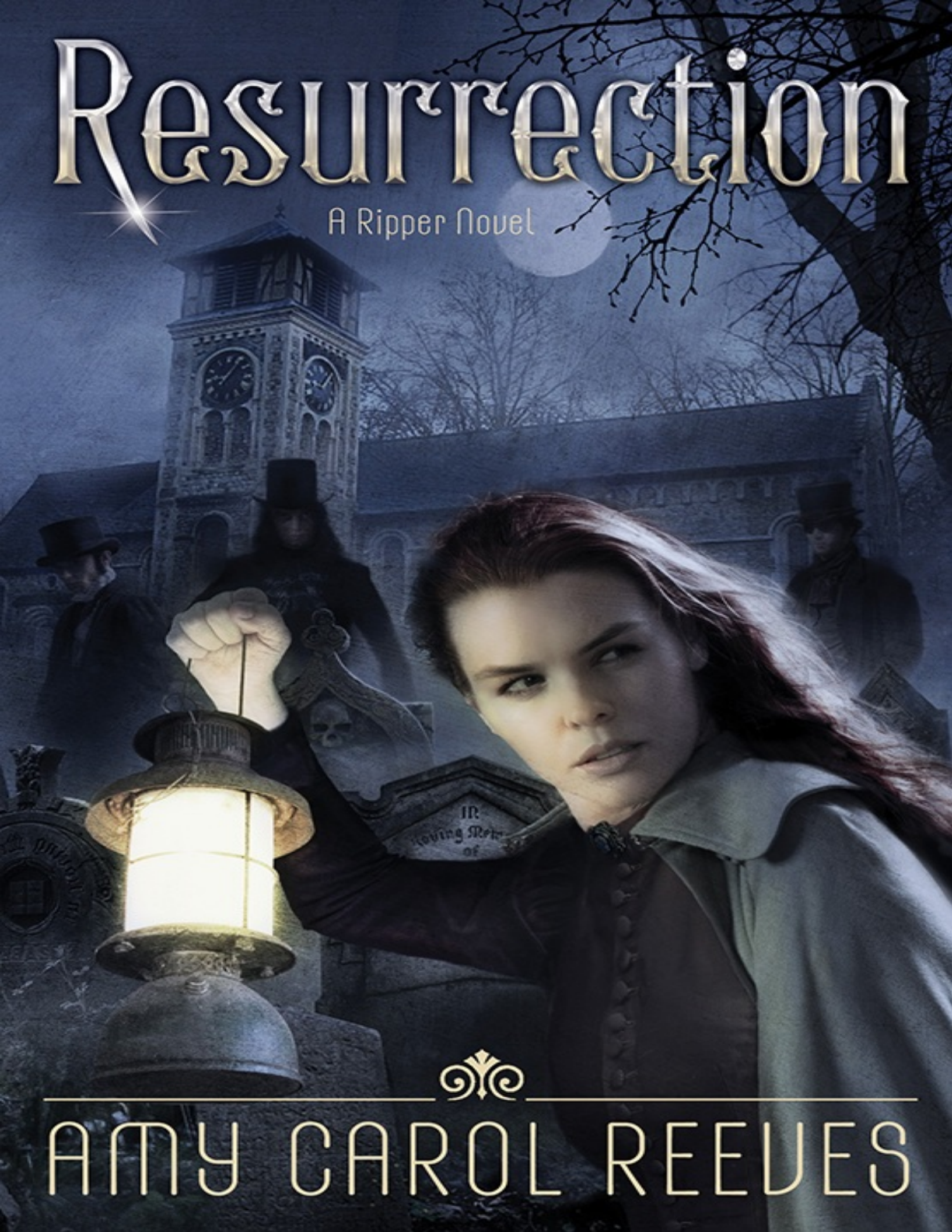


Resurrection

A Ripper Novel



AMY CAROL REEVES

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One

KENNILWORTH ESTATE, WARWICK—MAY 1889

Damn it!” William yelled, stumbling onto one knee in the gardens and dropping his walking stick. As I picked it up and helped him to his feet, I bit my tongue, weary of his poor attitude.

Our tempers had flared despite the idyllic surroundings of the Kennilworth Estate, where a light breeze stirred the thriving greenery and bees buzzed loudly in clusters of amaryllis and larkspur. I gingerly led William to a nearby stone bench and handed him his walking stick. Then we sat beside one another in angry silence.

During the past month of his convalescence, whenever I had checked in on William, he had worn at my patience. And I was to return to Grandmother’s house in Kensington tomorrow; she believed I’d spent these many weeks in Bath with Simon’s sister Rosamund, rather than in Orkney dealing with the Conclave’s valuables.

Simon and I had used a portion of the Conclave’s treasury to purchase the Kennilworth Estate in Warwick, a town only a short train ride from London. Although the estate and its grounds were rather lavish for my taste, the mansion had an extraordinary menagerie—a room we very much needed. Simon and I had only recently finished moving the Conclave’s animals here. To maintain discretion, we could only bring a few back at a time. It was an expensive and arduous task.

Consequently, I had done little else than travel, with Simon, back and forth from the Orkney Isles to Kennilworth, transporting animals, books, and papers. The Conclave had hidden these possessions with Seraphina, their shape-shifting lamia, who had served as caretaker for the animals in her underground home.

During our brief stays at the estate, I had tended to William, but his aunt, Christina, had assisted him during my frequent absences.

Brushing a dragonfly off my skirts, I turned to William. He seemed oblivious to my presence. “You *heard* Simon’s instructions,” I reminded him.

Simon was at work, in London, at Whitechapel Hospital for Women. He had directed the hospital alone ever since William became indisposed. I sorely wished Simon could be at Kennilworth with us. His presence was always so calming.

“Simon told you that the healing process might take a very long time,” I continued. “You need exercise each day, but you must pace yourself or it won’t work. William, *look* at me ... ” He turned his head a bit in my direction. “It *will not work* if you are not patient and consistent in your exercise.”

William leaned his chin heavily upon his walking stick and stared straight ahead into a wall of scented jasmine. “Do you know how difficult it is for me to stay here at this place like an invalid, while Simon works his miracles among the poor in the East End?”

I sighed, watching a hummingbird fly by.

