and I sit down next to him. "Maybe I'll talk more about my troubles some other time if you're still here. For now I just wish to enjoy this scenery in peace until the nightmare called reality takes me away from here" I say and admire the view in front of me.

It isn't long after that when I hear the voices of people around me and get up to see Cecelia trying out two different dresses in the room while Ellie is sitting there admiring her. "What is going on? What are you doing Cecelia?" I ask her and she looks at me like I've grown horns. "Don't tell me you forgot?" She asks me and I try to act like I know what she is talking about but I fail miserably.

"Of course you forgot. We were invited to a ball hosted by an acquaintance of my father , remember?" She says excitedly as she switches between the only two most expensive dresses we own.

She hands me over a blue dress and takes the red one for herself "this red one looks better on me so I'll take this and you take the blue one. You're not going to be looking for suitors anyway. It's been ages since we went to a ball." She says excitedly and yes It has been a while since we were invited to one. Actually we rarely get invited considering our family's situation nowadays but there are still some kind enough nobles who are acquainted with their father that invite us sometimes.

Honestly I would prefer it if they didn't and not because I hate the balls. I love the balls. The dresses, the dance, the food, the decorations. I love every single bit of it but what I can't stand is the men who keep trying to talk to me and my mother who keeps trying to find a suitor there. That's the only reason that makes me hate balls. I sigh and take the dress. "I'm fine with anything Cecelia" I say and get up to get ready.

Wearing a dress and properly getting ready for a ball is a lot of work but I always end up loving what I look like after getting completely ready. I look at my reflection in the mirror. Dark black hair, light complexion, dark eyes, medium sized nose and red but a little chapped lips. I love how I look overall and feel confident enough in myself. "Vera Rose Frost, you better get down here as soon as possible. We are getting late." I hear my mom shout again and go down immediately after admiring my reflection one last time.

The ride to the place was smooth except for the part where Mother kept lecturing us on how to behave like good ladies and make fine gentlemen approach us. We all get off the carriage and enter the gate.

I can practically feel Cecelia's excitement and honestly I can not blame her. I would be lying if I said I am not the tiniest bit excited. I am. The only issue is the suitors and my Mother. After a few pleasantries I slowly try to slip away between the crowd so I'm out of my Mother's field of vision. I bump into a few people but find my way to a quiet corner where I can just stand while simply admiring the decorations and other ladies' dresses.

Good lord these women have amazing taste in dresses but in men? Not so much.

After several moments of admiration and a third pie, I decide to stroll around the halls without attracting much attention. That's when I find a balcony that has a great view of the garden so I stand there admiring it from above. There are potential couples to be seen everywhere. Ladies trying to get themselves a fine suitor and I admire their efforts and respect their choices but also silently mourn the wasted potential of so many young women who could be so much more if given a chance. Maybe one day ladies wouldn't have to let their potential go to waste.

"But we can not figure out how it happened" My thoughts were interrupted by someone in the balcony next to me and what they said piqued my interest. I do not wish to eavesdrop but is it really eavesdropping if they're just willingly in my ear shot?

"A body was found in the forest with no signs of struggle or attacks, it's as if he just dropped dead out of the blue" I hear another person say. I can tell that there are at least three people talking to each other on the next balcony. I hide myself behind the thick wall so they can not see me and try to listen further. Again it's not eavesdropping if they're willingly in my earshot. It's a different thing that they do not know I am here.

"How could this be?" One of them says and the other two sigh. "We will have to ask Lord Vulcan for a favor so he can help us solve this case" Another one of them responds but the third person disagrees. "Lord Vulcan? I do not think we'll be

needing his assistance" The third person says while others try to convince him that they do.

They also start talking about other details of the case and I hear the details very carefully which is entirely their own fault because as responsible gentlemen they shouldn't be talking about such cases out in the open. It is indeed not my problem that they happen to be in my ear shot.

They all leave after discussing a few more things and thanks to them I just got an idea for my new novel which I will be starting tonight. Although just the idea itself isn't enough. I would also have to know more about the case which is clearly hard for me to know and I didn't even get to see their faces so I do not know where to get more leads from but what I do remember is that they were talking about some Lord named Vulcan who could help them solve this case so I can start by knowing more about this Lord Vulcan. Now I know it is just for a Novel but I like to get in detail.

I leave the balcony and get back to the main hall to find my sisters but I am caught by my Mother instead. "There you are you silly girl!" She acts like I'm still not mad at her but I am so I don't react to anything she says. She grabs my arm and makes me greet another one of the suitors and this one also seems like every other nincompoop I have met so far.

He greets me and kisses my hand. I fake smile and act as polite as I can and then comes the worst part where he asks me to dance and I was about to say no until my mother nudged her elbow so harshly on me I thought my soul would leave my body for a moment.

Despite disliking the concept of finding a good match, I very much enjoy the idea of dancing in my ball gown. I say yes and we had a pretty decent dance except for a few times when he accidentally stepped on my feet.

As soon as the dance ends I find my mother walking up to me all terrific and excited about the chat we had while dancing. He attempted to talk to me a few times but my response was vague and strict so he gave up. I can't tell Mother that so I say "we had an amazing conversation" with a fake smile so she lets me go but of course she doesn't and starts asking me for more details so I knew what I had to do now. "Is that Cecelia with Lord Henry?" I say pointing towards my sister and my mother immediately looks away to see where I pointed at and I successfully take this opportunity to escape.

As I was escaping I thought I saw someone familiar. I could only see the person's back but I definitely have seen them somewhere. I do not remember where though. Considering how much I leave my house, there are very few people I see often, let alone someone worthy of remembering. If the person was important I would remember them.

The rest of the time was barely worth remembering and I could not find anything about Lord Vulcan except just hearing a few people mention him in a conversation and speak highly of him. I suppose I'll have to be patient and see what I can do with the information I have on the case right now. I can write a few chapters with my own imagination until I figure out more about this case. Of course this is purely for my Novel. I am not interested in the case myself but I must admit it is quite intriguing.

I take out my pages and start writing the first few chapters of the Novel. I wrote the first chapter 3 times and threw the paper in the trash. This is not how I want the story to be told. I take a deep breath and drop the quill for now and go back to sleep but my mind can not help but wander around. Sometimes my mind is my biggest enemy because at least I can escape other people but I can not escape my own mind.

Let's just forget about other things for now, I have to know more about that Lord Vulcan. Maybe I can get close to him during a ball and acquire more information about the case. He most likely wouldn't think much of it because what can a sweet lady like me even do with that information?

I don't know when I fell asleep and find myself in a dream again. But this time the scenario is today's ball, everything is exactly the same. The human mind never ceases to amaze me with the details it can remember even though I consciously do not remember any of the details.

I just remember it was pretty. I take a pie from the food stall and eat it. It tastes and feels exactly as real life. I'm just eating the pie in peace until I see someone familiar yet again. The dunderhead. I roll my eyes "How are you still here?" I say while gulping down my pie. "Greetings to you too M'lady and I must say you look ravishing today" He says bowing slightly and greeting me.

He looks around the scenario and sighs "so no manslaughter today M'lady? How very unlike you" He says taunting me and I grab the knife next to me. "How about we change that? I'd hate to disappoint you" I say sarcastically while pointing the

knife at him. He laughs and takes the knife away and I let him because I am honestly not in the mood for that.

"But I must say I am surprised that you dream of balls too" He says looking around. "Well I went to one today and it was terrific except for the part where my Mother kept pushing me to acquire a suitor which is what happens every time I attend a ball." I say taking a drink from the table next to me. "Asuitor?" His tone seemed a little off for some reason.

"Well you know young ladies are told to find one and apparently time is ticking because I am turning 21 next month and Mother can not stand that" I say and take another drink. "And I suppose you are extremely against it?" He asks as if it isn't obvious. "Lord heavens whatever gave you that idea?" I say sarcastically and he laughs.

"But tell me, M'lady what do you wish for? I take it you are a very ambitious person so you must have a dream, am I correct?" He asks to take a few grapes from the table and I see no harm in telling him a little bit more about my ambition. "I wish to become a published author" I say and to my surprise he doesn't react negatively to it. Of course he doesn't, he's a figment of my own mind so he would always be supportive of me. That only makes sense.

"So what Novels have you written so far?" He asks as if he's genuinely curious about my work. "Well I used to write poems and short stories but I started writing my first ever Novel 4 months ago and just as it was about to be finished my mother set it to fire because I rejected a suitor" I say trying not to get too emotional remembering it.

"That's..... " I can sense the pity in his tone. "Don't try to make me feel better, it won't work. Now moving on, my Father encouraged me to let go of it and write an even better Novel than that one" I say with a smile and he returns it "now that's sweet" He says and I nod. "I already have an idea for the novel. Today during this ball I heard a few gentlemen talk about a case that could potentially be a murder. The body was found in the forest with no signs of struggle and they can not determine the cause. It caught my attention and I'm gonna get inspired by this case to write my new novel." I say enthusiastically.

Maybe I was thinking too much but his demeanor seemed to change a little as soon as I mentioned that case. "What Else did you hear M'lady" He asked but his tone is not the same anymore. "I could not hear more except for the part that they mentioned some Lord Vulcan who could help them solve this case and apparently he is brilliant" I say and he murmurs something to himself "what did you say?" I ask and he is back to his normal demeanor. "I'm sure he is a brilliant M'lady but I must say you should not get involved in this. It might get dangerous"

I'm irritated again. "Of course I shouldn't after all it is no place for a lady am I right? A lady should just stay inside and do the house chores, shouldn't she?" I snap and ramble on for a while but I notice he isn't trying to stop me or argue otherwise. "Why are you just standing there and not saying anything?" I ask and he finally starts talking "M'lady I didn't say that because you're a woman who should stay inside, I said that because it's dangerous for any normal civilian to get involved in such

cases. I would say the same thing to a boy your age too. There's nothing gender based about it"

He says explaining and I must admit he makes sense. That's the second time I've said something like that about a man. The first time was with my Father when he defended me against my mother when I was 7 and started reading. Of course the second man I say that about is a figment of my own mind.

"So why did you let me ramble on instead of stopping me?" I ask and he smiles "you have a lot of resentment towards men inside of you and it's valid resentment and you deserve to let out your rage so I do not wish to interrupt you. Suppressing it won't do any good now would it?" He says and it actually makes me smile a little.

"A man who understands women's resentment towards men? And supports women's ambition? No wonder you're not real" I say and he says something under his breath. "What do you keep murmuring to yourself? "Nothing just.....You'd be surprised by how many men like that might actually exist in real life" I laugh in disbelief "and what do you know about real life? You are not even real" I say but for some reason I feel bad for saying that.

Although, he doesn't seem to take it personally. "What I mean is M'lady you must keep an open mind and maybe you will in fact find someone like that in real life" He says and I laugh in disbelief yet again. "You have no idea what men are like in the real world" I say and I thought I heard him say "You'd be surprised M'lady"

Before I can ask him to repeat himself, it's time to wake up. "See you later M'lady" He says and I am back in my bed opening my eyes. I find Ellie hugging me and I smile at her "did you hear the news?" She asks me and I don't know what she's talking about "of course not Ellie I just woke up" I say getting up "Cecelia says she might get engaged to Lord Henry" I roll my eyes. "She says that after talking with every suitor she comes across and it never ends up in engagement" I say and look in the mirror. "Lord heavens do I look messy" I say to myself.

"No but this time Lord Henry has sent us some gifts this morning. That has never happened before" Now that caught my attention "really?" I ask her and she nods. I don't waste any more time in my room and immediately run downstairs looking for her. "Mother, do you see this necklace, it's so pretty" I hear Cecelia's voice and immediately smile.

"Now that is a beauty" I say and Cecelia looks at me with a smile "I know right?" She says admiring her necklace. "I meant you silly. You make the necklace look even more beautiful" I say and she shrugs me off. Mother seems very happy with this and I'm glad she will be occupied in getting Cecelia and Lord Henry together for a while and hopefully will not be focusing on me anytime soon. I can write my Novel in peace and also maybe try to gather more information about that case.

I need to get close to that Lord Vulcan if I want to keep an eye on this case. I get back to my room and clean up for today.



Chapter 3

Vera

It's 8 in the morning already so she must be arriving soon enough. I look through my window to see if a carriage has arrived but still no luck. She isn't usually late. What is taking her so long? I look at the clock again and hear a carriage arriving at my doorstep.

"Finally" I ran downstairs and gave my best friend Amelia a hug. "I have been waiting since morning. What took you so long?" I ask with joy "I arrived in London late last night so I overslept a little hence the delay" She says and I forgive her. "I missed you so much. How was the visit to your Uncle?"

I ask and she smiles "It was amazing, we had a lot of fun and I got some new dresses and Jewellery" She says while backing off and doing a little gesture to show the new dress and jewellery she is wearing. "It's fabulous, your golden hair go perfectly with the yellow dress" I say and she giggles. "What about you? I heard there was a ball yesterday so did you find any suitors?" She asks and I divert the attention towards Cecelia "not me but Cecelia here found a good suitor. Lord

Henry. He also sent her some gifts and jewelleries this morning" I say and Cecelia smiles.

She doesn't like Amelia for some reason and I don't understand why, I used to ask her the reason but stopped asking when she never gave a proper answer. "That's amazing Cecelia" Again Cecelia just smiles in response and says a quick thank you. "What about you? How is the novel writing going so far? You said you were about to finish it, so have you?" Now that's the part I did not want to talk about

"I'm so sorry" Amelia says while giving me a hug after I just told her what happened with my novel. "It's fine" I also told her about the new Novel I'm going to write and everything I heard yesterday at the ball and she also seems interested in the case but only to a certain level. I didn't tell her that I'm planning to get closer to that Lord Vulcan in order to find out more about the case of course. She would think I'm out of my mind which I quite frankly am but at least my curiosity would be fulfilled.

"I wish you luck for the Novel Vera" She says and we spend the next 2 hours chatting and playing chess. It is not normal for most women to play chess but my father has always encouraged me to learn it so I did and I also taught Amelia but her Mother doesn't know that because she would be absolutely against it just like my own Mother. "Checkmate" she says smiling in victory and I laugh.

"The student has outdone the teacher it seems and I couldn't be more proud" I say and she smiles and looks back at the clock. "I suppose it is time I leave" She says dishearteningly and I am in low spirits again. "Hold on a moment" I tell her

and go to my mother to ask if I can go with Amelia and be back in a few hours. She says no at first but agrees once I mention that she is back after a month and I missed her a lot so after a little bit more of nagging she let me go.

Amelia stops in between the way to her home to shop for some Crockerries and I follow her into the shop. Her coachman kept us accompanied by standing outside the shop gate. She is from a wealthy noble family so it's a given that they care about her safety.

There are a few ladies in the shop and Amelia takes her sweet time buying Crockerries so I take a stroll outside the shop while she does and as I am about to pass over an alley I hear something "this investigation is getting pointless" The voices sound familiar.

"Like I said we should drop this case as a mysterious death because that is all it is. We have tried our best but there are no leads whatsoever. What would Lord Vulcan even do? He can't make some evidence appear out of thin air. I say we drop this case" I take a peek at the people.

It's two men smoking and talking about that case from yesterday and by their voices I can tell they're the same men I heard yesterday. Again I'm not eavesdropping. They're just within my ear shot. No they can't just drop such a mysterious case like this one. Are they out of their mind? "Listen mate I know you're frustrated but We must let Lord Vulcan have a look at the case. Even if he can't solve it. He might provide us a different perspective on the case. He can provide some of his intellect and we can learn a lot from him"

Yes please do not drop this case, it's important for my Novel. I murmur to myself. "I sent a letter to Lord Vulcan and he said he will be visiting us tomorrow at that bakery near the church at 12 noon" One of them says and the other one scoffs "a bakery? To talk about a case? Is he okay in the head?" Well to be fair the man is right, who chooses a bakery for discussion of a potential murder case "All these genius detectives are never okay in the head" The other one responds and well he is also correct.

"Vera where have you been? I've been searching for you" Amelia calls me and I shush her. "What are you doing?" She says and I take her hand and start walking like I was just passing through this place. I don't turn my head to see if the men saw us because I can not risk them seeing my face especially when they're having a meeting at the bakery tomorrow and I plan to be there.

I just keep walking while holding Amelia's hand and once we are inside the carriage I let out my breath. "What happened? Did you get in trouble?" Amelia asks in a concerned tone. "No I was just listening to some gossip" Amelia looks at me like I'm so silly for overreacting like that over hearing a gossip and honestly it does seem silly from her point of view.

We spend the rest of the day at her home and her Mother treats me extremely nicely but I just have this feeling that she doesn't want me to be friends with Amelia. I don't say anything of course.

It's almost 6 in the evening when I finally reach my home. Amelia was kind enough to send me home in her carriage and as soon as I entered the doorstep my Mother started again

with the lecture and I sigh. I wish I could go far away from this place where no one would nag me. I do not react to anything she says and go straight to my room, take out my paper, ink, quill and start writing.

It was hard to begin but once I got a hang of the story I did not realize how many hours I spent writing. I look at the clock and it's 11 now. I look at my work and revisit the pages, I ended up writing 2 chapters only so far but the story seems to be working well. I am not worried about it afterall I will be getting more inspiration and information for the Novel tomorrow anyway. As for reaching the bakery near the church. I talked Amelia into going there with me. So I will be there.

This Lord Vulcan really seems a little cracked in the head because who holds meetings like that in a bakery. Good for me though. I stretch my body and yawn. I'm so tired I want to fall asleep immediately. And I swear to Christ if that dunderhead is there again messing with me I will not let him go today.

To my surprise he actually wasn't there in yesterday's dream and it was peaceful like it always has been. I loved it. Really. Although I do wonder why he wasn't there. I just want to know what happened all of a sudden. "Vera won't you be coming down for breakfast?" I hear Cecelia shout from downstairs. "I'm coming" I shout back and immediately finish getting ready for the day and go downstairs.

"Mother, Amelia said she found this great bakery nearby church and wanted to treat me." I say while taking my seat and she glares at me. "We also wanted to visit the church of course. It's been awhile since I've been there so we would be visiting

the church and then going to the bakery. You wouldn't deny me visiting the church now would you, Mother?" I say and take another bite. Before Mother can say anything my Father enters the scenario and immediately gives me permission to go whereas Mother glares at both of us yet again which I am used to by now.

Amelia arrives shortly at 11 and I leave with her to the bakery. Of course we are not going to the church that was just an excuse and May lord forgive me for it.

We arrive at the bakery quite on time and order some cake but I do not see the men from yesterday here at all. Amelia talks about another one of the potential suitors she's been talking to lately and I feel bad for not giving her my full attention as I keep searching for the men from yesterday.

"Lord Vulcan it's a pleasure to finally meet you" I hear a voice from the table behind us. Of course I couldn't see them because they were sitting behind me the whole time. Well that's just great. At least I can hear what they're saying. " You seem rather tired Sir" One of the men from yesterday says. "What can I say Mr. Douglas? I have been working on the case the whole night" Lord Vulcan replied and as soon as I hear his voice, there is something about his voice that I can not put my finger on.

"I visited the location and just as people said..... " He suddenly lowered his tone so I bent backwards a little to hear. "there is nothing to be searched upon, it's like the man just dropped dead out of nowhere. The doctors said his body was healthy at the time of death so it couldn't have been a health issue. I

also went to see his dead body last night to find any clues but nothing "

He says much to me and the other two men's disappointment. "which only points to one thing" He continues "If it is a murder then either the murderer is extremely smart or-" He stops "Or what?" The other two speak together. "The attack wasn't physical, it was mental" He says and the other two probably make the same expression as me.

He is actually quite not right in the head. "What do you mean by mental attack?" One of them still asks him despite how ridiculous it sounds. "You know, attack on the mind or consciousness of a person." He says casually like it's the most obvious answer. The other two are probably looking at him like he is out of his mind right now.

"Lord Vulcan, as much as we respect you, we do not have time for jokes. I must say that we take this seriously" One of them says and I can not see what face Vulcan is making right now but I'm sure it isn't good. "Gentlemen have you heard of something called hypnosis?" Vulcan says and for some reason I keep feeling like I have heard his voice somewhere. "Vera let's get going or our Mothers will be furious if we're late" Amelia says and I love her but I wish she would shut up right now. "Can we stay for a few more moments? I crave more cake, you know since it's the time of the month I'm craving more sweets" It's a lie of course but it works and she looks at me with sympathy and orders another cake.

I lean back again to hear more only to find out that they left within this short period of time. These are bunkers. How can they leave without discussing it further? On the other hand

what that Vulcan man said might have sounded ridiculous but it is a good idea. I could use something similar in my novel.

I eat the extra cake Amelia ordered for me and we leave the bakery together. She drops me home and my mind has been stirring up the next chapter of my novel during the entire ride home. I can not wait to put it on paper. I give Amelia a hug and enter my house only to find another nightmare.

Lord Henry has visited our home. I do like the fella but I don't trust him enough yet to let him have Cecelia. I greet him politely and my Mother asks me to stay in the hall until he leaves because apparently it's rude if all family members do not attend the guest which is extremely ridiculous if you ask me. Him and my Father talk about business and I couldn't care less about it. I can not wait to write the next chapter of my novel.

It feels like forever before Lord Henry finally leaves and I let out a sigh of relief. "If we are fortunate our Cecelia would be engaged by next month" Mother says in a cheerful tone and I am happy for her but I have not approved of Lord Henry yet. I smile and leave for my room immediately and pick up the paper and quill.

After finishing one and a half chapters of the Novel I think it's all I can do for today because my motivation and the ideas are suddenly gone which happens a lot but It will be fine as soon as I get my motivation again.

I look at the time it's 10 in the evening already. I skipped dinner but I do not regret it. I'm surprised Mother didn't yell at me for dinner though. I hear a knock at my door and say

come in. I see Father entering with a plate full of food in his hands. He smiles and brings it to me. "How is the novel going?" He asks and I smile. "Fantastic" I say. "Here Cecelia made this for you" He says gesturing towards the plate and I smiled because I knew she cared deep down but I still would've appreciated her not letting mother burn down my previous Novel.

Today's dream seems rather unique as I find myself in the bakery again. I know I can change the scenario of the dream as I like but for now I would like to let it play out. I look around the bakery.

"M'lady may I ask why you chose this scenario today?" I hear a voice and a small smile comes across my face. I turn around to find the dunderhead sitting at a table behind me "I went to this bakery today" I said and his demeanor suddenly seems different than usual. The way he is acting isn't like his usual self at all. "You did?" He says in a low tone. "I went with my best friend Amelia to eat cake. It was really delicious" I say, remembering the taste of the cake.

"You bet it was" He said under his breath but I heard him. I don't point it out because I am used to it now. "Why? Do you not like this scenario?" I ask and he makes an awkward expression like he's uncomfortable. "I'm M'lady. It's just so different from what you usually do in your dreams" He says but I feel like he is hiding something. "Can I tell you a secret?" I ask him and he smiles and it feels so genuine. "Anything M'lady" He says so I tell him about how I went there only to listen to what Lord Vulcan has to say. After I finished telling him, his reaction was not quite what I expected. He looks

frozen. "So did you see this Lord Vulcan?" He asked and I furrowed my brows "of course not, like I said he was sitting right behind me so I could only hear his voice. He disappeared before I could see his face" I say and he looks like he is feeling relieved.

"Too bad though. I thought If I see his face I might try to talk to him at the next ball I meet him at. Surely he is a prestigious person and must get invited to balls all the time" I say and he looks amused. "Why would you want to approach him, M'lady?" He asks and I have a wicked smile on my face "Why you ask? so I can seduce him into giving me more information about the case" I say and he looks like he is trying to suppress his laugh.

"What? You think I can't do that?" I ask him offended and he bursts out laughing. I kick one of his legs but of course it doesn't hurt him since it's a dream "No offense to you M'lady but I think he has enough self control that he would not be seduced by a woman so easily" He says still laughing "I very much take offense to that because I can very seductive if I try" I say getting up from my seat and changing the scenario of the dream into a ball whereas my dress has also changed into something more seductive. He looks around the scenario and then looks at me.

"Want to see?" I say while covering most of my face through a fan and only making my eyes visible. He doesn't say anything for a few moments and looks like he is frozen yet again but for a completely different reason.

"M'lady you don't have to prove anything. I believe you can be very.....seductive" He says the last part in a low breath.

"Come on now don't be so shy, it's not like it's real, let's just enjoy it a little" I say and take his hand. We start dancing and I try out some of the tricks and charms I have learned from reading romance novels.

While we're dancing I start noticing some of his features which I haven't paid any attention to so far. Like his chocolate brown eyes and his height. He certainly seems at least 6'1 and his brown hair compliments his brown eyes perfectly. His facial features are sharp and rather attractive. No wonder he isn't real because no real man would look like this. I think my mind did a great job when it comes to his looks.

We dance until the song is finished and I do not let him break eye contact the whole time and I perform some more subtle moves here and there. Honestly the only reason I can do it so confidently is because it's my dream. I doubt I could be so confident if it was reality. By the end he looks speechless.

"You See I wasn't exaggerating when I said I could be seductive" I say proudly and he gives me a strange look. He looks at me intently for a few moments before turning away. which I do not understand why. Did I do that bad? Even if I did it badly my self respect can not take the hit so I don't ask why he turned his head away "Indeed M'lady, I'm sure this Lord Vulcan holds no chance against your charms" He says still not looking at me. "Are you being sarcastic?" I ask and he immediately looks at me "No M'lady of course not" He exclaims but suddenly the conversation takes a turn to him seriously lecturing me.

"But M'lady I must say you shouldn't be eavesdropping on people" He says and my immediate response is "Is it really

eavesdropping if they're just within my ear shot?" I say and he chuckles. "Now that you have confirmed that my charms work I can try those on Lord Vulcan next time I see him at a ball" He hums in response "I'm sure he would be delighted to be experiencing your charms." and in between him saying that something hits me "but you are a figment of my own mind so of course it worked on you but how can I be sure if it will work on him? What if I make a fool of myself" He looks relieved for some reason.

"This is why I must warn you M'lady do not try those charms on any other man" He says the last part extremely seriously "of course I wouldn't, why would I ever want another man near me, it already baffles me that I have to do it with Lord Vulcan let alone any other man" I get a cringe just thinking about it.

"Do you think Lord Vulcan can actually be helpful? From what you have said He sounds like- *mind my language* - a moron" He asks and I find myself defending him. "What he said may sound stupid to others but I respect his opinions and his boldness to say something like that out loud. Not many speak their mind so easily, I respect him for that" Everything I said is true and I am grateful to him because afterall he did give me an idea for my Novel.

"You really think so?" He asks me with an almost sad expression. "Yes. Not to mention he has a reputation of a genius in solving mysterious cases so I do think he's a brilliant and bold man, a little silly but then again all genius people are a little silly" He smiles at that and this time I notice his smile compliments his face rather well.

I wake up to Cecelia telling me she got another gift from Lord Henry and I'm happy for her. She is admiring the dress he has sent her and looks rather enthusiastic. "I am going to wear this at the ball next weekend" She says and that catches my attention "Another ball? next weekend?" I ask and she turns around and nods.

"Yesterday we got an invitation to a ball hosted by another Noble family. It seems at Father's last business trip he made rather good connections with the Nobels hence we are invited" She says looking back at her reflection yet again. It's like God is on my side. This is the perfect opportunity to get close to that Lord Vulcan but I have to wait till next weekend. It will not be a problem because I may not look like it but I am a very patient person.



Chapter 4

Vera

I spend the next few days hanging out with Amelia and sometimes make an excuse to go back to that alley and the bakery hoping to find those men there again but I had no luck. Although my novel seems to be going well even without any leads because my imagination does the job well, there is still curiosity inside me about that case.

I love mysteries and unsolved cases afterall. I have also read a lot of novels like that and they always amuse me. So if I am being honest I do not really need to know more about the case for my Novel, it's just my own curiosity that I wish to fulfill. He also mentioned something like Hypnosis. I wonder what that was about. I think it's fine as long as I don't get in danger or put others in danger.

That dunderhead has been absent often in my dreams for the past few days and I wonder why. Did my mind finally get tired of him? For some reason the thought is dreadful to me. He is annoying, sure but he makes the dreams more fun and I always have something to look forward to every night when I go to sleep.

Lord heavens if someone knew I was thinking this way for a figment of my imagination I would probably be called not so sane. But it is like being attached to one of the characters in my novel. The characters in my Novel may not be real but I care about them. Not that I care about that dunderhead at all. It's just better when he's around in my dreams and makes everything more fun with his silly jokes. Even if my mind chooses to erase him, I'm sure it can create another one like him.

The ball Cecelia mentioned is three days away and my new dress has not yet arrived. This is a disaster. I usually wouldn't care that much because I believe I look good in anything but this time I actually have to talk to that Lord Vulcan so I need that perfect dress. Vera from two months ago would literally slap me if she found out I was trying to look good for a man but these are desperate times. At least he seems brilliant and bolder than most men around here. He's a little bit silly but it's fine.

I visit the shop again in hopes that they have my dress prepared but much to my disappointment they don't. "It's okay there are still 3 days left. I'm sure they'll prepare it by then. Let's go shop for matching Jewellery to your dress for now" Amelia says trying to cheer me up and I appreciate her efforts.

We went to the jewellery shops and Father was very generous with the money because the business has been going well ever since Lord Henry started investing in Father's business. I am grateful towards him for that.

Amelia helps me choose the best jewelleries and once we are done I am about to leave until I hear one of the employees say something that stops me in my tracks. "Did you hear Lord Vulcan himself visited the shop yesterday?" He visited this place? Do most gentlemen do that? I wouldn't be so sure because I have rarely seen men in jewellery shops. I lean over a little to hear more. "Yes I saw he picked up a ring and took it with him. He must be planning to get engaged soon" Now that doesn't sound good because I can not try to seduce a man who is planning to get engaged to another woman that too just for my own interests. I may be curious about this case but not enough to do something so low.

Good for him I suppose the lady must be lucky to have a brilliant man as her fiance considering those are rare nowadays.

I suppose I will have to find other ways to know more about this case. Lord Vulcan is out of the question right now. But I'm sure I'll figure something out.

Me and Amelia leave the shop and go to that bakery again because the cake there is in fact good. We sit at the same spot as we did last time and order our cakes. Amelia talks about this new Novel that she has been reading and I love to listen to her talk about it.

She suggested I read it too but I have been preoccupied with writing my own. "I'm starting to think Lord Vulcan was right" My ears pop up as soon as I hear that. God really is on my side. It's those two men again. What are the chances that I am here at the exact same time as them? "Don't entertain such ridiculous thoughts, I think he is not okay in the head we can

not trust everything he says" The other one replies and now I'm curious what Lord Vulcan revealed about that case now that these two are acting this way.

"What? You think that is actually possible? Lord Vulcan is not even a proper detective, He's just a what do they call it nowadays? a psychologist? Therapist?.....something like that. He studies and analyses people's behaviors and catches them when they're lying or manipulates the criminals into revealing the truth . Sure he has helped us make multiple criminals confess their crimes by playing mind tricks but this suggestion of his is beyond ridiculous" Now I am more invested than ever in this case and conversation. Especially Lord Vulcan. He studies people's minds?

That sounds extremely intriguing and new. I myself have always been curious about the human mind and it's nature but I never had any source to learn about it. I have to go meet this Lord Vulcan for sure. Not for seducing him of course but to know more about his work as what did they call him? A psychologist.

Once I arrive home I write a few more paragraphs of my Novel after dinner. The motivation to write has been gone lately but I try my best. After throwing a few more pages in trash I give up for today and go back to sleep. It sort of makes me sad that my mind is the only place I feel good at but sometimes is also the only place I wish to escape but can not.

In my dream I find myself back in the jewellery shop but no one is around this time. I look around to see if that dunderhead is here today but he isn't. Which is good of

course. It's peaceful without him around. There is nothing much to see in this scenario.

As I am about to change the scenario of the dream I hear a cough as if it's to grab my attention so I turn around only to find that dunderhead again. Somehow I find myself smiling. "Missed me M'lady?" He teases me. "You wish. It's much more peaceful without you" I say and he makes a fake gesture while putting a hand on his chest. "Ouch, that did not hurt at all" He says dramatically and I laugh. "There is a ball in three days" I say and his instant reaction is "finally! So are you going to meet that Lord Vulcan this time?" He sounds very enthusiastic about it for some reason. "No I dropped that notion" I say and he frowns.

"why? Are you not interested in this case anymore?" He asks and I understand why he'd think that. "I am certainly still very interested but I heard in a jewellery shop today that he picked up a ring for a lady so I am assuming he must be getting engaged soon so I had to drop that plan of seducing him. I can't do that to another woman's man of course " I say and he looks like he is dumbfounded.

"Well it doesn't necessarily mean that he's getting engaged, maybe he did it for another friend of his who asked him to pick up the ring for his fiance" He says and I scoff "that's just a speculation. I still do not wish to move forward with that anymore and now that I think about it the whole idea was very plainly idiotic. Seducing a man just to fulfill my curiosity about a case? It sounds absolutely ridiculous. I was blinded by my new novel idea and my curiosity. I acted very mindlessly" I say realising my own mindlessness.

"Don't say that M'lady you are absolutely brilliant and everyone makes mistakes" He says and I smile . "I found out Lord Vulcan is a psychologist. I assumed he was a detective because he was helping other detectives but apparently he studies the human mind. Isn't that fascinating?" I say in awe because I would also love to study something like that.

"You find that fascinating? Most people would say he's out of his mind for choosing a field like that or try to avoid him unless they need his help because then suddenly he is a genius to people" He says and I found that absolutely barbaric. People would do that? That's so horrible of them. "Why not? Human mind has always fascinated me and studying that really sounds beguiling. He is in a really interesting profession." He gives me a small smile at that. "Although I do wonder why he went as far as checking out the scene of tragedy himself and even examined the dead body. He is just a psychologist afterall" I say and he chuckles.

