

Victoria tidied herself up as much as time would allow and made her way to meet John, hoping that his disposition had softened since their last encounter. She was still reeling from her experience with the peep hole, and she needed some morality to center her and recall all of her qualms. If he would just live up to his reputation, it would enliven her commitment to save him, against all odds.

But it didn't seem she'd have such luck.

She found him talking to a street worker when she arrived, and the look on his face as he shooed her away made it clear which of them he'd rather talk to. But his woman left him, and Victoria approached, a stern and annoyed look on her face.

"We need to talk. Now."

"We needed to talk an hour ago and that delay hasn't ended the world."

"It may yet" she warned him. "Not in the carriage. We shouldn't hurry from London."

"Shouldn't hurry? I intend to see my father at the earliest convenience. We'll have the two of you annulled when I'm done with it."

Victoria gritted her teeth and began to walk down an alley, looking back in hopes he'd follow.

"Your father is already annulled" she muttered to herself, looking back to see him reluctantly follow.

"I'm sure your tour of Europe has left with rather inflated views of your own freedom, but I can assure you that you have none here. I am the present man of your household, and I will not be led about by some shrill tramp such as yourself."

“You’re not making this easy, but I am trying to help you” she whispered, looking about in fear of interlopers.

He looked down for her for a moment, her own eyes reflected in the lens of his dark spectacles. “You wish to talk in private? Fine. My family retains an apartment in the city. If we are not to hurry back, let’s hurry there.”

He took her by the arm and led her along, which she allowed as long as they were getting away. A private apartment would be safe enough from prying eyes and secret ears. And it was close to the place where his carriage had planned to depart. Before she knew it, she was entering its darkened foyer.

It didn’t seem that the place got much use, but that only helped her hopes of true solitude.

“Now, regardless of your coarse morals, you have made a name for yourself as a great man. A capable man, with means of his own and a good head on his shoulders.”

“Yet here I am with you” he scoffed, placing his coat on the rack.

“And so you are. I am here to warn you. I feel as though I am a child in a world I don’t understand. And trying to fight it would be like charging an army all alone. I need your help.”

“You know, I asked after you when I heard. They said you weren’t like other women. But yet the overblown dramatics come all the same.”

“I am not talking about the marriage! There are sinister forces at work here!”

He looked her over as if for the first time, his eyes lingering far longer than she would have liked. “Obviously. Your father. You. But it’s not too late. Tell me...has the marriage been consummated?”

She furrowed her brow. "Your priorities are in entirely the wrong place."

"No. If you're unblemished, we may still give you back. Or..."

He grinned, his eyes once more roving all of her that was not her face.

"We could make alternative arrangements."

She growled at him.

"Are you so thick and ugly that you cannot listen to me? Hasn't any of this struck you as odd? Anything at all? The swiftness of it, the unexpected match, the fact that your father had seemed content to be alone?"

He took a moment to consider and nodded. "Yes. It has felt increasingly odd. And there is one fact that has pestered me more than most" he offered, slowly making his way to her.

He reached out and kissed her.

"Why weren't you given to me?"

Victoria had been taken aback, completely and utterly shocked despite all the craven nature he had displayed. She pushed off but he held her tight, arms around her as he went in for another.

She struck his head with hers and tried to pull back.

"No, no you don't!" he growled, taking her by the arm as he reached down to her dress. The grip around her wrist was like iron, and her dress tore with little effort.

"Let go of me!" she shouted, scratching at his cheek with her nails. But before she had managed to pull herself away, the back of his hand sent her to the floor.

She tried to scurry away when a foot on the hem of her dress stopped her.

"What's wrong, *Mother*?" he hissed.

She tried to stand by her dress was a mess of pinned down and tattered fabric, and as she stumbled to her feet, he grabbed her by the neck.

His hand pressed her to a wall as she flailed and struggled.

“I ought to teach you, so you’re a good wife for my father. First lesson. No one will believe you over me. *No one*” he promised, going for a kiss at her neck as his free hand explored her chest.

She fought, struggled, fumbled...

And then, she found it.

SMASH!!!

The vase shattered in her hand as it struck the side of his face, breaking his glasses and sending him tumbling to the floor. She ran as fast as she could, and he hesitated in following her. She couldn’t believe that she’d managed an escape when she found a bathroom and locked herself inside.

Panting, she finally felt the weight of the assault fall upon her. She needed her wits about her during the attack but now...now she could feel all the terror and fear wash about her. She could realize what she had just managed to avoid. Tears fell down her face as she struggled to breathe.

BANG!!!

She recoiled from the locked door as it shuttered.