Despite his attitude, William was growing stronger every day. At first, Christina and I had to push him about the grounds in a wheelchair, but in the past few weeks, he had started walking with a stick or cane. His progress was so rapid that Simon thought he might soon walk unassisted. Yet William’s right thigh remained mildly inflamed from where Seraphina had bitten him. Simon had collected a sample of the lamia’s saliva soon after I killed her, and he found that her venom was unique. He believed that the poison would have to work itself out of the muscle before William could walk easily again. To speed up this process, Simon recommended regular and vigorous exercise.

As I considered William now, I knew that neither he nor I would say what was unsaid between us: that his pride was wounded from the whole ordeal with Seraphina. William was aware that if he had not been drinking excessively at the time, he would not have been so easy for Max to kidnap and stash away in Seraphina’s lair. The fact that Simon and I had risked our lives to save him, when he was so helpless and close to death, was unbearable to him.

“You are stronger now than you were even a week ago, William,” I said quietly. “You can’t let a few stumbles discourage you.” In the sunlight, I could

see that his appearance had also improved. Although he remained a little thin, he was no longer so emaciated and pale.

He continued to pout, saying nothing in response.

A sharp rustle sounded in the nearby bushes. Laura, Neil MacDiarmand's granddaughter, stood close to a nearby garden wall. She stared at William and me with wide eyes.

"Is Bridget finished with luncheon?" I asked.

The little girl nodded soberly, then turned and walked back toward the house, her lavender pinafore tied as primly as it had been when I secured it this morning.

When Laura was out of earshot, William said, "You know I loathe children, but I do feel pity for that little darling."

"I pity her too."

"You still haven't heard her speak a word?"

"No."

Laura had seen Seraphina kill her older sister and her sister's fiancé. Later, the lamia had devoured her grandfather, who had raised her. On one of our final trips to Orkney, Simon and I learned that Laura's grandmother had died suddenly of a stroke, likely brought on by the shock of her husband's death. Laura had been staying temporarily with a poor relative on the other side of Orkney, but the cousin already had ten children and didn't know what to do with the mute girl. Even though we were strangers to her, the cousin happily gave Laura to Simon and me to take back to London. We gave her Simon's address, but I doubted we would hear from her.

Neither Simon, William, nor I knew what to do with Laura MacDiarmand. When we'd first met her, that night in Neil's house before our confrontation with Seraphina, Laura was catatonic. Now, two months later, she still wouldn't speak.

"I know she needs time. Still, I'm worried," I muttered.

"She saw her sister ripped to shreds in front of her," William said.

"I know. But she's so young ... if she can get past this a bit. Neil said that she was strong ... " My voice trailed off. Bridget, our housemaid, would summon us again if we didn't hurry inside soon.

"Come along," I said, standing. Taking William's arm in my own, I led him back to the house.



I awoke early the next morning, not quite ready to return to Grandmother's house and my work at New Hospital.

I walked first through my favorite room, the menagerie, the early light seeping through the enormous windows along the east wall. Large, unlit gas lamps lined two of the walls at regular intervals, and a large bamboo swing hung suspended from the high ceiling along the south wall. This was my favorite place in the house, particularly in mornings and evenings. I loved the monkeys, the birds, Robert Buck's two dodos, and even Petey the tiger, ferocious and beautiful as he roamed throughout his large enclosure. Placing one hand upon a bar of the enclosure, I stared at him; he watched me sleepily through half-closed lids, his giant head upon his paws. He gave a low growl but didn't move. I thought of the photo of him in the Conclave's album, surrounded by the group soon after his capture in Asia. Notes near the photograph described him as a man-eater.

I stepped away from Petey's enclosure and stared about me one more time.

I wanted more plants in this room, but our household staff was very limited. We only had two servants, Bridget and Miranda, who had been recommended to us by Christina (they were some of the many former prostitutes she helped build new lives). The women could barely manage caring for the animals on top of their regular duties. Unfortunately, we could not risk bringing on more staff, as we didn't want too many questions about the animals or about the library, which Simon, William, and I kept locked for our own use. In it, we stored the Conclave's albums and books, alongside some of our own.

I slipped a half-eaten biscuit to a spider monkey and returned to the main part of the house, then went back upstairs to retrieve my bags.

As I walked through Laura's small room, which adjoined mine, I saw her dark brown hair falling about her face as she slept. The book I'd read to her last night, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, lay open beside her on the pillow.

I hoped that I might soon spend more time with Laura, once I finally decided how to tell Grandmother about this place. Laura enjoyed reading; it was one of the few times when a smile would play at the corner of her mouth. Simon said that she needed an education, but I didn't know how we could possibly send her to school or even hire a governess if she wouldn't speak.

After gently removing the book from her pillow and returning it to the nightstand, I kissed her forehead lightly and left.

Two

Arabella, you have been gone all these weeks, yet you only wrote to me twice. Certainly, in that extended time of leisure in Bath, you had opportunities to write. That was quite inconsiderate.”

I apologized profusely.

Of course, I had expected this. I had been in her house not yet an hour, and as we took tea in the parlor I endured her verbal lashing, to the tune of the grandfather clock ticking loudly from the hallway.

Jupe furiously sniffed at my boots. I wondered if the pug could still somehow smell the lamia on me.

“And, Arabella, what is that *awful* mark on your throat?” Grandmother asked. “Were the drawing rooms in Bath *that* ferocious?”

I touched the long laceration from Seraphina’s claw, which ran from the base of my throat across my left shoulder and then straight down to the lower part of my breast. The wound didn’t hurt much now, but the long scar would remain.

“It’s merely a cat scratch, Grandmother. Rosamund had a new kitten.”

“It must have been quite feral.”

“It was very feral, Grandmother. I’m lucky to have escaped alive.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter,” she said in a clipped tone. “We’ve had quite an uproar here this past week.”

I didn’t respond. Perhaps Grandmother’s friend Lady Violet had ordered the wrong drapes for her drawing room. This was a typical “uproar” in Kensington.

“The night before last, there was a murder two streets away,” Grandmother continued crossly. “Lord Millbrough’s nephew had just returned from finishing his degree. Lord Millbrough hosted the celebration. I was invited, but Lord Millbrough’s granddaughter, who was also at the party, was rumored to have had an indiscretion—”

“So who was murdered?”

Grandmother leaned forward. “Lord Millbrough’s *nephew*. Lionel. His throat was cut out savagely. Ellen said that the maid who found him told her it looked as if he’d been attacked by a wild dog.”

