To Love in Brocket Hall

by Palacios_Modernos

Summary

This story was inspired by the Victoria series, of the English channel ITV, whose first season premiered in Portugal in 2017, in 8 episodes in RTP1, and in the book by Daisy Goodwin, with the same title, published in 2016, by Review. In some points it uses some of Daisy Goodwin's phrases.

My starting point was to answer, in a fictional way, the question: what could have happened if Queen Victoria of England had not asked Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gota in marriage?

Based on the mutually profound relationship she had with his prime minister - William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne - what dynamic could have been established between them from that moment?

The text I publish here begin at the end of episode 4 of the series and on page 454 of the book and presents one of several possible fictional answers to this question.

Notes

I'm portuguese. This text was translated for English. I thank the help of a person who did the translation review of the first chapter. From the second chapter the text is translated by a professional translator.

This story also has a Portuguese version published in AO3.

Now you have a new Vicbourne group on Facebook: "Vicbourne - Queen Victoria and Lord Melbourne". Join us!
See the end of the work for more notes.
October 15, 1839 (Tuesday)

[...]

Night fell.

He was walking down the gallery, illuminated by dozens of candles, to meet the Queen.

She was near the fireplace - in her light pink dress and with her hair decorated with gardenias - and she was looking at the burning fire.

When he cast his eyes upon her, his heart leapt into his chest and he thought: how beautiful she looks!
Victoria turned and looked him in the eyes.

- They said you'd like to see me... Ma'am.

- Lord M...

She hesitated a few seconds and then, as she walked toward him, looking worried about how he would react, she continued:

- I was not able! Now they will all scold me, maybe even you will disagree, Lord M, but I could not say something I did not feel.

She stared at him, expecting a reaction.

He stayed a little worried about what he was going to hear next, but he felt she was looking for his support for the choice she had made, whatever it was.

He noticed that the gardenias she wore could not be his.

- What happened, Ma'am? He asked in the soft, low tone he always used to speak to her.

- I was not able to ask Albert to marry me! I dressed this way for that, but I was not able to call him to my presence.

Here was the justification for the gardenias not to be his!

She was continuing:

- He's leaving tomorrow! I could not marry an arrogant man who treats me like I'm a girl and does not respect me by calling into question my own way of governing and even my relationship with you. He and I do not suit, Lord M!

William Lamb, in the deepest part of himself, felt a secret relief from the words he had just heard. She was not going to marry that German clockwork! For a while she would continue being just his. At least the way she had been until now, in the relation of friendship that they were maintaining, in the time they were spending together, in the daily conversations of endless hours.

He concentrated. It was necessary to say what would be most appropriate for the situation: maintain his position that she should marry and, at the same time, make her feel that she had done no wrong, so that he could dispel the concern she felt.

- I understand, Ma'am. I think you should propose marriage to someone only when you feel that that is the right choice. Anyway, other suitors will emerge. - He said.

- Thank you, Lord M! - Victoria thanked him, smiling at him tenderly. - I'm more rested because I know I have your support.

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The next day Albert and his brother Ernst were preparing to leave for Coburg. Victoria came to say farewell to them outside the palace, next to the carriage that would take them.

- Goodbye Albert, I'm sorry you came so far without getting any results. But I believe you understand my position. We do not have much in common. - Said the Queen.

- Do not worry. I understand. Goodbye, Victoria. - Albert answered dryly, with the air of someone
who feels himself despised, and got into the carriage.

King Leopold and the Duchess of Kent were accompanying Victoria in farewell. When they returned to the interior of the palace, Leopold walked beside Victoria, rebuking her for what she had not done:

- It's unbelievable, Victoria, when everything seemed so well advanced, that you didn't request Albert in marriage! The best suitor you could have! How could you, after he had come here with the best of intentions, decide to send him away like this?

Victoria felt pressured and invaded in the intimacy of her feelings. She wasn't going to admit that interference in her life, and it would be good if she took a firm stance on this matter if she did not want it to become a daily pressure. She stopped in the gallery, looked at uncle Leopold and her mother, and said decisively:

- I am the Queen of England, and I decide whether or not to marry, when and with whom! As of today, I will not allow anyone to speak on this subject again in my presence. When I think it's time to get married, I'll let you know!

And she continued to hurry down the gallery, almost running, leaving Leopold and the duchess standing in the hallway looking at each other while Leopold continued to speak:

- When, you can even decide, with whom, it will be more difficult!

Victoria entered the bedroom and closed the door. She wanted to be alone and she wanted to cry. The pressure of the last days had been intense. It had been doubly terrible, being forced to marry someone she did not love, and worse than that, when she loved hopelessly someone she could not have. She had felt almost as if she were being condemned to a death sentence, waiting for the final moment, until the sentence had been commuted, and then by her herself, by being able to withstand the pressure and not ask Albert to marry her. She remembered how thwarted she had felt when she had combed and dressed to make the request that everyone had longed for, but she did not want to do. She threw herself onto the bed and began to cry, softly, so that no one would hear. Dash jumped up onto the bed and came to lick her face. She grabbed the dog and lay on her back, looking at the curtains of the canopy.

If William corresponded to what I feel for him…- She thought.

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In the scullery, the bets of the servants, on whom the queen would marry, were all without effect. She was not going to marry the Russian, on whom the dresser Jenkins had wagered; nor with the English, the bet of the butler Penge; nor with the German on whom the cook Francatelli had bet. Since Skerrett had not bet on anyone, it did not affect her. She just thought that the only person the Queen really liked was Lord Melbourne!

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That morning, Victoria, already tranquil, put on her light blue dress, brought by Mrs. Jenkins, asked the dresser Skerrett to put flowers in her hair, to match, and ordered Melbourne to be summoned.

Anticipation! It was the name of this waiting time when she knew he was coming in at any moment. It was distressing and wonderful at the same time! She was anxious for him to arrive quickly, but, at the same time, this time of waiting was filled with the pleasure of anticipation. The
expectation was delicious; it caused a boiling inside her!

He arrived and hurried to the presence of the Queen, who was waiting in the piano room, near three large windows through which the morning light was entering.

- Forgive me for being late, Ma'am. We do not usually meet so soon. - He said as he walked across the room to her, knelt down, and kissed her hand.

He was going to take her hand as he had done so many times. It was a simple gesture that had become commonplace. But it was the only way she could have daily physical contact with him. However, it was so fast, so fleeting... Yet, she always was striving to measure, in those seconds, whether he had held her hand for a longer time, or if the intensity or duration of the touch of the lips had been greater... Afterwards, in the evening she would record the impressions of this morning in her diary.

She was near one of the windows and Melbourne noticed how the light crept over the right side of her face making it even more beautiful.

- Lord M, yesterday I made a very important decision. - Said the Queen.

- Yes, Ma'am…? - He asked, at the same time that he felt a slight shudder inside and hoped to know what she would say next. He had already been confronted with her unpredictability, which favored her to appear unexpectedly or to have her call urgently to communicate information that normally required his ability to disguise his own feelings.

- I'm not getting married! - Victoria affirmed in a very peremptory way.

- No? - Melbourne asked in surprise. Although they both had already talked over this option, he wanted to believe that his power of persuasion had convinced her that she should marry. Although he already knew that she was not going to do it with Albert, he thought that, in time, another opportunity would come to her.

- No, I'm going to live alone for the rest of my life. After all, as you yourself told me, not all Queens marry. - She continued.

- But we had already considered that the best for you, Ma'am, was to have someone by your side … - He still tried to argue.

- Let's not go back to that conversation, Lord M! - She interrupted as she moved a little to the right side of him.

- It's worn out and it does not convince me. - She finished.

- Sorry, Ma'am! - Melbourne exclaimed as he turned to the right, toward her.

- But your mother and your uncle already know that? - He asked.

- No! And I am counting on you not to tell them. – Victoria stated.

- For me, Ma'am, you can rest assured. But they will not give up on that idea.

-They will, yes, for now. I told them I needed time and that when I am ready to get married I’ll communicate that desire. Until then, I’ve put the subject on hold. Actually, however, deep down I have no intention of ever marrying.
- I see. - Concluded Melbourne.

Then she remembered something else and to change the subject said:

- Ah, Lord M... I have a request for a marriage permit to be dispatched from your foreign secretary of state, Viscount Palmerston ... I believe the bride, Lady Emily Lamb, is your sister, correct?

- Oh, yes, Ma'am.

- And what shall I do? Do you think I can authorize it?

- I think so. I and my brother Frederick have not looked kindly on this relationship because they were ... lovers ... But now she's been a widow, ever since Lord Cowper died, in 1837. In principle Palmerston is not the best choice because he's been a womanizer ... Frederick isn't favorable to marriage too, but I... My brothers and I have a close relationship even if they did not have a good relationship with my wife. The reasons were obvious...

- Very well, it will be granted.

In the face of such a firm attitude that she did not want to get married, Melbourne did not have the courage to remind her again that he could not be her Prime Minister forever. She did not want to hear him say it. But now she was putting him in an even more difficult position. He would not be able to stop giving advice to her, which he had hoped a husband would do. Furthermore, this would require the continuity of the daily relationship which, although extraordinarily pleasant, was a risk that he was running ...

Her youth and freshness enchanted him. He liked this position of confidant and advisor to her, to know that he was the person closest to Victoria. Besides, this placement was making it possible for him to know what she thought and what she felt. He hoped that this advantage would allow him to avoid things ever going out of control.

No relationship could be more fascinating than the one he had with the Queen. Probably no other man before him had filled the place he occupied in the life of a girl/ woman with whom he had no blood ties and to whom he was not bound by marriage, but who was at the same time his Queen, his pupil, his friend ... And who could be his daughter or ... his wife ...

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Leopold considered he wasn't doing anything in England; his mission to marry his nephew Albert with Victoria had failed. It was best to go back to Belgium.

He went to say goodbye to Victoria who was sitting at the piano, pretending to be busy with something that gave her an excuse not to look at him.

- Victoria, my dear, it is time for my departure. You will not go outside and say goodbye to me?

- I'm very busy, you see ... but I wish you a good trip. - She answered dryly.

- Thank you. I wish you luck in your mission to govern England alone, even if this condition can not be dragged for a long time... I will be attentive to your reign and the possible choices of a consort...

The king left, and Victoria sighed and closed the piano!
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

This chapter took awhile to get published due to the need for translation. But from now on I hope to be able to publish a chapter every week.

It was then November.

In the afternoon, the Queen and the Prime Minister went riding together in Hyde Park.

Victoria was riding a white horse and Melbourne, on a brown horse, rode by her right side. They were followed in the distance by a groom and by one of the equerries, Lord Alfred Paget.

- It's been so long since we last rode together, Lord M!

- Ever since Prince Albert arrived to England, you had no time for that, Ma'am…

- We used to ride together every day! I missed our rides so much. The things that give me most pleasure in life are dancing until dawn, see the sun rise over the Thames, ride a horse and have your company… Now that the Albert nightmare is gone, this was just what I needed most, to relax.

Victoria smiled.

Melbourne returned.

The Queen continued to speak:

- When I was in Kensington, my time was strictly occupied: lessons from 9:30 to 12:30, break until 1 p.m., lunch, return to classes from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Galloping was then a good way to escape the suffocating atmosphere of the Kensington system.

- But now you can manage your own life – he observed.

- It was the best thing the throne brought me: freedom! I became independent and I'm happy about it! I can do everything I want, when I want. And that does not mean neglecting my obligations, as you know.

- Obviously not, Ma'am.

- It is neither the splendor of the situation nor the fact that I am a Queen that makes me so happy; it is the extremely pleasant life I lead that gives me peace and happiness. And your help was essential to this achievement, Lord M.

He smiled.

- Now I still have schedules and much to do, but I govern myself and I love my work!

The war with China had been lately an eminent topic of the talks between the Queen and the Prime Minister. Britain called for free trade, especially the opening of the opium trade, while the Imperial Chinese government, of the Qing Dynasty, tried to forbid it. Melbourne was now talking about the
launch of the first British iron warship, Nemesis, which had occurred that month, and how it would have a major impact on the actions of the British forces against the Chinese forces.

However, Victoria turned off the subject because another concerned her.

- The "marriage topic" will be addressed in the Privy Council next month. – said the Queen with some concern.

Melbourne noticed the way she referred to the subject. She had said the "marriage topic", and not the "topic of my marriage", as if it did not concern her, as if it was not her own destiny being played.

- Indeed... You know, your uncle and your mother may be giving you some time, Ma'am, but the Privy Council is not so condescending.

Victoria sighed in annoyance.

- Just now we were speaking of my conquest of freedom... Do you think I want to lose it again? Now that I have finally experienced what it is, do you think I want to marry a man whom I hardly know and who will try to control my life?

Melbourne still replied:

- You don't know if it is going to be like that.

However, frank as he was, he added:

- But it's likely to be so...

- Yesterday I was observing the genealogy of my family and do you know what I have noticed, again?

- What, Ma'am?

- That if Princess Charlotte had not passed away, or at least her unborn child, I would not be Queen of England today... but then I could marry more freely with whomever I wished...

She left the statement in the air.

When she had begun to speak, Melbourne realized at once the deduction she had made: had fate have a simple slight change, she would not be the Queen, and therefore she would be freer to marry someone she desired. The imposition of marriage was becoming a burden in her condition as a monarch. He also realized that the last part of her sentence was a provocation, that she referred to him...

- Facts are still facts, life is what it is, and it cannot be changed. If it was possible, I would also change many things in my life...

She deduced that he meant his failed marriage, the illness and death of his wife, the illness and death of his son...

He talked about that and the relationship he had with her, like how good it would have been for him to have known her in another condition, and how that should have happened when he was a few decades younger...

- I only state facts, Lord M ... I believe it to be God's will that I am Queen and, as you know, I take
my condition very seriously and try to do my best. I, a woman, the only daughter of the fifth son of a monarch... But a slight modification would have sufficed for everything to be different, with profound implications in my life.

- I understand, Ma'am.

- Do you know how I reacted when I first heard I was going to be Queen?

He waited for her to answer.

- I cried a lot when I knew the truth! Lehzen secretly put my family tree between the pages of my History book. When I examined it, I was astonished to find that I was second in line to the throne. Until that day I had never known that this was my destiny. No one had ever told me.

- So that means that this information had more impact in your life than you told me when we first met...

- I was frightened, I wondered if I was capable, if I could live up to this job, I felt imprisoned in a condition of life that I had not asked for and could not escape from. The crowds always scared me and I would have to deal with them...

- Nowadays you do that very well, Ma'am.

- It was you who taught me to deal with this obligation. And what they see from the outside does not express what I really feel inside... But what I wanted to stress is that any external event can change everything in one's life.

- But if Princess Charlotte had not died, we would not even have met.

The observation came to him spontaneously, because it was what he thought at the moment and because he felt the weight of this eventual circumstance of destiny.

She realized that he was lamenting if that had not happened and looked immediately at Melbourne. She had not thought of that! Yes, if she had not been a Queen, she wouldn’t have met the Prime Minister. She would not even live in England to where she had been carried inside the Duchess of Kent's womb, seven months pregnant. She would probably live in Germany.

- You are quite right, Lord M! In that case, even if it were just to meet you, it's worth being the Queen of England...

He smiled.

- I am flattered, Ma'am, and I must say that I also have not enjoyed serving another crowned head more than I enjoy serving yours!

They both smiled.

-Lord M, I need to get off the horse, I want to walk, can you help me? - She asked sympathetically.

He dismounted, circled around the front of her horse and came to help her down from the left side of her mount.

Victoria slid down and Melbourne put a hand on either side of her body, under her arms, just to sustain her. When she hit the ground he thought she was already stable, but she lost her balance slightly and her body was projected forwards bumping gently against his body. They looked at
each other for seconds. Then she pulled away naturally, as if nothing had happened, while she grabbed the reins in front of her horse and was saying:

- Thank you, Lord M.

Melbourne returned to his horse and took the reins.

Then they began to walk side by side, in the middle of the horses, and leading them pulled by the reins.

- I hope that in the twentieth or twenty-first century, who knows, the heir to the throne of England may marry whoever he pleases, no matter his social status, his functions, his past... - observed the Queen.

Melbourne thought it interesting that she projected that idea for the future. He also realized that she was talking about him again.

Whoever saw them walking side by side, pulling the horses, talking and laughing - and did not know that they were the Queen and the Prime Minister - would say they were engaged!

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The Privy Council was assembled in the throne room. Victoria came in, dressed in gray, accompanied by the Prime Minister who stood in a convenient spot as she continued to walk to the throne and sat down.

As soon as he was able to speak, the Duke of Wellington expressed his concern for the fact that the Queen had refused the suitor Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

- Your Grace, I understand your concern, but you will not tell me that you approved of my marriage to Prince Albert ... - Replied the Queen.

- Well, Ma'am, we were willing to consider the prince's conditions for an eventual marriage.

- Albert was a German prince, eventually Catholic, of a tiny dukedom, a minor, poor and mediocre state, not much larger than a British county. A realm of operetta, which has no more than 150,000 inhabitants, while London is inhabited by 2,000,000 people! I am the Queen of England! I am looking for a husband who matches my requirements.

Melbourne thought that if Wellington was a prodigious military strategist, Victoria was becoming a good political strategist. The arguments she used to justify the refusal were, precisely, aspects she knew Wellington would not approve.

- Indeed, Ma'am... But your Majesty is considering other suitors? The fact is that as far as we are aware, there are no other names being considered.

- No, honorable Duke, at this moment there are no other names to consider.

- But it is our duty to advise you that you must find other possibilities, for a marriage is highly desirable...

- I know! I do not need you to remind me of my duties. I just said that I refused Albert and that there are no other names in prospect at the moment...

She hoped to put a hold on the subject for some time by adding "at the moment."
- Majesty, a woman alone on the throne... It is not an easy task...

- Honorable duke, have I not been able to rule this Empire on my own so far?

She remembered the indispensable help of Lord M, but she could not admit it before the Privy Council, which would be counterproductive.

- Well it will continue to be so until I decide the moment has come for me to be married. Besides, as you can see, I am still very young, therefore I still have a long time to think of marriage. This matter is closed! Next? – she concluded.

Melbourne remembered the first Privy Council that Victoria had presided on the proclamation day. How nervous and frightened she was, and he had encouraged her to speak only with a slight movement of her eyebrows. Almost a child, alone for the first time in an assembly of men! The majesty of her presence and the modesty of her behavior! He remembered that he had placed himself behind her whispering the names of the Council members. And then, from the moment she told him that she wanted to be only called Victoria, when he uttered that name for the first time, and how he had been so proud to see her dignifiedly waving from the balcony. How things had changed since then! How she now got around to solving the issues, no longer needing to look at him. And how their mutual feelings had progressed to a state which, if it were not the absolute impediment of its realization, would be called of grace! For can a man desire more than to be loved by the woman he loves?

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Victoria returned to her quarters accompanied by Melbourne. Once alone with him in the corridor she began to unburden:

- Why does my marriage have to be discussed in the Privy Council?

- That's the rule, Ma'am...

- I know! But I did not want to have to submit to this! If it were a man, the pressure would not be so great!

- It would exist even so, given the necessity to generate an heir... But yes, perhaps it would be smaller...

They entered the green room. Victoria removed the band with the Order of the Garter and threw it indignantly over a settee.

- Why is it that a group of men who do not know me have the right to give their opinion about when and with whom I should marry? It is my life, my future...! If I marry now and die at the age of 80, I will live 60 years with a man for whom I have no affinity? For them it is only a State matter and a question of securing succession, for me it is my own life, which should exist beyond my condition of Queen, but which no one considers... Lord M, do you think I can be a better Queen single, but free, or married and imprisoned to a man for whom I have no feelings?

The Queen stared at him waiting for an answer.

Melbourne opened his mouth and hesitated, not sure what to answer...

- Well, Ma'am... There are many questions... But even marrying for reasons of State does not totally exclude a mutual feeling involved. It depends on the person. At this moment there are no prospects, but you do not know if when this prospect appears, it could be someone that you truly
cared for...

She sighed looking at him as if she had not gotten a convincing or clear answer.

Could he not simply drop that position of what was according to protocol, to the sense of duty, to self-sacrifice, and grasp her by the waist wrapping her in his arms? - Victoria thought. - How she needed his hands to hold her now! She should organize a ball. A ball was a good excuse to have, at least, one of his hands on her waist...

- We will continue to wait, then, for this prospect to convince me... - She ended up saying.

In fact, Melbourne felt himself in a very complicated situation and there was no end in sight. He had the Queen without a possible marriage on the horizon, which would become a political problem; she was not interested in marrying anyone because she was in love with him; and he loved her too, but he could not afford to reciprocate that feeling. To make matters worse, he was with Victoria on a daily basis and still had to serve as her counselor on the subject of marriage. It was starting to become unsustainable to maintain this supposed friendship with the Queen...
During that morning’s meeting, Lord Melbourne said to the Queen:

“I must inform you, Ma’am, that John Frost, Zephaniah Williams, and William Jones, the leaders of the Chartist movement, were yesterday found guilty of treason and sentenced to death, so you can now exercise your right to commute the penalty and, instead of death, condemn them to deportation as you wish.

"I will do so, Lord M!"

After a while the Queen said:

“Lord M, two weeks from now, I wish to go to Windsor to spend a few days, and I would like you to come with me so we do not interrupt our meetings.”

It was a common procedure for the monarch to travel to another residence and receive there his ministers and deal with State matters.

“To Windsor, Ma’am? I thought you didn’t enjoy going there much...”

“And I didn’t enjoy it, but after I got to know the place better I came to find it interesting to free myself from Buckingham. The experience there with Albert was not pleasant either, but now only with my ladies and with you it’s completely different. Don’t you know that much of what we feel about places depends on who are the people with whom we share them with?"

“Yes, Ma’am, I know...”

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In Windsor Castle Victoria felt freer. She was far from London society and didn’t bring her mother. For her company she had only Duchess Harriet Sutherland, her Mistress of the Robes, and Baroness Emma Portman, Lady of the Bedchamber, with whom she had an excellent relationship. Alfred Paget, one of the equerries, went as well. She had brought Skerrett the dresser to help her get dressed and combed. And she had summoned Melbourne, who travelled there alone in a carriage. Besides the need to have him around to solve political matters that demanded daily attention, just as if she was in Buckingham, it was obvious that her great need for him was only for his charming presence!

Victoria was absolutely sure that she loved that man, and that he was the only thing she wanted in life. She had a deep knowledge of herself and her own feelings. She had lived alone for many years, by herself, with no other people her own age to share activities with, and this had favored introspection which, in turn, allowed self-knowledge. For fear of being mocked or reprimanded, she had learned from an early age to shut up and hide her feelings, but she knew very well what she felt and what she wanted. The affinity with him was something she had never found with anyone else. And their complementarity was inexplicable. He knew what she thought and what she felt without her having to tell him. During a conversation she already knew what he would say next, even before he uttered the words.

While he did not arrive Victoria could not think of anything else but him and could barely breathe.
“Lord M, I'm so glad you're here! I have a surprise for you!” she said, receiving him in her living room and grabbing his hands.

“A surprise? For me?”

“What can it be now?” Melbourne asked himself.

“Come with me!”

He followed her along the corridors as she led him to the State Apartments wing.

She stopped in front of a door, looked at him and smiled.

She opened the door.

She entered followed by him and said:

“Here is the surprise: a chamber in Windsor just for you!”

“A chamber for me?” He asked bewildered.

“Yes, you are not just any guest! Here's a part of the castle just for you. A living room, an office, a bedroom... You can bring here everything you want and you can use this space whenever you want, whether I'm in the castle or not. It's yours! No one else will use these chambers!”

Melbourne opened his mouth, not knowing what to say.

“Well, Ma'am, I can only thank you! I was not expecting this.”

“You do not need to thank me! You deserve everything! In fact, you can thank me... You know how? By coming here very often, whenever I'm here...”

When he was alone in the quarters that the Queen had assigned to him, Melbourne had not yet recovered from the surprise. Then the curious idea that it seemed that she had set up a space to have him as a lover passed through his mind... Had she thought of that?

Before dinner the Queen entered the hall. Splendid, as always! With a green very low-cut dress, and a tiara on her head.

She went to Melbourne with shining eyes, as happy as if she had not yet seen him, and grabbed his hands:

“I’m so glad you came Lord M!”

He slightly lowered his head bowing, and saw her skin exposed by the wide neckline of her dress. She was beautiful! And she must be so soft... That chest, those shoulders and that bare neck that moved under his eyes every day! That tempted him every moment he was in her company! He wanted to kiss every inch of that skin! But she was not for him...

He forced himself to turn his gaze and his thought to her face.

“It's a pleasure, Ma’am!”

She gazed at him in the dark-blue, gold-embroidered Windsor uniform that rested beautifully on his body and made the green of his eyes shine even more brightly in the candlelight!
Then she let go of his hands slowly, trying to keep them in hers as long as possible, and walked away to the ladies in the hall.

He felt himself grow every time she paid him special attention, whenever she preferred him to the others present in a room, which she always did, unless she couldn’t. He could not help but feel extremely comforted by the way she treated him, and proud to know that he was the person she most cherished, but where would that lead them?

At the daily dinners in Buckingham at 7 p.m., the most prominent guest sat to the Queen's right. Melbourne was invariably to the left. That night, at dinner, the Queen asked him to sit at her right side. Now there was only her and him, Emma, Harriet, and Alfred, so the prominent spot was his, for his position as Prime Minister, yes, but mostly for the place he occupied in her heart.

They were not alone, but all through dinner Victoria barely remembered that there were more people at the table. Her eyes were always on Lord M, the questions and answers were all for Lord M, she watched every gesture of his as if there was always a novelty in each one. She tried to memorize the roll of expressions on his face to repeat them mentally when she was alone in her bed before sleep. She would write about that in her journal... The habit of writing a journal had begun in 1832, when she was 13 and her mother had given her a leather-bound notebook to write the impressions of her trip to Wales every night. At least this was a gesture from the Duchess of Kent that Victoria had appreciated. Her mother could not imagine the importance that this offer had for her as a means of deliverance at that time, and how the recording of events in her life would become a habit.

Being with him at night was always more stimulating. The effect of seduction he had on her was keener at night. The darkness, the light of the candles, the effect of the wines and the liquors made the senses more awake, and her desire for him increased.

She did not know, but for him the nights in her presence had the same effect.

After dinner they retired again to the hall to play Piquet.

The Queen played with the Prime Minister and even those who were around didn’t expect any different. To be with him anywhere was always wonderful. Talk to him about any subject was an immense satisfaction. But the pain and anguish at the fact that he did not reciprocate her feelings was always there and it was becoming more and more poignant.

“Did you know that Piquet is a game that already existed in the sixteenth century?” He asked.

“I did not know! You always know everything, Lord M!” She answered.

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Melbourne couldn’t sleep! Not because the bed was not good, it was great, but because he could not stop thinking about her. The invitation to go to Windsor, the offer of those quarters, dinner, the evening... What would she be thinking? Was that just a kindness of the Queen, or the courtship of a woman in love? Was she planning on using those and other means in the hope that he would end up giving in? Now that there were no suitors in line and that she did not want to marry anyone, was she thinking that he...

He got up, put on his robe and decided to leave the room. He wanted to take a walk in the hallway, eventually gaze at the Thames's brightness far away from a window that would give him a different perspective from the one he had in his room, and then go back to sleep.
In the Private Apartments wing Victoria was not sleeping. She was thinking of Melbourne a few hundred yards from her room. To have that man under the same roof as her, though several feet away, infected her circulatory and respiratory systems... Everything in her accelerated! Every time she closed her eyes the only thing she saw was William in his Windsor uniform in front of her! She was a woman in love and that condition was killing her!

She got up, put on her robe, and decided to leave the room. Without anyone knowing she would go to the State Apartments wing, and then return again to her room. As if like this it were possible to hear his breathing while he slept...

Somewhere in the castle, a clock marked 1 a.m.

They walked in perpendicular corridors, illuminated by the light of the moon, which entered through the windows. The walkways made the steps of both inaudible. When they reached a corner, she coming from his right and he coming from her left, they met in the hallway! The first reaction was of scare. On the one hand, because of the unexpectedness of the encounter and, secondly, because the other person was precisely the one causing their insomnia!

“Lord M!”

“Ma’am!”

He noticed her dressed in a white nightgown with embroidery, bows and frills, with her hair down her shoulders... He thought that seeing her that way was not the most appropriate. But if there was nothing to do about it, he only had to act naturally.

“I think we have a tendency to see each other in disarray...” He teased to ease the embarrassment.

They both laughed remembering the Dover House episode.

Victoria would never forget how on that day he had laid a hand on her back in a gesture of extreme familiarity that had flustered her. How she had felt his fingers touching her body, his thumb over the skin and the other fingers through the fabric of her dress...

She looked at the part of his chest that was exposed in the opening of his nightgown. It was exhilarating to see him like this, and she loved that more intimate way of him presenting himself to her. What if it were possible to touch his chest? What would it feel like?

“Do not tell me that the quarters I have given you are not comfortable enough and that you cannot sleep!” She teased.

He laughed.

“Oh, no, they are great! I'm the one who’s not used to spending many hours in bed, maybe that's why...”

“Did you go to sleep late? Do you spend much of your night reading and writing?” She asked, genuinely interested in his life beyond her, the hours of his that she didn’t see.

He understood this.

“That too. But sometimes I do not even lie down; I end up sleeping seated on my armchair, in the library. It was there that I was in the morning they went to wake me up to inform me that your uncle had passed away and that we now had a Queen...
She smiled softly. She remembered the moment she had met him, a few hours after that for sure. She looked at the chairs along the corridor.

“Don’t you want to sit down?” She asked.

He shook his head affirmatively.

She sat in a chair by a window and he in another one next to her.

“I don’t think it is healthy for you not to sleep comfortably in your bed.” The Queen observed.

The care of a woman in love for the man she loves.

“I think you're right, Ma’am, but it is a habit I gained from the circumstances of my life over many years...”

“Was it very difficult?” She asked quietly and stopped.

She was stepping on sensitive ground for him. She was very curious to know things about his past, but he did not talk about it with her. They had only talked about this subject once while riding, but he had been evasive and had said that she might be too young to understand; And another time he had sat down with her on the piano to encourage her to appear in public after the scandal with Flora Hastings. The most she knew about his life had come from Emma Portman. But she wanted to hear it from him. She realized that there was an underlying pain in him, and she really wanted to help minimize it.

"Yes, it was very difficult.” He almost whispered.

She waited, gave him time for if he wanted to continue.

“When I first met Caro...”

He stopped.

She waited anxiously.

After a few seconds he continued:

“She was 17 years old. About the same age as you Ma’am, when we first met.”

It came to his memory as on the day of the first Privy Council Victoria presided, on the day of the proclamation, when looking at her, he remembered Caro.

“She was introduced to me in 1802, in a visit to Brocket Hall. It was my mother who arranged the marriage, but we were mutually captivated by each other. We married in 1805, she was 19 and I was 26. That was centuries ago...”

Victoria felt her chest tighten by the pain on his face.

He thought of the unusual situation he was in. In the middle of the night, in the middle of a corridor of the castle, alone talking to the Queen, both in their nightgowns... And about his private life, about which he had never spoken to anyone and that he shouldn’t discuss with her... That would increase even more the intimacy between them... But he needed to talk, and in that moment he felt so good talking about that with her that it was like a lenitive... Because it was with her. And with her he could talk. He allowed himself to undress his armor. Even if reason told him not to, emotions he didn’t control pushed him to speak...
He lowered his eyes and without looking directly at her, he talked:

“You know, at first we were a happy couple... But things started to get complicated when George Augustus was born in 1807. The delivery was difficult for Caroline and the recovery long, but more serious than that was that we came to realize that our son had serious mental problems. However, despite all the difficulties, and even if it was suggested that he should have been sent to an institution, we took care of him at home. Then in 1809 we had a premature daughter who died after 24 hours. Caroline suffered another long period of convalescence. Not only because of the childbirth, but also because of the grief for the baby's death. All these family difficulties greatly affected Caro's health. And, I must confess, my career ambitions, very consuming, also aggravated the distance between us as a couple.”

Victoria remembered what he had said at Brocket Hall when she had declared her love for him: “If I had just spent more time watching the rooks, my wife would have felt more attended to.”

He continued:

“In 1812 broke the scandal that Caroline was Byron's mistress. I was his friend. I had met him when I was attending Trinity College in Cambridge, where I majored in Law, when I entered a group of radical romantics where Lord Byron was included. That lasted only a few months! After Byron broke the relationship between them I took her, desolate, to Ireland. But the distance did not cool down Caroline's interest in Byron. They corresponded constantly. However, when she returned to London in 1813, Byron made it clear that he had no intention of restarting their relationship. He got tired of her rebellious, unstable temper. That only stimulated Caro's public attempts to reunite with her ex-lover even more. She was obsessed with him. In early July 1813, at a ball, when they saw each other for the first time since the end of their relationship and Byron publicly insulted her, she broke a glass of wine and tried to cut off her wrists. She was not seriously injured, largely because of my mother's prompt intervention, but her mental stability was called into question. It was a tremendous scandal and society began to avoid her.”

As he spoke, Victoria was pleased that he was making confidences about his personal life to her. She felt closer and closer to him, more intimately connected to him, and that was her great goal. Gain ground inside his life. Besides, this meant that he had a deep confidence in her and also that he now thought she could understand.

She watched his long eyelashes move as he blinked his eyes and continued to listen:

“My mother wanted me to divorce her, but I refused. Caro went on to reside permanently in Brocket Hall. I took care of her trying to calm her nerves and even helping her with her novels published in 1822 and 1823. In fact, it was only in 1825 that there was a formal separation because my political career could not allow the continuity of the scandal. She should have left Brocket Hall, but she begged me to allow her to stay, ensuring me that she would avoid London and any chance of embarrassing me again. I let her stay, and although I lived in London, I often visited her. Her mental instability became more pronounced in the last years, further aggravated by her alcohol and laudanum abuse. In 1827 she had dropsy and was already under the care of a full-time doctor. In mid-January of 1828, she asked for a letter to be sent to me, to account for her terminal condition. At that time she presumably said “Send it to William. He’s the only one who never failed me”. She died in Melbourne Hall on the 25th of January 1828, even though I had already taken her to London to be assisted by the best doctors. At the time I was chief secretary of Ireland and made a dangerous crossing, during which I thought I was going to die myself, to be by Caro's bedside when she passed away…”

His voice failed.
Victoria was deeply distressed by his pain and softened by his conduct to the woman who had betrayed him! Once she had told him that she did not understand how he could have received her back and he had said that she might be too young to understand. However, she had just understood.

“Now I understand why you took her back.” Victoria said.

He looked directly at her.

Victoria watched the glimmer of the moonlight streaming through the window reflected in his eyes. Maybe, too, brighter by the tears that surfaced and that he tried to contain.

“You realized that her life had been very hard after the birth of your son, that she was sick and emotionally unstable, that is, she was not really to blame for what she did... Besides, Byron was probably not faithful to her either…”

“No, what he did was betrayal not only to me, but also to her... He used her fragility and made it even more acute. He was the greatest cause of the aggravation of her illness. Psychiatrists named Caro's disease erotomania, that is, dementia caused by the obsession for a man.”

“And at that time the scandal on the papers was...devastating...”

“Yes, what came on the papers was humiliating...But even worse was when she published a novel, Glenarvon, in 1816, where she talked about our marriage and her relationship with Byron... But the worst was what I felt for their betrayal... And that was agonizing...”

“But it was extremely noble what you did for her after!”

“No matter how much she betrayed me and what that cost me, I loved her! In a way that made me forgive rather than despise her. I understood that she was sick and therefore needed my help more than my contempt. There was always a remaining pain, of course, but I forgave her. And I was her support until death.... After all, her death affected me much... I was the only one she had! I was very hurt at her funeral, but at the same time I felt a relief because her suffering was over and I had done everything I could. I felt a kind of impossibility to believe that I would never see her face again, nor hear her voice once more, a kind of feeling of desolation and loneliness in everything, when I forced myself to remember that she had really disappeared. Like I had never experienced before, nothing like it. For a while, what I saw returned to my memory on every occasion....”

His voice faltered again with emotion.

Victoria felt a crazy urge to hug him, to comfort him, to caress him at that moment. She had wanted so much to listen to what he had to tell her, and now there it was exposed to her what he had to tell! And it was not pretty at all! She almost regretted wanting to know, almost as if she had no right to get it from him, of almost forcing him to relive that. She would stay there holding him in the corridor until morning if that would take away his pain... But she could not hug him, much less there in the middle of the corridor. With her right hand she grasped his right hand, making him open his fingers, and with the thumb pressed the back of his hand in a circular motion. The veins protruding from the back of his hand... She tried with that gesture to convey the maximum comfort she could...

He looked at her hand and looked at her.

The hour and the place where they were, the diffused light favored the informality and allowed that intimacy, which he felt like a hot and vibrant energy that seemed to run from the veins of his body to his heart!
He did not try to take his hand away. He kept it on hers. He acted naturally.

“And your son?” She finally asked.

“George Augustus died in 1836, before we met. He was 29 years old, but the mental age of about 7. Everything was finished... There was no one left of my fragile household, I was alone...”

He looked at her and thought: “Until you!”

“But today you have me!” Exclaimed Victoria.

He nodded his head to try to better understand the meaning of what she said.

“It was you yourself who told me that since you got to know me your life gained another impulse, have you not?”

“Yes of course! Serving you was the most important thing that happened in my life and the greatest accomplishment I could have.”

Victoria smiled, glad to have helped lifting his spirit up again.

“Good, how good it is to hear that.” She said. “Then you're not alone, not as long as you have me, and I'll always be by your side!”

“Then I thank you for your generosity.”

She smiled. She was not being generous. What moved her was another feeling... But if he insisted on talking like that it was already good...

Then he went back on the conversation:

“As you see, the need to take care of my wife and my son at night, for long periods of time, made me lose the habit of spending many hours in bed and accustomed me to sleep a long time in armchairs...”

He refrained from saying that the fact of having no one in bed waiting for him for years also meant that there was no reason to go there...

“And you, Ma'am? In this wing at this hour? Could you not sleep either?”

She noticed that he went back to using the word "Ma'am" again, which he hadn’t used during all the time that he told her of his past with his wife. And this "Ma'am" here, now, had been like an awakening, it marked the cutting of a moment of intimacy, returning once again to formality.

She calmly let go of his hand, which she had kept in hers all that time.

“Aaaa... No, I could not... I decided to walk in the corridors and I got here... But now that we have talked for a little while, maybe now we can sleep, right?”

“I think so”. He agreed.

She got up and he did the same.

They looked at each other.

She desperately desired him to kiss her!
He desperately desired to be able to kiss her!

“So until morning Lord M.”

“Good night, Ma’am!”

They went back to their own rooms.

Victoria was still unable to sleep. Now it was the conversation they had in the corridor that would not let her sleep. How was it possible that this man carried such a life story? A good man, honest, kind, extremely clever, with an immense culture, many levels above the average of the men with whom she dealt with and... gorgeous! With each passing day, with every new thing he said or did, she loved him more and more! And that made the pain bigger and bigger!

In another wing of the castle William fell on the bed and fell asleep. He slept deeply and calmly, in a way that he had not slept in a long time!

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In the morning they gathered in the Queen's living room to deal with State matters. As he watched her speaking and writing at her desk in front of him, Melbourne thought that he was indeed dating her, he just didn’t want anyone to know that, especially her... Every day, every hour, every minute, every second in her presence were for him an opportunity to see her, to hear her, to feel her, to enjoy her presence as a rejuvenating balm... An endless courtship. Never consumed! But an endless love affair. He was looking at her sideways, leaning over the table. He looked at the curve of her neck, her ear, her chin, her little snub nose that he liked so much, the lips that opened slightly...

At the end of the afternoon they walked together outside the castle. Harriet Sutherland and Emma Portman followed behind, but at a distance that didn’t allow them to overhear what they were saying, which Emma was increasing, slowing the pace to give them more privacy...

“Do you see what I see?” Harriet asked, looking at the Queen and the Prime Minister in front of her.

“Yes Harriet, and I have seen this for a long time...” Emma replied.

“You think they…”

“I think they like each other too much, more than circumstances allow, but no, they do not have an unseemly relationship."

“That would be chaos…” Harriet observed, and continued:

“But it's a shame, because it's so beautiful to see them together! There is something between them that can’t be explained, but that is very strong... And he is such a handsome man!”

“And he deserved so much to be allowed to be happy!” Concluded Emma.

The Queen and the Prime Minister strolled along the North Terrace, on the direction East/West. He was at her right side. In the background some boats snaked on the Thames, and on the horizon the sunset was forming.

“How is your brother Frederick's relationship, since last year Baron Beauvale, with Lord Palmerston?” The Queen asked, showing interest in his family life.
“Well, since Palmerston's marriage to Emily they've been getting along. And the fact that Frederick is British ambassador to Vienna makes it that they have to write each other. My brother says that, despite everything, Palmerston treats him with courtesy and trusts him very much.”

Now in the light of day Melbourne felt a little embarrassed by what he had said the night before and by the growing intimacy between them. He thought that he should say something:

“Ma’am, I wanted to apologize for last night! I shouldn’t have said all those things about my private life to you... I should not be bothering you with my personal issues...”

Unthinkingly she grabbed his left forearm with her right hand and shook her head negatively.

Each time she touched him unexpectedly, he felt a start in his chest. He looked at his arm and then at her.

“No, you do not have to apologize, on the contrary! I will always be willing to listen to you, about anything... Are not we friends?”

“We are, we are friends! Thank you Ma’am!” He smiled.

Victoria looked up to the high walls of the castle.

“In fact, Windsor is monumental and dignifies England!”

“Tell that to the Parliament, Ma’am! Your uncle George IV persuaded the Parliament to approve 300,000 pounds for the reform of the complex, which began in 1824, but today that amount reaches the exorbitant sum of one million pounds!”

“You know there was nothing I could do about that, when I became Queen the works were almost finished.”

“I know. I'm just saying that this idea that Windsor is a symbol of the wealth and power of the United Kingdom, which was the aim of your uncle, might perhaps soften the Parliament’s idea about the wearing of the coffers because of this place...”

“The first time I was here I was seven years old. It was on the occasion of my uncle George's birthday. I really enjoyed those days of celebration and I was dazzled by the grandeur of the court. When I got back to Kensington everything seemed even darker to me... Deprived of parties, I was almost cloistered! I cried a lot because of that..."

Victoria stood by the terrace wall looking at the river and the sun.

Melbourne stopped by her side. He felt sadness over her past, but nothing occurred to him to tell her that could minimize her pain because of it. But he knew that his presence in her life had had a therapeutic effect on it, and that certainty made him very satisfied.

“It was Elisabeth who had the North Terrace built, did you know?” She asked.

“Yes I know.”

“What do you not know, right?” She laughed and he joined her.

Then after a few moments of silence and more circumspectly she asked:

“Have Elisabeth and Robert Dudley ever been here on this terrace, almost 300 years ago, watching the sunset?”
He turned his head to the left and looked down at her.

He realized that she was making a connection between that couple of the past and the two of them and working out a romantic idea! And Melbourne was a romantic! He raised his eyebrows, made an air of uncertainty and replied:

“Who knows…”

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Victoria, standing near a table with her back to the door, was watching a collection of drawings when Melbourne came in for the meeting that day.

“See how interesting this drawing is!” She said smiling, turning her head slightly when she felt him come in and speaking hastily, as if she wanted him to see the drawing urgently.

Melbourne got closer and stopped slightly behind her and at her right side. He thought he could grab her waist if he wanted to! To feel the flatness of her belly through the fabric! He could not do that!

She felt his smell! A sense of comfort and faintness swept over her. She had spent so many hours of her life with him in the same space that if she entered a closed room where he had been moments before, she could identify his scent. And that was the only thing left of him in her quarters at Buckingham every time he left...

He saw that she had in her hand an antique drawing where a Queen was transported in a litter, accompanied by men on foot and others on horseback. The drawing had several captions.

Then Victoria said:

“It is a representation of the parade of Queen Elisabeth's coronation. Notice who is the rider behind: Robert Dudley, leading the palfrey of honor!”

“He was the Master of the Horse. Very interesting! The drawing…”

“It was Dudley who organized and oversaw most of the Queen's coronation festivities, and accompanied her in the parade.”

“Well, you're very well informed about Queen Elisabeth, Ma’am. It’s all I hear you talk about lately…”

“I've done some research on her life with the help of official historians. Her character interests me a lot. It's a source of inspiration... I find the similarities between her relationship with Earl Leicester and... ours to be extremely interesting…”

Melbourne got a bit flustered.

“For instance, it was you who organized my coronation…”

For now she was only making a comparison on practical and political issues.

He nodded.

Victoria dared to overstep a little more on the ground where she was stepping:

“Sometimes I wonder what kind of relationship existed between them, really... She never married,
he was a widower... Although later he had another wife that I know of... Political embarrassments would not allow marriage...”

“In fact...” It was the only thing that left Melbourne's mouth at that moment.

“In so many years we could have evolved...” She said in a low tone.

And then, quickly, trying to dissimulate:

“Sit down, Lord M, let's work!”

“Then I have good news: the Queen of England's sovereignty over New Zealand is guaranteed. Our envoy, Captain William Hobson, managed to make an agreement with the natives and got full control over New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi was signed on 6th February.

Chapter End Notes

1) The leaders of the Chartist movement were found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death on January 16, 1840.
2) The Treaty of Waitangi was signed on 6 February 1840.
Back in Buckingham, in the green room, that morning's meeting was about to end. Lord M was the only man the Queen received in her private quarters and with whom she spent long hours talking. Usually six hours a day. Victoria appreciated the fact that he never told her what to do, but only guided her, directed her to the best possible route. It had always been like this from the first day. He listened to her instead of telling her what to do. One thing she noticed is that he had always been a very attentive listener. She never felt that he was just waiting for her to finish talking so that he could give his own and superior opinion. And she appreciated his frank, open, natural, loving, warm ways! He was such a captivating man!

The Queen got up from her chair and paced around the room. Melbourne remained seated with his leg crossed. He was the only one who didn’t feel obligated to get up whenever the Queen did. The intimacy between them allowed that.

She still had something else to tell him. However, there was some domestic issue that needed to be addressed, so she asked him to wait a little while as she left, promising to return soon.

Since he had to wait for a while, Melbourne went to the balcony at the end of the gallery and stood there enjoying the fresh air.

She didn’t take long. She was coming back! He could hear the familiar sound of the rustling of her dress in the short, hurried steps she took down the hall. When he realized that she was already very close, he turned to see her enter the balcony.

“I’m sorry, Lord M. I had to give Lehzen some orientations... She’s the only person I can completely trust here in the palace as private secretary for unofficial matters and domestic affairs...”

“I can wait, Ma’am.”

“I wanted to tell you that I'm already preparing my visit to the King's College Hospital, which opens in April.”

“Very well, Ma’am. As I always say, it’s important that the people see you in those places: in hospitals, orphanages, asylums for the poor...”

They were next to each other. She was at his right side.

“And later today I wanted to go to the opera, but I would like you to come with me!”

“Later today, Ma’am? I had thought of staying home...”

“Please, Lord M, if you don’t come, I will not go either... There will be no one interesting there to keep me company...”