"You think too much M'lady, maybe he's just too passionate about such cases" I hum in response. "So M'lady you do not plan to meet him during this ball?" He asks and I shake my head. "Not really although I would love to know more about his work but approaching him as a woman would be too wrong considering he might be getting engaged soon".

"So what do you plan to do?" He asks and suddenly I'm hit with a genius idea "maybe I could approach him dressed as a boy while pretending to be a journalist who wants to interview him" I say and he laughs "M'lady you can not fool an over-observant psychologist. He will catch your lie within moments" He says breaking my delusions and my smile is gone

"you're right" I say while frowning. "Just gently approach him and try to talk about his work. Keep it professional and you will be fine. You won't be committing a felony by just talking to him about his work" He says and I suppose it does make sense, maybe I was overthinking it.

"You're right I can try to approach him simply to talk about his work." I say and he hums "also now that your seduction plan is not on the table anymore. You won't be using those tricks on any other man now would you?" His tone sounds a little too serious and low while he says that and I'm not sure why he is still talking about that "I think I already told you that I wouldn't" I say and he smiles as if he's relieved.

Hold on I think I know why he is acting like that. "Hey are you-" He looks at me immediately. "Worried that I might embarrass myself in front of those men? Of course you are because you think it was silly of me to even try that" I say and he has this expression of disbelief on his face.

"What? M'lady no that's not why I-" He stops in the middle of his sentence and I feel like he's searching for better words to convey what he wants to say. "Then why?" He opens his mouth to say something but stops again. "It's because it-" Before he can finish his sentence I find myself waking up in my bed while Ellie is playing a flute in my room. "Good morning Vera, see what Father brought for me" She shows me a flute and plays a few tunes and she plays marvelously but I wish she came here a few moments late. I love my family but sometimes I really wish to be alone in the morning. I suppose I'll ask him what he meant later but for now I have to get up for the day.

The next two days went by quickly and thankfully my dress arrived timely on the day of the ball. Even if the seducing Lord Vulcan plan is off I would still love to wear this dress. It makes me feel more courageous and confident in myself. Not that I usually lack it but a good dress can always make a lady feel a hundred times better about herself.

I try on the dress and it compliments my appearance quite perfectly. Next time when I show that dunderhead my charms I am going to use this dress so he can not laugh at me again. "Vera you look marvelous in that" Cecelia says looking at me and my reflection. "Be ready because no matter how much you hate it you will be getting a lot of suitors today" She says and suddenly my cheerful mood is no longer here. "How could you say something like that to me?" I say dramatically and she laughs. "Take it as a compliment Vera" She says while smiling.

As we are about to leave for the ball I see Lord Henry at our doorstep and Mother immediately smiles at the sight of him. Fortunately for me Mother isn't attending tonight's ball. They discuss something for a while and I see Mother coming towards us. "Vera, Cecelia listen to me Lord Henry wishes that he and Cecelia arrive together at the ball" She says and I frown. "But why?" I ask and Mother and Cecelia both look at me like I have lost my mind. "Why of course because he wants the public to know there is something going on between Cecelia and him or that he wishes to be engaged to her soon"

Mother explains to me like I'm some child who asked a senseless question. "Well then go on" I say and they look at me like I'm a fool yet again. "You have to accompany your sister," Mother says after taking a deep breath. "But-" I am

about to say something again but get interrupted by Mother. "Now don't ask why just accompany her and use this opportunity to get to know your future brother in law better and maybe ask him if he has any acquaintances or friends who wish to marry soon" I roll my eyes and I know that rebelling won't do any good and only waste more time so I agree and get on the carriage with her and Lord Henry.

"Pleasure to have you Miss Vera" Lord Henry says with a smile and it seems almost genuine. I still do not approve of him. I know he is a wealthy man but it doesn't mean he is a good one. One's heart and goodness matters the most specially when it comes to someone you are going to create a family with. I don't want my sister to suffer after marriage just because he isn't a good man and has affairs after marriage or doesn't care about her feelings at all. "It's an honor for me too" It's not but pleasantries should be performed so I have no choice.

The whole time in the carriage both of them can not stop eyeing each other and lord knows what they're conversing in between those subtle eye movements and interactions. I feel like I shouldn't be here and leave them alone but of course that isn't socially acceptable.

The carriage comes to a stop. Have we reached it already? Lord Henry gets out to see what the issue is and comes back a few moments later. "Apologies ladies but someone's carriage got stuck in the road and that someone happens to be my friend. He is headed towards the same destination so would you mind if he joins us?"

Yes I do mind very much. I already did not want to be here but now there is going to be another person? I was not mentally prepared to deal with so many unexpected events today but of course I can not say that so Cecelia and I both shake our heads and say "Not at all, he can join us of course."

"Thank you for your understanding. He is a gentle natured person so he will not trouble you at all." Lord Henry says and rushes back to get his friend but returns alone. "What happened to your friend?" Cecelia asked and I could not care less.

Please tell me he declined the offer. "He declined the offer" That is music to my ears "I told him about you two and he didn't want to inconvenience two ladies specially if one is my-" He stops mid sentence and Cecelia blushes. I roll my eyes for the lord knows how many times now. This is pure torture.

"That was very kind of him" I say and both of them break their eye contact. "Like I said he is a gentle soul" He said and took his seat inside the carriage again. "Lord Vulcan has always been like that" My pupils widen at the mention. "Lord Vulcan?" I exclaim and both of them seem surprised by my sudden outburst.

"Yeah, have you heard of Ms. Vera? I wouldn't be surprised if you have. He is quite popular between the ladies but he doesn't pay much attention to them. He is more of a serious gal, always focused on work and his cases" Lord Henry says and I try to take a peek at Lord Vulcan through the window while our carriage passes by him but all I can see is his back. If only he turned around a little. But then again what's the rush he will have there at the ball anyway.

I see another carriage approaching so I suppose he'll get a ride. "I never knew you were friends with him" I say and he smiles. "We get along quite well. I'm actually one of the few people he gets along with because most of the time he doesn't want to get involved with people." He says proudly and I nod. Cecelia seems more shocked with my questioning about Lord Vulcan and I know what she must be thinking.

"Why? Are you interested in him, Ms. Vera?" He asks and I do not know what to say to that. "Actually I am quite interested in his work. I heard he is something called a psychologist and I am quite fond of work like that so you can say I respect his work" I say an answer that doesn't arouse any weird suspicion but I know Cecelia is going to be talking my ear off about this later.

"I also heard he might be getting engaged" I say so Lord Henry can confirm my suspicion. "That is just a baseless rumour he is quite far from getting engaged in fact I think he might never get married at all" That makes me remember something that dunderhead said he might have picked for a friend and it suddenly hits me. Lord Henry is actually planning to propose to Cecelia soon. The friend must have been Lord Henry.

As we arrive at the ball it is extravagant like every other ball but there is something different here. I immediately go up to Cecelia and whisper in her ear "When on earth were you going to tell me this was a masquerade ball?" She looks at me with a weird expression. "Vera I told you this" She says and I want to kick her feet right now but I can't. "When on earth did you tell me that?" I ask in a whisper again.

"A few nights ago when you were writing, I entered your room to give you milk and briefly mentioned it and you hummed in response." I do not remember when that happened because I forget about reality when I'm writing.

"Well what do we do now we didn't bring any masks" I say and she laughs. "We didn't have to, the masks are there you can pick one." She points towards a huge table at the side of the hall which is filled with masks. It was out of my field of vision until now so I did not notice it.

"You do realise this is our first masquerade ball. We have only heard of it so far, so do you know what to do or how to behave?" I ask another silly question because yes I don't want to make a fool of myself. "What do you mean? It's like any other ball and you do everything like every other ball except you have a mask on your face" She says and I must have made a funny expression because she next she says "do not make that face in front of others it's rude" And I roll my eyes "well this whole concept is extremely ridiculous then. I thought Masquerade balls were something different and super mysterious or cool" I say and before she can respond someone is clanking a glass with a spoon gathering everyone's attention. It's the person who hosted the ball.

"Ladies and gentlemen I appreciate that you all spent your precious time coming here-" The host of this ball starts talking and it's usual nonsense and long speech which bores me. After a while he asks all of us to take our masks so me and Cecelia go and pick one.

I take a red one matching my dress and she takes one matching with hers. Once we have taken the mask the host

asks us to get divided into two groups, men or women, so the crowd evenly gets divided in two groups. And two of the host's servants bring out two plates including small chits and both of them stand in front of each group.

Now this looks interesting.

"Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, both plates have some chits. The chits in both plates have written numbers in them from 1-50 and you have to take a number and find your partner from the opposite group. Your partner would have the same number as you. You can begin now" The host says and the servants start going through each row of the divided group and people pick a chit. I picked mine too. I got 23 and Cecelia got 45. Once the chit picking is over. We are told to find our partner so the hall gets chaotic for the next few moments. I try to find my partner but end up dropping my chit so I try to pick it up but someone else does it for me.



Chapter 5

Vera

I look up to find a man with a brown mask. I look at him and he asks "23?". I nod and he shows his own chit. It is also 23. I smile politely and before we can talk further the host asks the crowd to stand in pairs with our partners so we do.

I take another little glance at him while he's carefully listening to the host. I feel like I have seen him before but I can not remember where. He looks strangely familiar. "This should be easy" He says and I awkwardly look away pretending that I wasn't staring at him the whole time. "What should be easy?" I ask and he spares me a glance before turning his attention back towards the host. "So whoever finds them first gets a surprise gift" I hear the host say and I'm lost. I did not hear what the host said this whole time at all.

"What-what is he talking about?" I ask and he turns to me and gives me a strange look. He shows a hint of a smile before starting to explain to me "There is a person between all these pairs who is an imposter planted by the host. The person carries small red circle shaped chits with them and they will start marking people with those chits and if any one person

from a pair gets marked then both are out of the game but if someone can catch that person before they can eliminate everyone playing the game then that someone gets a surprise gift."

He explains and I'm not going to lie, it sounds stimulating. "That doesn't sound so hard" I say but he smiles and leans into my ear "it can even be your own partner. How do you know it's not me?" He asks and I turn my head to look at him. I could swear on my life I have seen those eyes before. "Well then I would be safe wouldn't I? Because why would you eliminate yourself?" I ask and he chuckles "maybe I would just for the funnies afterall if I am the imposter I lose nothing by getting eliminated"

I think about it for a while and he is right. If he infact is the imposter he loses nothing but I'll get eliminated. I have to be careful around him. "Doesn't that mean it'll generate doubts between the pairs themselves. The pairs can't even trust each other" I say and he leans back "That is the point Miss, it's a test to see how easily people can turn against each other even for just a silly game" He says and I can notice that the pairs are looking at each other with distrustful eyes already.

"By the way, who are you? Have we met before?" I finally ask him and he looks like he isn't paying much attention to what I'm saying but analysing everyone's behavior instead. "Now what would be the point of a *masquerade* ball if I told you who I am?" He says and it's a good point I do admit there is some mystery to this whole thing and it's extremely refreshing. So far this ball is the only one I haven't been bored with after awhile.

I am lost in thoughts when suddenly he grabs me and changes my position to his left and his hands are immediately gone from my torso "Apologies miss I suspected you were about to get eliminated" I look at him dumbfounded with almost my jaw half open "that was barbaric" I say and he nods "Extremely. we both almost got eliminated" He says giving me a quick glance and looks back around observing more people.

Does he not realise that what he just did was not a proper way to behave with a lady he just met? Obviously he doesn't. And here I thought I was the clueless one. Before I can confront him about his behavior I notice someone acting rather strange so I pull his sleeve to catch his attention "Look over there. He looks suspicious" I say and he takes a look at the person and observes him for a while and says "He's not the imposter, he just needs to use the washroom" He says and I laugh at that. "What's so funny?" He asks and I stop giggling and shake my head "nothing" He looks at me strangely again but goes back to observing people.

I can hear disappointed groans of people who got eliminated already and thanks to him I'm not one of those people right now. "Miss follow me" he whispers slowly and this time I just follow him without any questions. Once we are behind a pillar he points towards a woman who is acting suspiciously and asks me "Miss can you go to her and make her open her purse" He says and I look at him like he's lost his mind. "Why would I do that? And what excuse would I use?" I say as he is intently looking at her purse. "I suspect she is carrying those red dots with her in that purse"

That makes sense "but what would I even say to her?" I ask and he looks at me like I'm an idiot. "Ask her for lady things or maybe lip paint or Just anything ladylike. Use any excuse to make her open her purse" He says and I can not believe he just mentioned that so casually. If I didn't want to win this I would have a whole argument with him right now. "What if she does have it?" I ask and he shows me a hand gesture making a circle with his index finger and thumb. "Show me this gesture subtly and steal the purse" He says and yet again I can not believe this guy but I do not argue more.

I approach her and make small talk while finally making an excuse for her to open her purse and my eyes widen at what I see. The red chits are actually inside her purse. When she realises her mistake she pulls her purse aside and I immediately pretend that I was looking at her jewellery the whole time. "Your jewellery is magnificent. I would love to know where you got it from" I divert the conversation so she doesn't suspect a thing and it works. I make that hand gesture towards him and he smiles.

Now all I have to do is steal the purse and get it to him. The next few minutes I keep trying to get her to leave her purse alone but it doesn't work until I'm hit with an idea. "Madam is that a piece of your jewellery lying around there? You must have dropped it accidentally" I say and she immediately starts checking her jewelleries and that's when she puts her purse on the nearby table and I slyly take the opportunity.

By the time she is done checking her jewellery I am already with my partner. I show him the purse proudly and he smiles. He puts out his hand for me to take and I gladly do so as we

walk to the centre of the hall very proudly and we announce that we have caught the person while Showing the red chits I pull out from the purse. After everyone acknowledges that we have in fact caught the person, The lady who owns the purse comes to the centre and takes her purse.

She laughs and admits that she is in fact the imposter implanted by the host and the host asks everyone to give us applause. We both bow respectfully towards the crowd.

The lady comes to me and says "you are indeed very sly my dear. Others were busy getting worried about elimination or doubting their own partners but you two did rather well" I smile humbly and return her purse. "You can check nothing else is gone from it. I only took out the red chits" I say so she doesn't get worried. "Oh don't worry there is not much of worth inside it anyway" She says and we are interrupted by another announcement of the host.

"Now before we can present pair no. 23 their surprise gift we would like them to give us tonight's first dance" The host says and the crowd bursts to cheers and applauses. I turn to look at him to see what his thought is on this and- "Miss would you honor me with a dance?" He asks very politely and I say yes. Afterall we couldn't have done it without each other.

As the music starts and our eyes meet I get that strange feeling again like I have looked in these exact eyes before. I just can not put my finger on it. When we start dancing I also feel this strange sense of familiarity with him. We have definitely met before and for some reason I think he can sense it too. We dance and sync perfectly with each other which is a good thing

because I wouldn't want to make a fool of ourselves after winning a game.

Once the dance is done and we bow I think I hear him say something but before I can ask him what he said I am immediately pulled aside by Cecelia being bombarded with questions. I didn't even get to thank him properly but I suppose there will be many chances since there is still time before the ball ends.

I mostly give Cecelia vague answers because my eyes are searching for Mr. 23 but I can't find him and Cecelia doesn't look like she will stop anytime soon . Where is Lord Henry when you need him? I wish he would come and occupy Cecelia. I think to myself while still vaguely answering her questions.

Thank heavens I can see Lord Henry approaching us "Ms Vera you really don't waste any time huh?" Lord Henry says and I don't understand what he means at all. "Lord Henry Whatever do you mean?" I ask and he chuckles "now don't play innocent Ms Vera" He says and I am still lost. "With all due respect Lord Henry I genuinely have no idea what you're talking about" I say and he realises I'm not pretending.

"So you didn't know that was Lord Vulcan?" He asks and I feel like a ceiling has collapsed on me "you're joking" I say and he doesn't change his expression at all "No I am not. That was indeed Lord Vulcan, I chose that mask for him myself and that man is wearing the same suit as him." I am still processing what he just said "Not to mention the way he solved something like this so fast. That was indeed him" I waste no more time there and immediately go to look for him but

unfortunately I have no luck even after 20 minutes. I can not find him anywhere.

"I don't think you will find him here anymore. He must have left already. He had the fun and he got the food so he must have left" Lord Henry says appearing behind me and I am in disbelief "but we haven't even received the price yet" I say and he chuckles "he doesn't care for such mundane things. I'm sure he only did it for the thrill of it" Somehow I find him even more fascinating now.

As we rode the carriage back home Cecelia was still having a hard time believing that I am not interested in Lord Vulcan in that way at all and that I just find his work fascinating. I told her not to breathe a word of this to Mother because then Mother will not leave me alone at all. Cecelia promised she won't but I have a hard time believing her.

After arriving home, I leave Cecelia to answer Mother's queries about tonight's events while I write a few more pages. This Novel just keeps getting more and more interesting as I write further.

I find myself in the ballroom again. I must have drifted off while writing. I look at the decorations and it never ceases to amaze me how magnificent these halls look. While admiring the decorations I find myself wanting to dance so I do.

I pretend that I am dancing with someone and it's freeing to just move along to the music and feel my body come alive. I am dancing alone and feeling the most free I have felt in a while. I spend several moments just like that until I'm not alone anymore.

I feel him join me in between my dance and we both don't say anything and just move along with the tune while looking at each other. He looks like he wants to say something but he doesn't say it. Neither of us say anything until the dance is done. Once the music stops and we are finally free to talk, the first words that come out of his mouth are "you are sensational M'lady" He says letting out his breath while having a strange look on his face.

I smile in response and we both make our way to a nearby table grabbing some snacks and drinks. They're not real of course but they feel so. "You will not believe what happened today" I say with enthusiasm and he smiles "tell me about it" He says with no hesitation. "I met Lord Vulcan today" His expression changes for a brief moment "Well What did you think of him?" I find his question rather weird because I thought he would ask about his work instead of what I thought of him but I don't mind answering that. "He is a brilliant person just like I thought. We were in a masquerade ball and we got paired together for a game. Can you believe that? What are the chances?

However I didn't know that he was Lord Vulcan. I found him really strange at first but it turns out he is brilliant and extremely observant. We won the game because of him. Although he didn't know it was me and neither did I know that it was him, we worked as a team pretty well even as strangers.

It was only after I finished having a dance with him that I found out he was in fact Lord Vulcan" I say and he listens to me intently with a hint of smile on his face. "But it was too

late until I realized who he was and before I could find him again, he was gone." I say the last part with a hint of disappointment. "It's okay M'lady you'll have many chances of meeting him again in the future" He says and I nod. "Is someone finally showing an interest in a potential male suitor?" He teases me and I roll my eyes.

"Just because I adore someone's brilliance and work does not mean I have romantic interest in them" For some reason he looks disappointed with my answer.

"That's disappointing" So he admits he feels disappointed. "Why so?" I ask and he looks like he's thinking carefully of what to say next. "No reason I just thought I might tease you about it if you did actually have an interest in him" He says but I feel like he isn't saying the complete truth about his opinion but I don't push.

"I shall never have a romantic interest in my lifetime" I say fiercely and he doesn't say anything, just smiles. "Whatever makes you happy M'lady" He says with a gentle smile but I feel like there is something sad about his smile.

"Most of the time people would start lecturing me about how that is unrealistic and that I will end up alone and society wouldn't accept me but you have a rather calm reaction. These are the times I remember you really are my mind's perfect creation" I say while looking at him while not being sure what expression I have on my face .

"M'lady you shouldn't listen to people. Always follow your heart. You don't have to find the perfect man if you don't want to. You don't have to get married if you don't want to. No one

can force you into doing anything unless you let them" He says and takes a step close to me. "Never let them control you, M'lady. Always stay true to yourself" He almost brings one of his hands to caress my cheek but stops as soon as he's about to touch it. If he wasn't my mind's creation I would think he was actually feeling something right now. I smile in response but he moves his hand away and turns around. "You're acting strange today" I say but he doesn't say anything.

"It's all in your head M'lady. Figuratively and quite literally" He says attempting to lighten the mood and I don't push further. "My novel is coming off great so far except sometimes I think my characters would hate me if they were real" I say and he immediately asks "why would you think that?" and my response is.....

"the way I have written their lives they would not say thank you if they ever met me" I say and it's quite in fact true. "What about you M'lady?" I look at him questionably. "Huh?" I ask with a look of confusion. "What if someone was writing your story? What would they say to them? Hypothetically of course" He asks and that's a refreshing question.

"If someone was indeed writing my story I would tell them to stop writing at all and that they are doing a terrible job at it because there is nothing thrilling about my life right now. I'd suggest they use more of their imagination and maybe even save me from my own mind" I say the last part in a low tone.

"If there were any readers reading my story I'd tell them that reading my story is quite pointless especially if they're hoping for some romance. " I also add "And If the author is writing this story from my point of view then god bless the reader's

poor soul" I end up wrapping my answer. "That was an extremely detailed response for a hypothetical question M'lady" He says and I nod "what can I say I'm just an extremely thorough person" He smiles and slowly nods.

We spend a few more minutes chatting away but I just feel like there is something different about him. He isn't acting like his usual self tonight but I can't really do anything about it so I let it go.

Few weeks later

I find myself in an awkward position between Lord Henry and Cecelia. It appears they were about to kiss and I interrupted them. They're both awkwardly looking around here and there whereas I don't know how to react

"Lord Henry it is splendid to meet you again" I say extremely awkwardly in an attempt to not to make this anymore awkward than it already is. "Y-Yes Ms. Vera likewise" He also responds very hesitatingly. A few more moments of awkwardness pass between us until he asks me "So how is your approach to Lord Vulcan going? Have you got any chance to meet Ms. Vera?"

He asks, trying to divert the topic and honestly it isn't really a good diversion. "Not yet. But I suppose I'll have to let fate decide whether I get to meet him again or not" I say and it sounded much more dramatic than I intended it to. "Well I can fix a meeting with him if you like Ms. Vera. Not to mention I was already planning to officially introduce my lovely Cecelia as my fiance to him soon" He says and yes he

finally proposed to her and she said yes. Mother has been over the moon since it happened.

As for his offer about setting up a meeting with Lord Vulcan, I'm grateful for it but hesitant at the same time. I don't want to look like a stalker or some obsessive journalist to him.

"Lord Henry I appreciate the offer but I don't think I should-" I get interrupted by Cecelia "don't be silly Vera, I'm sure Lord Vulcan wouldn't mind if he really is as much of a gentle soul as Lord Henry claims him to be" Lord Henry agrees and I suddenly have no choice left but to agree with them.

I feel suspicious of both of them because they definitely seem like they are conspiring something together but I can not understand what. "On one condition though" I say and they both nod immediately. "You won't tell him that I'm his partner from the masquerade ball" I ask and they both are hesitant for a moment but comply with my demand. I find both of them suspicious but don't say anything since I am also benefitting from this.

It was decided that we will be meeting him next week after Lord Henry asked Lord Vulcan about his schedule. I would be lying if I said I'm not least bit excited about it. I am. The reason I asked them not to tell him that I am his partner from the masquerade ball is because I want to see how good he is. Can he use his detective skills and psychological knowledge to figure out if it's me or not? It may sound childish but I find it fun.

I haven't met the dunderhead in my dream in a long time. Although I am used to it by now. He suddenly disappears for days and suddenly appears again acting all normal.

I can not complain about it to anyone since he isn't a real person and his presence in my dreams completely depends on my own mind and that's what frustrates me even more. I want to tell someone about the fact that I'm meeting Lord Vulcan.

Amelia has been busy with her potential suitor and has rarely time for me and quite frankly I do not blame her for it. She doesn't owe me anything. I just wish she spent a little bit more time with me. Perhaps I'm just being greedy. Now some would say I'm feeling lonely but I prefer calling it a 'tool for gathering emotions for my Novel' because I express my own feelings through my character and I genuinely believe readers would feel it from my work. I want my readers to know how I feel. I want them to see me through my characters.



Chapter 6

Vera

The day has arrived. I'm finally going to meet Lord Vulcan face to face and quite frankly I'm nervous as much as I'm excited. The carriage ride is more comfortable than the one I had with Lord Henry and Cecelia while going to that masquerade ball.

"So Ms. Vera, have you thought of what questions you're going to be asking him?" Lord Henry asks and Cecelia looks at me quite intently waiting for my response. I know what these two are thinking but it is nothing like that at all. I have no intention of entertaining any romance with Lord Vulcan.

I'm purely fascinated by his profession and nothing more but explaining it to these two would only deepen their suspicion so I don't bother correcting them. They can think what they want as long as I know myself that my intention is to only get to know more about his work.

"I in fact have prepared some questions I am going to ask him" I show Lord Henry my list of prepared questions and he takes the paper quite enthusiastically but as he reads it I can see a small frown is starting to form on his face. "Ms. Vera, these

questions make you look like you're a journalist interviewing him. All of these are very formal " He says and I nod proudly.

"Like I said I'm only interested in his profession and what he does" Both him and Cecelia look disappointed and I could not care less.

They are engaged now and I am very happy for them but they should mind their own business instead of trying to stir up unnecessary romance in my life. Although I appreciate the effort Lord Henry put into arranging this meeting.

As we enter the gate of Lord Vulcan's residence I can see he is quite rich. The gardens, the fountains and the residence itself is quite remarkable in size. Does his profession provide him enough to be able to own all this?

It looks like the question was quite evident on my face so Lord Henry answers "The wealth is quite generational. His Father passed down his inheritance when he passed away while Lord Vulcan was 12. It is hard manage the estate but he has got assistants so he still pursues psychology as a passion" I nod in understanding and as the carriage comes to halt in front of the main house entrance door, Lord Henry gets out first and gives a hand to Cecelia as she gets down the carriage and then to me.

I finally take in the whole residence while looking around the big garden and fountains along with the House's beautiful architecture. It's all very unreal. The Servants greet us as we enter the house and I can not help but admire the interior. It is definitely the work of a woman.

As we arrive at the main hall and seat ourselves on the sofa I notice something, a painting almost covering the wall from the ceiling to the floor. It's a painting of a family. I assume it must be Lord Vulcan's family. He is quite small in the painting though, he looks around 7 or 8.

The Mother looks Enchantingly beautiful and a little girl whom I assume is Lord Vulcan's sister resembles her mother's enchanting beauty just the same. The Father looks rather stern and has a sharp-glaring look on his face.

"That's the Vulcan family, like I said his father passed away when he was 12 henceforth he has been responsible for handling the family business and regrettably so his Mother also passed when he was 16" Lord Henry explains. I certainly feel bad for the siblings now

The servants serve tea and I ask one of them if it's fine to take a stroll around the garden since it seems lovely. "Why of course" I turn around to find a woman wearing an exquisite green dress as she's smiling at me. "Thank you Miss.....?" I ask and she politely introduces herself. "You can call me Celeste" I bow politely and introduce myself as well. Celeste is the sister and she looks almost the same as her Mother now. She has grown to resemble her mother more and more.

After sharing pleasantries for the next few minutes, all of us decide to take a stroll around the garden while having a very pleasant chat but I still haven't had a chance to meet Lord Vulcan.

"Theodore will be arriving soon" Celeste says in between chatting with Cecelia and Lord Henry and it made me realise I didn't even know Lord Vulcan's full name so far.

I suppose I have got to wait a few more minutes. While looking around I spot a bunny and decide to follow it. It's small, furry and adorable so what is not there to like.

While following the bunny I find myself near a tree and decide to climb it. Yes I climbed a tree so what? It was hard but worth it. After finally climbing a branch I decided to rest against it. The view is spectacular from up here and I'm having a pleasant time until I hear someone say "excuse me miss may I ask who you are and what are you doing on a tree in my garden?" I try to look down but I can't make out the person's face from up here. "Your garden? " I ask with confusion evident in my tone.

"Yes Miss this is my garden and I don't suppose I have seen you here before and neither do I know you so I'd like to ask very politely who are you and why are you here?" He is Lord Vulcan? His voice does sound familiar so I suppose yes. I look down but I still can not see his face due to the leaves coming in between. "I'm Vera Rose Frost. I'm an acquaintance of Lord Henry and I'm here with him and my sister who is engaged to him. He is your friend I heard" I say loud enough so he can hear me.

"Ahh, he did say he was visiting today but I suppose he must have forgotten to mention you. Miss Vera I must ask you to get down as it's extremely dangerous for a lady like you to climb a tree this high" He says and I roll my eyes, yes I know it's dangerous but it's thrilling so I simply do not care.

I do not want to argue with him anymore so I try to get down the branch but here's the issue. It looks like it's about to break.

Oh No.

I try to gently climb down but as my luck would be the branch breaks and I scream in terror as I'm about to hit the ground but I find myself hitting a person instead. I fell on Lord Vulcan and we both landed on the ground. This can not be how I officially meet him. My eyes are still closed from the shock and I suppose he is as shocked as me because ever since we landed on the ground he hasn't said a word.

"You can open your eyes M'lady" I gently open my eyes and my mind is blank for a few moments at what I see. When did I start dreaming? No this isn't a dream. The pain I feel from the fall is too much for this to be a dream.

"What is happening?" I mumble to myself and take a look at the person in front of me. This is unexplainable. I get up abruptly without taking my eyes off of him. "What in the world-" I say again questioning everything I have ever known.

"M'lady listen to me" He says. 'M'lady', why is he calling me that? Only one person calls me that.

No. No. No. No. No.

This can not be. I am losing my mind. Cecelia was right. Reading too much has started affecting my brain. I should stop everything. I start backing off from him and bump into someone.

"Good lord, Vera watch how you walk" I hear Cecelia say but I don't turn around to look at her or anyone else who's with

her. "So you two have finally met I see" Lord Henry says coming forward and introducing us. "Vera this is Lord Therodore Vulcan and Theodore my friend, this is Miss Vera sister of my very lovely fiance Cecelia" Both me and him do not pay any attention to anyone else except looking at each other the only difference was my eyes are filled with confusion and his with fear.

What is he afraid of? "Forgive my brother, he is not very good with people. Sometimes he gets socially awkward" Celeste says trying to end the silence and make the atmosphere less awkward but still we do not care. Lord knows how long we stared at each other before I stormed out of the place trying to make sense of everything.

Cecelia followed me asking tons of questions and my only response was that I don't feel well. She stopped pushing after a few minutes and we rode the carriage home. My mind has never been this chaotic in my whole life.

As we arrive home I lock myself in my room. Not knowing what to do or what to make of anything. Who was he? Lord Vulcan or..... No, the idea is insane. It is not possible. Maybe he just looks like him.

Maybe I saw him in passing somewhere and my subconscious caught on to his appearance and created him in my dreams. Yes, that makes sense. That has to be it. But then why did he look at me like that? Like he was afraid? Like he recognised me and not just from that ball? The questions are endless and I do not know where to get the answers. I could go to sleep and ask him or I could just ask Lord Vulcan but I'm afraid of the answers. My mind is in turmoil.

Writing.

That is the only thing I can do now. Write. I pick up my novel and start writing. I emerge myself in the story. Anything to distract me from reality. I write and write and write. I don't know if it's any good but I'll see it later with a clearer mind.

Right now I just need to do anything but think of this morning. I don't know how long I spent writing but it seems it's been a few hours and my hands have started hurting. I suppose it's around 7 in the evening now. Ellie visited my room a few times but I didn't respond so she left.

My head is still not clear enough. I need to get out. Take a stroll and clear my mind but of course Mother won't let me so I tell Ellie to cover for me and inform Father that I am writing and do not wish to be disturbed so he won't let anyone inside my room for a while. I escape through the window while wearing a cloak.

It was not easy of course but if I can climb a tree I can surely escape from my window. I have done this multiple times before.

As I finally find myself on the street, I start walking and I do not know or care where my feet take me until I almost get hit by someone's carriage. I didn't actually get hit but I fell down because of the shock. The carriage comes to a halt and the person driving the carriage screams at me for not watching where I'm going. I am about to apologize until I see someone get out of the carriage. It's a Man followed by a Woman.

They hurry towards me and ask me if I'm fine. "Sweetheart, are you hurt anywhere?" The woman asks very nicely and I say

no I'm fine. But to them it must've seemed like I'm still in shock when in reality I was troubled about a different matter entirely.

"Miss you seem to have injured yourself" The Man says while looking at my bleeding elbow. Lord heavens I didn't even notice. "Young lady we must apologize for this, would you mind coming with us to our home so we can have you nursed by our maids? Our home is right at the corner. We can not leave an injured person in the middle of the street and especially when it was our fault." The woman says sweetly and I can not refuse.

Although I shouldn't be going to a stranger's house like this, I seem to have lost the ability to reason since this morning.

We arrive at their place and it's a cozy sweet house that they have. Now that we're in better lighting I see their faces more clearly. I feel like I have seen these people before and they also have this expression on their face like they recognize me. "Miss forgive me but I think that I recognize you" The Man says and the woman seems to agree with him. "Yes Darling, have we met before?" The woman asks and I frankly feel the same but I just can not remember where or when I met them.

"Oh you're Mr. Gideon's daughter" The Man says and I find myself intrigued. Do they know my Father? "You're right Brother, I remember now" The woman says and I also seem to recall something from my memory.

"We met at the new year's party and your father introduced us briefly. We even talked for a while" The Woman says and I

recall it quite clearly now. Yes. They're the ones my Dad introduced me to hoping I would make some new friends.

"I'm Mira Rai and this is my brother Arjun Rai" She introduces herself and her brother. "I'm Vera Rose Frost. You can call me Vera" I say politely and they seem pleased with our meeting.

"Now let's get you treated first" Mira says and orders one of her maids to bring supplies and once they do Mira herself starts tending to my wounds. To not make things awkward I continue the conversation. "So from what I remember from our brief encounter during the new year's party, both you and your brother moved to London last year around December and have been here ever since. If you don't mind answering "How do you like London so far?"

I ask politely, trying not to sound too rude like I'm prying or anything. I simply want to make conversation. "Well, we actually quite like it here except we miss our home sometimes" I smile and nod because I can not say I understand the feeling.