I set my tea down a bit too hard and lightly kicked Jupe away from my boots. This seemed similar to the Highgate Cemetery murders last year, where grave robbers turned up dead with their throats torn out and their bodies eviscerated. “A *wild dog*?” I repeated.

Grandmother nodded vigorously. “Ellen swears that Lord Millbrough’s maid said the throat looked rather ... *gnawed*, but you know how dramatic Ellen can be. The coroner announced yesterday that it was merely a random and terrible attack by a vagabond. To my knowledge, though, there have been no arrests.”

“And it wasn’t a robbery? Nothing was taken off the young man’s body?”

Grandmother cocked her head. “I don’t believe so.” Then her interest in the matter waned. “All I care about is that it doesn’t happen again, and that Scotland Yard arrests the savage.” She tapped her wrinkled, heavily ringed fingers against a side table impatiently. “Now where is Richard? I asked him for those raspberry scones fifteen minutes ago.”

I bit my lip hard as Grandmother left the parlor to fetch Richard. I had never discussed the cemetery murders with her; in fact, I wasn’t even certain if she had heard of them. Inspector Abberline had seemed anxious—as he’d been in the Ripper case—not to cause a widespread public panic; Scotland Yard had tried to keep the brutal details, such as the cannibalism, out of the papers.

I wondered if any other graveyard murders had occurred in our absence.

I couldn’t jump to conclusions. Ellen indeed exaggerated, but at the same time, if Lionel Millbrough’s death was related to the cemetery murders, then it meant that the killers were moving beyond cemeteries, into respectable London neighborhoods.

Three

Two days later, Simon and I rode in a black brougham carriage to meet with Edmund Wyatt.

Wyatt had been spying on us earlier in the spring, and then caught up with us in Orkney soon after my battle with Seraphina. He explained that he worked for the monarchy and was concerned about the Conclave. We received a brief message from him during our travels, telling us he had been detained on business abroad and would return to London this week to talk further with us.

Still, Simon and I had many questions about him.

The carriage, which he'd sent especially for us, was secured with black shutters, so we could not see where we were going. If Wyatt truly was a member of Queen Victoria's Secret Service Bureau, such secrecy was understandable, but it was also quite maddening for Simon and me.

"I still don't think I trust Edmund Wyatt," I murmured quietly.

"Neither do I," Simon replied. "But I do believe that he works for the Queen. The emblem on his jacket did not look counterfeit. Although I suppose it could be ..."

Simon kept any further qualms to himself.

The carriage stalled momentarily before lurching forward again, and I was reminded of one of our many long carriage rides from Orkney to Warwick. I had asked Simon to elaborate upon his cryptic comments regarding Richard, Grandmother's butler.

Smiling in the darkness, Simon had said, "Yes, you should know the details of Richard's interesting history. His employment at Lady Westfield's home was a returned favor after my ... experience in Africa."

"He aided you?"

A faraway look then took over Simon's eyes, undoubtedly from memories of the awful sights he had seen in that village, how he killed his own uncle, how he tried to save the mutilated little boy. But nonetheless, quietly and in very few words, he told me about how, when he had returned to Port Francqui after being at his uncle's village, he'd been held there and interrogated by members of the Queen's Secret Service.

"I developed a terrible fever during my detainment. As a member of the Secret Service Bureau, one of Richard's responsibilities was to relocate the few survivors of the village and then burn the rest of it. If news of what happened there were made public, the village, as well as my uncle's madness, would be a blight upon Her Majesty's empire. I believe that the Bureau, except of course for Richard, half wished that I would simply perish—I feared they might decide to put a bullet through my head. Who would know? My mother and sisters would simply receive a letter saying that my uncle and I had died from illness. However, Richard was kind to me, very kind. He gave me food and water and ordered a nurse to attend to me. When Richard retired from the Queen's service, I knew that he wanted employment. His pension is deplorable, and he often gives money to his niece. I found him the position in your grandmother's house."

"I had no idea."

"That is why I had full confidence in him, this past autumn, to protect Lady Westfield on the night we confronted the Conclave. I told Richard we had become embroiled in a 'dangerous matter.' That was all I told him, but I knew he would watch over her." Glancing at me, Simon had smirked slightly. "He handles a pistol remarkably well. And a saber, for that matter."

Now, as we made our way to our meeting with Wyatt, I thought of how so much finally made sense—Richard's tattoo, the way Simon had offered him money when we left Grandmother under his protection that horrible night.

Breaking the silence, I asked, "Is it because of your experience in Africa that you think we should not trust Wyatt, or the monarchy as a whole for that matter?"

"I have no faith in the ways of the empire overseas," Simon said with a sigh. "My uncle's actions reflect how our nation treats those we're supposed to rule. England is worse than a bully, and the monarchy's initial decision to sanction the

Conclave was far from ethical.” His voice drained away bitterly. “If Wyatt indeed works for the monarchy, I think it would be unwise to trust him or them.”

My mind flashed to the Conclave’s yearly ritual, at which they took the elixir of life to maintain their immortality. By replenishing their systems with the elixir, which they had created from the philosopher’s stone, they kept themselves from aging or dying of natural causes. Until that night—the night I murdered them—they’d lived this way for centuries, pursuing scientific and scholarly projects “for the greater good” without a trace of conscience or concern for individual human life.

If the current monarchy allowed things to continue in this vein, even knowing about the Ripper murders and the lamia, it would be too terrible.

“I’m inclined to agree with you,” I told Simon. “I’m not naïve enough to think that the monarchy would care about you or me or our safety. They are most certainly using us, but Wyatt said that Max must be stopped or the entire monarchy would be threatened. Might they at least share the same goal as us—to stop Max?”

Even as I spoke, the words about sharing any goals with the monarchy felt distasteful.

The carriage came to a sudden halt, and Simon lowered his voice and spoke quickly.

“The monarchy’s goal is to protect themselves, whereas our goal is to protect ourselves and those we love. Even if we work with them to kill the Conclave’s last remaining member, they are the very establishment that created the Conclave three hundred years ago. I don’t know who exactly Wyatt is, or why he wants to meet with us, but we have breached the monarchy’s deepest secrets. Make no mistake—if we cooperate with them, we will be involved in a dangerous game, and we and all whom we hold dear might be crushed in the end.”