It was impossible to resist a request from her, moreover done like that!

“And what will the opera be?”
“Torquato Tasso, by Donizetti. I think Pierre Laporte has been doing a great management of the Theater by introducing Italian operas.”

He stood quiet for a little while.

“It's not Mozart, I know... But if you could make that sacrifice...” She said with a provocative manner that she knew he couldn’t resist.

He laughed.

“Very well, Ma’am. Nothing that is done in your presence is a sacrifice! I'll be there!”

“Thank you, Lord M! See you later, then!” She said smiling.

He bowed his head.

She moved to leave the balcony. But in doing so she didn’t turn to the right, which would have been easier because it was a clear space. She turned left, brushing her right shoulder against his right arm…

Melbourne did not move, but he felt a stir inside himself… He wondered if she had done that on purpose or if it had been accidental.

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The royal carriage arrived to Her Majesty's Theater. Several other carriages were lined up, unloading passengers in turns at the entrance. When she came down, Victoria looked around to see if William's carriage was already there or if she could see him among the people who walked through and climbed the steps. She did the same searching exercise for him among the crowd that gathered in the hall of the building and in the corridors that gave access to the royal box. Nothing!

Once in the box she sat in the front. The ladies stood behind her. She waited. More than the beginning of the opera, she awaited his arrival. It was about to start and he hadn’t showed up yet. She didn’t want to be always looking back, but every now and then she was tempted to do so. She looked at Emma and Harriet and smiled. They smiled back.

“He is here!” She thought.

She didn’t need to turn around to know. She heard him sigh behind her. His breath. Unmistakable! She now felt his presence filling her, running up her veins through her blood. That warm, sweet presence that soothed her! The full tranquility and safety he gave her! But she needed to look at him! She wanted to see his face and how he was dressed! She turned and her eyes met his. She smiled and he smiled as well. He was beautiful like this, in the dark, with the reflections of light on his face!

The opera’s overture began and she turned towards the show.

The staging of the melodrama about the fictionalized life of the 16th-century Italian poet, Torquato Tasso, was thrilling. In fact, that was what Victoria looked for in opera: emotions. A Queen couldn’t show feelings in public, but in the opera that was allowed.

Among other elements of the plot, Torquato was in love with the Duke of Ferrara's sister, Eleonora d'Este, who returned his feelings, but was compelled to accept an arranged marriage with a man of her social level...
There was an interlude between the first and the second act.

Victoria got up to talk to Lord M.

Emma and Harriet walked away to a corner talking with each other.

When he saw her get up and turn to him, he was overwhelmed by the glow she emanated. It was not possible to tell what glowed more, if the jewels she was wearing or her blue eyes set on him!

“You look stunning, Ma’am!”

“Thank you! You're always so kind to me!” And then, referring to the fact that he had acceded to her request “And you always follow my wishes!”

“You are the Queen!” He answered gently.

She was slightly annoyed by that answer. So he was only kind to her because she was the Queen? Was he simply acting like an obedient servant? She wanted him to behave like a man and go to her by his own desire! That insistence of his in behaving only like a faithful vassal was frustrating! She just wanted him to court her! That was what she did every day when they were together, within the limits of the possible.

“Is that all? You simply obey? Is there nothing else that moves you?” She asked in a tone affected by some harshness to which he was not used.

He understood the meaning of that tone.

“Of course! Your lovely presence moves me! When I said “the Queen”, I was speaking in a broad sense, I wasn’t referring only to your condition of monarch.”

She appreciated that remark! She smiled. And she had begun to realize that although he was very resilient, if he was surprised or challenged in the right way, he ended up giving in.

“And what do you think of the opera?”

“I think that life already has enough dramas, so it’s unnecessary to invent more...”

She was a bit disappointed by the realism of the answer. But she realized the context in which he spoke and recognized he was completely right.

“Maybe if people acted more on their own lives, then the dramas could be smaller...” She opined.

This way, she was urging him to change his position and return what she felt for him.

“Maybe...or not. Sometimes acting can make the drama even bigger...”

He explained, once again, why he couldn’t reciprocate her feelings.

They were interrupted by the Marquis of Londonderry, who went to the royal box to greet the Queen.

When the show ended Melbourne waited for the Queen to leave the box to follow a step behind her. As she passed by him, Victoria looked up and smiled. He returned and instinctively, without thinking, placed his right hand on her back, giving her passage. Slightly, without pressure, with his fingers only.
Although he had done that before, he didn’t have to do it again, much less in public. That familiarity! But it was already done. However, only Emma and Harriet were in the royal box, no one else saw it.

She felt it! The touch of his hand! Now all his fingers on the bare skin of her back! It was throbbing! Quick, but so throbbing!

They headed outside. The royal carriage awaited her. A lackey opened the carriage door. Melbourne gave her his hand to help her up. Already sitting inside and with the door still open, and even though she knew what the answer would be, she asked:

“Don’t you want to come with me?”

“We cannot travel together in a closed carriage. Much less at night!”

“Have a good night... Lord M.”

“Good night Ma'am.”

The lackey closed the door.

The carriage pulled away and he stood there, staring at her going away.

For her part, Victoria watched him through the window glass as long as distance and the angle of view allowed it. The pulling away of the carriage gave her a sense of loss. The cadence of her emotions was ruled by his presence or absence. If he was not there, it was a part of her that was missing.

And what if he kissed her the way men did with the women they desired, like the way she had heard her ladies of the bedchamber whisper about?

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She knew it was his birthday. On the 15th of March, Emma had said.

So she wanted to offer him a gift. She had never given him any object. Something that was given by her and would make him remember her when he saw it. Just like he gave her the telescope.

What could she choose?

A book? She would risk giving him one that he already had among the hundreds he accumulated, for he was a man who read about everything! And there was no new book that he didn’t buy right away! There was no Greek or Latin classic that he had not scribbled with his own reflections. He could have been a philosopher like Montaigne. Her Prime Minister was a brilliant man and she was very proud of him!

An inkwell and a silver-plated pen? That would be a good gift. It was something he used daily, but...

She knew what it could be! A pocket watch! The watch would also be used daily, but it had an advantage over the inkwell: instead of leaving it at home on the desk, he would always carry it with him in his vest pocket. And it was something he could hold in his hand...

At the end of that day’s meeting, as he got up and prepared to leave, packing papers in his briefcase, she went to the living room’s closet and took out a small box. Then she went to him and
when he turned to her, she reached out her hand with the box and said:

“I have a present for you…”

“For me, Ma’am?” He asked in surprise.

“Yes, with many congratulations from the Queen!”

He sighed and smiled. He had finally realized the reason for the offer.

He grabbed the box.

“Thank you Ma’am! You didn’t have to…”

“Yes I did!”

He sighed again and smiled at her.

“Will you not open the box?” She asked, eager to see his reaction.

“Oh, right…”

He opened it.

Inside was a small red velvet pouch. He put the box on the table, took the pouch out and, from inside it, the object that was there. It was a golden pocket watch of the best English watch brand. Personalized with the letters WL on the cover.

Melbourne felt agonized by the value of that gift, realizing that it represented the significance he had to the person who offered it.

“But it's a very expensive gift…” He remarked.

She shook her head negatively and said:

“Nothing I can offer you is enough retribution for all that you have given me, Lord M.”

He smiled. That was too touching. Her present and her words. He didn’t know what to say next or how to thank her properly. She had caught him completely unawares...

Then, the only thing that he was impelled to say at that moment, in a completely unreflective way, even inappropriate, but deeply felt in the depths of himself, was:

“May I kiss the Queen?”

She smiled satisfied by realizing the effect that present had provoked on him and by the unexpected question. The gesture had paid off much better than she could have imagined! Later that night she would have very interesting things to write on her journal! She took a step forward and put forth the left side of her face.

He leaned over her and gave her a tender kiss on the cheek.

Victoria closed her eyes. She felt his skin, soft, slightly against hers, and heard the sound of the chaste kiss laid like that.

They pulled away.
He put his watch back in the pouch and in the box, grabbed his briefcase and the watch case, bowed and said in a low, affected tone, with a slight smile on an expression that he hoped only showed a slight emotion:

“See you tomorrow, Ma'am…”

“See you tomorrow, Lord M…”

Victoria wept when he left. She felt the effect her gesture had had on him. There had been a mix of emotions in him, and that provoked a mix of emotions in her as well. On the one hand, he had received the gift as a kindness from her, and that had made him happy, and her too; But on the other hand he was touched in a profound way that, she noticed, had left him a bit sad, and that made her cry. She realized that it was not because of something bad or for what she had done that had affected him and made him feel sad, perceiving that this had happened for something that was beyond her, something he would have thought or felt at that moment. But seeing him like that moved her. She didn’t want him to be like this. She only wanted to see him happy!

As he walked the corridor towards the exit, Melbourne felt tears welling in his eyes. The gift had made him happy, of course. But such a gift was, obviously, a reinforcement of the declaration of love she had made him at Brocket Hall. And he loved her to the core! But she was the only woman he could not have! He was touched by the unspoken feelings, so he wanted to, but could not, tell her! She had offered him a valuable watch, but she was much more valuable and he could not have her. He would keep the watch in his waistcoat pocket, but she would always be kept in his heart. And her gift was one of those things that, although seemingly harmless, brought them closer and closer... And the kiss on the cheek...

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The Duke of Sussex, Victoria's paternal uncle, was married to Lady Cecilia Underwood, but this marriage didn't meet the norms of the Royal Marriages Act 1772, which required all members of the British royal family to seek permission from the king before marrying. This law made illegal the marriages of all people born into the British royal family who married, or were already married, to spouses of a lower condition without the permission of the sovereign. As the Duke's marriage was not considered legal, his wife was not granted the treatment of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Sussex, and Lady Cecilia was not accepted as a full member of the British royal family. The protocol prevented Cecilia from attending state functions with other members of the royal family, since she was not allowed to sit at her husband's side because of her low status.

When Victoria was little and had fury outbursts, to make her quiet down her mother would threaten that her uncle, at that time her neighbor in Kensington, would be furious. And she feared this uncle, a bibles and clocks enthusiast, who wandered the corridors of the palace with a black velvet cap on his head, dressed in extravagant slippers and a mauve velvet-embroidered robe.

Sussex was indeed an eccentric man, but today Victoria didn’t dislike him and thought it was not fair that he could not be accompanied by the woman with whom he had been married for nine years because of this difference in social status. She knew how the difference of status was an impediment to happiness! Therefore she decided to resolve this issue. On 10th April 1840 she assigned the title of Duchess of Inverness to Lady Cecilia, one of the sovereign's discretionary titles, and also because the Duke used, as a subsidiary title, that of Earl of Inverness. Because the marriage was morganatic, she could not be Duchess of Sussex.

The acceptance of this marriage also signified the acceptance of the Duke’s former marriage with Lady Augusta Murray, who also didn’t meet the norms of the Royal Marriages Act 1772, and thus the legitimacy of his two children from the first marriage.
Besides, it was good to be able to please her uncle, since she already had enough family problems with other uncles and with her own mother.

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Victoria turned 21 years old on 24th May 1840.

As always the Queen's birthday would be marked. A party was organized in the ballroom with a monumental cake as usual, and some children from the choir of St. Margaret's Church in Westminster would come to sing for the Queen the National Anthem. At night the streets would be decorated and lit because of the date.

Victoria remembered that about a month earlier, on 27th April, the first foundation stone of the new Palace of Westminster, which would be rebuilt after the fire of 1834, was laid. She knew that on that fatidic night Lord Melbourne had saved Westminster Hall, the most ancient part of the British Parliament, which had been there since the time of the Plantagenets. He himself ordered that the Hall had to be saved and his leadership, luck and the change of the wind allowed the preservation of that construction. He would be at the party, which provoked in her an overflowing joy difficult to hide. Very different from that other birthday in 1839, when he had resigned and sent her the telescope. She was euphoric, to the apprehension of Emma and Harriet, who had already clearly perceived the nature of the Queen's feelings for the Prime Minister.

The gifts would be delivered and opened during the party. But Melbourne didn’t want the other people there to see his gift to the Queen, which would feed the gossip of the Court. He had it delivered in advance.

A footman knocked on the door of the Queen's quarters and when he entered he said:

“With the compliments of Lord Melbourne.”

Victoria saw a basket full of peonies, some pink and some white. They were beautiful! He had never sent her peonies before. Nor did flowers usually come in such a large quantity!

She thanked him, grabbed the basket and set it on the table.

It weighed too much to contain only flowers!

She moved the flowers aside and saw that in the bottom there was a package wrapped in brown paper, knotted with a string. She removed the package from the basket and opened it. She saw a wooden box with a brass plaque on the lid that read: Offered to Her Majesty Queen Victoria on occasion of her twenty-first birthday from her devoted servant Lord Melbourne. She opened it. Inside was a cobalt-blue, gold-plated, oval and trimmed porcelain box with a tilting lid. The golden motifs spread around the box and on the lid formed a white-bottom medallion inside which the letters VR (Victoria Regina) were read, wrapped in flower garlands.

Victoria was delighted. The box could be used as a jewelry box. This present was more feminine and delicate than the telescope. It had been more carefully thought about. She believed it meant something else! He loved her, didn’t he? But he couldn’t allow their relationship to become of another nature.

He knew that this gift would have an exciting effect on her, but he had not resisted making that offer! She was so delicate and so strong at the same time, so girlish and so woman-like, so tender and so tempting, in a combo that disconcerted him! That was also why he had to return in 1839, after having resigned. It was impossible to leave such a Queen and such a woman! And she
deserved that and much more, whatever he could give her! He also thought about writing a note, but he didn’t know what to write that would be best for both. He couldn’t write what he really wanted to, and if he wrote anything else it wouldn’t have the meaning he wanted... Besides, the present spoke for itself, no words were needed.

Before the party began Victoria, already dressed up, stood at a window in her quarters watching the guests’ carriages arrive in the excited expectation of witnessing the moment of Lord M’s arrival. After confirming his presence she went to the ballroom.

When the Queen entered the hall, she wore a pink, silk dress with white embroidery that rounded off the neckline and sleeves. Her hair, caught to the left and falling wavy over her shoulder, had been decorated with two peonies on the right side. One pink and one white.

She went to the Prime Minister grabbing his hands and greeting him before anyone else. She could stand there and stare at him forever without ever getting bored!

“Lord M!” She exclaimed with a radiant smile, in a face of total admiration for him.

When she looked at him like that, it was like there was nothing else in the world, it was so pleasant and so heartbreaking at the same time! She was breathtaking! Every time he saw her it seemed she was always prettier! Again, he could not resist commenting on her appearance.

“You look splendid, Ma’am! Congratulations on another birthday!”

“Thank you! I’m really glad you’re here...”

He realized the depth of what she was saying.

The Queen walked away and went to greet other people in the hall.

He noticed that she had not said anything about the flowers and the box. But he guessed that she had understood that he preferred to be discreet about the present, since he had sent it in advance. Anyway, she was wearing two of his flowers in her hair, which meant she was sending him the message that she had liked the present. The use of those flowers was a secret shared between them. Only between them! The overwhelming contentment she had brought into his life was indescribable. Although that happiness was tightened by the anguish of impossibility. Her joy, her energy, determination, impulsiveness, and the courage to break the rules captivated him. In fact, her impulsiveness was something that he had a fundamental role reducing...

Emma approached him.

“The Queen is very cheerful today!”

Melbourne looked at Emma, but said nothing.

“She was already very excited ever since she got up in the morning, but after receiving a magnificent basket of peonies she became even more enthusiastic!” Emma informed him.

“Did she?” He asked as if he knew nothing.

“Why, William, we both and the Queen know where the flowers came from!”

He smiled.

“The Queen's birthday is an important date, and she must be properly presented with appropriate
gifts.” He justified.

Emma smiled and looked like someone who was not convinced by this innocent justification.

In the end there were already few people in the hall, and Melbourne went to the Queen to say goodbye.

Before he could speak she said:

“Lord M, do not go yet, please, I want to speak with you in my quarters.”

“Certainly, Ma’am.”

A few more people came closer to say farewell, and Melbourne stepped back, waiting so that they could talk.

At one point there were only the Queen, Melbourne, Emma, and the Duchess of Kent in the hall. The latter, as she didn’t feel welcomed by the other guests there, left.

Victoria informed Emma that she was going to her quarters with Lord M.

They entered the green room, the Queen leading the way.

Melbourne saw the flowers, now placed in a jar, and the porcelain box on the table.

Victoria turned to him.

“I wanted to thank you particularly for your gift! The porcelain box is very beautiful!”

“It’s Sèvres.”

“I saw the brand, I really like it. And I loved the flowers! They are so fragrant! You had never sent me peonies before…”

“They bloom in the spring and they’re my favorite flowers.”

Victoria thought that information important. All that related to him personally mattered much to her, and if he gave her these flowers and still confessed this preference to her, he was allowing her access to elements of his intimacy that most of the time he didn’t share.

“You know, when I got the telescope you gave me, at first I was not very happy with the gift... On your note you wrote that it would help me see things differently, but I did not find it very useful and what I wanted was to have you... back, as my Prime Minister, and you wouldn’t give in…” She said with a sad look gazing unfocused across the room “And I wanted your presence on my birthday and you were not there…” She added in a more emotional, well-disguised tone, and looking at him.

He sighed and waited for her to finish.

Then, without looking directly at him, she continued:

“But then I began to use it and I came to value it very much... It was the only thing I had of yours, and in the nights when I couldn’t sleep and watched the sky from one of the windows of my room, it allowed me to see some things much more clearly…”

Melbourne felt his chest shrink as he assumed what she meant.
She looked directly at him when she finished speaking.

For a few seconds he feared what she might say or do next, but then she changed the course of the conversation:

“Today I was immediately happy when I received your gift! I just had to change the dress I had already picked to match with your flowers in my hair...” She said trying to look amused.

He smiled, more relieved from the tension of seconds earlier.

“Thank you for everything.” She concluded.

“Everything I can give you will never be enough...” He confessed.

He shut up. He hoped she would think he meant that nothing would be enough to dignify her as a Queen. However, he wanted to be able to tell her that nothing he gave her would be enough to express his love for her.

“For what? To express your love for me?” Victoria thought.

She felt her stomach squeeze and a deep sadness. If nothing was enough to give her, why wouldn’t he give himself? It was the only thing she wanted. Nothing else! She was the richest woman in the world at a time when only a few women had anything of their own. In fact, she was the richest person in the world, and yet she couldn’t have what she most desired!

She was not able to verbalize anything of what she was thinking, obviously. She wouldn’t be able to do so without crying. And if she said what she thought, that would ruin everything between them...

“Well then, if you don’t need me anymore, I'll be heading home, Ma’am.”

She didn’t want him to go! She wanted him to stay!

But he had to go...

“Of course, Lord M. You may go...”

He moved to leave. He was going to say goodbye.

She didn’t give him time. She grabbed his right forearm, got up on her tiptoes, stretched out and kissed his cheek.

He felt struck by lightning.

“Ma’am...”

Noticing his embarrassment by her unexpected gesture, she said:

“Thank you, Lord M! And see you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow, Ma'am.”

He smiled slightly. He didn’t want to look too pleased because that would give her hope, but he couldn’t help but smile at her, given the tenderness of her gesture.

He left.
What would be wrong with that kiss?

Nothing!

Everything! The Queen did not kiss the Prime Minister! The Prime Minister did not kiss the Queen! But it was done! He himself had opened the precedent when he had asked her permission to kiss her two months earlier!

Chapter End Notes

1) Donizetti's opera Torquato Tasso premiered in Her Majesty's Theater on 3rd March 1840.
Victoria decided to take a phaeton’s ride in the park, accompanied by Lehzen and Harriet, and followed by her personal guard, which included the equerry Alfred Paget.

Outside the Palace, several people who gathered either on foot or in a carriage greeted the Queen. However a cart’s wheel had broken, causing it to immobilize and to drop its cargo across the ground. Victoria's phaeton had to stop as Paget encouraged the men present to hasten the resolution of the problem, in order to clear the way and allow the passage of the Queen.

Taking advantage of the confusion and the fact that the women stood still and less guarded at that moment, a man dared to leave the crowd and approach the royal carriage, throwing a branch of violets that fell on the lap of the Queen.

The ladies who accompanied the Queen were preoccupied by the audacity, but Victoria remained calm. Then the man approached the Queen introducing himself as Captain Childers and began with a strange conversation, saying that he had come to save the Queen from her gilded cage and that he had a house of elegant proportions where he could take her.

Lehzen, frightened, called Alfred Paget.

The Queen thanked the man's offer, saying that it was not necessary.

Paget ordered the guards to arrest the man, which they did immediately while he struggled, shouting that all he possessed belonged to the Queen.

Although the way was cleared and even though there had been no imminent danger, the degradable episode determined the return to the Palace.

When Melbourne went to Buckingham that day, he heard what had happened and was worried. As soon as he entered the Queen's chambers, after his usual greetings, he immediately asked:

“Are you all right, Ma’am? I heard about the incident...”

“It was simply a man with flowers...”

“But you ought to be careful. Maybe it would be better not to do these rides in the next few days...” He suggested.

“What would the people say if their Queen was afraid of leaving the Palace because of a man with violets?”

“As you know, I also believe that a monarch should not reveal fear under any circumstances, but the sovereign must also be prudent when it is necessary...” Melbourne warned.

Victoria was silent.

“I know that he wrote to you for a long time and that was not taken care of...” He continued.

“I didn’t think it mattered, I thought it was harmless.”

“But there can be no security breaches. I’m going to have your guard reinforced for future rides!” He exclaimed.
She smiled tenderly at him. She liked seeing him like that, worried about her! It showed her how much he liked her!

“Thank you, Lord M!”

She had decided that she would never marry without flame, and now everything in her was burning to have him! With Lord Melbourne her intact body had begun to know the nature of desire. She knew the uneasiness she felt when he was not with her, and how she trembled when she looked at him! She guessed the greed of a kiss that her eyes had witnessed in her teenage years between a couple of servants hiding in the shrubs of the Kensington garden...

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10th June 1840 (Wednesday)

Victoria was getting ready to go out. She was wearing a hat and accompanied by Lehzen when she met Melbourne in the hall.

“Oh, Lord M... Did you want to speak with me?” She asked with some expectation as Lehzen waited a few steps behind.

“Yes Ma'am. I know we do not have an appointment, but there are some things I would like to discuss and I thought that you might be available... But... I see you're ready to go out...” Melbourne said in a veiled attempt to figure out where she was going without having to ask directly.

“I'm going for a ride; I think it is my duty to show myself to my people.” She informed, fully knowing that she was in clear disobedience regarding the recommendation he had made her.

“But it is dangerous, Ma’am! After the episode with the flowers it is preferable to wait longer.”

“You are the one who taught me that a Queen has the duty to show herself in public!” She exclaimed, looking as if she cared nothing for his warning. “Besides, you also send me flowers and I don’t see anything dangerous about it!” She added provocatively.

Melbourne found her boldness amusing, but could not help putting on a reproachful expression at her last sentence. The intimacy between them had reached such a point that he dared to reprimand the Queen, even if only with the expression on his face.

“If you could wait for a bit, I won’t be long. I really wished we could talk today still!” She asked, with that sweet look that Melbourne could not resist.

He felt there was no way to convince her not to go out. As always, it was not easy to deter her from anything. And he had already had the guard reinforced...

“Very well, Ma’am. I will wait.”

Victoria headed for the phaeton, with the roof pulled back, waiting at the palace door with Lehzen. She had already sat down and Lehzen was getting ready to come up as well when Melbourne came hurrying up, almost running down the steps, gloved and putting on his hat.

“Forgive me Ma’am. Could I accompany you? I would feel more rested.”

Victoria looked at Lehzen, who awaited orders on what to do, and said:

“Thank you, Lehzen, but Lord Melbourne will keep me company.”
Lehzen moved away, somewhat reluctantly, and Melbourne came up sitting on the Queen's left side. Lehzen would have sat in the front.

“I am very happy!” said Victoria, as the carriage began to roll.

“This does not mean I approve!” Melbourne returned, looking at her half-way.

They smiled.

The phaeton was preparing to cross the gate of Buckingham Palace and the shouts of the people outside could already be heard.

Behind them rode Lord Alfred Paget and another equerry, and also more guards on horseback as determined by Melbourne.

“There was no need to be worried, Lord M. Look how happy the people are to see me.” Victoria said.

They rode through the gate, and the Queen began to wave to the crowding mob on either side of the way, trying to get a glimpse of her as the phaeton passed.

Suddenly, from the right side of the road, a man stepped out of the crowd and walked towards the phaeton. Melbourne saw that he carried a weapon and it was aimed at the Queen who, distracted, continued to wave, looking to the left. He acted on instinct and very quickly. He put his right arm around Victoria's body and, exerting some force, made her lean forward, holding her with the left hand and making her lie as much as possible inside the carriage with his body partially over hers.

“Stay calm, Ma'am!” He asked as he projected her forward.

A gunshot was heard. And then another, as the carriage considerably increased the speed of travel.

The hysteria all over was enormous, with people running and yelling in every direction while the guard arrested the criminal.

Then someone in the crowd shouted:

“God save the Queen!”

“Are you hurt?” Melbourne asked, as he pulled her up slightly, his face very close to the Queen's face, his left hand with the leather glove on her right cheek, his right hand on Victoria's back.

“No...” She replied, stunned. The hasty breath projected on his face, her left hand on the right side of his chest and her right over the hand he had placed on her face.

A few paces ahead the phaeton stopped and it was possible for them to sit down. They returned immediately to the palace. Victoria was still a little shocked, so he sustained her disguisedly with his right shoulder during the short period of return.

The carriage still had not stopped completely when Melbourne – who had lost his hat and taken off his gloves – jumped from the vehicle, circled around the back, and ran to help Victoria down on the other side.

She looked dejected. He held her by the elbow to help her walk to the door of the palace, but he was afraid she would faint. He should not do it, but he had to pick her up! In fact, if he wouldn't do it, who else would? And it was an emergency... In a fraction of a second, he picked her up and
carried her hurriedly towards the palace door while Lord Paget gave orders to the guards who ran to open it.

The left arm under Victoria's back and the right under her thighs.

He walked down the corridors in silence to the Queen's quarters.

He fell in the depths of himself. There he was, William Lamb, with the Queen of England in his arms. But at that moment he was not the Prime Minister who carried his Queen. He was an ordinary man who carried in his arms the woman he loved! For the first time in his life he could feel through the clothing the contours, weight and warmth of her body, whose shapes had jutted out by crushing the skirt of her gown in order to pick her up. He wanted to arrive quickly to her room to get out of that situation and, at the same time, wanted that moment to extend in time.

Victoria had placed her right arm around his shoulders and had buried her face in his left shoulder. Covered by the brim of her hat, he could not see it. She felt the smell and warmth of his body, and the pressure and safety of the hands that supported her body. She didn’t remember anyone ever holding her in their arms. The feeling could not be better!

Lehzen hurried down the hall to find out what had happened, for she had heard the phaeton return shortly after the departure. She was startled when she saw the Queen being carried like that and was shocked to realize it was the Prime Minister carrying her.

“What happened to Her Majesty?” She asked worriedly.

“It's all good, Baroness, it was only a scare.” Melbourne reassured her.

“Good thing someone showed up.” He thought.

He was going to enter the Queen's room and lay her in her bed. It was better that there was someone else watching that moment so that the embarrassment was minor. With her left hand Victoria took off the hat.

Melbourne crossed the Queen's quarters and finally entered the room, followed by Lehzen, and laid her carefully on the right side of the bed, slightly resting on the headboard, while she looked at him in silence.

“You're safe here, Ma'am.” He said softly, looking her in the eyes, in a tone that sounded to Victoria like velvet, and walked away from her.

Victoria felt the loss of his body heat.

Lehzen replaced him next to Victoria, wanting to know what had happened and how she could help, while the Duchess of Kent came in through the door and ran to the bed also alarmed.

Melbourne stood there for a few seconds feeling awkward, not knowing what to do, moving his body back and forth in a quick, short, embarrassed movement. He wanted to stay there beside her, but he couldn’t. However, he didn’t know if she would need anything else from him...

He looked at her again, and Victoria looked at him, oblivious of what Lehzen and the duchess were saying to her. She didn’t hear them...

“Thank you, Lord M!”

“You are welcome, Ma'am! If you don’t need me any longer...” He said, as he bowed slightly with
his head and moved away facing her, until he reached the door of the room.

Then he turned his back and continued through the succession of rooms in the quarters until he left through the last door.

Through the doors, successively opened, Victoria kept her eyes locked on his back until he disappeared completely.

“Don’t go William, stay here with me! Let me lay on your arms eternally...” Victoria thought as he walked away.

Viscount Melbourne met the Queen's doctor, Sir James Clark, on the corridor and informed him that Her Majesty was well, only a little shaken.

The doctor went to see her. He entered the room already after the Queen had stripped off her dress and put on one of her nightgowns.

In fact, Victoria had nothing serious. She was only half inert, which the doctor attributed to the shock of the attack she had just suffered.

“You must rest, Your Highness” He said after examining her.

“Now you know why I and Sir Conroy kept you in Kensington. I always knew your Uncle Cumberland would try to kill you.” Warned the Duchess of Kent.

“Do you really think Uncle Cumberland would try to shoot me in broad daylight?” Victoria asked angrily.

“No, him, but one of his men!” The duchess returned.

To follow the doctor's recommendations, the latter and the women present left the room, closing the door to let the Queen rest.

“Alone at last!” Victoria thought.

The shock at the attempted regicide she had suffered was not what troubled her most at that time. That situation of having William with her every day without actually having him was much more upsetting. And the physical contact that had just happened between them was even more poignant.

The attack turned out to have a positive aspect. He had picked her up in his arms, making her feel in the clouds! However, although the commotion she felt was not due to the attack, this gave her an excuse to justify before everyone else her prostrate state of mind. It was very hard to be Queen, always surrounded by people, with rare alone moments and always watched and always a target of scrutiny and intrigue. What did they all know about what she felt or about what would be best for her? Nothing!

The last days had been hard, in terms of work – with and without Lord M – and in terms of having to associate daily with a man she loved, but had to pretend not to love. On the one hand, to prevent from feeding intrigues in the court; On the other hand, because of her condition as Queen, which didn’t allow the union to a man with Melbourne’s status; And, still on the other hand, because of him, who had not been receptive to her proposal at Brocket Hall. And here was a matter that was really important. What did he really feel for her? The day she went to Brocket Hall, Melbourne's refusal had been painful, but poetic, sensitive to her feelings. He had made her realize that there was no room in his heart for another woman besides his dead wife. But then, at the masquerade, through the example of the relationship between Queen Elizabeth and Robert Dudley, he had hinted that the feeling was mutual, but it could not be fulfilled for reasons of State. At least that
was how she had interpreted it, or was he just talking about the concrete situation of Elisabeth and Robert, and not theirs by analogy? Yet Emma had also hinted that what he had told her at Brocket Hall was no more than what he wanted her to believe. And she had spoken of orchids, how they were difficult to cultivate, how he had stopped cultivating them since the death of his wife, and how he had started to plant them again and was sending them to her. And she knew well how often she received flowers from him.

And then there was the way he looked at her, the way he talked to her, cared for her, advised her and protected her. Just like he had done now. And the episode of the regicide attempt had raised some evidence. More than having protected her physically, just like what other Prime Minister in the same situation could have done, there was the way he had touched her and looked at her... Was that the look of a man in love? That he was very fond of her, she had no doubt. He had already shown that many times. But could it be love? The way men loved? It was love, she knew it!

Oh, what could be better than being saved by the man she loved?

Yet she was not going to insist on her feelings with him. She had never done it after Brocket Hall – unless in a subtle manner, especially using Elizabeth and Dudley as shields – and now she would not do it either. She would never pressure him, for that was not her way of acting and because, despite her inexperience, she sensed that this attitude would not yield any result, except to possibly destroy the friendship between them and drive him away from her. That she could not stand. She respected his choice. Even though it cost her terribly.

There was nothing to do, just wait. Only time would show what could happen next.

All of this made her exhausted, physically and emotionally. And today she didn’t feel like pretending nothing was wrong. Luckily, today she didn’t have to pretend.

She wished he would come and visit her soon...

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The events of that day had been highly demanding. Melbourne needed to be isolated to feel.

He went to Brocket Hall.

After dinner he asked not to be bothered and closed himself in the library. He filled a glass of brandy and sat there. The drinking habit was something that was rooted. Normally he didn’t get drunk, but he drank more than he should. The trend dictated that men should drink. They had to “drink like a lord”! So he drank constantly in society. And the difficult vicissitudes of his life made alcohol an easily obtainable consolation.

The fear that something serious would happen to Victoria robbed him of his strength. When it had been necessary, he had acted in cold blood – as usual and as the situation required – but now that he was alone and remembering what had happened next to Buckingham, he felt the strength withering from his body. As if his blood was draining out. If something serious happened to Victoria, he would be a dead man! There would be no more reason to get out of bed every morning! And then there had been those pure minutes in which he had carried her in his arms, as if she was a little girl, when she was in fact a woman... The sensation that had caused him then was indescribable. The distress he felt inside was even greater for what that moment had made him feel than for the attack itself.

“And now, William, what are you going to do?” He wondered aloud.
Eight months earlier he thought he had everything under control, but the game had changed when she decided, against all expectations, not to ask Albert to marry her. Ever since, living with her was a constant test. And now with all that scene of the attack, things had gotten complicated because his capacity for self-control had been shaken.

He closed his eyes and imagined the moment when he had her in his arms. He stood there, mentally repeating that episode, which gave him a sense of fullness that was also repeating.

Marrying her – he dared to think – was completely out of the question. That would never be accepted by anyone, not her family, nor the Privy Council, the Cabinet, the Parliament, or the people. He, a man with no royal blood, a simple Viscount, a recent title on top of it; A man with a past involved in scandals; The Prime Minister, which would make them say he had manipulated her; Much older than she was, which would convince them even more that he had seduced her... Her image in the mud, the Empire plunged into political chaos... She accused of being mad, which had already been invoked because of the episode with the ladies of the bedchamber. If all this happened, she would be forced to abdicate and the Cumberland jerk would sit on the throne. Everything would be put into question: her preparation to be Queen, her reign plans and his own government... And the British Empire deserved better, deserved what he anticipated she could give it as Queen, especially if she were to have a long reign, bearing in mind that the last three had been disastrous at various levels. George III possessed of cyclical madness; George IV an unbearable fool; William IV a half-witted imbecile. Besides, she needed someone who would accompany her for many more years than he could, given the age difference between them.

The alternative? Become lovers. An unviable madness! A hypothesis even more selfish than the previous one! To have her as he wished, just like as if marrying her, but she would only have him as lover and not as the official husband. She could enjoy his love, as he knew she longed for, but could not have him at her side in the private and political life. To some extent, in an important part of her life as a Queen, she would still be alone. And if this were discovered and became public, then they would be lost. And if she got pregnant they would have a gigantic problem in their hands. A virgin Queen cannot bear an heir!

And the heir, yes, the heir! Her marriage was absolutely a State reason to generate an heir to the crown. That idea of not wanting to marry was serious, very serious. If she didn’t marry, there would be no heir, and if he didn’t exist, one day the throne could be inherited by Cumberland’s son, George, the same age as Victoria, or by a son of his. This was not what he and she wanted.

What was he going to do? Yes, he! Because if anyone could do anything, it was him. For the influence he had on her and for the responsibility age gave him to keep them from committing foolishness.

Stop being her Prime Minister? She would be in crisis like the other time he had resigned. Move farther away from the palace and the court? Make the relationship more political and less personal? It was too late for that, and she would not allow it either.

Unless the obvious need for distance was very well explained to her... Maybe... Do nothing, let it run? A risk because one day one of them would screw it up. Convince her to reconsider marriage? The best option, but very difficult to address because she didn’t want to hear about it again, nor could he deal with this hypothesis the way he did when Albert was on the waiting list of the suitors. Victoria in another man’s bed...!

He fell asleep...

When he woke up, at dawn, his head felt heavy as if he had not slept at all. He got up and went to bed.
The next day he thought he had to go and see her. As difficult as it was – and at the same time so pleasant – he had to go and see her. If he didn’t she would be troubled and would show up there, as she had done the other time, which was not at all appropriate at that moment in their lives. He still wondered that it would be nice of him to bring her flowers, but if he didn’t want to emphasize her feelings, should he bring her flowers?

“Think, William. Think before you act and, above all, before you speak.” He said to himself.

***

In the palace Victoria was fully recovered from the incident of the day before. She was wearing her long-sleeved violet dress, whose neckline was topped with a narrow white embroidery, and was sitting at her desk in her quarters to dispatch petitions.

Melbourne arrived and liked what he saw. She seemed well and happy.

Dash lifted his head from the cushion as he felt him come in.

The sun streaming through the windows flooded the room.

She stood up as he came in and took a few steps towards him holding out her right hand.

He knelt down and kissed her hand.

“Ma’am!” He said as he stood up, bowing his head slightly and smiling at her.

“I see you are completely restored! I'm glad!” He continued.

“Dear Lord M! I am so glad you came! Here I was in distress because you still hadn’t come today.”

Her remark made him think how she was addicted to his presence. How did things get to that point?

She examined his looks that day. This wonderful being who knelt before her as a subject, who followed her as a Prime Minister, but whom she desired as a man!

“I was in Brocket Hall. It took me longer to get here.”

“Did you go to Brocket Hall yesterday? On a Wednesday?” She asked in wonder.

“Yes... I had some urgent matters with the farm to deal with.” That was the first thing he thought of. A harmless lie to protect himself.

The Queen ordered tea for them both, and they sat down each on either side of the table with papers to dispatch in the middle, and a blue and white English china teacup in front of each.

Melbourne had his back to the window, facing the Queen, cross-legged, and his hands clasped over his knees as he waited for the tea to cool a little more.

“I spoke with the head of the guard before coming here. The man has already been identified: Edward Oxford.” He said.

“Are you already informed of this?”

“Of course, everything that concerns you interests me, Ma’am!”
Melbourne reproached himself by that last statement! Why flirt with her like that? What had he decided in Brocket Hall? He didn’t remember... In fact, it seemed to him that he had decided nothing, that he was in a dead end...

Victoria looked at him and smiled. She liked the insinuation.

“He says no, but...” She thought.

The tea he had in front of him smoked and the steam rose in the air.

“My God, how beautiful this man is!” She continued to ramble to herself.

She lowered her eyes, but then looked back at him, aware of what she was doing, and asked provocatively:

“And you didn’t bring me flowers today?”

“Well, this is getting carried away...” He thought.

“I didn’t have time to pick them, I was already late, Ma’am.” He excused himself.

He remembered that he actually didn’t bring her flowers on purpose. He lied again! How was it possible that he had already lied to her twice in such a short time? Harmless lies, it was true, but from the moment that there was the need to lie, things were not going well.

To shift to a more comfortable subject he returned to Edward Oxford.

“He's a member of the Young England.”

“Are they chartists?”

“No. They promulgate a sort of conservative, romantic social theory. Their political message describes an idealized feudalism with an absolute monarch and a strong established church, with the philanthropy of “noblesse oblige” as the basis for its paternalistic way of social organization...”

“I see.”

“But they found a letter sent to Edward Oxford that told him to wait for instructions... from Hanover...”

Victoria looked shocked.

“You think he's a henchman of my uncle? I know he wanted to be king, but to do such a thing?”

“He may not have given that order... But this society could be plotting to... to kill you, Ma’am...”

Victoria looked alarmed at the idea that there was indeed a plan set up for that purpose.

“And what will happen to this man? Is he going to be sentenced to death?” She asked.

“It seems to me to be the obvious outcome, but as you can see, we must first inquire whether there are more people involved or a person in charge. We have to wait.”

“And what would you advise me to do in the meantime, Lord M?”

“I advise you to stay here, where you are safe. I have already ensured that the guard is reinforced.
When we understand what really happened and when the danger dissipates, and we consider that there are safety conditions, you can normally resume your rides.”

Here he was again showing concern for her, being protective and making her feel safe! She felt so comfortable. But couldn’t he hug her, too? Now!

“It was very important what you did for me yesterday, Lord M!” She thanked him with some emotion in her voice as she grabbed the teacup on both sides. “There are no words to thank you for the noble and heroic gesture of saving my life and having brought me here...”

She glanced towards the bed in the back, in the bedroom, separated from the green room where they were, just across the blue room, and visible because the two doors that separated them from the bedroom were both open. Melbourne followed her gaze in the same direction and remembered the scene from the day before. He realized he was constantly in that space to gather with the Queen, which was her space of intimacy, always the two there alone and with a bed a few paces away...

“You don’t have to thank me, Ma’am! Anyone in my place would have protected their Queen. I acted only by instinct and brought you to a safe place.”

Melbourne thought this might be the time to introduce the theme that he thought, the day before, was one of the best chances to solve their problem: her marriage to someone. No matter how much it would cost him.

He pushed his hands away, rested his left forearm on the table and said quietly, feeling her reactions.

“You know, Ma’am, some time has already passed and... perhaps... I don’t know... we could go back to talking about a matter that... you know perfectly well how important it is: for you, for the kingdom...” He gestured with his hands. “And that has to do with what happened yesterday and the need to have someone who... who will protect you, who will make a decision at a crucial moment, someone who accompanies you, with whom you can share the daily worries... and the joys also...”

He felt his heart shatter to be able to utter these words. How could he tell her to do all this with some other man that was not him?

Victoria listened to what he was saying with her eyes on her teacup, and she knew exactly where he was getting at when he began to speak. She didn’t like that topic, but she knew he was absolutely right. She could have stopped him from talking, as she had done before. But she was not going to do it. She knew that he only wanted what was best for her, even if the best for her was what he could not give her. She understood that. She realized that even though he might just as well correspond to what she felt for him, he would be trapped by circumstances and he could not simply let things go as she pleased. She remembered the scandal that had been the case of Lady Flora Hastings, how he had warned her before and how he had been right. Nor did she want to be embroiled in a scandal over a socially unacceptable relationship between a Queen of England and a Prime Minister. And she knew how unshakable he had been when he had resigned, and how he had resisted her pressure to keep attending the palace after that, contradicting her action as long as he could to resume his position as Prime Minister. He was a man of convictions and principles, and he would not overlook them.

He waited for a remark from her.

“I know, Lord M.” She answered quietly.
“At least the reaction was not bad.” He thought.

She looked up at him and continued:

“I know this better than anyone. Do you know how much that pressures me every day? Do you know what it is to carry this weight on your shoulders?”

He began to be bothered by the way she spoke. He drew his forearm off the table, backed away a little and swallowed.

“The Queen of England must marry! There must be an heir. It is the survival of the crown that is at stake. The Empire that must be saved. All over me! Everyone waiting for me to do something! It's all in my hands! I pretend that I don’t care about this matter, that I don’t want to know about it, but I do care a lot. I know what they think, even when they don’t tell me anything because they were forbidden to. Even when no one talks about it, it is always there. Not talking about it changes nothing...”

She spoke in a not raised tone, but in a way that showed the oppression she felt.

She continued in a higher tone:

“And me? Does anyone remember me? Does anyone care about me, what I think, what I feel? Does it occur to anyone that to save England I must sacrifice myself?”

Her eyes were slightly humid. Now she was hurt!

He felt guilty for bringing up the topic, making her live those emotions and subjecting himself to them. He felt a crazy urge to get up from the chair with an impulse, run to her and hug her. But he could not do that. That boundary could never be crossed. If he hugged her at that moment there would be no return. God knows what would happen next...

“I apologize Ma’am! I am sorry that this matter makes you feel this way...” He said quietly, hiding the whirlwind he felt.

“Besides, how can I marry someone else when I have the man I love in front of me?” She asked convincingly.

Now she had crossed the line! How was that possible? What to say after this? The talk in Brocket Hall, using the rooks as backing, had held the matter so far, but the bindings he had placed had just been broken. And now what was he going to rely on?

They stared at each other for a few seconds with the question she had asked hanging over them. The table between them. Melbourne was grateful that the table was there and that that conversation was taking place in Buckingham, a palace full of people, with ladies, noblemen, and servants everywhere, going in and out of the rooms. From the Lord Chamberlain to the man who kindled candles and lamps, the Royal House had 445 people. If they were elsewhere, standing, without anything staying between them, he would have kissed her. He couldn’t stand another scene like Brocket Hall!

She could no longer bear maintaining her eyes on his. She looked back at the cup of tea. She put her elbows on the table and her hands in front of her forehead and eyes. She didn’t cry, but she was upset. He saw her lips tremble.

“Why didn’t you ask Albert to marry you?” Thought Melbourne.
And now what should he tell her that was appropriate? She was used to him always having an immediate response. He couldn’t remain silent or she would interpret that he consented to what she had said. Perhaps it was time to address the other matter that he had thought the night before that could be a valid choice. He was going to be honest, not revealing everything, but honest. Honesty always worked with her.

“Ma’am... I am not blind or insensitive.” He said looking as much circumspect as he could.

She looked at him very attentively, wanting to absorb everything he said. Her beautiful blue eyes fixed on him, hoping he would tell her what she wanted to hear. Absolutely concentrated on him, as she had done at Brocket Hall, as she always did...

“I see... and I feel, the pain you live by not being reciprocated in your love for me, which makes me extremely flattered, but which has no future because I cannot give it in return. That would be madness, you know it as well as I do.” He appealed to her rational ability. “It would be the end of your reign.”

“So what can I do to stop feeling what I feel?”

He rubbed the index finger of his left hand over his left eyebrow, a typical gesture of when he searched for the right words to tell her.

“Well, I had already thought of telling you before that… maybe the best – to try to make that feeling you have for me... go away... and who knows, after that you may find someone you like and with whom you can... – would be to decrease our encounters. Do you understand? Spend less time together, I would spend less time in the court, in the palace, in your most private and family moments... Keep working together, the meetings to deal with government issues... but minimize the rest.”

He had spoken in the first person of the plural, not the second. He was trying to make a pact with her, to reach a settlement by common consent. Everything that was decided together always worked.

With this argument he gave her an alternative, which he hoped she would take as viable, but did not take everything away, or it would only make things worse. He would not withdraw entirely from her life, he would only minimize his presence.

“No need to rush, just give it a little time.” He said, so that she didn’t feel overwhelmed, pressured as she already was from all sides. “Don’t think about marriage. Contact other members of other royal families, make invitations, throw banquets, dances... Naturally, when you are not expecting, someone will appear that you will like... Do you agree with me, Ma’am?”

Victoria felt that he understood her and thought his proposal was sensible. In fact, no relationship between the two would ever be accepted by anyone. And who knows, he could be right and with time what she felt could fade, and some suitor who appealed to her could show up.

With a sad face she replied:

“I agree, Lord M.”

He sighed inwardly.

“Very well, Ma’am. Shall we address today’s order of affairs?”

They started talking about politics and drinking the tea that was already cold.
Chapter 6

When Melbourne left Buckingham and arrived to his London home, he thought that he was trying to restrain Victoria, but more than that he could not forget that he had to restrain himself as well. And what would she do next? Could she really stay away from him in more personal terms? His position was indeed difficult, for he had to think and act for them both. Control her and control himself.