I once visited my Uncle for a week and kept missing my own home and parents but these two have left their country behind for months. I can't even begin to imagine how much they must be missing their home. "You know I have many friends back in India but I have yet to make any here. It seems quite hard to do so" Mira says and that's disheartening because she seems to be one the sweetest people ever. I can not remember why I didn't get to talk to her more during the new year's party.

"I can be your friend Mira, if you don't mind ofcourse" I say and she smiles and hugs me and I return it.

"There, all done" Mira says after finally finishing to tend to my wound. "You did it rather well" I say and she smiles. "Well I've been studying medicine and nursing back in India" She says and I can not hide my surprise. "People tend to have that reaction" She says not finding my reaction rude.

"What brings you to London if you don't mind me asking. You two seem like you miss your home so it made me curious about what could be so important that you both decided to move here" I ask, trying not to seem like I'm prying too much.

"There have been some cases of mysterious deaths in London" Mira's brother Arjun says and that immediately got all of my attention. "What kind of deaths?" I ask pretending like I don't know anything. Technically I don't know much.

"I can not reveal too much but it's just some unsolved cases and the deaths have been more frequent in the last 1 year, it's not a disease not a murder so the detectives are having hard time figuring it out" He says and it's nothing that I don't already know.

"I was originally called here to solve another case but I solved it within a month and got intrigued by these mysterious cases. I have been trying to get a lead but nothing" Hold on Arjun's voice it feels like I have heard it somewhere.

I suddenly get flashbacks of the ball where I first heard about that case in the forest. There were three people talking about the case but after that I only ever saw the two other detectives working on it. I never saw the third one again.

Perhaps Arjun is the third person who was discussing the case with those people that night. I can tell by the voice and the

accent. "What happened? Are you still working on those cases?" I ask and he looks at me like he is suspicious for a moment but then lets it go. "Not really, the higher ups decided the cases are a waste of time since there are no leads so I was assigned other cases" He says with disappointment evident in his tone.

"I heard they even called a psychologist to help with the case, which seems absurd to me. Because he can't figure out a dead person's mind now can he?" Arjun says and I'm alerted yet again. Right. The psychologist. Lord Vulcan. Now that he says that it does sound even more absurd that they called him for help but I suppose the last two detectives on the case were desperate.

"Despite everything I personally quite like London" Mira says trying to lighten the mood and divert the conversation towards lighter topics. "Ms. Vera forgive me if it sounds like I'm prying but would you mind telling us what you were doing alone on a street this late? It's quite dangerous you know" Arjun says and I'm suddenly worried what if he tells my father about this. They're acquainted after all.

"I'm going to be honest. I was going through a hard time and I wanted to take a stroll to clear my mind but of course my parents wouldn't allow it so late at night so I came without telling them."

I say and both siblings look at each other and start laughing. "Remember how we used to do that back in India" Mira says and Arjun laughs in agreement. "It's fine we totally understand but you should be careful Miss Vera" Arjun says and with a polite smile and I nod in agreement.

"Miss Vera if you don't mind we would like to drop you home as you can see it's gotten even more late. and don't worry your parents won't see you" Arjun offers and I can not help but feel grateful. I accept the offer and bid a goodbye to Mira who looks pleased to have met me. The feeling is incredibly mutual.

Arjun dropped me off near my home and helped me reach my room's window so I wouldn't fall or break any bones. It was hard but we managed. It was kind of him to do so much for me. Once I was safely back in my room he left. It looks like my casual stroll around the street to clear my head made me new friends.

I am exhausted from everything so as soon as I lie on my bed I fall asleep and find myself in my dream again. thankfully alone. I don't even know what I would do or say to him when I see him again. Is there even an explanation? I wouldn't know.



Chapter 7

Vera

The next time I meet Lord Henry is during another event when someone from the nobility is celebrating a birthday during the night and that too in a garden. I do not know who's birthday it is but I get free food and get to wear a pretty dress so I'm not that bothered.

Cecelia and Lord Henry have been inseparable the whole event. It's like they come in pair. You can not spot one without the other and Cecelia genuinely seems happy with him so I finally give him my approval mentally. He wouldn't know of course.

As I'm looking at them I spot a familiar figure approaching Lord Henry. it's *him* . I take a look at him and no matter how much I see or try to find a difference, he looks exactly the same as that dunderhead from my dreams.

As I'm looking at him he suddenly turns his head and we make eye contact and just for that moment I feel like we're the only ones here. Everyone else makes noises. I do not know what this is called but I certainly don't enjoy this feeling.

I turn away and walk towards another direction trying to avoid him but I bump into someone. I don't turn around to see if Lord Vulcan is still looking. I simply apologize to the person I bumped into without even looking at their face. "Miss Vera? Pleasure to see you again" I recognize that voice. "Ah... Mr. Arjun, it's been a while" I greet him politely and he smiles. I look around to see if Mira is also with him but I don't find her anywhere.

"I'm hurt Miss Vera" Arjun says in a teasing tone. "Why so?" I ask in confusion. "You're always looking for Mira. Am I not good enough of a company for you? I heard you and Mira have been visiting each other often. It's a shame I'm mostly at work so I don't get to see you much" He says and that makes me giggle a little.

I play along with his little teasing game to distract my mind. "Well what can I say, your sister is infact more pleasure to be around and most importantly she doesn't try to flirt with me as a joke"

I say and he smiles "guilty as charged. Although if I ever make you uncomfortable do point it out Miss Vera" He says seriously and I appreciate it. "So where is Mira exactly?" I ask and he rolls his eyes. "You only care about your friend now don't you?"

He says and I shamelessly nod, making him laugh yet again. "She's over there having a pleasant chat with a friend of hers" He points towards the direction Mira is standing and I immediately smile looking at her. I look at Arjun with a little bit of guilt and then I look at her "it's fine Miss Vera just go

to her" He says laughing and I'm grateful to him for not taking it to heart.

As I'm about to go to her, someone suddenly comes into the field of my vision. "M'lady we need to talk" It's him. Calling me M'lady. I backed away and hit Arjun yet again. "Is there any trouble Ms. Vera?" He asks sternly looking at Lord Vulcan. "No, no it's fine Thank you" I say and flee the scene by walking faster towards a secluded place in the garden so no one can come near me.

I sit against a tree wishing no one would disturb me anymore but of course that's not possible.

I feel someone sitting on the other side of the tree but they don't say anything. I appreciate it. I sit there in silence for a while and so does the other person. Somehow I feel like it's him but I'm too afraid to confirm my suspicion. I don't know how long we spend just sitting there in silence.

"M'lady I'll wait"

I hear the person from the other side say and he immediately gets up after saying that. Something in me stirs up and I get up to follow him. "Don't turn around" I say and he stops "is it really you?" I ask hoping he understands what I mean. I hear a sigh and then he says "yes M'lady" I knew it was him so I shouldn't be this shocked after he confirmed it himself but I am.

"How?" I ask and "I'll explain everything tonight M'lady" is all he says before walking away. Tonight when? In the dream? I suppose that's what he meant. I watch him walk back into the house along with people celebrating. He didn't even turn

around once. Not that I wanted him to but.....since when did he follow what I told him to do? I'm not disappointed, just surprised at how he listens so well in real life.

The rest of the night was busy and ended quite quickly. As I arrive at my house my Mother looks rather pleased. I do not know why though. "I heard you are talking to some Lord Vulcan" She says cheerfully. "It's not like that. He's a friend of Lord Henry and I'm interested in his work that's all" I say trying to shrug her off but of course she doesn't stop at that.

"Oh dear that's how great relationships start" She says and I roll my eyes. "Sure Mother" I mumble to myself and go into my room ready to fall asleep after being exhausted. Will he be there? I should hope so.

After falling asleep I find myself surrounded by a thick fog and nothing else in sight. What is this scenario? "Father please don't leave us" I hear a child cry and I follow the voice.

It leads to a room where a sick man is lying on his bed surrounded by two children and a woman. These people. They're from the painting I saw at Lord Vulcan's house. Why am I having this dream? I didn't even know them at that age.

"Celeste don't cry, we will be fine and Father is not leaving us. He's just sick" The little boy says bravely although I can tell he also wishes to cry but is holding it together.

"Children your Father needs rest. It's time you leave him alone" The Mother says and the children nod. "Theodore" The sick man lying on bed calls the little boy towards him. "Remember that you will always be my pride and joy and Celeste my beautiful princess you're always perfect in my eyes"

The scenario abruptly changes as if someone is changing it on will.

But I'm not the one changing it then how? "What's happening? It's my dream but I'm not the one controlling it?" I say to myself and my question is answered after a few moments. "That's because it's not your dream M'lady, it's mine"

I turn around to find that dunder- Lord Vulcan standing in front of me. "Whatever do you mean?" I ask with perplexity evident in my tone. "How am I in your dream? How is that possible?" I ask and my question is answered right next moment.

"Just like I have been in yours multiple times" He says simply like it's supposed to make sense. "That doesn't make any sense" I say and he smiles a little "Many things in this world don't, M'lady. You said you were fascinated by my work in psychology so you must understand that the human mind, conscious and subconscious are always mysteriously fascinating." It's true. I have always been fascinated by consciousness, the human mind and the mysterious meaning behind dreams so I nod in response.

"M'lady have you heard of hypnosis?" He asks and I remember that day in the bakery he mentioned something similar. "I remember you mentioning it to those detectives" I say and he nods.

"Hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness where the person is-" He stops in between the explanation and looks at

me "M'lady would you prefer it if I showed you?" He asks and I nod. I would like to see what he's talking about.

"Very well" He says and the scenario starts to change and I suddenly find myself in a dark room where a person is lying on a bed comfortably and Lord Vulcan is sitting on the chair next to the person while holding a pendulum on top of the person. The person's eyes are following the pendulum and they seem like they're sleeping.

"What is happening to the person?" I ask and turn my head to the right only to find him standing there leaning against the wall while crossing his arms. "This is my memory" He says and I look back at 'him' who's sitting on a chair performing this 'hypnosis' "so what exactly is going on" I ask and he tells me to focus on what I'm seeing.

The person lying on the bed looks dazed like he isn't in his right mind but he's also answering all the questions lord Vulcan asks him like a machine with no awareness of anything else around him. "So this is hypnosis?" I ask and he nods.

"Yes M'lady. Through hypnosis a person can enter a different state of awareness and also revisit memories or answer any questions the person in control is asking" He says and it sounds fascinating that something like this is possible but "how is this related to anything that happened with us. The dreams I mean" I ask and he comes and stands next to me.

"M'lady hypnosis isn't just for revisiting old memories or asking questions. It can also be used in a dangerous way." He says and I'm suddenly even more curious "how?" He smiles and

points towards the person lying on the bed. "He was my patient for a long time" He says and I nod

"It all started with him in a hypno therapy session when he found himself in someone else's subconscious or you can say someone else's dream" I listen to him very carefully.

"At first I thought he was just dreaming but he wasn't able to control the dream despite the instructions I was giving him. If it was his own dream he should've been able to control it but he wasn't. Instead he tried to fight the person who's dream it was" I look at him with evident surprise on my face.

"Of course that didn't end well so I had to snap him out of the hypnosis" He says and I nod. "So what happened? How did you figure out that it was someone else's dream?" I ask and he smiles. "Ironically M'lady, the person whose dream he was in is my friend you know very well" My mind immediately goes to Lord Henry.

"Yes, it was Lord Henry. I met him the next day for a chat and he briefly mentioned a weird dream he had the day before and it sounded oddly familiar to what my patient had been saying during the session. That's when I started getting intrigued by the possibility of travelling through the realm of subconscious and people's dreams. It might not sound sane to others but to me it was fascinating" I hear him and as ridiculous as it sounds I myself find it intriguing.

"Since I could always control my dreams I started trying to travel to other people's dreams to see if it was actually possible" I look at him and he smiles.

"I know any other normal person would let it go but I just couldn't" He says as if trying to convince me that he isn't normal. "I don't think you're weird for that" I say and he looks at me with a strange sort of look as if it's his first time hearing that.

"I would have done the same thing" He seems rather relaxed now that I've said that. "You really are a unique person M'lady" He says and I add "however..." His relaxed expression falters for a bit.

"Spying on other people's dreams is not a good thing." I say scolding him. "Yes M'lady I'm aware. I had only been doing it for experiments at first but then I started finding myself in random people's dreams. I couldn't control it for a while but eventually I got a hang of it and I originally planned on stopping that one night but then I ended up in your dream."

He looks at me with an expression of....awe? "Most of the time people would be enjoying riches or having a loving marriage in their dreams but you M'lady were shooting men and that too with such rage, I couldn't help but be a little curious and intrigued by you" He says and I remember the first time I encountered him in my dream when I was letting out my rage.

"You could've told me you know" I say and he laughs in disbelief. "M'lady this sort of thing isn't exactly something that can be just said so easily" He says and I understand why he would think that.

Although I'm still mad at him. I remember all the times I've talked to him about Lord Vulcan as if he were someone else and he heard me out so intently. I suddenly feel nauseous and

betrayed by him. I must have looked so funny to him. Acting like his fan or what not. He must have been laughing at me during those times.

My eyes widened further as I remember the time I told him I'd seduce Lord Vulcan and he laughed at me. Lord heavens all of a sudden I feel so embarrassed I want to crawl In a hole. I want to get away from him. He must've noticed the change in my demeanor as he started looking concerned. "M'lady are you feeling okay?" I don't respond and try to run away from him but there's no place to run away to since it's his dream but I don't care about that I just want to run.

As I'm trying to get away from him I feel the scenario of the dream change into a field and I feel relieved. I can run freely now, did he change the scenario on purpose? I run for a few moments and as I'm about to reach a tree I'm suddenly pulled back by someone. It's him. He's hugging me from behind. I don't know what to say so I don't say anything. He just holds me and rubs my arms gently as if trying to calm me down. He doesn't say anything until I've calmed down. "M'lady you can be as mad as you want at me but please never be embarrassed for being yourself. Not in front of me at least" He says and I feel a sense of calmness in me as if every bone in my body is telling me that I can trust him on that. Although it's a dream, what I feel is completely real.

"You were never too childish or too much for me. Even your silly ideas have a sense of uniqueness in them that I admire." He says and all the embarrassment I was feeling is starting to slip away little by little.

I turn around to finally face him. I took a good look at him for the next few moments. His features are sharp yet a little gentle in their own way, his light brown hair matching his eyes perfectly, his attire, everything. "No wonder I thought you weren't real" I mumble to myself. He hears it and smiles. "Whatever, do you mean M'lady?" He asks and I sort of want to punch his perfect face so I do.

It's not like it's going to hurt much in a dream "Woah okay I deserved that but you still haven't clarified what you meant by that M'lady" I realize he's actually serious. "I mean you look perfect and say perfect things so of course I thought my own mind created you" I say and I think I see him.... blush?

He looked away from me and tried to divert the topic. "Well M'lady, another fun fact you should know about the human mind is that it can not create new faces so it wouldn't be possible" He says and I nod.

"I have another question though" I say and he gives me all his attention yet again. "Yes M'lady? Anything" He says and I ask away "at the masquerade ball, did you know it was me?" I ask and he goes silent for a moment. "I had suspicions when we first got paired but the moment I got sure of it was during our dance" He says and I recall our dance. Even I felt a strange sense of familiarity with him at that time but I never would've thought that it was the dunderhead from my dream. "I see"

"But I didn't know you were Lord Henry's sister in law so I was as surprised as you that day in the garden. I figured you'd need time and space to process things so I stopped trying to contact you or visit you in the dreams" He says and I appreciate it.

"But M'lady if you don't mind me asking...." He says hesitantly. "Yes?" I urge him to go on but he still seems hesitant. "How are you acquainted with Mr. Rai?" He asks and I remember the encounter we had with him.

I was too caught up in my own emotions that I completely forgot about him. "He's a friend's brother, he helped me out a few times with some things so I'm grateful towards him" I say and I feel something change in him.

"Why? Is there anything wrong with that?" I ask and he changes his tone "Nothing M'lady. He's a friend and it's a good thing you're going out and making new friends. That's progress" He says but somehow I feel like he doesn't mean it. "I suppose so" I say without pointing the change in his tone out.

"But M'lady I thought you didn't like most Men" He says and he's correct. I don't. "It's true but Mr. Rai and his sister saved me after I got hurt on the street. It was entirely my own fault but they were kind enough to take me to their place and have me nursed. I'm mainly friends with his sister Mira but he also doesn't seem like a bad person. He's very gentle with his sister and protective over her and he helped me out multiple times so I suppose he isn't that bad of a man " I say and somehow I feel like he isn't liking this conversation anymore.

Does he dislike Mr. Rai? I remember Arjun mentioned that he found it absurd that a psychologist was called for help and even on that balcony he mentioned he disliked the idea of getting a psychologist involved so is it because of the cases that they do not get along? That must be it.

"Of course M'lady as long as he's helpful and kind to you and you're enjoying his company I suppose it's all good" He says and I can tell he doesn't mean those words. "M'lady, has my sister Celeste ever told you how protective and gentle I am with her?" He asks and I'm confused at the sudden change of topic.

"She briefly mentioned it, yes" I say and he smiles. "Now that we know each other I can also help you out with many things in real life too M'lady" He says and I appreciate the offer but I don't want to be much of a burden.

"That's kind of you but I wouldn't want to trouble you after all you're a busy man with cases to solve and estate to manage" I say and he looks confused as if not sure how I knew about his business. "Lord Henry briefly mentioned it" I say and he makes that expression of 'oh' which is kind of adorable.

"I remember you mentioning hypnosis to those two detectives in that bakery" I say and his attention is brought back to the case since I felt like he wasn't liking the previous conversation anymore "Yes M'lady I did" before I can ask why or how he starts the explanation himself. "I suspect that the victims of mysterious death cases are actually killed through hypnosis" He says and I am beyond speechless because what in the world?

"I suspect that the victims were put into deep hypnosis and their brains were wired to shut down the entire body and kill itself" He says and I'm absolutely horrified at the thought. "Is that possible? Who would do something like that?" I say to myself.

"It's a mere possibility M'lady that is why no one is willing to believe me." I don't know what to say. "But wouldn't the other person have to be a psychologist or a hypno therapist too?" I ask and he nods. "There are very few people in London who are into this field so it's easy to find all the psychologists but I fear it's not someone with the tag of a psychologist or a hypno therapist. It's just someone with the knowledge of it" He says and that makes more sense. "Knowledge can indeed be dangerous in the hands of the wrong person" I say and he nods.

"But no matter how much I try, the police or court won't believe me and I have no leads whatsoever hence I'm tempted to give up since I've been losing a lot of sleep over these cases in the last few weeks" I remember he looked tired even during the birthday celebration last night.

"You should rest more and you don't have to visit me in my dreams, you know. Your health is more important" he smiles and says "You never have to worry about my health M'lady and you're not getting rid of me that easily" He jokes and I nudge him with my elbow. "One more thing" I say, catching his attention. "Yes M'lady? "

"We're catching the person responsible for the deaths together"



Chapter 8

Vera

Before I can hear his response I'm abruptly woken up by Ellie while Cecelia is crying on the room's floor, I get up from my bed and go to Cecelia "what happened?" I ask and she hugs me while crying and I look at Ellie in confusion. "It's Father" She says and I feel my world come to a halt.

No No No No No No

"What happened?" Ellie tries to explain but starts crying herself. "What happened to Father Ellie?" I almost shout at her but control my tone. "He was found by the policemen this morning" Cecelia says in between the sobs "they say he was attacked by someone and is in critical condition" She continues sobbing "so where is he?" I ask and Ellie responds "at the hospital"

I waste no more time and immediately run downstairs to visit the hospital but I'm stopped by Mother who also seems to have been crying for awhile "He isn't allowed visitors yet" She says in hopes that I'd stop but that doesn't stop me.

"Vera you can not be going out in your undergarments" Mother shouts and I realise she's correct. These are the moments I wish I was a man so I wouldn't have to worry about things like that although it isn't appropriate even for a man either but people wouldn't care that much if it was a man.

I throw on a dress quickly and Cecelia says she'd join me, to which I say yes and as we're about to leave the house. I see Lord Henry at the doorstep. Cecelia immediately hugs him and breaks down in his arms while he tries to comfort her. As I see her getting comforted so sweetly by her fiance I feel something in my heart. I don't know what it is but.....we don't have time for this.

I want to tell them to be quick but that doesn't sound appropriate. They finally part after a few minutes of hugging and comforting. "I heard the news, I'm so sorry. I've brought the carriage we shall depart now" He says and me and Cecelia get on the carriage. Mother insisted on coming but she has been in bad health herself so we convinced her to rest. "How could this happen?" Cecelia mumbles.

"I'm sure we'll find out whoever is responsible for this soon. I also sent Lord Vulcan a letter regarding this. I'm sure he'll be using his connections with the detectives to help us find the Culprit" My ears jolted up at Lord Vulcan's name. I'm going to be honest, it's very comforting hearing that he'll be helping us out. "Until then I've ordered the hospital to give father in law the best care they can" Once again I feel grateful towards Lord Henry

As we arrive at the hospital, we're told that we can not visit him until a few more hours and my heart sinks. I expected

this much but waiting for hours is still unnerving. We spend around 40 minutes outside the room my Father is kept in and Lord Henry is trying his best to offer comfort to Cecelia.

My heart warms at that but also feels a little pang of pain. I don't understand why. I'm certainly happy for them. Is it because I also wish for someone to comfort me like that? I shake my head at the absolutely absurd thought. No that can not be it. I have built myself up to be self dependent emotionally. I do not need anyone to comfort me and most certainly not a partner. I'm just feeling vulnerable because of Father. That has to be it.

"How has he been so far?" I hear a familiar voice say and lift my head up. "Theodore, thank you for arriving on such short notice" My brother in law gets up and greets him. For some reason I feel relieved as soon as I see him. "They said he will be fine. The wound was fatal but they were able to save him" Lord Henry explains and I add " But We have to wait a few hours before we can visit him" He looks at me and we stare at each other for a few moments and he nods

"M'lady I've asked my detective friends for a favor and they said they'd pay special attention to the case and make sure it's assigned to a capable person." He says and I feel a little relieved hearing it from him. "I appreciate your help very much" I say and I can see the confusion between Lord Henry and Cecelia very well. "Since when were you two on speaking terms?" My brother in law asks and Cecelia looks at me with suspicion. "Last I remember you despised him so much you ran away twice from him" Cecelia adds and I saw a look of hurt in Lord Vulcan's eyes for a few moments. "Did it look like she despised

me that much?" He asks awkwardly and both of them nod together.

"Oh well M'lady I'm certainly glad you don't despise me anymore" He says attempting to joke about it. "You two are overreacting, I never despised him" I say and they both make a face of disbelief "you can not say that after you ran away the only two times you saw him." Cecelia adds and honestly it makes sense from her point of view but she doesn't know the whole story.

"She's got a point, Miss Vera. After all the interest you showed in his work I thought you'd be delighted to meet him but the way you reacted I thought maybe you hated the way he looked" Lord Henry says and before I can correct him he continues "but you're not the kind of person who would judge someone for their looks so I doubted that was the case and not to mention the ladies usually love his looks." Somehow the last part irritated me a little.

"Then I thought maybe it was because of his horrible personality that you didn't like him" Lord Henry adds and Lord Vulcan coughs awkwardly. "Thank you for your insight about my personality, Lord Henry. I'm sure M'la- Miss Vera had her reasons for reacting that way. Let's leave it at that now shall we?"

Lord Vulcan says, trying to end the conversation. "Sorry Mate as much as I like you, you have got to work on your social skills and develop a personality or you'll never get a wife" Lord Henry says jokingly but I kind of don't like the way he insults Lord Vulcan even as a joke "Right, you say you don't even want a wife" That catches my attention. "You don't?" I ask Lord

Vulcan myself and he looks like he doesn't know how to respond. When he doesn't say anything for a while Lord Henry adds "That's what he always says" that's unexpected. "M'lady that's-

"You can visit the patient now but only two people can enter at once" The nurse interrupts and me and Cecelia look at each other and nod. We go inside the room and look at our Father. He's in horrible condition. "He was attacked on his head and was bleeding a lot, it looked like the person tried to drive a rod through his skull" The nurse explains and both mine and Cecelia's expressions are horrified at the thought.

"Who would do something so horrible?" Cecelia says trying not to break into sobs again and I don't even know how to comfort her or what to say. I take Father's hand in mine and wish for his recovery soon.

"Father I promise to make you so proud one day" I don't know what else to say to him actually I have no words to express so I just sit there holding his hand and trying not to cry. "I can not see him like this" Cecelia says crying and runs out of the room.

I don't know how long I spent next to my father like this until someone calls me. I turn around to find Lord Vulcan. "M'lady it's time to go" He says and I notice the nurse behind him and nod.

Once we're both out of the room he says "we got a lead on who the attacker might have been" My mind is alerted immediately. "What lead?" I ask and he shows me a drawing of a pendant. It's a half moon pendant. "A pendant like this

was found at the scene and we're suspecting it belonged to the attacker" He says and looks back at my father's room.

"Once your Father wakes up he can perhaps confirm whether it belonged to the attacker Or it's his own" He says and I add "it's likely that it belongs to the attacker. My father is a simple man. He isn't really fond of jewellery" I say and he nods.

"M'lady I think it's best that you return home and take some rest" I do feel extremely tired but I don't want to leave Father's side. "The staff will take care of him, neglecting your own health doesn't look good on a future published author M'lady" He managed to make me smile despite everything. "Where is Cecelia?" I ask as my eyes look for her. "Unfortunately Lord Henry had a work emergency so he had to leave and I convinced Miss Cecelia to take a leave as well by ensuring I'll stay with you"

A question pops in my head despite everything going on. "Why are you doing so much?" I ask and he looks perplexed "I'm not sure if I'm following M'lady" He asks so I continue explaining "I understand you asked detectives for a favor since Lord Henry personally requested your assistance but staying here with me for so long is certainly something you don't need to do, so why?"

He looks like he's at a loss for words "is it because I'm Lord Henry's Sister in law?" I ask and he immediately responds "your relationship with Lord Henry has nothing to do with why I'm here" I'm the perplexed one now. "Then why?" he looks frustrated now. "M'lady you really don't understand do you?" He asks and I shake my head. He takes a deep breath and lets out a sigh.

"Let's just say it's because we're friends" He says and I'm dumbfounded. "Friends?" Are we friends? For a long time I thought he was just a figment of my imagination but can we be considered friends now that I know he's a real person? "Yes M'lady unless you don't wish to be acquainted with me at all anymore" He says the last part with a hint of fear in his tone. "No, of course not. I'd be delighted to be friends with you" I say and he smiles.

"It's time you go home and rest M'lady" He says and I nod. I look back at my Father's room one last time before leaving and Lord Vulcan follows me from behind. As we get out of the hospital and I'm about to sit in the carriage he brought I hear someone call me.

"Miss Vera" I turn around to see who it might be. "Mr. Rai, good to see you" I greet him and he returns it. "Miss Vera, I heard about your father and came as soon as I could. Unfortunately Mira is suffering from a cold so she couldn't visit but she sent her well wishes to you and your family" It's nice seeing so many people here and supporting our family.

"I made a request with the higher ups and I'm officially working on this case Miss Vera" That makes my eyes light up and I could see Lord Vulcan being a little surprised from the corner of my eye "Really? I could never be grateful enough to you Mr. Rai" I say with a smile and he returns it. "I'll make sure whoever did this is caught as soon as possible" He says and that reassures me a lot. I know he's a good detective, I know I can trust him on this.

"M'lady I think it's time to go" I turn around to see Lord Vulcan and for some reason he seems like he's irritated now.

"Yeah sure and it appears your request was also granted considering Mr..Rai got the case" I say cheerfully and he looks like he doesn't agree. I forgot these two have not officially met yet so I introduce them.

"Right I didn't even introduce you two, Lord Vulcan this is Mr. Arjun Rai, he's my friend's brother, he's a detective and I'm grateful towards him regarding many things" I say and turn to Arjun "Mr. Rai this is Lord Vulcan he's a businessman and a psychologist, he's a friend of mine and also a close friend of Cecelia's fiance" Both of them look at each other and I feel like they're not going to get along. They shake hands and exchange greetings politely but I can sense the tension between them. They clearly don't like each other for some reason.

"Miss Vera I'm going to my workplace so I suppose I can drop you off On the way if you don't mind" Mr. Rai offers and as I'm about to decline but Lord Vulcan steps in "your offer is very much appreciated but I'm afraid she doesn't require it as you can see I'm already dropping her off" Lord Vulcan says politely but I can sense the irritation in his tone.

"Why don't we let her decide?" Arjun says and I nod. "Mr. Rai Lord Vulcan is correct, you have already done so much for me hence I do not wish to trouble you anymore" I say and he looks like he's about to argue more but then stops and nods. "As you wish Miss Vera" He says and steps aside as me and Lord Vulcan get inside the carriage and find a maid from his house already sitting there.

At first I was confused about why she's here but I then I remembered it's considered inappropriate for a man and

woman to ride a carriage alone together if unmarried, I suppose he remembered that and brought along a maid just in case. That was very thoughtful of him.

I look at him and he still seems irritated from meeting Mr. Rai. I remember that Mr. Rai mentioned he didn't like psychologists so his irritation was explainable but Lord Vulcan works with detectives all the time, I don't understand why he'd be so irritated. "Do you not like Mr. Rai?" I ask and he looks outside the window to avoid my eyes "Why would you think that M'lady?" He asks as if his whole behavior isn't enough to let everyone know.

"Oh I don't know, maybe the way you were glaring at him the whole time" I say and he looks away. "He's a nice Man, you might get along if you get to know him" I say trying to make things better although I know it's not going to work. "Sure M'lady I'll try to get to know him better" I can tell he won't but I don't push the matter for now.

We spend next few minutes in silence while enjoying the ride

"So you don't wish to marry?" I ask to start another conversation. He seems surprised at the sudden question. "Well I have always been too busy to give the matter a thought" He says and I bring up what Lord Henry said "Earlier Lord Henry mentioned that you had no such interests" I say and he immediately responds with "I have always been uninterested in romance and I'm sure you understand why since you yourself are uninterested in it" He says and I couldn't agree more.

"Yes indeed it's a facade to make two people suffer their whole life by fooling them into believing they're in love. No such thing exists and I'm sure as a psychologist it's harder for you to fall in love since you can see through most people's intentions" I say and he looks like he's thinking deeply about what I said.

"I didn't expect such an intense opinion of romance from you M'lady" I feel a little offended by that for some reason. "Why not?" I ask and he responds with "For someone who doesn't care about romance you seem to have an awfully strong opinion of it and sound like you have given it a lot of thought. People who are truly not interested in romance simply don't think twice about it"

I feel a little irritated now. "I thought things through so I don't make any mistakes like falling for someone because that would be incredibly stupid. Before I can fall prey to such stupidity it's better to think it through beforehand and avoid it completely" I say and he looks like he's taking notes mentally regarding something and I'm more irritated now.

I suddenly feel like I'm being analyzed and I do not like it "Are you analyzing my behavior like one of your patients? Do you think I need mental help?" I say almost raising my voice. Of course he would also think that just like everyone. "I am not your patient to fix" I say with a stern tone. "No M'lady Of course that's not what I-"

The carriage comes to a stop and I get out. Great, it's his house. I simply do not care to ask if this was a mistake or not. I just keep walking in his garden out of rage and I can feel him following me. "Of course you think I need to be fixed and my

opinions are immature and need to be changed" I say moving forward while stomping on the ground in rage and as I'm about to pass by the tree I first met him at he comes in front of me and I start walking backwards as he comes forward. I refuse to look at him as I keep walking backwards.

"M'lady look at me" I still don't and keep stepping backwards and he keeps stepping forward. "M'lady please" I hear the pleading in his voice and my knees almost melt. I finally look at him and feel myself hit the tree the moment our eyes meet. I always loved his eyes but the way he's pleading with them right now makes my heart clench. He closes his eyes and shortens the distance between us. Our foreheads almost touching. "Please hear me out M'lady" He says almost begging.

"You don't need to be fixed" He says every word like he means it. "And your opinions are valid" I feel tears almost form in my eyes "and no you do not need mental help" He says and somehow I feel like the last part is a lie. I sort of chuckle at it. "This is the first time someone has said that to me, usually I'm told otherwise" I say and the corners of his lips pull up a little. "They're the ones who need mental help M'lady not you" He says and I laugh again. "You're going overboard trying to comfort me" I say and he shrugs "As long as it makes you feel better M'lady" He says so casually yet it generates a warm feeling in my heart.

As he said that I realized that I may have overreacted a little over a casual chat. "I apologize for overreacting, It's just I'm so used to the fact that you're the perfect figment of my mind and would never say anything to hurt me but when I noticed you act like that my insecurities got triggered. I got afraid that

you were just like everyone else and didn't understand me like I thought you did so my suppressed anger resurfaced " He listened to me very intently "M'lady I can not say that my words will never hurt you because frankly sometimes I myself don't know what I'm saying or what should be said in certain moments but I do promise that if my words ever hurt you again I'll always be here to explain or take any punishment you wish for me" He says and once again I find it hard to believe that he isn't a figment of my own mind.

"Hey Theodore I-" We both turned around to see Celeste who stopped her sentence in the middle and abruptly turned around. "I'm so sorry I didn't mean to interrupt, I was so busy looking at these documents that I didn't notice you were with someone"

She says as she's turned away. We both part away from each other although I'm not sure why it feels like I've been caught doing something I shouldn't be doing. We were just talking and she happened to arrive in the middle of it. There is nothing wrong with talking so why is her reaction so extreme?

In my dreams we used to talk all the time but I suppose things are different in the real world. "You're not interrupting anything Celeste" I say and she turns around, eyeing both of us suspiciously. "We were just talking" I say and she doesn't seem to believe me. "It's nice to see you again Miss Vera" She says walking towards us and I return her greeting.