Voices approached the carriage.

“But won’t we be in over our heads if we continue this fight against Max alone?” I whispered.

Simon smiled serenely before saying, “We’ve been in ‘over our heads’ for a long while now, and I believe we will be a great deal better off continuing as we have been.”

“Quite true,” I said quickly, returning his smile.

His tone turned serious again. “Our path might cross the monarchy’s path, but we cannot trust them. It’s far too dangerous.”

As the driver swung the door open, I met Simon’s eyes and nodded slightly to let him know I agreed.

In the late afternoon light, I saw that we were in a narrow alleyway. A light rain had begun. I looked about me but did not recognize any streets or landscapes. We had been riding for only about half an hour, so I assumed that we must still be within the vicinity of London.

Then I saw Edmund Wyatt waiting for us. He still sported ash-blond hair and seemingly sunburned skin, which had always struck me as out of place in London. But something else about his appearance was odd. He seemed gaunt, and his already flushed face appeared bloated. His hand trembled a little as he shook our hands. I wondered if perhaps he’d become ill during his trip abroad.

After briefly greeting us, Wyatt led us through the late afternoon drizzle to a door, then up a narrow set of stairs into a small, modest flat.

The flat was dark, even a bit dingy for a man who presumably worked for Queen Victoria. Still, I was impressed by the weapons and instruments in the rooms. The walls were covered with swords, sabers, and mahogany bookcases. A telescope rested near a heavily draped window, and a strange, enormous picture of all of the constellations hung over a desk.

Wyatt led us through the long flat until we reached a small back room with an extremely large oak table. It reminded me of the table the Conclave once had, at their house on Montgomery Street.

“I am certain that you both have many unanswered questions about this Conclave business,” Wyatt said after we’d seated ourselves. He sat directly across the table from us, a good five feet away.

“To begin with, why did the monarchy not stop the Conclave when they began murdering women in Whitechapel last year?” I asked sharply.

Wyatt looked down at his folded fingers and then back at us. He gazed hard at me for a few seconds before turning his attention to Simon.

“Your hospital flourished, did it not, Dr. St. John, after the deaths of those women?”

Simon hesitated, watching Wyatt coolly. “Whitechapel Hospital received significant charitable donations last autumn.”

After a few awkward seconds of silence, Wyatt continued, his voice slightly raspy. I wondered if he was nervous. “The journalistic attention to the area caused public awareness of the East End to surge significantly. And last I heard, Miss Sharp, you and Dr. William Siddal are planning to establish a school for the children in one wing of the hospital. Now you have almost all the funding you need to do this.”

“*At the cost of—*”

Simon silenced me with a sharp tap on my knee and I struggled to subdue my anger.

“At the cost of five alcoholic prostitutes, Miss Sharp,” Wyatt continued. “Her Majesty does not endorse the *deeds* of the Conclave—that’s why they were instructed by Queen Elizabeth to remain independent of the monarchy, to make their own decisions about what was right and wrong as long as their works benefitted the public good. As long as their actions do not hurt her empire—as long as they use their knowledge to *benefit* her city, nation, and empire—then she doesn’t bother herself about the means by which they go about it.”

“Did you know about the lamia?” I demanded.

Wyatt sighed. “I only learned of her recently. The Conclave did well at keeping her existence a secret. We have never had much information as to the details of their work. Historically, there’s been *one* member and one member only in the Bureau who even knows of the existence of the Conclave, or Case X as we call it. Francis Walsingham, who was Queen Elizabeth’s advisor, established this system years ago in case the Conclave became too roguish in their independence. There was always a concern that they might turn against the empire or publicly reveal the elixir.”

“Murdering women wasn’t considered *roguish*?”

Wyatt narrowed his eyes. “Your mouth, Miss Sharp, is unbecoming and will gain you no favors as a gentlewoman.”

“I’m not looking for favors from you, and whoever said that I was a gentle—”

Simon cut me off. “Miss Sharp and I have grave concerns regarding the Conclave’s unethical practices.”

Wyatt sat back in his chair and straightened his posture. “I’m not here to quibble with either of you about how the Conclave has behaved in the past. The

truth of the matter is that they have mostly been left alone by the monarchy—although they have always been paid generously upon an annual basis, and occasionally met with the king or queen. Often, the advisor for Case X never even meets a single member of the Conclave. I only took this job last year, when there was that mysterious fire at their London property and the members of the group perished.”

He folded his hands carefully in front of him, and I sensed that Wyatt was getting to the heart of the matter.

“We knew that the Conclave had taken in another member several years ago,” he said. “An assassin from France, who apparently survived the fire. On this front, a problem has arisen. This assassin has ensnared you two—and the young physician, William Siddal—into the Conclave’s business.”

Simon and I remained silent.

Upon receiving no response, Wyatt leveled his gaze at Simon. “I’m learning many interesting details about the Conclave. They have become bolder in recent years.” He turned to me. “Miss Sharp, did they not try to make your mother a part of the group?”

A lump rose in my throat. “Yes.”

Wyatt paused. “Do you know anything about her relationship with the assassin, Max Bartlett?”

Thoughts that I couldn’t quite piece together formed in my head. I felt Simon’s gaze upon me.

“Did she tell you anything about him, Miss Sharp?” Wyatt pressed.

“No.” My answer was firm. She hadn’t. But Max had been there, that day in Ireland when I’d almost drowned. He had rescued me, and as I regained consciousness I heard him arguing with Mother. How many times had she spoken to him or seen him in the years after she fled from London?

Wyatt eyed me carefully for a few seconds, skeptical. “I have tried to follow him, but he is a strange, shadowy character. Over the past few weeks I have been in France, trying to learn more of his history. His past is virtually untraceable. I *do* know that not only is he a skilled assassin and a psychic, but the elixir gives him powers it did not give the other members. He became an aberration.”

I recalled all the times I had seen Max climbing walls, how he could sometimes possess the bodies of others. I thought of his strength. His speed.

“Although apparently French, he speaks English well, with no French accent. In fact, he speaks several languages and can adapt his speech to any accent or dialect.”

I remembered Max’s Austrian accent that time he’d arrived in Grandmother’s parlor. I remembered hearing him speak in German to Dr. Buck once at the hospital. Yes, all that Wyatt said seemed accurate.