In the palace Victoria, on the other hand, thought about the conversation they had and concluded that she still couldn’t understand what his feelings for her actually were. He always managed to be evasive! He had said that he couldn’t reciprocate what she felt for him, but why? Because as a man he didn’t love her, or simply out of duty? No, she knew he loved her... Anyway he was right, she agreed with his choice and things were going to be as he had suggested.

The newspapers were filled with news and pictures of the assassination attempt on the Queen and the heroic act of the Prime Minister. Lord Melbourne had saved the Queen's life! Now the name of the Prime Minister filled the newspapers, no longer involved in scandals, but in the act of the greatest nobility a man could have in his life: saving the life of another human being, more exalted even if that person were to be the highest figure of the nation to which he belonged. The popularity of the Queen and of the Prime Minister grew in public opinion.

The work meetings between the Queen and the Prime Minister still took place, even in the privacy of her quarters, as always, and even accompanied with tea. But he ceased to be an assiduous presence in the palace to dine as he had been thus far, to spend the evening, to participate in the dances, to attend the soirees, to accompany her to the opera, and so on.

Victoria missed him terribly, but she understood and couldn’t do more than endure his absence. She tried to surround herself with other people her own age, but she found all the young men who flattered her to be empty beings, immature, reckless, vain, ignorant, and other more unpleasant things. The comparison was inevitable. No one could rival William! He was always more mature, more thoughtful, more calm, smarter, more cultured, more handsome!

At night, when she was alone in her bedroom, in her nightgown, she would stand at the window looking at the stars with the telescope he had given her on her 20th birthday. Other times she read the letters he had sent her and that she kept as treasures, even if they were only about political matters. However, some contained words that expressed the affection and concern he felt for her. She imagined the sound of his voice uttering the words she read. It was a pleasure to run her fingers through the paper and think that he had touched them and that his fist had drawn those letters. She thought of his hands... She breathed the scent of the paper, the same smell of his library the day she had burst in. It smelled of books, old paper, wood and leather... It was warm and sweet...

And then she thought of him alone in that big house, whether he was in London or at Brocket Hall, even more alone at Brocket Hall, isolated in the middle of the countryside. He would have dinner alone, he would have no one to talk to, nor any distractions other than reading and writing... He would sleep alone in an immense bed... or else he wouldn’t even go to bed... How could any woman have been able to betray that man? She lamented the solitary and painful life he carried, he deserved much more and much better! And she had everything to offer him! She would give all of herself to him! And he didn’t want to...

She ended up going to bed. She lay on her side, flexed her legs, grabbed a pillow, and imagined herself embracing William. And it was so comfortable falling asleep like that! Imagine that it was
true. And his name was so beautiful! She loved to call him Lord M, it was intimate. But William was even more intimate! She liked to hear Emma speak of him, she called him that. William... William Lamb...

His image was the last thing her mind projected before falling asleep, and the first one that shone when she woke in the morning.

It was he who had imposed the new rules, but that didn’t mean that this separation didn’t cost him too. Melbourne would give everything to be at the palace at night in her company, as it had happened on most evenings until then. And he knew that she should be down in the dumps with his absence. He would stay alone at home surrounded by books and papers, unless he had an official commitment or an invitation he could not refuse that made him have to go out at night. But for the most part, he couldn’t concentrate on the tasks he had set out to do. So brandy was his salvation!

One night, against all the recommendations he could make to himself, he left home after dinner for a walk. His steps obviously led him to Buckingham! Passing by the palace on a night stroll was normal, but he couldn’t be seen prowling or standing in front of the Queen's house! That would give rise to comments, suspicions about the reasons for his presence there, at that hour! And being a public figure didn’t help at all! But he couldn’t resist! He couldn’t even see her! However, being closer to her was appeasing... Or not...

In the vicinity of the palace he slowed his pace still at a convenient distance. There was light coming out of the Queen's chambers. He drew as near as possible, but at the same time maintaining a safe distance, so that in case he was discovered by someone in that place, he could still have a plausible excuse to give. He saw a figure near a window. That window was in the Queen's bedroom. She was at the window! He stood behind a nearby tree. Not that at that distance and in the dimly lit spot he was in, she could see him. But it was safer. The enormous distance she was at made that he couldn’t distinguish her face, but with the lit candles inside the room and the curtains drawn back it was possible to see her silhouette in the window, her hair down, she would be in her nightgown... Then she made a movement and he realized what she was doing: watching the stars with the telescope he had given her! He remembered her words about the telescope: “It was the only thing I had of yours, and in the nights when I couldn’t sleep and watched the sky from one of the windows of my room, it allowed me to see some things much more clearly...”. It had been in those moments that she had found herself in love with him! In that instant she was up there thinking about him! And he was down there looking at her! And she didn’t know it!

He went home a lot more radiant! Only a few hours ago he had been with her, but to be able to see her again, at that hour, when this shouldn’t have happened, and to know that she presumably was thinking about him, gave him a special satisfaction!

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That morning, just like all the others, Skerrett fixed the Queen's hair in front of her dressing table. The more time passed, the more intimate they became. Although a gigantic social difference separated them, their age was close and in other circumstances of life they could have been just friends.

While she was combed, the Queen asked:

“Skerrett... Can I ask you something?”

“All questions you’d like, Ma’am.”

The Queen turned to her and Skerrett waited for the question.
“You know, I’m curious about something, but I don’t have anyone to talk to about it... I cannot talk about it with my mother, with Lehzen, or my ladies... But you, who are my age, should understand me... And you have lived in other places, met other people, while I was always locked up in Kensington...”

Skerrett silently made an affirmative nod, prompting her to continue.

The Queen continued:

“When people marry, what happens between them? The wedding night... you see? Do you know?”

Skerrett didn’t know what to say. The Queen of England, a virgin, was asking her, who by chance had already worked at a house of prostitutes, if she knew what happened between a man and a woman on their wedding night!

Before the silence and astonishment of the girl the Queen added:

“You don’t know either? It’s just that I would like to be prepared for the day I have to marry someone. Everyone says that I should get married and even though I don’t have a fiancé right now, I would like to know what it’s like...”

The dresser thought she had to get over her embarrassment. Clearly, she was asking for her help. And Skerrett was very fond of her and liked to be able to help her.

“Well, Your Majesty, I have a friend who... she is married... and she told me what it’s like...”

Victoria asked her to sit down in front of her, and after the dresser sat down, she stood very attentive to what she was going to say.

Skerrett tried to be simple and brief in the approach. She told her that men's bodies were different and that that happened because they had a "fitting" function in the women's bodies. And that was what happened when they got married... or when a woman gave herself to a man... they "fitted" in together... And it was from this action that babies could be made. But what Skerrett was careful to emphasize, to dispel any concerns, and which Victoria retained as the most important of the conversation, was that if it was done with love, it didn't hurt. And that was the most beautiful thing that could happen between a man and a woman...

***

The investigation on the Queen's attempted assassination revealed that the weapon was not loaded, it contained only gunpowder, and that the letter advising to wait for instructions from Hanover had been written by Edward Oxford himself! Although tried for high treason, he was eventually diagnosed as mad and sent to an asylum where he should be kept until the Queen ordered otherwise.

***

Victoria had been out of the palace for a few days in the country house of a high nobility family, accompanied by her ladies.

The Duchess of Kent, who hadn’t accompanied her, had news.

As soon as Victoria, on her return, entered the room, the duchess immediately walked to her and kissed her.
“Victoria, I'm so glad you're back! In your absence a letter from Copenhagen arrived!”

“A letter?”

“Yes, Christian from Denmark introduced himself as your suitor!”

“What?” The surprise and fear on her face. “Again?”

“Yes, poor Christian, last time we declined his claim because we considered Albert the ideal match. But as he learned that you rejected Albert, he renewed his claim.”

“It cannot be! I don’t want to marry him!”

“Victoria, Christian from Denmark is a great alternative to Albert! He was in your coronation, remember?”

“Vaguely...” Victoria replied, rolling her eyes.

“So you barely know him to dislike him already.”

“I dislike any man who...”

She was going to say “is not Lord Melbourne”, but stopped in time and concluded the sentence in another way:

“...wants to marry me! I said I didn’t want to marry anyone!”

“That is not a viable alternative for your life! Let's invite Christian to come to London and...”

“No! Never! You are forbidden! I don’t authorize this!”

Victoria left the room, slammed the door, and went to her chambers. She threw herself onto the bed and cried.

***

She had to tell Lord M, but she was upset to have to address the issue. If she didn’t speak about it, it was as if the matter didn’t exist. Verbalizing it would make it real! But the matter was too relevant not to be transmitted to Lord M. In addition, it would become public and he would eventually find out. It was better if she told him first.

And what was he going to say? What could he do? If only he could save her! She thought he desired her as much as she did! His gaze had already given her this certainty many times. The way she had caught him off guard, staring at her during the dinners. The eyes, his eyes! There was nothing more beautiful and brighter! The way he offered her his hands, the soft and prolonged touch, giving her skin an intense thrill! The complicit silences!

She walked in the gardens of Buckingham Palace with Harriet, Emma, and Dash.

Melbourne appeared.

- Ma’am! Ladies…

He saw immediately in her face that something had happened.

“I was told that Your Majesty would be here. At this time we usually gather in your chambers, I
thought it strange...”

“Lord M! I needed to walk, to catch some air...”

She squeezed her hands together anxiously, looked down at the ground and began to walk.

He began to walk beside her.

The ladies of the bedchamber followed behind.

They had walked only a few steps when the Queen looked back and asked:

“Harriet, Emma... Do you mind waiting here? I need to speak privately with Lord Melbourne.”

The two women nodded and stopped following them.

They continued to walk next to each other. Dash stood behind them.

“What's the matter, Ma'am? You are worrying me!”

They came to a garden bench and Victoria stopped. He thought she was going to sit down, but she remained standing. She was too nervous to sit down. She turned to face him and said:

“We have a new suitor!”

Melbourne felt his chest shrink.

“Do we? I thought the suitors were for you, Ma'am.” He tried to joke, picking up the unusual fact of her having spoken in the plural, making that matter, which was hers, as something that concerned both of them. And how it concerned them both!

She sighed looking as if this was no laughing matter.

“Lord M, please!” She said annoyed, and continued:

“Christian from Denmark renewed his claim to marry me, since I remain single.”

Melbourne chose to focus on the obvious part:

“Well, let me see, Christian is the son of Friedrich Wilhelm, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Beck, and Princess Louise Caroline of Hesse. I believe he is the fourth child. Through his mother, he is the great-grandson of King Frederick V of Denmark, he has affinity with you as he is the great-great grandchild of George II of Great Britain, and is a descendant of several other monarchs, having no direct pretensions to any of the European thrones. It seems normal to me that he finds himself to be a suitable suitor and that your mother and your uncle Leopold would find him appropriate. In fact, he must be about your age.”

“He's 22 years old.”

“And what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know, that's why we're having this conversation. My mother already wanted to invite him to come to London... Why do I have to go through this again? I feel like a cow in a market waiting for a buyer...”

If it had not been for the panic in her face - and on his chest - Melbourne would have laughed at
“Lord M, I don’t want to marry him! I don’t want to marry anyone! But then I wonder if it would be wise to refuse another suitor. For England, because of my condition as Queen... And how many times am I going to keep doing this in my life? How did Elisabeth resist this pressure for so many years?"

Clearly, she was begging him for help. As if saying “Do something, get me out of here.” He wanted to be able to do something. He wanted to get her out of there. All he had to do was tell her that he loved her and she would have no doubts about what to do next. She would immediately reject Christian from Denmark. But then what? He felt imprisoned within his own life and there was no possible escape, there was no solution for the situation they were in. He wanted to be able to take her and run away to the other side of the world, somewhere where no one knew she had been a Queen and he a Prime Minister. However, he couldn’t do any of this; he could only try to help in his eternal position as guide, friend and confidant.

“To refuse him will not be prudent, in fact. But I understand that you are not even willing to welcome him to London. Postpone it. Save time. Say you'll think about it. If it takes too long he will find another chance.” He ended up suggesting.

He couldn’t believe he had just said that last sentence! He wanted, just like her, that Christian from Denmark disappeared from the map, which was not the rational solution to the English throne. But is love rational?

Victoria grabbed both his hands and squeezed them between hers, at her chest high. Although unfortunately he didn’t reciprocate her feelings, in fact he saw her as a woman and not just as a Queen. And that reassured her. He was the only one who understood. And he didn’t see her only as a match for an advantageous wedding or as a path to power. She felt like hugging him! Kissing him! But she couldn’t.

She closed her eyes and said:

“Thank you Lord M, thank you so much!”

She opened her eyes.

“I knew that together we would find a solution. At least for now.” She concluded.

They returned to the palace for that morning’s meeting.

Melbourne was struggling with the anguish caused by the news. Something that was common in his life. Now there was another suitor. The nightmare was going to start all over! He knew this was going to happen. He himself had told her to be open to other possibilities. But now it was real! Now there was another prince on the way! Why did his life have to be like that? Why? Why? He could never have imagined that such a thing could have happened in their lives! The Queen in love with him and him in love with the Queen! Madness! A tragedy! An affliction!

***

After telling her mother that she was going to think about Christian's proposal as a way to appease her for a while, Victoria took refuge in her quarters.

When returning home in the carriage Melbourne was thinking how they were both living a lie, pretending nothing was wrong. When in reality everything was wrong! They had the most sincere relation that existed, but which, in reality, was overlaid by a pretense relationship... Walking in that
line between friends and lovers was something very slippery and dangerous. It was so easy to fall... But how to get up after that?
Melbourne woke up at Brocket Hall where he had spent the weekend, and hoped to be able to return to London where he had a meeting with the Queen. However, he woke up feeling as if he had caught a cold. The day before he had gone to watch the rooks in the same spot where Victoria had once appeared to him and had declared her love for him. Sometimes it didn’t do him any good going back there, other times he felt the need to go there and stay for a while. In the most secret part of himself he imagined that she could return there... but obviously that was not going to happen... What was true was that because of the rooks-watching, night had fallen, he was still out there in the cold on the return home and now the result was visible... It was impossible to travel to Buckingham! He had to send a message to the Queen. Not only informing why he wouldn’t come to her, but also reassuring her, lest she thought of showing up.

Victoria was expecting him to arrive that day at mid-morning, as was usual when they met. But instead of him came a note that a footman handed to her in a silver plate. Her heart pounded in her chest when she saw the calligraphy so familiar. She broke the seal and opened it quickly. Everything that had to do with him was of crucial importance to her.

She read:

"Brocket Hall, 21st September 1840
Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to Her Majesty and regrets to inform that he will not be able to present himself to Her presence today.
Lord Melbourne is at Brocket Hall where he is slightly ill with a mere cold in consequence of a chilly night. He shall be fully recovered soon."

Victoria immediately wrote an answer she had delivered to Brocket Hall:

"Buckingham Palace, 21st September 1840
The Queen regrets to know that Lord Melbourne is feeling unwell and therefore that she will not be able to see him today.
The Queen anxiously hopes that Lord Melbourne may recover quickly and may soon return to her presence."

Victoria was saddened because she wasn’t going to see him that day, and also slightly worried because he was sick. However, that didn’t affect her too much. Soon he would be back.

But the week went by and he didn’t show up nor sent any more word.

She asked Emma if she knew anything. But she didn’t, if she did she would have already told her. However, she pledged to find out. Her husband, Baron Edward Portman, undersecretary for the colonies, would go to Brocket Hall to pay a visit and bring news.

The news came. Melbourne was better, there was nothing to worry about. He should return the next week.

Victoria was grateful for the information and tried to push away the thought of him all alone in the countryside, a much more secluded place than Buckingham... But the more she tried to dismiss that idea, the more she thought about it. About three months had gone by since their personal distancing had been decided between them! An eternity! There was a pain inside her to have him, a pain that would only be appeased if he reciprocated what she felt for him. His absence was
palpable. In his absence she couldn’t breathe. The anguish kept her from concentrating on what she was doing and forced her to constantly take deep breathes, as if searching for air pockets that would prevent her from suffocating.

Emma noticed her anxiety, but said nothing.

On Thursday Melbourne was already recovered, but he didn’t feel like going to London on Friday. He would spend the weekend there and return on Monday. He also felt himself in a phase where he wanted to take refuge in there, far away from the hustle and bustle of the city, to be quiet in silence, not needing to dress up, to be able to spend a lot of time in the library or in the bedroom reading or writing. Even organizing some matters he would later discuss with the Queen.

On Saturday after lunch Victoria couldn’t resist the whim she felt:

“Emma!”

“Yes Ma’am!”

“I need your help and discretion in a matter.”

“Of course, Ma’am, whatever you need.”

Victoria hesitated a little, but ended up saying:

“I need you to lend me your carriage so that I can go to Brocket Hall, and I need you to hide the fact that I am not at the palace. Today I have no official appointments, but there can always be someone asking for me, wanting to see me. I need you and Harriet to make up credible excuses for these people not to see me. Tell them I’m asleep, sick, that I asked not to be disturbed, anything…”

Emma was apprehensive. Supposedly the Queen shouldn’t travel alone! For the danger of something happening to her, and not to give rise to comments. But by the way she had spoken, she clearly showed that she wanted to go alone, she didn’t intend to have Emma accompanying her. She thought she could call her to reason and tell her not to go, but she couldn’t. And she would also be incapable of not helping her, which she had already done in other circumstances... And she trusted William... so...

Victoria went. In an unguarded carriage! What recklessness!

She was wearing her light blue dress with lace cuffs, simple and sober as she liked her dresses, but very pretty! It was not an adequate dress for travel, nor to go to the countryside, but she wanted to be very beautiful for him. The hair had been simply combed with a braid rolled into a bun, around which a simple blue ribbon was tied. The broad neckline of the dress, which exposed the shoulders, was covered with a cloak to protect herself from the cold, and a long, dark veil over her hat covered her face so that not even the coachman would know the identity of the lady he was carrying. Maybe he knew, but it was a precaution...

The trip to Brocket Hall took two hours. She arrived around 3 o’clock.

The butler's eyes widened when he saw her. The Queen! It was not the first time she came to Brocket Hall, but it was not every day that the Queen was welcomed in one’s house!

This time she was not going to burst into Lord M’s quarters. She wanted to spare him the embarrassment of Dover House again. Although that had turned out to be quite amusing and had enhanced the intimacy between them. She asked to be announced. In the meantime she waited in the small room she was pointed to.
Melbourne was in the bedroom, tucked into bed, in his nightgown, since he hadn’t felt like going out after lunch. He was sitting on the bed reading.

Hedges, the butler, knocked and entered when authorized, saying:

“Her Majesty the Queen is down there and wishes to see Your Lordship.”

He had the feeling that something inside him fell. If he had been standing up, his heart would have fallen to his feet! Thus, it only fell to his stomach!

“It cannot be! What is she doing here?” He thought.

“Bring Her Majesty into the living room on the first floor and tell her I’ll go right now. Oh, and I don’t want any servants on this floor until I authorize them.” He ordered.

The butler left to carry out his orders. As he walked to meet the Queen, and then escorted her into the living room, he thought how he had already seen so much in that house, for so many were the years in which he had already been in the service of the Lamb family. He remembered how His Lordship had lived sad and prostrated before the Queen ascended to the throne, and how he then began to see a different gleam in his eyes, even though it seemed to him that he was still carrying over his shoulders some invisible weight. He also remembered the first time the Queen had been there and he had told her where to find Lord Melbourne. From what he had been able to perceive, the conversation had not been pleasant. The Queen looked very upset when she left and His Lordship hadn’t had the happiness he deserved, but perhaps this was not the easiest way... Well, in his long years of service, experience told him that, the more he knew, the best attitude was always to pretend not to see or hear anything that went on around him.

Melbourne hurried off. He thought it had been a good idea to have taken a bath that morning! He put on beige pants and a white shirt. He wondered if he should put on his vest and a coat... There was no time for handkerchiefs... Since he was at home and she had showed up without warning, there wasn’t need for such formality... It was also not the first time she had seen him more in disarray... In fact, it seemed like this was becoming a tradition... He kept only the pants and shirt and put on his shoes. Okay, he was good to go. Just needed to fix the hair...

He walked down the hall to the living room.

He opened the door, came in, bumped into her standing up - visibly anxious waiting for him - and closed the door behind him.

While she waited, she had taken off her cloak, hat, and gloves, and had placed them all on a chair, along with the bag she carried. She wanted him to see the dress and the effect it had on her.

“Lord M ...” She said smiling at him as soon as she saw him enter.

He walked over to her.

“Ma’am... welcome to Brocket Hall.” He smiled back.

She smiled again tenderly.

She observed the manner he was dressed. She liked seeing him like that, with the collar of the shirt open, revealing his neck and part of his chest. She drank with her eyes his naked skin. And, like
before, she liked that more intimate way of his presenting himself to her.

“Who accompanied you here?” He asked.

“I came here by myself!”

“But that is reckless. The Queen does not travel alone…”

“I needed to be alone.” She answered with determination, putting an end to that issue.

“And you also came in disguise this time, I suppose…” He joked good-humored.

“Oh, yes, of course, better than last time…” She returned also with a sense of humor and continued:

“And you? Are you feeling better? I can see so!”

“Completely healed, Ma’am, as I asked them to tell you. I'll be back on Monday. You didn’t need to have bothered coming here.” He continued smiling.

Those green eyes were her doom. What could she do to make him allow her to submerge in them?

“You sound as if you are not pleased by my visit!” She observed, looking slightly affected by his last sentence.

“Oh, no, not at all! I am very happy and honored by your presence. I only think that my health condition does not justify worrying.”

“Oh, of course I worry; I always do about everything that concerns you.”

“Would you like to sit down?” He said, pointing to a couch.

She sat and he sat down to her left, a little apart, his body slightly twisted so he could face her.

Melbourne felt that they couldn’t remain there in that half-awkward situation where there was no futile subject to talk about. What were they going to talk about? Of the weather? Of his illness, which had already passed? Of politics, that was so far away in London, in the palace, in the House? Screw politics! Of St. Chrysostom? Of the rooks?

It was obvious that she didn’t go there for his illness...

He had to face the situation head-on. Some result would come out of it...

“Why did you come here, Ma’am?” He asked directly.

“To inquire about your health, isn’t it obvious?”

“No, it's not…”

Disarmed, she lowered her eyes to her lap and squeezed her hands. Then she looked up at him and said:

“I missed you…”

Her eyes filled with tears, her lips began to tremble and it was already at great cost that she uttered the last part of the sentence:

“…Lord M!”
Tears streamed down her face and she sobbed:

“I missed you so, so much, Lord M!”

He realized that the longing she expressed was not for the few days that she had spent without seeing him, but for all the months that had passed without their relationship being as close as it had been before. It was even longing for what had never happened...

He couldn’t bear it! That was more than he could handle! On an impulse he came to her and hugged her tightly!

Her nose lightly touched the skin of his chest, exposed in the opening of his shirt, in the moment their bodies united. Her face against his chest. Her tears that wetted his shirt. His chin rested on her head. The palms of her hands on his chest, and his arms around her back, pressing her against him, embracing her gently but at the same time with a vigor that comforted her.

“Hush... I'm here...” He said reassuringly.

He closed his eyes and let the tears fall without making a sound, so she wouldn’t realize he was crying as well.

She calmed down.

They stood like this for a while in silence.

Touching the Queen was tantamount to treason. He was holding her! But how could such a thing be considered treason?

She felt his scent and it gave her absolute peace. She took her hands from his chest and wrapped her arms around his back, pressing him against her as well and favoring a mutual hug. She wanted to merge herself into him, to transport her soul, everything she felt inside, into his body.

The sensations that they both lived at that moment in such a simple gesture were indescribable. If Paradise existed it should be like that!

At that moment come what may, she would still die happy! The width and solidity of his chest and his back... The warmth, the warmth of his body... it felt so good, so comforting! The firmness of his arms around her, the sense of absolute protection this gave her! The smell... of the body, the clothes... The movement of his chest caused by his breathing... The beating of the heart... Nobody ever hugged her. Her mother did it exceptionally, but it was not very pleasant. What she felt at this moment was completely different, beautiful and indescribable!

Melbourne was enchanted by that girl/woman. He had never had such a relationship with anyone. A relationship that allowed him to be alone in his own home with a woman in his arms without it having to result in sex at once. And that was even more exciting. Emotionally exciting. Everything about her was charming: her beauty, delicacy, nobility of character, immense strength and, at the same time, the need to be protected. Someone with a moving youth, but a woman who was mature enough to know what she felt and wanted. The Queen of England, the highest figure of the nation, to whom he owed allegiance and respect, and at the same time the ordinary woman who only needed him to pamper her.

Her breasts, pressed against his chest...

Then, without letting go of him completely, she climbed up onto the couch and knelt on the right side of his body, so that she could raise enough to place her head over his right shoulder.
She fully invaded him!

Her body glued along the right side of his body, her arms around his shoulders, her face over his right shoulder, her hair against his right ear. His arms around her back, his chin almost brushing her bare shoulder, but avoiding the touch of each other’s skin...

He pressed his head lightly against her head. He could feel the warmth emanating from her and the smell of the hair: young, pure and sweet... So comforting! And exciting at the same time. His fingers felt the structure of her corset beneath the fabric of her dress...

He could sit her on his lap if he wanted to.

He could kiss her if he wanted to.

He could…

Emotion made his body react, but his brain commanded.

They remained there, in silence, bound together for a little longer.

The Queen and the Prime Minister.

A man and a woman.

At Brocket Hall everything was so much easier between them! So much more informal, more intimate! At Brocket Hall it was easy to forget that she was the Queen and he the Prime Minister. Brocket Hall allowed that!

How long had it been since a woman had hugged him like that? In fact, had any woman ever hugged him like that? No! He knew she was deeply in love with him, but there was a candor in the way she expressed it that no other woman had ever expressed to him before.

When he thought it appropriate to say a few words, Melbourne asked:

“Do you miss me still... Ma’am?”

She released herself slowly from his embrace. Her hands passing through his chest, seemingly unconsciously, but causing in him a mixture of sensations difficult to describe.

She descended to the couch again, sitting down beside him.

“I’m sorry for all this, Lord M! I didn’t like Albert treating me like a girl, but I just behaved like one...”

Melbourne shook his head negatively and said:

“He doesn’t know you! What you just did has nothing to do with immaturity...”

“I feel so alone... The throne is the loneliest place on earth. I have no one on the same level as me, who understands me, except you... Everyone is below me and they look at me from down below. And they always have expectations to which I have to correspond, they always expect me to do something, I’m the one who is Queen... the Queen must know... I wonder what good is to be the most desired match in Europe, the Queen of the richest nation in the world, if I am not totally happy... Do you think anyone imagines that I, with all my wealth, am not the happiest woman in the world, Lord M?”
“No, no one would...”

“I wish I were an ordinary woman!”

“I wish you were an ordinary woman.” Thought Melbourne.

“You, besides Lehzen, were the first person who listened to me, who gave me attention, who believed in me, who praised me... Lord M, how grateful I am for that! As time went by I became more and more cunning. I was already strong, I had to be... and determined, I knew what I wanted... But you guided me, opened paths, and taught me what I still didn’t know... Filled my life with immense happiness, it became much more colorful, warm and sweet!”

Colorful, warm and sweet! She had said... Melbourne memorized those words and felt a satisfaction inside the chest.

“I'm glad to know I had that effect on you, Ma’am!”

“But now, without you by my side, as before, my life is such a void!”

“So is mine, so is mine...” Melbourne thought.

“You know, Ma’am, in time, you become accustomed to solitude. I got used to it too. Only it takes time and it is hard to pass by. But if that is your will, you will get used to it.”

She wanted to have answered that it didn’t have to be like that, that he didn't have to live in solitude, that since they were both alone they could combine their solitudes and find themselves in a perfect relationship for both sides... But she was questioned by Melbourne who, to get out of that situation and to get her to cheer up suggested:

“Well, since you are here, would you like to see the Brocket Hall house? We have lots of works of art and many beautiful things that I know you would like to see.”

She smiled, though feeling a little interrupted:

“That sounds like a great suggestion to me!”

He went through the various floors of the house with her, showing her the rooms he deemed convenient, and the works of art he thought would interest her. Brocket Hall was practically a palace, albeit on a smaller scale. Lined outside with Portland stone, the quality and beauty of the architecture and decor of the house were of overwhelming nobility!

They returned to the same room where they had been shortly before. Now she was much more cheerful.

Victoria grabbed her purse, hat, cloak and gloves and said:

“Well, Lord M, I think I can return to London now. Thank you for everything! I'm feeling beautifully, what happened in this room just now filled my heart! I will bring this moment with me and remember it many times.”

Melbourne felt a deep lament inside his chest for the fact that she was leaving.

“You don’t have to thank me, Ma’am. You know I would do anything for you. I just won’t do anything that might harm you in any way...” He figured she would understand the meaning of this last sentence.
“I’m also very happy for what happened here today and you can be sure that I too will remember this moment.” He concluded.

“But do not be so exigent with me, come over to the palace more often, and give me the pleasure of your company also in my leisure time. As a friend…” She asked, making him understand that he didn’t have to worry about distancing himself from her because she would be content to have him just as a friend.

“As for showing up more at the palace, we’ll see if I can... You know I too want to be your friend very much…”

He gave her hope of being closer to her, but he didn’t fully commit so that she wouldn’t be disappointed if he didn’t show up and because he didn’t know yet if it would be wise to do that again, he had to think. As for stressing that he wanted to be her friend, this statement had a double meaning that he wanted her to understand: he intended a personal relationship in which he wouldn’t be pressured by her to something more; And he wouldn’t allow himself to be taken away for more than that.

He opened the door and waited for her to leave the room so that he could follow behind her.

They took a few steps, side by side, in the corridor lit by the huge skylight on the ceiling that projected light into the hallway and into the main staircase of the house.

He intended to go downstairs and accompany her to the door. But she asked him to stay, she would go down by herself, she had also come here alone... and now she already knew the house. The butler would open the door and someone would call the coachman. He nodded. There was no point in contradicting her...

As they walked, she suddenly stopped in the hallway and he, caught unawares, realized that he had gotten ahead of her, which should not happen.

He turned to her to understand why she had stopped.

Victoria smiled at him tenderly and said:

“You once told me, that when I gave my heart, I would give it without reservation…”

He remembered the episode with the rooks and his chest tightened fearing for what she was going to say next.

“Yes, I remember.” He said, trying to look as neutral as possible.

“And you were right!!”

“Was I, Ma’am?”

“I gave it to you and it will never be anyone else's!”

Those words echoed inside his head. She told him that even if she had to marry someone else out of duty, she would only love him! How could she love him that way?

Then the Queen took his hands tenderly.

He looked at her hands and then at her.

And then she concluded:
“Goodbye, Lord M!”

“Goodbye, Ma’am!”

She let go of his hands slowly, passed close to his left shoulder and left.

He rubbed his hands together trying to keep the touch and warmth of her hands from moments before. And then he turned to watch her walking along the corridor.

He had seen that scene before! That scene that repeated itself! He not grabbing the opportunity she gave him and letting her go! Like the day he watched the rooks and she had come to declare her love for him for the first time. Melbourne felt like a trapped man between the sense of duty and the need for self-satisfaction for what he felt for Victoria. A physical satisfaction, also, but above all, an emotional satisfaction. A realization as a man he had never had before. If he let her start going down the stairs it would be too late. She was coming to the top of the stairs! She was going to climb down...

Suddenly, something popped inside him!

William Lamb was driven by some major force that made him run along the corridor! He rushed to her like he had never done before! As he should have done a long time ago! On that day when he watched the rooks, when she turned her back to him...

She heard his footsteps on the corridor, but she was not frightened. And it was all so fast that she would not even be able to.

He grabbed her by the waist and wrapped his arms around her! He held her against him! That delicate waist he had wished to seize so many times!

Oh, his hands on her body! Finally! How she had wished for that for so long!

When she felt him catching her, Victoria dropped her purse, cloak, hat, and gloves, placed her forearms on top of his, and their hands clasped together. Her right hand in his left hand and his right hand in her left hand.

His hands: big, safe and soft! Clutching hers, small and delicate, as he had never done before.

Victoria didn't have time to think about what was happening, but she felt it was something wonderful and that it would be transformative.

He kissed her left shoulder gently. He touched her skin, chaste and satiny, with his lips for the first time!

She closed her eyes and bent her neck slightly to that side, touching his head with her head.

Then he slowly covered her left shoulder with kisses until he reached the neck, which he continued to kiss upwards until he reached the nape.

Victoria felt a shiver run through her spine.

Then, with his hands on her waist, he turned her slowly toward him, looked into her eyes for a moment, those big, beautiful blue eyes, totally focused on his, as they always did. Waiting... always waiting...

Victoria grabbed his arms above his elbows with both hands. She slightly opened her mouth, took a
deep breath making her breasts rise up in the line of the cleavage and casting the exhaled breath over his face…

William kissed her!

Victoria closed her eyes.

A kiss on the lips, relatively short, but determined.

He embraced her with passion and she returned the same way.

He stopped for seconds and then kissed her again.

Victoria had never been kissed before, but she thought it so stimulating! Instinctively, she opened her mouth, moved her lips and he took advantage of that willingness to kiss her in a deeper, more intense and longer way!

She felt a strange tongue touching hers, but it was all very exciting. She offered her mouth to his ravenous tongue in a maddening desire for his touch! Her heart quickened, her body faltered, as if she was going to faint, but as long as he held her like this, like a castaway clinging to a lifeline, she would be safe. Then the sensation was wonderful, as if she was floating, something breathtaking. The most similar to that feeling of weakened limbs she had felt in life was the effect of the champagne she had drunk on the night of the coronation ball...

Melbourne experienced a huge thrill in his chest! Her lips... full and soft... How often he had wanted so much to kiss that perfect mouth, dense and pink! Now her lips were no longer an image of desire, but something real. Keeping his left hand on her waist, he wrapped his right hand around her hair and held her head to deepen the kiss. At last he could taste her! Her tongue touched his hesitantly, exploring. But this inexperience was all the more rousing. He was greedy for her and now it was possible to be satisfied!

She saw how her body could respond to those kisses and to that other body pressed against hers. This was not happening! She felt the hot, wet effect of his mouth on hers. An electrifying energy that ran through her. The taste, the breath... And through the fabric of the dress, the burning of his hands’ touch, pressing on her waist, on her back... She groaned in his mouth.

That sound made him shiver with desire.

“I'll take it!” Melbourne gasped, with his forehead pressed to Victoria's, and his hands holding her body on both sides.

“What?” Victoria asked, her too with racing breath.

“You love!” He replied with a smile.

Her face blossomed in an open smile, and her chest gasped even more quickly. She placed both hands on each side of his face, fingers at the temples, the palms on his cheeks. She stretched her neck so he would kiss her again.

He did so, responding to the appetite of that flesh now at the disposal of his craving. She was so sweet! And she was receptive. More than that, she took initiative.

“I love you, Ma'am! More than anything else in my life!”

He told her that he loved her! For the first time unequivocally! At last!
“And I love you, Lord M!”

He was intoxicating!

“My darling, my darling...” He was pronouncing as he kissed her on the mouth, the jaw, the neck... Always pressing her against him.

She felt that this was his essence, what he gave her through these kisses that she had never experienced before. She received the most intimate of him and wanted him to receive the same from her. At this moment he could take from her whatever he wanted! He could enjoy her as he pleased!

There was a mixture of sensations between them! Years of forbidden desire and contained anxiety placed in those kisses. His tongue possessing hers, tying itself to hers.

Now she couldn’t lose this physical touch, not now that it had been given to her! She couldn’t let go of him, she couldn’t conceive getting away from his skin, she wanted them to stay that way, suspended in time. A Queen, she knew, didn’t act on impulse, but at this moment giving in to impulse was the only thing she needed!

Then, when he suspended again the kisses, looking at him, languid but determined, she whispered:

“I want to be yours...”

He shuddered. He searched her eyes with his, trying to understand the exact meaning of what she was saying. Green over blue.

“Now!” She finished.

Melbourne wondered if she really knew the meaning of what she had just said.

She had now placed her palms on his chest. He grabbed both her hands with his and asked:

“Ma’am, are you sure that...?”

“Yes!” She answered determinedly before he finished the question.

He would have continued the question with “you really want to do this?”

Her eyes sparkled with an uneasiness that Melbourne interpreted as a mixture of curiosity, desire, and nervousness.

“But do you know...?”

She was not able to speak again... She lowered her head and, once more, now with her head under his chin, made an affirmative motion before he finished the question.

He would have continued with “what the consequences are?”. He thought of her ceasing to be a virgin to any potential spouse, the danger of pregnancy, and even worse, the extreme risk of forced abdication...

She knew... What did she know? She knew that she loved him, that she trusted him more than herself, that she wanted to give herself to him so badly, although she didn’t know exactly what it would entail, but instinctively she knew she wanted to do it, there was a magnetic energy in him that impelled her to do so. And she remembered what Skerrett had said: if it was done with love, it did not hurt. And that was the most beautiful thing that could happen between a man and a
woman... If they loved each other, then, there was no difficulty. And she wanted to know very much what the most beautiful thing that could happen between them was. If everything that had happened between them had always been so wonderful until this day, then if there were still more steps to climb, she wanted to attain that achievement. And judging from what had happened so far, when he hugged her and kissed her, she could only wish that more was possible.

He thought she was stunning! And she was always following unexpected paths, disarming him. If he rejected her now, then she would beg. And he would never allow her to go through such humiliation! Beg him to give her what he most wanted to give her! And he was no saint, he never had been! She was the one who saw him as a man of virtues. But she was special to him and their relationship was special. However, it was so special that it even consented to this: she was there with him in a place she shouldn’t be, the words she had uttered before that she should never have said, and what would happen next if he allowed it. And he couldn’t deny it to her or to him. He couldn’t send her away again... He was no longer in condition to do so... If they had already gotten there, there was no going back anymore. Why was that gift offered to him? She was a gift and he couldn’t deny it. He, who was no saint, at that moment was only a man. He wanted to be only a man right now! So from now on, her life would be in his hands!

Brocket Hall allowed everything...

He picked her up and carried her into the bedroom.
Chapter 8

When he entered the room he laid her down slowly on the floor. He turned and locked the door. He wanted time! Time for them, time just for her!

Victoria took the opportunity to observe the bedroom. The huge canopy bed, with the linen pulled down – as he had left it when he went out – the white sheets and pillows. A huge window facing the trees... and the rooks... His reassuring scent in there...

The bedroom was large and therefore they were far from the bed, on its right side, whereas the window was on the wall at the left side of the bed.

Melbourne turned to her, held her around the waist and kissed her raptly.

She felt a mix of anxiety, faintness of limbs, tenderness, and desire for this wonderful man.

Then he kissed her softly on the lips, again and again, and remembered a detail that should be more comfortable for Victoria.

Leaving her for a few moments, he went to leave the window’s shutters ajar, straining the incoming light. Although the shutters were almost completely closed, they could still see each other clearly, the atmosphere became only more intimate.

He walked back to her.

He touched her lips again and she immediately responded, as she had been anxiously awaiting his return. They kissed for a long time, discovering the touch and shape of their bodies through their clothes.

From that moment the world ceased to exist! England ceased to exist! There was only that room and them inside it!

He was going to have to undress her! Usually, they came already with the process facilitated, in their underwear or naked. But in this case even the clothes she wore prolonged the years of waiting to live this moment. However, the task would also be delicious...

Gently he turned her around. He kissed her shoulders and neck and began to open the clasps on the back of her dress, from top to bottom, revealing a little more of her back, pieces of naked skin until then invisible, to which he was adding kisses.

Feeling the body of her dress open, Victoria pulled it down, freed herself from the sleeves, and the skirt fell in balloon around her.

He then untied the ribbon that held the petticoat around her waist and the piece also fell to the floor on top of the dress.

It was time to remove the corset that, although it could be opened in the front where it had clasps, it had to be previously extended in the back where it was tightened with cords. As patiently as possible, but with a feverish curiosity, Melbourne delicately untied the lowest cord and went on extending the cords from the bottom up until the corset loosened on her body. His fingers were not trained in the small details of those feminine tasks, but he did his best.

Then she turned to him and tried to have him kiss her again. Her thirsty lips!
Melbourne complied, going down from her lips to the corner of her mouth, then to her jaw, her neck, her chest, and then to the uppermost part of her breasts, now more exposed over the corset and the shirt without shoulders and with very short sleeves that she wore underneath.

At last what he had wished so many times to be able to do could now be fulfilled. How had he been allowed to kiss that skin? Feeling her skin on his lips made him dizzy. To feel his mouth on her skin was inebriating. She caught his fiery gaze over her chest above the corset.

His fingers slipped over the edge of the corset, between it and the shirt, and began to open the clasps, one by one, from top to bottom.

With each clasp he opened, Victoria felt more exposed, but freer as well. How she wanted to be free of everything for him... She felt his fingers touch her breasts and moving down her body, over the shirt, as he moved them to open the clasps. That touch was new, strange and yet so familiar... and exciting! Her heart raced, her breath too.

To Melbourne the expectation was growing. How he had dreamed with that moment, how he had already seen it happen like this in his dreams! While sleeping and day-dreaming. When he released her from the corset he let it drop to the floor.

Victoria was left only with the knee length shirt, slightly transparent, which let envisage her breasts underneath; her underpants also at knee length, and below the white stockings that rose above the knees to a third of her thighs.

Their disturbance grew with the uneven breathlessness of their ardor.

Melbourne thought it would be more comfortable for her if he didn’t yet strip off her shirt that would continue to cover her naked body. So, kissing her on the exposed part of her breasts, his hands ran through Victoria's body up to down, along her hips and thighs and pressing her buttocks with moderate intensity.

Taken by the dizziness, she alternated between grabbing his neck and head with both hands.

He grabbed her shirt by her thighs on both sides and pulled it up so he could put his hands under the fabric. Underneath the shirt, he raised his hands to Victoria's waist, untied the ribbon that bound the underpants and bending down made them fall to her feet. The shirt came down behind his hands, preventing him from seeing her nakedness. He didn’t want to rush it, and for her it would be more gradual.

She felt with increasing excitement the slight, unintended touch, but now direct of his fingers on the skin of her belly and thighs as he untied and lowered her underwear. The feeling of absolute nudity beneath her shirt was new, disturbing, and liberating at the same time!

Then he grabbed the ribbon that wrapped around her hair bun and pulled it. The ribbon was untied and he let it drop to the floor. Then he removed the hairpins that held together her hair bun one by one, and it fell apart in a braid. He untied the tiny ribbon that held the end of the braid. He stuck his fingers through the three locks of braided hair, and carefully undid it and made it fall over her shoulders. With the outer part of his right hand fingers he stroked her left cheek, looking at her with absolute adoration as she closed her eyes. Then he opened his hand, placing the index finger behind her ear and his thumb on her face. He moved his fingers gently behind her ear and on her face. Then he went down, his thumb over her jaw, his other fingers over her neck, his whole hand over her shoulder, caressing her skin very slowly. He turned his hand over and slid down her arm, touching it with the outside of his fingers.
She kept her eyes closed. That had a provocative effect! No one had ever touched her before. She had never felt the touch of another's skin on hers. And the skin that touched hers was his! It was his hands! And the way he touched her! It was thrilling!

To free her from all that fabric around her feet, he picked her up again releasing her from all the undressed garments left on the floor. She facilitated the task by moving her feet and taking off her shoes.

Victoria didn’t know for a fact what would happen next, but at that moment she let herself be guided by him, just as she had always done in the exercise of her sovereignty. She absolutely trusted him in everything, she would entrust her own life to him, and so there was no doubt, fear or embarrassment. She was only nervous for the anticipation of what was to come next, and for the novelty of what was happening. But each transposed phase told her that the previous nervousness was not justified. With any other man that would be completely inconceivable. With him it was crystal clear! She let herself go with the same ease with which everything happened together with that man!

He carried her to the edge of the right side of the bed.

He sat her down on the edge of the bed.

Her shirt rose to the middle of her thighs.

He knelt at her feet, his Queen, as he had done so many times, but now in another context and for another purpose. He placed himself between her legs and as he kissed her mouth, he slowly traced with his hands the exposed skin of her thighs above the stockings. Silk! It was the word that best described the touch of her skin! How he had longed for the softness of that body! He felt the warm, soft skin that his shaking hands were discovering.

She felt for the first time the warmth of his hands coming up her thighs, almost to her groin, squeezing into her skin. His thumbs were going up in the inside part, and the remaining fingers in the outside.

Then he put his arms around her and kissed her breasts softly over the fabric of the shirt, then her belly, and again her breasts.

Victoria tilted her head back with a moan of joy as she gripped his head with both hands, trailing her fingers through the dazzling curl of his hair. She wanted to feel his mouth on her bare skin, without the fabric standing in the way.

Melbourne delighted with the coziness of her fingers. It felt so good!

They had not uttered a word since they had left the top of the stairs, but no words were necessary. They were soul mates and had long since developed an eye language. Their eyes were enough to communicate. And now there were also their hands and mouth... In addition, to say something then would break the magic of the moment. After so much waiting for both of them, what any of them wanted was to enjoy the moment. Contemplate and feel!

She brought her head forward again and he kissed her mouth.

Holding her back with his left hand, with his right he traversed her belly, over the fabric, upwards. He held her right breast in the palm of his hand, lifted it up and felt it softly. His hands on her breasts!

Her breasts in his hands! It felt so good that Victoria thought it could not be real.
Then she lowered her hands, stroking his neck, and caressed his shoulders over the shirt, while he kissed her mouth eagerly. She put her hands in the opening of his shirt, in the exposed part of his chest, and opened it wider, exposing his chest and shoulders where she moved her hands repeatedly.

Her hands touching the skin of his body! He found that touch so delightful! He moaned with pleasure and, continuing to kiss her, stripped off his shirt to give her easier access to his own body.

Victoria felt herself exalting before his firm, elegant torso. She had never seen a man’s naked upper body before, but what she saw at that moment was charming and exciting, in a way that is hard to describe... Now it was possible not only to see, but also to touch, much more than what he had exposed when he had been more in disarray in her presence. With her exploring hands she traced his chest and back avidly, feeling the softness of his skin, the unprecedented touch of the hair on his chest, and the warmth emanating from him. As he kissed her on the left shoulder, she brushed her cheek against his chest... A new contact of astounding effect!

Melbourne felt it was time to take her shirt off, either by the moment they were in, and by the thought that she was excited enough to make it appear as a natural action now. He grabbed the fabric of her shirt in her back and used some force to raise it, for Victoria was seated over her shirt and therefore restraining it. She realized what he wanted to do and relieved her own weight letting the shirt go up. Then he lifted her shirt lightly, an action she facilitated by raising her arms. From bottom to top, the shirt went on revealing her naked body until she was completely released from the covering fabric, which he threw to the end of the room.

It felt a bit embarrassing being unprotected like that without the fabric, but she wanted to do this, she needed to do this!

Contemplating her with total devotion, Melbourne wondered what had he ever done in life to be worthy of such a vision! The body he had so often wished to see and touch. The Queen's body that he must never have seen or touched. The body he saw and touched at that moment. The virgin and untouched body of Victoria! He felt a shudder at the excitement of being the man who initiated her in the pleasures of the flesh. There was so much to get out of her... Her breasts in front of him: firm, round and beautiful! Never touched before, not even observed by anyone! Bigger than they seemed to be when she was dressed and pressed by the corset, and he saw them over the neckline of her dress.

