

Footsteps drifted on the air, measured but quiet, as if not wanting to be heard, the soft sound coming closer and closer. Olivia's heart picked up speed. The air around her tingled; she wasn't sure whether it was her own nerves or that strange aura of power she sensed coming from him as she watched from the window.

She faced the door and held her breath. She'd taken the fireplace poker for a weapon, just in case, relieved that the dizziness was easing its ferocious grip a bit, enough perhaps to fool him.

The door opened abruptly.

It was the man from the driveway, the dark-haired one in the vest and sleeves, the same one who had been in her kitchen—if it had been her kitchen at all. Olivia shoved the thought aside, and hefted the poker over her shoulder. He had looked plenty big from a second story window, and he was even bigger up close, tall, easily over six feet with broad shoulders and long, solid arms roped with muscles not even the flowing shirt he wore could disguise. Even so, a poker could do enough damage to give her a head start. To where, she had no idea, but she wasn't going to stand idly by and do nothing.

It was unfair that he was so stunning.

He had left the door open. The hallway stretched out behind him, the perfect escape if she could make it that far, and get around him.

Which was an impossibility, but seeing that open door gave an odd sense of reassurance.

He looked at that poker, and his eyebrows lifted over gorgeous eyes, a strikingly light gray against his tanned skin and black hair. A smile tugged at one corner of his mouth. Olivia felt her temper rise. This might be funny to him, but it was deadly serious to her, and the poker was getting heavier by the second. Clearly, she wasn't as recovered as she needed to be.

But she didn't want him to know that. She couldn't afford to show weakness. "Who are you?"

He ignored her question and looked pointedly at the poker in her hands. "I see you are awake," he merely said in that rich, dark voice she remembered. Definitely a British accent. She was certain she heard a smile in those words.

Olivia clamped her jaw shut. If he wouldn't answer her first question, she doubted he'd answer any of the others. What she was doing here, for starters. What they wanted with her, why he told that other man he didn't know how she got here.

And most particularly, why there had been a carriage in his front yard, no telephone, or electric lights, and why he and his friend were dressed in costume. There was an obvious, ugly answer, tales of women who woke up with no memory of how they got there or what had happened.

Olivia stared at him. Not stared, exactly, but she fixed her gaze on him and let her thoughts tumble around like ping-pong balls. She shook her head against the frightening thought, and the room lurched.

The man made a move toward her, but she took a better grip on the poker, and he subsided. He looked her over, taking his sweet time while she simmered. "You should not be out of bed." He pointed at it.

She had no intention of climbing meekly back in but she wasn't sure how long she could stand. Her arms trembled; she knew he saw it because the smile crept out of his voice and onto his face. Olivia couldn't look away.

It was almost as if someone had reached into her secret wishes and brought them to life, those fanciful, un-liberated dreams of Tall, Dark and Handsome, who would come and rescue her from her single state, and free her from endless dates with boring men. He didn't look like he would bore her on his worst day.

His dark hair curled along that ridiculous collar on his shirt. A finely sculptured nose, straight and narrow, neat eyebrows, not too thin or too thick, ears that lay close to his head, fabulous cheekbones, and a jaw just exactly strong enough. And those eyes, piercing light eyes, almost a match for her own, more a glittering silver than her own pale green.

They twinkled at her, as if the two of them shared a joke. She wished she could trust the humor in his eyes and his voice, but she knew the smile was at her expense as she stood there, half his size, in a loosened gown she had no idea how to fasten by herself, holding an iron poker on him in what appeared to be his own house.

It was not the beautiful eyes and perfectly sculptured face, tempting as they were, that made her wish she could trust him. It was the air of confidence, of capability, a man secure in himself, a man who knew exactly who he was and where he belonged.

Olivia hardened her resolve. "How did I get here?"

Those eyebrows went up again, and the smile widened. "I think that should be my question, don't you? Only my valet is allowed in here when I'm dressing unless I have invited them beforehand. You made no attempt to knock first. Had you done so, I would have heard you."

Valet?

The smile slipped, and curiosity took its place. "I even brought my butler in to see if he recognized you and knew who you were, and what you were doing in my room during my bath. Delightful surprise though you are, I would have liked a warning. You caught me rather off-guard. I prefer to be appropriately dressed when meeting new . . . guests."

Bath. She'd heard that from him twice now. If she had been in *his* bath, he could hardly have been in *her* kitchen. Someone had abducted her from her house, but she hadn't drunk or eaten anything that could have been tainted, and until he appeared, no one had been with her.

She decided to work that out later, and snapped her attention back to his words.

"I am seldom here, and at first glance thought it possible that you might be a new maid, unacquainted with the rules of the house. I see now that cannot be. You are hardly dressed like a maid." Something flickered in his eyes, but the smile came back. "I assure you, my servants would have seen that you had all the tea and cakes you required while you waited had you merely used the knocker. A woman dressed like you would have been admitted immediately." His gaze slipped down her body, then snapped back up to her face.