Chapter 9

Vera

"I'm so sorry to hear about your father Ms Vera, I wish him the safest recovery soon" Celeste says as we're sitting down in their living room. "Thank you Miss Celeste" She seems like a wonderful person. Last time I visited I could not chat with her but I think we can bond this time. "Miss Vera you're certainly delightful to talk to. I had been regretting that we could not talk much the last time you visited but we can make up for it today if you do not mind ofcourse" I smile. "The feeling is extremely mutual Miss Celeste"

"M'lady, I inquired the coachman. He claimed it was an honest mistake. He is used to following this route hence he absentmindedly took the usual route, I told him it was fine but the mistake shouldn't happen again. You were supposed to take this time off to rest, I apologize on his behalf" Lord Vulcan explains.

"Honestly I'm glad I came here, I have been feeling devastated since morning but I got to meet Celeste again and we can bond better" I say and he smiles "Whatever makes you happy M'lady" Somehow I feel this weird warm feeling in my heart

every time he says things like that. I always feel warm whenever my father or Amelia comfort me but this is different.

Lord Vulcan is certainly good at comforting but somehow I do not think it's the same feeling. Whatever it is now is not the time to think about it. I ignore the feeling for now and drink the tea that Celeste very sweetly served. "So Miss Vera, what do you like about my brother?"

I almost choke down the tea and put the cup down while Lord Vulcan provides me with a handkerchief. "M'lady please slow down" He says and I finally calm down after a few coughs. "I'm sorry but what do you mean by that?" I ask and Celeste looks perplexed "well I thought you guys are you know involved or at least about to be engaged" She says and both of us look speechless at first but begin to deny it as soon as we recover from the absurdity of the claim. "That is not the case at all, we're just acquaintances and more or less like friends" I finally say as she laughs awkwardly. "I.... See" she sounds like she doesn't believe us but there is nothing we can do to convince her so we leave it at that.

"I'm sorry for assuming that. It's just that Brother rarely talks to people at all, let alone women and when I saw that you two were *talking* in the garden I assumed that you were.....you know" She explains and I look at him while he's sipping tea. I notice his ears are a little red. Oh my, is he embarrassed? That's kind of adorable. I'm certainly going to tease him about it later. "Oh I don't mind at all, it's understandable."

"Lord Henry told me you are writing a book and I am quite a reader so if you don't mind can I get a look at your novel once it's finished?" Celeste asks and I feel awkward all of a sudden.

Am I writing a book? Yes. Do I wish for people to read it? yes but do I want people I know to read it? Unfortunately No but I can not be saying that to her so I just end up saying "sure I would love to hear what you have to say about it" That's not a lie, I'd like to hear people's opinion but I don't want them to read it. Sounds quite ridiculous but that's just how I feel.

"It's fabulous to know you love to read Miss Celeste, not many young women are open to reading nowadays or more like they aren't allowed to" I say the last part with a bit of frustration because it still infuriates me how so many young women in multiple parts of the country are discouraged to read. "My brother has always been supportive of me. He always pushes me to learn new things and enhance my intellect. He even pushed me to run our clothing business all by myself while he takes care of the rest of our estate and focuses on learning psychology" She says and I find that extremely heartwarming although It's sorrowful that something so basic from a man can be considered thoughtful and evolutionary.

Do not misunderstand me, I am delighted that Lord Vulcan supports his sister but I wish it wasn't considered a bizarre thing for a man to do because at the end of the day it should be a human right for women to be able to do all that even without the permission of a man.

I had a wonderful time chatting with Celeste for the next 2 hours although I couldn't fully enjoy it since I was still worried about my Father in the back of my mind most of the time. Both of them tried their best to cheer me up and I appreciated the effort but ofcourse I can not be feeling any better until Father gets up.

Lord Vulcan brought me back to the hospital and I found Cecelia and Lord Henry to be already here.

"Vera Father is awake" As soon as I hear Cecelia say that I immediately run towards the room. I sit down on the chair next to his bed and take his hand in mine. "Father, how are you feeling?" I ask and he looks at both of us with pure affection. "I'm in quite a lot of pain Vera, however seeing my little girls so worried and crying is not helping me feel any better." Me and Cecelia smile through tears. "I promise we'll catch the person who did this to you and they will have to pay" I say through gritted teeth. "He was wearing a cloak, I couldn't see his face but he was good at fighting as you can see" Lord Vulcan and Lord Henry enter the room while maintaining a proper distance and still giving us space as family.

After a few moments of talking with my Father I feel a lot better. "Sir if you don't mind could you tell us what exactly happened? We think it would be helpful if you could remember any crucial detail. No pressure of course. You don't have to force yourself if you don't remember" Lord Henry asks and Father tries to remember the incident.

"I was returning home at around 5 in the morning after working all night. It was a dark alley and I was simply passing through until I saw someone looking suspicious in a cloak but I didn't let it bother me until I heard him say weird things" Father says and Cecelia asks what sort of weird things but Father says he didn't exactly remember what the person was saying but "I noticed he wasn't alone, there was another person with him there and He was trying to do something with a pendulum to that person" Both Me and Lord Vulcan

look at each other at the same time knowing exactly what he's talking about. "I didn't understand what he was doing but I certainly felt like it was something bad so I intervened and that's when he started attacking me, I tried to stop him but couldn't and ended up in this situation" Father says the last part with a hint of regret . "I managed to pull a pendant from his neck in hopes that it might be helpful for police to find him later. Although I'm not sure if it's actually going to be helpful or not."

"It has been helpful indeed Sir, the detectives have been inquiring about the pendant on jewellery stores and they'll certainly soon find out who brought such a pendant and we'll be a step closer to catching that person" Lord Vulcan says and my Father nods. "Who might this gentleman be?" Father asks and Lord Henry explains. "He's a close friend of mine. He knows some detectives personally so I asked for a favor from him" Father nods in understanding. "We would be indebted to you for your help gentleman" Father says and Lord Vulcan shakes his head. "I can only do so much for a friend Sir" He looks at me while saying the word 'friend' and I smile.

After a certain period of time the nurse asks us to leave the room as it's time for Father's rest so we do. As soon as we're out of the room Lord Henry and Cecelia request to have a talk with me and Lord Vulcan so we do.

As soon as we're in a secluded place Lord Henry starts talking. "Okay so what exactly is going on between you two" He asks and I roll my eyes. First Celeste and now them again. "Do not give me the eye roll sister for I know you're certainly hiding something" She says and has a look of disbelief on my face.

"We're good friends and we respect each other's work. That's all" Lord Vulcan responds and I couldn't agree more with him. It is indeed true that I respect his work and we're great friends. I don't know why it's hard for people to believe that a man and a lady can be friends with no romantic acquaintance at all. "He is correct indeed and I'm sure you're aware of his disinterest in marriage and I happen to share the same views as on the matter hence it is extremely absurd for any of you to be thinking anything remotely similar to what you're trying to imply" I say with a stern tone but Cecelia still doesn't seem to believe me and I have given up on trying.

"Well Miss Vera forgive me if I had been too disrespectful. I got a little worked up thinking my friend here who has never been interested in romance finally found a lady he likes. Although it would've been delightful had you actually been involved in a romantic relationship but we respect your choice Miss Vera" Lord Henry says apologizing and I accept his apology.

"Miss Vera, do you mind telling us what made you so unsure of marriage?" Lord Henry asks although he's being polite but I do not wish to share my views with him for I do not think he would understand. "She dreams of being a published author. Although I've told her multiple times that it's a silly dream yet she-" Cecelia explains but gets interrupted by Lord Vulcan "With all due respect Miss Cecelia I beg to differ. Miss Vera here is quite intellectual and has a vivid imagination. I firmly believe she holds more than enough talent to become a published author"

I look at him with gratitude and give him a small smile. Whatever good deeds I did to deserve a friend like him? Cecelia says nothing in response for a while but smiles politely. "Yes I apologize to Lord Vulcan for my ignorance of my sister's talent" She says and sounds like she means it but I don't understand why she's smiling looking at both of us.

"M'lady I suppose it's time to go back, you really need to rest today after Celeste took most of your resting time" He says and I nod. "When did you meet Celeste?" Cecelia asks and we explain what happened. She is looking at us with that weird look yet again like she knows something but can not say it. I don't inquire further because I do feel exhausted and don't have energy to hold a conversation any longer.

A few weeks later Father is in a lot better health and will be recovering completely soon enough, at least that's what I'm wishing for. I have been busy with visiting Mira and Celeste along with going to the hospital. I have been bonding better with Celeste as well but unfortunately her brother isn't around much. Lord Vulcan has been busy with his work and finding out leads on the case. Mr. Rai has also been working on the case and gave us a few suspects but we can not be sure who the attacker is yet. I have been wishing to be helpful with finding the attacker but both of them have refused to get me involved for obvious reasons. The reasons being I might be put in danger if I involve myself too much.

I myself have been too occupied with visiting father, writing my Novel and helping Celeste manage some of her business affairs. Yes she asked for my help in managing her clothing brand and I agreed. Mostly I provide her with some ideas and

opinions on certain designs and she seems to like them. Mira has been teaching me about medicine and I would love to inquire more knowledge regarding various topics so I have been visiting her regarding that and one of the reasons is to just hang out with her and take a rest.

What saddens me is that in between all this I've only got to meet Amelia once or twice, that too when she herself visited me. I have to make it up to her so I'll be visiting her soon. Me from a few months ago would not believe how busy I have gotten considering I used to lie around in my room all day and just read.

It's been a tiring day so I decided to sleep as soon as I get back from visiting Mira. Mr. Rai said they are certain they have found a suspect and this time they have evidence against him. Although I did not get my hopes up.

It's also been a few weeks since I saw Lord Vulcan, he hasn't even been around in the dreams for a while and No I do not miss him I just wish that he was around here to tell me if he's gotten anywhere with the case. That's all.

As soon as I lie on my bed I find myself in a deep slumber of sleep due to today's exhaustion. In the dream I find myself in a certain dark alley. I sense danger for some reason. I do not know how I ended up in this dream but it certainly feels like I shouldn't be here.

As I'm walking down the alley I hear a grunt. I hide myself behind a dumpster and take a peek at what is going on. There are two people. One in a cloak and one in normal clothes. The one in the cloak is holding a pendulum in front of the

other one and saying something to him which I can not hear but as soon as I am about to get closer I hear a voice I recognize very well. "Gentlemen, what's happening here?" It's my Father's voice. What is he doing here? One thing is for sure this isn't my dream. I have accidentally travelled into someone else's dream. The person holding the pendulum tells my Father to leave but he doesn't listen and insists on inquiring what exactly is going on. I fear I know where this is going. Father please turn away. The words are on the tip of my tongue but I must not make myself known for I need to figure out who the person behind the cloak is.

They have a dispute and my Father threatens to inform the police about this. That's when I see the person in cloak snapping and finding the nearest thing he can use to attack, which is a metal rod. He tries to attack Father but I scream. "No you can not do that" I shout and both of their attention is turned towards me.

The person who's attacking is faceless which is horrifying to look at. It's like seeing a ghost. I scream seeing his horrible not-a-face at first. "Lord heavens get a face" I shout and he stops whereas my Father looks at me with pure confusion. "Vera sweetheart what are you doing here? It's extremely dangerous for you. Get out of this place right now. I will deal with this madman" Father says and it appears this is his dream and he doesn't realise that he is dreaming.

Before I can respond the faceless person tries to attack us again and I find the nearest metal rod and drive it through his skull. As I turn around after doing just that my father looks

extremely confused but also sort of proud. Oh if only he knew how often I do such things in my dreams.

We are both staring at the body lying down with no face. "Father, do you really not remember what he looked like?" I ask and father seems like he is trying to remember. "I do not Vera" He says and I sigh in disappointment. "Although I do remember he had a scar" He says and a vertical scar appears on the person's left eye as if someone cut it through a knife. "That's good, papa, do you remember anything else?" I ask and he says "he also had long hair till his neck I suppose" The lying down body grows curly hair till it's neck. That's a good enough description. "Anything else papa?" I ask and he shakes his head. "That's all I can remember Vera" He says and I take his hand in mine "that's good enough Father"

Next day I go to Lord Vulcan's house as soon as I can to let him know about what I have found out through being in my Father's dream last night but unfortunately he isn't there. It is always a pleasure to meet Celeste but she doesn't seem to be present either. The servants offer tea while I wait for Lord Vulcan to arrive. "We expect Lord Vulcan to arrive in half an hour, Miss Vera" One of the housekeepers says and I nod.

As I'm waiting I find a few novels on a nearby table so I decide to go and take a look. However one of the Novels appears to be in a different language that I do not recognize. Can he read multiple languages? That is fascinating. I look over the Novel and I do not understand a word but it certainly piqued my interest.

"It's in Russian M'lady" I hear Lord Vulcan say and put the novel down abruptly. "Oh I was just curious so I decided to

take a look. You understand Russian?" I ask and he comes forward picking up the book.

"I have been learning it for quite some time now. I can understand it quite well enough" He says and I smile. "This one is called 'Prestupléniye i Nakazániye' by Fyodor Dostoevsky" He says and my eyes light up at the mention of the writer's name.

"I have heard of him, people say he's a splendid writer" I say with a cheerful tone and he agrees. "Splendid indeed M'lady, a lot of his works are something to be praised for, the fella is certainly going down in history as one of the greatest writers" He says and I nod.

"If only I could also read Russian. I heard most of his work isn't available in English yet" I ask and he nods "unfortunately that's true M'lady but you can always learn Russian" He says and I nod.

"Considering your thirst for knowledge, it must intrigue you to learn multiple other languages" He is not wrong. I would certainly love to learn a lot more things if we didn't have an attacker on the loose to catch. Right, I came here to tell him something important.

"I had a dream last night" I say and he puts down the Novel giving me his full attention. "I think I ended up in my Father's dream just like I ended up in yours" His eyebrows furrowed in response to what I said. "Did something happen M'lady?" He asks and I nod. "Father was dreaming about the scenario of when he was attacked" His expression turns more serious with every sentence I say.

"At first I thought maybe I could see the face of the person attacking but it was a faceless person" I say and he makes an understanding expression "which means your father doesn't remember his face at all" He adds and I nod. "I intervened in the scenario as he was about to attack Father and drove the rod through his skull like he was planning to do with Papa" He smiles at that. "I'm not surprised M'lady" He says and I wanna smack him playfully but I remember we're having a serious conversation right now.

"Now the good part is papa didn't realise it was a dream and started talking to me so I asked him if he actually didn't remember anything at all and at first he said no but then one of his memories resurfaced and a scar appeared on the body's face. It was a vertical scar on his left eye and the body grew long curly hair till his neck" I explain with every detail I remember.

By the time I end up explaining everything to him he looks deep in thought. "Do you think it's possible that it was an actual description of the person responsible for the attack?" I ask and he looks like he's contemplating what to say next. "M'lady it's certainly possible that it was an actual description but we can not ignore the possibility of it being a meaningless manifestation of his subconscious" He says and I'm sort of disappointed by the second half of his statement.

I certainly had high hopes since that dream and thought that it might be helpful to catch the attacker but I suppose not. It looks like he notices my expression so he tries to say something more comforting "However there is a way to confirm this" He says and I look at him with hopeful eyes yet

again. "What that might be?" I ask and he looks like he is hesitant before suggesting whatever he is about to suggest.

"It's okay don't be hesitant, I'm willing to do anything if it means that person will get caught" I say reassuring him and he finally speaks.

"M'lady would you be fine If I attempted hypnosis on your father?"



Chapter 10

Vera

"You.... You mean like that thing you showed me in the dream? " I ask and he nods. "Yes M'lady I could make an attempt with hypnosis on your father trying to make him remember what the person looks like" That sounds promising so why was he hesitant suggesting such a thing?

"However M'lady, the thing is..... " He looks hesitant yet again. "It's okay just say it" I say and after a few moments of reconsideration he starts talking. "Your Father he... " he stops yet again and I encourage him to go on. "He ought to be reliving the same memory if I were to attempt a hypnosis on him which can be traumatizing for him after all that he has been through which is why I was hesitant to suggest this in the first place" He says and the realisation dawns upon me.

Making my father relive that same horrifying memory? No, I will not be doing that. That sounds horrifying and selfish. I know we need to catch the person and make them pay but not at my father's expense. I look down in disagreement and he notices that I am no longer open to the idea and immediately starts to comfort me.

He holds both of my arms gently "M'lady we don't have to do this, it was merely a suggestion and this is why I was hesitant to make it. It's a preposterous idea M'lady forgive me for even suggesting it" He says and I shake my head. "No, No it's fine I like the idea and it could certainly work but it's just the thought of my making Father go through all that yet again is agonizing" I say while noticing that this is the first time he's touching my arm in reality other than dancing or helping me get on and off the carriage. Sure he did touch my arms as a way of comforting me in my dreams a few times but it feels certainly weird in reality. Not bad weird but good weird.

He seems to have noticed it too and we stare at each other for a good amount of time. His brown eyes have always been pretty so enchanting that one can't look away from them but right now it's just the way sunshine hits his eyes gently making them look prettier and silly. I got so lost I didn't realize when we had gotten a little closer to each other.

"Vera I heard you arrived shortly almost half an hour-" Celeste says arriving in the room and immediately stopping whatever she was saying. He abruptly moves his hands away but it seems like he doesn't want to.

For some reason it feels like we got caught doing something we shouldn't be doing yet again. Although it wasn't anything bad. He just touched my arm in an attempt to comfort me which is normal. Amelia and others do it to me all the time but for some reason it felt different with him.

"Did I interrupt something?" She says and we both deny it. "No you did not" I say although I do wish she came a few

moments later because what we were discussing was important of course.

"Of course I did, I apologize for entering so abruptly, I didn't know you two were having a serious discussion" I can hear a hint of teasing in her tone but I do not point it out. I just say it's fine and Lord Vulcan just nods at his sister. All three of us sit down on the couch of the living room.

"So how is your father now Vera?" She asks and I tell her he's recovering just fine. She is still looking at both of us suspiciously but doesn't say anything. "So brother, what do you think of Miss Olivia? Isn't she lovely?" She says changing the topic all of a sudden. Miss Olivia? Who that might be? "Why would you bring her up now?" He says as if he isn't liking what the conversation is heading towards.

"Why not? I felt like you had a great dance with her at the ball last week" She says and I feel a ping in my heart all of a sudden. It seems like she's saying it all playfully just to tease her brother yet I can not help but feel a little blue. It must be the wind. "I was purely there to chat with Lord Nathaniel and others about business. Miss Olivia's mother insisted that we dance so I couldn't say no out of respect for her mother. The dance itself was average and I didn't talk much with her" He says sternly as if hinting his sister to drop the topic but Celeste smiles mischievously instead.

"Brother, don't you think it's time I got a sister in law to be around the house and help me with things?" She says in a teasing way and Lord Vulcan dismisses her immediately. "Celeste, You are perfectly capable of handling things around the house on your own. Not to mention we have servants for

most things so you certainly don't need a sister in law" He says in an unyielding manner and I feel relieved somehow.

"Ofcourse you would say that brother. Vera don't you think I am correct?" Celeste looks at me and I awkwardly put down the cup I was drinking the tea from. "Well I'm not sure, if he doesn't wish to marry it's his own choice and we should respect it. I don't think you should be forcing him" I say and Celeste rolls her eyes. "Of course you of all people would say that" She says as a joke but I sort of feel offended. "Hey whatever do you mean?" I say making my feelings known through my tone. "You are just like him when it comes to marriage so of course you would take his side" Celeste says and I do not know how to feel about that.

"You know what?" Celeste says with a suspicious level of enthusiasm. "You two should marry each other" Lord Vulcan coughs up the tea he was drinking and puts the cup down. "Celeste how preposterous things you say" He says with the same stern tone. "Oh come on now brother you both are totally alike and I would love to have Vera as my sister in law" She says playfully and I can not help but laugh at her joke. "You can be really funny if you try Celeste" I say in between my laughs.

"Must you hurt my feelings this way Vera? I feel like my heart has been torn into pieces. How cruel of you Vera" She says dramatically putting her hand on her heart which doesn't help me suppress my laughter. I turn around to see if Lord Vulcan is laughing too but I don't see him laughing, instead he has this strange alluring look on his face like he is stunned as he's

looking at me. My laughs subside as I notice him and before I know I find myself staring at him.

There's just something about his eyes that I can not look away. If only I had the talent to paint, I would give my all to recreate this look in his eyes and have it captured forever. I'm not sure if it's even possible to capture such beauty in a painting but one could try. "Did you know my brother paints as well?" I'm suddenly broken out of my trance and brought back to reality.

It's as if Celeste read my mind and started talking about paintings. "Is it true? Do you paint Lord Vulcan?" I ask and he turns away. "When I have time which is very rarely" He responds and I can not help but wonder what kind of art he would be creating. "Do you mind if I see?" I ask and he looks skeptical.

"Surely why not? Come with me I'll show you some of his work" Celeste says and starts running towards the hall and I get up enthusiastically running behind her whereas Lord Vulcan gets up abruptly. "Celeste you don't need to-" He begins talking but Celeste cuts him off. "Too late brother we're already halfway there" She says playfully and I'd like to admit I certainly enjoy their lovely banter a lot. Lord Vulcan is still trying to catch up by walking faster but since we're running he's still far behind or so I thought because in the next few moments his long legs immediately catch up to us.

"Still too late brother" She says as she opens the door to a room full of paintings. There are at least 10-15 of them but they're all covered. "M'lady I highly request that you do not encourage such behavior of Celeste else she'll be doing this more often in the future" He says and I laugh "As much as I

respect your request I'd have to decline it because I am certainly having a lot of fun with her" I say and he shakes head.

"This one's enchanting" I turn around to look at Celeste and the piece she's standing next to.

It's a man touching the reflection of the moon on the lake with an endearing look in his eyes. As if he's looking at something he can not have but could only dream of acquiring it hence he gently touches the reflection. "This is marvelous" I say as I notice the painting and small details about it. The man looks exhausted yet he came to visit the lake just so he can touch the reflection of the moon even if it means only for a moment. The way his feelings are conveyed is impeccable.

"Lord Vulcan I surely didn't know you had such talent for painting" I say and he looks a little embarrassed. "I'm glad you enjoy it M'lady" He says and I turn to look at his other works which Celeste just uncovered. All of them have such depth in them I can not understand how long it must have taken to create all of these. "Enjoy? I'm a fan now" I say and he chuckles. "You flatter me M'lady"

As Celeste is about to uncover the painting at the end of the room Lord Vulcan suddenly hurries towards her "Celeste No not that one-" He says almost shouting and I follow him. Unfortunately he reached too late as Celeste already uncovered the last painting. The moment that painting got uncovered something in me stirred. I take in the painting for a few moments and I find myself too stunned to say anything about it.

"M'lady I-" He starts talking but I interrupt. "It's ethereal" I say and he doesn't say anything in response to that. "When did you make it?" I ask still not to look away from the painting. He sounded unsure of how to respond but he did. "I finished it last week"

"Why?" I ask and he looks confused. "I mean why would you paint me?" He seems to be contemplating his words carefully. "Why not?" I'm the confused one now. "Whatever do you mean?" I say and he smiles a little before continuing. "You're everything a painter can look for in a muse" He says and before I can respond he continues. "It's not just beauty that you carry with yourself M'lady it's your mind, your soul, your kindness that make you a perfect muse" He says and I get that warm feeling in my heart again.

Is this how it feels to be honored? I think so? I'm speechless for a few moments and forget to respond to him. "I feel.....very honored Lord Vulcan" I say and he looks at me with that strange look again.

"I feel like I shouldn't be here" Lord heavens I completely forgot Celeste is also in the room with us. "Now why would you say that?" I say turning to look at her. "Whenever it comes to you two I always feel like I'm interrupting something" She says and I find that ridiculous. "That's absurd, You're never interrupting anything" I say and her response is a very sarcastic 'sure I'm not'

I go to her and tangle my hands with her "you do know you're my favorite person here right?" I say and she smiles. "Ouch I'm quite hurt M'lady" Lord Vulcan says dramatically putting a hand on his heart. These two really are siblings. "Tell me Lord

Vulcan how do you find time for all this. I'm sure you're occupied with multiple things" I ask and Celeste responds instead of him. "I tell him to take a break all the time but he doesn't seem to listen. You wouldn't believe he made that painting of yours in one night without any sleep" I feel something stir in my chest again as she says that. Maybe it's a feeling of concern. "Do you lose sleep often because of work and trying to follow all your passions?" I ask and he looks away.

"Sometimes you just have to live in between all the chaos of life and if to live means following my passion despite losing sleep I don't fear paying the price, M'lady" He is looking straight at me by the time he finishes his sentence. When did his eyes get so magnetic? "There you go with your poetic talks brother" Celeste says and I should look away from him but I don't want to. "Well, someone seems to understand them so I don't find the need to stop myself sister" He says and I smile.

Celeste seems to mumble something to herself which none of us can hear. "M'lady may I ask how is your novel coming along?" He asks and I remember it's about to be finished. "It's almost done, I'm barely wrapping up the last few chapters" I say and Celeste comes and holds my hand "you must let me read it at least once Vera" She says enthusiastically and as much skeptical as I am about letting anyone I know read it, it's inevitable."sure but you'll have to give me a harsh and honest review" I say and she smiles. "I'm not at all going to be gentle with my remarks just because you're my sister in la- I mean like my sister"

I noticed what she was about to call me but I don't comment on it because no good will come out of addressing it. I

understand why she must have the wrong idea about us but she won't understand that two people can be friends without romance getting involved. I certainly had no intention of addressing her mistake however Lord Vulcan had other plans. "Celeste you are offending her by joking about that" He says and I do not know where he got that notion from because It's just a silly joke and I do not mind at all.

"No she's not, I simply do not mind it. It's a harmless joke" I say and he seems relieved "see she doesn't mind at all so why must you always be so serious" She asks and Lord Vulcan sighs.

I look at the clock behind her and remember it's been 3 hours since I arrived here. Mother will not spare me if I am any more late than this. "It's been a pleasure being here but I must go now or my Mother will be furious" I say, bringing both sibling's attention to me. "Sure M'lady I'll drop you off myself" Lord Vulcan says and I decline his offer. "It's fine I arrived in my family carriage hence it's fine you do not need to drop me off" I say and he looks like he wants to say something but decides to just nod.

During the ride home I recall all the interactions I had with the Vulcans today and I can not help but smile. I am certainly blessed to have found such friends. However, the reason I visited them today seems to still be an issue. We did not have any credible proof of the identity of the attacker. I do hope Mr. Rai has gotten somewhere with his work. Come to think of it, I have to pay him a visit.

As I'm lost in thought I notice something odd. The carriage is going awfully fast and this isn't the way towards my home. Is the coachman taking a different route today? "Excuse me? Are you sure we're going the right way? I knock on the carriage wall but there is no response for a while so I ask again but there is still no response regarding that. I start to worry a little because this has never happened before and as I look outside the window the streets are getting busier and the houses are getting smaller as the carriage continues down this path. I certainly know that this isn't the right route.

This wouldn't do. I have to do something. I try to open the carriage door but it doesn't open. Did they lock it from outside? There is no doubt that this is kidnapping now. I think back to the moment Lord Vulcan offered to come with me but I declined. What an idiot I am. "Dear Author, back when I said my life was boring I didn't mean that you had to have me kidnapped to make it interesting" I curse out my imaginary author.

As the speed of the carriage increases my thinking capability decreases. I look at the size of the window and wonder if I can jump out of it but no I can not.

The carriage abruptly comes to a halt and the door is opened violently. Someone comes and grabs me harshly and before I can see who it is, a cloth is wrapped around my eyes and my hands are tied as if that wasn't enough I'm violently thrown on the ground. "What is happening? Where am I? " The person doesn't respond and I'm suddenly forced to get up and walk forward. From what I can smell I think we're in an abandoned factory. I hear three or four other men join the

walk and I do not recognize their voice but they're talking about some murders. Now they have my full attention. They're talking about someone who can 'get it done' with no consequences. I'm convinced they're talking about that person responsible for the mysterious deaths and most likely responsible for my Father's attack too.

I stop struggling to get free and listen to them carefully. "That man who was looking for that weird pendant?" One of them says and the other one responds "yes, that fella is looking for a half moon shaped pendant because it's important for him to get it back" One of them breaks a bottle from the sound of it and says "but the police has it how does he expect us to get it back?"

The other men laugh and I feel someone walk towards me.

That's where this pretty thing comes in. The man touches my chin and I feel disgusted. I move my head away and he laughs.

"Do you really think the police will be returning the pendant in place of this thing?" Another one of them asks and the man near me walks away. "Even if they're against it, her fiancé has enough influence on them to convince them, her fiancé seems to be quite wealthy so we can also ask for £5000 or more" The man who just walked away says and I roll my eyes behind the covered clothes. These imbeciles really thought I am Lord Vulcan's fiancé or even that much of value to him?

Sure we're great friends but this is beyond consideration even if I were his fiancé. I'm not going to be waiting for someone to save me but what I am going to do is escape before these

imbeciles can get that pendant back. "He's visiting us tonight"
I listen very carefully. "And he's going to have a chat with her"

It appears being kidnapped has its positive points. If that man
is in fact visiting tonight then it is my chance to get any clue
regarding him or maybe.....

if I'm fortunate enough then just have him caught.



Chapter 11

Vera

It's been a few hours and what I have found out so far is that all of these men are absolute morons who have no idea what they're doing or who they're dealing with. It appears the attacker hired these amateurs to kidnap me but they haven't been working together on his other murders which is obvious by the stupidity of these imbeciles.

Lord heavens, I feel tired and I want to go to sleep but lord knows what these men might do so I do not take the risk despite being sleepy. They are so boring, all they talk about is alcohol and women. They remind me why I started despising men in the first place.

I am lost in thought until I hear all of them stand up and stop talking altogether. "Sir we have her as you asked" I see the star of the show has arrived. I can not wait to punch his face and trust me I will. "Miss Vera Rose Frost" The man says and I can hear him walk slowly towards me. I don't say anything in response to him. "Not talking to me I see" He says and I feel him grab a chair and sit on while facing me.

"Maybe you'll talk once your fiance arrives" that caught my attention. "Caught your attention have I M'lady?" He says the last word like a taunt. "Do not call me that" I say with disgust filled in my voice. "Why? Only your lovely fiance gets to call you that?" He says and I feel disgusted to my core. "Yes, only he gets to call me that now why don't you be nice and remove this thing from my eyes so I can see your ugly face" I say through gritted teeth and he chuckles.

"I see why he likes you so much" One thing I can conclude about this person so far is that he has heard a lot of mine and Lord Vulcan's conversations and that would mean he has been following us for a certain amount of time. "You know If he had been nicer to me then maybe you wouldn't be here Miss Vera Rose Frost " I froze at that. Does he know Lord Vulcan personally?

"Did he tell you what he did to me?" He says in a dangerously low and angered tone. When I don't say anything for a while he continues talking "Of course he wouldn't tell his lovely fiance about his bad deeds now would he?" I feel my heart sink. What is he talking about? He is certainly making things up to make me act up.

"I do not believe you and I wish to hear no more of your lies" He laughs menacingly. " Oh are you so blinded by love that you no longer wish to hear the truth?" He says and I do not respond yet again. "He has you under his spell doesn't he? Tell me what psychological tricks he use on you?" He says and the sinking feeling in my heart deepens. "Oh you wouldn't know would you? Neither did I" I was not scared until now but I am starting to feel horrified not by this man but by the things he

has said. For some reason he believes we are in love and even engaged but I haven't corrected him on that yet because it guarantees my safety. As long as they believe I'm actually his fiancée they won't hurt me.

What horrifies me is the things this man is saying about Lord Vulcan. Surely I don't believe him. Not at all but despite everything if he genuinely believes Lord Vulcan has done him wrong then it puts both Lord Vulcan and me in danger.

"I wonder what his reaction would be when he reads the letter I sent him" He says and I immediately ask "what letter?" He laughs and I can smell him smoking. "Surely you must know he has to be informed about your kidnapping so he can visit us and I can finally settle our score" He says and if I thought my heart was sinking before but I was wrong. The feeling of dread I have right now is nothing compared to what I was feeling before.

If I am being honest I have in truth no idea of how Lord Vulcan is going to respond to the letter. Maybe he'll inform the police or try to find me or maybe ignore the matter altogether thinking it a prank.

"Oh how beautiful is love. You're the one who's kidnapped yet you're concerned about him?" He says and I roll my eyes yet again. "How about you let me see your ugly face and then we can talk. If he knows who you are then there is no point in trying to keep from seeing your face now is there?" I say and he chuckles.

"Eager to see the one who'll kill your love?" He says smugly and everytime he mentions harming Lord Vulcan I want to gut

him alive. No one harms my loved ones, my friends or my family. They're all very dear to me despite the occasional differences that we have.

I spit at the direction of his voice hoping that it landed on him. He goes silent for a moment and I assume that it did. He slaps me in return. "Now that isn't very ladylike behavior M'lady" I scoff at him. "Only gentlemen deserve my ladylike behavior and you are no gentleman" I say, earning a menacing laugh. "I have to say my old friend has got great taste in ladies" He says as I feel his voice getting closer "too bad he won't be alive to have a beautiful life with you" He comes closer to whisper something to me "however I don't mind filling in on his role once he's gone" He whispers in my ear and my stomach starts churning. As I feel like he's about to touch my face I hear a gunshot and he falls groaning in pain. "My hand" He screams and I can not help but laugh. "Deserved it" I say aloud and suddenly I feel a knife on my throat.