Now there she was, exposed in front of him, but the tenderness with which he looked at her was so strong, there was such a sweetness in that look that made her feel comfortable in that intimacy!

He was moved! He ardently wanted that body offered to him, but at the same time he was softened by the candor of that girl/woman he had in front of him!

With his hands on her back, sustaining her body, which she leaned back, he kissed her belly again, now directly on the skin, and started going up. As he ran his hands over the softness of her flesh in bloom, he brought his face close to her breasts. He kissed them gently, one and then the other. He spread kisses around each of them and brushed them with his nose. He sank between them! He swept the interval between them with kisses, and with his nose, and then with his tongue. He felt her twitch at the touch of his tongue. Her skin smelled of lavender! He placed his mouth in the pink center of her right breast. He kissed it. He sucked it for a while. Then he did the same in the left breast. He knew the effect that action had on women, how exciting it was, promoting the lubrication she needed for the next phase. If there was anything positive about the age difference between them, one of them was the knowledge it gave him about women.

It was her! Here and now! In all her youth! The Queen! Victoria!
Now her body was no longer merely a figure of veneration, of his imagination’s stimulus or of his nocturnal desires, but a real body which was possible to enjoy. At last! Victoria felt drunk with pleasure! His mouth, hot and wet, on her breasts! The cuddling of the nose! The hot breath! The smooth skin of his well shaved face, caressing the inside of her breasts. The suction effect. There was a growing tingling in the lower abdomen and even lower... Instinctively she wrapped her legs around his body as she embraced him around his neck with both hands and thrust her fingers in his nape’s hair!

He noticed there was a flame inside her! And her hands on his neck and inside his hair gave him a feeling of voluptuous sweetness.

“William!” She exclaimed.

She wondered if she should have called him that. It was the first time she uttered his name as she spoke it inwardly. But he didn’t say anything, so there was no inconvenience. William was a suave name! Even softer than Lord M.

He liked to hear her pronounce his name with that intimacy she had never used before. She alone called him Lord M, and this form of treatment had always been tender and provocative to him, but hearing her call him by his first name, in an extreme familiarity, made him even more roused. He kissed her mouth voraciously as he grabbed her left breast with determination. He didn’t want to be too abrupt for what he imagined would be her perception, but he knew that determination would be exciting for her, and he was growing more and more excited!

His hands on her breasts, on her belly, her back, her thighs, her hips, her buttocks, pressing her! Those hands beautiful and vigorous, and delicate at the same time! Her breasts grew thicker and her skin burned. At that moment he could do with her anything he wanted! She fervidly wished for him to do everything he wanted!

He felt himself entering a state of primitive and wild man!

She noticed the difference in his condition.

He was out of the usual Lord M’s mood he always showed!

She saw him out of the Lord M’s disposition she had always known! But all that, although new and surprising, was pleasant and not frightening.

He concentrated on her. That moment had to be hers. His too, but for her it was the first time and he couldn’t disappoint her, he couldn’t rush it... If the impetus at that point was already too much, it would not go well... Maybe it was better to think of the red boxes of the dispatches...

He leaned over her kissing her and making her lay down on the bed. He moved her body aligning it to the center of the bed and making sure her head was on the pillows. Her hair scattered over the white of the sheets. Then he sat on the bed with his back to her and his feet to the floor to take off the shoes and undress his pants and underwear.

Victoria flexed her legs, with her knees high and held together. At that moment she felt too exposed and the flexing of her legs gave her a slight sense of protection from his direct gaze on what was most intimate. It was easier when he kissed her and she knew where his eyes were. She laid her hands on her belly, a stance she was used to when appearing socially as Queen and that give her security. On his bed, where he had slept, his scent on the sheets and the pillows was intoxicating! It was warm and sweet.
He had always thought it a bit ridiculous the moment when he had to undress his pants, not because of shame, but because it meant stopping what he was doing and leaving the woman in the middle of the process... He did that as quickly as possible, not only for her, but for him too... He turned and climbed onto the bed already naked.

Victoria preferred not to look directly at everything he exposed... She turned her head to the left and looked out the window. She heard the rooks outside. The rooks mated for life. He had said that. She knew that this was what they were doing at that moment. She thought he was going to kiss her again, but he positioned himself at her feet, grabbed the top of her right stocking and began to pull it slowly along her leg until it came out her foot. Then he did the same with the left stocking.

She put her arms along her body and closed her eyes.

Then he began to kiss her from her right foot to her knee, and then up her thigh to her belly.

Victoria moaned at his mouth’s course, she could never have imagined how good it was to be kissed like that!

He took his time kissing and licking her belly at different places.

She ran her right hand over his head as she felt the middle of her legs throb for him in an innovative way!

Then he laid at her right side and kissed her again on the mouth as she wrapped her arms around his shoulders. Continuing to kiss her he lowered his right hand along her body. Back, waist, belly. He went down, down, and got there! The open hand over the lower abdomen, fingers stretched over the triangular area between her legs.

As such at the first touch Victoria, who still had her knees bent, retreated! He had a hand in there!

He wanted to tell her something that would free her from the slight tension caused by his hand placed there for the first time. But there was nothing truly effective to say at that moment that he could think of.

He looked at her and made that gesture of encouragement with the eyebrows she knew so well. It was the most effective thing he could do to make her relax. He knew that. She knew that. Then she relieved the tension and spread her legs slightly.

He lowered his cupped hand and his long fingers covered the whole middle of her legs!

From that moment on the bedroom ceased to exist. There was only that bed and both of them on it. He stroked the orifice with two fingers and felt she was very wet as it was desirable.

Victoria couldn’t believe what was happening! He was touching... there!

Discovering the secret places of her body drove him crazy! With his wet fingers in her, he traced the space between the folds of flesh upwards, from one side to the other slowly and gently, without pressure. He repeated the gesture with his fingers on both sides at the same time upwards. He went down. Then he went up and down, repeated the process a few times, progressively increasing the pressure and speed, but without intensifying it too much.

She could feel his fingers. Oh no! How good it was! The hand... His hand, his fingers... in her! The
same hand that held hers when he knelt at her feet and saluted her as Queen! Her Prime Minister, the man who had always been the most respectful of her subjects, but also the tenderest and the most intimate, now with a strong definite purpose caressed with his hand the middle of her legs, stirring her desire until then contained. What one could do with one’s hands!

He filled his hand in her. He thought she was perfect, with the right proportionality. He was not seeing her, but the image was communicated through his fingers. He wanted to believe she had been designed to fit perfectly into his hand like that. One day she might marry another man, but no one would ever have what he had at that moment! No one! No other man would have put his hand there for the first time and felt the first time she had gotten wet.

The exhilaration caused by his hand covering her completely was inexpressible. She started to moan louder and started to gasp more.

He felt her desire grow. Giving in to instinct, Victoria encouraged him to proceed! Around the orifice he repeatedly made circular movements to relax the spot, encouraging it to open and distend.

“What you're doing to me is...” She said languidly.

“All you deserve.” He completed softly.

He put aside the possibility of putting his fingers inside her; he didn’t want to do it like that... She was prepared for it to happen otherwise. She deserved it to happen otherwise! He raised his hand, stroked with his fingers the upper and central part with a slight pressure.

Oh no! That was extraordinary! Victoria closed her eyes and squirmed in his hand! She was much wetter now!

He noticed her squirming with pleasure, and she was pressing herself against his hand in search of the satisfaction that it gave her. She was freeing herself and that was beautiful!

She knew there was an energy that worked there. She had already touched that spot a few times in her life when she was in bed in the dark and could not sleep. By mere chance of course, when adjusting her underwear or feeling an itch, she had discovered that touching that place made her feel unlike anything she felt when touching any other part of her body. But it was strange and she didn’t explore where else that could lead her. She slept in her mother's room until the day she became Queen. She was always watched. There were not many possibilities for her to discover her own body. The day she had become Queen she told her mother that her first wish was to be left alone for an hour. And that night she slept for the first time alone in a bedroom.

Now it was different! It was more intense! And it was his hand, warm and soft, vigorous and beautiful, with protruding veins, which she had caressed in a corridor in Windsor that caused that! Victoria felt herself in his hands! Completely in his hands! But she felt no inhibition towards him, she gave herself entirely and nothing that he did would matter! Anything would be extraordinary, for sure!

His heart beat faster and faster, and his breathing grew more and more breathless. He wanted her to be his! He wanted to be inside her!

Melbourne lifted his body and leaned over her.

The concrete movement above her led Victoria to open her legs for the placement of his body in that interval!
On his knees, he placed his hands on either side of her hips and ran up her body, outlining her shapes until the waist. How often had he wanted to do that! Feel the curve between her hips and her waist, thin and delicate, that was almost possible to contour with the hands. Her figure was fascinating! The touch of the skin absolutely delirious!

He lay on top of her and kissed her passionately on the belly, inside her breasts, mouth, neck, chest and breasts as they hugged each other. He ran his hands across her thighs and buttocks, encouraging her to keep her knees bent, which helped lift her hips.

She felt the imminence of his body’s weight, a feeling of almost crushing that was terribly arousing; the heat; the smell; the skin of his entire naked body rubbing against the skin of her entire naked body; his hands; his breath; the kisses! And there was a rigid masculinity touching the skin on the inside of her thighs... Lying on top of her, he tightened his tension against her body in a thrill. His chest over the softness and voluptuousness of her breasts. Her breasts feeling the caress of his skin and the soft hairs of his chest. She had never felt that! It was as if she were plunged in something that enveloped her on all sides and in every possible way. Everything in him and everything he did was sensory and stimulating! The emotion she felt was so extraordinary that it seemed she had lost the sensation of her own bones. She thought that if she was not lying down she would faint. That must be why those things were done on a bed. With her eyes closed, she felt an effervescence inside her that guided her towards an unfamiliar but very appealing direction!

“You are a treasure!” He said as he brushed a lock of hair from her face. “My treasure…”

He positioned himself at her entrance and felt her abundantly wet. The expectation of what was to follow was overwhelming!

By feeling him leaning over, Victoria opened her eyes, felt a tightness in her belly, and her heart quickened. She tried to calm her breathing.

He looked deep into her eyes, as if to ask permission to enter, to ask if she was prepared for him to enter. From her gaze, lost in his, he thought so.

She knew what his eyes were asking. She just wanted him to do it!

He forced the entrance! Blind with desire, but careful. He couldn’t hurt her! Not now!

Victoria felt strangely forced to open! She closed her eyes, involuntarily contracted, and moaned!

He stopped.

“Breathe.” He said softly and tenderly, kissing her lovingly on the cheek.

She opened her eyes again.

He gave her some time.

She took a deep breath.

He advanced again! Breaching her deeper.

Mouths joined, mixing their flow of desire.

“Oh my love!” He exclaimed as an expression of release from the emotion he felt inside.

His breath projected into her mouth!
She noted what he had said! For the first time he called her that! My love!

Victoria felt him progress inside her, as he kissed her, opening and conquering the space of dilation of her body. The process continued slowly as he gave her the possibility of adjusting to the pressure and volume. On the one hand, there was an ardor caused by the force exerted on one side against the natural resistance of the other and by the attrition of the bodies in friction, but on the other, a luxuriant pleasure in that discomfort. She opened herself to receive him. It was an extraordinary sensation! There was an indescribable pleasure that increased at every covered inch! More and more inside her! As in politics, and as she herself had said some time before in the living room, he was now also guiding her, opening paths for her, teaching her what she didn’t know yet... Filling her with immense happiness, making her life much more colorful, hot and sweet! She ran her hands thought his back, and the feeling of his skin’s touch, warm and soft, was indescribable.

Melbourne felt the tightness, the moisture, and the warmth inside her body. He walked towards her depths, conquering every inch! She was his! He had made her and she was his! In that way, immaculate, she would never be anyone else’s! The young virgin Queen of England, the best match in Europe, the Queen of the richest nation in the world, the woman he loved and who loved him, in his house, in his bedroom, on his bed, and him inside her! Oh God! There was nothing more glorious! Nothing more to wish for in the world! This was so much more than he had ever imagined! And he had already imagined so much! He could cry at that moment! He felt her arms holding him, as if she could not bear the thought of letting him go, her hands on his ribs and back, and those soft, delicate but very determined fingers made him feel in jubilation and whispered what she felt. And it was because of him that she reacted like that! She was there pulsating, underneath him.

“My darling…”

She felt fulfilled! He was inside her! So this is how it happened...

When he had already entered her as deep as possible, he relieved the pressure by withdrawing slightly and slowly.

A more lacerating sensation ran through her.

Then he began to move his hips in a continuous swinging exercise and deepened inside her.

She felt him sink and emerge from inside her, moving as his wet tongue enlaced hers. First slowly, then faster and reaching deeper. Pleasure returned. He was bulging and hot inside her. She felt full of him! Physically and emotionally fulfilled. At last, full of him! So this was what she had been wanting from him for years, but she didn’t know! That he filled her, gave her a fullness that she had always known she wanted, but didn’t know before how to get it. She gave in to the pleasure she felt. If that was what happened between a man and a woman on their wedding night, then she wanted that to repeat continually!

They had been made for that. To be bound together! Mind, heart, soul and body. She had never been complete like this before! He had never felt so completely himself as at that moment!

Now, at that moment, she was being completed as a woman!

He rested his head on the pillow and pressed his left cheek to her face. He became attentive of her groans and breathing to try to perceive what she felt and act accordingly. Her body involved him inside. He felt every inch of her beneath him, the involuntary rhythm of her hips and thighs, her soft belly and swollen breasts. From the way she moved, moaned in appreciation and gasped beneath him, he knew all was well. There was nothing more magnificent!
She heard his guttural moans and it was new and strange, but exciting. She had never seen him like this! Out of control, beside himself! Her Lord M, always so well-ordered! And it was she who provoked that chaos, unheard of in him! That Lord M was another man. And yet it was the same man. But this one was even more exciting! So this was a man. This body, this sound and this sensation!

She was now more dilated and distended, and his deepening inside her was bigger. The pleasure was increasing. She really wanted him to continue! At that moment the only thing she saw was his left shoulder, and she was only focused on what she felt in the most central and deepest of herself, which he reached insistently.

“Oh, what’s this?” She asked faintly, enjoying the pleasure he gave her, not knowing exactly what she was saying.

“Pleasure.” He replied with his mouth in her ear.

He raised his torso again to look at her. He gazed at her face, lit by the sensations he was causing her, saw her open her mouth like a rosebud and pant. Her breasts rose. She looked at those limpid eyes of enchanting brightness that lay upon hers and penetrated them, just as his body penetrated the most intimate of her.

He savored every precious inch around him. She was so delicious! He wanted all of her! The movements became frantic, intense, and irrational! He felt an uncontrollable desire, a torrential will! He wanted to free himself, relieve the tension that bound him and let the desire flow, surrender to the explosion of life, melt and die in her!

“You are wonderful!”

Victoria thought it was more than she could bear!

“I think I’m going to faint…” She whispered, frowning.

“It seems so... you will not... Let yourself go...”

In a stronger movement of his hips, he pushed her body upward, making her slightly slide on the bed. Victoria felt him reach inside her a spot somewhere that seemed higher and never touched before... The new, strong, shimmering sensation that followed, and made her senses vibrate, without direction or coherence, was indescribable! An explosion of intense pleasure from the inner center that expanded throughout her body in spasms, causing a momentary loss of consciousness for a split second, when she didn’t know what she was saying or doing. She twitched, opened her mouth, moaned, fixed her nails on his shoulders, and shouted:

“William! William... William...”

The bed ceased to exist. At that moment there were only the two of them. Two bodies merged into a single being. It only made sense like that! Connected! In that instant, she got what she had wanted some time before, when she had hugged him on the living room’s couch. She had just merged into him, transported her soul, everything she felt within herself into his body! It was as if there had been a release of her own Self, which had been vaporized, elevated, and introduced in him, then returning to her.

He felt the contractions of her body, squeezing him inside her, and relieved the tension of his torso over her, giving her room to expand, but as Victoria was reaching the top he grabbed her more impetuously, in a way that he thought could leave marks, and he felt himself attain ecstasy in
contractions that ended him!

Had it not been the disembodied state she was in, provoked by the peak of pleasure, the way he had grabbed her would have hurt, indeed. She finished the state of rapture by turning her head on the pillow towards the window.

“Victoria!” He uttered at last, in the convulsion of the moment, burying his face in her neck.

She felt her name safe in his mouth, as she had always felt safe near him since that morning in Kensington when they had met. He had called her by her name for the first time. Now she was not the Ma’am! This was what she wanted from him!

He was blown away! She had reached the pinnacle and that was splendid! Because she had experienced it and because he had given her that pleasure, and had seen and felt her vibrate for him in every inch.

“It’s all right!” He said as he kissed her forehead.

For a few seconds she thought she could now lay exhausted on the bed in recovery. But he steadied himself on his knees, put his hands under her back, and without getting out of her, made her rise to sit her on the bed and on top of him. The sudden change of position made Victoria experience once more a wonderful sense of pleasure, albeit less intense and shorter. She clung to his neck as he hugged her.

“William!” She said at last.

They were sweating, their hearts racing and panting.

Victoria thought that, as Skerrett had said, it did not hurt. And it was the most beautiful thing that had ever happened between them! She desired him in a surprising and unrestrained way that if she didn’t know for a fact existed, she would think it impossible!

Then she pressed her forehead to William’s forehead, grabbed his head with both hands, and letting emotional tears flow down her face, said:

“I will never leave you!”

Driven by the conviction of that affirmation, which she had repeated after the day he had rejected her near the rooks, he kissed the tears that slid down her face and then her mouth, and let his tears run as well.

It was a tension of years that was set free for them both!

They hugged each other with intensity.

Her breasts pressed against his chest, her face over his left shoulder.

He placed his right hand on her head and said:

“You are beautiful! Perfect!”

Victoria felt something humid dripping from inside her. Skerrett had not said anything about that, but since William remained calmly embracing her, it should be normal...
They were lying on the bed.

Victoria, with her head on William's left side, had placed her left hand on the center of his chest. He wrapped his arms around her naked back.

“I cannot believe I'm here…” She said.

“If you don’t believe it, what about me? To dream about it yes, to consummate it, never…”

“So this is what happens between a man and a woman on their wedding night…” She remarked.

“Yes it is. Although unfortunately with many couples things don’t happen as they did with us…”

“What do you mean?”

“When marriages take place only for convenience and the people in question don’t love each other, what they feel during the act is not so pleasant... It’s not difficult for you to imagine how you would feel if you married someone you don’t love... For many women, the wedding night is a torment where they are forced to be physically involved with someone they often even despise…” William explained.

And to tease her, he added:

“Imagine yourself like this in bed with Robert Peel…”

Victoria frowned and asked with disgust:

“The Frog?”

“The Frog? What are you talking about?” He asked surprised.

“It's how Lehzen calls him...”

They both laughed.

“But you said once that you would consider marry him…remember?” He continued to tease her.

“At that point I would do anything to get rid of Albert!” She replied smiling.

After some quiet time he asked:

“Does it hurt?”

“No. I only feel a burning.”

“It's normal, it will pass.”

He kissed her forehead.

“Now yes, I am the happiest woman in the world! The Queen of England, the most desired match in Europe, is absolutely happy! Are you happy?” She asked raising her head and looking directly to him. It was very important to her that he was happy. She knew he was happy, but she wanted to
hear him say it.

He smiled as if saying: how can you ask such a thing, is it not obvious that the answer is yes? He pulled her closer to him. Her breasts rubbing against his chest.

“Ma’am, I love you with all my strength, as I have never loved anyone else before! I will always be by your side and I will do everything for you! I feel like the happiest man on earth for having the woman I love in my arms!”

They kissed deeply.

“I love you! I love you so, so much...! It even hurts... But don’t call me Ma’am anymore, I am not your Ma’am, I am a woman and you are the only person who ever saw me like this.” She asked.

“Yes, indeed... you are a woman...”

She kissed him again on the mouth. Then she kissed his chest a few times and she nuzzled, her face on his chest. She was tired and sleepy. She wanted to sleep like that, holding him. Now he was real. It was no longer a pillow.

“I want to stay here forever.” Victoria said half serious half joking, as a provocation to which she knew he would react.

“I really wish I could, but we can’t. It’s getting dark outside and you need to go back to London. Poor Emma will be worried by this time. The Queen should be arriving soon... And you know you can’t spend the night outside the palace...”

It was six o’clock, three hours had passed since she had arrived.

She realized that she had to hurry up. She lifted her body and sat on the bed.

He got out of bed by the right side and started to put on his clothes, his back to her.

Victoria noticed with surprise the new fact of him being naked in front of her. Now that the hot moments had passed, that intimacy had gotten a little embarrassing. She moved on the bed to leave from the left side, but stopped when she noticed that the sheet was slightly stained with blood.

At that moment, he turned to her as he tucked the shirt inside his pants and noticed what she was realizing.

“It's normal, Victoria... It won’t happen again...”

With her back half turned to him, she looked back at him as if acknowledging what he was saying.

“There's a porcelain bowl over there, the jug has water, and there are towels in the closet.” He pointed to the cupboard and the closet in the bedroom. “You can wash yourself and get dressed while I go outside for a few moments and I'll be right back.” He finished.

She nodded and he left the room.

When he returned, William brought with him her bag, gloves, hat, and cloak that had been left in the hallway. He knocked on the door.

“Yes.” She replied from inside.

He felt some tension in her answer, opened the door, and entered.
She had already put on her underwear, her shirt and her stockings.

“You have to help me get dressed...” She asked looking very incapable of tending to herself, and it seemed that while he had been out of the room, she had become aware of the impact that what just happened had on their lives.

“Certainly, Ma’am!” He said playfully.

She smiled.

He tightened and tied her corset as best he could, given the lack of experience in the task, and closed her dress.

Meanwhile Victoria, now less tense and remembering the day she had caught William off guard in Dover House, and the night they had met in a corridor in Windsor, she remarked smiling:

“We had never seen each other so much in disarray before...”

“I don’t think so!” He laughed at her back.

“My braid...” She said looking at the nearby mirror and observing her hair down.

“I can help too.”

“You?” She asked in surprise, turning her head back.

“It wouldn’t be the first time in my life that I’ve done a braid...”

“Oh... I imagine not...” She said, in a tone of mild discomfort that seemed to express her sudden awareness that he had a past with another woman before her. As if she had not had that detail in mind for the last few hours.

“And I was the one who undid it, we should redo it... It won’t look as perfect as if it were made by your dresser, but...” He continued, apparently not having noticed the tone of voice she had used.

He gestured with his eyes towards the chair in front of her so that she would sit.

After she detangled her hair with a comb he braided her.

She liked the feel of his fingers on her hair. She instructed him that he had to roll it again to form a bun, put on the hair clips and ribbon.

In the end it didn’t look that bad.

“You have many skills that I didn’t know of...” She remarked looking at his face reflected in the mirror.

“And I have more that you don’t know of yet...”

She laughed.

“I’ll be waiting for you to show me these other skills, then...”

Reflected in the mirror, he smiled at her.

That man was a box of surprises!
Before they left, William went to get a small basket of white gardenias he had picked up when he had left her alone in the bedroom. She had given herself to him. She had given him her virginity, he gave her flowers. It was not payment, it was not an exchange. The exchange that existed between them was only love! It was a symbol, the marking of a remarkable moment in their lives. White was the purity of Victoria that, although she might be considered lost in the eyes of society, to William it was as striking after what had happened as it had been before. The purity of heart and feelings.

When she saw the basket of flowers he handed her, Victoria, moved, let the tears fall down her face as she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him with emotion.

When she left Brocket Hall Victoria carried William inside her forever...

***

For safety reasons he decided to accompany her on the trip to London.

The Queen should not travel alone with a man in a closed carriage. That could lead to comments. Much less at night. But precisely because it was night, it was easier to conceal. Also the carriage was not royal and she was disguised (hopefully). And he was not going to let her make her journey back alone, nor did he want to make the trip in a carriage of his own, following behind her, when they could travel together.

They sat side by side hugging one another.

The outer lanterns of the carriage cast some light inside.

Victoria looked at the basket with gardenias on the floor of the carriage.

“William...” She stopped.

Then she asked:

“Can I call you that?”

“Of course!”

Lord M was a magical expression, a bond, a connection, a unique bond and intimacy between them! But William was the essence! Lord M was love! William was passion! Lord M was soul! William was flesh! Though any of the names could have any of these meanings.

“I need to justify something to you.” She continued.

“Yes?”

“The day I danced with Albert and gave him the gardenias you had sent me, I was not getting rid of the flowers, I didn’t do it because I didn’t appreciate them, all the flowers you sent me always had a lot of meaning for me. I loved you! I just pitied him. Because he lost contact with his mother when he was five, because his parents separated, and he told me that he remembered the smell of those flowers, which she used to wear when she went out and kissed him goodbye...”

“I’m not going to lie. I was in fact very hurt when I saw you giving him the flowers. I thought it was at that very moment that I was losing you. That you would never be mine...” He confessed.

“Oh I’m sorry! I’m so sorry! It was thoughtless, it was on the spur of the moment...”
“But I understand, don’t worry.” He calmed her down.

There was some quiet time, and then he said:

“But after the ball, you were impressed by him...”

Victoria laughed at the remark. He was showing jealousy of Albert...

“William, honestly, it's true that I was impressed by him the night we danced together. He no longer danced as badly as before. He was kinder to me. He was handsome, gave me attention... You had not reciprocated my feelings for you. You told me to marry him. Everyone around me told me to marry him. The pressure over me came from all sides, including the crown I wear on my head. I knew I had to marry him. I thought of giving him a chance, yes. I was trying hard to act as everyone asked me to. But he didn’t took the opportunity and spoiled everything when we were in the forest! He still helped me with the injured Dash, which was noble of him, but then he was irascible to question my governance and my relationship with you.”

“Very well, I understand, but I never told you to marry him. I just told you to give him a chance, to welcome him...”

She smiled and continued:

“I was trying to figure out if he could be the man to whom I could give my heart without hesitation, as you had told me would happen. But I didn’t feel any certainty on the way things were going between me and Albert...”

“But you even went to Windsor on purpose on a Wednesday because of a sudden passion for trees... and forced me to come along...” he said provocatively.

“I only gave you this excuse of my interest in the trees so as not to confess directly that I was going there to give Albert a chance when in fact I loved you! But, as you well said, I forced you to come along because I would only feel safe if you were there too, as in all other situations...”

He smiled.

She pressed closer against him, her head leaned over William's chest and her right arm around his waist. She remained silent.

He thought she might have fallen asleep.

There she was. The woman he had just unraveled! How could she be so soft and so hot at the same time? There he was! There they were! Now, besides one “I”, and one “you”, there was also a “we”. There was what “we” had done.

And now? When she would have to marry another... What would it be like? How would they both live with that? Or would she never marry and they would be lovers? Elisabeth and Robert Dudley...

She had decided that she didn’t want to get married and had just said she would never leave him. He believed the deep truth of what she had said. But the circumstances of their lives were very specific and there was all the pressure around her condition of monarch. How could she keep on resisting that pressure? One day she might have to marry someone else... One day she could become the wife of another man, yes she could! But she would always be his! No one would receive from her the unique love that she had for him. And no one would have of her what he had had shortly before.
It was true that she was no longer a virgin, which would be an embarrassment to a potential marriage to another person, but there had always been ways to disguise this condition for centuries...

What if she had become with child? He could have avoided substantiating her, but he had not. Not in that moment, not with her! Precisely because it was her! At that moment the emotion had taken hold of him and had not allowed him the necessary concentration for it. Besides, deliberately, at that moment, he just needed to merge into her and combine with her! That was the only thing lacking between them! That was what they had done! Fusion! He had not been able to resist that attraction. Love, sex and tears! They were connected forever!

She had not fallen asleep, she just kept her eyes closed while enjoying in silence the contact with his body and felt the movement of his breath.

***

Emma was at the window desperate waiting for the Queen to return. If nothing happened, she would need to send someone to Brocket Hall in a few minutes.

The carriage arrived and she was eager to confirm that the Queen was there.

At William's request, the coachman rounded the building so that they could enter the palace through a more discreet door. With the darkness of the late hour, the carriage without the royal coat of arms that carried them and the veil Victoria wore, it was hoped that this would cover up the late arrival of the Queen, moreover accompanied by the Prime Minister! However, there were not many women living in the Court who were as short as she was...

Victoria and William entered the room where Emma was. Side by side and smiling informally as an engaged couple. The Queen, who had already taken the veil off, brought the basket with gardenias in her hand. Their eyes glittered! When they saw her they reduced the agitation.

Emma stared at them and thought she knew what had happened.

Dash ran to Victoria when he saw her come in, and she stooped to pet him.

"Sorry, Emma!" Said Melbourne "It was my fault, having delayed Her Majesty with... political matters... so I had to accompany her back here to make sure that she arrived well."

"Oh, Emma, I'm sorry. It will not happen again!" Said Victoria grabbing her hands.

She smiled at them, sighed and said:

"Apologies accepted, Your Majesty! William... But I was already very worried! A few more minutes and I would have sent someone to Brocket Hall to find out what was going on!"

"Thank you Emma! You can go." Victoria said.

Emma left.

"Now it’s best that I go," said William.

"Are you going back to Brocket Hall?" She asked worriedly.

"No, I will stay in London."

"And will you come back tomorrow?"
“Of course I will come back tomorrow!”

He kissed her quickly, lest someone showed up.

“Until tomorrow, Ma’am, sleep well!” He said quietly.

She looked at him reprovingly.

“Oh, I'm sorry, Victoria!” He said even more quietly.

“See you tomorrow, William. I'll dream about you!”

He smiled and left.

***

When he was finally alone in his London home, Melbourne thought about the transformation that had taken place in his life during the afternoon.

He looked at the bottle of brandy, but today he didn’t need it, it would sit there still. He wouldn’t ingest brandy in the same way from now on! He no longer needed it, nor should he do it.

He was still not sure what impulse had made him take the Queen to bed. A sentence formed in his brain: the Prime Minister fucked the Queen! He laughed at this thought. It would make a fine newspaper title! He assumed that a Prime Minister had never fucked a Queen. He wondered what Robert Peel would say if he knew...

He remembered her naked body, magnificent, the curves, the smooth skin, her fingers on his body, and how she had shouted William... It was true! He had taken her! And it was not a girl, it was a woman he fucked!

The strangest and most surprising thing was that he didn’t even feel guilty about it. So much time spent in fear of screwing up and now he didn’t even feel guilty! But how could he feel guilty if what had happened on his bed in Brocket Hall was sacred! More than the Queen, she was the woman he loved! And how could anyone deny any man the possibility of having the woman he loved?

What he felt was a fullness! Yes! An intense degree of satisfaction.

But he had to admit that from now on their die was cast and somehow they had to be played... He still wasn’t sure how, but the future would bring him the answer.

***

Victoria ordered dinner in her chambers. Dinner time had long since passed, and she didn’t feel like seeing anyone else after what had happened. She wanted to be alone. She couldn’t think of anything else. She wouldn’t be able to pay attention to anything she would be told. And her hair was also not in the best conditions to be seen by curious eyes.

She wanted to go to bed earlier than usual. Normally she would lie down after midnight, sometimes several hours later, if there was a ball, but today at 11 pm she was already asking Skerrett to help her undress, alleging being tired. Which was true. The trip to Brocket Hall and all the emotional experience of that afternoon had been demanding! But what she really wanted was to be alone to remember what had happened in the afternoon.

When Skerrett looked at the Queen's hair before undoing her hairstyle, she knew immediately that
it was different!

Victoria saw the astonished face of the dresser reflected in the dressing table mirror in front of her. Without turning to her she said:

“I trust your discretion, Skerrett.”

“Certainly, Ma’am!”

The matter rested there.

After being left alone in her nightgown and with her brushed hair down her back, Victoria mentally remade all that afternoon in Brocket Hall, ever since she arrived until William's farewell in Buckingham. This she couldn't write in her journal. Maybe one day she could write down what had happened that afternoon...

That afternoon had changed everything in her life. In fact she had begun to change that morning of 20th June 1837, in Kensington, when she met the distinguished William Lamb. That tall, handsome man who had smiled at her. Now that was clear! And now a single event had changed everything: she had become absolutely happy, with William's retribution to the love she felt for him; and now she was, in fact, a woman! He had made her a woman! In addition to all the areas in which he had helped her grow, he had also transformed her in the intimacy.

She undressed and stood naked before the full-length mirror. It was that body he desired and possessed. She was a woman to him! She shook her head, a gesture that made her loose hair balance behind her. She felt him caress the skin of her back and that touch gave her a mental association with his fingers! His fingers, his hands, his arms around her body, embracing her back...

She still felt a little burning, but the memory of all the sensations of her body experienced in that bedroom and in that bed, in William's hands and mouth, made her feel ecstatic. How could it possibly have been so good? What was the word that best applied to what had happened between them? Sublime! She wanted him to do it all again! He was the reason for her existence! He and only he!

However, it was also necessary to think that from now on things would have to change on a daily basis and hurdles would need to be fought and overcome. She wanted William by her side every day and in her bed every night. She just had to find a way to make it possible!

When she fell asleep Victoria dreamed that she lived with William in Brocket Hall. And there was a baby...
Chapter 10

On Sunday morning Emma Portman went to Melbourne’s house.

“Good Morning William!”

“Good Morning Emma! Have a seat!”

They both sat down.

“I apologize, perhaps it is too early to come to your house. But I barely even slept tonight, and I had to talk to you outside the palace before you went back…”

“What is the matter?” He asked worriedly, wondering if something had happened to Victoria.

“Let me tell you that yesterday you startled me!”

“Ah, so that's it!” He thought.

“I have already apologized.”

“And I have already accepted your apologies. What worries me now is not the Queen's delay and my affliction because of it, but the cause of the delay…”

William looked down to the floor.

“I felt the way the two of you entered that room last night.” She confessed.

“Thank you for your concern, Emma. I know you genuinely care about me and the Queen, but yesterday things…”

He thought about what he was going to say next.

“They have somehow changed between us…” He finished.

Emma looked at him with a serious, questioning look.

“I guessed so, but changed how? Did you openly declare your love for her?”

He looked at Emma in surprise.

“My love?”

“Oh, William, do you really think you can fool anyone with that look of madly in love with the Queen that you desperately try to hide? Most people may not even notice it this way, but I know you very well! Ever since Albert arrived, every time the Queen got closer to him you almost collapsed… And from then on…”

“Did you know that she had already got ahead and done that months ago? The other time you lent her your carriage for her to go to Brocket Hall.”

“I knew something had happened there, because on the way back she was so miserable and tearful, but did she even go so far as to declare her love explicitly?”

“Pretty much…”
“And how did you respond to that?”

“I? If she was miserable and tearful what do you think? I was a fool and told her I couldn’t reciprocate what she felt because of my wife’s memory.”

“Now all makes sense. Once she said, displeased, that you only cared about your wife's memory. But... and yesterday? Did you eventually admit to reciprocating her feelings?”

“Yesterday everything, Emma! Yesterday everything happened…”

“Did you kiss?” She asked uneasily.

He laughed.

“Everything Emma. Yesterday everything that could happen between a man and a woman who love each other happened.”

Emma's heart leapt from her chest in fear of the result of what he had just admitted. She swallowed.

“William! Have you made the Queen, a virgin, your lover?”

“No, Emma. Yesterday we, the two of us, became one. The world can call it as they wish.”

The depth of what he said left Emma weak, except to put on a tender look.

“And you know what is the strangest? I do not even feel guilty about it! Can you believe it?” He asked.

Then he looked disbelieving and continued:

“Afraid for so long of what could happen between us, her reactions, mine... So much time controlling her and myself... So much time in suffering for what was impossible... So many fears for her family, the Privy Council, the Parliament, the people... and in the end... I was convinced that she had to marry and I encouraged her myself... Can you believe it? I pushed the woman I love to marry another man! And she resisted that! Have you noticed, Emma, how she had the courage to refuse to marry another man for me? She refused a German prince her age for being in love with me! For me, Emma, for me! She resisted the pressure from all sides over her, including my own pressure and my non-retribution of her feelings! Do you see how small she is and how strong she is? Do you think it possible for me to be able to resist such a woman?”

She listened to his questions, but she knew she didn’t need to answer. He only had to verbalize the questions that had already passed through his brain so many times, and make them echo in the air, as if hearing them back made the facts more real.

“You've always been attracted to impulsive and stubborn women, each in their own way…” She ended up saying.

“I needed her, Emma. After everything that happened in my life ... I needed to feel that I was still alive, do you understand? And now I feel like I am alive! And I just want to live with her and for her as long as possible!”

“I'm delighted William, to hear you speak like this…”

“Yesterday I could not repeat the same mistake as before. Yesterday I could not let her leave... I'm not afraid of scandals anymore! You know? The fear I felt before transformed into strength to
defend what I feel for her and to defend her to the end! Do you know what she told me? That she will never leave me...”

Emma knew the impact that such a promise had on his life. When he said that, she felt tears welling in her eyes and saw that tears were also in his.

“But what are you going to do next?” Emma asked worriedly.

“Honestly? I do not know! Do you think it is possible? Me in a situation like this? I will talk to her later... We'll see.”

“William, I cannot say that I don’t fear for you, because I do, because I love both of you and I cannot see how your life can be easy from now on. But one thing I can guarantee: I will help you whenever you need!”

He took her hands and said:

“Thank you, Emma!”

After Emma left, Melbourne already knew what had driven him to grab Victoria before she left Brocket Hall, the reason why the brain submitted to the heart and the will of the mind submitted to the will of the body. Desire was greater than fear! And fear, at that moment, was no longer of scandals, but of losing her forever.

***

After lunch Melbourne went to the palace.

Victoria had put on her light pink dress. The marriage proposal dress that had not happened, thankfully! It was very beautiful and if it had not been good enough for Albert it was magnificent for William! And she had decorated her hair with the gardenias she had brought from Brocket Hall the night before. The first time flowers...

She was in the garden near a folly and was accompanied by Emma and Harriet. The day was sunny and birds were heard in the garden, and bells from afar.

She saw him in the distance walking towards her, and her heart raced.

She looked at Emma.

She sensed her anxiety, better than the Queen could imagine at that moment.

When he arrived he bowed and said:

“Your Majesty! Ladies!”

“Good afternoon, Lord M! What brings you to the palace on a Sunday?” She acted to give credibility to his presence there.

He noticed the gardenias in her hair and said:

“Oh, there is an urgent matter about which it is imperative to speak to Your Majesty.”

He looked at Emma.

Emma noticed and told Harriet:
“Come on, let's take a walk in the garden while Her Majesty deals with state affairs with Lord Melbourne.”

Harriet understood the real necessity to move away and acted accordingly.

Instinctively they entered the folly. They both needed to be alone and invisible.

She turned to a corner where they couldn’t be seen and leaned against the wall.

They hugged and kissed.

To have her there, compressed between him and the wall, was exhilarating! And hidden in the garden folly!

Both of them gasping.

“William!” She said softly, her hands on his chest as he wrapped his arms around her back.

“Ma’a…, Victoria!”

She took a deep breath, her forehead against his chin.

Now they weren’t simply the Queen and the Prime Minister...

“I was anxious for you to get here! I've missed you so much...” She said.

“I know... I was also mad with desire to see you!”

They kissed again.

“Are you alright?” He asked, trying to calm his breath.

“Of course I am! I'm not a porcelain doll, William! I am a woman of flesh and blood!”

“I know you're a woman... I know... but I could tell you're made of the finest porcelain!” He said with half-closed eyes.

“But why wouldn’t I be all right? I'm better than ever in my entire existence!”

“Sometimes I get a little worried about the succession of things in your life...”

“Like what?” She asked curiously.

“You had to become queen very quickly... And now you've become a woman even faster...”

“Oh, but I always learned fast... you know that...”

“Yes, I know... But I think I didn’t give you much time to go discovering the progression of a relationship between a man and a woman... You had all the sensations all at once...”

“Oh, William, after so many years waiting... It was the best you could have done to me and the best that could have happened to me! You think you control everything, don’t you? I’m the one who didn’t give you time to teach me this gradation, I’m the one who didn’t want to take all that time. Why do you think a woman goes alone to a man's house? Especially a queen!”

He was surprised at what she was saying.
“You went there with the intention of...”

“No exactly. The intention, as you say, existed in me almost since I met you, although I didn’t know what intention was that... But there was something else to happen between us that I desired, because there was an enchantment around us that attracted me. Yesterday I went there because I desperately needed anything you could give me so I could breathe. Even if it were only your silent presence. But that intention was there too, that force that pulled me and made me go to Brocket Hall without thinking of the conventions, the dangers, although I couldn’t predict what would actually happen afterwards...”

“I understand.”

She continued:

“And there is that famous quote from Shakespeare, which you like to mention so much: There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries...”

He accompanied her and together they finished the quote as if saying a prayer:

“On such a full sea are we now afloat. And we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.”

He smiled.

“Indeed... But you were very brave yesterday. To go to Brocket Hall, say what you said and... do what you did...” He said in a low, drawn-out way, looking at her with half-closed lids. The desire expressed in the face, but in contention.

“You’re the one who gives me courage, and the love that I feel for you and that I know you feel for me too.”

“Just as you had also been very brave when you went there the other time. To go there and openly declare your feelings like that... And your insistence, twice, going against to what I told you... Insisting that I already had your heart and saying that had you been in my deceased wife’s place you would never had left me...”

“If you had sent me away again yesterday after what I asked of you... I would have died...”

“And so would I... But I think you came to realize why I couldn’t reciprocate your love that day...”

“Yes, later I understood. You just couldn’t correspond out of duty. That's what I interpreted from your words at the masquerade. Sometimes I had doubts if my interpretation was correct, but then I thought so. Although, if that was true, on the one hand it was more comforting, on the other, it was even more distressing. It was good to know that you reciprocated my feelings, but it was frustrating to know that being reciprocated, that feeling couldn’t be consummated.”

“You cannot imagine how that cost me!” He exclaimed.

“And I was devastated...”

“But I'm also sure that in the last few hours, while you were alone, you thought about what happened in Brocket Hall yesterday...” He continued.

“Of course. How could I not? It was the happiest day of my life!”
He smiled, sighed, and asked:

“And what did you think?”

“There's a question I need to ask you...” She interjected.

“All the questions you want, Ma’a... Victoria!”

She looked him in the eye, smiled and asked determinedly:

“William, my love, will you marry me?”

The question fell in his chest like a stone thrown into a lake, causing circular waves... It was true what had happened the day before, and it was true that one of the choices of life for two people who loved each other was marriage, especially after having done what they had done. It was also true that from now on some alternative had to be found for their lives that was beyond a political relationship between the Queen and the Prime Minister. But he could never have imagined that the Queen could ask him to marry her, so... Of course, if she loved him, that was a natural consequence... And it was true that she had already basically proposed to him at Brocket Hall before. However, at that moment the proposal fell on him causing a start... Now it was different, it was clearly verbalized and it was formal. Proposed to at a time like this of his life! When there was no more hope. And by the Queen! And she knew that this was not possible, it was not attainable... And that was distressing! Its impossibility as well as the fighting for it against the whole world! But he had to answer. And he had to tell the truth. For her and for him.

He smiled.

He took her hands gently, as he had done in Brocket Hall near the rooks.

He looked into her eyes and replied:

“Oh, of course I do! More than anything in my life! What I've tried not to want for years!”

She smiled with immense happiness.

They hugged and kissed again.

Then, with tears welling in his eyes, he added:

“But you know that is impossible. We can’t... You can only marry someone from a royal family and I'm not a prince...”

His warning made her chest tighten.

“Surely there must be a way, William!” She said with some desperation in her voice. “You know the laws so well, you could try to find a way...”

Although he did not believe so, to reassure her he said:

“Certainly, Victoria, I will study this matter in detail!”

“When I was 18 I wrote in my journal that I would only marry a man I worshiped, and that man is you!”

He smiled.
She continued:

“And one day I told you that I wouldn’t get married just to satisfy you, and you said no, that I should satisfy myself. So that’s what I’m trying to do, the only marriage that satisfies me... And you too...”

“Of course it satisfies me, more than anything else, but…”

“But what, William?”

“I don’t want my love to harm you…” He said with a choked voice holding her more tightly against him.

She kissed his chin, his jaw and his face saying:

“Oh, William, what would harm me was not to have you! The best for me is you! I love you! It is unthinkable not having you by my side every day!”

He kissed her face and said:

“I know, my love! I also love you madly and I can’t be far away from you! Not now…”

“Even if they want to prevent our marriage, we have already mated for life, haven’t we, William?” She asked expectantly.

He noticed the metaphor used and replied:

“Yes, of course…”

They kissed.

They collected themselves and went out to walk in the garden.

She wanted to give him her arm or hold his hand, but she couldn’t!

They saw Emma and Harriet in the distance.

“There are your ladies. You should go to them and I should leave.” Said William.

“Let them be…” Victoria answered as she walked towards the back of a tree trunk, so no one would see her.

He walked over to her.

“Don’t go yet, William!” She said leaning against the tree trunk.

“I have to go. We shouldn’t give rise to suspicion...”

He lifted her right hand and kissed it. He couldn’t say goodbye in any other way since they were exposed in the garden.

She understood and smiled.

They walked together to where the ladies were. She stayed with them and he left.

Victoria felt a void inside her! The emptiness that stayed every time he left! A void that was only filled when he was in her presence! He saw her as a woman. First as a woman, and only then as a
Queen. And that was her essence. Be a woman. And he had been the only one to consider her like such. And it had been so since they had met. Everyone else saw her as if there was no human being in her like any other first of all.

***

The Queen was in the green room with Emma. The two of them alone.

“Ma’am…”

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry for what I am going to say, but I think it is best to tell you something, for it might be useful for you…”

“What is it?” Victoria asked intrigued.

“I know about the nature of your relationship with the Prime Minister…” At that moment it didn’t seem right for her to call him William, it seemed too familiar to call him that in front of his “wife.”

The Queen looked at her a little apprehensively.

“No need to worry, Ma’am. I will not tell anyone, and I am willing to assist you in all that is necessary to cover this up.”

“How do you know?”

“Well, Ma’am, it is not hard... I have always observed how Your Majesty worships Lord Melbourne... and how he worships you. The borrowing of my carriage could only have one purpose... And what happened yesterday was very evident. Your delay and the contentment with which you arrived here... I was very worried about this possibility and this morning I went to William’s house (she ended up saying) and he did confirm what happened…”

Victoria was bothered by the disclosure. She stared at the floor.

“No need to be embarrassed, Ma’am. I understand what is going on between you.”

She looked up again at Emma, smiled and said with gratitude:

“Thank you Emma!”

***

On Monday morning he returned to the usual daily pace.

He entered her chambers through the green room looking for her with his eyes, while a footman shut the door behind him. Victoria was by the fireplace, sitting in a chair, with one of the volumes of the Commentaries on the Laws of England in her hand.

Dash slept on another chair.

As soon as she saw him come in, she dropped the book on the side table, stood up and ran to him, climbing down the steps that separated her from where he came in, smiling openly. He smiled back, caught the impact of her body on his, they hugged and kissed intensely.