“As you know, in taking on the name Bartlett, he is pretending to be Dr. Julian Bartlett’s nephew. We’re almost certain it’s not his actual name. He is elusive. Dangerous. And now, he’s gone underground. We keep trying to track him, but we cannot even determine where he lives. He was spotted in London this month by one of my men, near the Thames, but chasing him thus far has been futile. He cut the throats of two of my men recently.”

As he spoke, Wyatt seemed increasingly agitated. I noticed his fourth finger trembling.

“So, what do you want from us? If the Secret Service Bureau can’t locate him, why would you think that we could?” I asked.

Wyatt, brimming with impatience, leaned across the table. “Because, Miss Sharp, he always seems to come back to *you*. What is it about you? Why won’t he leave you alone?”

A ticking clock sounded loudly from across the room.

“What does he want from you, Miss Sharp?”

But I didn’t speak a word. I wasn’t about to tell Wyatt my entire history with Max.

As if reading my thoughts, Simon spoke quickly. “We have nothing more to discuss here.” He stood up and I followed his lead, wanting only to leave this place.

“There have been more murders during your cavorts in Orkney,” Wyatt said abruptly, pulling a file from a bag at his feet that I hadn’t noticed before. “In fact, there have been many more than we’ve made public. At least twenty cannibalistic murders have occurred since your first journey to the Orkney Isles.”

Standing up, he placed a photograph on the table for us to see. “Highgate Cemetery.”

I saw a young male victim whose throat and stomach had been eviscerated, exactly like the body I’d seen earlier this spring.

“Brompton Cemetery.” Wyatt laid out another photograph. This one depicted a young female gravedigger, a great gaping hole in her chest.

“Abney Park. Kensal Green.” He laid out two equally grotesque photographs of bodies. All looked as if they had been attacked by wild dogs.

“The dead have all been resurrection men, common gravediggers. No one would inquire after them, so we’ve disposed of the last seven bodies quietly. However, two weeks ago, a priest near Covent Gardens was murdered in his own parsonage, cannibalized just like the gravediggers. Then, as you likely know, Miss Sharp, a young law student in Kensington was murdered. The murderer, or murderers, are becoming more brazen, expanding their ‘hunting’ territories beyond the cemeteries.”

It was as I had feared.

Wyatt drew a deep breath. “And there have been rumors, by some who live or work near the cemeteries, of odd-looking figures roaming near the walls. One individual reported seeing a pale woman, blood smeared upon her face. We have reason to believe—particularly since we found the Conclave’s symbol near the murdered men in Highgate this spring—that Max Bartlett is involved, and that he has these strange others working for him. He is taunting the authorities, just as he did in the Ripper case.”

“I find it difficult to believe,” Simon said quietly, “that you and your men cannot patrol these areas better. That *your* men have not seen these figures.”

Beads of perspiration popped out across Wyatt’s red forehead. “I actually have few men at my disposal—less than ten. And now, because of Bartlett, I am down to eight. Because of the highly sensitive nature of the Conclave, only Her Majesty and I know of the matters surrounding Case X; my men only know that we are pursuing Max Bartlett, thought to be a Ripper suspect, and a group of cannibalistic lunatics.” He wiped his face. “I met with Her Majesty yesterday. We need to find Bartlett, and whoever else is involved, before the situation becomes any more difficult.”

“Why do you suddenly care so much that a Conclave member is murdering people?” I snapped. “It almost sounds like it’s because the victims now include a wealthy Kensington youth from a prominent family.”

Rather than answering me, Wyatt merely glared. His hands trembled as he began collecting the photographs. Although I didn’t really care, I wondered vaguely if the trembling was from anger or from illness.

Of course, Wyatt couldn’t respond to my question because it hit too hard against too many truths. It was perfectly acceptable for the Conclave to murder so long as they were discreet, so long as they didn’t murder anyone “important.” But now Max had splintered away from the established pattern; he was an immortal who paid no heed to the monarchy’s will. He mocked them with his painted chalices on tombstones; he engaged them in his reckless, high-stakes games. I fought an urge to chuckle. Like Victor Frankenstein, the monarchy had created a monster beyond its control.

Shoving the photographs back into his bag, Wyatt stepped away from the table. “I’ll be talking with you both at a later time.”

“We have nothing more to discuss,” Simon said again, as we were ushered out of the flat and back downstairs to the carriage.



Max stood at a distance, a wide-brimmed hat guarding his face from the drizzling rain.

His two male companions stood with him atop a nearby building, their eyes upon Abbie Sharp and Simon St. John stepping into the dark carriage.

“Things are about to get interesting,” the man closest to Max remarked. His intense blue eyes gleamed under his short hazelnut curls, like he was a child impatient for Christmas.

“Yes,” the other young man said. This man was tall and strikingly beautiful, with dark curly hair and dark eyes. “Impressive, that work in Orkney. It would be a shame to kill her. A terrible shame. She’s too pretty.”

“*Far* too pretty,” Max said. He kept his eyes upon her. “And too much like her mother.”

The three men stood silent and still as statues for a few minutes, not bothered by the building rain as they watched the carriage pull away.

“Come along,” Max said abruptly. “This will do no good. We’ve got too much to do, and it’s almost time to introduce Miss Sharp to our friends.”

His blue-eyed companion smirked, his cape swirling in a stream of weak wind as he turned leave. “I hope she survives.”

“Yes,” Max said, almost to himself.

He lingered in his place as the others walked away, watching until the carriage was out of sight.

Four

The leaves of the great cedar tree rattled high above us as we eased, with the crowd, through the Circle of Lebanon in Highgate Cemetery. The corridor felt tight with the crush of warm bodies, and I tried to stay close to Simon. While Mariah's funeral had been sparsely attended, Lionel Millbrough the Third's funeral attracted half of Kensington.

Grandmother walked ahead of us with her friends, Lady Violet and Lady Catherine. All three women were clad in noisy black crinoline, but they spoke in hushed whispers and dabbed daintily at their eyes with embroidered handkerchiefs. Grandmother hadn't known the young man very well, but as one was expected to cry at a funeral, she cried. As for me, I couldn't even pretend to cry. My mind was still reeling from our meeting with Wyatt yesterday.