“Come out, Victoria. You have been bought!”

BANG!!!

“You have been sold!”

BANG!!!

“You are ours now. You belong to this family and the men in it! You will serve us! You will live for us! You are not Victoria anymore. You are our bride!”

BANG!!! BANG!!! BANG!!!

The wood splintered. The door shuddered on its hinges. He was going to break it down and then-

BANG!!!

Then all went silent. The last crack she’d heard had not been like the others. The smell of smoke moved through gaps in the door as she heard John stammer.

“My hands are up! My hands are-”

Then, with a loud thud, his body fell to the floor.

“He’s knocked out, dear” said Petunia from the other side. “You can open the door.”

Victoria hesitated, realizing just how shellshocked she was as she saw her trembling hand extend towards the lock. And then, it opened the door to reveal John on the floor. Above him stood Petunia, with a revolver in one hand and a nightstick in the other.

“This house fell under The Countess’s control along with the rest of the estate. I have the key. Now...”

Captain Mundt walked into the room, grabbing John and roughly slinging him over his own burly shoulder.

“I was a bit worried. Your first assignment, and all...”

But as she quipped, Victoria looked up to her with red eyes. The Madam immediately softened, and crouched down her side, putting a hand on her shoulder and then pulling her into a hug.

“It’s fine. You’re fine. You’re safe. We’re here...”

She cooed and comforted her until the carriage was loaded and John was long gone. Victoria had no idea how long she sat there, but soon enough she had recovered enough to think. All her qualms, all her courage, and she’d been willing to risk, all for him...

“We should get you back to the manor.”

Victoria nodded, following her in a daze as they went to another room and found a new dress for her, and then found another carriage outside.

The long journey back to the manor left Victoria with plenty of time to think. Feelings calcified inside her. Fear turned to anger and anger turned to hate. She tried to think of any alternative to what she was being drawn towards, but there were none that she could conjure. Besides, at some point she realized that she wasn’t really trying. She wanted what was coming. No more clever ploys or trying to think of her way out of it. The perfect path was the one before her. If it hadn’t been waiting for her, she might have invented it herself.

“Victoria, I am so sorry at what happened to you-” began The Countess.

“Where is he?”

The Countess made her way, guiding her on without further need for conversation.

He was waiting in what had once been his bedroom, bound in an X position with chains holding his arms up and his feet down. They'd taken the liberty of shaving him bare in the time he was here, and he was blindfolded and gagged.

"He's yours, of course. I wouldn't dream of selling him off to another after what you've been through. And-"

"How long?" asked Victoria, her curt and rageful words cutting through The Countess's speech.

"How long?" she asked.

"Until he's finished. Like his father. I never want to see him again. Not until he's like the others" mused Victoria, looking at his male form, the form that had abused her so. No, that would have to go. She could only face him once he was stripped of it.

"A few months. A year for full results. What would you like to request? His fate is yours to choose. A cage, a belt, a knife?"

"I'll decide later. I'm going to think long and hard about it" promised Victoria. "I'll give you a full list. But until then..."

She took a step forward.

The Countess watched as Victoria looked down to her feet, as if not trusting them to approach this evil man. Even bound, she was frightened of him. Yet she took one step after another, moving closer and closer until she stood right before the bound man.

Slowly, she leaned in to whisper.

"I was trying to warn you. To save you, and myself. But you were right. That would have been my lot in your world. But we're not in your world anymore. We're in mine. You belong to me. Like a little toy. They're going to break you. I tried to help. You

could have avoided this. I tried. So I want you to remember, throughout all of this, for the rest of your miserable life...”

She let out a cruel laugh.

“This was your fault.”

With that she stormed out of the room, leaving The Countess there with a satisfied smile. It was always a good day when she acquired a new sissy. Even so far into her endeavor, with an empire of slaves, she cherished the suffering of each one.

But gaining someone like Victoria? That was too rare. And today she had gained two in her service. It would take months to get John ready for Victoria, and just as much time to get Victoria ready for him. But under her wing, they’d both bloom soon enough.

“Felicity” she called, watching as the buxom redhead bounced into the room.

“Yes, Countess?”

“Your son is finally home” she said, gesturing to the chained man in the middle of the room.

Felicity looked at him, but said nothing.

“I just wanted to call you in and tell you that if Victoria decides to castrate him, you’ll be the one holding the scissors. Understood?”

“Yes, Countess” said Felicity, maintaining her bright smile.

“Very good. Poetic, I think. Ending your own line...” smiled The Countess as she patted her on the head.

“And as you end your line...” mused the Countess as she walked to the window, watching Victoria from afar. “I will secure mine.”