She turned her back to him, her body pressed against his.
He wrapped his arms around her waist and she grabbed his hands.

He kissed her neck on the right side.

She closed her eyes and said:

“I love it when you grab me like that, from behind, and I love it when you kiss me on my neck!”

“I can kiss your whole body whenever you want!”

Victoria laughed, put her right hand on his face, caressed his soft skin, and then turned to face him. She grabbed his coat, stretched and kissed his mouth. She slipped her hands between his coat and waistcoat, embraced his back and pressed his body against hers.

Melbourne returned, but warned:

“Victoria, I’d love to stay here being the target of all your affection, but I don’t think it's wise for us to continue any longer under these circumstances...”

“You're right.” She agreed sighing and stepping away from him. “Have a seat.”

They sat each in their own chair, facing each other, in front of the large window of the green room, through which the sun filled the room.

He stared at her.

She stared at him.

They both knew what had to be said next.

Neither of them wanted to be the first to begin, breaking the near-enchantment of the past two days.

He started:

“Well, I think we have a matter of utmost importance to deal with... For England and for our lives.”

She leaned forward, took his hands in hers and said:

“The only thing I want is to marry you, and this is the only proposition I will allow to come to fruition. From now on it's completely out of the question to marry anyone else but you, William.”

“That wish of yours makes me radiant, Victoria, but you know as well as I do how very difficult that is, that no one will support this decision and that if you insist they will force you to abdicate. And I don’t want you to abdicate and neither do you.”

“And what would be the alternative? To become lovers? Like Elisabeth and Robert Dudley?” Victoria asked, smiling.

William smiled back and replied:

“All queens need a companion. If there is no husband, there must be somebody else. But the condition of lovers is not a good option for anyone, much less for the two of us, for all that it entails...”

She continued:
“For what I’m concerned, as long as I can have you by my side, it is equally wonderful, but we would have to live hidden, without being able to show ourselves to the world, always afraid that someone would find out...”

“But insisting on an official marriage with me will originate a battle for which I cannot predict the outcome at this time, only failure...”

“At least we have to try.”

“Victoria, I wish I had a solution for our current life situation, but I don’t. I should have it! I should have thought of it before...”

“No! You don’t have to have solutions. The solution has to be found by the two of us because I am as, or even more responsible for this situation than you.” She said peremptorily.

“It is frustrating that the two choices considered are both negative: marriage won’t be authorized without a forced abdication, and an illicit relationship carries immense dangers.” He concluded.

“I hope that soon we will have found a possible way... We must study the laws of marriage, find precedents in England, examples in other monarchies... In the meantime we can only be Elisabeth and Leicester. We'll be just companions...” Victoria suggested.

He smiled.

She rose from her chair, knelt on the floor, and laid her head on his lap. He put his left hand on her head. She grabbed his right hand and kissed it.

“Victoria!” He said laughing. “I have the Queen of England kneeling at my feet!”

She smiled, but remained in the same position.

After a moment, William introduced a crucial question that worried him.

“My love... You are aware that because of what happened between us, you could be expecting a baby?”

“Yes, I know... But it was only once...”

He sighed sympathetically and continued:

“Well, Victoria, it's not that simple... Even if we did it only once, it could still happen...”

She lifted her head from his lap, made a frightened look, and stood up, turning her back to him and walking away a few paces. She remembered Flora Hastings.

He got up too and approached her.

“But you may not be either.” He tried to calm her.

William put himself in front of her and made her look at him, lifting her chin gently and then holding her shoulders with both hands.

“If your menses come as usual this month, then you are not pregnant. You will only probably be pregnant if they don’t come...”

“What if I am?”
“If you are, we will act accordingly. You said yourself that you want to marry me, didn’t you? I will never leave you and if there is a baby it will have a father...”

They hugged each other. She put her left cheek against his chest.

“But, as you said earlier, it’s not likely that the marriage would be approved...” She remarked, now already apprehensive.

“But it was you who said that we have to find a way for that approval to exist... You won’t give up fighting now...” He warned, his previously unbelieving speech now reversed to try to reassure her.

“No, I won’t!”

“It all depends on what the Privy Council, the Parliament, and England demand of us...” He remarked.

“In last resort I may have to abdicate...”

“But we don’t want that and we will do anything so that it doesn’t happen!” William exclaimed.

“I don’t want to abdicate, but if there is no alternative...”

“You think I’m worth the risk?” He asked looking gravely at her.

“Of course I do, William! I may have to abdicate as a queen, but I won’t give you up. I didn’t choose to be a queen, but I chose you. I want to be Queen of England, but I want you too and I cannot imagine one thing without the other. I can’t lose you! Neither you nor... a fruit of our love...”

That said, Melbourne felt a thud in the chest.

He pressed her against him again.

“A son... Your son... Mine and yours... That was something that would make me very happy!” He said emotionally.

She stepped back to look at him.

He finished:

“Only the potential political consequences make me apprehensive... But let's wait, there could be nothing... And if it happens we will have to find a solution.”

They kissed.
Victoria decided to change some things in the domestic organization of her house. Now she needed to enjoy her relationship with William and that had to be kept a secret. Having Lehzen sleeping in a room next door with a connecting entry and people bursting into her chambers could not continue to happen.

She informed Lehzen that from now on she would have to move to another bedroom relatively close but not communicating with hers. And she established that the entrances into her chambers could only be made after verbally authorized by her. Besides, there was nothing strange about doors locked from the inside. That didn’t mean something was wrong.

Lehzen considered it to be an affront, and stated that she didn’t understand the reason for such imposition, so different from what had always been. Victoria asked her not to feel that way and explained that she was no longer a child, and that she only wished to have more privacy, to be able to spend more time alone, to be at peace with her thoughts, her decisions and her reading. To be queen was to be too scrutinized and monitored and she didn’t want to continue to feel watched, like a prisoner in her own home.

On the other hand, Melbourne was again a regular presence in the palace outside office hours, which obviously could not go unnoticed by the people around. But that was not unheard of, it had always happened in the past.

Whoever was closer and spent more time with the Queen realized that she looked for Melbourne with her eyes whenever he entered a room, that she glowed whenever he appeared, that she had no eyes for anyone else when he was present, that she changed her countenance when he left. But that was not exactly news to anyone either. Their close relationship had always been object of an exchange of views since the beginning of her reign. Perhaps now there were those who sensed even a greater intimacy between them...

That they would continue to call her Mrs. Melbourne was not original, and secretly Victoria even liked to know that they called her that, and that they imagined that she could have an intimate relationship with William, which was in fact true. Actually, that absolutely forbidden relationship, although dangerous and difficult to maintain for both of them, was extremely exciting!

After a few days the menses came. Victoria sighed with relief and reported this to William, who said that from now on they had to be more careful if they had intimate relations to try to avoid pregnancy before the proper time. He would have to withdraw in time to prevent the seed from being deposited inside, thus preventing her from conceiving.

Because of her closeness to the Queen’s intimacy, Skerrett had noticed that she was uneasy before the menses came, and that she was relieved after they appeared. Suddenly she remembered the conversation they had had in which the Queen had asked what happened between a man and a woman on their wedding night. And remembered that strange hairdo... Had she had physical contact with someone and so was curious to know how it was before, and then was afraid of being expecting? It could not be! The Queen wouldn’t do that! With whom would she do that? There was only one man she truly liked! The man Skerrett had always thought from the beginning - when bets were made in the scullery on whom the Queen would marry - was the only one she liked. Lord Melbourne! And lately Lord Melbourne was, again, always in the palace... So, could they be lovers? Skerrett felt a mixture of emotions. She found it lovely that they loved each other. But she was afraid for them both.
That night there would be a ball. The Queen had received envoys from other European courts and wanted to show the grandeur of the English court.

She was just finishing getting ready with Skerrett's help when a footman arrived with a small silver tray with two white gardenias and said:

“With regards from Lord Melbourne, Ma’am.”

Victoria grabbed the flowers, smiled, smelled them and tucked them into the neckline of her dress as Skerrett did her hair.

When William entered the ballroom he swept it with his eyes searching for her, but Victoria was not there yet.

He approached Emma Portman and asked:

“Emma, is the Queen ready yet?”

“When I left her chambers she was ready and the dresser had already left, she must be about to show up. Have patience, William…”

“Can I go see her?”

She sighed with a tender look.

“Come with me!”

Emma walked down the hall with William to protect the potential discovery of the Prime Minister at that hour in a place of access to the Queen’s private quarters. If someone showed up, they could pretend to be there talking. Besides, Emma's presence made any supposition of a criminal conversation between the Queen and Lord Melbourne disappear.

When they reached the door Emma looked down the hall and, seeing no one, signaled William to enter.

“I'll stay here and protect your rearguard…”

He went in and closed the door.

Victoria, sensing someone entering, ran to him while saying:

“Lord Melbourne! In the Queen's quarters at this hour?”

They kissed.

“Emma came here with me and stayed outside. I just wanted to be able to say hello to you properly, which I cannot do publicly at the ball.”

He noticed the flowers on her cleavage, but made no comment.

They kissed again.

She grabbed his face in her hands and asked:
“Stay with me tonight!”

He grabbed her wrists, pulling her hands up to his chest and asked:

“Victoria, don’t tempt me! I can’t stay here overnight...”

“William, I want to feel you inside me again!” She pleaded with her hands on his chest as he held them in his.

He felt an increasing excitement at her request.

“Aaaa... Victoria, don’t say that, please, or neither of us will show up at the ball! Which seems very obvious to me...”

They kissed.

He wanted her naked! Here! Now! Run his hands all over her body! Kiss her from head to toe! But the damn clothes she wore made it impossible for him to access her body, and he couldn’t crumple her dress or hair because she had just finished getting ready for the ball... It was necessary to resist the temptation to undress her...

Panting, he stopped kissing her.

“Stay until the end of the dance. After I leave wait for a while, pretend you're leaving, but ask Emma to help you get back here. Tomorrow we'll find a way for you to leave without being noticed...” She said while trying to calm her breathing.

“It is beyond my strength to reject that proposal, Victoria! I just don’t know how I will resist during the dance...”

She smiled and said:

“Now go... In a few minutes I'll be there.”

He kissed her again and headed for the door.

He tapped lightly for Emma to open the door and tell him if he could leave.

They both returned to the ballroom.

A few moments later the Queen came in looking for him with her eyes.

She went to Melbourne immediately, pretending not to have seen him before, and with a reason for conversation already prepared to talk to him.

“Lord M!”

She grabbed his hands in hers and said:

“Thank you for the flowers! They are as beautiful as ever!”

He recognized the line from the other ball. He replied as on that day:

“The glasshouses of Brocket Hall are at your service, Ma’am!”

And he completed:
“Perhaps I could have the pleasure of... dancing with you...”

She smiled.

The music erupted in the hall and they began to dance.

“This ball is for you alone! Today I am only yours! I organized this ball so that I could make up to you for what happened in that other one...” Victoria said looking excited.

He thought that, in fact, now she was only his! How had that happened? It was still a dream, it couldn’t be real! He pulled her against him with his right hand and squeezed her left hand in his.

“I thought the ball was meant to welcome the ambassadors...” He said.

“That was a good excuse, wasn’t it?”

He laughed.

“As queen, it's up to me to choose who I want to dance with, so today, it will only be with you! Let's imagine that there is no one else in this hall, that it is just us!”

“I think we should always keep in mind that there are a lot of people in the hall and that everyone's eyes are on us...”

She smiled.

Despite the warning he himself gave, he knew that he was holding her against him tighter than was necessary for the dance. But he wanted her! Very much!

“And you'll have to dance with other people as well, we need to conceal...” He continued.

“I know... Do you remember my coronation ball?”

“Of course, it was unforgettable!”

“Do you know when was the first time I felt safe that night?”

He looked at her inquiringly.

“It was when you put your hand on my waist and we started dancing.”

He smiled and looked at the flowers on her chest.

“I still haven’t explained the meaning of the flowers on your chest, have I?”

“No! Do they have a special meaning?”

“They do!”

“What is it?”

“The gardenias mean purity, sincerity, sweetness... And they are also a symbol of... a secret love!”

“William! Was that the message you sent me with the flowers?” She asked surprised.

“It was!”
“And I didn’t know?”

“It seems not!”

“I thought they were beautiful, and I interpreted your offer as a gesture of love, after all you only give flowers to someone you like... But I didn’t know that specific meaning. And the peonies, your favorite, what do they mean?”

“Sincerity, happiness… ideal marriage.”

Victoria smiled at the discovery of this hidden language.

“I'm stunned! All is left is to ask the meaning of the orchids...”

“Orchids can mean love, desire and seduction. But they can have different meanings depending on the color. The white orchid means pure love. The pink or lilac orchid is a flower of seduction!”

“William! I am fascinated by this revelation! And it seems to me that right now the gardenias are the most appropriate. Symbol of our secret love!”

He laughed.

***

The Queen was reputed to be the best dancer in the kingdom. She was proud of it. She liked to dance until three or four o'clock in the morning, but tonight there was a strong appeal for the dance not to last so long. She couldn’t bear to wait... Leaving was the only way to end the ball. There were already few people in the ballroom. She asked Emma to help William put into practice the request she had made to him. Emma warned that he really had to leave early before anyone could see him in the palace at an hour for which there would be no justification.

The Queen left, her eyes locked on him, prolonging the voluptuousness of the moment.

He followed her with eyes full of desire until she disappeared through the door.

The remaining participants began to leave.

Melbourne and Emma stayed there.

He left to dismiss the coachman, saying that he would walk home, and then returned inside, as if he had forgotten something, as the last couple of people left.

He found Emma again in the hall. There was no one else there.

She accompanied him once again down the corridor, empty at that hour.

“Emma, I'm so sorry to put you in this situation!”

“Do not worry about me. What did I tell you once? That I was willing to help you in everything!”

“I just don’t want you to come to harm because you are protect us. Imagine that someone thinks you and I are lovers, you are a married woman…”

“Everyone knows we are friends. And I’ll take care of my husband. And you also know that he and I have a very open relationship, he doesn’t control what I do...”
“But I'm embarrassed by the circumstance...”

“Don’t be, William, you're not doing anything wrong.”

“And how do I get out tomorrow?”

“The Queen will not rise early because of today's ball, and so the dressers will not come to the room early. But you will have to leave early before there is movement in the palace. The sun rises around 7:30 a.m. You have to leave before that, between 7 and 7:30, and sneak out through the servants' wing and the back. I'll be here at 7:15 to protect your way out.”

Having arrived to the Queen's chambers, with no one else in the hallway, Emma waited for him to enter and left.

The chambers were now in the dark, but the bedroom door was ajar and from the gap there came a light. Melbourne locked the door of the chambers and headed for Victoria's bedroom with an expectant commotion in his chest. He felt like a young man in love at a forbidden rendezvous with a young bride. How many years have passed since he last felt like this?

She had heard him come in. The sound of the door closing, then the sound of footsteps on the way to the bedroom. The pace of his footsteps coming towards her was thrilling! The imminence of what would follow!

William slowly pushed the bedroom door open.

Victoria was standing with her back to the door, her nightdress on, her hair down, her shoulders and back uncovered. She waited anxiously for him in that position without turning around.

He moved slowly towards her, turned her hair to the left, and ran his right hand slowly down her naked back, pressing lightly upward.

Feeling his breath behind her was enough to get excited! And now he ran his hand on her back! It was a fire that was burning! Just the anticipation she had went through in the previous hours was already stimulating! And now he was there! She closed her eyes.

Then he ran his hand over her right shoulder, down her arm, grabbed it right under the shoulder, kissed her shoulder, laid his chin on top of it and wrapped his arms around her waist.

She leaned the right side of her face against his head.

He ran his hands over her body, over the shirt. The left hand over the breasts, the right over her right thigh and then the belly, at the level of the uterus, pressing her against his body.

Feeling enveloped by him, Victoria let out a soft moan of pleasure.

Their breathing became more audible.

He pulled her nightgown up.

Victoria lifted her arms and he undressed her and threw the garment to the floor.

She was completely naked, only with the white stockings that reached a third of her thigh.

He hugged her again and pressed her against his body. He ran his tongue and teeth over her neck and filled his hands with her breasts. There were no words! The feeling of having her in his hands like that was indescribable! She gave him vitality and took his strength away! It seemed
contradictory, but it wasn’t! Everything about her was so young, pure, lush, untouched, forbidden! If he didn’t love her like this, viscerally, it would be a sin to touch her like that! He felt her breasts with his left hand as he wrapped her waist with his right arm.

Her body vibrated with desire.

Keeping his left hand on her breasts, he lowered his right hand down Victoria’s belly - feeling the flatness of her belly, as he had wished to do in innumerable meetings in the past - then placing it in the middle of her legs.

Victoria’s first involuntary reaction was to retreat, but then she pulled her thighs away, facilitating the placement of his hand. She already knew how it was... his long fingers covering her whole.

He stimulated her for some time in that position as he kissed and sucked her neck.

She was jubilating because of what he was doing to her, and felt the excitement of his body glued to her...

“William...” She said, propelling her hips back as he pressed her from the front with his hand and from the back with his own body, trapping her in his arms.

His effect on her was always so powerful! In his arms she lost all control over herself! She wanted to kiss him! She insisted on turning her body and turned to him.

They hugged and kissed each other intensely.

She found the contact of her naked body against his dressed body tremendously exciting! The touch of the coat’s velvet fabric on her skin, the buttons of the vest, the chain of the watch...

He suddenly grabbed her buttocks with both hands as she tucked her fingers into his hair and kissed him desperately.

Then she began to undress him. She untied the handkerchief, helped to take off his coat, unbutton the vest...

His mouth seized hers in a possessive kiss.

She undressed his shirt with impetuosity and ran her hands over his belly and chest, as if mapping his body with her fingers. Then over the shoulders and the back.

He unbuckled his pants. He turned her around and made her walk to the bed, flex her knees and climb onto it. He followed her. Always with her in front of him and with her back to him. Holding her, with his left hand on her belly, he grabbed two pillows with his right hand and placed them under Victoria’s belly, tilting her to lie on her stomach, her hips higher than the rest of the body. She stretched her arms forward.

He left the bed for a moment, signaling her to remain in that position.

She waited for what would happen next. The other time it hadn’t been like that... A horde of butterflies fluttered inside her stomach!

He stripped off the rest of his clothes and took off his shoes. He went back to the bed and stood behind her. He began to gently kiss her left thigh over the stocking and went up, up, passing the buttock and then down to the beginning of her back. In that position Victoria formed a wonderful concavity at the end of her back and just above the buttocks! He went back on the right side,
kissing the buttock and then her right thigh.

She felt a vibrating energy running through her.

Then he ran his hands up and down her back, pressing the index finger down her spine. Her skin was so soft! Then he covered her back with kisses, up and down. He alternated between kisses and sweeps with his tongue.

“Ooooh...!” She exclaimed.

He felt and kissed her buttocks on both sides, enjoying the heat radiating to his hands. He found the volume and curvature of her hips and buttocks before him beautiful! He busied himself for a while between licking, sucking and nibbling.

Victoria was burning!

He grabbed her thighs with both hands and strode down with kisses the inside of her buttocks until he reached her entrance with his mouth. He kissed it and ran his tongue over it repeatedly.

“Aaaaah...!” She exclaimed relatively loudly. What was he doing? Was that possible? His mouth over there, in her! Did other people also do this?

“Very different today from the day he had given her a chaste kiss on the cheek!” He thought. “This was her taste! He had already tasted the skin, the lips, and now... The smell and the taste of her were... fresh and pure! No other man had been there before, and he had only done it once...”

Then she felt his hands lift her hips, his nose moving down her middle, up and down, and then his tongue coming down and passing slowly, but repeatedly, in that place that when caressed by his hand had an extraordinary effect! Victoria was on the verge of screaming! Not because the sensation was extremely intense, but because it was terribly exciting! She closed her eyes shut and grabbed the pillows in front of her.

He put his body on top of hers.

She sighed. The madness of his skin sliding over hers!

He kissed her shoulders and neck.

She felt brushing on her middle the length of his will, voluminous and urgent! Hot and soft!

He burst into her all at once. It was not very fast, but it was sequential. All at once.

Victoria felt his entrance into her more sudden than the first time. But then maybe it was even more exciting like this! It was, at least, different.

She opened her mouth and exclaimed:

“Oh, William!”

He withdrew slightly. He pushed back deep inside her.

She reacted moaning.

Hearing her moan like that, underneath him, was delirious!

He retreated again only in part. He didn’t move forward again, as she expected.
However, she recoiled trying to get him to fill her again.

“Very good!” He thought.

And then... He invaded her body, going back and forth, and that was inexplicably astonishing. The pressure of his body on her made her hips rise even higher and her back bend. That position made penetration deeper. It seemed that he hit some inner part of her body that had not been touched the other time.

He thrust his right hand under her body and grabbed her breasts that, in that position, bulged.

Everything accelerated in both: the breathing, the heartbeat, the speed of their bodies’ movement.

Victoria felt her body respond to his stimuli. Her Prime Minister! In her bed! Inside her! She grabbed the pillows in front of her and asked:

“Ah, my love, how can this be so good?”

“You drive me crazy, Victoria!” He whispered in her ear.

She felt herself entering a state in which she was not a queen, nor an ordinary woman, only a female, the whole woman of that man who possessed her!

“Continue!” She asked.

He increased the tossing speed. Then he lifted his body and buried his fingers in her buttocks. The panting, carried by the frenzy. She was delicious! And so reactive! He was possessing the Queen, in her own bed! He felt her begin to shiver around him.

Victoria hit the bliss! She closed her eyes, squeezed the pillows tightly with both hands, and exclaimed:

“William! William!”

He came out from inside her spilling out into the concavity of the end of her back.

Then, stunned, collapsed on the mattress.

“Don’t move, my love.” He asked.

She would not move any way, as she waited for her body to materialize again.

They stayed for a few moments catching their breath. She on her stomach and he partially on top of her kissing her back. Beautiful, wonderful!

William plucked up the courage to get up, went to fetch his pocket-handkerchief and carefully wiped her back and buttocks while saying:

“We can’t allow stains on the sheets; that would raise suspicion...”

Then he lay down on his right side and she did the same with her back to him.

He pulled her to him and put his left arm around her, gently grabbing her breasts.

She couldn’t see him, but felt his whole body over hers.
“William... today was a lot more exciting than the other time. The first time was beautiful and was very, very good, but today was more...” She remarked missing the word to conclude.

He brushed the hair from her ear and whispered:

“Primitive...”

“That, primitive must be the right word...”

He kissed her neck and shoulder and said:

“We can always do it in different ways...”

She turned to him and kissed him on the mouth.

“I'm the happiest woman in the world!”

Victoria loved sex! And Melbourne enhanced and expanded that propensity. A woman who once did not immediately understand that a virgin couldn’t be generating a child, and yet...

He rose again, blew out the remaining candles on the candlesticks of the bedroom, and went back to bed.

They hugged and kissed.

She was warm and soft in his arms.

He leaned his head against the left side of her chest and Victoria put the fingers of her right hand into his hair and caressed his head with the tips of her fingers.

It was the first time he spent the night with a woman for many years. And with this woman! He just wanted to stay there like this. Deep inside, he needed more of these fingers in his hair, this affection he received from her, than of possessing her body. Well, he had already possessed her body. So now he just needed this. He wouldn’t be able to stay there till the sun was up, but he would sleep with her!

“You are a miracle in my life!” He said with closed eyes in a sleepy tone.

She told him nothing more trying not to wake him, but she felt those words as a personal victory over his past pains.

They fell asleep.

***

Melbourne woke up in the dark.

He shifted in the bed and she opened her eyes reluctantly, though she couldn’t see him.

“William...”

“Victoria.”

She reached out to him, grabbed him and kissed his shoulder, chest and mouth, barely opening her eyes, half asleep.
“I'll have to go soon…” He informed her.

“Don’t go... Stay here with me... It is so good to wake up with you here next to me, with your body’s heat and to feel your skin in mine...” She said.

He leaned over her and kissed her mouth and breasts for a while... For how long had he not had this? Waking up in the middle of the night with a woman in his arms. No, she was different! He had never had this! She was a flooding force that had entered his life, a vibrant energy that warmed him and gave him vigor! He felt himself harden.

She spread her legs and he sank into her.

The sense of stretching caused by him inside her was always breathtaking, and the sense of unity that existed between them in each of these moments was exceptional!

They loved each other as dawn progressed.

When they finished, as she moved on the bed, she let out a moan of discomfort.

Then he asked:

“Are you sore?”

“A little...”

“Is that bad?” He asked expectantly.

“No... I think it's great!” She answered laughing.

“It's good for you to remember that I was there...” He said laughing as well.

“I would never forget anyway...” She said as he kissed her neck and chest.

Then she pushed him so that he would lay on his back, lifted her body and put herself on top of him. She grabbed William's head with both hands and began to kiss his face.

One, two, three kisses along the forehead.

He closed his eyes.

A kiss on the nose. A kiss in each of the closed eyes. A kiss on each side of the face, the protruding veins beneath the eyes, and then the expression wrinkles on the sides of the mouth. It was so good to kiss the expression wrinkles on his face! A kiss on the cheek, a kiss on the mouth. She had decorated his face. She had memorized it in her brain and imprinted it on her heart and wished many times she could do that. To kiss his face like that. And now she could do it at last!

Her weight on him was comforting. And those soft kisses she gave him...

She made him lift his arms upward, with the hands near the head, intertwined her hands in his and then lying over him, with the skin of her naked body touching the whole surface of the naked skin of his body, said:

“This is what I am! This woman in the night, undressed for you! Not the queen that everyone sees outside during the day! That is just a character I try to represent in the best way. I needed someone to rescue me from myself, and you did it!”
He rolled her body around, reversing the positions and placing her underneath him.

“And I will continue to accompany the Queen outside, as I have always done, and I will be here all the nights that you want me, available to the woman who lives inside her.”

He kissed her passionately.

“Now I have to go before the entire palace wakes up.” He said in a tone of regret that he had to leave her so early.

“I'm going to go on sleeping, I'm tired... You kill me!” She exclaimed.

He laughed softly.

“Do I? I think it's the other way around...”

She smiled.

Reluctantly, William got up, got dressed, and came to bed to kiss her goodbye, asking her to go back to sleep.

She buried her body on the mattress and her face on the pillows searching for the scent he had left in the fabric.

He opened the door of her chambers carefully.

There was no one in the corridors still in the gloom. Only Emma, who waited! How embarrassing!

They headed for the servants’ wing.

“My husband does not know that I'm here at this time to help you in this situation…” Emma informed.

“I am so sorry about all this, Emma! It will not happen again!” He apologized.

Melbourne left from the back covertly in the presence of Emma, in the event that someone came and an excuse on why he was there at that hour needed. They could say that he had come to bring some urgent information to Emma to be passed on to the Queen.

When he was on the street Melbourne sighed with relief. He walked home on foot. On the way he thought he couldn’t do that anymore! At this age, after all the scandals in which he had been involved, sneaking like that from the Queen's bed! If this was discovered, it would be the biggest scandal of all time that had ever been in the papers!

He realized that he was dressed in his ball clothes, for he had not been able to predict the day before that he was going to spend the night with the Queen...

When he was almost home, a carriage stopped at his side.

“Melbourne!”

He turned to the man in the window.

“Wellington!”

The old marshal was coming from Apsley House. But with two million people in London why did
he have to meet Wellington that day at that hour?

“Good Morning! I see you are just coming back from last night's ball!” Wellington exclaimed.

Melbourne’s wit made him play the game, giving him the answer he wanted:

“You know how it is, Duke... The dance, the drinks... What would be the best way for a lonely man like me to finish the night?”

“With a woman!”

“Precisely! And you know how hard it is for a man to get up from the bed where a woman is…”

“I know, I know…”

Wellington was the widower of Kitty Pakenham, with whom he had had an unsatisfactory marriage, and of whom he had lived away for many years due to military campaigns. A frivolous, laid-back woman who contrasted with Arthur Wellesley, an imposing man on military discipline. Several women had been in his bed.


Melbourne nodded slightly.

“Be careful, my dear Viscount, do not get yourself involved in scandals once again… Have a good day...” Wellington warned and the carriage left.

“Good morning…” Melbourne ended up saying a few moments after the carriage pulled away.
Chapter 12

When he returned to the palace for that morning's meeting Melbourne didn’t tell Victoria about the encounter he had had with the Duke hours earlier.

“William! Good Morning!”

“Victoria...”

They kissed quickly.

“And now tell me... Do you feel compensated for that fateful last ball?” She asked looking satisfied.

He grabbed her by the waist and pulled her against him smiling.

“Completely compensated! Since last night, even before the ball, until now... Any man in the world couldn’t ask for more!”

He kissed her intensely.

“Did everything go well when you left?” She asked interestedly.

“It did.”

“You're beautiful!”

He smiled self-contentedly.

“And you’re delicious!”

William laughed, showing surprise on his face.

“Delicious? Like what?” He asked as he grabbed her hands between their chests.

“Like... a Cadbury chocolate...”

“Hmm... No one would have made such a comparison!”

They both laughed.

Skerrett walked through the hall and heard them laughing. She couldn’t help but smile as well!

“You are perfect in everything! What you do to me in bed is wonderful...”

“Don’t go there yet Victoria... we have a lot of documents to read and dispatch there in those boxes... Yes, but since you mention it, not wanting to compliment myself, I guess a young prince, inexperienced, would not have my... knowledge... on that matter...”

“So I really made a good choice!” She concluded.

They laughed again together.

They would stay the rest of the morning like this, lulled in each other, but work had to be done.
They got on with that, starting by sitting at the desk.

After the dispatch of some documents about the appointment of deans to some of the cathedrals, Melbourne introduced the topic that most occupied his thoughts in those days:

“Victoria...”

“Yes?”

“Maybe we should start weighing the pros - if they exist - and the cons of announcing your intention to marry... me. We won’t be able to keep this situation a secret for long and there is a danger that you could be... This circumstance has to become public, but if we are going to disclose it we will need to have well-prepared arguments.”

“Of course William. What do you propose?”

“Let’s first consider the cons, which they won’t accept.”

“Very well...”

“Well, starting with the gravest, I have no royal blood; I'm just a Viscount, a recent title. Moreover I'm a widower with a scandalous past and much older than you, which will make them say that I seduced you...”

“That last part is true!” She teased.

He smiled reproachfully and continued:

“It is also very grave that I am your Prime Minister, so they will say that I took advantage of this position to obtain a more intimate relationship with you, and a Prime Minister can never be married to the Queen... Politically it is completely unfeasible. The Crown cannot marry the Parliament! The sovereign must be impartial.”

“So if I insist on this, given the factors you have just pointed out, what would they do?” She asked so he would tell her the consequences.

“They will drag your image through the mud and the empire will be plunged into political chaos. You will be accused of mental disorder, of mental instability, which they have already invoked in the past about the Ladies of the Bedchamber episode occurred in 1839. If all this happens they will force you to abdicate and the alternative is your Uncle Cumberland, who can’t wait to sit on the throne of England.”

“In fact, our marriage is not a marriage of convenience. Besides us loving each other, it must be the most inconvenient marriage in the eyes of the world.” She joked.

They smiled.

“How could we, even remotely, overcome those circumstances?” She asked. “Have you thought of any possibilities, as I asked you?”

“I know what the law says... You know there is a Royal Marriages Act of 1772. What does this law say?”

“That no member of the royal family can marry without the sovereign's permission.”

“And what is the purpose?”
“Avoid diminishing the status of the Royal Household by preventing the marriage of its members to people of inferior social status.”

“In the light of what you have just said, do you think it possible to marry me?”

Victoria knew the incoherence of what she was going to answer, but even so she wanted to say it so that all arguments could be discussed in the hope of finding a path they could follow:

“If the law says that permission has to be given by the sovereign, the monarch is me, and I can authorize my own marriage.”

He realized her intention and responded accordingly:

“But that is subverting the law! And what is expected of the monarch is to set the example and not to go over the law when it doesn’t suit them! You can’t demand that members of the Royal Household don’t marry people of inferior status when you do it yourself!”

“Henry VIII, when the head of the Catholic Church didn’t authorize the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, he simply founded the Anglican church…” Victoria said amusedly.

“Well, we're not in the sixteenth century anymore, and you can’t behave like Henry VIII…”

“Then? Alternative?”

“Well, there is the legal figure of morganatic marriage. You know what it is…” He said.

“It is the marriage of a nobleman, a prince or a king, to someone of the lower nobility or a commoner, but that is recognized as legal. In that case the law is not disrespected; it may be a way…” She said, noting the feasibility of the proposition.

“But it has serious implications... The children of a marriage of this nature can’t inherit titles or rights of the highest-status parent.”

“And the spouse…”

“Neither…”

“That's our solution!” Victoria said with a blank look.

“You want to have a morganatic marriage with me?” He asked in surprise.

“If there is no alternative…”

“Even with the future implications…”

“Yes of course.” She reinforced.

“You want to marry a man my age… and you don’t mind that your children wouldn’t inherit the throne of England just to be able to marry a man of old age…”

“That is what I want. And you're not an old man!” She exclaimed in a scolding tone.

He smiled.

“What if I insist on a non-morganatic marriage?” She asked, defying the law.
“The alternative they will give you is abdication. No one will accept you as Queen married to me, nor the children of our union as heirs. In practice, it has an even worse result because the morganatic marriage still allows you to continue to reign, it will only nullify that possibility for your children…”

Victoria was thoughtful.

“And you would still have to annul the other great obstacle…” He said.

He didn’t explain which one, waiting for her to figure it out on her own.

“You will have to stop being Prime Minister….” She made the obvious deduction.

“Yes…”

“And do you want to do that?”

“I want to, if it means sharing my life with you.”

She smiled slightly at him.

“Is it more important for you to be married to me than to be Prime Minister?” She asked.

“What do you think, Victoria?”

“It’s not that… Do you not regret having to resign the position?”

“Victoria, prime ministers are always changing. I myself was prime minister and stopped being one a few times. At any moment there are elections and governments change. In the next election, I would probably lose. If I resign I would only be anticipating that outcome in a few months… And if that gives me the possibility of being able to show myself to the world with you, how could I still feel any hesitation? Before you became Queen I already intended to withdraw from politics. If it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t be here for years now…”

“I wouldn’t like to have another Prime Minister… Nor other ladies… But today I can no longer act like I did in the past. Besides, Peel is not that bad…” She grimaced. “If he were to win the next elections, I would have to accept him as well, with no room for any refusal, any more than the ladies he proposed. And actually, if you resigned, I would stop having you as Prime Minister, but I would have you in my life every day... And every night... In the light of the world... And that is highly compensating.” Victoria concluded.

“But in this case it will not be Peel to succeed me...”

“It won’t?”

“The other time, if you had allowed it, it would have been Peel because my party had lost strength in the Parliament and the alternative was for power to be given to the Tories. But at this moment things are balanced and the only change would be that of the man who holds the position of prime minister, but a Whig all the same…”

“Ah... So it's less serious... And who could that be?” Victoria asked curiously.

“John Russell, 1st Earl Russell, leader of the Whigs in the House of Commons.”

“And would I keep my ladies?”
“Yes!”

“Then let’s suppose you resign. How do we solve the other obstacles?” She asked excitedly at the prospect.

“The marital and personal scandals of the past and age can’t be erased.” He said.

“But the title can be high. I can do that!” She exclaimed.

“But why would you grant me a title?”

Her eyes widened as the thought struck her brain as she said:

“Because you saved my life!”

He shook his head, trying to understand her idea.

“You saved my life, the life of the sovereign of England; that should be rewarded. Is there any act of greater nobility? The monarch uses the granting of nobiliary titles for that.” She explained.

“And what does that change? What is the advantage of that?” He asked incredulously.

“Well, it’s better for you to be an Earl than to be a Viscount, is it not?”

“I confess I don’t feel good about that. Not only about the reward itself, because what I have done does not justify it, nor also about the fact that it would be you yourself to attribute it in order to have a more prominent fiancé on the social ladder. It looks like you’re buying me…”

“If you want to marry me, you have to stop those pruritus… Aren’t you willing to resign? I am willing to do everything in my power for us to get married… And give you a title is something that is in my own hands… Have you seen the opportunity that we end up having, given the position that I occupy? It’s a coincidence that I’m your fiancé and at the same time the Queen…”

“So let’s continue to assume that I resign and that you make me a higher noble… What would overcome the other problems?” William asked.

“The scandals of your past have been compensated thanks to the good image of you that came out in the papers when you saved my life. No one can deny that. It is a very favorable element in the public opinion… Did you see what came out in the Times and the Morning Post? You were praised for your courage and coolness.”

“Yes…”

“Age… I didn’t want to have to think about that…” She said looking at him sadly.

His face closed as well.

“Well, that's not a political issue, it's something that only concerns us, and none of us cares about this difference…” She tried to get the matter over with.

“But it's just…” He still started, but could not continue.

She pressed her lips together to keep the tears from flowing into her blue eyes.

They remained silent.
They pulled themselves together.

She moved to another subject:

“We can still add other favorable elements. My alternative would be my Uncle Cumberland, and no one wants him as King of England. He could even please some of the Tories, but no one else wants him, public opinion does not want him... Half of the kingdom thinks he killed a servant, and the other half think that he generated a son in his own sister... And public opinion is favorable to me as Queen. Demanding my abdication wouldn’t be wise. They know that. And I will remind them of it myself if necessary.”

“But even if you get the approval for the marriage, the Parliament will not approve of any allowance for me, don’t count on it, but I don’t need it either way... And I’ll never be allowed to be a Prince Consort...” He took the chance to warn her of the obstacles.

“But you should be Prince Consort, yes! At least you should receive Royal Highness Treatment! In fact, you should be King Consort! Just like the husband of Queen Maria II of Portugal! Another Coburg...”

William made a face of utter disapproval and said:

“Do not demand too much, Victoria, we'll be very lucky if they overlook the other obstacles! Don’t create more! King Consort? You must be joking! You're the Queen! No man, not even a prince of royal blood with whom you married would be allowed to be king, or he would stand above you. And to the husband of the Queen of Portugal this title was only granted when the crown prince was born, which will not happen if you do a morganatic marriage...”

She recognized the logic of his response and added:

“But there are still other small favorable aspects. You're English, it's my English wedding! Was it not you who said that an English wedding would be very well regarded? Wellington wouldn’t want me to marry a German. And you are Anglican and I am the supreme governor of the Church of England. He would hate a suitor whom he suspected of being a Papist!”

“Will we make it?” He asked, but seeing a faint possibility that was beginning to become credible.

“I believe so, William, we have to make it!”

The first step was to grant Melbourne a title for services rendered personally to the sovereign of England. The second was his resignation as Prime Minister. The third the disclosure of the intention of their marriage. In this last step, the first clash would be domestic. Her mother, Uncle Leopold, not to mention Cumberland. And Lehzen, who loved her more than her own mother, but who never welcomed the close relationship between Victoria and the Prime Minister. Then things would only become public after the announcement to the Privy Council. And afterwards, with an opinion that was hopefully favorable, the matter would reach the Parliament.

On the announcement to her family Victoria would have to act alone. It made no sense for Melbourne to accompany her, for he was not a suitor or an official fiancé whom the family already recognized as such. In the Privy Council he would be present because he was also a member of the Council. In Parliament he would also be present, alone. So many barriers to overcome! It would still take so much time! Victoria thought that if it were not for the fact that in practice they already had a romantic relationship, she wouldn’t be able to wait until marriage. However, the danger of getting pregnant was real and marriage couldn’t take too long, as it might be necessary to cover up an untimely pregnancy.
They went back to Windsor together. She wanted to enjoy the new relationship that now existed between them, and it was easier to do so at Windsor. Obviously with Harriet, Emma and Alfred Paget on their tails, but still it was a lot better than in Buckingham. This time, in addition to Skerrett, Baroness Lehzen also went.

Melbourne went to Victoria's room to get the day's work going. He stepped in, kissed her, but thought it strange that she remained very quiet looking at him as he still held her in his arms. He asked:

“What is it? Is everything all right?”

“Everything is great! Do you know what I would like?”

“No…”

“To go riding!”

“But don’t we have a lot of work ahead of us?”

“We have, but I don’t feel like it... I just want to walk, catch some air, be with you...”

He smiled and kissed her forehead saying:

“Very well, my dear, let us go ride! And then, when we get back, we'll concentrate on our work.”

“Let us get dressed then…” She said.

They met at the entrance already dressed for the occasion.

When she saw him waiting for her, Victoria remarked provocatively:

“You look stunning in your riding boots!”

He nodded his head affirmatively and said:

“I will not forget!”

They mounted on horseback and headed for the forest zone. Alfred Paget and a groom followed behind at some distance.

They entered the forest.

After a while she said:

“I think it must have been around here that Dash was injured and I had a fight with Albert... Do you know what he told me in the middle of the argument? That I should marry you.”

The surprise on Melbourne's face.

“Hum... Did the prince say that?”

“He was jealous of my relationship with you. He didn’t like the intimacy that existed between us. I told him that when I was in Kensington my only friend was Dash, but that since I became Queen, I had you... and my ladies... And he exploded! He said that you were the one who told me what to
think, that you controlled me, imagine that! What did he know about you? Nothing! Where was he while you were always here by my side? Did he think he would come here, so suddenly, effortlessly, never having done a thing for me, behaving like a futile, arrogant, and rude kid, and I would still propose to him?"

Melbourne sighed and said:

“And I, that day in the castle, thinking that you were finally understanding each other...”

“Why?”

“Well, when I saw Alfred Paget enter the castle alone, I asked where you were and he said that he had left with Ernest because they were superfluous...”

“What nonsense! They could have perfectly stayed!” She exclaimed indignantly.

“You have no idea how worried I was when the equerry told me this!”

“Oh my darling! How I regret hearing this! But shortly afterwards I informed you that I was not going to marry him!”

“And I was secretly so relieved for that! And at the same time very worried about how would our future be...”

Nearby some deer were frightened by their presence and fled making a noise that startled Victoria. Recovered from the scare she asked:

“And do you want to know another very curious event?”

And then she explained:

“My Uncle Leopold pressured me to marry Albert, as you know. Then one day he went so far as to tell me that I needed to lose my virginal shyness and ask Albert to marry me. To tell this to me when I had already gone to Brocket Hall to declare myself to you! As if I needed him to encourage me... What drives us are our own feelings and not the pressure they make on us!”

“And fortunately, you kept your feelings and resisted the pressure.”

She smiled.

Alfred Paget was following behind them. He was accustomed to always follow behind. Hundreds of times! Those who follow behind see much. Whoever goes ahead forgets that is being watched! For example, the way in which the riders approached each other from time to time almost touching each other... A queen would not approach a prime minister like that... He wondered, therefore, if he should stop following them and return to the castle, leaving them alone, as he had done that time he had left the Queen alone in the woods with Prince Albert. But now the situation was different, he didn’t have the brother of the royal hand suitor to give him that freedom. And he couldn’t make that decision for himself, only with the Queen's command. As such, he continued riding behind them. He himself had once felt in love with the Queen, but he was only a subject, had no status to get such a woman, and those thoughts had been swept away. In any case, it would only remain with him the conviction that had formed in his brain about the real nature of the relationship between the Queen and the Prime Minister.

Victoria wanted to do something crazy. She wanted to start galloping, convinced that William
would follow her, or dismount and lay on the ground with him. She wanted to run and that he ran after her; that he toppled her to the ground and kissed her.

They were not alone, she couldn’t do that!

She didn’t tell her thoughts out loud, but William felt she was hot by the way she breathed and looked at him.

“She asked.

“Shall we return?” She asked.

They returned to the castle.

When they dismounted, there was an urgency in her eyes.

William noticed that.

They entered the castle; took off their hats; went upstairs. They should have separated for different bedchambers, but he took her right hand and they went, almost running, along the corridor holding hands.

He had never held her hand before, and that gesture was of indissoluble intimacy! When he took her hand to kiss it he didn’t grab it completely, he didn’t press it that way and didn’t keep it in his hand more than the seconds needed.

The fact that in Windsor the abuses of servants were worse than in Buckingham meant that half the butlers, footmen, grooms, and chamber servants seldom came to work. This made the corridors less crowded and it was easier to go unnoticed.

In anticipation of what would follow, she felt the blood in her hand's veins throb in the compression of his hand. His footsteps were wider than hers, so she was almost dragged like a child by the hand of an adult.

He opened the door to the chambers she had given him. He entered before her, against all precedence, pulled her inside and closed the door. He grabbed her, kissed her greedily, pushed her, and pressed her body against the wall near the door!

She felt the growing enthusiasm of his body against her... She untied the scarf on his neck.

He unbuttoned her coat that she herself helped undress.

With both hands he opened her shirt violently. The corset was a frustrating block because it prevented his access to her breasts! However, it would be impossible to undress her at that time! He touched her breasts even through the frame and kissed the part of her flesh more revealed by the opened shirt as she wrapped his neck with both hands and tucked her fingers through his hair.

William stripped off his coat and vest. He pulled her skirt and petticoat up to have access to her hips and buttocks over the underwear. Then he turned her to the other side of the room and made her walk backwards kissing her repeatedly. His hands now on her face, as he kissed her. They smelled of the leather of the gloves he had taken off after the ride.

She slammed against his desk.

He grabbed her by the waist, lifted her body up and sat her on the desk.

Some papers flew to the ground...
He lifted her skirt and petticoat. It was impossible to undress her underwear that had the waistband stuck under the corset.

She spread her legs to the placement of his body and pulled his shirt from inside his pants. She thrust her hands inside his shirt and ran down his belly, chest, and back.

He searched with his right hand for the central opening of her underwear, cleverly designed so that all women could respond to the inevitable by overcoming the impossibility of undressing their underwear.

Victoria rubbed her cheek on his neck and left jaw, delirious with the warmth and touch of his hand. She felt trapped inside the corset structure with which she had to live daily. Even more trapped on this occasion! She wanted his hands and his mouth on her skin! But he couldn’t reach more than what was exposed. And the swelling of her breasts and the fast breathing made the feeling of imprisonment and suffocation even greater! But that suffocation was also exciting!

He unbuttoned his pants, put his left hand on her back and pulled her closer.

He fucked her eagerly!

In riding boots!

It was relatively fast! There was not a cry or even a word. Just whispered moans and a deep breath. The place, the hour of the day and the little time that they had to carry out the act thus determined it. But prohibition and danger made it terribly exciting!

When their agitation ended – imperatively with him out of her - she kissed his exposed chest in the opening of his shirt. It was warm and sweaty.

“Is this what you wanted?” He asked.

Below his chin, still shaken by the orgasmic wave that had run through her body moments before, she shook her head affirmatively, running her nose on his skin.

“You'll have to hurry, my dear. They will miss you and realize that I also disappeared...”

They composed themselves quickly and in the best way possible after the mess generated in the clothes they wore and in their presentation. He would stay there for some time until he went to her to work, but she had to leave.

When she grabbed the door handle with her left hand she looked back and said smiling:

“Thank you!”

He looked at her, shocked, and warned:

“Please, Victoria, don’t thank me for a thing like this.”

She held out her right hand to him.

He grabbed it.

“I should... You make me happy!”