"Come out or I'll slice her throat open" One of the men who kidnapped me says while holding a knife near my throat. "Make sure to do it thoroughly so there's no chance I'm alive" I say with all seriousness and the man goes speechless. "M'lady as much as I'm fond of your humour and passionate spirit, I'd appreciate it if you were serious at times like this" I hear his voice and smile immediately. "Whatever makes you think I'm being funny?" I say as he fights some other men trying to attack him. "So you're serious? " He shouts while fighting the men. "Certainly because if I get out of here alive, these men certainly won't have able bodies" I say with full confidence and I feel the pressure of the knife being pushed into my throat more. "One advice, if you're going to slice someone's throat just do

it" I say as I free myself of the ropes and remove the knife from near my throat and headbutt the man who was holding it. I remove the cloth that was covering my eyes and look around for the person responsible for this, the one who ordered these men to kidnap me . He is nowhere to be seen.

"Really? After all that big talk he has escaped?" I say frustratingly. "M'lady you could free yourself all this time?" He asks while dodging one of the men's attacks. "Of course I could, I carry a blade with me at all times after some men tried to be funny with me on streets while I used to sneak out at night" I say while kicking one of the men in between their legs.

"Do you mind if I ask why you didn't do it so far?" He shouts while being a little out of breath and I smile. "I heard that the guy who could be responsible for my Father's attack would be visiting tonight hence I decided to wait for him to get here so we could catch him but unfortunately the coward has run away" I say in between avoiding some of the men's attacks. "He isn't the type to run away M'lady" He says and I have a hard time believing him. "It's hard to believe when I don't see him around" I say but suddenly I feel a chill down my spine.

"Why don't you stop now my old friend? Or this lovely lady right here won't be able to take her next breath." I go still as I feel a gunpoint pressed against my back. "Great, first a knife and now a gunpoint. Fabulous ways to make my life interesting Dear Author." I mumble to myself as I curse out my imaginary author yet again. I see Lord Vulcan go still even though most of the men are on ground groaning in pain so no one has the energy to attack him thank heavens.

"Let her go, it's me you want, isn't it correct?" Lord Vulcan says "not even over my dead body" The words come out of my mouth before I was aware of it. "Lovers in distress how magnificent" The man holding me on gun point hisses. "Edmund, it's me you want. She has nothing to do with what happened, be practical and let her go" Lord Vulcan says and I can feel this Edmund person getting more and more mad. "Do you want him to shoot me or what? Why do you say things that make him mad you dunderhead. No wonder I used to call you a dunderhead because you are one" I say in frustration and I can see Lord Vulcan scoffing. "M'lady may I remind you if you had just agreed to let me drop you home none of this would have happened" He says and it's my turn to scoff. "Oh So it's my fault now is it?" I shout and he looks like he's speechless. One of the men from the ground gets up and tries to attack him yet again. "I didn't mean that M'lady" He says while dodging the attack.

"Ohh of course you didn't. I want to end this engagement because I have seen how much of a dunderhead and a moron you are" I say shouting, he stops for a second and I hope he took the hint I dropped. Yes I intend to stall this Edmund guy until the police arrive. If it means this stupid pointless argument with Lord Vulcan then so be it. How do I know the police are arriving? Lord Vulcan showed me a hand gesture which I once mentioned that I'm using as a sign for 'help is arriving' in my novel.

"M'lady now don't be so hasty" He says and I have to control my laugh because he actually sounds like a puppy trying to convince me to stay in an engagement. It's sort of adorable. "You two can stop your lover's quarrel, it's making me

nauseous" The Edmund guy says and I shout at him. "Would You shut up you imbecile, you have no idea how much of a distress a lady is in when she finds out her fiance is an extremely useless moron" I say shouting and the Edmund guy seems speechless for a moment.

"Forgive me M'lady I had no clue that I had caused you such distress" Lord Vulcan says while still fighting some of the men and this is sort of hilarious. I could add a similar scene in my novel. As I'm about to say something in response the policemen arrive at the scene and Edmund throws me on the ground and runs away.

"Officers I have been through hell trying to stall and keep that guy occupied. You better catch him" I say out of breath trying to get up. "M'lady please allow me" Lord Vulcan offers his hand helping me to get up and I take it.

"You have done a splendid job keeping him occupied, M'lady , although I....." He seems hesitant to finish his sentence. "Although what? It's fine just say it" I tell him and he does.

"Although I do wish you wouldn't put yourself in danger like that again. He could've shot you any moment you know" He says with a lot of concern and I scoff. "But he didn't" I say and suddenly I remember how Lord Vulcan shot his hand when he was about to touch my face. "Also you of all people have no right to be concerned. Earlier when you shot his hand, it could've hit me" I say while trying to punch him "But it didn't" He says backing off. "Oh but I'm about to hit you my lord" I say as I attempt to punch him but he dodges all of my punches extremely easily and that annoys me more. "M'lady don't you think it isn't appropriate to behave like this right now?" He

says getting behind me so our backs are pressed against each other. "Why would that be?" I say as I turn around trying to kick him but I stop as he says the next thing. "This isn't a dream M'lady" He says as we turn around and look at each other.

The realisation suddenly dawns upon me. I'm used to having quarrels with him over petty things and then have silly fights because we do it all the time in dreams but in reality I shouldn't be acting like this. He is correct. He is a respectful Lord and I am a lady.

To hell with it.

I try to punch him again. "And?" He dodges effortlessly. "Just so you know, to me You're still the dunderhead I met" He smiles hearing that. "I'm glad M'lady," he says. "I wanted to make it clear since our recent interactions have been too formal. I enjoyed them but I am more fond of this" I say and he chuckles while taking my fist in his hand and looking at me while he brings it down. "Likewise M'lady" He says with that intense look of his again. I don't know how to explain it but the way he looks at me sometimes I feel like.....

"Apologies, Lord Vulcan. He got away" one of the officers said and suddenly there's nothing to be happy about any longer. We both look at the officer and I'm about to get angrier when Lord Vulcan interrupts "it's fine we now know who it is. We'll catch him sooner or later" He says and I can not believe he is so calm about this. Him and the officer talked about something for a while and I can not help but worry now. "We will inform you as soon as we can find something on it " The officer says and leaves.

"How are you so calm about this? If he got away it means what I've endured since this afternoon is for nothing" I say in a fit of rage.

I try to throw something in a rage and accidentally start a fire. "M'lady that bottle contained alcohol" He says grabbing my arm as we both start running away and I realised I threw an alcohol bottle near a fireplace. Oops.

We both run as the fire increases and as we're about to get out of there one of the men who I suppose was hiding all along attacks Lord Vulcan from behind and another one of them tries to grab me but before they can I make sure they can't have children in this life. I show my blade to the other men and threaten to do the same with them. As I get closer to them with blade, the other man I just stabbed between his legs screams in pain while lying on the ground. The other two men slowly back off and run away leaving Lord Vulcan wounded on the floor.

I try to help him get up but he groans in pain. I ignore the man I just turned incapable of having children and take one of Lord Vulcan's hand behind my neck and help him walk. "Are you alright? Does it hurt a lot?" I ask and he seems to be stunned for a moment and suddenly clings on to me more. "Oh M'lady I'm in absolute agony" He says and I get worried for him. "You're not bleeding though" I say and he looks like he's gotten caught red handed. "Yes M'lady but he hit me with a rod it still hurts. My muscles and bones are so sore" He says, still clinging on to me. For some reason I feel suspicious of him for acting like that, is he really hurt or just teasing me?

I don't know what to say so I simply carry him like that for a while and avoid people's eyes at all costs until we find an abandoned hut. "Do you think we could go inside?" I ask and he looks at the abandoned hut. "We shouldn't M'lady but we are in no position to be picky now are we?" He says and I agree with him. We get inside the hut and as soon as we do I gently put him down. "Now what do we do?" I ask and he shrugs. "Wait for the morning?" He says it is no big deal.

"I want to argue but I'm way too tired and I just want to sleep" I say and he nods. "Yes M'lady, just take a seat anywhere" He says and I go sit next to him.



Chapter 12

Vera

"You know I wonder what gave him the notion that we were engaged. Perhaps if he didn't think that then he wouldn't have had me kidnapped" We hear people outside running towards the factory trying to stop the fire which I started by an honest mistake.

"Likewise M'lady, I wonder what made him think we were engaged and so in love" He says but I feel like he's being sarcastic. I don't comment on it because I don't want to argue right now. "You know sometimes I genuinely do not get it" I say and he asks "what M'lady?" I turn to look at him as the moonlight shines on his face through cracks of the hut. "All the bizarre agitation about love and romance" I say and he chuckles "what do you genuinely think of it?" He asks and I try to put my feelings in words.

"Like I mentioned last time, my view is that love is a fairytale made for women to keep them in control . It gives them beautiful delusions of a feeling of ecstasy which doesn't even last a few months let alone a lifetime. Women are promised that they'll be cherished and loved like no other but in the

end they feel entrapped once the delusion drops and by the time they realise it it's too late." I say and he listens to it all without any judgement but before he can comment on it I continue "at least that's what I used to think" That catches him Off guard. "And how do you think of it now?" He asks and I turn to look at him. If I thought his eyes were pretty in the sunlight I was unbelievably mistaken. The beauty of his eyes as the moonlight hits his eyes is enchanting.

"You know I read Jane Austen in order to understand romance better and she did splendid work but in the end wasn't it all just in her head? The Mr. Darcy she imagined doesn't exist in reality yet every woman who's read pride and prejudice will look for hers in every man she meets only to be met with disappointment" I say and he keeps looking at me through it all. "But my sister has found hers and she seems so in love I can see her whole body express it through subtle actions every time she's around Lord Henry so it has made me question everything regarding love"

I say and he smiles. "Maybe if you find your Mr. Darcy you'll start to understand" He says and I can feel the pit in my stomach going deeper. "That is not-" He cuts me off in between "but you would run away wouldn't you?" He says and I'm speechless. "I-" I'm trying to say something but I can not. "If he appeared right now you would stumble and try to run away despite having feelings for him because you're not mentally at the place to accept such love yet" He continues leaving me speechless. "How do you know?" I ask and how foolish of me to ask. Of course he knows. Figuring people out is his profession.

I should be mad but somehow I don't mind being figured out by him anymore. "And not only that M'lady You would be oblivious to your own feelings for a certain period of time however the moment you do realise them you'd certainly run away" He says and I scoff in disbelief. "I strongly disagree, first of all I wouldn't fall for anyone and second of all if by some miracle I do I would immediately slap myself" I say and he laughs. "I can see that happening" and I feel the need to smack him again but I don't.

"Although there's a chance you'd know about your feelings deep down but wouldn't dare to admit" He says and I do not like what this conversation is heading towards anymore so I look away from him. "Some wise friend you are. I'm sure other ladies also love your opinions on them" I feel irritated mentioning other ladies, why did I even do that? I don't even know anymore. He laughs and I'm even more displeased now.

"You need not to worry M'lady, I do not care enough to think that deeply about others unless they're my patients" He says and I find that relieving. "Only the ones closest to me have the opportunity to be observed too deeply by me." He adds and I feel that warm feeling in my chest again. I do not know why but I feel myself panicking. "So that includes Celeste, Lord Henry and Me?" I ask and he nods "how come you only have two close friends. You certainly need more of them" I say, teasing him.

"You can say I prefer quality over quantity" He says and that's a good thing so I understand and nod. "Your turn now" I say and he looks puzzled. "My turn for what?"

"To give me your opinion on love and tell me why you don't really wish to marry."

He seems to be deep in thought and looks like he doesn't know where to begin. "If you want me to be honest then I never gave it much of a thought to begin with as I said previously" He says, causing me to frown. "Whatever do you mean?" I ask and he lifts a corner of his mouth. "I never had the time to With all the estate to be managed, studying psychology, following my passions and hobbies. I had always been too occupied to even think of it" He says and it makes sense now. "But Lord Henry said you're not interested in marriage and never want to marry at all" I ask and he looks down and sighs

"That is indeed true. I did tell him that once he mentioned the idea of finding a wife to me and that was the first time I gave this matter a thought and from what I observed about marriages is that most women are suffering and a lot of married men I meet seem to not have enough time for their wives which ends up adding to their wife's misery and I thought I wouldn't want my sister to go through such a marriage and neither would I want to bestow such misfortune on an innocent lady by marrying her for I am certainly a busy man and I fear my wife would be unhappy as I would be incapable of keeping her accompany hence I came to conclusion of never marrying and saving an innocent woman the trouble"

He says explaining and I smile "That is awfully considerate of you. Not many men think that far although they should" I say and he smiles sadly "M'lady that is basic human empathy yet

many people fail to harbor it." He says and I nod sadly knowing it's true. "However my opinions on love and marriages seem to be changing just like you as I witness the relationship between Lord Henry and Cecelia. Lord Henry is indeed a busy man yet he finds time for Miss Cecelia and visits your family quite often I must say. It made me think that many men can make time if they truly love their woman" He says and it raises a question in my mind. "So do you think if you ever loved a woman and believed you would do anything to keep her happy and would make a good husband for her then would you marry her?"

I ask and he looks at me with that strange alluring look again. "I certainly would" He says and for some reason it makes my heart sink. "Ohh so are there any hopes I could expect you to be getting married soon?" I ask despite the sinking feeling in my heart. "M'lady Are you asking if there's someone I have fallen for?" He asks and I nod fearing the answer while he looks at me, tilts his head and says "I fear the answer is yes" He says and I don't say anything for a few moments not knowing how to respond. "That's wonderful. I'm sure the lady is very fortunate. You're so considerate and would make a fine husband for her" I say despite the dry and heavy feeling in my throat. It must be Miss Olivia that Celeste mentioned. He doesn't talk to women much yet he danced and chatted with her. Of course she must have caught his eye no matter how much he denies it.

"Thank you M'lady but I don't think I will have the fortune of asking for her hand anytime soon" He says and I ask "why would that be?" He shrugs. "I don't suppose she likes me that way yet and quite frankly it's extremely difficult to impress

her." He says and I nod. "Women certainly should have higher standards. If you're not her Mr. Darcy she wouldn't be impressed no matter what you do" I say but he doesn't seem to be discouraged. "I do not wish to be her Mr. Darcy for she isn't my Elizabeth Bennet. To me she is not to be compared to anyone as she herself is the pedestal I yearn for" I smile at that.

"You certainly are a charmer. I'm surprised she isn't already bewitched by you" I say but that sinking feeling is still inside my heart. "Like I said she is hard to impress and that's one of her charms that I like" He smiles foolishly and I can not help but stare for a few moments. "M'lady I assume despite your recent changes of opinion on romance you do not have any men in your mind for that matter?" He asks and I immediately shake my head. "Certainly Not. Despite my curiosity on the topic I still do not wish to entertain the idea in any way possible" I say firmly and he chuckles.

"Always stand your ground M'lady" I smile and notice his back. It doesn't seem to be bleeding but he said it was hurting so the pain must still be there. How silly of me to forget that he's hurt.

"Are you hurt badly? Should we get some medicine?" I ask and he shakes his head. "No M'lady it's not that serious" He says but I'm still concerned so I try to ask one more time. "You know Mira, Mr. Rai's sister studies medicine and I've been learning a lot from her so you can trust me with medicines or at least dressing a wound, I will not be poisoning you If that's what you're worried about" I say attempting to make a joke but he seems irritated instead.

"So you visit Mr. Rai's house often?" He asks and I nod. "Well Of course I have to, sometimes Mira also visits me so it's sort of mutual. It's a shame Mr. Rai isn't around the house much. Both of them seem like lovely people to be around" I say and he's silent and moreaggravated now. Did I say something wrong? "You seem rather eager to have Mr. Rai's company" He says with a deep tone with a hint of madness? I have never heard him like this before and I don't know what to say to that.

"Well like I said he's a good person to be around and be close friends with" He scoffs. "What would I be to you then?" He says sounding..... mad? Irritated? I'm not sure anymore. Of course he's irritated and tired. We both just almost had a near death experience.

"Well you're also-" Something seems to have taken over him as he slowly comes close to me "a close friend" I say nervously. Nervous? No. I'm not nervous. There is no reason to be, just take a deep breath. "oh so you consider me a close friend?" He asks and I nod. "M'lady do you consider this a close friend?" He says almost caressing my cheek but never actually touching it but.....I want him to touch it- NO what on earth am I thinking. This is preposterous. "Y-Yes you're a close friend" I say with a hitched breath. I should move away yet I do not.

"How close do we have to be to be considered more than that?" He asks and my mind is blank. These sudden weird feelings rise up in me and I wouldn't know what to do. All I can focus on is his voice and those eyes of his. What kind of sorcery is this? I didn't even eat or drink anything bad. That must be it.

I must be hungry. I haven't eaten for the whole day. Yes I'm hungry.

"More than that? Why would-" My sentence is caught in my throat as he comes unfathomably close to my face while his nose almost grazes my jaw and he whispers "forgive me M'lady" as he unclips my hair and they fall messily on my shoulder. "Marvelous" He whispers looking at me as if he's admiring a painting. It takes him a few moments to come back to his senses.

"An artist and a muse" He says and I'm rather confused. "We are more than close friends, M'lady" he said and I understood what he meant. "We're an artist and muse" I say finally understanding what he meant. Of course that is exactly what he meant, what on earth was I thinking?. He smiles and nods but somehow I can sense a bit of disappointment and sadness in him. "Also give that back to me" I say trying to get my clip back because I can not have my hair looking messy like this. They're already hard enough to manage.

He teases and doesn't let me have the clip so I forcefully push him down and attempt to take it back. "You shall not win from me" I say and he laughs "Really?" He asks tilting his head and I challenge him "yes" he keeps switching the clip from one hand to another as I struggle to get it back. In a sense of annoyance I attempt to get up rashly and lose my balance but as I'm about to fall he abruptly gets up and catches me. "That was close" I whisper with a fastened heart rate. "Thank you" I whispered.

He stares at me for a few moments and runs his hands against my locks while one of his hands is still keeping me steady and

thank goodness because I need him to keep me steady as I feel absolutely dizzy right now. It must be because of how I almost lost my balance. "M'lady do you see the beauty in the mess?" He says while running his hands through my locks and still looking at me with that same alluring gaze. "What do you mean?" I ask and he grazes my cheek with the back of his hand. "You right here" He whispers "are an enthralling mess". I feel those things in my stomach again, all over, the feeling in my heart and my nerves seem to be anything but calm.

"I am thrilled that you think so" I barely manage to say the words out. "Thrilled are you now? Do you understand what other thrilling things you can feel?" He whispers gently while taking one of my hands in his and planting a gentle kiss on my wrist. It somehow made me shiver and my whole body felt like it's burning. I let out a shaky "no" . Apparently I seem to have lost the ability to speak or make sense of things because I am very much aware of whatever it is that's happening right now could be considered extremely inappropriate but I seem to have lost all of my ability to reason.

"What are we even-" I manage to say a few words but get "do you feel it?" He asks and I seem to be getting more and more dizzy along with this unexplainable feeling all over. I suppose that is the feeling he is talking about. "I.... do" he smirks? "I want you to remember this feeling Vera"

Vera.....This is the first time he called me by my name, no 'miss' or 'm'lady' and the way it slips out of his tongue makes me feel some way it never has. "Why? " I ask and he lifts a corner of his mouth "because you should know no one besides me is capable of bringing this feeling back" He says, being

quite sure of himself. I do not know what to say so I simply nod and attempt to move away and break free from him but the moment I do he brings me closer and whispers pleadingly "please" I feel as if my whole world turned upside down as I hear his pleading and I find my knees to grow weaker.

"Please what?" I ask because I genuinely do not know what he's pleading about. He rests his chin on my head gently and says. "Just a moment longer" He whispers. "Please let me have this Vera" He says with the same hint of pleading in his voice. I don't say anything for a few moments and let him have whatever it is that he meant.

I didn't quite understand what he meant but I do not wish to ask either. I also find myself wishing to stay this way a little longer since it feels unbelievably comforting so I do. I do realise it is improper for us to be this way but it's nothing inappropriate that we're doing. We are just comforting each other as friends and I do not have any objections to it and neither should anyone else for that matter.

I rest my head on his chest while he continues to rest his chin on my head. We stay that way a little longer. I try to ignore the burning sensation I keep feeling again and again. "Do you think what we're doing is..... inappropriate?" I ask and he chuckles. "Well I suppose it is in the eyes of society but the question is how do you feel about it? Do you wish to part away from me or wish to stay like this a little longer?" He asks and I say "we are not doing anything wrong or inappropriate so I suppose it's fine and I do wish to stay this way a little longer" I say and he hums.

"Look at me being quite selfish today" He says and I ask what exactly does he mean "you wouldn't understand M'lady" He says and I move away a little to look at him while his hand stays on my waist and this time he lets me. "Then make me understand" I say and he smiles. "I can not.... yet"

I wish to ask more but It seems he's convinced that I wouldn't understand so I drop it. "I feel weak in the knees, let's sit down" I say and he is stunned for a moment and then smirks a little. "You.....feel weak in the knees?" He asks with a bit of humor in his voice as if he intends to tease me. "I do. Why?" He smiles wider and I feel like I shouldn't have told him that. "Nothing M'lady let's just sit down" He says and we both sit down against a wall.

We chat a little longer over a few things and before I can realise I find myself rather sleepy and without realising I doze off on his shoulder.



Chapter 13

Vera

As the morning arrives we both get up and find ourselves in a rather peculiar position. From the looks of it, it seems I fell asleep on his chest while his hands were wrapped around me.

I immediately free myself and stand up, waking him up in the process. "How do you feel now?" I ask. "About what?" He mumbles in a sleepy voice which is deeper than his usual voice and I quite like it. It makes me feel a certain way.

"I... I mean your injury" He looks like he suddenly realized something. "My injury. Yes, of course. My injury is quite fine M'lady I'll have the nurses look at it later" He says and I nod. "So what are we doing now?" I ask and it seems he himself does not know. "We must get out of here first that is for sure" He says and I nod. "But I can not leave like this" I say and he looks perplexed. "Why not?" And sometimes I really do forget he is a dunderhead.

"If anybody sees us, as in a lady and a gentleman leaving the house together right in the morning, it would start rumours for sure and that is certainly the last thing I need right now" I

say and he nods in understanding. "Well then what do you suggest?" He asks and an amazing idea crosses my mind.

I call him close to me and whisper something in his ear. His expression changes to that of disbelief. "M'lady you're not serious are you?" He asks and I nod very proudly. "I am as serious as one can get" I say and he shakes his head in disbelief. "I should've expected something like this from you" He says and I giggle in excitement. "Now would you please be kind enough to get it" I say and he nods.

"Very well if that's what you wish" He says and walks out of the place while I sit there waiting for him to get back. Thankfully my wait does not last long as he comes back soon enough with the thing I asked for. I immediately go up to him and demand for him to give it to me. "I have always wanted to do this at least once in my life" I say with enthusiasm as I hold the garment he has just brought for me.

"Now turn around and If I see you looking this way for a split second, you will be blinded for life as I'll make sure of it" I say with a stern warning and he respectfully turns around. "I wouldn't dream of it M'lady although I am wounded that you question my honor as a gentleman even after all this time" He says rather dramatically and I immediately respond with "after last night I wouldn't be sure" I say in an attempt to give a witty response however it turns out I have turned things rather awkward between us.

I'm not sure why I said that. It's not like we did anything inappropriate last night, it was just us merely hugging but somehow it felt extremely scandalous. Now that I have turned

things rather awkward between us, I don't say anything as he's turned around and I change my clothes.

Once I'm done I ask him to turn around and take a look at me and as soon as he does he looks like he is holding back a laugh. "Do not say a word" I say sternly warning him yet he continues to giggle. "Forgive me M'lady it's just I've never seen you like this but it's surely refreshing. You certainly make a fine gentleman" He says in between his giggles and I find myself tempted to punch him so I do.

"You're a rather strong gentleman M'lady" He says and I find myself tempted to punch him again but I do not. "I'm sure ladies would line up for you the moment you step out in the street" This time I punch him and he laughs as if it didn't affect him one bit. "I'm sure I look fine despite your mockings" I say with confidence.

"You do M'lady you just need to wear that tie properly so if you do not mind, May I?" He asks and I nod. He slowly comes closer and fixes my tie gently. "There" He says looking at me up and down. "Now gentleman, where are we headed?" He asks and I have a wicked smile on my face.

"To catch that bastard," I say, cursing out loud. It is liberating to curse so freely. "M'lady you're not serious are you?" He asks with a genuine concerned tone and I smile wickedly yet again.

"We blew up a factory last night and I'm sure he is out there to get us and not to mention your family must be worried about you" He says and it's all true and his concern is rather valid but I can not sit idly by while waiting for others to do something while he is still out there. The police haven't been

of much help since the past month and I have had enough of waiting. I'd do it myself even if it endangers me.

"I understand your concern but I have had enough of waiting. As for my family, you can ask Celeste to write a letter to them saying that I have fallen ill and will be staying with her for a few days. My mother is rather occupied with Cecelia and Lord Henry's upcoming wedding so I'm sure she'd pay it no mind" I say and he still doesn't look convinced.

"Trust me it'll be fine afterall you're here with me" I say and look at him with pleading eyes and after some hesitation he nods "only on one condition" He says and I agree immediately without even hearing it. "The moment you get hurt we'll call this off" He says with seriousness. I simply nod.

As we get out of the hut we first realise that we are quite far from the factory. It seems in eagerness to get away from it I didn't realise how far we actually got from it.

We head to a store to get some tea and as we're waiting for the tea to arrive he says something that I was hoping we could avoid forever. "Why are you not asking me about it?" This is exactly what I was dreading. "Whatever do you mean?" I say still attempting to dodge the topic. "M'lady look at me" He says and I do. As soon as I look at him I find myself defenseless.

"Why are you not asking me what was the horrible thing that I did to Edmund?" He asks and I avoid eye contact with him again. "Does it matter?" I say and I feel so horrible for saying that. "Yes it does" He says and I take a deep breath and sigh. "You're afraid of the answer are you not?" He says and lord how I hate when he is correct.

My silence gives him the answer and I do not know if it's a good thing or a bad one. "Will you see me in a different light if I told you the truth?" He asks and I simply say "that depends on what you tell me. However it wouldn't change the fact that you are still the person I have known for so long" I say although I'm not sure how much I can handle.

He doesn't seem too thrilled by my response. "It was 3 years ago" He begins telling me the story and I listen to him intently as he goes on.

"He was my first ever patient and I was thrilled that I was getting any patients at all as you know people do not consider psychological and mental health issues a serious problem." He says and I encourage him to go on.

3 years ago (Author's POV)

As his first patient walked in he seemed rather thrilled at the sight of him. The patient seemed to have long curly hair and a big beard, a sign of not caring enough to even take care of himself. The dark circles ensured that the gentleman had been awake for several nights and the skinny body certainly confirmed that he had not been eating properly at all. One could say the patient was from a poor family Although the carriage he has arrived in seemed to indicate otherwise.

"Please do be seated" Vulcan says politely and the person responds in return taking the seat opposite to that of himself. "What seems to be troubling you sir" Vulcan asks, receiving no response, instead another man enters the room handing him a note and a bag of money. "What meaning should I make

of this?" He asks the man and he gestures towards the note hence Vulcan picks it up and starts reading it.

It appears the gentleman is from a far land and was specifically sent here for a treatment although the words in the note were not so kind towards his patient. "What is this supposed to be?" Vulcan asks the man and the man takes away the note.

"Lord Russell of Scotland wishes that you fix his son. There is something not quite right with his mind. He has not been doing anything since his mother's passing. He stays in his room all day and refuses to do anything. It has been 5 years yet he can not seem to let go. Servants used to groom him up but as it appears he no longer allows them to enter his room. The doctors suggested that the problem might be mental at this point which is considered a shame on the family. Hence Lord Russell decided to have him treated far away from Scotland. The money will not be an issue as long as you make sure sir edmund will be fine"

The man with the note explains in one breath and Vulcan listens to everything intently and as he hears more he starts taking pity on his first ever patient and that was his first mistake.

Vulcan is tempted to turn them away but he can not help but feel pity towards his first ever patient so he does not.

"Sir you do realise that I am new in this field do you not?" Vulcan asks and the man says "that is irrelevant, we do not care if you have experience, you will not be operating on him or performing surgeries. All you have to do is fix his mind through your talking or whatever it is that you do. I'm sure it

will be fine" The man says and somehow it made Vulcan feel disrespected but he did not say anything for he has decided that he is going to help Edmund recover.

The man waits outside the door for the entirety of their first session although they did not seem to reach anywhere in their first session as Edmund refused all of Vulcan's attempts to converse with him. However Edmund did give Vulcan a reaction at the drawing of a half moon. "You like it?" Vulcan asks Edmund but instead of giving any verbal response Edmund reaches out to the drawing and starts crying while hugging it.

Vulcan took a note of the fact that a half moon triggers some sort of emotional response in him.

Their next 3 sessions get them nowhere and as Vulcan is starting to lose hope Edmund starts talking to him for the first time ever. "Emma" He says for the first time as he looks at the half moon drawing yet again. "Who is Emma?" Vulcan asks and tears start forming in Edmund's eyes. "My love" He whispers and Vulcan finds himself confused. "Was it not his mother that died that turned him to this state?" thought Vulcan and proceeded to ask him if that were true.

"No, No they killed Emma" He starts whispering and Vulcan feels as if the world has turned upside down. "My poor Emma" He says with tears flowing down his face and hugging the half moon painting. "Just because she was of low birth they had her killed" He says and Vulcan is not sure of what to make of that information.

"But was it not your mother who died?" Vulcan asks to confirm and suddenly his sorrowful expression is changed to that of a sinful one. "Yes she did..... I killed her" He says with such a sinister grin and with no remorse which even left Vulcan feeling a little disturbed.

The worst part was Vulcan did not know whether to believe him or not. Patients sometimes make up stories to build a wall around them to scare people away and Vulcan was not sure if Edmund's stories were to be believed or not.

Vulcan gently asks Edmund why he had killed his mother and his only response is "Because she was irritable" He says as if it was a completely valid reason to kill his mother. "And she had my Emma killed because I wanted to marry her" He says in the voice of a child . "Why do you cling on to the half moon painting?" Vulcan asks gently as if talking to a child. "Because she gave me a half moon pendant as a gift. It's the only thing that reminds me of her"

He says looking at the painting longingly. "Do you still have the pendant?" Vulcan asks and Edmund nods "yes it's back at home in Scotland, I have it hidden so no one finds it" He says and Vulcan smiles. "Very well, now would you like to tell me why Emma's death impacted you this much? I mean sure people die and the sorrow is there for a certain period of time but people move on so why have you not? " Vulcan asks out of his own genuine curiosity and Edmund ends up laughing hysterically.

"You have never been in love have you?" Vulcan seems shocked as this is the first time Edmund himself asked him a question so he felt obligated to respond as it may help them

bond on a deeper level although everything in his gut was telling him to not to trust this man.

"I have not" Vulcan responds simply and Edmund says in between his laughs "no wonder you asked me such a foolish question" Vulcan does not know how to respond to that so he attempts to change the topic but before he can Edmund says something that made Vulcan feel even more disturbed. "I will make sure you understand my sorrow" Edmund mumbles slowly and Vulcan surely felt uncomfortable by that but Edmund is his patient so he has to keep personal feelings aside for he really wishes to help this man.

"I suppose our session comes to an end today. I believe we have made progress" Vulcan says and Edmund responds with a somewhat creepy grin. "I'm starting to like you doctor" Edmund says before leaving.

Vulcan should have stopped on that day itself but curiosity can be a cruel thing even for someone as wise as Theodore Vulcan.

Present time (Vera's POV)

"Here is your order gentlemen" The waitress serves us the tea and as I'm about to take my first sip she winks at me and I end up choking on it. "Did she just?" I whisper scream and Vulcan chuckles a little despite the serious topic we were just discussing. "Did I not say ladies would line up for you gentleman" He says teasing me again and I kick his leg from under the table.

"So what happened next?" I ask turning serious once again and he seems hesitant to continue so I do not wish to push any

further. He will tell me when he feels ready and the time is right.

"Did you see that wounded man last night?" We hear some men talk behind us. "It seemed like he was shot, his hand looked in a terrible condition as it was bleeding far too much" Another one of the men behind us says. Both me and Vulcan look at each other in mutual understanding that they're talking about Edmund.

I get up from my seat and go towards those men leaving Lord Vulcan Speechless. "Why I hear you gentlemen are discussing something rather interesting" I try to say in a manly tone but it comes out as more of soft and boyish. They all turn to look at me. I suddenly feel nervous as they look at me suspiciously for a few moments but become rather welcoming as soon as I show a friendly smile. "Well we saw some bimbo bleeding through his hands and running towards the back alley last night. It was around the time that the factory caught fire." One of the men says and I nod "why are you so interested in this. Aren't you a little too young to be interested in such topics boy?" One of the men says and I laugh awkwardly. "I work for the press so it is my duty to gather any news I can" I say and all of them look suspicious but then start laughing.

"That's some hard work you do there bud. Come have some tea with us" One of them offers but I politely decline saying I have to get back to work. Once I get back to my own seat Lord Vulcan looks like he is holding his laugh back yet again. "I will not be hesitant to punch you again" I say and he lets out his laugh.

"Why I hear you gentlemen are discussing something rather interesting" He says trying to imitate me and this time I kick him from below the table with all I have. "M'lady that's-" I smile innocently "what?" He groans in pain and I drink my tea enjoying every sip of it.

"Now we know what direction he went to but that doesn't necessarily mean if we follow the same path we'll be able to catch him" I say and he hums in agreement.

"I think I might know where he went" Lord Vulcan says and I raise an eyebrow in disbelief. "There was a bar he often used to visit when he was my patient. Not at the start of our treatment of course but as he got better at talking and started becoming more.... Human.....he often used to visit a bar and from what I remember it could be around this area although I myself have never visited it but he told me the name of it and If I'm correct one of my old acquaintances works at that bar" He says and I find myself rather enthusiastic about it.