"Servants?" Olivia asked faintly. "You have servants, too?" Not just a valet and butler, odd as that was. No one had a valet any more, at least not that she'd heard. And who still had butlers? Certainly no one she knew, not even anyone she worked for.

He drew back. In surprise or offense, Olivia could not tell. "Of course. It is impossible to run an estate of this size without them."

"Your *estate*? Where am I?" Knowing there were servants around might be good if one of them would help her get away, or bad if they were all loyal to him. Which they probably were.

And who did he think she was here to meet?

The man leaned casually against the doorjamb, and folded his arms over his broad chest. "Now I must wonder if I am being insulted. A lovely thing like you, and you might not be in the right house. Where do you think you should be?"

"I don't know." It came out like a wail. "You brought me here. Why me? I can't be of any use to you."

He smiled again, and this time there was no mistaking the wolfish character there. "I can think of any number of reasons you can be of use to me." Then he sobered. "While it pains me to say this, I did not bring you here."

The poker was so heavy, Olivia wasn't sure how much longer she'd be able to hold it. Her legs were shaking, but under the dress she wore, she doubted he'd be able to tell.

She was naturally pale, with the fair coloring that went along with her red hair, but from the way his gaze suddenly sharpened, Olivia suspected she'd gone a whole new shade of ashen.

Her muscles abruptly gave up the struggle. The poker dropped, its point hitting the beautiful wooden floor with a frightening scrape, and she braced herself against the handle like a cane, hoping it hadn't done too much damage to the wood, hoping the thing would hold her up long enough for the man to leave the room. The dizziness that had plagued her since she woke up attacked with a vengeance, and she felt her balance go.

Strong arms caught her, lifted her. "No more arguments. This is my bed, and I shall have to find another place to sleep for the night, but I can hardly let an ill woman sleep on the floor."

Now that she was no longer standing, Olivia's head cleared slightly. Whatever had happened to her wasn't out of her system yet, but she could tell that with a little more rest, she'd be herself. "What did you give me?" she asked desperately as the man laid her on the bed with more care than she expected.

"Nothing at all. Why? Are you hungry? Thirsty?" His face was close to hers as he pulled his arm from under her shoulders. His eyes suddenly grew dark as his pupils widened, leaving that strange silvery ring around the edge of the darkness.

A darkness that threatened to draw her in, warm and close, very close. She felt his breath on her skin.

"Are you hungry?" he asked again, those eyes with that odd silver rim of iris fixed on hers, still so close that it was becoming hard to breathe.

Olivia forced her mind back to the subject at hand. Food.

Feeding her might be an excuse to get a drug down her again, but for some strange reason, she doubted he meant any harm. He'd had all kinds of chances to hurt her, even frighten her, and he'd done nothing except put her to bed, and catch her when she started to fall.

Of course, there was still that unlaced corset, and the gown. She hadn't been wearing *them* in her kitchen.

"I won't eat," she warned him. *Something* had made her weak and woozy, with no memories between her kitchen and this room. He didn't act like any kidnapper she'd ever heard about, but something was very strange here.

"If you won't eat, a cup of tea, then." He straightened at last, his arms sliding away from beneath her, leaving a trail of warmth.

Olivia grabbed at his sleeve before he turned to walk away. She had to try, one more time. "Please. Tell me where I am?"

A frown of genuine worry creased his forehead. "Do you honestly not know?"

She shook her head, something she quickly reminded herself not to do for a while as the room moved again. "No."

He stared down at her. "If you don't know where you are, do you remember how you got here? By stage? Walking? Did you get a ride on some farmer's cart?"

"No." As he had listed off the choices, Olivia felt panic stir. "This isn't some reality show, is it? You aren't doing this to stay in character?"

"Some *what*? Stay in character? What is this you are asking?" He backed up a step, and Olivia lost her grip on his sleeve.

"Can you answer one question for me?" She heard the rising desperation in her voice, so he must have heard it, too.

"What?" The man sounded wary. He folded his arms, probably to keep her from reaching for him again.

"If you won't tell me where I am, can you at least tell me"—it was so hard to ask, but she had to, all the signs pointed to it, no matter how impossible it was—"when I am?"

He looked aghast. "You are more ill than any of us realized. I will have someone bring tea for you soon. Drink it or not, as you wish."

Despite her fear, Olivia felt a laugh threaten. Tea, of all things!

"Please," it sounded strange to have him use the word, "stay in bed."

And then he slipped out the door, leaving Olivia more unsettled than ever. Nothing here made sense. He was so decidedly English, his speech oddly stilted and formal.

The wild idea rose up again, leaving Olivia nauseous with dread.

It was ridiculous. Absurd.

Insane.

Maybe she had lost her mind.

But she didn't think so.