He smiled and closed his eyes for seconds.
Victoria dropped his hand and left.

The chambers she had given him had served for them to behave like lovers after all! And the one who had taken the initiative to use them to that end, against all initial fears, ended up being him! How was it possible that of all the women he had ever had, she was the one with whom he best related sexually? And why had she been given to him in this moment of his life?

For years there had been a sexual tension between them that had now faded.

They both thought that if they were fast enough their absence would almost not be noticed. As Paget left the horses in the stables he would think that they had went inside the castle to do something "politically correct"; and Lehzen and the ladies of the bedchamber, while Paget didn’t come alone, would think they were still riding.

When Victoria left William’s bedchambers she saw no one. But she was seen! Lezhen saw her leaving the door of the Prime Minister's chambers! She didn’t say a thing, she didn’t know how, but she stood alert.
Chapter 13

The next day William returned to meet Victoria for their work meeting.

They were sitting at the table surrounded by documents and state affairs, and suddenly he asked:

“How do you love me?”

“How?” She asked, raising her head from the papers, surprised by the question whose answer seemed obvious to her. “You don’t know?”

“Not if you don’t tell me.”

She smiled and exclaimed:

“I have got everything in you! You are a perfect man!”

“How can you be more specific?” He asked.

Victoria sighed, smiled again, and sought within herself all the justifications she could give him:

“Well, you are true, loyal, kind, amiable, amusing, affectionate... You are a companion, a protector, a guide... You are sensitive, kind, determined, principled, intelligent, very cultivated... You listen to me, understand and advise me... And you have a wonderful voice, which reassures me, a distinct bearing, beautiful hands, a beautiful face and dazzling eyes! I couldn’t wish for any other man when I have this one!”

He smiled.

“And you don’t think I’m too old for you?”

“No! Of course not!”

“Why don’t you prefer a man your age? Is not a young man lusher, more exciting?”

“No! What kind of question is that? You have doubts?” Victoria asked indignantly, with a wry smile.

“No, my dear, of course not, I just need to understand. Put yourself in my shoes; imagine yourself a man my age who has a woman of your age in love with him. Do you think it’s obvious for him to understand why that happens? It is not. Sometimes looking at your youth and beauty it seems unbelievable, somewhat unreal. Do you understand?”

Calmer she replied:

“Yes, I think so. Let me see... how can I explain this to you... Young men... like Albert, for instance... don’t interest me because they are too childish, immature, they don’t have your experience, they don’t make me feel the safety that you do, they are empty, rash, ignorant, vain...”

He sighed.
“And then there's the skin…” She added.

“The skin?” He asked.

“Yes, the skin... Theirs is... childish. Your skin is... mature. And that is... tremendously exciting!”

“Oh... The things I'm learning!” He exclaimed, grinning in surprise.

She laughed.

“And there’s the excitement of your experience as a man that teaches me to be a woman…”

He rose from the table and walked towards her. She did the same instinctively. He kissed her and held her in his arms.

“So what about you? Why do you love me?” She asked.

“But that's obvious!”

“If I gave you my reasons, now I want to hear yours.”

He grabbed her waist and said looking amused:

“You are young, cheerful, elegant, beautiful... you are a good queen, an active, determined, persistent, intelligent, kind, affectionate woman... and you have a little snub nose...”

“Do you think I have a snub nose?” She asked, looking surprised.

“I don’t think so, it is snub! But it's beautiful!”

Victoria laughed.

“Do you know when I fell in love with you?” Victoria asked.

“When?”

“Well, I didn’t realize it at the time... It was not until later that, thinking about it, I came to this conclusion. It was that morning in Kensington when you took the doll and asked if she had a name.”

He looked at her inquiringly. He wondered what difference could have made picking up the doll.

She continued:

“No other man would have picked up the doll, much less would have asked what her name was! That has indirectly shown that you are a sensitive person. You took interest in my universe of life, you wanted to know. No one else would have done it... When you saw the doll I was apprehensive, I thought it would be embarrassing if you thought that I was still playing with dolls. But then you acted with such ease; that it was normal for her to be there...”

Victoria raised her eyebrows more and concluded:

“And you smiled at me! And you were a tall, handsome man with a velvet voice!”

He kissed her lips tenderly.

“And you, when did you fall in love with me?” Victoria asked.
“Me? I don’t know... As time went by and I have become more and more acquainted with you and more and more impressed. But thinking about it, that morning in Kensington had a lot of impact on me too. I was blown away with you, with your beauty and the way you talked and the things you said, something very mature and determined for someone so young and who had always lived isolated... Before I met you, I thought I was going to meet an immature young woman, and then I discovered someone of immense dignity. I felt like you were a queen in every way. And you were so young and sparkling, the way your eyes shined... Do you know what I thought when I went to the palace on horseback?”

“What?” She asked curiously.

“As I approached the palace gardens the trees grew thicker and, for moments, I imagined myself as the prince from the Sleeping Beauty fairytale, who was coming to wake the princess, who had been sleeping for a hundred years…”

Victoria found that extremely romantic. She could never have imagined that he had thought such a thing even before he knew her, and it was even more exceptional that they subsequently developed a mutual love. She exclaimed:

“William, that’s beautiful!”

“And in fact, thinking about it, just like him, when I found you in the “tower”, I found your beauty so great that I fell in love!” He finished.

“I was not sleeping, but it felt like I was, so many years nearly all the time locked up in Kensington, and when you kissed my hand it awakened me to life, as a queen and as a woman. That day you were, in fact, my prince who came on horseback and dismounted in my life. I peered out of the window and saw you dismount and talk to Conroy before you came up.”

“Fortunately you got rid of him in good time!” William remarked.

She nodded and continued:

“My favorite fairytale is The Beauty and the Beast, and it’s curious that it applies to us today, in a way.”

“Oh, of course, you are the beauty and I’m the beast!” William said, making a funny look.

Victoria laughed. She made those adorable dimples that formed on her face when she smiled that he appreciated, and explained:

“No! That’s not it! I like the story because it has an important message: it is necessary to love beyond appearances, to love what people have inside, regardless of what they look like on the outside. And the part where the story touches us is that, just as Belle’s love put an end to the curse that had condemned the prince to live in the form of a monster until a maiden agreed to marry him, my love for you took away the pain and gave you a new reason to live... Wasn’t it?”

“It was, my love, it was! Just now you talked about the doll... 123, was it not?”

“Yes, I had 132 dolls, and with Lehzen’s help I dressed them in costumes based on the characters of the plays or the operas I saw with my mother.”

“Do you know what? You are my doll, a beautiful little doll! And with a crown!” He concluded, grabbed her face with both hands and kissed her.
Not much work was done in Windsor now! The Queen and the Prime Minister preferred to practice the gallantry instead of dispatching state affairs! But political issues had already occupied them for years, and courting each other was a novelty, a discovery, and a gift to both.

That night he wore the Privy Counselor uniform or Court uniform during dinner and the evening.

She was going crazy! The elegance and shine of that uniform in him were exhilarating! She felt a mad urge to throw herself on him, now that she knew what it was like to attain ecstasy with him inside her! Now that she knew the fullness, the moment of fainting and the period of recovery, with the exchange of kisses on their naked and sweated skin!

She knew that by the end of the evening each had to sleep in their own chambers. But she had to at least make sure that they were able to kiss each other goodnight.

When he was alone to taste a glass of Port - after Alfred Paget's departure - Victoria approached William and asked disguisedly:

“Meet me in the East Wing corridor in 30 minutes.”

He didn’t realize exactly what she was planning, but he would do as she asked.

A few minutes later Victoria left the room as if she were just leaving to respond to a need by resorting to the private compartment. If so, she should have called Skerrett to help with the dress, but once in the hall she simply walked to the East Wing, the same where her bedroom and the private compartment were, and halfway to his chambers.

William would have to find an excuse to leave. A few more minutes after the Queen left, he said he was tired and apologized for leaving early for his quarters. He left and went to meet her.

Emma and Harriet looked at each other...

She was waiting for him anxiously.

“What were you thinking, Victoria?” He asked in a low, worried tone as he approached her.

“Oh, William! I just needed you to wish me a good night properly!” She exclaimed walking up to him and placing both hands on his chest.

He should not do it, it was dangerous! But he couldn’t resist wrapping his arms around her.

She ran her hands up his chest, feeling the sparkling gold embroidery on the deep blue of the fabric. She clasped her hands on his shoulders.

He kissed her!

There! That was all! That was all she needed!

She couldn’t stay longer, she had to go back to the parlour.

“Good night, William!”

“Good night, Victoria!”

***
Victoria was now in bed and should sleep, but she thought of William. So much time spent with him, so close to him, a forbidden good night kiss in the hall and with so much need for him! How was that possible? She felt helpless on the bed alone. She wanted to feel his body against her!

Without thinking it through she got up, put on her robe, and went to his chambers.

The door was not locked. She opened it very slowly. She didn’t want him to wake up before time, if he was asleep. She wanted to surprise him.

It was dark, but the moonlight streamed in through the window.

He was in bed, lying on his left side, his back to her and judging by his breathing he was asleep. Beautiful! The sound of his breathing!

Victoria stripped off her robe, put it on a chair and watched him. He was gorgeous! Even asleep and half in the dark! And like this on his back... Everything in him was beautiful! She slightly pushed the sheets and slipped inside the bed behind his back, pulling the sheets back over her. She leaned over his shoulder, covered by the nightgown he wore, opened in his chest, and kissed his neck gently.

William, who had already woken up with her weight on the mattress, but who had remained still, turned his head to look at her.

“Victoria! What are you doing here?” He asked in a low voice.

“A surprise!”

He turned his body to her laying on his back and, as he put his arms around her body and pulled her to him, he warned:

“You are risking too much.”

“I only came for a little while.” She said as she cuddled on her side next to him.

He rolled his body again to lie on his right side, face to face with her body.

“I just want to feel the warmth of your body, your smell and the taste of your kisses...” She explained.

He pressed her against him and kissed her mouth.

“You look beautiful in that damn uniform!”

“Why damn?” He asked puzzled.

“Because it won’t let me concentrate. You cannot imagine the effect you have on me in that uniform! Now I was there in my bedroom and couldn’t think of anything else, the only thing I saw was your image, in uniform, in front of me.”

He laughed and ran his left hand down her legs, feeling them naked because the nightgown had come up, and realizing she was not wearing anything underneath. He kissed her tenderly.

She placed her forehead on his chest, kissed the exposed skin on the opening of his shirt and prepared to lay there like that.

William hugged her, but after a moment he said:
“Turn your back to me.”

“My back? Why?”

“You'll see...”

She turned.

She felt him hard against her buttocks, the fabric of the nightgowns between their bodies.

He kissed her neck, and beneath the sheets, which covered them up to the chest, he lifted her nightgown up above her waist, running his hand slowly over her bare skin as he raised the fabric in front of him.

Victoria sighed.

Then he ran his hand over her buttocks in a circular motion and then tucked it between her legs, which Victoria opened to his placing so he could fill his hand with her.

His hand was a blessing! She moaned.

He began to stimulate her. His fingers running between the folds of the flesh back and forth... The sensation was different from when he did it forth and back... In the continuity, she began to moan more audibly.

“Oh! William...” She said, emptying herself in a humid heat.

“Shhh... you can’t be loud.” He warned softly in her ear.

When he felt she was getting sufficiently aroused he took his hand away and then she felt his solid member pass between her thighs, rubbing all over her. First slowly, back and forth, and then in a few repeated movements of shuttle...

She was dissolving at that moment! She drained of desire for him. She wanted to feel that consistency inside! She moaned for it, but didn’t ask for it directly, waiting for him to do it.

He inserted himself in her.

“Oh, Victoria! Victoria...” He whispered in her ear.

She felt him slide through her! Oh, he was opening her up! Oh, and it was getting deeper and deeper!

William wrapped his left arm around her, searching for her breasts inside the opening of the nightgown.

She grabbed his forearm with her left hand, exposed with the drop of his sleeve. Of protruding veins, beautiful, vigorous, exciting!

And now he began to move!

With his volume and agitation inside her, she was getting more and more excited! In an allure that came, she rose but waited suspended, on a level of excitement that was attained and stretched for some time without however reaching the top. Today it was different! The other times that wonderful sensation rose in a growing gradation until she couldn’t take it anymore and exploded. Today it had risen to a terribly pleasant spot, but it remained at that level for some time, without
any explanation as to why that happened. And she didn’t want it to end! She wanted it to go on! Him inside her like that! So wonderful... He was!

The guttural sounds he produced near her neck, her face, and her ear made the act all the more stimulating. And there was the repeated and lustful clash of his body against hers!

It was so good that it became desperate! Like she was being tortured! Victoria needed to scream! But in this case of pleasure! That was it, pleasure was torture! Could pleasure be torture? Was it possible to call pleasure torture? But she could not scream! If she did, the sound would spread through the centuries-old walls of Windsor! Lying on her side as she was, she rolled her head more to sink her face into the pillow.

He felt there was a desperation in her that was unusual. A despair of delight! She was distressed and could not scream. Fascinating! William was leaning on his right elbow, but extending his forearm he managed to run his fingers on her temple and face on the left side, soothing her and kissing her face next.

“I love you, I love you...” She whispered urgently.

He kissed her face again and said:

“I know, I know... And I love you, Victoria!”

But Victoria's affliction sharpened his appetite for her, which made him move more violently into a desire for purely carnal possession.

Her right arm was bent over the mattress and her open hand dropped onto the pillow beside her face. Then with the left hand he grabbed her right hand, entwining their fingers together and squeezing it. She gripped his hand even harder. He gave her his hand to help her bear the pleasure he gave her, and she gripped his hand seeking solace for the affliction of pleasure she felt and that he awakened. What a strange and exciting contradiction, this one! When pleasure is a kind of torture and when the tormentor is the comforter! She could laugh or cry at that moment, any manifestation of emotions that allowed her to release the dazzling sensation he was causing her!

“You're so delicious!” He exclaimed.

She exploded! At that moment Victoria squeezed his hand so tightly that William thought that if her hand wasn’t so small and delicate it could almost break his bones. In this way he could measure the intensity of the pleasure he was giving her! It was there in that little hand that gripped his!

He withdrew and let himself break out next, avoiding tainting her shirt! He sacrificed his. What happened to him didn’t raise suspicion.

Victoria stood for a few seconds with her body quivering in the sequence of the ravenousness moments before. It had never been like that! And she had reached the climax in his hand! Aside from everything else he had already done to her, that element of his hand in hers had been phenomenal!

She preferred not to watch the whole of what happened after he withdrew from her. Meanwhile she recapitulated the previous moments.

He finished undressing his nightgown throwing it down to the floor next.

Then she felt William lay back behind her back again and pulled her nightgown down, as if to
comfort her with the protection of the cloth.

He hugged her to calm her down, running his left hand repeatedly in Victoria's belly, and whispered in her ear as he kissed her temple:

“Okay, it’s all alright now...”

When she could speak, she asked:

“How could anyone think this is wrong?”

He was surprised by the truth of her question.

“Those who don’t know how this really can be... and those who do, but doesn’t want to or cannot recognize it...”

After a while she turned to him, kissed him and hugged him.

“This is not good for you, is it?” She asked quietly.

He didn’t understand the question. How could she doubt it was not good for him? It was fantastic!

“What?” He asked incredulously.

“Your withdrawal before...”

He understood, surprised by the unexpectedness of her concern.

“Well, I can’t say that's the pleasantest way to do it... but it's necessary... and it's always good, anyway...”

She stood wondering about what he had said but made no further remarks.

They stood there for some time cuddling.

“Now, unfortunately, I have to go...” She warned.

“You were reckless by coming here with an innocent motive, but ended up being punished...” He said smiling, in a double sense that she understood, kissing his forehead.

“If all the punishments coming from you are like this, then I'll be reckless many times...”

They smiled and kissed. And reluctantly she got out of bed and, even more reluctantly, he let her go.

***

Still in Windsor, Victoria was seated embroidering. She hadn’t had the time for that in a while, but it was something she liked and that relieved her of the pressure of the daily official commitments. She forced herself to take some time to embroider.

“Majesty?” Lehzen stepped into the room.

“Yes, Lehzen...”

“A dresser found this button...” The baroness informed as she reached out her hand with the small piece between her index finger and thumb.
The Queen raised her head from the embroidery to look at what she showed her.

“Oh, it's a button of one of my riding suits.”

The baroness's countenance was heavy and she stood there without saying anything and without moving.

“What of it, Lehzen? You'd better give that to a seamstress so she can sew it back to the shirt.”

“Ma'am... I don’t want to be abusive, but... this button was found in Lord Melbourne's quarters.”

Victoria's face mirrored the shock she felt when she heard such a thing. She remembered the day she had been there and how he had opened her shirt in an impulse to gain access to her body. The button must have popped out and neither of them noticed. She tried to save the situation:

“Oh Lehzen, I have been to Lord M's chambers several times... I went there when the chambers were ready, I went there with him to give him the use of the space...”

“In a riding suit?” Lehzen asked knowing that would disarm her.

The Queen stared at her for a moment.

To spare her from the embarrassment of not knowing what to answer the Baroness continued:

“I saw you, Ma'am. The day you went horse riding, and I thought you had not yet returned... leaving Lord Melbourne's quarters in a riding suit, in a hurry, and straightening the clothes...”

Victoria could not deny that. And Lehzen would have to know about her relationship with William. It did not have to be that way, but... She decided to tell half the truth:

“Yes, Lehzen, I was there that day as well.”

“Ma'am!”

“Nothing happened. We were just talking. The button must have dropped...”

She had just lied, but she could never confess to Lehzen what had happened.

“I do not want to disrespect you... but I care about your well-being and your reputation... Attending Lord Melbourne's quarters is not acceptable for your condition...” The Baroness warned.

“I know Lehzen. Anyway there's something I need to tell you, but now you have almost found out... Lord Melbourne and I... We will announce our wish to get married soon...”

“Your Majesty! It is not possible!” Lehzen exclaimed in astonishment.

“It is possible, yes, Lehzen. Love simply happens between people, it is not something we can control...”

“I warned you about Lord Melbourne, right on the day you first met... I told you to take precautions, that you should not receive him alone!”

“Lehzen, listen to what I say! Lord Melbourne is not that kind of person. He does not correspond to that image that the newspapers and the gossipers of the court and politics wanted to transmit about him. This image you have carried.”
“But Ma’am...”

“And now you know that I am right. You have had time to observe for years the way Lord Melbourne treats me, how he cares about me, protects me, and does everything for me. Are you going to deny that?” Victoria asked determinedly.

“No, Your Majesty...” The Baroness admitted.

“You are jealous of him, I know. Because before I was only yours and then I became his too. More of his, I confess and I apologize if it hurts you. But my relationship with him is different. You do not have to be jealous. I love him, Lehzen! But I love him as a man. And I love you as a mother!”

Tears welled in her eyes as she held out her hands to the Baroness, who seized them and sat down in another chair next to the Queen.

Lehzen struggled to smile, but continued in an obviously alarmed speech:

“It makes me very worried! This is impossible! The consequences of this...”

“Calm down! Lord Melbourne and I are studying what are the possibilities of our marriage taking place. We will find a way. Do not worry so much. I know it's difficult, but we have to wait...”

Victoria tried to reassure her, but she also didn’t know what might happen.

“I have raised you with so much love, I always considered you as my daughter... And I always imagined that one day you would marry a prince who would accompany you through life and who would give you many children...”

“Lord Melbourne is my Prince, Lehzen. He does not have royal blood, but that does not matter. Only what he means to me is important.”

The Baroness laughed reluctantly.

“Now go. Take the button to stitch back to the shirt. And we will not discuss this matter again.” Victoria concluded.

“Yes, Your Majesty!” The Baroness agreed and left.

Chapter End Notes

Well, we've come to a turning point in this story. Does anyone want to make a general or specific appreciation (as you prefer) of what you read in these 13 chapters? Especially, who has read but has not commented until now. I would like to know what you think about this story and what feelings it conveys to those who read. What do you think?
Chapter 14

Giving Melbourne a higher nobility title was relatively easy and quick. The explanation for doing so was well justified. William Lamb went from Viscount to Earl, because giving him a higher title than that wouldn’t be appropriate. But Victoria had in mind that although she was not authorized to turn the man she loved into a prince consort, she would give him the title of duke for marriage. And climbing a step on the stairs, turning him into an Earl, made him already halfway there.

That morning, when he sat down with her on the work desk, after kissing her, the first document she handed him was the letter of granting of the Earl title.

He looked at the paper and saw immediately what it was about.

“I wanted to give you the document in person.” She said smiling.

“I don’t know if this was a good idea, Victoria.”

“Of course it was; this is only the first step!”

“Then can I take the next one?” He asked expectantly.

She looked serious and sorrowful, but turned her eyes to him and said:

“Yes.”

“In that case, I will resign tomorrow.”

“But then, today is our last meeting, as queen and prime minister.” She said disturbed.

“We haven’t been the queen and the prime minister for some time now, have we, Victoria?” He asked tenderly, making her face reality.

“No. Ever since the last time I went to Brocket Hall...”

“Even longer before that... Even without you or I having thought about it. As our feelings for each other evolved and transformed into love between a man and a woman, this political relationship deep down ceased to exist.”

“Yes.” She agreed. “But without you it will not be the same...”

“I know...”

When the meeting was over he got up and she got up next, wringing her hands. This gesture was a sign that she was nervous. She stood there looking at him and he looked at her realizing what she was thinking and feeling. Tears welled in her eyes, and both of them were compelled by the same impulse to hug each other. She pressed her face into his chest and wrapped his back. He squeezed her back. She started to cry holding him. She sobbed for a while. He placed his right hand on her head and kissed her hair over the forehead.

“There, there, my love? My embrace used to have the effect of calming your tears and not making you cry even more...” He remarked.

“I didn’t want to... I didn’t want to cry... but I can’t... I know we will be able to marry, but I cannot stop regretting not having you as prime minister...”
She pulled away from him slightly to look into his eyes and said:

“Everything you did for me in my early years of reign was very important. I knew practically nothing and you taught me everything! I don’t know what kind of queen I could have been if you hadn’t appeared in my life. Everything that I am was made by you. It was you who made the Queen of England! And made me a woman! You made me! I am your work! I am you!”

Melbourne felt something breathtaking inside his chest at her words. A mixture of pride in what she told him and a passion for that wonderful being, his queen and his woman. The compliment fell viscerally within him, in the same place where he kept the love he felt for her, and projected up everything that was pleasant inside.

“Then you are my best work! The most perfect and beautiful!” He said softly, kissing her forehead.

She lifted her head to look into his eyes again and said:

“I shall never forget!”

They kissed passionately.

And then he left and did not come back that day. Although he was already preparing the whole process for the resignation, there were still some details to handle so that the decision could be made official.

William’s resignation, although it was one of the most difficult steps before the marriage to Victoria, happened the next day. Melbourne invoked personal motives for resigning, which was true, but could not yet reveal the reasons. His resignation, on the one hand, caused strangeness, both in his fellow party members and in his political opponents, but on the other hand, it was not so strange. Everyone knew that the Prime Minister and the Queen had an extremely close relationship and everyone remembered the episode of his resignation in the past, in which she maneuvered the events so as to keep him as prime minister. Given these reasons, resignation was strange. But they also knew how politics had become tiresome for Melbourne and how he would rather live more isolated at Brocket Hall, so in this way, perhaps resignation was natural...

After the official resignation Melbourne sent a note to the Queen to let her know of the occurred:

Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to Your Majesty, and informs that his resignation is a fait accompli.
Lord Melbourne advises Your Majesty to contact Lord John Russell.

Notes of this nature didn’t allow a more intimate treatment, lest someone else read its content.

Victoria found herself in a situation in which a part of her yearned to summon John Russell, as this would hasten the rest of the process, and another part didn’t wish to do so because she would have to start communicating with another man as her prime minister. To cheer herself up she thought that what she lost from William as her prime minister she would gain in double, since he would become her husband. He ceased to be her companion in politics to become her life companion, and her life was the private part and the political part. But in meetings with the prime minister and at official ceremonies she would have to confront someone else, and that would be strange and difficult to bear.

Victoria summoned John Russell.

***
Melbourne would continue to sit in the House of Lords as a party member, and to be the Queen's private secretary. So that evening he showed up at the palace to respond to her dinner invitation.

She would greet him in the piano room, before the arrival of the remaining guests she would gather at the table.

He entered.

She got up and walked over to him.

They held hands and he kissed her forehead.

“William!” She said softly.

“Ma’am!” He replied, afraid that someone would hear them.

“I already spoke to John Russell.”

“I know…”

At dinner Emma and Harriet were present. They already knew that Melbourne had been replaced by Russell, but that they would remain the Queen’s ladies, since the party in the government remained the same.

Emma approached William at the end of dinner.

“The game has begun…” She remarked disguisedly.

“Yes, it has begun. It remains to be seen whether our idealized moves will lead us to victory.”

“You have already played your part as a politician by the Queen’s side. From now on, what makes sense is that you take another place together with the woman she is.”

“That will be so, Emma... In any case...”

William and Victoria publicly bid farewell after dinner. Tomorrow when he returned, it would simply be in the position of secretary.

***

They were sitting in their chairs by the green room’s window and talking.

“How is it going?” He asked, referring to the Queen's relationship with the new Prime Minister, with whom she had just spoken before received him.

“It's all well... He doesn’t have your charm, but he's also trying his best effort for us to understand each other...”

“You'll see that all is going to go well.”

“William... If we're going to get married I need to make sure of one thing...”

“Yes?”

“It's about your past...”

He realized what she meant. They had never spoken about that...
“Ask away.” He said encouraging her, but feeling inwardly apprehensive.

After a few seconds, during which she was plucking up courage, she asked:

“That court case relating to Mrs. Caroline Norton in 1836. Were you in fact innocent?”

He swallowed.

“Yes I was.” William answered calmly.

“So how did your relationship come to court?” Victoria asked anxious for the answer.

“We were friends. But... our friendship became a problem when she wanted to be more than that because the relationship with her husband was bad, because he was very jealous and possessive, inclined to drunkenness and violence... George Norton, supposing there was something between us, blackmailed me. He said that if I didn’t give him a certain amount of money he would accuse me of adultery. I refused his blackmail and he placed the case in the court of law. But more than a personal case there was a political conspiracy here to jeopardize me because Norton was a member of the Tories. However, during the process, it was made clear that I was innocent. There was no evidence against us because they didn’t exist.”

“I see.”

“But, unfortunately, Caroline was badly hurt by the case, as you know. When she separated from her husband she was prohibited of seeing her children.” William continued.

“I know, hence the very strong campaign she led to have the law changed so that the mothers could have custody of their children.”

“And that culminated in the Custody of Infants Act, which we approved in Parliament last August, which now allows mothers to resort to court to have custody of children up to the age of 7 and have contact with the eldest ones.” He concluded.

There was a moment of silence.

Before she said anything else he wanted to inform her of the rest...

“But there was another case Victoria …” He said, his eyes on the ground.

She looked at him with surprise and fear of what she would hear next.

He looked at her.

“When I was the Chief Secretary for Ireland between 1827 and 1828, there was another case related to an alleged involvement with Lady Branden of Dublin. In 1828 I was sued by her husband, the 4th Lord Branden, a worthless cleric, for criminal conversation. I assume that you didn’t know about this other case yet, but I have the duty to tell you, not only for there to be transparency between us, but also because now they will exploit everything that is possible to harm us, and that will come up again...”

“And in that other case were you also declared innocent?” She asked anxiously.

“I was…” He replied simply.

Why did this man not say more?
“And were you?” Victoria insisted, fearing the answer.

“I was.”

“William, I'm sorry, but…” Victoria hesitated for a few seconds and continued. “Not that I am doubting what you're telling me, is it not strange that this kind of accusation has recurred in your life?”

He sighed.

“Victoria... There are a few different circumstances here that I ask you to understand. I have a whole life before our relationship. In fact, my previous life is three times yours. During this life I met many people and had various kinds of relationships with them. It is only natural that, over time, this may have given rise from time to time to conflicts, misunderstandings... My status as a politician also favored this. When one holds political positions, many enemies appear that try to harm us. On the other hand, I must confess that I have always been very successful among women. I don’t know exactly why... I always had women interested in me, even though I was not interested in them... And that only harmed me, only got me into this kind of situations that tarnished my personal and political reputation. It was as if I had a magnet...”

“That part I understand. I can explain it to you...” She remarked, trying to lighten the weight of their conversation.

“Victoria, the management of my personal life was always difficult and was always full of embarrassment of different kinds... Maybe I also didn’t know how to manage it the best way... I have my own way of being and of relating to people, as you know, and apparently this is not always well interpreted by the world around. Maybe I had gestures or words to these women that they interpreted in a wrong way, and that their husbands interpreted in an even worse way...”

“You are such a clever man, so pragmatic in politics, and yet emotionally complex...”

He raised his eyebrows at her conclusion.

“I think that's it, Victoria, you're absolutely right.”

Then she remembered:

“But... did you have lovers? Were you the lover of other women?”

The grief on her face. The distress for the possibility of a potential positive response.

Melbourne felt scrutinized in his intimate life. But he understood her need to know, for their relationship and for the delicate political moment in which they were about to step in. He stared at the floor for a moment, fearing her reaction, but then looked at her and said:

“Yes.”

He couldn’t lie. Because that would be betrayal and because she would know the truth later in the papers, which would only make matters worse.

She took a deep breath, her chest rose and tears welled up in her eyes. She got up from the chair and walked across the room, her back to his back. She laid her eyes on the floor and tears streamed down her face. It was demolishing! It burned! Imagining William in other women's bed... That man, absolutely sacred, enjoyed by other women... Of Caro she was not jealous. She was his wife. She had already passed. But others?
He got up immediately, walked over to her and stood behind her waiting for a reaction.

She didn’t turn or move.

He stood behind her and began to speak calmly:

“As I said earlier, Victoria, I had a life before you, which gave me more than enough time to make a lot of mistakes... I had an unhappy marriage. I loved my wife, but we didn’t have a happy marriage. I was a lonely man, even while married, and then I was a widower. I liked women, I needed them... And they, as I said, looked for me without my having to do anything... All this made it happen...”

“Do you frequent to houses of ill repute?” She asked in a tear-filled voice.

“No!”

He moved straight away to face her and grabbed her arms over her elbows with both hands. He thought she would look at him then, but she kept her head down, only allowing him to grasp her.

“I mean…”

The last two words had not gone well for him... Now he had placed doubts in her head! He was beginning to worry about the direction in which this conversation was going.

“I have frequented houses of ill repute in the past, like all men do, but that was in the past! Not today! I was a widower, nothing prevented me from going to such places. I didn’t expect anything else from life, either…” He justified worriedly, hoping to have been effective in the response and that she would look at him.

She still didn’t look at him.

“Victoria, look at me. Please!”

She lifted her head and looked at him.

“I've never been with another woman since I met you!” William confessed in a tone that expressed the depth of what that meant.

She felt her chest fill. What he just said was very important.

“You know that was more than three years ago. Do you know what that means?” He asked.

“I think so…”

“I couldn’t, I wouldn’t! Honestly, Victoria, I'm going to tell you something I didn’t need to tell you.”

She redoubled her attention, her eyes widening.

“After I met you, there was a time I went to one of these houses. I only went there to seek what all men seek in these places: the pleasure of the flesh for a moment. Going there means nothing more! What we have in bed doesn't exist in a brothel!”

She didn’t exactly understand the meaning of this last sentence. She didn’t know exactly what happened in a brothel, or what differences existed between what happened there and what went on between them in intimacy. But she understood the essential: what connected him to her was a
thousand times more elevated than what made him go to a brothel. That was the meaning of that sentence.

Meanwhile he advanced in the narration:

“I was alone, and I thought about going there to ease the tension of the last days. But after getting there I couldn’t. There was no excitement. I didn’t feel like it. It didn’t make sense. It was too empty, useless, and insignificant! I ended up leaving. And then I realized why I hadn’t gone through with it. Because your presence was there with me! This episode even helped me to establish within me the conviction that I loved you deeply. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

She nodded and replied:

“Yes.”

He hugged her.

She took a few seconds to reciprocate, remaining with her arms down her body. Then she was not able to stay that way. She knew it hurt him. She hugged him too. She felt a mixture of disgust and affection for him at that moment. But as his justifications integrated into her head, the initial shock subsided and tenderness for him returned. To love someone so deeply could be very complicated. Things seemed easier when they were just the queen and the prime minister. Now it was necessary to fight. Not only for the world to allow them to stay together, but also to stay together, overcoming the past and the differences between them.

He moved slightly away from her so that she would look at him again and declared with conviction:

“Of all the things I have done in life and of all the relationships I have ever had with women, the noblest of them all is the relationship I have with you. Never doubt that, my love! So noble that I spent almost three years loving you without ever having revealed my love so not to harm you. In fact, I refused your love when it was declared openly to me just so as not to harm you. And God knows how I needed to repay this love! I even tried to convince you to marry another man when I loved you desperately and I would have to live with that! Just so that my presence near you would not be unworthy and would not bring you shame…”

She shook her head negatively and placed her right hand in his mouth, stopping him from continuing.

“No, William, don’t say that! Your presence will never nor could ever be unworthy of me or bring me any shame. There is nothing about you that I can be ashamed of! On the contrary! You have everything to make me very proud of you!”

She searched his mouth with hers.

He returned.

The doubts were healed!

***

Melbourne advised Victoria to inform the new Prime Minister about the intention to marry and the name of the fiancé before informing any other person or institution. He was the highest figure in the Cabinet, and it was a vote of confidence from the Queen that would foster his eventual support. Russell was his friend, but he knew that this didn’t mean that he would easily support their
intention. What they wanted was too extraordinary to be supported, even by the more liberal Whigs and Melbourne’s own party. Moreover, as prime minister, Russell had a reputation to maintain, and support that madness would not be favorable to him.

Victoria requested the presence of John Russell in the palace.

When he arrived he realized she was nervous. He wondered what had happened.

After sitting down Victoria began:

“Lord Russell, I asked you here because I have a matter of the utmost importance to speak to you about.”

“Yes, Your Majesty…”

“And which is also classified. It cannot be made public before it is appropriate. No one knows yet. You are the first person to whom I am disclosing it.”

“Of course, Ma’am!”

“It is about my marriage…”

“Oh, Ma’am. Such excellent news!”

“Yes… What I wanted to tell you is that the person I intend to marry is…” Victoria swallowed.

“…Lord Melbourne.”

If he had not been sitting Russell would have fallen down. He could not hide the shock on his face. She waited for him to react.

“Well, Ma’am… the choice is quite surprising…”

It was not surprising. Everybody knew from the beginning how the Queen loved Melbourne and how he did everything for her. But it was not at all expected that they would ever have the courage to get to this point!

“I know. And for that reason I would like to discuss with you the political terms of this union.” Victoria said, feeling the Prime Minister’s reaction.

“If I may, Ma’am, and with all due respect to Lord Melbourne, of whom I am a friend, I can see no possibility that this marriage can be authorized. Lord Melbourne's status does not allow him to; he does not belong to any royal lineage.”

“No, but in spite of that I would like to have all possibilities weighed, however remote.” She insisted.

“Well, to be able to marry Lord Melbourne, the only choice I see as viable is your abdication.”

“But I do not want to abdicate!” Exclaimed the Queen, looking indignant.

“So to keep the throne, marrying Lord Melbourne is not compatible, Your Majesty. You know you have to marry a person of royal blood. You are certainly aware of the reason why the Royal Marriages Act 1772 was approved…”

“Yes, I know the law!” Victoria exclaimed again, considering it rather vexing that the Prime
Minister reminded her of the laws. As if she did not know them!

“Then, as you can conclude, Ma’am, what is expected of the monarch is to set the example, not the reverse. Even if it is in their hands to authorize their own marriage, they are not expected to be in favor of a union that the law considers unlawful... I beg my pardon, but how can the sovereign expect to be respected when they themselves do not comply with the law?”

“What about a morganatic marriage? It is legally valid. It allows me to marry Lord Melbourne and remain queen.” She said, hoping Russell's rigid posture would break. Russell looked at the Queen surprised. She was really adamant on marrying Melbourne no matter what. He warned:

“The concept never clearly existed in the United Kingdom...”

“But the practice does... The English Crown has married plebeians until the seventeenth century. Only the first marriage of Henry VIII was with a royal princess, Catherine of Aragon, all the others were with women of lower status, of greater or lesser nobility. Edward IV’s wife, whom he married in secret, was not from a royal family either. There is also the case of the third wife of John de Gaunt, son of Edward III, who was his children’s governess. And Lord Melbourne is not a commoner, he is a member of the nobility, and no longer considered low since he received the title of Earl.” She said showing how she was well-informed.

“We are no longer in the time of the marriages you speak of, Ma’am, and I think that choice will be unacceptable to the British people.”

“But there are recent examples in other monarchies: the French empress Marie Louise contracted a second morganatic marriage with a Count after the death of her first husband, Napoléon I; and the Queen of Spain, María Cristina de Borbón-Dos Sicilias, the widow of Ferdinand VII, married one of her guards...” Victoria continued to argue.

“You say well, Ma’am, in other monarchies... And these royal highnesses were not queens by birth, but by marriage, and were already widows of their respective husbands when they remarried that way... Not quite the same thing...”

“But a morganatic marriage is a compromise between a royal marriage and abdication. I can hold the throne, I can marry Lord Melbourne, he will not be prince consort, he will have a title... of duke... I would like for him to receive the title of Duke of Edinburgh that is vacant in the United Kingdom’s peerage... And our children will be considered legitimate, but they will not be able to inherit the crown, nor any property or rights thereof, nor enjoy the precedence given to the crown princes...” The Queen recalled the compromises she would have to make in order to try to balance the impediments the Prime Minister quoted.

Seeing that she would not give up, Russell ended up saying:

“Very well, Ma’am, the only thing I can do is consult the opinion of the Cabinet and Parliament on this point. And I assume that you will communicate this intention to your Privy Council...”

“Of course. I will disclose it first to my family and then the Council. And I would appreciate that, after these steps, you would convey this wish to the Cabinet and Parliament.”

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Victoria sent for her mother.

“I presume that you have something truly important to tell me, Drina! It's not usual for you to call
me like this, to talk to me...”

“In fact... It's about my marriage.”

“Oh, at last! You decided it is time to get married!” Cried the duchess looking happy!

“Yes…”

“How wonderful! We can invite Christian to come to London, then!”

“I'm not marrying Christian from Denmark!”

“No? Then who will it be? I do not know of any other suitor…”

Victoria paused. The words would not come out. Then, trying to show determination, she said:

“With Lord Melbourne…”

The duchess was shocked:

“What? Have you gone mad for good?”

“No, Mama! I've never been so lucid in my life!”

“Has this man got what he wanted from the start? I told you that he was a gallant, that you could not trust him! How did you let yourself be carried away by his beautiful words?” The duchess asked raising her voice, and growing indignant.

“That's not at all what happened! See, how wrong you are? Making a false appreciation of Lord Melbourne! It was I who insisted on my feelings for him! Lord Melbourne tried to keep me away for a long time!” Victoria retaliated, defending William's reputation in an altered voice.

“Oh, Drina, do you believe that? That is what he wanted you to think to impress you!”

“Enough! You talk about things you do not know! You do not know what happened! I am not asking for permission to marry, I do not need it, I am the queen, I am telling you what I am going to do.”

“What happened to you? What did he do to you? Did he attack your honor?” Asked the restless duchess.

“Nothing! Nothing happened!”

“Lord Melbourne can be charged with high treason!” Threatened the duchess.

“The Regency Act of 1830, which predicted a regency in case I had inherited the throne before the age of eighteen, that made it illegal for me to marry without the consent of the regent and established that the spouse would be guilty of high treason if the marriage would take place without this license, is no longer applicable. I inherited the throne after 18 and I'm 21 years old.”

“And he's willing to join you in this madness?”

“Of course. If not I would not be telling you that I'm going to marry him.”

“Wait and see what will happen when your Uncle Leopold knows about this! And Cumberland…” Threatened the Duchess again.
“Let them say what they wish!” Victoria finished and left the room.

***

Leopold found out what was happening in England through the Duchess of Kent. The king of Belgium traveled to London.

***

Christian of Denmark was informed that his claim to the Queen of England's hand had been rejected for the second time.
Chapter 15

The Duchess of Kent was absolutely against that marriage, nevertheless she felt that she had to defend Victoria's honor by arranging chaperons for every moment she and Lord Melbourne were together from then on.

Victoria found the imposition utterly ridiculous because she had been meeting alone with William for years, and because she still had political issues to deal with him as her personal secretary, which did not suffer the presence of others during their meetings.

The Duchess pleaded that at least in the open space outside the palace and in public, in non-political gatherings, Victoria allowed the presence of her ladies of the bedchamber.

She didn’t say yes but she also didn’t contest.

***

William was on his way to Victoria to prepare for the Privy Council the next day when he met the Duchess of Kent in the corridor.

When she saw him she was reluctant to look at him, but William caught her attention:

"Your Highness…"

She stopped.

"Lord Melbourne!"

"Could we talk for a few minutes?" He asked.

"Follow me." The Duchess ordered curtly.

They entered a room.

Normally Melbourne treated her with as much courtesy as indifference. But if he was going to marry her daughter, it was necessary to soften relations between them.

The duchess did not tell him to sit down, she just said:

"Speak!"

"I know you are not in favor of my marriage to Her Majesty, which is perfectly understandable, but I just wanted to assure you that my intentions toward her are the noblest and truest."

"You are not suited for her! You are all wrong!" Said the duchess looking indignant.

"I know…"

She looked at him in surprise. Did he agree with her?

He went on:

"But I have never loved any other woman in my life as much as I love your daughter."

"She should marry a prince of royal blood!" Cried the Duchess, on the verge of tears. "She should
have married Albert!”

“She did not love Albert!”

“And what does that matter?” The Duchess asked, weeping.

“It matters to her!”

The Duchess sat down on a couch and began to justify herself:

“She hates the way I raised her, but I just wanted to protect her! When the Duke died she was just a baby and I was alone to watch over her. There was fear of an accident, a kidnapping, a poisoning or some other form of murder! If Victoria disappeared, that would have really come in handy for the horrible, reactionary Duke of Cumberland, who follows her in the line of succession. A man suspected of killing one of his servants... I made the choices that seemed best to keep her safe.”

“Yet keeping her so cut off from the Court did not prepare her for what would be her future as a queen…” Melbourne said in a critical tone.

“I tried to keep my daughter from any contact with that hell of doom and debauchery that was the court of George IV.”

“But you have also not been prodigal in affection, I presume…” He remarked, with his usual frankness.

“I do not have a very affectionate personality and a monarch has to be educated with some rigidity so that they are prepared for the demands they will have to face. Like a wedding that suits the needs of the kingdom they rule and not the realization of a reverie!” The Duchess finished with a changed voice.

They were silent.

Melbourne sat on another couch, even without being authorized to do so.

“I spent years trying to avoid this from happening...” He said calmly.

“I know...” The Duchess confessed.

He realized that she had known what was going on between him and Victoria long before they had made their intention to marry official. In fact, he had always heard that mothers always knew everything... He had had a very close relationship with his own mother...

“She came from Brocket Hall washed in tears…” The Duchess recalled.

Melbourne felt his stomach tighten.

The Duchess continued:

“I may have a difficult relationship with my daughter, but I love her... I told her that no man would give her up unless he felt it was his duty.”

William received that information with surprise and at the same time found it reassuring that she had given this explanation to Victoria, helping her understand his refusal.

“You are quite right, Your Highness. I have always tried to fulfill my duty. If God exists He knows I tried! How I tried... But then...”
“My aversion is not to you exactly, but to what you are going to bring her, and what you will not be able to give her...” She finally admitted.

“You know, Your Highness, sometimes I wonder if I am being selfish...”

She looked at him. The man said things she did not expect and that made her posture before him change...

“Which of us will benefit most in this marriage? I will. I will have Victoria until the end of my days... but she will be left alone too soon...”

The Duchess did not know what to answer. Logic told her to respond that he was being selfish, making him feel guilty, taking revenge on what he was doing with her daughter. But she could not say it at the explicit evidence of how much he loved her. She ended up saying:

“I know you did everything for her... and that you will continue to do so. But I cannot help but regret that things are not happening as I imagined for her. It was not for this that I protected her, that I made so many sacrifices, and that we lived with so many difficulties after the death of the Duke... I did everything for her to become queen and now she is on the verge of losing the throne!”

“I can only guarantee that whatever the circumstances, I will always be by her side... Now, if you will excuse me...”

Melbourne got up and left.

***

The preparation for the Privy Council took place throughout the afternoon. It was necessary to predict what the counselors would say or ask, and prepare beforehand the appropriate answers.

Victoria felt butterflies in her stomach as the day they would publicly announce their wedding approached.

When the meeting was over it was already dusk, and though she had already predicted the answer, Victoria asked:

“You will have dinner with me, won’t you William?”

“Of course, don’t we have dinner together every day?”

“Almost every day...” She corrected. “There are those days when you go to have dinner at someone else’s house...” She added in a good-humored reprehension tone.

“I’m invited, Victoria. I already decline many invitations. There are some that I cannot refuse.”

He got up and she did the same.

While he was arranging the folder with papers she went to the door and locked it discreetly.

He noticed what she had done, but pretended not to.

She moved around the room, as if expecting something, while he finished packing the documents.

Then, to his left, she asked:

“But are you going out?”
“I'm going home to change my clothes and will come back for dinner.” He replied closing the folder.

She came up to him and grabbed his left arm.

When he turned to her, to realize what she intended, Victoria grabbed his face with both hands, stretched and kissed him.

He immediately answered.

They kissed voraciously! She wanted to consume him! He could absorb her!

Then he kissed her shoulders and clavicles. He loved kissing the exposed parts of her body above the neckline of her dress. He had idolized her body for years, especially what was revealed above the cleavage, and now he could enjoy it whenever he wanted. It was intoxicating to kiss her skin like that!

“William, I need you...” She whispered in his ear, her lips brushing his ear as she felt his hands on her hips and his mouth on her neck.

“I know, but it’s better not...” He warned, trying to regain his composure the best he could and staring at her seriously.

“But you told me in that bed that in all the nights I wanted, you would be available for the woman inside me...” She tried to complain, looking at the bed in the back, in the bedroom with the door open.

“And you know that's the truth. But you also know that it should not continue to happen now. We cannot repeat what happened here that night, it's too risky... And the decision about our fate can still take a while and it's not wise to keep playing with fire...”

“But I need... what you make me feel... again...” She pleaded.

He looked deep into her eyes. He seemed to wonder: what am I to do with you?

He made her walk backwards to the nearest wall, lifted her skirt and petticoat up, and sought with his right hand the central opening of her underpants.

He could have started here... But he didn’t.

The kisses he gave her! The touch of his hand! The heat, the movement! The smell of his skin! Victoria was delighted.

Of all the parts of her body that he had touched, this one was where the skin was softer, thinner, and delicate! Almost childish. He should have never had access to this skin and this flesh that was expanding in his hand!

Victoria thought that at some point he would take her to bed or lay her down on the floor. It did not matter that this was not the time or place for something like this to happen! She lost track of time! However, at some point she realized that he was taking longer in this circumstance than she had thought.