"The George Inn" He says and it seems I myself have heard of it a few times during balls and parties. "That sounds like a prestigious bar, are you sure it's around this area?" I ask and he thinks about it for a few moments. "I suppose it would be around two or three miles from here" He says and as I finish my tea I say to him "well then we do not have much time as we'll have to walk there so get your arse up" His mouth is almost dropped open in my language. "M'lady your language keeps getting more and more foul" He says and I give him a glare. "And I quite frankly enjoy it."

We pay our bill and start moving towards the bar. Although it is quite a walk, we have no choice. As we're walking I find

myself quite enjoying the views of the street. As a lady I've never had the luxury to enjoy the free streets of London. Even the times I sneaked out I was often anxious and worried about getting caught or finding weirdos but wandering streets as a man feels so free. It is sad as much as it's freeing.

"M'lady are you alright?" He asks and I nod. " I was just thinking about how a simple act of wandering streets feels so freeing in the clothing of a man whereas if I was a woman dressed in my normal clothes I would be getting looks from everyone and feel anxious all the time. The difference enrages me yet I can not do anything about it."

I say and he looks like he doesn't know how to respond to it. "Well you're not powerless M'lady. You are writing your novel, correct?" He asks and I nod. "Actually it's done. It only needs to be edited and revised" I say and he smiles like he is proud of me. "Well then I have no doubt you have raised your voice in your Novel and with it your voice shall reach many young women and men" He says encouraging me and I nod.

I have in fact talked about the double standards of society and multiple other issues in my Novel so I do hope it brings some change but I alone can only do so much.

During our journey to the bar we stop by to get some food at a restaurant and as we eat I spot many men talking about multiple things which also includes some vulgar words and rather peculiar things which I did not understand. "You see when I was on the top and I slipped it in-" One of the men who thought he was whispering says but was actually quite loud and Lord Vulcan chokes on his food.

"M'lady let's get out of here" He says whispering although I'm curious what the men are talking about. "What is he talking about? Slipped what in and where?" I ask and he gestures to me to lower my tone. Before I can say anything anymore he grabs my arm and drags me out of the restaurant after paying the bill.



Chapter 14

Vera

"Forgive my behavior M'lady but that was not meant for your ears." He says and I have never been more curious about anything. "But I wish to know what they meant" I demand assertively. "M'lady if you do not already know what it means then it certainly is not my place to tell you" He says respectfully.

"Well then you can just show me can you not?" I ask and start coughing vigorously. "M'lady I can not show you either" He says and I roll my eyes. "Fine I'll ask someone else, maybe Mr. Rai would be willing to show me" I mention Mr. Rai because he is the only other man I'm acquainted with besides him. He suddenly stops in his tracks.

"M'lady do you really not know what they meant or are you just poking fun at me?" He asks and I wonder what made him question that. "If I'm being honest I do have an idea of what they meant" I don't. I simply say that so I do not sound like a complete idiot.

"And what pray tell is your idea of what they were talking about?" He asks and I think of my next words very carefully.

"Well they were probably talking about some game you men play among yourselves which requires sliding something in. Like a ball or maybe a bat" I say and he looks like he'll burst out laughing any moment.

"Indeed M'lady" He says in between his choked laughs. "Fine I admit I have no clue what they were talking about but I'm extremely curious" I say and he is still stifling his laughter so I smack his shoulder.

"Forgive me M'lady it's not a laughing matter but it's just you're quite unintentionally hilarious" He says and I do not know what to make of it.

"Whatever you say" I say and we keep moving forward. "I will make you show me one day though" I say with determination and he takes a deep breath as if asking lord for more patience. I suppose I'm getting on his nerves so that's an achievement. I enjoy making men uncomfortable.

We walk for lord knows how long before we finally reach the bar. The evening approaches rather slowly and we decide that we can not go inside unless the bar is too crowded as we're here to blend in with the crowd and not to stand out.

There were times he suggested that I stay outside the bar as I've never been in one and there might be dangerous drunk men inside but like always I argued my way and made him agree to let me come with him. Although he stated some ground rules for letting me come with him which are:

- 1- Do not talk to any man
- 2- Do not touch Alcohol

3- stay by his side

Of course I'm going to follow all the rules like the obedient girl I am.

As we enter the bar a distinct smell fills my nose making me want to throw up. Do all the bars smell this way? How do men handle it? I do not question anything or complain. I simply stick by his side as he talks to someone at the counter. I suppose he asked the bartender about where he could find his acquaintance.

The bartender went somewhere for a few minutes and came back to whisper something to him. He turns to me and says "M'lady I'm afraid you'll have to stay here" He says whispering and I do not question him. I understand these things are difficult to handle and the acquaintance can not trust everyone.

I simply nod and wait at a table quietly. I look around to see all sorts of men being drunk and playing games, however some of them seem to be quite wealthy and actually in their senses.

One of the bartenders asks for my order so I simply ask for water, however it appears the bartender wants to sell good drinks today. "We have this fine beer imported recently. Are you sure you wouldn't be an interested gentleman?" He asks and I firmly deny but unfortunately for me he is extremely convincing so I agree with him.

I know I said no alcohol but a few sips of beer wouldn't hurt would they? He brings in the drink and as soon as I take a few sips I spit it out within a mili second. "What in the world is that?" I say out and the bartender looks at me suspiciously.

"Sir, is it your first time drinking a beer?" He asks and Ofcourse I can not have him thinking that.

"It's just been a while since I drank. I've been busy with work for the past few months hence I had no time for drinking. The drink is spectacular. I shall have more of it" I say rather convincingly although he still looks at me as if I'm weird and serves the drink.

I drank it all in one go this time. Well that wasn't as bad as I thought. "I shall have more" I say and have only a few more drinks.

After a few minutes everything starts to look blurry and why does the bartender have two heads? And since when did I have 20 fingers? This is amazing. I feel as if I can fly. I look around to find my man but I can not see him anywhere. Did he also grow two heads and fly away?

I put my head down on the table and feel the sleep take over me.

"M'lady let's get going, it's getting late" I hear a familiar voice and immediately get up. "Oh you're here. Look at you growing two heads." I say giggling and I can not figure out his expression. "Did I or did I not tell you to stay away from alcohol?" He asks and I smile "but I drank beer so I didn't break the rules" I say giggling and cupping my face in my hand.

"I should've seen this coming" He says under his breath and helps me get up from the chair. I grab on to him however I'm in no condition to walk. "M'lady do you mind if I carry you on my back?" He asks and I shake my head. "You can carry me

however and whenever you like. I'm always yours to carry" I say with a smile and still cupping my face.

I don't know if It's my imagination or I see him smile and blush a little. "adorable" He whispers but then starts lecturing me about what I did was dangerous and irresponsible. "Your handsome face should not be lecturing me this way. Use it for something better" I say and he seems speechless.

He finally lifts me up and carries me on his back. I wrap my hands around his neck and legs around his waist. "This is so fun" I say and he groans "ofcourse it's fun for you" He says and I ask why is it not fun for him. "This is pure torment for me" He says and I wonder if I'm that heavy.

"I do not think I'm that heavy" I say and he chuckles. "It's not because you're heavy, it's because of completely other reasons which you wouldn't understand" He says and I frown.

"Why are there so many things that I don't understand? Make me understand it all" I whine and he smiles. "You will understand when time is right M'lady" He says and I want to know when the time will be right. I'm tempted to ask but I'm more tempted to rest my eyes so I do.

I'm suddenly laid down on a bed and covered with a blanket. I opened my eyes to find him turned around ready to leave. "Where are you going?" I ask and he turns to look at me. "Don't worry M'lady my room is right across yours so you can call me if you need help with anything anytime" He says and turns around to leave again.

"I need help with taking off my trousers" I say in my sleepy voice. "They're extremely uncomfortable to sleep in" I say and he purses his lips. "Except that" He says and sits next to me.

"We do not have any clothes that you can change into so I suggest you bear it for one night" He says and I start to unbutton a few top buttons of my shirt myself. "Nevermind I'll do it myself" I can not make out his exact expression but from what I can tell is that his eyes widen and he immediately grabs both of my hands and pins them above my head.

"You really do test my patience M'lady" I'm not sure if it's just my brain or his voice actually sounds quite deeper than usual. I can finally see his face clearly. I've never seen him make this expression before. The way his face is so stern is as if he's fighting something within his mind yet his eyes are dark but have a gentle look in them.

"Such pretty eyes" I say and his expression seems to have gotten serious. He looks away and releases my hands and as soon as he does I grab his face in my hands to take a look at him properly. "Those gorgeous of yours need to be painted" I say with a giggle.

I see his expression darken but he looks a little saddened?

He grabs my hands and kisses the palm of my hand gently and that makes me feel some sort of way and I mean good sort of way. "M'lady" He says with a deep voice "You are being really cruel right now" He says like a plea.

"Why do you look at me that way sometimes?" I ask and he drops my hand. I think I heard him say "you would run away

if I told you" but before I can confirm what he said I feel the sleep take over me so I let it.

My head feels as if someone ran a carriage over it. What happened? Everything looks blurry and I have a sharp pain in my head. My ears feel too sensitive. Nothing makes sense. Have I passed away finally? The pain in my head would say otherwise.

I hear the door open and Lord Vulcan walks in. "Good morning M'lady I've ordered some tea for you. It shall be arriving soon. How are you feeling?" He asks and I immediately utter "horrible"

"That's better than I expected" He says and I want to throw something at him. "What happened?" I ask and he gives an expression of "where do I even begin?" Despite my impatience, I wait for him to continue. "What shouldn't have happened. You got drunk despite my warnings" He says with a stern look and appears to be determined to give me a lecture about it.

"I'll spare you from the lecture as you already know what you did and my lecture wouldn't stop you from doing anything you want so please get some rest and have your tea as soon as it arrives" He says and I let out a sigh of relief.

"Did something happen last night?" I ask and he turns serious. "So you don't remember anything?" He asks and I nod. He seems relieved and disappointed at the time. I don't know what to make of it. "Nothing significant happened" He says plainly although I can sense he isn't completely being truthful however it'd be pointless of me to keep asking if he doesn't wish to say something.

"I trust you. I hope you know that" I say and I don't even know why I said that. He looks just as confused as me. "I mean I trust you enough that I wouldn't question your honour and let myself feel at ease around you even if I'm not in the right state of mind" I say explaining. That was a good excuse I just made up. Although every part of it is extremely true.

"That's comforting to know" He says and I nod awkwardly. There is a knock at our door and I tell them to come in. It's the tea he ordered however that isn't the only thing entering the room right now. I see a few people bringing in a lot of dresses and some jewellery. "What is that for?" I ask and he waits for the servants to leave before he can continue.

"We're going to a masquerade ball tonight M'lady" He says and I take a look at the dresses. "And you thought I'd wear all of them for one night?" I ask sarcastically and he seems to get a little embarrassed. "I didn't know what kind of dresses you liked so I got multiple of them. If you don't like these let me know I'll buy some better ones and return these" He says and I look at him in disbelief.

"The dresses are marvelous. The only issue is however shall I decide which one I should wear" I say looking at the dresses in awe. "Well they're all yours" He says and I am still in utter disbelief.

"Why are we going to a ball again?" I ask while sipping my tea. It's extremely refreshing.

Help me take off my trousers.

I choke on my tea as soon as my brain flashes an image of saying that in front of him. Did that actually happen or my

brain simply hallucinated that? I am still in my trousers so I don't think it's an actual memory. It's most likely made up by my brain.

I heard men tend to have bad hangovers and shattered memories or even hallucinations after getting drunk and I finally realise what they feel. That hallucination was plain preposterous. I would never say such a thing to a man.

"Are you alright? What happened all of a sudden?" He asks me to give him napkins. "Nothing" I say and it's clear that he doesn't believe me at all. "Did I say something inappropriate last night?" I ask and he seems hesitant. "Describe inappropriate" He asks and I feel a little awkward "something a lady shouldn't say" I say and pretend to think for a while.

"You say a lot of things a lady shouldn't say, what exactly do you mean M'lady?" He teases me and I throw a pillow at him while he giggles. "I assure you that you didn't do or say anything inappropriate" He says and I let out a sigh of relief. It was indeed my own hallucination.

"So why are we going to this ball? I suppose it has something to do with Edmund or someone who doesn't enjoy social gatherings like you wouldn't suggest in the first place" I ask and he smiles and I can see a hint of pride in that smile.

"You're correct M'lady, He is attending a ball tonight but not alone" He says and my interest is peaked. "I suppose he intends to carry out something tonight. Another murder perhaps" I ask and he shakes his head.

"He is meeting someone" He says and I'm not sure whether it's a good thing or a bad one. "So he'll be there with probably one

of his partners in crime and if we're lucky enough we get to catch them together" I say and he nods. "But we'll also need some assistance with the police which I have already arranged for"

Sometimes I forget he is actually a rich man and has connections in society. To me he just feels like my best friend at times. My best friend is still Amelia of course then Celeste and then Mira. He comes at fourth but I still value him in a different sort of way.

"So what are you going to wear? Don't tell me that is what you're wearing" I say looking at his current suit which is fine but an insult to his appearance as compared to how I've seen him at other balls and occasions. "Of course not I've got one suit for myself as well" He says and I let out a sigh of relief.

"Show me" I ask and he doesn't understand at first but brings the suit once I ask him. "Now I have to pick a dress that matches this perfectly" I say, making him perplexed. "I don't understand. Why do we need to match?" He asks and next thing I say leaves him too stunned to speak

"We are a couple afterall" His eyes widened at my words. "Surely you don't think when we get out of here with me dressed as a lady people wouldn't question it. We have to tell them something believable" He nods and comes near me. "This one matches perfectly, what do you think?" He says picking a blue dress and I agree with him.

"This one it is then" I say and ask him to leave the room so I can try. Although it is quite hard putting on a proper ball

gown by myself. I've always had help from Cecelia or mother but of course I can not ask anyone for help here.

Maybe I could ask him to get me some helpers who could help with the dress.

I peek through the door while he's standing in the hallway reading a book. Where did he get the book? I don't bother asking. "Hey" I whisper and he looks towards me. "Yes what happened M'lady" He asks "could you get me some helpers who could help me try on the dress? It is a difficult task to do on my own specially with the corset" I ask and he makes an understanding expression and immediately goes to call for help although much to my disappointment when he returns there is no help with him.

"Forgive me M'lady they said all of their female staff and maids are busy right now" He says and I frown. "Well that's just awesome isn't it?" I say sarcastically. I look at him and a preposterous thought enters my head. "Perhaps you could help me" I say and he drops the book he was holding a moment ago.

"Absolutely not M'lady, that's inappropriate in every possible way" He says moving backwards. "Well for today we're a couple for everyone so it doesn't really matter, as long as we don't cross a line it wouldn't be inappropriate and you're just helping with tying the corset is all" I say trying to rationalize my idea

"No M'lady I respect you a lot to-" He says and I cut him off. "I know you do, that's exactly why I trust you with this" I say, making him stop his sentence in between. "I wouldn't even

think of asking such a thing to another man" I say and he seems almost convinced.

"For someone who doesn't know much of the world, You sure do know how to manipulate someone into doing your bidding" He says and I smirk "That is a great observation M'lord Thank you very much" I say as if I'm proud of myself. "And that's precisely why I like you" He says with a smile and enters the room.

As he enters the room he takes a proper look at me and his ears turn red. adorable. "No need to get so awkward, we've been in worse situations in our dreams together." I say trying to make him feel better but it doesn't work.

"You know what, I now realise you were correct. I'm making you uncomfortable and that shouldn't be happening. You can leave. It was stupid of me to even-" He stops me from talking as he gets behind me and slowly starts tying the corset. Somehow this feels more intimate than it should. I've had people help me with corsets multiple times but it's never felt like this.

For a moment I felt as if his hand grazed my bare skin at the back and my breath hitched unintentionally at the moment. I suppose he noticed and immediately moved his hand away. How embarrassing of me. Now that I think about it. It really wasn't a good idea asking him for help.

My breathing gets heavier as he continues to tie the corset as it gets tighter and makes me wince. I let out a heavy breath as soon as it's done. "I almost forgot how much I despise these sort of corsets" I say with heavy breathing whereas he seems to

be in deep thought about something. His eyes have a little dark look in them.

As he's done with the corset I turn around to check the look in the mirror and I quite like what I see.

"Blue really suits you" He says and I nod. He brings up a necklace matching the jewellery. "May I?" He asks and I let him put it on me. The necklace looks great with the dress.

"Your choice is quite perfect" I say and he seems awed as he stares in the mirror. "Perfect indeed" He says with a smile and adds "if I were the mirror I wouldn't want you to leave me even for one moment for I'd long to see you all day" He says and I feel my cheeks heated. What is happening? Am I.....? No it can not be.

It's ridiculous. I can not be blushing over something a man said. That's outrageous. My past self would slap me if she saw me.

This is the first time it has happened. What led it to this?

I need to calm down, I'm overreacting. It can simply be because of the heat. It's preposterous to think I'd blush over a man's words. Oh how Cecelia would poke fun at me if she knew.

"You flatter me" I say avoiding his eyes. He probably notices the change in me and asks what happened. I avoid being truthful of course. He sighs. "You never tell me anything do you?" He says and I can feel his voice has gotten heavier.

"What do you mean? I always tell you everything" I say and he scoffs. "Well then tell me are you actually being truthful right

now?" He asks. My silence gives the answer. "Did I say something I shouldn't have?" He asks and I immediately say "no ofcourse not. It's just....." I try to convey my feelings but it sounds absolutely laughable to me that I overreacted so much over simple words that could be taken as a simple compliment.

Sure I've got compliments before but they never made me feel this way. This is new and I'm afraid of it. I can not tell him that. It would be a laughable matter for him perhaps. When I don't say anything for the next few moments he sighs and says "well then excuse me M'lady, I'll leave you to it" He turns around to leave but I do not wish for him to leave.

"We'll be heading out in a few hours, I'll tell the workers to let you know" He says and closes the door.



Chapter 15

Vera

We head out for the ball and we are both silent during the entire ride. It's extremely awkward kind of silence. Even the chaperone isn't here since we said we're a married couple. That makes it even more awkward.

"About my family, do they know where I am?" I ask and he says

"Worry not about them for I had already sent a letter to them the moment I heard of your kidnapping" He says and I immediately get more worried. "You did not mention the kidnapping did you?" I ask and he shakes his head. "I reckoned you wouldn't want them to worry so I made an excuse and said you are quite sick and would be staying with us for a few days" I let out a sigh of relief.

The relief is gone as soon as the conversation ends and the atmosphere is back to awkwardness. really just messed up a friendship just because his words made me feel a certain way? That sounds unfathomably stupid and something I'm totally capable of doing. He has complimented me before ofcourse but it's the way he said it this time while looking at the mirror

and standing behind me with that expression and voice as if he was looking at one of his art pieces.

It made me feel I don't know what it was but I've never felt it before and it horrified me to feel that way for the first time. That still doesn't justify the way I acted with him. I have to apologize for my behavior. His friendship is much more important to me than some fleeting feelings I got.

As we reach the venue he helps me get off the carriage and I take in the view of the venue. It is quite extravagant. We both walk side by side although he still doesn't say anything to me.

As we enter the main hall of the ball we give each other a look and finally put on our mask. "How will we recognize him?" I ask and he responds "I can spot him easily based on his behavioral pattern and body language. He was my patient for months afterall" He says looking around but his energy still seems off.

His voice doesn't have the same warmth it usually has when he's talking with me and my heart feels heavy because of it.

Once this is over I will apologize to him.

As we look around, there are a lot of people dancing and having quite a time of their life. I wonder if any of them know what's taking place here behind the scenes.

"I'll be back in a moment M'lady" he says and leaves. I do not ask further questions.

As soon as he leaves I turn around to grab a snack from the table but accidentally end up bumping into someone. "Oh I apologize, I should've paid more attention" I say without

recognizing the person behind the mask. "Miss Vera" The man says and I immediately recognize the voice.

"Mr. Rai?" Of course he would be here. He is also working on the case. How could I ever forget? He must be here for Edmund as well.

Perhaps that's a good thing. Perhaps we could ask for his co-operation. However Lord Vulcan wouldn't agree. They do not seem to get along for whatever reason. "Yes it is indeed me and as surprised as I am, I am also glad to see you. I thought you were sick and couldn't attend any balls for a few days" He says and I awkwardly laugh. "Well as you can see I am quite well now"

I say and he nods. "Glad to hear that your father has finally been discharged" He says and thank goodness I'm wearing a mask. Otherwise my shock could not be hidden. "He has indeed been discharged" I say awkwardly.

This is how I find out my father's been discharged? I have this sudden urge to run back home and see my father but ofcourse I can not do that yet.

"Miss Vera, may I have the next dance?" He asks and for a moment I completely forgot we were at a ball. "Yes you may" I say and he smiles. "Mira has been planning to visit you; however , she has been quite busy herself. Forgive her for it" He says and I gently shake my head. "Oh it's not a matter at all. I'd prefer it if she were paying more attention to learning and spending more time working hard" I say and as the next song starts playing he asks for my hand and I give it to him.

We start dancing and it begins quite well however it's not as perfect as it was with *him*. I do enjoy Mr. Rai's company but I do not feel as ease with him as I feel with Lord Vulcan. It makes sense considering I have not spent much time with him. I'm sure he'd be wonderful to know more about.

I have to stop thinking about Lord Vulcan now and start focusing on the dance. I can not completely blame Mr. Rai for our few misaligned steps. My mind is in turmoil and I can not seem to get a hang on it. "Are you sure you're still not sick, Ms. Vera?" He asks and I shake my head. "I'm not sick it's just I'm quite nervous to be here" I lie and he seems to take it.

"Ladies tend to have that effect around me" He says in a joking manner and I laugh. "Oh I'm sure they do" I say in disbelief. "Do you not believe me Miss?" He says pretending to be hurt. "Oh I do, certainly" I say sarcastically and he pretends to be hurt again. "You have given quite a blow to my ego" He says dramatically yet again.

"I'm sure Mira would be pleased about it. She loves to see you lose an argument afterall" I say and he nods. "You two have ganged up on me and I do not feel like I like it" He says and I shrug. "Well like it or not you'll have to live with it now" I say while laughing and he chuckles.

As we're talking I feel someone's gaze upon me, I've actually been feeling it for quite some time but I tried to ignore it. However I can not anymore so I turn my head to see who it is only to find Lord Vulcan looking straight at me with a burning gaze.

He seems as if he could murder someone with one look. I do hope it's not directed towards me. Whatever made him feel such anger? Did he find out where Edmund is? I'll have to ask him once the dance finishes. I can not focus on what Mr. Rai is saying as I'm occupied with dealing with a murderous gaze which I hope isn't directed towards me. I look at Mr. Rai to say something and that's when it starts making sense to me.

He is glaring at Mr. Rai. It makes total sense since they don't get along. I let out a sigh of relief with the thought. "So what do you think?" Mr. Rai asks and I have no clue what he has been talking about for the past few minutes.

"I - I think that's fantastic?" I am unsure of what I've just agreed to. "See I knew you would like the idea" He says and I do not have the heart to ask him to repeat himself. I've already had enough of losing friends today. I can not have more of it.

Although I wouldn't say I've lost him. I am going to apologize as soon as this is all over.

As the dance comes to an end we both bow to each other politely and leave the stage. "Well then excuse me, I'll see you around Mr. Rai" I say and he nods.

I turn around to look at Lord Vulcan but he seems to have moved from his previous spot. Where did he go now?

"I have spotted Edmund. He has been sneaking around the hall and drawing as little attention as he can towards himself" I hear a voice from behind me "anything else? What about the meeting?" I ask and he grabs me quietly in a corner. "They are smuggling weapons" He says and My jaw drops open. "They

are WHAT" I whisper-shout. "He works for smugglers" He says leaving me stunned.

"M'lady the matter is much more serious than just him trying to take revenge on me. I suggest you stay out of it from this moment on" He says and I immediately start arguing otherwise.

He doesn't seem to yield easily this time. He sternly says that I stay out of it this time. "Well I'm already here. What am I supposed to do for the rest of the evening then? I might as well just help you out" I say and he says something that leaves me speechless

"You seemed to be having quite a good time with that gentleman. I suppose you could ask him to accompany you" He says but I know he doesn't truly mean that. "I understand you do not get along with Mr. Rai but could you at least try not to glare at him all the time?" I ask and his eyes look perplexed. "Mr. Rai? That was him?" He asks and I'm the confused one now.

"Didn't you already know he was Mr. Rai? If not then why were you glaring at him like you wanted to murder him earlier?" I ask and he says "well he was wearing a mask so how should I know" It makes sense that he didn't know.

"but if you didn't know then why were you glaring at him?" He sighs and says "let's leave this conversation for later, I have to get going and for goodness sake do not follow me" He says and I nod.

Of course I'm going to follow him subtly.

He turns around to leave and as soon as he has walked enough distance I very subtly try to follow him and I'm glad he doesn't notice.

He takes a turn and I fasten my steps in order to catch up to him, however I find myself almost bumping into him as he is standing there crossing his hands and looking at me as if he has caught me red handed. Well he has.

"I was just looking for a washroom" I say and take a deep breath "M'lady you're going to have to come up with better excuses" He says and I feel like I've embarrassed myself even further by making that pathetic excuse.

"you know I will not stay behind so why bother? Just take me with you" I say and he sighs. "On one condition" He says and I immediately agree.

"If things get out of hand then no matter what happens to me, do not stay behind. Run and save yourself" He says and my heart drops. How could he say such a thing so easily? I simply nod and I feel as if he knows I wouldn't do that.

He agrees to let me come with him. "That is the room" He points towards it and I look towards the room. "So how are we going to know what they're talking about?" I ask and he tells me his plan and my eyes widen with every word.

"That is dangerous" I say and he nods. "That is why you should leave M'lady" He says and I ignore him. "I have a better plan" I say

He says "I have a better plan" I say and starts explaining my idea although he gives quite disapproving looks from his eyes as he hears my plans. I still continue and by the time I have

finished explaining what I plan to do his first reaction is "absolutely not"

"Well it's better than you going in there. He'd recognize you within a few moments, mask or not" I say and he can not disagree with me on that one. "Edmund has only seen me a few times, there's a slightly lesser chance that he'd recognize me behind a mask" I say and he still doesn't seem completely convinced.

"Trust me I'd do a great job" I say and after a few moments of consideration he agrees hesitantly.

"Do you think Mr. Rai is also going to get involved here? He is working on the case officially afterall and I suppose he has some intel that is why he is here" I ask and he seems irritated at the mention of his name.

"I can not be sure if that is true however if he is indeed involved and is also trying to catch him then our plans might clash with him. If they do I'd have to come to a mutual understanding with him and you will stay out if it" He says firmly leaving me no space to argue.

"Let's get going then" I say and he goes towards the next room and I enter the one where they're holding the meeting.

It's not only one person, there are multiple men and two women. At first glance it simply looks like it's a normal gathering of guests who decided to take a break from the ball. I can not seem to recognize a single person. I still do not know which one is Edmund.

I forget I have to say something as everyone stares at me in silence as if I've committed a crime by merely entering the room.

"Oh forgive me gentlemen, is this not the washroom?" I ask and they seem to be suspicious of me, so I do what I do best. Pretend to be an innocent and naive young lady who is simply lost.

I start crying dramatically "if not then forgive me as My fiance has just cancelled my engagement and my mind is in turmoil" I say in between the fake cries. "One of the gentlemen comes up to me and says "that's alright Miss we understand it can be hard, I'm sure you'll find a much better man" He says and I say "is it alright if I stayed with you here for a moment and had something to eat? After all you're all just having fun here are you not" I say in between my fake sobs.

"Perhaps your boring business talks could put me to sleep. I do not understand much of your business things anyways" I say and the man who came to talk to me looks pretty convinced.

However one of them firmly says "we sympathize with you young miss however we can not have you here. I humbly request that you leave" I look at the man standing beside me with fake teary eyes and he tries to convince the other man that it's fine to let me stay here for a few moments.

After a few minutes of discussion they come to an agreement. The man comes up to me and leads me to another room which is connected to this room. The previous room was like

a mini hall full of sofa and other furniture whereas this one is a bedroom.

"Stay here young Miss I'd be back in almost an hour, once our business talks are over" He says leaving me in the bedroom.

This isn't exactly what I had expected but it's better than nothing. Surely they wouldn't let me sit between them and discuss all the important things in front of a stranger.

"Ahh Mr. Russell you're finally here" That man who was against me staying in the room says and I finally realise Edmund had not been in the room till now.

I put my ear on the wall attempting to hear what they're talking about and it feels as if luck is on my side, I can hear a lot of things clearly.

"£10,000 or no biscuits" I hear Edmund say and the room bursts into murmurs. "Enough" The same man who was against me staying here says. It looks like he is their boss considering how fast they all listen to him. "Your biscuits have gotten quite expensive however their quality does not seem to match their price" I suppose biscuits are code words for weapons.

"My Lord I risk everything to bring you finest quality biscuits of England and as I'm sure you know nowadays Scotland has a shortage of them. I suggest you do not risk losing such a great deal of biscuits as I can assure you no one else can provide you such a great deal" Edmund says and the leader still sound skeptical regarding their deal.

"I shall like to see the biscuits first" The leader says and Edmund responds "very well My lord, visit this address

tomorrow evening at 9" He says and I assume Edmund passed a paper with the address written on it since they do not talk it out loud.

Well that's just inconvenient. "I hear you have been causing some trouble Mr. Russell" The leader says and Edmund goes silent for a few moments. "You are extremely good at your work however you have been quite sloppy recently" Ohh that must have hurt Edmund's ego.

"With all due respect My lord, that is my personal business, it doesn't affect our deal in any way. I still provide the best quality biscuits there might be" Edmund says confidently although I can sense the anger in his tone.

"It isn't about the biscuits. I'm talking about the last witness that you left alive. You couldn't get rid of an old man and says you're getting sloppy" My heart drops at the mention of my father. " That morning I was simply trying to get rid of our main witness, Mr. Frost was just collateral damage, he stuck his nose somewhere he shouldn't have. I should've ended him right there, however he got fortunate" Edmund says and The leader responds "we can not afford any other witnesses getting fortunate. Get rid of him"

The leader says and I feel this surge of anger within me. It takes everything in me to not walk across the hall and simply shoot them all. However this isn't one of those dreams and I can not do that as disheartening as it might be.

"Will do My lord" Edmund says and the rest of them make a toast. Murderers all of them. They talk of other things for the next few moments most of which I do not know about but I

still listen to everything as I suspect any information can be valuable.

I suddenly hear a knock at the window and jump in shock. Ahh right I almost forgot about this. I go towards the window and open it so he can come in. "I can not believe you actually climbed through a window" I say and he seems pretty out of breath.

"Well I did not have a choice now did I?" He says and he looks towards the door. "Did you find out anything valuable?" He asks and I nod. "Yes they're going to exchange the weapons tomorrow but I could not catch the address as they wrote it on a paper and passed it to one another instead of talking about it"

I say and he immediately goes towards the window and does a gesture with his hands. "What are you doing?" I ask looking down the window and see Mr. Rai and some other police officers. It seems as if the officers have encircled the area however they're retreating now. Mr Rai down there seems just as confused.

"You got Mr. Rai to help us?" I asked and he nodded "well after you entered the room we briefly met and I brought up the topic of Edmund and as it turns out you were quite correct. He was indeed here to catch them as well so we decided to work together despite our dislike for each other." I smile at his words.

"I knew you could get along" I say and immediately disagrees with me. "I suppose you're retreating now because you wish to catch them red handed tomorrow?" I ask and he looks at me

and lifts a corner of his mouth which seems like he's almost smiling.

"You're correct" He says and I look down at Mr. Rai who is still confused.

"I'll tell him later on" He says and I hear a knock at the door. "Young miss, may I come in?" The man who brought me in here asks and I immediately ask Lord Vulcan to hide. "But where?" He asks and I sometimes really wish my brain worked faster in such situations because both of us seem to get confused at this time.

"Under the bed quickly" I say and he resists but obeys after a few smacks on his shoulder. "Yes Of course you may come in Sir" I say and he enters. The door opens and he enters and starts smiling as soon as he sees me. "Our boring business meeting has ended. Now we can talk freely and you can tell me all about your fiance who left you" He says and I smile awkwardly. "Well what can I say he was such a *mind my language* arce. He left me for another woman. Am I not pretty enough?" I say fake crying.

"Not at all young miss you're a beauty." He says and I almost throw up at his words. "So would you be willing to see me again?" I ask and he immediately responds "certainty young miss, whenever you wish to see me" He says and I smirk. "How about tomorrow evening?" I say and he has gone silent. "Except tomorrow night young miss" He says and I ask why. "I have a business meeting tomorrow night" He says and I cry dramatically yet again.

"You make excuses to avoid me or tell me what sort of meetings are so late?" I say and cringe at my own dialogues. "It's true young miss, I will be at the port tomorrow night." He says and immediately covers his mouth. "Forgive me young miss I shouldn't have said that" I almost want to scream in victory as he let out the location of their meeting.

"What did you say? I couldn't hear properly. Could you repeat that?" I ask innocently and he says "nevermind if you didn't hear"

"Sir would you give me the liberty of leaving me alone for now as I have cried so many tears tonight I need some rest" I say and he seems as if he doesn't wish to go but agrees.

"I'll see you the day after tomorrow young miss" He says and leaves.

I close the door and let out a sigh of relief. "That was maddening"

Lord Vulcan comes out stifling his laughs from under the bed and I roll my eyes "yeah laugh away at me, however I got the location"

I say but it doesn't seem to affect him one bit. "You make excuses to avoid me" He says imitating me and I smack him with a pillow again.

"Thank you for your help M'lady" He says once he's done laughing. "See you should appreciate me more" I say and he replies "so should you" I take a seat next to him on the bed.



Chapter 16

Vera

"About this afternoon, I'm most authentically sorry for acting that way" I say and he turns serious. "The whole carriage ride was awkward and I could not stand it" I say and he agrees with me.