Simon and I had not had much time to talk about the meeting. Although I was once again working at New Hospital, I still often helped out at Whitechapel, and that evening Simon and I had delivered three babies. Today, my feet ached from spending my morning assisting in the operating theater at New Hospital. In addition, my books and notes for the medical school examinations awaited me upon my desk at home. I planned to start at the London Medical School for Women in the autumn, and often I studied to the point of exhaustion.

The crowd was entering a dark mausoleum. I held back. The place was far too cold and, in spite of the cement-encased coffins, smelled of decomposition.

Simon must have had the same thoughts because he remained where he was, leaning against the wall. He nodded his head at me, and as Grandmother and the others walked past, we hung back together, easing ourselves slowly out of the Circle of Lebanon and through Egyptian Avenue.

When we reached Egyptian Avenue's impressive entrance, we paused. Simon laid his long, pale fingers lightly on one of the column's carved lotus petals.

In spite of its tombstones and the gnarled overgrowth, I'd always found Highgate Cemetery comforting. I liked meandering around the tombs, the thick tree trunks spiraling out like fingers. The cemetery teemed with wildlife—hares, foxes, red-bosomed sparrows. As there were no crying children or barking dogs, I preferred this place to any London park. As did William; I remembered the time I ran into him near his family's gravesite.

"Have you been here since Mariah's death?" I asked Simon.

"A few times. During daylight hours, of course." He glanced away for a second, shielding his ice-blue eyes from the sunlight with one hand and lowering his voice. "I don't think that we should bother anymore with Wyatt."

"I agree. He knew that the Conclave was behind the Ripper murders and yet he did nothing. He doesn't strike me as being morally tortured. I'd be fine if I never heard from him again."

"And yet ... " Simon still squinted out over the tangled sea of graves beyond us. "I fear we will."

I wasn't finished venting my spleen. "Did you notice how awful he appeared yesterday? How his hands and fingers trembled? How gaunt his appearance was? If he does indeed work for Queen Victoria, perhaps his work has made him ill ... which would be a proper sort of justice."

Simon looked down at me, smirking a little. "In terms of our initial qualms about his credentials, I'm convinced that he works for the Queen, given all that he knows about the Conclave's history. It would be an extraordinary charade if he did not. And yes, Abbie, I also noticed his appearance. His entire demeanor seems different than it did in Orkney, and it troubles me."

"Why?"

Simon hesitated. "I'm concerned that he is perhaps ... untrustworthy."

"What would his health or appearance have to do with being untrustworthy?"

Simon started to speak, then stopped and shrugged. "I'm not certain exactly. I just have some ... premonitions."

"Might you clarify?"

Simon seemed to be trying to come up with the right words. "Let's just say that Edmund Wyatt might be a ... complicated individual."

He turned his attention back to the surrounding graveyard. I followed his gaze, watching a large raven burst away from a tree, cawing loudly; a cloud of dried

leaves rained down behind it. “I would love to know what happens here at night,” Simon murmured.

Then he nodded in the direction of the Millbrough mausoleum. “And evidently, it’s happening *outside* of here. Be careful, Abbie.”

“I think Kensington has had enough gruesome happenings for one week,” I said, following his gaze to a young fox running nearby.

The sun glinted on Simon’s light lashes, illuminating his angel-like features. He made no reply.



Three nights later I awoke, startled by a distant, off-key shriek.

Confused, I surveyed my dark bedroom.

I had fallen asleep slouched in my desk chair, my anatomy book still open in my lap. The candle upon my desk had long since burned down. I squinted, my eyes adjusting to the darkness, at the clock above my bedroom fireplace. It was two o’clock in the morning.

The house was silent now. I wondered if perhaps I’d been dreaming.

Rubbing my eyes, I returned the book to the desk and walked heavily to my bed.

Just as I slipped under my bedcovers a loud thump sounded, as if someone had thrown a large sack of flour against my bedroom door. I sat up, jolted.

Leaping quietly from the bed, I laid my hand on the doorknob.

Silence.

I held my breath and swung the door open.

I screamed.

Ellen, our maid, tumbled into my room, her throat ripped out. The back of her head hit my bedroom floor, and her lifeless eyes stared up at me.

Covering my mouth to keep from crying out again, I crouched down and felt her wrist for a pulse. Her body was still warm, but she was dead. There was no breath, no heartbeat. Her strawlike, graying red hair spiraled loose about her shoulders, and her nightgown was ripped open near the gaping wound at her neck. Blood seeped rapidly out, spreading across and staining the carpet at my feet.

Jupe began to bark from Grandmother's downstairs bedroom, immediately below my own.

Grandmother.

I ran to my closet, my fingers shaking violently as I grabbed my bowie knife from my trunk and bolted back across the room.

But then *she*—my beloved dead friend Mariah—stepped into the doorway, blocking me. She stood above Ellen's body. Even though it was night, she wore no coat or shawl over her green gown. Blood was smeared upon her mouth; she was like a predator guarding its prey.

I blinked, unbelieving.

"Mariah ..." I whispered.

Even now, with the blood upon her face, she was beautiful. Her hair hung dark and curly around her face. Mariah had always had a china-doll complexion, but now her face was alarmingly pale. Her eyes shone wide and dark, with curious purple crescents under them. Something about Mariah seemed like a blurred painting that had been wiped by a hand before it dried.

She smiled, wiped some blood from her mouth, stepped into my bedroom, and walked straight toward me.

Horror and longing washed over me.

She had been my friend.

She was dead.

I'd seen her die, that night in Lady Violet's attic.

I thought of the ways Max had used her, both while she was alive and then shortly before her death. I stuttered as I stepped backward, still clutching the knife; my thoughts grew scrambled and increasingly incoherent. As I backed away from her, breathless, my back hit hard against my bedpost.

It was unbelievable, but I wanted to embrace her.

And yet ... there was something feral, something strange in her eyes that I'd never seen when she was alive. I stared from her bloodstained mouth back to Ellen's body. I thought of the strange people who'd pursued me when I'd ventured alone into Highgate Cemetery this spring.

"Mariah ..." I stuttered. "You're dead."

She continued advancing upon me.

Vaguely, I remembered to keep my grip upon the knife.

“I *am* dead.”

In my shock, I hadn't noticed how quickly she was moving. Now she stood immediately before me. In a single movement she ripped open the buttons on her gown, baring her chest to me. She wore no corset, no undergarments even. A great purple wound, which looked as if it had been crudely sewn together, spanned her breastbone.