“What are you doing?” She asked languidly.

“What you are feeling.” He replied simply.
Oh, and she was feeling it! She was feeling it! His fingers touching her center of the world and the tremendous effect of this action! The movements: long, short, slow, faster, more to the side, more to the center, lower, higher. The palm of his hand caressing her...

“Tell me where you need me to put my fingers...” He asked.

She didn’t exactly understand. She needed his fingers there, where he had them!

“Here? Higher? Lower?” He asked as he shifted his fingers to the positions he said.

She understood. He wanted her to guide him to where it was best for her.

“There, William! There!” She demanded urgently so that he didn’t deviate a millimeter. And then slower: “There...”

It grew! It increased! Her need, his speed! Her breath and his desire!

He was attentive to the way she moaned quietly and her breathing, with his eyes closed as he held her by the waist with his left arm and used his right hand to stimulate her.

She put her hands on his shoulders. She needed support to continue to rise and endure.

He shifted one finger higher and then touched her further to the left side.

She melted in his hand! The body in spasms, the mouth open, the eyes rolled up, the legs fainting...

He kept his hand on her as she completed herself in an unconscious attempt to escape his hand.

Victoria fell to her knees with him supporting her body with his hands under her arms, preventing her from reaching the ground suddenly.

He hugged her and kissed her forehead!

She wanted to hug him, but she did not yet have control over her movements. There was no strength for it. Her whole body was too heavy.

They stood kneeling on the floor, entwined in each other.

“You were not inside me...” She remarked in a tone of slight astonishment.

“No.”

“It had never been like this...”

“But it can be. And there is no danger like this.” He warned.

“It's a relief!”

“I know Victoria; I know it's relieving...” He agreed touched by her remark.

After a few seconds he added:

“You can do it too. At night in your bed... you will see that it works...”

She looked at him, becoming aware of what he was saying. Until the wedding, whatever way that happened, he would not give in for it to happen any other way. To protect her. But he had taught her how she could attain pleasure alone, how she could mitigate her desire for him.
He got up and pulled her up as well. Then he said:

“Now I really have to go change, but I'll be back soon for dinner.”

She nodded.

He kissed her gently on the lips, picked up the folder and left.

***

The next day Victoria waited for William in the green room.

He came, kissed her and said:

“Good Morning my love! Are you ready?”

She took a deep breath.

“Good Morning William! What if I said I’m not?”

“You can do it! And I will be there, right by your side.”

She smiled and he returned.

His job, as always, was to calm her down and give her confidence, but he was as much or even more nervous than she was at the expectation of what would happen from that moment on, when the words she had prepared had been pronounced publicly before the Privy Council. However, he had to hide that.

“Unless you want to give up...” He teased.

She looked at him reproachfully and said:

“Of course not!”

Then she made a signal with her head for them to leave.

They crossed the corridor, he one step back and to her right side.

The Queen entered the throne room, where the entire Privy Council was already assembled for the announcement of the sovereign’s engagement, followed by Melbourne.

The Council bowed.

Melbourne stopped in a convenient place as she walked to the throne and sat down.

She looked at him in the front row, on her right side.

He made the same kind of encouragement move with his eyebrows as he had done on the day of the first Privy Council.

She remembered that he had used the same gesture the day they shared a bed for the first time! Victoria felt herself pluck up courage, looked forward, and struggled to hide the way she trembled inside. She was no longer that apprehensive 18-year-old girl. And the love she had for him gave her immeasurable courage. No matter how hard it was or whatever had to be overcome. She would do it.
She positioned the paper she carried with the little speech she would make and declared:

“Since our last meeting, I have declared the intention of marrying the 1st Earl of Melbourne, William Lamb. I hope that God will bless this union and make it conducive to the interests of my people, as well as to my own domestic happiness.”

Melbourne felt his heart fall down as he heard his name spoken before the Privy Council.

The announcement fell in the room like a cannonball. Immediately there was a buzz and all the members of the council looked at him and commented among each other what they had just heard.

Melbourne felt Wellington glaring at him. He looked at Victoria.

She looked at him.

Wellington remembered the morning he had met Melbourne walking home still with the same clothes he had worn at the ball... Did he really mean the Queen? What had they been up to?

“Your Majesty, with your permission, I cannot believe in such an inconsequential choice!” Wellington said.

“Why inconsequential, Your Grace?” The Queen asked, trying to keep her voice steady.

“Lord Melbourne’s status is not equivalent to yours, he is not a prince of royal blood! That alone renders this marriage completely unfeasible! Not to mention the past of the candidate... the political relations... the age too advanced to accompany you on the throne... Your subjects would consider this marriage morally unacceptable.”

“Lord Melbourne is no longer prime minister, and he is now an English earl, almost equivalent to a German duke.”

“But, Your Majesty, a queen cannot subvert the Royal Marriages Act 1772 and marry a man of inferior status without losing the throne...”

Victoria felt aggravated. Wellington was already taking the matter to the extreme...

“Well, I would like this combination of factors to be considered. Maintaining the throne and marrying Lord Melbourne.”

“I do not see any possibility of that happening...” The duke insisted.

“Alternatively, I can also opt for a morganatic marriage...” She used, once again, the only trump she had.

Wellington became aware of the extent of the Queen's relationship with the prime minister. Was she willing to face all the consequences?

“Your Majesty... That has serious political consequences! And Your Majesty is in a position to make an advantageous alliance for the United Kingdom, you are the queen of the richest European nation, this marriage makes such an alliance impossible.”

“If I had accepted Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha what advantageous alliance would he bring to England? And marrying Lord Melbourne, I would have an English wedding. Is there a better option than marrying an Englishman who knows the nation like nobody else and loves the country where he was born? And that is purely Anglican!”
“The fact that he is no longer prime minister does not negate the political relations from his past.” Wellington warned.

The members of the Council were favorable to that remark.

Victoria let the warning pass, she had no way to contradict it. But the Duke of Sussex advanced another remark, which filled the time the Queen might have answered Wellington:

“But the unorthodox life, so to speak, of Lord Melbourne will be a source of embarrassment to the English throne, to you and to England before the other nations of Europe and the world!”

So she had made his wife a duchess, and now he made such a remark? Hadn’t he also acted contrary to the Royal Marriages Act 1772? But Victoria knew that this would always be brought up by someone and that her marriage situation was more serious than her uncle’s...

Melbourne received the Duke's remarks as an attack on his dignity. He felt embarrassed for bringing dishonor to Victoria and to the English empire. He stared at the floor.

Victoria looked at William, but did not meet his eyes. She told the assembly:

“My Lords, Lord Melbourne has never done anything to be ashamed of, and therefore cannot bring any infamy to the English throne. The issues relating to his first marriage, which circulated in the newspapers, were not triggered by him, they were something completely unrelated to him. And you know how the newspapers exaggerate and misrepresent the truth of the facts. On the other hand, in court proceedings Lord Melbourne was found not guilty. Does the Queen's Privy Council call into question the competence and impartiality of the English courts?”

Victoria looked back at William and met his eyes.

“No, Ma'am.” The Duke of Sussex replied.

“Lord Melbourne is one of the most worthy men in Britain, who has served as a military man and a politician. During the Napoleonic Wars he served as captain and major in the Volunteer Infantry of Hertfordshire and in addition to other political offices he served the highest of the nation beneath the monarch, prime minister.”

Wellington smiled ironically. He knew all about the Napoleonic Wars, as he had been the commander of the British-German army and their Belgian-Dutch allies, alongside the Prussian forces, who had finally defeated Napoleon in 1815 in the famous Battle of Waterloo! William Lamb had served those military posts in 1803 and 1804, but on English soil! In any case it was still a military service to the British crown, and Arthur Wellesley acknowledged the Queen's fighting ability, including the introduction of this aspect as an element of valorization of the suitor she intended!

Melbourne thought that he didn’t remember talking about his military contribution to Victoria. She had been gathering information on her own.

The Queen continued:

“Besides, Lord Melbourne had the noblest gesture a British man could have in saving the queen's life. Is there any other act of greater dignity? Did you read what was in the newspapers at the time? Do you know how public opinion values Lord Melbourne, whether in Britain or in the world?”

The Duke of Sussex spoke again to the Queen:
“However, Lord Melbourne is a man of relatively advanced age. If it were allowed, which I do not believe, the possibility of marrying him and maintaining the throne, the probability of giving England a large offspring to assure succession is reduced...”

There was more buzz in the room.

Melbourne was increasingly bothered by everyone talking about him as if he was not there. And he couldn’t say anything. It was not his place to. The matter was between the Queen and her Privy Council, to which he himself belonged, but at that moment he felt that his role was only as suitor to the Queen's hand.

“Is there any guarantee in marrying a young man that I will have a large offspring?” Asked the Queen, knowing that would block the Duke.

“No, Ma'am... But the odds are lower...”

“Well, my Lords, I do not think we can base our actions on mere odds. Marrying a young man does not guarantee that he will not be unfit for childbearing, or that he will not die young...”

Melbourne was more and more surprised by Victoria's argumentation and resourcefulness. Even on more delicate issues like this one of producing an heir...

“The Privy Council will have to consider this matter very carefully in order to be able to deliver an opinion.” Wellington said.

“Then I ask you to consider, my Lords, how my marriage to Lord Melbourne is more favorable than unfavorable. The Council has always advised me to get married and that is what I intend to do. Getting married will allow me to overcome the problems that the Council finds in me remaining single: I will have someone by my side to share my reign, and if I were allowed to have a non-morganatic marriage and keep the throne, I could ensure succession. And there is no other man better suited to take the place of my husband than Lord Melbourne, who is the one who has been by my side since the first day of my reign, the one who best guided me, and the man who has the right political culture and experience, which a young monarch would not have, much less if he were a foreign prince.”

The Queen decided that the Privy Council would end there.

Victoria was emotionally exhausted.

William felt small for being the target of everyone’s scrutiny, for having to prove himself worthy of the Queen's hand. As if it took more than loving her hopelessly!

She got up and left the throne room.

He left immediately behind, as he always did.

They returned to the green room.

At the other Privy Council she had been outraged, not now. She walked down the corridor in silence, but when she entered the green room, she said looking fatigued:

“I'm tired, William.”

“I know...” He said, pulling her closer to him and wrapping his arms around her back. “But this has only just begun...”
He was always so tender and warm!

“I am sorry William, for putting you through this!” She said.

“Please, my dear... there is nothing to be sorry about. Incidentally, if anyone has to apologize that would be me for getting ourselves into this situation...”

“No one is to blame; it's the circumstances of our lives... You understand my position... William, my love, I didn’t want to have to abdicate! I know there was a divine purpose in my life...” She explained in anguish.

“Of course I understand...”

“But if that is the only option left, I will do it! And it's not for you! Do not apologize or thank me! It's for us, it's for me. Even if they take the throne away I will continue to live, but without you I would cease to breathe...”

He kissed her passionately and then said:

“You are the symbol of a new age, and your subjects are thankful for that. They are tired of being ruled by old men, and they know how fortunate they are to have a beautiful young queen! Let's hope that those who have the power of decision feel things the same way...”

“Anyway, I know I can stay like this, holding you forever.”

“As far as it depends on me...”

***

Cumberland knew what was happening in England through the Tories. The king of Hanover traveled to London.

***

Newspapers began to spread the word. Some unfavorably, others favorably. There were even factions, a group of unfavorable newspapers and a group of favorable ones, depending on the opinion of their directors.

Lord Melbourne was the man with a past involved in scandal, the political upstart, the seducer of the virgin queen, a man who was too old.

Lord Melbourne was the dignified prime minister, the Queen's counselor, the man who had saved the life of Her Majesty, a handsome man.

Public opinion began to form as well. For some, it was a shame, for others, a fairy tale.

The Queen was crazy.

The Queen was in love.

But passion was also madness. A queen does not marry for passion, she marries out of duty!

The newspapers even recaptured, as was predicted, the previous scandals in which William's name had been involved....

Lord Hastings, brother of Flora Hastings, a Torie, was delighted with the exploration and blistering
of this story in the newspapers and in the public opinion as revenge for what had happened to Lady Flora.

Melbourne didn’t read the papers, he had stopped doing so for years, but he listened to the comments.

In London's gentlemen's clubs there was no other subject of talk. At White's, frequented by the Tories, the story was running high. At Brooks's, mostly Whig, and which Melbourne frequented, the subject was softened, but it did not cease to amaze. Now everyone understood why he had resigned from the post of prime minister, and why the Queen had acted calmly in the face of this evidence. She would cease having him at her desk only to start having him in bed! If he had not been already there!

Victoria read all the newspapers, though sometimes Lehzen and her ladies tried to keep them from reaching her hands. She even took her time to calculate the percentage of favorable news compared to the percentage of unfavorable news! Sometimes “yes” would win, other times the “no”, as time went by.

When she was with William she told him what she read.

“I don’t want to know!” He said.

“But I need to share what I feel!”

“I understand…”

He understood, but he thought it scary that she would even count the news!

He would give in and listen to what she said.

She ended up not saying everything because she knew it bothered him.

It was necessary to let the public opinion calm down. Over time things always quieted down, became natural, everyone already knew it and had commented enough.
Leopold arrived to the palace.

Victoria would have gladly had her guard bar his entrance, but it was not prudent to do so.

When he entered the throne room the King of Belgium greeted Victoria curtly and she reacted the same way.

“Victoria.”

“Uncle.”

“Well, I think it is clear why I am here. Your mother contacted me and asked me to come and instill some sense in that head of yours. You remember, I am sure, that when I left the last time I told you that I was going to be attentive of what was happening in London.”

“Thank you for your concern, but your journey has been in vain. Nothing you can tell me will change anything!” She tried to block him right away.

“I do not think you have deeply considered the consequences of what you are doing, have you, Victoria? Surely Lord Melbourne has not alerted you to some aspects because he is not interested in doing so...”

Victoria wanted to throw him into the street! To speak like that about William in her presence!

Leopold continued:

“Do you remember what I told you that night when we came from the opera in your carriage?”

“We are not in those times anymore! The Chartist movement is under control and my popularity as a queen is higher...”

“But other movements can always arise... And with a queen behaving in this dissolute and dishonorable way for the English monarchy, it is normal to have some contestation, and that it grows and becomes a revolution that dethrones monarchy!”

Victoria grew in indignation and rebuked him in a high, tense tone:

“I will not allow you to come here to my house to tell me what I should do in my personal and political life! Let alone to address me with offensive language!”

Leopold was a bit tense, but added:

“There will be those who demand your abdication! This madness will be your ruin!”

“I do not acknowledge any authority from you over me! You are permitted to leave!”

She was expelling him from the throne room!

He left.
Was he threatening her? Was it possible that he was willing to foment a rebellion against his own niece, which would lead to her deposition, only to get revenge for the fact that she had not married Albert, as he intended?

It was not possible! Leopold, as far as she knew, was relatively harmless. He made those threats, but he would not be capable of really acting against her. In spite of everything, she thought that deep down he actually liked her... Or didn’t he?

***

When the Duke of Cumberland, Ernest Augustus, since 1837 first king of Hanover, arrived in London, he started by circulating among the Tories. He wanted to know everything that was going on, understand the intentions of his political faction, build a strategy and gain allies. Having been born as the fifth male son of George III, he was not likely to inherit the throne of the United Kingdom, but the various circumstances of his older brothers’ lives and the death of George III's only granddaughter Charlotte in childbirth, and her son, still had gave him hope that he could come to rule this kingdom. However, this possibility had ended when Victoria, daughter of his brother Edward Augustus, Duke of Kent, was born. In 1839 he thought that there could still be a chance when Victoria had been affected by Lord Melbourne's resignation as prime minister, but even then he had failed to succeed. Now there was another possibility, stronger than the last. Insisting on that marriage was a folly! And he was still Victoria's heir as long as she had no children!

At White's the Sovereign's wedding story was seen as something sordid. The claim of the Queen's madness was put back on the table by Cumberland. No monarch in their right mind would make such a decision! Worse than not wanting to get married was to want to marry that man! All in all, a Whig! If a strong campaign in the Press was made...

Much of the Tories supported the idea of dementia, reinforced by the mental disorders of her grandfather George III, which many feared Victoria might have inherited. The solution would be for the Queen to abdicate. And the only natural substitute was Cumberland! And he had a strong influence on the House of Lords.

Wellington and, by his influence, Peel regarded this solution with apprehension. The Queen could be inconsequential, but she was in perfect control of her faculties. Wanting to forge the opposite was not right and would be unsustainable. And she was a worthy monarch while Cumberland on the throne would be a danger. A man who Wellington did not trust due to political maneuvering of the past, involved in a series of scandals that included crimes, with a turbulent and unpopular personality. Arthur Wellesley thought the people would rather have Tom Thumb on the throne instead of being ruled by Cumberland!

There had to be another solution.

***

In a floral-patterned dress, Victoria was in the garden painting, trying to take her mind off the problems that occupied her head. Next to her sat Emma and Harriet. If now her relationship with William was of an engaged couple, then they could act as such. They could be outdoors instead of locked inside the palace! Even if there had to be a chaperone! Being with him was fine in any location, but wandering outside was very enjoyable.

He arrived.

She got up and her ladies got up at once.
He grabbed her hand, lifted it, and kissed it. He ran his thumb over her knuckles, holding her hand longer than was necessary. He smiled and said looking at her:

“Good Morning!”

She smiled.

Then he turned and said:

“Ladies!”

They bowed their heads.

William signaled to Victoria with his eyes for them to start walking.

She understood.

They started to walk side by side followed by the ladies.

He had noticed that she had been happy with his arrival, that she was apparently calm, but there was an implicit tension.

She sighed and said:

“William, my Uncle Leopold was here...”

So that was it.

“And what did he say?”

“Barbarities!” Victoria answered indignantly.

They were in a wide space with green grass. The day was beautiful, sunny, but slightly cold. Victoria wanted to be alone with William, but there was no place to take refuge and her ladies were back there. But they could remain farther away...

Victoria turned back and motioned for them to stop. They obeyed. She and William kept walking.

“He said that my choice is dishonorable for the English throne...” She said in a sad tone.

William felt a tightness in his stomach.

“And that because of this choice I may be forced to abdicate, and that there can be a revolt that will put an end to monarchy...” She concluded, showing concern.

He felt agonized over the possibility that any of these assumptions would come true. He stopped and she stopped beside him.

“I’m sorry Victoria, I never wanted things to get to this point...” He said without looking at her.

“I know...” She said, turning her head to look at him, and then asked:

“Do you think there could be a revolution like the one that happened in France in 1789 that established the Republic?”

“No! Not something as serious. As I always say, the British are not a revolutionary people. But I’m afraid there's more...”
“More? Of what?”

“What I have to tell you is not good…”

“What? Tell me, William!” She demanded in growing anxiety.

He turned his head to look at her and said:

“I was told that your uncle Cumberland is also in London, and that he is gathering support for his cause... which is to occupy your throne... He wants to force your abdication... on the basis of the law and under the pretext of… insanity…”

“Will he come here, too?” She asked worriedly.

“No, he will not. Not with what he is planning against you…”

Victoria looked forward. She was feeling discouraged by what she read in the newspapers and by the conversation she had had with Leopold. Now this news was even worse. She could not look strong now. She dropped to her knees on the floor, the skirt of her dress forming a balloon.

He immediately stoop down to her side and put his left arm around her back and his right hand on her right arm under her elbow, hoping to get her up.

Harriet stepped forward with intention to help. Emma grabbed her arm and shook her head so she would not. William was there! He was the best help the Queen could have.

Victoria did not react to his impulse to get up, standing motionless on the floor with her eyes closed and saying:

“Let me stay like this, William…”

Unable to hug her, and given the slight cold, he undressed his coat and placed it on her shoulders, then sat down on the floor beside her.

“You should have brought a shawl, Victoria.”

When he put his coat over her shoulders, he had taken the opportunity of running his fingertips over her bare skin so she could feel him. And the coat brought his warmth and smell, and that comforted her! She wanted to lean her head against his shoulder, but that was not convenient!

Watching them from afar, Harriet and Emma were in awe! They looked like a teenage couple. Nothing of what unfolded before their eyes was conventional, but neither could it be considered unacceptable. The Queen sitting on the garden floor, the man she wanted to marry wrapping his arm around her, putting his coat on her back like that and sitting on the floor next to her...

“My uncles look like gargoyles…” Victoria remarked.

After a few seconds she asked:

“What do you think the Privy Council will say?”

“I take it they will not be supportive.”

“And in the parliament?”

“My influence there, at this moment, is diminished, as you know. Even some of my party members
don’t welcome our marriage. Let's just say the situation is too bizarre. The people are not prepared, the law is not prepared... However, we are still fortune that the Cabinet is Whig, because if they were Tories...”

“But Cumberland is unpopular, is he not?” She asked hopefully.

“He is. But with the right support he will get there. The mass of the population is favorable to you, but the conservative aristocracy doesn’t welcome our marriage. And it will be the aristocracy voting in the parliament, not the people…”

“And love?”

“Hmm!” Melbourne sighed. “They're not ready for it, Victoria. That is not how the world organizes. You know that…”

“I just want to be happy! By your side…”

“What worries me is what you might be forced to give up on my account.”

“It’s not for you, William! It's for us, it's for me! I already explained this to you. Instead of feeling responsible for the negative consequences of our marriage, please interpret the situation exactly the other way around. All the consequences that I have to face are to achieve happiness. Your role in my life is solely to allow me to achieve glory, regardless of all the consequences that may follow. The happiness that I find by your side will always be above all else.”

He smiled and said:

“Although for years I feared to ever came to the suffering of the moment in which we are, and I desperately wanted to avoid it for you, when I finally gave in, what motivated me was to have realized that this pain would be even greater and more destructive for both if I didn’t give in. Now that we've come this far, I still wish you didn’t have to go through this, but I don’t regret anything I did that allows us to have what we have together...”

She grabbed his left hand with her right hand and their fingers intertwined. In the distance nobody noticed. And then she said:

“You did everything right, we did everything right... They are the ones that are wrong, but we still haven’t lost...”

“No, not yet. And we'll have to believe until the end...”

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“His Majesty, the King of Belgium, my Lord!”

From the agitation of the butler as he entered the room, one could imagine that Leopold was impatient.

The butler had barely finished the sentence, and Leopold was already entering the room, facing Melbourne.

The king had dared to enter his house without permission! How dared he? Melbourne prepared for the clash. Leopold could be king, but he was an imprudent interlocutor, who wrangled, but with whom was easy to argue.
The butler left immediately and closed the door.

“Lord Melbourne!”

“Your Majesty!”

They were both standing, facing each other, a few yards apart.

Given the rudeness of the entrance Melbourne thought he didn’t have to point him to a seat.

“Well, I do not believe I need to tell you the reason why I have come here...” The king began.

Melbourne nodded, but made no comment.

“The nature of my niece's interest for you has always been clear to me, just like the reason for her refusal to ask Albert in marriage was justified in my mind. However, I did not expect her to go so far as to want you to be more than her Prime Minister. I should have immediately suspected that a strong reason was behind your resignation... Lord Melbourne ceased to be Prime Minister to be King of England!” He exclaimed ironically.

Melbourne interfered, preventing him from continuing to dramatize:

“Your Majesty does not need to beat around the bush or even to ironize! You may get to the point! What do you have to tell me, in fact?”

“Give up the marriage with my niece!”

“Give it up?” Melbourne asked with a sarcastic smile.

“Victoria is young and fickle, she does not know what she wants, she is captivated by you charm, but we can talk man to man.”

“Man to man?” Asked Melbourne, as if saying “Are you sure?”

“You, who love her so much, know that if you think it through, you are not being rational. You know she deserves another marriage, someone young to accompany her for life, many more years than the ones remaining for you...”

Melbourne began to feel uncomfortable by the conversation.

“You are old at Victoria's side! Eventually she will get tired. She is probably going to fall in love with younger men... It would not be the first time that you would go through something like that...”

Now Melbourne was getting agonized. Leopold knew exactly where to attack.

“You know this is a reverie. It is preferable to quit while it is time. It is the best for Victoria and will avoid the problems you might have in the future.”

“Your Majesty!” Melbourne exclaimed too loudly for Leopold's ears.

The king fell silent.

Now Leopold was about to hear what he had to say. Melbourne continued:

“You just said that you wanted to talk to me man to man, did you not?”
Leopold nodded.

"Then from man to man, what I have to tell you is that what exists between me and Victoria is a higher feeling that is above all things. I may be much older than her, but Victoria loves me and I am not afraid that she might betray me. Besides, despite my age and full awareness that she will be alone in a few years, I want to give her everything I can for as long as possible. Do you still remember what it is like to love a woman, Your Majesty? Is there anyone that you truly love at this moment? And that love you?"

Now Melbourne had touched Leopold's weakness. Charlotte! Charlotte whom Leopold had loved and with whom he had been married for only a year and a half! Charlotte whom he could always be together with and never tire! Charlotte who passed away in 1817 at the age of 21, giving birth to their stillborn son. A single blow that had taken away all of Leopold's hope and happiness. He had never been able to fully regain that feeling of happiness that blessed his short life as that woman's husband. Without her, he had become incomplete. It was as if he had lost his heart!

He had remarried in 1829, but the marriage ended in 1831. And in 1832 he had a third marriage with a woman 22 younger, who felt sacrificed by having to marry him: Louise d'Orléans, daughter of the King of France. However, cohabitation had revealed the possibility of understanding and affection between the two. But no one could fill the void left by Charlotte!

"No one can replace Charlotte!" Leopold replied, looking slightly emotional.

Melbourne liked the king's frankness. Leopold was dominated!

"So if your love for Princess Charlotte is still present, it is very easy to understand the nature of the feeling that exists between me and your niece! And neither of us will give up this feeling!" Melbourne declared peremptorily.

"She should have married Albert." Said Leopold, saddened by the failure of his long-standing plan.

"Why? Because he and Victoria would illusory reconstitute your lost relationship with Princess Charlotte?"

Leopold did not answer. He felt something break inside him. He could have still used low means of persuasion. He had thought of them on his way to Melbourne’s house. Money, benefits... But he had lost the courage to do such a thing... And Melbourne would not accept it. Leopold knew he was a man of integrity.

"Is there nothing I can say or do to make you give up this intent...?" Leopold still tried to insist one last time.

"No!"

Leopold nodded courteously and left.

***

William arrived that morning with relevant information.

Victoria was in the piano room, playing excerpts from different musical pieces at random, with two ladies of the bedchamber nearby. She got up and they did the same.

He greeted her like a well-behaved fiancé, kissing her hand, but he signaled with his eyes for her to get rid of the ladies.
“Please... I need to speak with Lord Melbourne.”

They looked at each other, but there was no questioning an order from the Queen. An unusual behavior was already common in the Sovereign. They left.

“Close the door, please.”

They closed it.

He kissed her quickly.

“What is the matter, my love?” She asked, grabbing his hands and looking at him with agitation.

“It is not official yet and it will come to you officially, but I already know the opinion of the Privy Council.” He said, moving away from her.

“And what is it?” She asked anxiously.

“Negative.”

“Negative?”

“Of course, what did you expect?” He questioned with a resigned tone.

“But this will weigh on the development of the issue in the Parliament.”

“And I also know from Russell what the opinion of the Cabinet is.” He added.

“And...?”

“Not favorable either.”

Victoria looked uneasy and walked to the nearest window, wringing her hands. Then she turned to him and said:

“I just wanted to be able to marry in the most convenient way for everyone. Marry you, keep the throne, and let our children inherit it.”

“But for that you would have to marry a royal prince, not me...” He said turning his head to the right side and rolling his eyes.

“What if I decide to have a royal wedding against the will of the Cabinet? Marry you and refuse to abdicate...”

“If you do this, in a form of protest against your action the Cabinet will resign, causing a constitutional crisis!” He answered in a tone of admonition.

“But I am the Queen... That should allow me some liberality!” She countered in despair.

“Victoria, we're not in an absolute monarchy, but in a constitutional monarchy! You can’t do what you want, and although one power does not depend on another, it depends on constitutional norms. If the agent of an institution doesn’t obey this system, he will be subject to liability!” His tone increased. “Do you accept the established powers and then disrespect them?”

“Can’t the law be altered?”
“Rules cannot be changed when they become inconvenient. You cannot change laws or ignore them when they do not suit you! You have to submit to them! In fact, as monarch you should be the first to submit to them, without questioning. Which means that if you go against the law you have to submit to the consequences of that.” He continued in a tone of reproach even higher.

“I know! I know!” She said also with her tone changed. “On the coronation oath I swore by God to obey the laws of the kingdom!”

She was walking around the room while he spoke.

He was standing there in the living room, moving his arms and keeping his speech in an irritated tone:

“You only have two solutions: either abdicate or do a morganatic marriage. In this case, if it is authorized by the Parliament. If it is not allowed, the solution that remains will always be abdication. Only this allows you to make any marital decisions without other constitutional implications.”

She loved him, she only wanted the best for their marriage, and he was treating the matter as a mere political issue, talking only about the Constitution and with a suffocating distance.

“You talk like them! It sounds like you're scolding me!” She said aggravated.

“I'm just making you face reality!”

In a perplexed way she asked:

“William, are you arguing with me?” Then she added “You sound like the matter doesn’t concern you! What I'm doing is for you, too!”

“And what I'm saying is for you, too!” He retaliated.

“Why are we fighting over this? The marriage issue should bring us together!” She almost yelled.

He sighed and tilted his head up and down, as was usual when he spoke more agitatedly. Then he walked up to her with his hands open reaching forward, pleading peace, and said quietly:

“I am sorry, Victoria. I never wanted it to come to this! I'm worried about this matter, and that leaves me like this, annoyed…”

Tears welled up in her eyes. She walked over to him, placing her hands on his chest.

“William, my love, you have to tell me how you feel. Otherwise I won’t know and I won’t understand you…”

He hugged her.

“Victoria, I have spent many years without affection in my life until you appeared in it. Then I spent years with what I felt for you silenced inside my chest. Then you acted on that and made me act to attain glory. But even though glory has been achieved I still feel responsible for the situation we are in…”

“But you don’t feel guilty…”

“No, but I cannot help but feel there's a responsibility. A conscious person has to feel responsible in this situation…”
“But that responsibility is shared. I'm as responsible as you are.” She insisted.

He moved his head doubtfully.

“William, put aside the idea that you should have avoided this! You did the best you could have done for us! And I thank you for that every day!”

He smiled.

She loved him so, so much! And she wanted him to be very proud of being her man. He prided himself. She knew. But she wanted to tell him something else that would sustain him as a man! That would dispel this idea of responsibility for what had happened in Brocket Hall that had triggered the whole situation in which they were. Hugging him, she looked him in the eye and said:

“You're the only man I would open my legs to.”

He was surprised by the rawness of her statement. Much had evolved their relationship since that morning in Kensington.

Then she completed:

“I could never do with Albert what I do with you. No, how I do it with you...”

He felt shivers. She often made comparisons between him and Albert, and it always left him delighted. Albert was the rival, the man to whom he had been on the verge of losing her, decades younger... And yet she had chosen him! He stated:

“And you are the best thing that ever happened to me in my whole life!”

And then he kissed her madly!

***

There was heated discussion in the House. The subject was too exciting! It was necessary to discuss before voting. But if the opinion of the Privy Council was unfavorable, and if the Cabinet did not support the intention of marriage, would the Parliament be favorable? The prospect was that the result here was also negative. Cabinet members were in the Parliament. Some of the Council members were in the Parliament. One party and the other were gathering followers. Even Cumberland was in the Parliament!

Abdication no!

Morganatic marriage yes!

Morganatic marriage no!

Abdication yes!

Pay an allowance to a fiancé with this status? How much?

No, without subsidy!

A Royal Highness spouse or a duke?

What if a regency was needed?
What if the Queen died without heirs?

What if the queen died with heirs from a man of such a low social status?

Who would occupy the throne in any of these circumstances?

Cumberland!

George, son of the Duke of Cumberland?

Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge?

There was no solution in sight for the next few days!

Chapter End Notes

And now? What do you think will happen? Abdication? Morganatic wedding? Royal wedding?
Leopold left for Belgium while Victoria wrote to her half-sister Feodora of Leiningen, daughter from her mother’s first marriage with Emich Carl, Prince of Leiningen.

Until Victoria was 9 years old, her half-sister had also lived with her in Kensington, but at the age of 21 Feodora had married Prince Ernst Christian Carl of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, and had left for the German Confederation where she lived in Langenburg Castle. Victoria had always missed her very much, but the letters exchanged between them were frequent. Lately she had needed her more than ever. No family member supported her marriage, and some were still trying to stop it. At least Feodora understood. She did not know William personally, but she had always read the highest praise about him in the letters Victoria wrote to her since the beginning of her reign. She understood, therefore, the nature and force of the feeling that united them. Especially since she had only seen her husband twice before getting married.

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It was the day before the voting in the Parliament.

He had come to dine with her, of course. But the atmosphere was not favorable.

The Duchess of Kent didn’t say a word throughout the entire meal. She didn’t feel comfortable in Melbourne’s presence and feared for the uncertainty of her personal future.

Victoria also didn’t say much, but that was due to the apprehension she felt about the next day's vote. She needed William to hug her, but in the presence of others that was not possible.

After dinner he was leaving. They walked side by side, arm in arm, along the gallery followed by some distance by Emma and another lady.

He sensed her anguish, but he could not physically manifest himself as would be needed to calm her down.

Victoria desperately needed to be alone with him, she felt herself suffocating and needed to catch some air... She stopped and, looking back, said:

“I will be on the balcony for just a few minutes with Lord Melbourne...”

The ladies understood that they should wait there and let them go.

She walked to the balcony and he followed her.

As they walked through the access door to the balcony, she walked to the left side so that the wall covered them and it would not possible for anyone to see them from the gallery.

He followed her.

The balcony was half lit, with the light of the night and the light projected from the corridor.

She placed herself with her back to the wall, but as he approached, she grabbed the outside part of his coat and rolled it around to make him turn to the side of the wall.
He wrapped his arms around her back.

Between pressing her forehead against his chest and pulling away to look him in the eye, she shook her head in despair, and then he saw the anguish in her eyes.

“I need you to stay in the palace with me, William…”

He pressed her against him and she wrapped her arms around his back.

“Don’t say that, my love. You know that I can’t, and seeing you like this I’ll go home a lot more worried about you… It’s almost done. From tomorrow on, at least, there will be a verdict, even if it is an unfavorable one…”

“But I need you to hold me, to feel you close to me…”

“Shh… I’m here. I’ll stay here until you calm down.” He whispered, kissing her forehead and pressing her harder against him.

She reassured herself slightly by the prospect of staying there for a few minutes, warm and cozy, as she had been on that couch in Brocket Hall before she had given herself to him for the first time. There was no safer and more comfortable place in the world than his arms. How she had needed that hug during all the years she had lived without affection! She inhaled his scent, like someone stocking up on a food reserve to consume later.

“I won’t be able to sleep…” She said.

“Yes you will. You must rest.” He stated softly as he placed his right hand on her head and with his thumb massaged her left temple.

“Without you here I won’t!”

He had never seen her so nervous, not even in the early days of her reign when she was even younger and still inexperienced. He had to do something to calm her down so he could leave, or she would never let him go. If he could leave something of his with her, it might calm her down. But what?

Keeping her pressed against him with his left hand, with his right hand he untied the dark green handkerchief he wore around his neck.

Seeing him doing so she moved slightly away from his body, placed her hands on his chest and asked:

“What are you doing, William?”

“Keep my handkerchief, Victoria. Keep it close to you, sleep with it and think that through it my presence is always with you…”

He wanted to say this in a determined tone to raise her spirits, but for the last three words his voice choked, coming out in a sigh.

She grabbed the handkerchief with both hands and pressed her forehead against his chest once more as he hugged her again.

“I must give you something of mine, then. To take with you… Pull the ribbon out of my hair!” She asked. “There’s only one hairclip that joins the tips underneath.”
He put his hands behind the strand of hair, pulled the hairclip, and untied the blue satin ribbon.

“Put it in your pocket and take it with you to the Parliament tomorrow. It might give us luck...”

He smiled and slipped the ribbon into his coat pocket.

Not only had he calmed her down, giving her something to hold on to, as the retribution she had been able to do with him had raised her spirits even more! There it was, everything that was done together, shared, always worked!

They kissed tenderly.

“I love you, Victoria! You are the most precious thing of my entire life!”

“And I love you, William! Very much…”

“Rest easy. I promise that tomorrow, as soon as there is a result, I will come immediately to the palace!”

She nodded.

“See you tomorrow!” He said at last and kissed her forehead.

She kissed his face by the chin, brushed her cheek against his jaw, and said goodbye:

“Until tomorrow, William!”

When he left the balcony, Emma noticed that he didn’t have the handkerchief and that he was somewhat upset when he said:

“Take care of the Queen, Emma, if you please!”

“Surely, William, rest assured!”

“See you tomorrow, and thank you.”

“See you tomorrow.”

Since Emma did not know what would be the Queen’s mood, before she went to the balcony, in order to get the other lady out of there, she asked:

“Go get a shawl for Her Majesty, if you please.”

As soon as she left Emma went to the balcony.

“Your Majesty…”

The Queen was crying leaning against the balcony’s balustrade with William's handkerchief in her hand. Victoria had calmed down when he held her, but when he left she felt like crying.

Emma approached her.

“Ma’am…”

“Oh, Emma, what do you think is going to happen?”

“Unfortunately, I do not know, Ma’am, but you have to believe that you will succeed... Now calm
down, please. When William left, he asked me to take care of you. He would not like to know that you are like this, would he?"

“No, Emma...”

“Think like this, Ma’am: Even if you are forced to abdicate, which we hope will not happen, in any of the circumstances that they will determine for your life tomorrow, you will always have William with you. It is the best prospect, is it not?”

“Yes it is...”

“Ma’am, William loves you deeply and will always do everything for you.”

“I know. And I love him more than my own life...”

Emma restrained herself from crying.

The other lady arrived with the shawl.

“Now put on the shawl as it is cold, and it would be best if you went to your chambers.” Asked Emma.

The Queen received the shawl from Emma's hands and went back inside to her chambers.

Emma noticed that she no longer had the ribbon in her hair and figured out what had happened...

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After undressing with Skerrett's help, Victoria dismissed her and was alone.

She went to the window and looked at the London lights. This could be her last night as queen. She remembered Marie-Antoinette. How had she went through the last night before the beheading? She was not going to be killed, it was not as tragic as that, but being dethroned was a kind of death sentence. It was the death of her natural condition by birth. The condition which, in spite of the initial shock, she had always believed it was determined by divine providence. Her destiny was to be queen. Now called into question for a simple reason. Just because she loved the man she wanted to marry. These laws were not fair! She knew that if she was deposed she would not be devoid of status and comfort. Besides being a countess by marriage and enjoying her husband's personal fortune, she remained a royal princess - a condition by which she ought to receive a compatible allowance - and would continue to enjoy the income of the dukedoms of Cornwall and Lancashire as hitherto. However, deposition was a very heavy sentence for any monarch.

Her mother had always told her that when her father, the Duke of Kent, was in the military garrison in Gibraltar, a gypsy had told him that he would be the father of a great queen. And, in fact, the offspring of the Duke had been reduced to a girl who, by vicissitudes of destiny, had become Queen. On the day of her coronation she could not find the words to say how proud she was to be queen of such a nation! She had promised her deceased father to do her best to become a great queen. But now all this was called into question. However, if the gypsy's prediction remained true as hitherto she could not stop being queen the next day...

Somewhere out of those tiny lights that she saw from the window was William. He was struggling not to express his feelings, always trying to calm her, but she knew that this was very difficult for him too.

She grabbed his handkerchief that she had left on the dresser when she was getting ready for bed
and went to sleep. She positioned a pillow on the right side of the bed, placed the handkerchief on top of it, lay on her right side, hugged the pillow with her left arm and rested her face against the tissue of the handkerchief. It had his smell! She imagined he was there and thought that whatever happened, at least they would have each other.

She eventually fell asleep.

***

William got home and started the routine of the past that had been suspended since Victoria had come into his life as a woman. He asked the butler for a bottle of brandy, went to the library, stripped off his coat, and started pacing back and forth. When the butler brought the drink he asked not to be disturbed, sat on the chair and began to drink.

He was going to spend the night there.

He hadn’t wanted any of this to have happened. He hadn’t wanted her to go through this. But now there was nothing to do. Regret? If he had it, this was the right time to feel it. Now that the situation had reached the limit. But no, he didn’t regret it. Nothing of what he had told her or what he had done with her brought him regret! A man cannot regret anything he does with and to the woman he loves! That wouldn’t make sense! If there was no regret, there was no blame either. It made no sense to tell himself that it could have been otherwise. No, it couldn’t. If it had happened like this, it was because this was how it had to happen. He knew better than anyone that he had done everything in his power for a long time so that things would never come to this day when she was being threatened to give up the throne for the love they shared. He had lived in her shadow for years without ever declaring the love he felt! He had refused her love when she had wanted to hand it on a plate and he desperately needed it! He had prompted her to marry another man! What could anyone ask him to have done even more? Would it be possible to ask even more of a man deeply in love with a woman? So his conscience could only be clear.

The clock at the entrance struck one in the morning.

If things had come this far, it had been the circumstances of life that had guided them in this direction. There was nothing he could have done to keep her from not asking Albert to marry her. He could not control the fact that they didn’t get along. In fact, that even seemed to favor his relationship with Victoria. And from that point on, the evolution of the relationship, the things that had happened, the things that had been said, all had led their fate to the point where they were today. He only regretted all this for her, only she worried him. If she had to abdicate, how would she live from then on? Not in material terms, because nothing would be lacking for her. Not in affective terms, for this he would take care of. But what about inside her head and her heart, how would she rearrange her condition in the world? A monarch was not supposed to be deposed. The monarch's condition, in principle, would never be removed...

He fell asleep.

***

Victoria woke up early and could sleep no more.

She went to the window, but apparently everything was the same as any other morning in London. Only inside her the tension deepened.

She got dressed with the help of Skerrett, but couldn’t eat breakfast. Nervousness didn’t allow any food to go down.
She didn’t want to be locked in the palace or she would go mad.

She went to the garden followed by her ladies, who took a thousand turns behind her, walking hundreds of times through the same place. Sometimes she sat down, but she didn’t spend much time in that position. She got up again and paced back and forth as she wrung her hands together.

William’s handkerchief folded and tucked inside the neckline of the dress so as not to be visible.

***

Melbourne saw the day breaking throughout the dawn. He was tired, but the greatest trial would follow. He conveniently prepared to go to the Parliament and thought he should send a message to Victoria as a way to accompany her from afar.

Now they were engaged, and if someone opened the note before arriving to the Queen it could be written in some more intimate terms. He wrote:

"Victoria, my love!
My heart is full of you. I never imagined, not even in my dreams, to find such love on earth. I am dazzled when I think of you near me, your skin in mine!
I'm going to the Parliament now.
Today is the day when, because we love each other, your destiny will be decided.
Let men understand that love must be greater than convention.

I kiss your hands with all my love,
William"

***

When the note arrived, brought by a footman on a silver plate, Victoria was in the garden.

She opened it quickly with her heart pounding and her hands trembling, and she read it.

She felt her heart grow inside her chest with the tender, sensual content. She smiled but made no comment.

***

A morganatic marriage was the last hope to keep the throne. But the vote was apparently lost. Tories, Whigs, on one side and the other on the benches there were deputies against a morganatic marriage and favorable to abdication.

William decided to leave the room. He could not stand being there anymore. The result was expected...

He stood in the corridor walking aimlessly. At this hour Victoria would be worried in Buckingham, at the window, as she always did, waiting for him to return. What should he do? Send a messenger to say something, but that at this moment the perspective would only be negative; or should he wait for the final result to be able to convey it personally by prolonging the wait?

He was going down the stairs without having decided what to do.

“Melbourne!”

He turned around.
It was Wellington.

“Your Grace!”

“What does Wellington want now?” He thought.

The duke stopped beside him and said with a lively tone:

“Congratulations!”

William raised his eyebrows in interrogation.

“You know, my dear Melbourne, we may even be political opponents, but I respect you and I have great admiration for you! You are a man of integrity.”

“Thank you, Duke!”

“Do you remember how, in 1836, when the scandal with Mrs. Norton was on the verge of overthrowing your government, I - and the king as well - urged you to remain Prime Minister and nothing has changed politically?”

“Of course I do.”

“And I admire you today even more. The excellent work you did with the Queen in these early years of reign is undeniable! And now you got what any man in this world could want. Marry the Queen of England!”

He stressed the expression Queen of England.

William was stunned. For seconds, he stopped seeing and hearing clearly. Everything was foggy, and the only thing that suddenly seemed to have passed into his head, and then echoed, was the beating of his heart.

“And on top of it she loves you hopelessly!” The duke finished smiling with a paternal expression, went down the stairs and left.

William could not tell him anything else. He stood on the stairs watching him disappear.

Then he reached into his coat pocket and found the ribbon of Victoria's hair.

William still didn’t know, but Wellington had voted in favor of morganatic marriage! And after him, Peel and some other members of the conservative party…

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He wanted to hug Victoria at that moment! But he had to get to the palace first!

He hastened the coachman to have the carriage carrying him arrive to Buckingham as soon as possible.

She saw him coming through the window!

When he got out of the carriage he looked up at the window, but at that distance she couldn’t figure out his expression.

He saw her silhouette in the window and watched her walk away.
On an impulse she bolted from the window, opened the chamber’s door, grabbed the skirt of her dress, and ran down the hall! Dash ran after her. A Queen couldn’t run, but she had to! It was not the queen who ran, it was the woman who ran!

Emma and the other ladies stayed where they were. It would be impossible to keep up with her... And there was nothing to be done to stop her!

The closer he was to giving her the news, the greater was his desire to do it and the difficulty in restraining himself. William was driven to run too. He ran up the outer steps, entered the palace, crossed the hall, and began to climb the stairs, climbing the steps at increasing speed. First one by one, then two by two. He began to hear her footsteps running down the corridor above the flight of stairs where he was. He increased his speed. He reached the top of the stairs and stopped, turning to the side where she came from. When she saw him at the top of the stairs she shouted:

“William!”

“Victoria!”

He ran to her.

She continued to run to him.

When they were approaching he said:

“We did it! We can get married!”

He withstood the clash of her body against his and they hugged each other.

He kissed her on the forehead.

She put her hands inside his coat to feel closer to his body. She raised her head and they kissed.

Many things in their lives happened in corridors. It seemed that they were always in a hallway and that the same scene, or similar scenes, were repeated continually. The two of them in a corridor in Buckingham on the night of the coronation ball; the two of them in a hedge wall in the garden of Brocket Hall near the rooks; the two of them in their nightgowns in a corridor in Windsor; the two of them in a hallway of the Brocket Hall house kissing for the first time; the two of them again in a corridor of Windsor sharing a forbidden kiss; and now, again, the two of them in a corridor in Buckingham.

The queen, single and supposedly a virgin, was in the corridor hugging and kissing a man, to whom she should never be engaged, in a completely indecent manner in the sight of the passing-by footmen! But an unconventional relationship with that man had always existed since she had become queen. Things had only evolved now...