"I also apologize for my behavior M'lady" He says and I immediately shake my head. "No...no, your response was completely understandable. I was rather rude. You simply gave me a compliment and I acted rudely." I say and he seems to be in deep thought. "Did you not like the compliment?" He asks and without any hesitation I disagree with him.

"It's just your words.... they...." I attempt to continue talking but have a hard time speaking out my words although he still listens to me patiently. "They made me feel a certain way and I couldn't fathom it" I say with extreme embarrassment. I do not have the courage to look at him so I avoid his eyes at all costs.

"I have received compliments before but none of them made me feel that way so I couldn't process it and ended up acting the way I did" I Say still avoiding his eyes. "M'lady look at me"

No no no no. I'd rather dissolve into nothingness and disappear.

When I don't face him even after his request. He gently puts his two fingers under my chin and makes me look at him. Thank lords I still have the mask on or I'd be even more embarrassed if he saw my face.

He slowly closes the distance between us and whispers something in my ear. "And how about this?" He asks and my immediate response is "huh?"

"How does this make you feel?" He asks in a husky voice and I suddenly feel hot all over again. Thank goodness I'm sitting because my knees feel so weak. "I'm not sure" I lie because I cannot tell him the truth. It's far too embarrassing.

He unties my mask and as soon as it drops he looks at my face and smirks. "Liar" He whispers and I feel the blood rush to my cheeks. One of his hands is almost cupping one of my cheeks but still not completely touching it. "You're afraid aren't you?" He whispers again and my eyes almost widen at his words.

"Afraid of these feelings I give you.....feelings that only I can stir in you" He continues and with every word I realize he is correct.

"Don't you think it has been going on for long enough *Vera*" He whisper-pleads. His nose grazes my jaw "*please Vera*" I close my eyes as he says that and a sound escapes my throat. A sound I've never made before.

He stopped what he was doing. "That is a dangerous sound to make *Vera*" His voice sounds rough. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to-" He cuts me off "I know you didn't" He says caressing my

lips with his thumb and it makes me feel something else entirely.

"Tell me what do you think you're feeling right now?" He asks but it sounds more like a demand. "something I shouldn't be feeling" I say quite aware that the feelings arousing in my body are somewhat forbidden.

"And how pray-tell do you wish to deal with this feeling?" He asks in a gentle whisper. "I.....wish to indulge in it" I say knowing what it means.

He looks at me with longing evident in his eyes and says "don't play with me Vera" He pleads and I kiss the palm of his hand.

"I'm not" I say and he closes his eyes as if asking the lord for patience.

"You do realise what it means to indulge in these feelings do you not?" He asks and I think for a few moments and nod.

"I do. I'm unable to fathom them now but how will I ever be if I keep ignoring them? I wish to find out what they are and why I have them....." I say and take a pause before continuing.

"So I can be over them" For some reason these words are heavy to get out of my throat.

They say heartbreaks can not be seen but what I see in his eyes at this moment might prove otherwise.

"Ofcourse what was I thinking?" He whispers underneath his breath but the room is so quiet I heard him clearly. He looks away from me and gets up from the bed.

"Forgive me M'lady, I suppose we should be going" He says abruptly moving towards the door as if running away from me and it breaks my heart. I certainly don't enjoy this feeling at all.

"You were right" I say, making him stop in his tracks as he is about to open the door. "I am running away" I say but he doesn't respond. "You made a Great observation M'lord" I add and he walks out of the door.

My throat feels heavy but not more than my heart. why? This is what I always wanted for myself. Never indulging in these feelings, Never even thinking about it and I always had a clear goal. So why does it feel so heavy and wrong? The goals are still clear but the feelings are not.

I need someone to give me a tight slap and get my thoughts and mind together. I can not go on like this. I never wished to indulge in romance however I openly admitted in front of him that I would indulge in it only to fulfill my curiosity so I can understand it and be over it. How shameful.

I should not have said that but It felt so right at that moment I could not help but admit that I wanted to feel more of what I was feeling at that moment. It was a momentary lapse in judgement I suppose but the heavy feeling in my chest right now is clearly not momentary.

If my life was infact a Novel this would be the moment my readers would despise me the most and they wouldn't be alone in this as I do so despise myself for being the way I am when it comes to handling these emotions.

After wallowing in self pity for the next few moments I get out of the room and start walking back towards the main hall. On the way I bump into a strange man in a mask and he apologizes however I feel I have heard his voice before.

Of course I've heard that voice before. It's Edmund. What would he still be doing here? Should he not already be..... well out of this place or anywhere but here?

I decided to follow him despite not being in a good emotional condition. Some things are simply more important and this happens to be one of them.

As I follow him, I see him get inside a room and I immediately put my ear on the door as soon as it closes

"Greetings Young Master. It has been a while" It sounds like an old man's voice "Where are the funds?" Edmund asks without even acknowledging his greeting.

"Young master, Your father still refuses to accept you as his son after what you've done and I can not continue providing funds to you in secrecy for he has started suspecting things. If Lord Russell were to find out I have been contacting you, it wouldn't be good for either of us " The old man says and I remember Lord Vulcan mentioning the man who brought Edmund as his first ever patient to him. I reckon this must be him.

"Would you stop being so intolerable and get me the funds already? I do not care what that old rat thinks of me no more" Edmund responds in irritation.

"Young Master I can not-" The old man starts speaking but Edmund cuts him off. "Then get out of sight and show yourself when you can" Edmund says with the same irritation.

"Young Master, it's about time you stopped doing these endeavors because-" There is a gunshot fired all of a sudden. It's not from inside the room but from outside the building itself.

There are multiple shots fired back to back and I try to get as far away from that room as I can before both of them can come out and spot me.

As soon as I reach the main hall there is chaos everywhere. I do not know where to go or where to look. "Miss Vera" I turned around to find Mr. Rai. "What on earth is happening Mr. Rai?" I ask however his concern seems different right now.

"Forgive me" He grabs my arm and takes me to the exit of the hall. "Do you have any chaperones or carriages?" He asks and I shake my head. I can not tell him I'm with Lord Vulcan. That would give him preposterous ideas. That could be true. A voice in back of my head says and I immediately shut it down.

"Very well, then might I suggest you stay at my residence for today Miss Vera? It's not far from here and I do have a chaperone and a carriage. Not to mention Mira would be delighted to see you but only if you're comfortable ofcourse" He says and I wish to decline the offer but I have no choice as I certainly can not face Lord Vulcan right now after what happened earlier.

I agree with his suggestion and he tells me to wait in his carriage as he goes to take care of certain things.

He comes back with a chaperone after a while and instructs the driver to start moving

"What were those gunshots?" I ask and he explains everything.

Apparently some thieves and robbers thought it was a perfect idea to try robbery in a place full of armed police officers. Well they didn't know there would be police officers as the officers were here for a different matter entirely.

The officers have caught the group of people and they're being dealt with.

"Miss Vera, might I ask how you were at the ball alone? It didn't occur to me to ask you before about who you came with" He asks and I have no idea what to say. "I was with Celeste" I lie. "Who that might be?" He asks and I absolutely forgot that he hasn't met Celeste or ever heard of her.

"Lord Vulcan's sister. I came with her but she felt unwell and went home earlier. We came in the same carriage so I told her the carriage can come back and pick me up later, however before it could come back the attempted robbery happened and here we are" I lie straight through my teeth.

I can not believe I made that all up right at this moment. "So a carriage would be coming back to pick you up?" He asks and I nod. "Worry not Miss Vera the guards must have seen us going back together so they would inform them" He says and now I'm truly worried about Lord Vulcan.

It was clear he didn't wish to see me however would he still be worried if I suddenly disappeared? No, I suppose he would be glad that he doesn't have to face me anymore.

Me and Mr. Rai talk about different things the entire ride as I get to know more of him. However whenever he mentions something remotely similar to what Lord Vulcan does I can not help but feel that pain in my heart again. I deserve it after the way I acted today.

We arrived at his residence sooner than I had expected. He truly meant it when he said his residence was not far from there.

As soon as I enter the house my eyes start searching for Mira. It would be incredibly nice to meet a friend after what I have been going through for the past few days. Surely I can't tell her everything but telling her some parts wouldn't hurt.

"The person you're searching for would be up in her room at this hour Miss Vera" Mr. Rai comes up behind me and says. I turn around to express my gratitude for letting me stay here and immediately run to Mira's room.

I knock but the response I get is quite not what I was expecting. "Brother I have no interest in hearing about your heroic deeds today. Go find yourself a wife so you can bore her with it" She says and I can not help but giggle. "I do not mind finding a wife if you help me" I say mimicking a man's voice in a horrible manner.

There is no response for a few moments and then I see the door open quite abruptly. "Vera it's you. It has been quite long, how have you been?" She asks while hugging me and I

chuckle "I was here two weeks ago" I say and she rolls her eyes. "Two weeks is a long enough time, alright?" She says and I smile.

As we get inside her room we talk about multiple things. She tells me about what she has been up to lately and what new things she learned and I talk about well.....my Novel since I can not share the events of the past few days.... Unless.....

"Mira, Say there's a character in my Novel and something happens to her while she feels really lost, what do you think she shall do?" She asks me for more details about what happens to this 'character' so I tell her everything that happened to me pretending like it has happened to my character.

"The character certainly has an adventurous life" She says and I can't help but agree, it has been quite an eventful few days and I have this feeling that Mira knows I'm not talking about my character.

"Your character, she is in love with that man, that is for sure" She says and my mind goes numb. "No t- that can not be true, she aims to be independent and despises the notion of marriage" I say firmly and continue "I think she had a momentary lapse in judgement that's all" Mira chuckles.

"it's just like the man said, she is running away from her feelings. If she were a real person then I can surely say her feelings would eventually catch up with her as she wouldn't be able to endure the heartbreak" She says making me question everything.

"I mean if we're being frank this character of yours has been quite dense for a while. The man has evidently made it clear that he has feelings for her but your character has created such a wall around herself that she can not see or dare I say refuses to see that she also has feelings for him" With every word Mira says makes me rethink every interaction I have had with him.

"But what if that's not what she wants? What if she still wishes for an independent life free from marriage and love?" Mira smiles and takes my hand in hers. "If she chooses to run away from her feelings and live an independent life then she can certainly do so but would she really be living if her heart is in turmoil along with her mind?"

I don't say anything and simply think about what she is talking about. "Surely she would've thrived living an independent life before however now that her heart has experienced those feelings she can not live the same way anymore" Mira adds

"Once a heart has tasted love it can not persevere without it, Many have tried and rarely have succeeded" She waits for my response whereas I'm still lost in thinking about what has conspired in that room with Lord Vulcan today.

"So what do you think the character should do?" I ask and she gives me a knowing smile. "You're the author so you decide the ending for this character even if you don't wish to. Even if you simply want someone else to make the decision for you, in the end it is you who shall decide what happens" She clearly knows I'm not talking about the character but I appreciate her keeping up the pretense.

"Whatever your character decides I shall support her" She says and I smile. "How do you even know so much about love and feelings? Is there something or someone you're not telling me about?" I ask suspiciously and she shakes her head. "I wish Vera" She says rolling around her bed.

"That is just what I have observed through multiple love stories and reading a lot of books" She says and I smile. "I have also read multiple books, how come I don't have such insight on things" I ask and she pinches my nose.

"Because you have your own perspective Vera. We can both read the same books and end up with completely different opinions and perception" She says and I nod. "Also you are dense when it comes to love itself" She says and I take very much offense in that. It's true but it's still hurtful.

"Oh so if you had feelings for someone you would immediately know?" I ask and she nods "certainly I'm not as dense as you" She says and I can not wait for the day she catches feelings for someone. "Sure I'll see how true that is" I say, teasing her.

We talk for a while and end up falling asleep together.

As the morning arrives and Mira wakes me up, the first words I hear from her are not what I expected right in the morning.

"Wake up Vera. There's someone here to see you" That makes me open my eyes in an instant. "Who?" I ask and she smiles mischievously. "Get ready first and then you shall find out" I roll my eyes and get ready. "You can wear any of my dresses by the way" I smile and nod.

It takes me some time to get ready but as soon as I do. I go downstairs to see who it could possibly be to come and visit me right in the morning and most of all how did they find out I was here.

My question is answered as I enter the living room. It's the person I'd rather not see right now. I can only see his back, yet I know it's him. Good lord, I wish I could run away from here. This is going to be super awkward. "Lord Vulcan, good to see you" I say, greeting him and his head turns to look at me. The moment our eyes meet I can feel the warm feeling in my chest again.

He returns my greetings but he seems extremely exhausted. "M'lord you look extremely exhausted are you quite alright?" Mira asks him and he puts the cup of tea he was drinking down on the table. "Yes Miss Mira thank you for asking" He says but he looks as if he hasn't slept the whole night.

He couldn't possibly have been..... No, it's absurd. No one sane would do that. My heart sinks at the thought.

"Well he is exhausted rightfully so. He has been searching for you the whole night Miss Vera" Mr. Rai adds as he enters the living room. I forgot he is not sane or normal in any way.

"You exaggerate Mr. Rai. I was simply making sure my sister's best friend was alright as she has been staying with us so her safety is our responsibility" Lord Vulcan explains and I can feel the sternness in his words.

"Are you sure there are no other reasons why you were so desperately looking for her?" Mr. Rai asks suspiciously but before anyone else can say anything I interrupt.

"Lord Vulcan, I apologize for the trouble I have caused you. Everything happened so abruptly that I ended up here"

I say very formally and he nods. "Do you mind paying Celeste a visit? She has been quite worried about you since she left earlier than you yesterday" He says and I remember the lie I told Mr. Rai. He is playing along with it and clearly it's not Celeste who has been worried, it's him.

"Of course I don't mind." I say but Mira whines. "You're leaving already? But you just arrived last night" I smile and tell her that it's fine and that I can visit again.

"Lord Vulcan I shall have a problem with you as you are here to steal my friend away" She says and Lord Vulcan smiles "well it's only for a day. She can be yours right after she's free. One can not keep someone that doesn't belong with them for long" The last part of his sentence leaves both of us in awkward positions.

"I suppose this is how your female character feels around her male love interest" Mira whispers in my ear and I deeply regret telling her about it as she is simply teasing me right now.

"We shall leave in a few moments then" I say and he agrees.



Chapter 17

Vera

It is rather awkward here as we are sitting in the carriage moving towards his home. He doesn't look at me or say anything. I don't attempt a conversation either as I'm lost in my own world but I do believe he deserves a proper apology from me.

"M'lord I must apologize properly for yesterday. It is as I said everything happened so quickly that I couldn't understand what was going on and Mr. Rai appeared and offered to let me stay at his residence for the day, an offer I couldn't refuse considering the circumstances at that time" I say and he still hasn't looked at me once ever since I started speaking.

"It does not matter M'lady" He says and and I can feel the exhaustion in his voice. "But I have caused you a great deal of trouble. You had to look for me the entire night and I can not help but feel bad about it" I say and he still continues to stare outside the window.

"If that's all you're willing to feel for me then gladly do so" He says and I may be dense but I did not miss the underlying

meaning behind the sentence. I go silent for the next few moments.

"So what are we doing tonight? About Edmund I mean" I ask and he finally looks at me "We are not doing anything, me and Mr. Rai are. You need not worry yourself over such matters any longer as it is much too dangerous since we are no longer dealing with one killer but a whole new group of people and we have no idea how dangerous they can be"

He says strictly leaving no room for argument. "And do not plan to secretly follow us as I have asked Celeste to keep an eye on you, she'll make sure you're busy the entire time"

He says and I can not believe he'd get me out of the plan so easily. I know arguing otherwise would not do any good so I don't say anything not to mention after last night it's a surprise he's talking to me at all.

I reckon I'll have to figure out my own way to be there like I always do.

"Did you get hurt last night M'lady?" He notices a bruise on my arm. "Well yes I suppose I knocked off a few things and bumped into a few people in between all the chaos. It doesn't matter though, Mira gave me some herbs already to ease the pain. It shall heal soon enough" I say but he still looks rather concerned.

"You should get some rest as soon as we reach your residence. you haven't slept properly in a while" He looks outside the window again but doesn't respond immediately. "We have many things to prepare for tonight, I can not rest. Once I have

dropped you home with Celeste I shall leave immediately" He says with exhaustion.

"That is ridiculous, you sound so exhausted. I'm sure Mr. Rai will take care of arrangements" There it is again the disapproving look in his eyes as soon as I mention Mr. Rai. "You trust him a great deal M'lady" I can sense the disapproval in his tone.

"Well of course I do, he has been nothing but kind and helpful to me. Not to mention he has been very supportive of me trying to learn more about medical science through Mira" I say and his irritation has visibly grown. I sigh and finally ask him.

"Let me be a bit frank, Why is it that you dislike him so? I thought you two were getting along quite well after yesterday, but seeing your reaction right now you clearly still dislike him. Just tell me what it is"

He sighs "If you still don't know then It's best that we do not discuss the matter" He says and I'm the irritated one. "No I will not drop it, tell me what it is about him that you dislike so" I ask again in an unwavering tone and he seems to be losing his patience as well.

"Don't make me say it M'lady" He says and I fully plan on making him say it. "Well then I shall ask him why he dislikes you" I say and he closes his eyes in frustration as if asking lord for more patience.

"M'lady do not tell me you don't see him doting on you" He says and I chuckle in disbelief. "That is preposterous, he would

never. He only thinks of me as a friend" I say in the same tone of being in utter disbelief.

"Just as *you* see *me* as a friend? Just like *we both* have been 'friends' for so long?" He immediately realises he shouldn't have said that and we both go awkwardly silent for a few moments.

"Don't tell me your dislike of him is simply because you were begrudging this whole time?" I ask and he seems to be quite embarrassed. "Huh" I utter in disbelief yet again. "M'lord that's not a valid reason to-" He interrupts me "why not?" He asks seriously.

"Is the torment I go through every single time I see you talk to him and give him that precious smile while I know damn well he wishes to pursue you not good enough of a reason?" He says and I have the same feeling back in my chest again. Good lord I have to get rid of it.

"He doesn't wish to pursue me, he is simply being a good friend" I say and he chuckles in disbelief. "M'lady with all due respect, you are really smart, your mind is remarkable however when it comes to these things you are quite dense" He says "I take very much offense to that" I say knowing that he's correct. Yes I do not understand society's rules or social norms but I can not help it as it is who I am.

"What so every man who is friendly with me is trying to pursue me?" I ask in disbelief. "If he is persistent for a while then yes" I close my eyes taking a deep breath. "You have been friendly since beginning to me so does that mean you were trying to pursue me?" I ask and he goes silent.

"We have arrived sir" The driver shouts from the front and we both are brought back to the present after being so involved in our argument.

"Let's get going, Celeste must be waiting" He says and I'm irritated. I want my answers. "Lord Vulcan, you were correct this indeed has been going on for far too long" I say and he gives me a look I quite can not explain.

"I want answers now" I say and he sighs "well then you shall have them" He says and I feel relieved. "After we meet Celeste. She knew of the kidnapping and has been extremely worried for the past few days" He says and I can not defy that.

"Vera how on earth did you end up being kidnapped?" Celeste asks, giving me a hug. "Well it's a long story. I shall tell you some other time" I say and she frowns.

We exchange greetings and she asks for my well being.

"I'll be leaving then, have a good day M'lady" Lord Vulcan says and gives me one last look before leaving.

I stare at him leaving the room and as soon I turn to look at Celeste she is giving me a mischievous smile while crossing her arms. "Vera Rose Frost" This is the first time she has called me by my full name so it sort of leaves me surprised.

"What happened between you two?" She asks and I close my eyes in disbelief. There is no possible way she can know something happened between me and Lord Vulcan because nothing did. Did it? We just had a few conversations and

nothing too scandalous happened so I would say nothing happened between us.

"If you say 'nothing' I will disown you and disintegrate your body parts right here. No one will know" She says in all seriousness

"How could you be so sure that something happened?" I ask and she has a proud grin on her face. "Anyone with observation skills of a 10 year old can tell the energy is different with you two. I mean sure there was always some tension and you were quite dense but something was different this time. Besides you two were together for 3 days. You really wish to tell me that the tension didn't finally explode?"

She says with joy and excitement like that of a child. "Surely I don't need to know the intimate details. That would be absolutely gross. He is my brother. But I wish to know whatever progress happened" She asks and lord is she about to be disappointed.

After I tell her the vague details about what happened between us in the past three days her first reaction is "I can not believe you two still haven't kissed" She says in extreme disappointment and I almost spill my tea that I have been drinking.

"Celeste, that is scandalous, ofcourse I would never do such a thing. I think it disgusting" I say in absolute disgust whereas Celeste is still giggling. "Surely you wouldn't" She says teasing me and I roll my eyes.

A memory of him pinning me down on bed flashes in my brain. This time I spilled my tea. What outrageous brain do I

have now. How shameless. Good lord I need to visit church once this is all over.

However, why did it feel like a memory? His face was almost too close to mine. It looked like a memory from the night I was drunk. Did we actually? No, that would be preposterous and I know him enough to trust that he wouldn't cross a line even if I'm drunk.

But I need to ask him about it just so I can be certain.

"Are you alright? Fine I'll stop teasing you" Celeste says handing me a few napkins. "Thank you very much" I say and she chuckles.

As we're discussing something one of the guards comes in and announces that Cecelia and Lord Henry are here.

I certainly didn't expect them to arrive. What if she sees I'm well and decides to take me back home? I suppose it's better if I do go with them because It'd be simpler to reach the port from there.

However Celeste sees through my thoughts and immediately refuses to let me go before tomorrow morning and even insists that Cecelia stay here tonight.

"Ofcourse not Miss Celeste I can not intrude as my sister has been enough of a trouble to you both" She says and I agree with her.

"Not at all Miss Cecelia. In fact I would love to get to know you better as well if you do not mind" Celeste says and this is the only time I dislike her very friendly nature because why would she befriend Cecelia so easily? That is unfair.

In the end Cecelia agrees to stay and I sigh in defeat. "My love While you two ladies are bonding, do you mind if I take my sister-in-law to be on a stroll with me?" Lord Henry politely asks Cecelia and she says she doesn't mind obviously.

I on the other hand am not sure what Lord Henry could possibly want to talk to me about. Surely I've approved of him but I still am not comfortable enough to talk to him alone.

As soon as we both are out on the stroll in the garden he starts talking about how things have been with Cecelia and honestly I really do not care, as long as they're happy they can spare me the details.

"What is it that you truly wish to ask me Lord Henry" I get straight to the point and he breathes a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness you understood Miss Vera, the small talk was agonizing" He says and I smile. "Come on tell me what it is then?" I ask and he starts explaining.

"You see Cecelia and I have been great but..." He looks a bit hesitant to continue. "But what?" I ask and he continues hesitantly. "Sometimes I feel as if she doesn't let herself be herself in front of me" He takes a pause and then continues "and I want her to feel comfortable enough around me so she can be herself without fear of being judged. I have tried everything in my power yet there are moments I feel as if she's not being herself with me so I wish to know your thoughts on it and I'd be extremely grateful if you had some advice for me"

He says and I'm honestly surprised because from my point of view they always looked so perfect and happy together that I never thought he had such doubts in his head.

"As her sister I can clearly tell she likes you a lot and fully trusts you to be comfortable enough around you." I say but he doesn't seem to believe me. "I doubt that, there are moments she gets embarrassed and I don't want her to feel embarrassed around me Just like you don't feel embarrassed around Lord Vulcan"

I let out a chuckle in disbelief. I do not even correct him on me and Lord Vulcan comment. "Does everyone suspect Lord Vulcan and me have something between us?" I ask in disbelief. "Anyone with eyes? Yes" Lord Henry says and I roll my eyes.

"Nevermind that, as for Cecelia there are moments when women feel embarrassed to do something in front of the man they love.. For example they don't wish to let the man they love hear their grumbling stomach or sometimes women think they look too ugly while making certain expressions and surely no woman would want the man they love to see it so it isn't that you don't make her comfortable enough it's just that these things take time. As she spends more time in your presence after your marriage she'll slowly start getting used to these things as she realises she can't keep avoiding it forever. So worry not dear future brother-in-law my sister is still head over heels for you"

I say finishing my sentence with a grin and he seems to be so relieved.

"Miss Vera, for someone who claims to never have had feelings for anyone, you seem to give some wise advice" lord Henry says and I pretend to think. "Now that I think about it, I actually read it in a book" I say and he chuckles. "You're quite a jokester Miss Vera no wonder Lord Vulcan has been

fascinated with you for-" He stops mid sentence and suddenly there's an awkward pause there.

"Just so you know there are moments when I do get embarrassed in front of Lord Vulcan" I say to lighten the mood but it turns to another query session of Lord Henry

"So have you really realized your feelings for him?" He asks and my honest response is "it's complicated" He smiles and says "such things always are"

As we chat a bit more about a few things, there's something Lord Henry says that catches my attention. "You know after what happened with Edmund I never thought Vulcan could continue being in the psychology field but he is a strong fella" He says and I give him a confused look. "And your expression tells me you don't know what I'm talking about..... Great..... So..... I suppose it's time we get back to the oth-" Before he can finish that sentence I interrupt him"

"What happened? Tell me" I demand but he hesitates. "Miss Vera I'm afraid it's not my place to-" I interrupted him yet again, Unregrettably so.

"He could only tell me a fraction of what happened. I never got to know the rest of it, I'm sure if he didn't wish for me to know about it he wouldn't have started telling me about it" I say and he purses his lips together probably contemplating whether to actually tell me further or not.

"It's alright if you don't want to, I don't wish to put you under any pressure if that's-" I say but I'm interrupted. "Not at all Miss Vera, I was simply wondering where to begin"

He says and I give him an understanding nod.



Chapter 18

3 years ago (Author's POV)

The visits of Gentleman Edmund Russell had become quite often, peculiar as he was, he always used to say something in between the sessions that would put Vulcan in a rather uncomfortable emotional state. However his determination didn't waver as he was persistent in helping this gentleman.

"You know my mother, she was always annoying with her nagging and demands," Edmund says, bringing up his mother again. Vulcan looks up from his diary and puts it aside.

"You rarely mention your mother so what made you think of her today?" Vulcan asks and Edmund gives a sadistic smile. "Why? Does a loving son need a reason to remember his unloving mother?" He asks and Vulcan sighs in defeat. Edmund often enjoyed playing these games with him.

"a peasant wench was beating her son as I was crossing the street" Edmund says and Vulcan assumes it reminds Edmund of his childhood.

"So did that remind you of your childhood?" Vulcan asks and Edmunds nods. "It reminded me how my mother beat the

child of a maid whom I started forming a friendship with" That piques Vulcan's curiosity.

"So were you close with the said child?" Vulcan asks and Edmund entirely ignores his query. "But then it also reminded me how my father beat her whenever he was not in good spirits and it overjoyed me" He says with a sarcastic laugh.

"You know my darling Emma, she was an angel, I knew my mother would target her if she found out I have been contacting her so I stopped myself for a long time. I tried to contain my love for her but whenever she walked in front of me with those hazel green eyes and beautiful blonde hair, the way she stole glances at me I couldn't help but get weak" He added.

"So all you had to do was stay away from her?" Vulcan asks and Edmund brings his small bottle of vodka to his mouth and takes a few sips from it "Sounds easy to you does it not?" He asks and Vulcan's silence was taken as a yes by him

"You know, Doctor I surely do hope you find love one day and lose it. You pretend to understand me and your patients, you pretend to give people wise advice and help them overcome their pain but how can you truly understand them if you've never been in their shoes?" Edmund says with an unexplainable sort of pain in his tone.

"It is my job to-" Vulcan starts talking but Edmund interrupts him. "Fixing people? I'd like to see you fix yourself once you've lost your love, it'd be a wonder to see how you'd do it" He blurts out

"Psychology? Understanding brains? Give me a break, you can't even understand souls" Edmund says, making Vulcan think deeply about multiple things.

"You can not fix anyone if you try it through your brain instead of your soul" Edmund says, drinking down the whole bottle in one go.

"That is indeed a good insight Mr. Russell, it shows that you wish for me to be empathetic towards-" Edmund starts laughing sarcastically before Vulcan can finish his sentence.

"I'll be waiting for the day you lose your love so I can see you going through your emotions logically. What a sight it would be"

Edmund says and gets up to leave. "Also I'm going to burn that diary of yours down" Edmund says looking at the diary where Vulcan was taking notes.

Vulcan pays it no mind thinking it to be a joke.

"So my first ever patient completely despises me" Vulcan says to Henry as they're having some wine together at Henry's place. "I'm sure that's not the case, he'll come around soon enough" Henry says but of course Vulcan has hard time believing that.

"There's something about him that makes me uneasy" Vulcan says and Henry's simple response is "it's your first time being a psychologist or therapist whatever you call it, I'm sure it'll be fine later" Vulcan knew that wasn't the case, however he didn't push the conversation further that day.

The next few sessions with Edmund were better than he has expected, Edmund was starting to open up more but sometimes Vulcan could tell it was all a pretense. There were times Vulcan wanted to give up on him however if he couldn't help his first ever patient then what sort of therapist would he be?

One night as he was heading towards his home he noticed something unusual. The footmen on his front gate were..... asleep?

He tried to wake them but nothing happened. He took out a pistol that he carried with himself at all times... for safety reasons ofcourse. As he slowly moved inside his house. He saw the maids and all other coachmen laying down as if they were in a deep sleep.

As he entered his living hall the sight that welcomed him was far from what he was expecting. Celeste was having a pleasant chat with Edmund.

"Celeste moves away from him" Vulcan shouts and Celeste turns to look at him in confusion. "Brother you are back" Celeste says with a smile however as she notices that he is holding a pistol a frown appears on her face "brother what is going on why do you have a-" Before she could finish her sentence Edmund grabs Celeste and threatens her life while putting a knife on her throat.

"Welcome home my dear friend. It turns out your sister here is quite gullible" The absolute horror on Celeste's face was visible even with dim lighting. "Sir, is this a prank or a joke? You said you were good friends with my brother" Celeste says

trying to sound brave but the terror in her voice is quite noticeable.

"Oh we're great friends indeed. He understands my pain deeply or so he says" Edmund says and Vulcan feels frozen for a moment not knowing how to respond to the current situation.

"Ed- Edmund you have a problem with me. Celeste is innocent. She has done you no wrong so let her go. I'll understand you better. I'll do better by your side but please let her go" Vulcan says with desperation.

"Ohhh no no" Edmund says laughing sarcastically. "I said I would make you understand the pain, my pain. So I shall. I suppose your sister is the only close one you have in your life that you can not afford to lose. So her fault is being related to you." He says in a menacing tone.

"I admit" Vulcan says in desperation. "I admit that I can not understand you. You win. I will never be able to understand your pain and I apologize that I made it seem as if I would" something changes in Edmund's eyes. "That's where you are wrong," Edmund says with the same menacing voice.

"You can understand me. If you lose someone dear to you. Then you will feel my pain and once you feel my pain you can fix me" Edmund says and Vulcan realises that all hope is lost. Edmund can not be reasoned with. No matter what Vulcan says Edmund would always find a way to justify his actions.

Upon the realization Vulcan does something he usually wouldn't do. He shoots Edmund, his hand to be exact. Edmund winces in pain as he falls down on the floor and in

the process a candle near him falls down making a table cloth near it catch the fire.

Celeste runs to Vulcan as soon as she gets freed from Edmund's grip. "Brother I had no idea that he was your enemy. He said you were close friends and I-" Vulcan shushes Celeste and asks her to leave the house as he tries to shut down the fire. The maids and footmen who were fainted till now start to wake up from the ruckus and scream in terror. Some of them attempt to cool down the fire however it doesn't work and only ends up increasing the fire even further.

When everyone realises the fire can not be put off any longer they start to vacate the place whereas Edmund lies on ground holding his shot hand and groaning in pain. As he tries to find something to hold on to in order to get up, a burning piece of clothing comes in contact with his face which ends up resulting in a half burned mark on his face.

Vulcan reaches out to him and ties both of his hands before helping him get up and leave the burning place behind.

It appears someone informed nearby people and police as a whole bunch of people were gathered outside the gate of his place.

As the police arrive several minutes later. Vulcan hands over Edmund to the police and explains what happened.

As Vulcan looks at Edmund through the bars, Edmund smirks and says "don't think you've won yet" Vulcan sighs at his stubbornness. He still hasn't lost his arrogance even when he's behind the bars.

"When I get free from here, you will regret doing this to me" Edmund says in the same arrogant manner.

Vulcan chuckles and looks him in the eye "You can never be free. Not truly. Your sick mind won't let you and you know it. Isn't that why you wished to be understood by me? You hoped that I'd provide you that freedom and acceptance despite knowing deep down that even you yourself can not provide it for you. Your mind is your real cage and you wish to be free of it by.....fixing it however you ended up tearing it down instead and now you've become..... This. You have my sympathy Mr. Russell but never my understanding. Your actions today can not be excused or forgiven"

Vulcan says and sees something change in Edmund's eyes. "You think you have me all figured out do you not?" Edmund says as more of a warning than a question. Vulcan doesn't respond and turns away.

He knows Edmund will not stay behind the bars for long as his father's connections would get him out within the next few days or perhaps even the next few hours.

What he could do right now is get back to his sister who must be in a great deal of trauma.

As he gets back to her, she seems to be in no condition to talk however seeing her brother she sits up on her bed quietly still not saying anything.

"He said he was your friend and he brought sweets for all the footmen and maids, he even insisted that I distribute the sweets immediately. I thought he was genuinely nice. If I knew

he was your enemy I wouldn't have-" She couldn't talk but seeing her brother made her want to let it all out.

He approaches her slowly and hugs her "shh- it wasn't your fault. Never blame yourself for what happened today. If anyone is to blame it's me. He was my patient. I failed him. It's me who should be apologizing" Vulcan says and Celeste shakes her head. "No brother, absolutely not. He is solely responsible for his actions. A lot of people go through a lot of things but not all of them do what he did" She looks at him

"It's not your fault brother. You tried your best. Some people are beyond being saved" She says in order to comfort him but it develops a feeling of guilt inside him instead.