She grabbed my free hand and pulled it toward the wound. “Touch me, Abbie.”

A tear fell down my cheek, and I couldn't pull my hand away.

“Yes, it was a violent death, wasn't it, Abbie love? Don't you remember? I fell three stories onto that pile of splintered wood.”

“You're cold.” I whispered. Under my fingertips, her scarred breasts felt cold as marble.

“I was dead. But now I'm alive. Resurrected.” She giggled. “Isn't it wonderful?” Her laugh was almost musical.

My mouth parched and I couldn't speak. I took a deep breath. “*How?* How did this happen, Mariah?”

She smiled mysteriously.

She was so beautiful, even in this deathly pale and frightening form. She leaned toward me, her bloodstained mouth nearing my own; my hand still rested upon the stitched wound. I froze. Her breath was a winter breeze, soothing yet tinged with some vaguely rotten odor. Again, I couldn't move. I searched her face, sought traces of my friend. But this Mariah seemed so cruel, not the witty, kind companion I had known.

I tried to pull myself away from her spell, surface from my shock. Jupe's bark continued downstairs, and I heard Grandmother fussing at him. Grandmother couldn't see this—Ellen's body, Mariah.

Against my instinct to run, I remained frozen.

Mariah smiled.

My breath came out ragged as I stared into her eyes. I felt the stitches under my fingertips, rough blights over her cold skin.

Suddenly Mariah kissed me, her lips pressing hard against mine. I returned the kiss, still under her spell. Her mouth was cold, my tears warm.

Then I tasted the blood on her lips.

I pulled away, regaining all of my senses and remembering that I needed to get to Grandmother. I pushed Mariah away hard, and she landed on the floor.

“Get away!” I yelled, holding the knife in front of me. I reminded myself that this fiend was not the Mariah Crawley I had known.

She bared her teeth at me, crouching between me and Ellen’s body in the doorway, her hair loose and wild about her shoulders. She seemed oblivious to her exposed breasts. Her fingers, long and pale, curled in front of her against the carpeted floor like an animal’s claws.

“What did you do to Ellen?” I demanded, hoping that she could not hear the fear in my voice.

Mariah curled her lips back from her teeth like a snarling dog; she crouched lower, as if she would pounce at any moment. “My appetite has changed a bit since I returned. I could tear your throat . . . ”

Grandmother’s door opened downstairs. “Arabella?”

Then I heard a crash from somewhere in the back of the house.

Were there more of them?

Richard! Where was Richard? Had he heard this from his attic bedroom? Panicked, I wondered if he was lying dead like Ellen.

Mariah smiled and glanced toward the door, then looked up at me viciously through her thick, dark lashes. “Actually, I’m supposed to leave *you* alive. But Lady Westfield . . . ” She licked her lips. “Do you think she’ll be happy to see me again?” She sprang over Ellen’s body and ran toward the staircase.

“*No!* ” I screamed, running after her, gripping my knife. As I lunged out of the room, I felt Ellen’s blood on the soles of my bare feet. Taking the steps three at a time, I saw, in the dimness, Mariah running ahead of me, surprisingly lithe in her green gown. Through the bannister spindles, I saw light spreading from Grandmother’s doorway.

“Grandmother!” I shouted, almost falling headfirst down the last five steps. “Get back into your room and lock the door! *Now!* ”

Another great crash came from the back of the house, in the direction of the kitchen.

Whining, Jupe bolted away from Grandmother’s bedroom.

Turning the corner, I stopped, frozen in my tracks.

Grandmother was standing in her bedroom doorway, staring with horror at Mariah. She wore a robe; her hair was still in paper curlers. At the end of the hall, past Grandmother and directly across from me, were three men, all frighteningly pale like Mariah.

One was very young, no more than fifteen. Another wore an old constable's uniform—I recognized him immediately as the man who had pursued me in Highgate Cemetery. The third man was older, perhaps in his fifties. They stood silently in the hallway, all with that same feral, hungry look on their faces.

Trying to decide how best to protect Grandmother, I watched all of their positions at once: Mariah in front of Grandmother, the others paused at the end of the hallway. I thought of the illustrations I had seen in zoology books of lionesses surrounding their prey.

Grandmother didn't seem to see the others; her eyes remained locked upon Mariah.

"Mariah ..." she muttered, her voice no more than a croak. She swayed on her feet a bit and clutched the door frame in support.

Mariah threw her head back in a hysterical laugh. "It's a miracle, Lady Westfield! I'm back from the dead!"

"No!" I yelled, leaping between them. I shoved Grandmother back into her room. But before I could shut the door, a searing pain, like fire, shot through my shoulder as Mariah bit me. I heard the sound of tearing fabric.

Suddenly, the three others charged down the hallway toward us.

Ignoring the wetness spreading down my arm, I shoved Mariah hard, throwing her against the wall and swiping at her with the bowie knife. Outnumbered, I spun around to fight the others.

Then the older intruder fell forward, dead, a knife in his back.

Richard!

I saw Richard pummeling the constable to the ground.

Mariah, frenzied now, lunged at me, aiming for my throat. I pushed her so hard against the wall that a mirror fell, missing her head but shattering to pieces about her.

While Richard struggled with the constable, the boy sprang at me, and I kned him hard in the ribs. He howled in pain and lunged again, his teeth bared like an animal.

Who were these beings?

“Get back, Grandmother!” I yelled. “Lock the door!”

But she didn’t move.

“Bitch!” Mariah yelled as she stood up, mirror fragments caught in the ruffles of her gown. The glass had cut the exposed parts of her breasts; the blood seeping out was rust brown, not bright red like my own.

I stabbed at the boy but missed his chest; my knife blade grazed his arm. We struggled and he wrested the knife from my grip, swinging it clumsily at me.

As I fought both the boy and Mariah, I saw that Richard and the constable were still locked in struggle. They both fell into the grandfather clock, which teetered briefly and then crashed to the floor loudly. Wood and glass splinters flew everywhere.

“This can’t *be* !” Grandmother screamed from behind me as I continued fighting, blocking the boy and Mariah from Grandmother. I tried to remember everything that my old friend Roddy told me about fighting, but my strength was waning. My shoulder ached, and the boy still had my knife.

“It *is*, Grandmother! It’s *Mariah*! Now get me a weapon!”