Edmund was released a few days later as Vulcan expected. Although Edmund never visited Vulcan himself and neither did Vulcan try to approach him for obvious reasons.

As Vulcan sits in his clinic he sees a woman and her chaperone approach his door. The lady's face is half covered with a big hat as if she doesn't want to be seen.

Her chaperone enters first and begins to announce her but she stops him and enters the room before he can finish. She takes off her hat and introduces herself. "I'm Irene. That's all you need to know" She appears to be of a wealthy noble family and Vulcan has deduced that she is here without letting anyone know. She has brown hair and grey eyes, quite the average height. She appears to be the epitome of a high class noble lady.

"I'm Theodre Vulcan, pleased to make you acquainted with Miss Irene. May I ask what brings you here?" He says politely.

"One thing I'd like to make clear is that no one should know that I am visiting you here" She says firmly and he nods. "I figured out that much and I suppose the name you gave me is also fake" he says and she looks impressed at his quick wit.

"As for why I'm here. I'd like you to be my psychiatrist" She says and Vulcan looks suspicious of her for a moment. "Miss, I'm sure you can find better psychiatrists than me here in London. I'm quite surprised you decided to visit me at all after the recent incident. My reputation did get a lot of damage" He says but she does not seem fazed.

"Rumours do not concern me, your capability does. I heard you have helped multiple other clients of yours and they gave quite a good review of your treatment. One mistake doesn't define a man's character" She says and Vulcan raises an eyebrow still being suspicious of her.

He does not wish to take her in as a client as she seems to be someone he shouldn't get involved with, not to mention he is still suspicious of her. He doesn't mind treating a woman in fact he would love to help more women however if anyone were to ever see this exchange going on between them. It wouldn't be good for either of them. He could take another damage to his reputation as it can be rebuilt but her reputation as a woman can not, hence he attempts to refuse her.

"I suppose since you're going to be attending the sessions in secrecy you'd like them to be either at an early hour or a late one and that would be hard for me to fit in my schedule" he says but he gets interrupted. "Timing will not be an issue. I can visit anytime you wish" She says and he sighs in defeat.

"Miss you do understand that it would be extremely risky if we were to get caught unfortunately much more for you than me and I do not wish to cause a woman's reputation any damage in any way" He says attempting to convince her but unfortunately for him she seems to be determined.

"I understand your concerns but I wouldn't be here if I hadn't already thought over that possibility now would I?" She says and he looks away and sighs in defeat.

"If you are worried about the cost then do not be concerned you would be paid handsomely but considering your Inheritance and multiple family businesses I don't suppose you care much for money" She says and he can not disagree there.

"I would appreciate it if you would accept me as your client." She says as if requesting him to accept her. "Please" She adds the last word awkwardly as if she isn't used to saying words like that.

In the end he ends up accepting her as a client and something told him this would not end well. He had his first session with Irene that very day and what he found was that she had been suffering from nightmares. The nightmares, as she described, were the ones where she killed her father herself again and again.

They did not make much progress on the first session but as days went by he could see her opening up more to him. He tried to understand her better in order to help her but Edmund's words echoed in his mind making him doubt his own capabilities to help his clients.

Irene noticed some change in him and asked him if he was okay. He didn't tell her how he felt of course but it still weighed on him.

Although it had been a few sessions with her but Irene still had not told the real reason she fantasizes about killing her father or has nightmares of killing him and he knew it took time for clients to be able to fully open up themselves in front of him but some part of him still thought it was his incompetence that made clients feel as if they couldn't trust him.

"It seems Edmund's words did get to me afterall" He thinks to himself and drinks his tea.

It was one beautiful afternoon when Irene decided to finally open up and tell the truth about her father to him and what he hears shocks him to his core. He knew men were devious but to this extent he did not think so but oh he had not seen enough yet.

"I was 8" She starts gathering more of her courage. "And one night when I saw my father in his study room working, I decided to tell him the truth," Irene says, looking lost as if she is reliving the exact day. "The truth of what my uncle has been doing to me but before my father could say anything else my uncle appeared in the room as well." She says taking a deep breath and trying to keep herself together. "I thought he would take my side, I thought my father would disown my uncle. My uncle was a burden to us and unemployed afterall but my father did not disown him or cut ties with him" What she said after this made Vulcan nauseous.

"He joined him" She says tears running down her face but her expression didn't falter. "My own father and Uncle did it to me that night and my mother" She says on the verge of crying "my mother saw it happen yet she..... She didn't say or do anything" Irene says still not wiping her tears. "To her the financial security and status were much more important than her daughter" She says suppressing her rage.

"When I heard my own mother say that I should simply bear with it, my first ever emotion was rage, pure rage and helplessness" Vulcan wished to say something but he knew it was better to let her let it all out and feel uninterrupted.

"I have been having nightmares ever since that night. In the nightmares whenever my father and uncle try to do that to me I find something and murder them. I suppose it is what I wish I had done that night but couldn't since it was reality" She says and chuckles. "The reality sounds more like a nightmare than the nightmare itself whereas the 'nightmare' more sounds like a dream to me if I'm being honest" She says in between her silent cries.

Before he could say anything at all regarding what she let out so far, she got up abruptly and left. "I will not be attending the next few sessions as I need some time" She says without turning around and leaves.

Vulcan doesn't stop her. He understands she needs time to gather herself together after that.

He felt outraged hearing her story and wished to do something in order to help her and get her father and uncle behind the bars but he would have to gather more

information on them and the problem was he did not know anything about her. Even her name was fake.

It was not hard for him to find out who she actually was but that would be crossing a line even if his intentions were good and knowing Irene, he knew for sure that she wouldn't appreciate it.

It takes her two weeks to finally face him again but what surprises Vulcan at her second visit is a man who comes with her this time.

A man he thought he would never see again. "Lord Vulcan, this is my new guard that I decided to hire as I feel much safer with him around. He would be standing outside of the room at every session. I hope you understand" Irene says but Vulcan appears to be too shocked to pay her any mind.

"Pleased to meet you Lord Vulcan" Edmund says with a dangerous smirk on his face. Vulcan doesn't know how to respond and before he can say anything to Irene about him, Edmund shows a knife to him and points towards Irene.

The gesture was clear. If Vulcan made a wrong move Edmund wouldn't hesitate stabbing her.

"Miss Please take your usual seat" Vulcan says trying to sound normal but his voice betrays him. "Are you alright Mr. Vulcan?" Irene asks and he nods "yes I'm just feeling a little thirsty" He says drinking a glass of water from his table"

Irene doubts his Explanation but doesn't question him any further.

"It took me quite a while to finally be able to collect myself together" She says and he nods while keeping an eye out for Edmund.

"I have yet not been able to understand why I keep having those nightmares" She says and Vulcan opens his mouth to say something but is rendered speechless at Irene's next words

"Considering I killed him"

"You- what?" He asks in disbelief to confirm if he just misheard something whereas she looks as if she doesn't regret anything.

"When you have access to the kitchen, food is easy to poison," she says in a casual manner.

Vulcan does not know how to respond to the information he just received while also having Edmund in the room who might do anything any moment.

"Miss forgive me but how about we cut today's session short?" Vulcan says and Irene furrows her brows. "I hope you do know that If you intend to reveal my secret You would suffer consequences, surely you don't believe I told you that without any countermeasures?" She says in a skeptical tone.

"No, of course Not Miss Irene. You have nothing to worry about regarding what you just revealed to me. It's just I have been feeling quite unwell today and clearly you have a serious matter to discuss hence considering my health I do not believe I can provide the exact support you're looking for today." He says trying to convince her to leave so he can have a word with Edmund.

She raises an eyebrow in suspicion but sighs and accepts his explanation.

"Very well, I'll be seeing you in our next session then. What a waste of time indeed" She murmurs the last part but he hears it anyway. "I apologize for this" He says again but she pays him no mind.

As she is about to reach for the exit door she feels a knife being pressed on to her back. She gets alert immediately and does not make a move.

"Now, now, I have played the bodyguard long enough for Miss Irene. It's time you fulfilled the purpose I truly approached you for" Edmund says while Vulcan has already reached for his shotgun and points towards Edmund.

"Edmund let her go" Vulcan warns but his words do not seem to have any effect on Edmund. "You know me better than to simply expect me to obey your words do you not?" Edmund says in a menacing tone.

"She has nothing to do with me or my family. She is simply an innocent Client" Vulcan says but Edmund does not seem to believe him.

"Is that so?" Edmund asks, turning her around while still pressing the knife on her back. "Why do you care what happens to her then? You certainly have some level of feelings for her do you not?" Edmund says and Vulcan can not help but get frustrated.

"Edmund I do not know how to word this any better but simply because you do not have basic human empathy does not mean I do not either." Vulcan says and that seemed to have a certain effect on Edmund. "I realise that you have trouble understanding normal human relations and can not

understand why I would care whether a person I barely know lives or dies but it does not mean that others are the same" He says and Edmund seems to be listening intently.

"I do not wish for her to die because she is a person, with dreams and a future not because whatever feelings you assume I have for her" Vulcan says but Edmund has a hard time believing Vulcan.

"Well you could not have chosen a worse approach, Vulcan. Unfortunately for you this woman that you claim you have no feelings for.....dies" Before Vulcan can process Edmund's words Edmund has already cut Irene's throat quietly deeply.

As Irene falls on the ground with the blood dripping from her throat, Vulcan shoots Edmund on the shoulder and there seems to be no regret in Edmund's eyes.

As Vulcan approaches Irene she only manages to say one sentence while looking at him with desperate eyes "Do not let my family find out that I was here" She says and Vulcan nods.

"What have you done?" Vulcan says looking towards Edmund while holding a few tears back. "I told you I'd make you understand my pain" Edmund says in satisfaction.



Chapter 19

Vera

"It seems you finally approve of your brother in law considering how intently you're listening to him" Cecelia says suddenly interrupting us. As much as I love her I am irritated by her interference at this moment because I wish to know more.

I turn to her and smile, "my dear sister, when did I ever say I didn't approve of him?" I ask and Cecelia and Lord Henry both look at each other and pass an understanding look. "Your words can hide your feelings but your face can not. It was obvious from the different types of facial expressions you used to make around him. In fact I knew from the beginning" Cecelia says and I realise I have trouble controlling my facial expressions whenever I feel irritated or uncomfortable.

So all this time they both knew I didn't like lord Henry yet they did not point it out? "So why didn't you say anything?" I ask and Cecelia smiles. "I was planning to but my dear fiance here stopped me saying he wanted to gain your approval without making it obvious" She says and I turn to look at Lord Henry.

He simply shrugs "I might have said that" He says casually and all of a sudden I feel embarrassment wash over me.

"You know you should consider yourself lucky as I do not approve of any man that easily" I say and Lord Henry smiles.

"Yes I'm very much aware of Miss Vera and I appreciate it" He says and we start moving inside the house.

"What time is it" I ask as soon as we enter their house. "5:30 why?" Cecelia says and I waste no time in heading towards the port. "I'll explain later. I must leave for now" I say in a hurry

All of them appear to be confused as to why I'm acting like this all of a sudden.

All of them except Celeste of course. She knows what's about to happen and where exactly I plan to go right at this moment.

She gives me a look of disapproval but doesn't say anything to stop me. Good. Through her eyes I can tell she knows that nothing she says would stop me.

As I take a carriage and head for the port I remember something important. I ask the carriage to be stopped at a hotel.

I certainly can not be going there in a dress hence it's time to bring the gentleman in me back.

It took me a few minutes to get the gentlemanly clothes and change inside the hotel , however it was worth it. These are better for a place like a port.

As the carriage heads towards the Port my mind can not help but think of everything Lord Henry told me about 3 years ago and Edmund.

That explains why Edmund was obsessed with hurting me. At first I thought it was simply because of my Father but no it was the only reason. He wanted Lord Vulcan to feel his pain, just as three years ago.

I can not say I sympathize with him because I do not. It's just as Celeste said, Just because the world did him wrong it does not mean it gives him the right to harm the innocents. His choices were his own hence he is completely responsible for his actions.

I do not yet know what happened after Irene's death but I intend to find out soon enough.

As I head towards the Port I can feel my heart getting heavier. Whatever happens I hope Lord Vulcan stays unharmed.

I should've known it was too much to ask for.

2 weeks later

I open my eyes to find Cecelia sitting right next to me. I take a look at my surroundings and realise I'm at the hospital. "Cecelia what happened?" I ask my sister and she immediately takes notice that I have woken up. The nurse calls the doctor and Cecelia tells the nurse to inform him "she is awake" Cecelia starts shouting as soon as she notices I'm awake.

"Cecelia, what on earth is going on?" I ask and she looks at me as if I've lost my mind. "Vera hold on a moment the doctor will be arriving soon." Cecelia says, holding my hand. However what I do not understand is why am I at the hospital?

Before I can ponder on the question more. The doctor rushes in and starts checking me and asking about how I feel.

"My head feels heavy" I say and the doctor nods. "That's quite normal Miss Vera. No need to worry, you'll feel fine soon enough"

The doctor and the nurses perform a few more tests on me and ask a few more questions and I answer them honestly.

However no one has answered my question yet. What am I doing at the hospital.

As the doctor is in the middle of performing his tests. I see another man entering the room. "My love you're here. How was the meeting with your new clients today?" Cecelia goes up to him, locking up her hands with his as if it is the most natural thing in the world leaving me speechless.

"Cecelia, what on earth are you doing?" I ask her in almost a shout. "Whatever do you mean Vera? Are you still in shock? Are you feeling unwell?" She asks but before I can respond she looks at the doctor and asks him. "Doctor, is everything alright with her?" She asks and the doctor nods. "For now she is quite well. We'll be here for assistance shall she need any more" The doctor says and leaves. Cecelia turns to look at me as I've grown horns.

"I'm feeling perfectly fine Cecelia but the question is what is wrong with you?" I ask in a stern tone and she appears to be confused. "Me? What have I done?" She asks as if she doesn't know what I'm talking about.

I scoff at her question. "As if I need to say it out loud" I say and look towards the gentleman standing next to her. "Vera you must make yourself clear as I truly do not understand

what you mean" She says and with her tone I can tell she is being truthful.

"If you wish for me to say it out loud then I shall." I say taking a deep breath "Why are you locking hands with..... a strange man so openly. Have you lost all shame? Do you not care what society will think of our family? Us?" I whisper shouting the last part although I do not have enough energy to argue at this moment but her actions are outrageous.

"Vera what do you mean a strange man? This is my fiance. I am to marry him in a few weeks. Are you playing a prank on me? Because if so it's not funny in the slightest" Cecelia says and my brows furrow in the pure confusion.

"A prank? I should be the one asking you that. Why is there a strange man locking hands with you and you are openly calling him your fiance?" I whisper-shout yet again and her expression looks as if she is horrified.

"Vera what do you mean by a 'strange man'? This is Lord Henry. We got engaged a few weeks ago and he has been nothing but pleasant and generous towards our family. You even gave him your approval, remember?" She says and I can not fathom the words out of her mouth.

Engaged? Cecelia? To a man even I approved? Either she is playing a huge prank on me or all this is just a horrible dream.

"Cecelia enough with the prank. Do you think mother would approve of you locking hands with a man just so you can play a prank on me?" I ask in a firm tone while giving the man a disapproving look.

"Good Lord Vera what has happened to you?" She says almost breaking down in tears. The man calls the doctor again while Cecelia is choking down some tears and I am very confused by all this.

Why am I at a hospital in the first place? I don't remember anything unusual happening. I went to sleep last night and woke up and found myself here all of a sudden.

I have noticed that I have injuries and bruises in my hands but I do not remember how I got them. Did I fall from bed in my sleep last night? No, that wouldn't cause such injuries or these brutal bruises.

"Doctor, she is acting weird. She says she doesn't recognize my fiance and does not remember me being engaged" Cecelia says but it appears the man with her has already explained the situation to the doctor.

The doctor checks my eyes and asks me more questions.

"What is the last thing you remember?" The doctor asks and I respond honestly. "Going to bed" I say and his brows furrow.

"Can you recall any of the yesterday's events, Miss? Can you tell me what you did yesterday?" The doctor asks and I find that question to be extremely weird. "Well I..... can not recall the exact details but I do know that I got a letter from Lord Donnelly saying he'll be visiting our house and my mother was happy thinking he intended to ask for my hand" I say remembering the only significant thing from yesterday.

"Miss, can you tell me what date it is today?" The doctor asks and it takes me a few moments to remember.

"It's 23 January, 1869" I say and the people in the room look at each other as if they do not know what to say.

"Vera.... " Cecelia says with a heavy voice. "That was 8 months ago" She says and it takes me a few moments to process her words.

"It's 24th of August today" She adds, making my mind go completely blank and not knowing what to do or say.

"Miss Vera it appears that you are suffering from amnesia" The doctor says and I do not understand anything. "Isn't that the condition where a person loses their memory?" I add and he nods.

"But that can not be. I clearly remember yesterday and-" I stop and try to recall more details about yesterday however It's all extremely blurry.

I sigh in defeat. "Why on earth is this happening to me?" I say and Cecelia takes my hand in hers. "It's alright Vera. We will help you recover your memory"

Cecelia says and looks at the man in an affectionate way and he returns the gaze. Somehow I feel nauseous now. I take a look at the man. He is not bad looking. Blonde hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, symmetrical features and what not. However I still do not trust this man to have my sister yet.

"How could this be?" I murmur to myself. "The past 8 months of my life completely vanished from memory... It feels so wrong" I say and Cecelia takes my hand in hers. "We're here for you Vera. We'll help you remember" Cecelia says and I do not doubt that she means it.

"Cecelia, can I be honest with you?" I ask and she nods so I continue "personally it feels extremely weird having lost my memory but I do not care if I'm being honest. I truly don't think anything significant would've happened in the past 8 months except you getting engaged ofcourse" I say and before she can respond I continue. "Besides every year it's been the same so I doubt anything worth remembering would have happened in the past 8 months" I say and sigh.

Cecelia and her fiance give each other an awkward look as if they know something I don't. "So do not think of me as someone who needs to be taken care of. I'm still the same Vera, I just have lost a mere few months of my memories" Cecelia and her fiance share the same look again.

Before they can say anything the doctor interrupts. "Forgive my intrusion but it's time for her to rest. I believe you should leave for now. You may continue this conversation later." Both of them insist on staying but the doctor doesn't allow them so in the end they both leave and as soon as they go outside the room I hear her fiance say "Vulcan, when did you arrive?" Vulcan? That name.....Sounds familiar.

I do not think much about it at first however when the voice responds "quite a while" It makes me think. I feel a strange familiarity in that voice that I can not explain. Perhaps I briefly met the man in the past 8 months at some ball.

I hear them all walk away and lay back on my bed to rest. 8 months. It all feels so strange yet exciting. I always wanted to experience something like this. It may sound as if I need some mental help but I do not. I'm perfectly sane. It's just the idea

of experiencing something like memory loss sounds intriguing to me and now it has actually happened to me.

I am discharged from the hospital in the next 3 days and honestly it's such a relief. Multiple people visited me during that time including my mother, father and surprisingly Cecilia's fiance as well. I did hear that his friend Vulcan came with him but he did not enter the room.

I suppose he must be a little shy but why did he come with Lord Henry when he wasn't going to greet me anyway? Sort of rude if you ask me but then again, Less people the better.

Another strange thing that happened in the past 8 months was that I made two new friends. Their names are Mira and Celeste. Celeste came and visited me thrice whereas Mira also visited 2 times. I do not remember anything about them so I was very hostile with them and they seemed quite upset by it but it is not my fault that my memory is gone.

I'm sure if we were truly friends then we can create that bond again even without my memories so it'll be fine.

As I reach home. Mother immediately asks me to sit down and have some food and I have been starving so I obliged.

As we're all eating at the table I hear something that catches my attention. "You know Lord Vulcan has been giving some great advice regarding investments to Lord Henry so-" Father says and I interrupt him. "Lord Vulcan? Is he the same person who came to the hospital with Lord Henry and always waited outside my room?" I ask and the table goes silent for a moment.

"Y-Yes indeed it is him" Cecelia says awkwardly. "Why would you ask that?" Cecilia asks and I honestly do not know why I asked either. "Nothing I just thought it was quite rude of him to not come and say hello while standing right outside my room" I say and Cecelia giggles leaving me confused.

"What is so funny about that?" I ask in irritation and she says "nothing" I roll my eyes at her response. "He is just a little shy and doesn't get along with people well" Cecelia says and I nod.

After the dinner I head to my room and lie down in bed and as I turn over I see a pile of papers and quill next to it. I immediately go towards it and take the papers in my hand. "A novel?" I mumble to myself as I open its first page. The handwriting is mine but I don't remember writing it so does that mean I have been working on another Novel in the past 8 months. I suppose it does.

I start reading and do not realize when the 2 hours pass. Good heavens this is actually good. Did I truly write it? I don't think I'm capable of writing something so good.

You're fully capable of creating Amazing things M'lady

I suddenly get a glimpse of a memory that I do not know if it's from a dream or reality. "M'lady?" I repeat with curiosity. "Who could possibly call me that in such an affectionate tone?" I think to myself and the only answer that comes to mind is that It was a dream. It would make more sense because I do not entertain men in real life.

Shutting the Novel I lie down on my bed and find myself falling into a deep sleep as soon as I close my eyes.

"So no manslaughter today M'lady?" I hear a man's voice inside my dream and notice myself appearing in a scenario. I'm actually watching myself in third person which is quite strange.

In the scenario I see myself standing near a table during a ball although the hall is empty which seems to be extremely weird. There is a man standing next to me. I can not make out his face properly.

"How about we change that? I'd hate to disappoint you" I say, showing the man a knife and he smoothly takes it out of my hand.

I watch the scenario unravel and the more I watch it the more it feels..... familiar. I feel myself getting a sense of having lived this exact moment before.

Why do I get along with that man so well? Did I meet him before? Is it one of my memories or just another dream? I wonder to myself knowing well enough that I would most likely never know.

I keep having these weird scenarios in the dream where I'm conversing with that man and we seem to be getting along quite well. During the scenarios I also see myself getting more and more comfortable with that man which makes me question this whole thing.

"No wonder you're a creation of my own imagination" Is a line I say to that man extremely often during these scenarios and that ends up answering my question. He is a creation of my own mind.

Now it makes sense why I felt so comfortable around that man. It also appears sort of pathetic that I was so isolated that my brain had to come up with an imaginary man to make me feel better.

My sweet dream doesn't last long as I hear Cecelia attempting to wake me up. "First morning since you've been back and you're oversleeping?" She says taunting me and I groan in irritation.

"Vera come on get up, we have to get going" Cecelia says making me frown in confusion. "Going? Where?" She looks as if she is trying to remember something.

"Oh did I forget to tell you? Your friend Celeste has invited us over for a brunch" She says and I sigh. "Do we have to go? She is lovely but it is the whole endeavor of getting ready and going all the way there that bothers me" I say, wanting to lay back to bed in my warm blanket.

She rolls her eyes, "if it was the old you, you would've gotten up in excitement and immediately gotten ready but here we are" She says and I honestly do not know how to respond to that.

Was I really that close with Celeste?

I do not argue with her any longer and get ready. It takes me quite some time to do so as I see a lot of new dresses in my closet which I did not have before. I take it as we are not struggling financially any longer, thanks to Cecilia's engagement to Lord Henry I suppose.

Father seems to be in good health now. From what I heard Father was attacked by someone and was hospitalized for

weeks. Even the police got involved so it turns out I quite in fact have lost a lot of memories.

All that matters is that my father is well now.

I get ready as some scenarios from last night's dream replay in my head. "That man's voice I feel as if I've heard it a lot."

I think about it for a moment as it brings a weird feeling inside my chest.

"Did you see that man in your dream again Vera?" Ellie asks me and that catches me by surprise. "What man, Ellie?" I ask and she smiles "you know the one you used to love to talk about" She says and I have a hard time believing her.

"What else did I use to say about that man Ellie?" I ask her and she giggles. "That you enjoyed his company a lot even if it was just in dreams" Ellie says and I suppose it could make sense since it was just a dream. I would never say that about a real man of course.

"I did see him in my dream again but I did not get to talk to him yet unfortunately" I say and Ellie smiles again

"It's okay you can meet him again today anyways" She says and before I can ask what she truly meant by that, Cecelia calls me downstairs.

"We'll continue this talk later Ellie" I say and she nods.



Chapter 20

Vera

I can see the carriage arrive at Celeste's Estate and I find myself in awe. I did not know that she belonged to such a wealthy family.

"Close your mouth Vera it's rude" Cecelia says and I realise my mouth has been open in awe for the past few moments. I awkwardly close my mouth and take a better look around. There seems to be an extremely well kept garden along with a fountain as in front of their entrance door.

It looks marvelous. As we enter the house we see servants welcoming us politely so I return the gesture.

Upon reaching the living room I find Celeste seated on the couch knitting something while some documents are stranded around the table in front of us.

As soon as one of the guards announces us she immediately gets up and greets us with a smile on her face. She genuinely seems to be excited to have us here whereas me, I wish I could reciprocate the enthusiasm but I can not as I do not remember our friendship nor our bond.

"Thank you for having us" I say and she looks around. "I apologize for the mess, I was working on one of the new clothes in my fashion line business" She says apologizing and I find myself intrigued by this idea of her working in a fashion line.

"You work in a fashion line? Are you allowed to do that?" I ask and Cecelia nudges her elbow at me as if I've asked something too direct or rude but frankly I don't see the issue in asking such a question considering we were close.

"Well of course, my brother doesn't mind. In fact he was the one who suggested I manage our family's fashion line business" She says and that makes me raise an eyebrow in doubt. Would a man really allow his sister to do such a thing nowadays? As hard as it is to believe it's apparently true.

"You know you used to help me and suggest some ideas as well" She says, catching my attention and I ask "me? I used to do that?" she nods and brings me some other drawings of some clothing designs. "You made these" She shows me some of the styles and I look at them in disbelief. She realises that I'm very confused by all this so she drops the subject for now.

"Let's head towards the table now shall we? After all I invited you over for brunch" She says and both of us nod.

We are having a very peaceful brunch until I notice a tree in her garden which gives me some sort of flashbacks. I touch my head as it starts aching with a sharp pain as some strange flashbacks of memories resurface in my mind.

I don't suppose I have seen you here before

I hear that voice in my head as if it's a memory trying to resurface as soon as I look at that tree.

"Vera are you feeling alright? Should we get a doctor" Cecelia asks and I shake my head. "No ... No need to get a doctor just get me some herbs or medicines and I will be fine" I say but none of them seem convinced.

"We will get a doctor just in case Vera" Celeste says and I nod.

The doctor arrives almost an hour later and checks me while I'm resting in Celeste's guest room.

"It appears she has a lot of important memories here and being here might be triggering those memories on the surface yet again" The doctor says and I am not surprised at all by the declaration.

"So is it considered good or bad that she is here?" Celeste asks and the doctor says "It is arguably good however if the headaches or memories get too much to handle then she must leave as we can not afford to have any more damage on her mental health than we already have"

All of us nod in response. The Doctor gives Cecelia and Celeste some suggestion on how to handle my episodes like that and frankly I feel as if I'm being a burden to them and I do not like it one bit

As soon as the doctor leaves, both Cecelia and Celeste leave me to take rest and I do in fact lay in the bed for quite some time but there's only so much boredom I can handle so I decide to wander around the halls.

I understand it's not a polite thing to do however I'm not trying to sneak around or steal anything so I don't suppose it should be an issue.

While wandering the halls I find myself completely drawn with the beauty of the interior. I did not get to appreciate it the first time I walked through these halls but now I can take my time.

As I take a turn towards the hall I see a slightly open door to a room so I decide to go and close it and perhaps take a look. Only a small peek of course but is it truly my fault that I found a room full of art pieces covered with clothes?

Who could possibly resist the allure of so many art pieces altogether? I do not consider it to be my fault that it was there. I'm a curious being and I simply wish to take a look.

I get inside the room and take the cloth off of the first art piece and I immediately feel drawn to it. It's extremely beautifully made.

It's a painting of a man touching the reflection of a moon with a longing look in his eyes. I can surely tell whoever drew this has been longing for something in their life or perhaps someone but it's not really my place to make speculations about that.

I take my time appreciating the art piece and move towards other pieces as well. Slowly taking a look at all of them.

They're all very well made and I would certainly love to meet the artist who created them.

As I'm about to cover all the pieces back again I notice one in the corner of the room. It almost slipped my attention as it was in such a corner as if purposely hidden.

I start to move towards it with the intention of taking it off but I'm interrupted by Cecelia. "Vera what on earth are you doing?" Cecelia says whisper shouting. "I was just taking a look at all these Art pieces. You know how much I love art. I can not just simply ignore a treasure like this" I say whispering and she drags me out of room which I do not mind because I do realise that I have done wrong.

"It is terribly rude to do something of this sort. What if it was Celeste who found you? What would you have said then?" She whisper-shouts again and honestly I do not have any response to that.

We cover all the uncovered art pieces and leave the room but unfortunately as soon as we exit the room we run into Celeste who most likely saw us coming through that door. She doesn't say anything for a while so I apologize before she can bring it up.

"I'm sorry, I was just wandering around the hallways and noticed the door was open so I decided to take a peek at the artworks." I say and she hears me out at first and then giggles. "It's fine Vera, I do not mind at all. Besides you've already seen all of those so it doesn't matter" She says and that brings me a great relief.

"So was there any piece in particular that caught your eye?" She asks and I feel like she wants to hear about a piece in particular.

"Well there was this piece of a man touching a moon's reflection. I found that to be quite alluring" I say and she smiles with a hint of disappointment. "Was there any other piece that caught your eye? Something that would have shocked you?" She asks and I'm quite frankly not sure what she wishes to hear.

"Well all other pieces were good as well" I say and she still doesn't seem to be satisfied with my answer. "Did you not see all the art pieces there?" She asks and I wonder how she knows that.

"Well as I was about to uncover the last piece but I was disturbed by my very lovely sister here so no I couldn't" I say giving Cecelia a taunting look.

"It's fine I suppose you can always have a look later" Celeste says and I suddenly have this urge to ask her "do you mind telling me who created all those art pieces?" I ask and Cecelia smiles. "It was my brother" She says and I am quite surprised if I'm being honest.

"Really? I had no idea he has such an artistic talent" I say and she chuckles "well of course you didn't. Your memories are gone" She says and I nod "yeah well there's that" I say and she asks me again "so what do you think? Is my brother a good artist?"

I pretend to think for a while and respond. "Not good but a marvelous artist" I say and she smiles in satisfaction.

"So does he sell his art as well or-" I ask and she immediately says "oh no it's just a side hobby for him. He only paints when

he's free or distressed about something" She says and that makes me even more curious about this brother of hers.

"So what does he usually do? For living I mean" I ask and Cecelia nudges me with her elbow yet again. "He's a psychologist and a businessman on the side." She says, capturing my attention.

"That is an interesting combination" I say and she nods. Cecelia and Celeste share a look between them that I do not understand.

"Doesn't that make you a little curious about him?" Cecelia asks and I'm surprised about how she knew that.

"Well a little" I say and both of them share another understanding look which makes me feel as if they have some inside joke that I am not a part of.

I don't want to talk about it as it's obvious that they would not tell me hence I decide to change the topic of conversation altogether.

"Is it okay if I take a look around the garden Celeste?" I ask and she gives Cecelia a look again. "Yeah sure it's fine. Feel free to roam around look at trees or whatever it is that you wish to do"

I can clearly sense some other intentions in her tone however I do not know how to address it.

I suppose it's fine as long as I can have a walk in her garden.

I take my sweet time looking around the garden. It appears to be very well kept.

The trees, the grass, the flowers everything feels soothing to my soul.

As I'm walking around I notice that tree which gave me weird flashbacks.

I really want to go near it but I'm not sure if it would be a good idea. I'm afraid I'll start getting those weird flashbacks again and my head would start hurting more than I can imagine.

I turn around to leave but something catches my eye. A bunny. I notice an adorable bunny hopping around the garden so I decide to try and catch it. Probably not the best idea I have had but it looks extremely fluffy and adorable so it's perfectly fine.

"Hey come here" I say as I run behind it. As if it would understand me.

I sigh and start following it and before I realise I hit my head against a tree.

The same tree that gave me some flashbacks and made my head hurt.

Only this time it made my head hurt through physical damage instead of mental one.

I rub my head in pain. "Naughty bunny" I scold the bunny and it just disappears yet again. I hear a groaning sound from the branches of the tree but I find nothing as I look up.

As I'm about to follow the bunny again something falls from the tree. A book. I look up to see where the book fell from and I find a man sitting on the tree as if he is pretending to be invisible.

"Whatever you are doing there sir?" I ask but he doesn't respond so I pick up the book.

"You've Got quite a taste in books gentleman" I say as I read the book title Frankenstein. He still doesn't respond which I think is extremely rude.

"I see you do not wish to engage in a conversation with me so I'll leave you to your book right here" I say as I settle the book down near the tree.

"I'll be leaving then sir" I announce yet he refuses to even look at me or give me a response at all which I find extremely rude.

"What a strange man. What is he doing in Celeste's house anyway? Is he perhaps a gardener?" I think to myself but not give it much thought.

As I'm about to leave I hear the branches of the tree rustle again and look up to see what's going on.

That is when I hear him scream as he falls down from the tree....

On me.

He fell down from the tree on me.

It takes me a few moments to realise what has just happened and I have this look of disbelief on my face.

As if that wasn't enough I start getting some flashbacks of memories yet again. I knew being near this tree was a bad choice.

I think to myself as he gets up immediately from the top of me and I rub my head as it starts aching again.

"M'lady are you fine?" He asks and that word M'lady is somehow triggering the memories further.

It takes me quite some time to finally open my eyes and take a final look at the man who just triggered all of this and my brain goes absolutely blank as soon as I take a look at him

You

you