Grandmother must have regained some of her composure, for in a split second I had a poker in my hand.

I smacked Mariah hard in the chest and then struck the boy across the face. Both stumbled backward.

Richard now held the constable up against the wall, his hand squeezing the man’s neck.

Suddenly, the front door burst open. Everyone, including our attackers, froze.

Max strode into the foyer.

There must have been a slight rain outside, for water glistened in the wild dark curls around his head. His leopard-green eyes gleamed. Two other male figures stood behind him, framed by the front doorway, their faces shadowy in the misty night. I strained my eyes past Max’s large form while keeping a tight hold of the poker. One of the men wore some sort of cape and turban; the other one had dark curly hair. I could not see their faces.

Quickly I turned my attention back to Max.

“Oh, thank heavens!” Grandmother exclaimed from behind me. “It’s Mr. Bartlett ...”

She tried to push past me.

“Grandmother, *no!*” I blocked her with my arm, keeping her behind me in the bedroom. Mariah glared daggers at me but remained still. The other attackers and Richard also froze.

Max walked slowly toward us, surveying the scene: the subdued attackers, the broken mirror, the stained carpets and shattered grandfather clock. His eyes rested upon the dead attacker on the floor. As he neared me, I saw that he was holding Jupe in his arms.

Grandmother said nothing else, but I heard her catch her breath. She was no fool; she realized something was amiss.

I was still breathless from the fight; my heart pounded and my chest heaved. Goose bumps prickled upon my neck—Max had almost reached Grandmother’s doorway, where I stood.

My thoughts spun frantically as I tried to make sense of it all.

“Your dog, Lady Westfield,” Max said without even glancing at her. He threw Jupe into the bedroom. The dog yelped as it hit the far wall.

Everyone remained silent. Richard cast me a glance. A small gash ran across his cheek, and a lock of his thin white hair fell across his forehead. Still, his hand remained clutched tightly around the constable’s throat.

“It’s time to go,” Max said sternly to our attackers.

I glared at him. I could not fight him here. Richard, Grandmother, and I were outnumbered, and Grandmother and Richard meant nothing to Max. He would kill them in a minute.

“What are you doing here?” I demanded. “Who are these people?”

Max stared down at me, his eyes glinting.

Grandmother clutched my arm tightly, protectively, trying to pull me back toward her. This version of Max was far removed from the well-behaved gentleman who had paid her a visit this spring.

Max smiled widely and leaned toward me. The scent of Oriental cigars lingered upon his jacket. “Did you like the little show tonight?”

“Get out of this house,” I said through gritted teeth. Grandmother’s grip tightened on my arm.

He was too close to me, and to her. I swung the poker at him, but he caught my wrist in a painful vise-grip. He was always one step ahead of me, always

flawlessly interpreting my next move. I needed to regroup, come up with a better plan, if I was going to rid myself of him for good.

One of the men in the doorway chuckled softly, and I turned sharply to them. Maddeningly, I could still only see the outlines of their figures.

“We’re finished for tonight,” Max said.

The constable pushed Richard away from him.

Mariah gnashed her teeth at me and Grandmother. She obviously still wanted to tear my throat out, but she was cowering in Max’s presence.

What had happened to her?

The Mariah I had known would never have cowered to anyone, particularly a man.

Max stooped, picked up the man Richard had stabbed, and flung him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. He glanced toward the men still lingering in the open front door. “I’ll take them out back.”

The turbaned man nodded, bowed a bit, and quietly closed the front door, shutting himself and the other man outside, while Max, still holding the dead man, glanced back at me, locking his gaze into mine. A smile played at the corners of his mouth. Richard stepped quietly aside, his hand clutching a long shard of glass as a weapon. Mariah, the constable, and the boy followed Max out quietly.

The moment the door closed, I turned to Grandmother.

She clutched me tightly to her. My blood was still rushing, my head spinning. I heard Richard firmly bolting the back door in the kitchen.

Suddenly Grandmother pulled away, gripping her chest.

“Grandmother!”

Her face was so pale. Alarmed, I led her to bed. She had never had heart trouble before, but I feared for her now because of her age and the shock of what had just happened.

“Lie down. I’ll bring you some hot tea.”

Jupe, cringing but unharmed, leaped onto the bed beside her.

“They’re gone, Grandmother.” I kissed her cheek and left, shutting her bedroom door behind me. She could not see Ellen’s body.

I retrieved my bowie knife from the floor where the boy had dropped it and found Richard upstairs, kneeling over Ellen. He had closed her eyelids. Soberly,

he looked up at me. The long deep scratch on his cheek glistened with blood in the darkness.

“Do you have something to tell me, Miss Sharp?”

“I can’t ...”

But he continued. “This is merely an intuition, but that attack ... I feel as if you and your friend, Dr. St. John, might not be altogether *surprised* by tonight’s events.” He narrowed his eyes. “What muddles have you involved yourself in?”

I had to look away from Ellen’s body, a lump in my throat. She was yet another casualty of my ties to the Conclave. It would be impossible now to keep Richard and Grandmother out of this.

“How much did Simon tell you during the Ripper murders?” I wiped a tear away from my face.

“A bit. He said that you were involved in some sort of very serious business. That there was a killer after you.”

I slumped onto the top of the staircase. The pain in my shoulder wound throbbed hard. The coagulating blood glued the thin fabric of my nightgown to my skin.

“Please,” I muttered wearily, “please summon Simon and Scotland Yard.”

“And tell them *what*, precisely?” Richard asked pointedly.

“Tell the police that we found Ellen this way. That she was murdered like the Millbrough youth the other night. Tell them the killer was here, but that we saw nothing.”

Richard hesitated, then nodded. “I will. But I must know *everything* regarding this matter. That’s only fair for Lady Westfield and her safety. We will leave Ellen’s body here, but I do not want Lady Westfield to see this sight.”

“I won’t let her out of her bedroom.”

I tried not to look at Ellen’s body. I winced, fought back tears. The pain from my shoulder wound began to spread down my arm.

Richard’s eyes lingered on the bite. “You’re wounded.”

“Simon will examine it when he arrives.”

Richard started down the stairs, pausing after a few steps.

“Is there something else, Richard?”

He started to speak, then shook his head. “I hardly know what to say. Please attend to Lady Westfield.”

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