Chapter End Notes

Finally, there was a verdict! They can get married!!! What do you feel about the solving the essential question in Victoria and Lord M life?
In order for the marriage to take place, and given the exceptional circumstances in which it took place, it was necessary to make a prenuptial agreement that established the conditions of the Queen's marriage.

The document was sent by the Parliament to Victoria for approval.

Victoria read the contents of the document where the following premises were established:

“This was a morganatic marriage in which the monarch married a groom of inferior social status. The spouse could not be prince consort, nor receive Royal Highness treatment. Instead he shall receive the title of Duke of Edinburgh, not hereditary, enjoyed only in life. Consequently, the spouse was not entitled to the precedence of Royal Highness. He would always be in disadvantage compared with all monarchs and princes of royal blood who were in his presence, merely occupying the place of a Duke, which implied that in most State ceremonies and family life in the palace he could not walk, stay or sit next to the Queen. Nevertheless, as husband of the sovereign, among dukes, he would always have the first place. The spouse was not entitled to a subsidy granted by the Parliament, like the other royal consorts, but only to the income that came from the dukedom. The children of this marriage were considered legitimate, but could not inherit the throne, nor any royal property, rights or royalties, nor receive precedence equal to those of the crown princes. They could receive duke titles and associated rights. If it were necessary to secure a regency, it would be performed by George, son of the Duke of Cumberland, Ernest Augustus, king of Hanover, and grandson of George III, and, were this impossible, by Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge, son of George III. In case of death of the Queen, the heir to the throne would be George, son of the Duke of Cumberland, Ernest Augustus, king of Hanover, and grandson of George III, and, in the impossibility of this, Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge, son of George III.”

Victoria felt agonized, an indescribable sense of malaise, she was on the verge of bursting with indignation and crying upset! She grabbed a vase and threw it against the wall, which made it shatter on the floor in a thousand pieces.

William was in the hallway and hurried up when he heard the noise. He thought she might have hurt herself. He entered the room and saw her falling to her knees on the floor, sobbing and tears streaming down her face. The document lying on the floor beside her.

The ladies in another room heard the crash, but when they reached the hall Emma saw William enter the room where the Queen was and stopped the rest of the ladies from continuing.

He rushed to her. He knelt on the floor in front of her so he could hold her.

She clung to him and continued to cry.

“Shhh... I'm here... What happened?”

“They don’t respect you!”

“Who?”
“The Parliament... The prenuptial agreement has arrived... Their demands are...” She sobbed.

Keeping her next to him with his left hand, with his right hand he grabbed the document lying over there on the ground.

He read it.

In short, William Lamb was just the husband. And he couldn’t even occupy this place publicly in most events; nor domestically, in some situations. Basically, in the eyes of English society, Europe and the world, his function would be limited to satisfying the Queen in bed. In fact, he was nothing more than a formally recognized royal lover. Any man of royal blood who became the husband of the Queen of England could never be king, for if he did, he would stand above the queen, which was absolutely unacceptable. The only constitutional function of the man of royal blood who married the queen was to produce an heir to the throne, but in his case, not even as a breeder he had worth, given that the children he produced would not inherit the throne. It was a humiliating condition for any man in his place. However, he was the happiest man in the world! For even being her husband was a condition he had never thought he could reach!

In fact, outrageously, and against all expectations, the respectable English Parliament had submitted to the Queen's amorous reveries! But simply for a real State matter: the alternative, the king of Hanover, did not gather political consensus in the House. Nor as an alternative to Victoria at this time nor as future heir to the Crown, so Cumberland had accepted that the throne would be inherited by his son. He was already king of Hanover, the age was already advanced and not gathering all the necessary support, it was preferable to at least have the throne of the United Kingdom be inherited by his son George. A blind man, but whom Cumberland thought perfectly fit to be king.

Victoria was disgusted! She knew it would be like that, she knew the law, the conventions, the customs, she always thought they were natural, but now she felt the consequences of all this in her skin and blood, and that was distressing... Not to her husband! Not to the man she loved!

“Victoria, look at me!” He said lifting her chin.

She looked.

He wiped her tears with his thumbs.

She closed her eyes and opened them again.

Then William declared:

“The only thing I want is you, my love! The rest doesn’t matter! Titles, precedence, allowance... I don’t want any of that! I just want to be your husband. We still have to thank the Parliament for the approval of the marriage and you keeping the throne! To want more than that is illusion...”

“No! They cannot do this! This is humiliating! I cannot allow them to humiliate you inside my own house! Do you realize what this demands in practice? We will be in events where you cannot be by my side, or better, where you cannot go to not be ashamed to have to sit a few paces away from me! Don’t tell me that you wouldn’t feel not even a little humiliated in public ceremonies for not being able to be by my side...”

He was silent for a few seconds. Then he said:

“I would... But what I really didn’t want was for you to go through the shame of not being able to have your husband by your side.”
“But it's not because of you, do not say that! It is not you who causes embarrassment, but laws and customs!”

“And what do you want to do?” He asked.

“Negotiate with these hellish snakes! Otherwise they will turn you into a joke all over the world! You will receive Royal Highness treatment and equivalent precedence. Less than that is impossible!”

“They won’t accept it.” William warned.

“I have to at least try! If they don’t want to accept I will let them know that I intend to abdicate! I want to see what they will do, then!”

William sighed, a little in disagreement that she wanted to fight that whole fight because of him, even being determined to threaten the Parliament with abdication. But now, because of the result of the vote in the Parliament, she had already realized that they didn’t want her to abdicate, so she could now use that threat to enforce her demands. He finally agreed with her:

“Very well, Victoria! But now let's get up.” He said as he stood up and held out his hands for her to grab them and get up from the floor.

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Victoria did not endorse the document that had been sent to her by the Parliament and required other conditions for her marriage to William.

The Parliament discussed and adjusted the conditions.

Now the text had some modifications:

"The spouse could not be prince consort, but he could receive Royal Highness treatment by marriage. He also received the title of Duke of Edinburgh, not hereditary, enjoyed only in life. Consequently, the spouse was entitled to the precedence of Royal Highness but, since it was obtained only by marriage, he would always be below all the monarchs and princes of royal blood who were in his presence. Nevertheless, as husband of the sovereign, among dukes, he would always have the first place."

In this way the document was approved.

***

At last, the nightmare had passed!

Now it was possible to start preparing the wedding with William!

Decide the day, time and location. Meet with Lord Chamberlain to organize the ceremony and the party: choose the music, the flowers, the bridesmaids, the dishes to be served, the wedding cake... And the most exciting: the choice of the dress!

It was decided that the wedding day would be 8th February 1841.

William helped to decide some things, especially more protocol aspects, but in more feminine aspects he didn’t interfere. And the choice of the dress really had to be a secret.

Victoria sought inspiration for her dress by flicking through the volumes of La Mode Illustre, and
asked Harriet Sutherland, generally considered one of London’s best-dressed women, for suggestions. The brides she had seen wore dresses of various colors, usually garish colors, which stood out, and silver and gold, for they showed the nobility and wealth of who wore them. But she wanted something different! She decided to wear white satin. Because she was very fond of the color, although it was unusual in weddings because it got dirty easily, and in order to escape the existing pattern. Maybe one day it would still be tradition!

Regarding the dress ornaments, one thing that seemed obvious to her was the use of lace with flower designs. Due to the industrial development, laces were now produced in machines, and therefore the craftsmen were running out of work. Because of this, Victoria decided that she would give work to an army of craftsmen who would work for her. The choice also became a political matter, and had favorable consequences in public opinion.

She also made two other decisions that hadn’t been made before: she would wear a veil and a bouquet of flowers. For several days 200 workers from the small town of Honiton made her veil from the same lace as the dress, and that stretched 13 feet behind her.

Victoria conceived and designed her dress in the purest romantic concept. Her creation left the neckline uncovered in a tight satin corset that ended in a V over the lower abdomen, and opened in a wide pleated skirt from the waist. Around the neckline a wide frill of lace to match the endings of the sleeves, dropping below the elbow.

She also designed her bridesmaids’ dresses embroidered with white roses. One of them would be Frances, William’s niece, daughter of his sister Emily and Lord Palmerston, though she had been born when her mother was married to Lord Cowper...

The model and molds of her dress would then be burned to prevent them from being imitated.

The place of her wedding night and the three days she could spend after the wedding was obvious. She wanted to go to Brocket Hall. Place of high significance in their lives. For him Brocket Hall was a refuge, for her it was a place that conveyed her peace and comfort that she couldn’t find even in Buckingham. And it had been there that the most important things in her life had happened. At Brocket Hall she had first declared her love for William, and in Brocket Hall she had given herself to him for the first time. The first night as husband and wife had to be spent there. Husband! A strange word. Now he would be her husband. It still seemed unreal!

He had spent the honeymoon with Caroline at Brocket Hall, but this no longer had any importance at the present time, and it didn’t affect him that the same event would be repeated in that place with another woman. That property had marked his whole life. He had lived there many good times and many bad moments, caused by Caro’s illness and scandals, and also by Augustus’ illness. Like that occasion in 1812 when Byron had written to Caroline to terminate their relationship, and the pain of the loss led to her sanity showing signs of collapse manifested by the building of a fire outside the Brocket Hall house where she burned all the gifts of the poet and anything that reminded her of him. The climax of the event had been the burning of an effigy of Byron, while Caroline sang a text she had written especially for the occasion. Or that other moment, in 1824, when the funeral procession that accompanied Byron’s coffin from London to Nottinghamshire, to its rural seat, passed through Brocket Hall, which allowed Caroline to see it and disturbed her...

But of the last times he only had fond memories of that space. Besides being a refuge, the miracle that had happened in his life had taken place in Brocket Hall, divided by two distinct and extremely remarkable moments: the day Victoria had declared her love to him (although at that time it had been a very difficult moment, since he had been obliged, by duty, to refuse her feeling), and that other day when she had given herself to him!
William didn’t talk to Victoria about the scenes of the past associated with Brocket Hall.

***

Victoria was still in the garden painting with her ladies, and William – who had arrived earlier than they had arranged – was waiting for her in the piano room. He observed her through one of the windows and saw her outside laughing. Was this real?

Baroness Lehzen entered the room, but as soon as she saw him, she lowered her head and turned, preparing to leave.

Melbourne called for her:

“Baroness...”

She turned to him.

“Yes, Lord Melbourne?”

“Do you have something to tell me?”

“Such as?” She asked embarrassed.

“Do you have anything to tell me about Her Majesty’s wedding?”

She walked into the room approaching him and confessed:

“I am not sure if I should say it…”

“I think you should.”

“Honestly, Lord Melbourne, it was not for this wedding that I took care of Her Majesty since she was born...”

“I know Baroness. But I want you to know that I have not used my place as prime minister and private secretary to achieve this marriage.”

The baroness looked out the window and saw the Queen in the garden. After a few seconds she said:

“When she was a child she had many fits of fury. But when I started to be in charge of her education at the age of five, I realized that the rigidity with which they treated her would not put an end to those rages. It was true that she was a raptured child, not docile, but she never lied! So I tried sweetness... and I was successful where everyone had failed!”

Melbourne, who had looked outside again, felt touched by the Baroness's stance towards her little Victoria!

“The Baroness is an intelligent woman. I did the same with her...” He said.

At this moment they were standing next to each other, watching the Queen outside. Like two guardian angels, the two people who loved Victoria the most, in two different ways. The one who had taken care of her as a mother until she was 18, and the one who had loved her as a man since she was 18.

“I know you did everything for her.” Admitted Lehzen.
“And I wish as much as you do for her to be happy.”

“She is happy... by your side. I already realized that. I just cannot get used to the idea...”

“But maybe I can hope that you get used to it... in time...” He tested her.

“Yes, maybe...”

The Baroness gave a slight smile and left.

Usually a fiancé might have to fight the aversion of the bride's mother, but he had to deal with that animosity coming from Victoria’s “two mothers”...

***

William was now sitting on a coach in the piano room while Victoria, with her back to him, was staring out one of the windows in silence.

He was enthusiastically talking about the recent capture by the British forces of the island of Hong Kong on 20th January 1841, and its formal occupation by the United Kingdom on 26th January. Meanwhile he watched the beauty of her nape under the hair. He loved that hairdo!

Victoria was not paying attention to what he was saying.

It was best to change the subject:

“Victoria, do you know what I've been thinking?”

“What?”

“I know your relationship with your mother is complicated... but you should try to make things better between you two...”

“Do you have any idea of what you're saying?” She asked indignantly turning to him.

“It's complicated, I know, but she's your mother and you need her on several occasions. You will need her in the future...”

“For what?”

“She is a woman... she is a mother... One day you will be a mother... You will need advice during pregnancy, childbirth, the first times with the baby... Who better than she could do this?”

Victoria moved around the room in silence wringing her hands together.

He knew there was something worrying her.

It was true. And now he had touched the spot.

“William...” She said as she turned to him.

“Yes?”

“Now that we're getting married, and we'll sleep in the same bed every night... could we make things continue to be like this...?”

“How so?”
“Well... I don’t have to be with child right away, do I?”

“Does it bother you to have children? We had already spoken about this once, I thought that...”

“What bothers me is not the thought of having children...” She said, not letting him finish the sentence.

He made an interrogative expression for her to finish.

“Of course I want children. Your children, William! Only... not yet...”

“Very well... You want a way to pick the rose without pricking in the thorns. But why?”

With a concerned look she said:

“I think of Princess Charlotte...”

He understood. He held out his right hand for her to grasp, and when she did he pulled her to sit beside him on the coach. Then he pulled her body against his chest, wrapped his arms around her, and kissed her forehead. Meanwhile she lifted her feet up to the couch and lay on her side over his chest.

Victoria had been haunted since childhood by the dramatic accounts of the death at childbirth of her uncle Leopold's wife, who was also her cousin from her father's side.

“No, you don’t have to get pregnant if we can avoid it. But one day that will happen. The precaution we used sometimes is not always effective... It can always happen...”

“But until it happens...”

“There are other ways to avoid pregnancy, but I don’t think you're going to like them very much...”

“What are they?” She asked curiously.

“Well, one of them implies that you insert a small moist sponge, tied with a ribbon, inside your body, which will absorb the seed preventing it from entering the uterus...”

She found the procedure strange and asked:

“And others?”

“Men can also wear protection of linen, silk, animal bladder skin or gut, which collects the seed preventing it from being spilled inside the women...”

“I see...”

She didn’t, she had never seen it, but she imagined how it could be...

“But all this can be uncomfortable to use or minimize pleasure... And these methods are not always effective either.” He warned.

“And a new life must be God’s will... Maybe we shouldn’t interfere...” She remarked, looking for his opinion about the Church's condemnation of any means that would prevent conception.

“What we did was just postpone this occurrence.” He said in order to soothe her. “And we can continue to postpone... When it fails, it was because God wanted to...”
Always the practical view of reality!

“Hmm…”

“But there’s another option…” He said.

“What?”

“The one that is absolutely effective in avoiding conception!”

“Yes?” She asked in the hope of finding the most convenient procedure.

“Abstinence! Do you want to opt for this solution?” He asked smiling, already deducing the answer.

“No!” Victoria answered smiling.

He kissed her mouth quickly.

“But I know you would like to have a baby, right?” She asked.

“I do… very much… But I don’t want you to have a child just for me…”

“No… I want it to! But I’m scared of childbirth…”

He kissed her forehead again.

“A few months ago my cousin, Queen Maria II of Portugal, had a horrible labor that lasted 32 hours and her daughter was born dead… Her spirits, when she wrote me to tell the story, were the worst you can imagine… I really like Maria ever since we met in Kensington when we were both 9 years old. Her life has not been easy…” Victoria told him worriedly.

There was an inevitable identification with those women who, like her, had to be subjected to the determinism of their condition as women and queens. Whether they were sovereigns by birth, or queen consorts. All in the same boat! The inevitability of the reign’s afflictions, and the suffering of bringing children into the world!

“Don’t worry about that now Victoria. You're not even pregnant yet. And when that happens, a long time will pass before giving birth… And you will always have excellent medical care…” William tried to reassure her.

She made an unconvinced smile.

He felt that everything he said made no sense nor was effective to calm her, for the danger of childbirth was indeed eminent, and therefore the fear of this moment among women was very real.

After a few seconds she said:

“Last night I did that thing you told me…”

He was stunned by the information, a bit sideways to the subject they were talking about.

“Yes?”

“It was good! I imagined you were there with me…”
William felt himself pulsate.

“Do you do that too?” She asked curiously.

“Yes Victoria, I do, too.” He replied disconcerted.

“Imagination has an incredible power!” She remarked and then asked, “When you do it, do you think of me, as well?”

“Of course! How do you think I survived all these years when I wanted you, but could not have you?”

She smiled.

Then he added:

“You know, Victoria. That is also a way to avoid pregnancy.”

“But it’s not the same!” She complained.

“In fact, it's not…”

After a few minutes of silence on his chest she said:

“When we get married, I want you to do it the natural way, I don’t want you to continue to avoid like you've done so far. Because that is not the best for you either... When we are married, pregnancy will no longer be a problem and, despite my fears, I want to have a child of yours because I know it is very important to you, it will make you happy and I also want it... The fact that I know how essential this is for you alone, gives me immense strength. Let's leave it to God to determine when I'm going to get pregnant and what will happen next…”

He kissed her.

She knew how a child would bring immense happiness to him, and although she didn’t want to think about it, she also knew that for him time went by faster...

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On the eve of the wedding Victoria granted William the Royal Highness treatment by marriage, as authorized by the Parliament. She also bestowed upon him the honor of knight of the Order of the Garter. After the marriage he would receive the title of Duke of Edinburgh. From today on he left the House of Lords. It would be unfeasible to stay there being married to the Queen.

The Archbishop of Canterbury asked Victoria if he should maintain or suppress the sermon of obedience to the sovereign that the consort was to pronounce. She replied that, indeed, he should suppress it; she wanted to be married as a woman, and not as a queen!

After the final rehearsal at the chapel the bride and groom dined in Buckingham with members of both families and other guests that would attend the wedding. Among them was William's sister and brother-in-law, Emily Lamb and Lord Palmerston, as well as his younger brother Frederick Lamb and the woman he would marry a few days later, on 25th February, Alexandrina von Maltzan. Curiously Frederick, who was 59, was about to marry a 23-year-old woman, just as William, 62, was going to marry Victoria, with only 22. But Frederick was described as being as handsome and carefree at sixty as he had been at twenty and five, and Victoria thought the same about William! The Queen liked Alexandrina, who besides being her age was a nice and lively
woman. At dinner were also Victoria’s half-brothers: Carl Emich, 3rd Prince of Leiningen, married to Countess Maria von Klebelsberg; and Feodora of Leiningen, married to Prince Ernst I of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. As well as Aunt Adelaide, widow of King William IV, Victoria's immediate predecessor.

But after dinner, when the ladies moved into the piano room while the men, as was tradition, were still drinking in the dining room, it was Emily who approached Victoria.

“Your Majesty, may I?” She asked for permission to sit next to the Queen on the couch where she was.

“Of course, Emily, sit down.”

Emily sat down and said:

“I am sorry, Your Majesty, but I would like to say a few words about William since you are getting married tomorrow.”

“Yes of course. But do not be so formal with me, from tomorrow on we will belong to the same family.” Asked the Queen.

Emily nodded and began:

“I love my brother.”

Victoria smiled, but she did not understand what she intended.

Emily continued:

“That's why I lamented every day he was married to Caroline. That woman destroyed 23 years of his life, and even left him with emotional sequels that remain to this day. In principle he could not dare marry her because he had no social status and fortune that would allow him to marry Caroline Ponsonby. But in 1805, with the death of our elder brother, he became the heir to our father's title and estate, and his political career began. Then he could marry her. How I wished he had never done it! Caroline saw life as a drama in which she was the heroine, and when life did not match her ideals, she reinvented it, living in a world of unreality. He could not live up to her notion of how a husband should be. Their marriage became a sequence of quarrels and reconciliations. By 1810, they already lived separate lives. William devoted himself to his parliamentary work, while Caroline developed friendships that would feed her ego with women and intellectuals of dubious reputations, and even violent and public flirtations...”

“It was not easy, he told me…” Remarked Victoria when she had a chance amid the enthusiasm with which Emily spoke.

“Everything in his family life went wrong: marriage, children, scandals related to alleged extramarital affairs... Me and Frederick called Caro a “little beast”. Not even the wedding day itself went without incident. At the end of the service, the increasingly hysterical Caroline had a fit of anger and had to be whisked away from the room. This explosion of emotion made William become very protective of Caroline, relieving her of anything that could disturb her.”

“I did not know of that particular episode of the wedding day...” Said Victoria.

“He was very condescending to her… When the affair with Byron got known, he did nothing... And then he was reluctant to divorce her, even though everyone told him to do so. He felt responsible for Caro. When in 1816 she published that terrible novel that ridiculed him, his initial
reaction was to never see her again, but incomprehensibly when people began to cut off relations with her, he relented and stayed together with that madwoman. One day he said to me, “We will stay or fall together.”

“She had no one else, and she really needed help, and only he could help her…” Victoria justified.

“That is true... My brother is an excellent man! But very fragile emotionally, although it may not appear so. He very much needs to be loved.” Emily said in a kind of plea to Victoria.

“I know.”

“In all his life, you were the best thing that ever happened to him, Ma’am! Ever since he became your prime minister and personal secretary everything in him changed. His state of mind is another completely new and vibrant, the joy, the brightness in the eyes...”

“Yes, I know that.” Victoria said feeling emotional. What Emily had just told her was no novelty, but to hear it from a third person made the meaning of it even larger and more real.

“So it may seem strange what I am going to say, but I need to thank you for what you did for him.”

“Oh, there is nothing to thank me for! What he did for me is priceless, too. But yes, I understand what you mean and I am glad that you are happy with our union.”

“Very much! But he needs you to continue to support him... How should I put it...? Now that you are going to have a different relationship from what you have had until now, that you are going to be husband and wife, there may be moments in the future when he needs to be supported in his emotions, times in which he is more silent, sadder, more angry... It does not mean that there is a problem with you. Sometimes it is the anguish of the past that returns, and he has gone through very difficult things...”

“I know it was difficult and I appreciate your warning. I will be attentive to his emotions. The anniversaries of his son’s death, for example, are often complicated...” Victoria said.

“Oh yes! The son is a huge grief! He did everything for him. Imagine that when he went to Ireland in 1827, he took Augustus with him, which I considered madness! But Caro was also in a miserable condition and he wanted to be able to look after his son.”

Victoria was shocked.

“He did not tell me he had taken his son with him to Ireland!” Cried the Queen.

“It is normal. He tends to hide his acts of greater nobility! At that time Caroline's health began to deteriorate even more. She was tired of life but she finally calmed down. It seemed at that moment that her affection was all to her husband. William was absent in Ireland, but by this time the letters between them were tender and affectionate. Then in 1828 she eventually passed away.”

They were in silent for a few moments. Then Emily added:

“I would also like to thank you for having authorized my marriage to Lord Palmerston. I am very happy in my marriage, although initially my brothers disapproved.”

The men began to enter the room.

“You are welcome.” Victoria said. “And the relationship between your husband and your brother Frederick is appeased?” She asked.
“Yes, relations between the two of them have become friendlier. We also like Alexandrina very much and this has favored relations among all.”

William approached them and Emily took the opportunity to get up and leave for Victoria to stay alone with him.

Victoria looked at him. He was splendid!

Without sitting William asked:

“What was Emily talking to you about?”

Smiling Victoria got up from the couch and said:

“She was telling me that she is very fond of you, that she is very happy with our marriage, and that she is very happy with hers.”

“How nice…” Remarked William, who knew Emily well and assumed that the content of the conversation had been much wider. Women!

Victoria and William made their way to the balcony lit by two high-standing chandeliers. No one followed them. They were getting married the next day, and their relationship had always followed its own rules.

They were next to each other by the balustrade. They stood there in silence without saying anything to each other. It was not needed. The presence of each of them was enough for the other to feel like in Paradise.

She heard him breathing deeply. She smiled to herself. How familiar! The diversity of emotions that the sound of that breath transmitted to her!

He noticed that she smiled. He looked at her.

She looked to him and smiled again.

“I see you're happy!” He said.

“Very! I couldn’t be more! Are you happy too?”

“You know I am!” He answered putting his right hand in the pocket of his coat.

He had brought her a wedding gift, as was tradition. He reached out his hand for her with a small box.

“It's my wedding gift. I hope you like it.”

She smiled again in anticipation of what she was about to find, and opened the small box. Inside on a blue velvet lining was a white gold brooch, porcelain and enamel, in the shape of a white orchid.

Victoria was delighted with the piece. It had a special meaning that they both knew very well.

“It doesn’t have diamonds…” He remarked.

“I don’t need you to give me diamonds! I just need your love! It's beautiful!” Victoria exclaimed in an open laugh as she stretched to kiss him.
He grabbed her by the waist, placed his hands on the end of her back and kissed her.

He loved her waist, and that area at the end of her back was of a beauty impossible to describe. The shape of that part of her body, the way the opening of the dress settled there, how she moved as she walked, and he watched her from the back...

“A prince would have offered you diamonds…” He said, holding her tight.

“But he wouldn’t give me the love that you offer!”

“It was made especially for you, and there are three reasons for it not to have diamonds…” He said.

There trapped in his arms, with the box and brooch in her hand, she looked at him questioningly.

Then he explained:

“First because you already have many diamonds…”

She smiled.

“Then, because although you like diamonds, I know that you also like simple pieces…”

William made a long wait before continuing.

“And finally because you are the diamond! And the brooch is only complete when you put it on!”

She was touched by that romantic creativity!

“Oh my love! You are so handsome and so sweet! And you understand me so well! What matters to me is not value, in fact, but meaning. And besides the telescope you gave me, the porcelain box and the letters you wrote to me, I have nothing more significant than this brooch. I'm going to wear it tomorrow to decorate my wedding dress.”

They kissed.

Chapter End Notes

Although marriage is morganatic, Lord M's position is almost equivalent to Albert's, which, as you recall, had an inferior status in relation to Victoria's uncles. The only practical consequence of morganatic marriage is that their children can not inherit the throne. Marriage would only be called "royal marriage" if Victoria married to a man of a royal lineage, but Lord M had no royal blood. A marriage called "royal" would never be possible. In real life, if Victoria and Lord M had decided to marry, she would have been forced to abdicate and Cumberland would be king of the United Kingdom. In real life, to me, it does not seem possible (although it could have happened by unexpected vicissitudes) that the throne and the marriage could be maintained at the same time. In fiction, the only solution I had, to keep the story credible, was that a morganatic wedding could be authorized, assuming that it could be approved by Parliament because anything can happen in a vote and sometimes the results are unpredictable, depending on the impact of the ideas of each faction. The disadvantages that Lord M received, comparing to a husband of royal blood, are consistent with his lowest social status, and evidence something very important in the
context of this story which is the fact that, for him, the love for Victoria is above all social and economic advantages. What matters to him is being the husband, no matter how that was achieved. On the other hand, Victoria accepts that her children do not inherit the throne, that there is no continuity of their generations to bear the Crown, for the love that she has for Lord M. And for the children, the fact that they do not inherit the throne is indifferent since they will already receive from their parents sufficient status and wealth.
William shaved, bathed, and put on his gala garment of officer of the British royal armies.

It was today! It was now that it would become true!

But it was also now that it started to get scary.

He hadn’t felt this way the day he had married Caro. At that time he didn’t have the life experience that he had today, he couldn’t have it... And he didn’t feel the weight of responsibility. Besides no wedding could compare to the one he was about to do. No one married the Queen of England. A woman over whom no one had precedence. Only one man in the world did it. And it was he who was going to marry her! He who had every impediment to being able to do so! He would have to master his nerves and survive this day of ceremony, protocol, formalities, church, banquet, guests, looks, comments, circumstantial conversations... Until finally at night he could feel her body again close to his! Have her in his arms, kiss her, and possess her! Today he would have to do it differently. He would think about it later...

After all the years that had passed and all the barriers that had been surpassed today they would overcome the last one!

Brother Frederick was there in his home to accompany him to the chapel, and then to the altar. Noticing William’s nervousness he said:

“Come on, brother? Calm down! You have already overcome the hardest part, which was getting here. Today you only have to enjoy your wedding day with the Queen of England!”

“It’s easy for you to talk. Your marriage will be much more trivial...”

“And I’m completely in love with that woman! And she for me, I am sure!”

“I don’t doubt that either!”

“Then do not tell me you have doubts about...tonight...” Frederick teased smiling.

“No, my problem is not tonight, it is to survive from now until then...”

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Victoria woke up early. The expectation was great and it didn’t let her sleep anymore.

She went to the window. The day was beautiful with sun and blue sky. As joyful as her emotions on this wonderful day in which she would marry William Lamb at last! Or the always hers Lord M! She remembered the time when they were just the Queen and her Prime Minister and private secretary Lord M. She recalled their first meeting in Kensington and the day, when he first entered that room where she was now, she had attributed him the exclusive name of Lord M! She thought about what she felt for him then and how her feelings had evolved. She remembered inside what she had felt when she loved him in secret; when she had the courage to go to Brocket Hall and tell him what she felt; when he refused her; when she loved him even more and suffered because she could not have him; when she wanted him to do something to her that she didn’t know exactly what
it was, but knew that existed, especially when Skerrett had explained to her what happened between a man and a woman in the privacy of a bed... She felt again the excitement she had felt then when she had imagined that her Lord M could touch her more than was allowed, that he hugged her, or that he kissed her not just in her right hand... Or when she imagined that she could touch his chest exposed in the opening of his shirt or kiss his face...

And after all time had passed and he had already done so much with her and her with him! And today was the culmination of a difficult journey, of a gigantic struggle to reach the top, with the realization of a wedding with him. She was happy! She had achieved everything she wanted! She didn’t need anything else!

She couldn’t stand the wait until the wedding hour and sent a note to William:

"My beloved William,
I hope you slept well! Today is the happiest day of my life!
Let me know when you are ready.
Forever yours!
Victoria"

She was combed by Skerrett. She decided not to wear a diamond tiara. She preferred a crown of natural orange blossoms, a symbol of fertility, to fasten the veil.

She put on her magnificent white dress with the help of Skerrett and Lehzen.

William sent the answer with the bearer:

"My dear,
What I feel on this day is easier to imagine than to describe!
I am ready and I am going to St. James now.
With all my love!
William"

Victoria refused to wear the royal scarlet robe. This was her day as a woman, not as queen! And she didn’t want to overshadow William.

She chose the diamond necklace and earrings offered by the Sultan of Turkey; placed in the center of the dress neckline the brooch William had given her the day before; and fixed on the shoulders the great Collar of the Order of the Garter with the Great George, both of the 17th century, made of gold, diamonds and enamel.

The bouquet, simple, contained bunches of myrtle, symbol of eternal love.

When she looked in the mirror after completely ready she was stunning! She smiled with immense happiness!

It was just how she had imagined!

That’s how she wanted to marry William!

***

Outside the palace of St. James – the royal residence before Victoria had decided to live in Buckingham – the populace crowded because the wedding was going to take place in its royal chapel. After all it was not every day that there was a royal wedding! And of a queen heiress! Since when was there no joy worthy of the name in the royal family? With the added factor, which
sharpened people's curiosity, that the wedding would be with a man who for all reasons was not supposed to! And more extraordinary, the Queen loved him!

Inside the chapel – adorned with banners of noble houses, candle chandeliers, and bouquets of roses from Brocket Hall, and musicians and singers lined up – the guests, aristocrats and kings filled the available seats. Obviously there were several personalities whose absence was justified: Uncle Cumberland, Uncle Leopold of Belgium, and cousin Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. However Cousin Ernest of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, who remained single, decided to accept the invitation and attend the wedding. He understood that Victoria had not married his brother, with whom she didn’t identify herself with; he liked her very much and wanted to share in her happiness, and knew what it was like to love someone he could not have, so he fully supported that her cousin had managed to defeat everything and everyone to marry the man she loved.

William arrived by carriage to St. James. It was a bit scary to have to go out and face that crowd. Although he had been a public man for many years, the habit of facing audiences and producing speeches, that was unlike anything else! Now he was the Queen's groom. And when they left the chapel he would be the Queen's husband. And he had never been in that position before!

He got out of the carriage and smiled at the people around him. It was all he could do.

White pearl cashmere pants ending below the knee; red coat with gold buttons, and black cuffs and collar embroidered in gold; pearl white socks and black shoes. And also the insignia of the Order of the Garter: on the chest the cross and necklace, fastened by two white satin bows on the golden epaulets, and the bind on the left leg below the knee.

The trumpets resounded and William, almost pale and very attentive, received the homage usually reserved for the monarchs.

He entered the chapel, accompanied by Brother Frederick, and walked to the altar.

It was a difficult course, given the nervousness that was aggravated by having all of England and the world with their eyes fixed on him. He felt the weight of the eyes of all those people on him, and the weight of the thoughts they would have, as well as the words they whispered among themselves, those that had already been spoken at home and would be said when they left... How had he got there? They would ask for certain. But he asked himself the same!

At one point of the trajectory Emma smiled at him.

William returned.

He saw Emily and Palmerston.

He didn’t see anyone else, nor did he want to. If he didn’t see the shapes of the faces clearly, it was as if they were not there.

Finally at the top of the chapel! He positioned himself in the right place, with his back to the entrance, and waited.

With the arrival of Victoria in the royal carriage, necessarily accompanied by her mother and her Mistress of the Robes Harriet Sutherland, the ovation of the population increased.

She was happy! From Buckingham's windows and along the way she had seen that there were many people on the street, just as on the day of her coronation, but now there was still more people, numbers that associated with the greetings she heard gave her firm conviction that the people of England ultimately supported her marriage. She didn’t like crowds, but that day the
presence of the crowd was important because it was a sign of support!

The bells of St. James were ringing.

Victoria stepped out of the carriage, made her way to the chapel accompanied by the Duke of Sussex, who would take her to the altar, and waited for her dress to be arranged and the procession to be formed – the Prime Minister at the front, her twelve bridesmaids behind holding the tail of the dress on either side, and in the end Harriet.

It was now! She was ready! William would be up there waiting for her! She felt a shiver of anticipation and took a deep breath.

William had already spent some time waiting when the music broke out in the chapel, and the choir began to sing. He felt a tightness in his stomach. This was the sign that she was already there and was about to walk to him! He swallowed.

The crossing of the nave of the chapel, leaning on the hand of the Duke of Sussex, began. Victoria was happy and anxious, not exactly nervous. She had made such walks on other occasions as in her coronation or in the opening of the Parliament. She used to have William a step behind her or in front of her, in a position where she could see the expressions of the face that, in silence, gave her indications on what to do. Now he was in the back, but with his back to her. She watched the contour of that elegant, familiar silhouette whose vision gave her so many different emotions. She longed to get close to him!

He couldn’t turn around, but he wanted to do so. He knew how the opening entourage was organized. In the front would come the Prime Minister raising the ceremonial sword or sword of honour. If she had married Albert, he would have been the one to carry that same sword, to have to walk through the nave of the chapel and to watch her promise eternal love to another man! He thought that if that had happened he would not have been able to stand up! He would have fallen on his knees in the nave of the chapel under the weight of that sword. The thought itself was agonizing! He took a deep breath.

Emma noticed the movement of his shoulders up and down at that moment, and couldn’t help but feel compassion. How wonderful that everything had went in the best way!

She was coming to him. He looked to the left as she positioned herself there. First turning back to deliver the bouquet to one of the ladies who accompanied her, then turning to look at him too!

They smiled at each other. Their eyes said the same thing: at last!

He had never seen anything more beautiful! She looked gorgeous, white, pure as she was, the sight of an angel! The cut of the neckline of the dress enhanced Victoria's sensual cleavage. The brooch he had given her the night before was attached to the center of her neckline!

He would have taken her hand and she would have taken his hand to calm him down, as curiously enough he was much more nervous than she was! She realized he was trembling. This wonderful man, full of the experience of decades of life, a career politician, was nervous on his wedding day! This man who had guided and calmed her in every moment of their life together, from the most public to the most intimate, was nervous!

They turned to the front.

The Archbishop of Canterbury began the ceremony.

After some time came the crucial moment. The wedding vows.
“William, will you accept this woman to be your wife, and live together in marriage under the blessing of God? Will you love her, comfort her, and honor her in health and sickness for the rest of your lives?” The Archbishop asked.

“Oh, God, how could he ask such a thing? That was all he had done since that morning in Kensington! To love her, comfort her, and honor her... And that was all he would continue to do!” He thought.

“Yes!” He replied firmly, in spite of the inner nervousness.

“Victoria, will you accept this man to be your husband, and live together in marriage under the blessing of God? Will you obey and serve him, love him, and respect him in health and sickness for the rest of your lives?” The Archbishop asked again.

“Of course, with all my strength!” She thought.

“Yes!”

There were several emotional people at the moment: Emma, Harriet, Skerret, Emily. And even the most reluctant about this union: Lehzen and the Duchess of Kent.

Then he could turn to Victoria, and she to him, for the placement of the wedding ring.

He took her open left hand finally feeling her comfortable physical touch, and placed the ring on her middle finger saying the words:

“With this Ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

It was all true!

With my body I thee worship... In every way...

Wellington smiled ironically when he heard the part “with all my worldly goods I thee endow.”

The cannons of Hyde Park and the Tower of London thundered at the moment the ring was placed on Victoria's finger. It was one o'clock in the afternoon!

“I declare you husband and wife.” The Archbishop of Canterbury finally said.

They would have kissed in that moment! But in public it was not acceptable.

Victoria and William smiled!

Her eyes were even wider and bluer than usual, in a lake of tears of joy!

His eyes inevitably tear-stained.

They held hands, turned to the guests who filled the chapel, and applause was heard!

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At the exit of the chapel, where the sun shone to illuminate the knot, a waiting crowd greeted them. Over two hundred thousand subjects!

Victoria and William entered the royal carriage that would take them to the banquet in
Buckingham.

He grabbed her left hand and said:

“You look beautiful!”

“You look very handsome, too! And I'm happy!” She exclaimed, smiling.

“And I don’t even have the words to describe what I feel!”

She squeezed his hand and smiled again.

On the way they beckoned to the vibrant crowd that shouted their names and launched a sea of flowers, a blessing for the rarity of that union of love that had so many obstacles to transpose to become true.

Already in the palace the shouts of the crowd continued outside, in a collective refusal to closing the public celebrations.

Victoria looked at William.

“I don’t want to separate from the people that are down there because of us yet. I cannot stay inside!”

“What are you going to do?” He asked in surprise.

“William, I have an idea... Come with me!”

Before general astonishment, the Queen ordered the doors of the balcony to be opened. She stepped outside with William by her side, and they walked to the balustrade so that the people crowded outside could see them again. The sensation was indescribable with the immediate elevation of the global cry in the sight of the bride and groom.

Victoria felt immense pride in her chest for being there with William at her side. The pride of the winners! The pride of having that wonderful man as husband!

William grabbed and squeezed her left hand. As she felt his hand on hers she looked at him. There was something in him today that needed her constant touch.

“William, is everything alright?”

“I'm nervous... Do you think I could be nervous on the day of my wedding to the Queen of England?”

“Of course, but you have no reason for it, my love! Already in the chapel you trembled...”

“I think the weight of responsibility is falling over me today and... this is all new to me, this condition of husband... and the situations where I will have to be by your side...”

“That doesn’t even sound like you. With all your experience in public life and all that you have done for me, teaching me and guiding me in public acts, giving me courage to overcome my fears...”

“But this is different from being a prime minister or having any other political office, and it was much easier to convey tranquility to you, when it was only you in this position, than for me to rest easy in my new place...”
She smiled tenderly at him.

He went on:

“Like this we're doing now... waving from the balcony... I've never done this before, I feel ridiculous... I don’t even know if the people down there expect me to do it or if they're just there for you...”

“No, they're there for both of us. I didn’t get married alone, they know it was with you and they came...”

“Then I need you to guide me in these things, too…” William asked.

“Very well my Love! Keep waving. I think you do it very royally!” She remarked, teasing him.

He laughed.

“Don’t worry my darling, tonight when we're at Brocket Hall I will be all right. All this will already have passed and there is the quietest place in the world...”

“And if you're not calm yet you'll be, I promise!” She assured him, looking at him from the side.

He laughed, understanding the meaning of what she said.

It was the debut of the balcony of Buckingham Palace. Victoria decreed after that the tradition would be maintained to share with the people the happy days of the kingdom!

***

The banquet followed, and then the sweets and the wedding cake that they cut together. The cake, armed on several floors, weighed 150 kilos and it took four men to lift it. It was decorated with small branches of flowers and cupids, and on the top were the figures of the bride and groom. At William's feet a dog, symbol of fidelity, and at Victoria's feet a couple of turtledoves, a sign of eternal love.

Victoria tossed the bouquet as William took the opportunity to approach Wellington, who was biting a slice of cake.

“Duke! I have not yet thanked you conveniently for what you have done, and which has permitted, against all expectations, the realization of this marriage and the maintenance of the Queen on the throne.” William thanked him.

“My dear Melbourne, it is difficult to estimate the value of the teachings which the Queen received from your hands in these early years of reign as her closest adviser to England and the empire. In the crucial years that formed her and when it was tried to overthrow her, it was you who were always by her side. You may not be a prince of royal blood, but it seems to me that you are the best indicated man to take the place of the Queen's husband.”

“Thank you, Duke!”

“And neither I nor England would stand Cumberland!” The old marshal finished smiling.

William smiled, too.

***
The party ended at 5:00 p.m. The bride and groom changed in separate rooms and traveled to Brocket Hall with a small entourage of servants and a bodyguard on horseback. Victoria with a white dress, but simpler and more practical for travel than her wedding dress.

Now they could both travel in royal and closed carriages without embarrassment. Thus it was permissible for them to enjoy each other's physical proximity along the way. After a day with lots of people around, in which they had barely managed to touch each other, they just wanted to be alone! But the trip to Brocket still took two hours, which was exhausting, and they would still have to deal with the crowds that, in some parts of the course, packed the road at the passage of the royal procession. Long journeys and crowds had always been exhausting for Victoria. It was an annoyance not being able to travel like ordinary mortals. But if they had traveled elsewhere it would still be worse. The journey to Windsor, for example, took four hours.

William and Victoria entered through the front door of the Brocket Hall house, as the carriage that had brought them and the accompanying entourage went through the outside of the mansion to unload their luggage in another wing of the building and to unharness the horses. In the entrance hall were the butler, two servants, and two maids waiting to receive orders on what to provide. Brocket Hall transformed from that day into a royal residence and the logistics of the house would become more complex.

It was 7:30 p.m. William asked that dinner be served at 8:00 in the smallest dining room upstairs, and gave express orders for the plates to be placed on the table so as to put one seat on the right side of the other. Although the table was smaller than that of the large dining room, if it was placed with the two seats in front of each other, as he supposed the servants would do, he and Victoria would be too far apart.

The servants left and the bride and groom were alone.

William looked at the main staircase of the house in front of him and then at Victoria looking amused.

She wondered what he was thinking.

Without her expecting it, he picked her up in his arms.

She laughed, put her arms around his neck and teased him:

“You will not be able to climb the stairs while carrying me.”

“Of course, I will!”

He started to climb up the stairs and she laid her face on his shoulder saying:

“I love it when you pick me up.”

“And I love having you in my arms...”

William carried Victoria to the first-floor living room.

He put her on the floor.

They stayed there to rest from the journey for a few minutes while a bustle of servants unloaded and arranged luggage, prepared the room, finished dinner, and set the table.

They kissed and kissed and kissed each other…
Someone knocked on the door.

The butler entered after being authorized and informed that dinner could be served.

The meal went by with the attendance of the servants. When it was over William couldn’t stand to have more people in the same space as the two of them! If they wanted to have more liberty, the procedures at Brocket Hall had to become more informal or it would seem they were in the royal palace.

He dismissed the servants.

When they were alone Victoria, who had been seated at William's right, rose from her chair and sat on his lap as he finished the glass of Port.

He put his left arm around her waist as he held the glass with his right hand.

She kissed him. He tasted of port wine! It was good!

He set the glass down so he could wrap both hands around her waist.

“We're married, William!” She exclaimed, pressing her forehead against his forehead, and cupping his face with both hands, as if she had to verbalize it to make it real.

“Nothing and no one can stand between us now!” He added, lifting her dress to press his hand on her left thigh.

He kissed her again, then going down her jaw. He kissed her behind her ear and sucked her offered neck, as he began to open the upper clasps on the back of her dress.

Victoria adored to be the target of these caresses, understood that he was excited, but moved away a little for him to stop.

“William, I'm going to the bedroom so Skerrett can help me undress, and then you'll go meet me there, yes?”

“ICan undress you, we don’t need Skerrett...” He warned in amazement.

“But it will be easier if I'm already in my nightgown...” Victoria tried to persuade him.

“But I love undressing you, I see no inconvenience in doing so...” He insisted, not understanding her choice.

“You will not be disappointed, I promise...” She finished, giving him a sly look.

He surrendered, smiling.

***

In William's room, which was to be of both of them, and which had been previously heated by the burning fire, Victoria was helped by the dresser to take off her clothes and loosen her hair and, once in her nightgown, she dismissed her.

Before leaving, Skerrett wished her a good night and smiled at her with a knowing look that Victoria understood.

William, on the other hand, undressed in a guest room on the other side of the hall.
When he entered the room, dressed in his nightshirt and robe, it was strangely darkened. All the candles in the various candlesticks had been extinguished, and only the burning fire scarcely lit the room. Then he saw the outline of her naked body in front of the window.

Ever since he had made her a woman the relationship with her own body had changed. She felt more liberated, more awake, knew exactly the effect that certain gestures had on her and which were her body’s most sensitive places that she liked him to explore in different ways. And to feel him inside her, his life inside her, was of course the most exceptional thing a woman could feel!

He realized that she was surprising him, and understood that she had begun to take initiative, as opposed to the previous times in which she let herself be guided by him and returned. She had always been very receptive in bed from the start, but the initiative was usually not from her. Maybe before she thought the initiative had to start from him or maybe she had never thought about it, and now she was just freeing herself. Learning and freeing.

And that was it; she was learning and releasing herself.

William smiled. Without taking his eyes off her, he stripped off the robe that he threw on a chair and walked to Victoria. As he was about to reach her, he grabbed the fabric of his nightshirt behind his neck with both hands, pulled it up and stripped off his shirt in one swift movement, throwing it to the floor. With the fiery look of a burning man, he grabbed her by the waist with his right hand, pressed as much of his skin as possible against the skin of her body, with his left hand lifted her hair up in the nape area, and kissed her on the neck and then on the mouth viscerally.

She corresponded by kissing and hugging him with equal fervor. His body tied to hers was an extraordinary sensation!

Her skin, soft and desirable, brushing against his, made William catch fire! He thought that now he could do anything he wanted with her! He guided her backwards to the wall by the window as he kissed her and licked her down from her mouth to her neck, shoulders, chest, and breasts.

She felt his member rise against her, touching her belly, and then tightened between them.

“Oooh...” She sighed. “I need you, Lord M!”

In his head the designation fell weird in context! For a few seconds he stopped kissing her as that set of letters and their meaning entered his brain and reorganized.

In these seconds she waited expectantly for the effect of this designation at that moment.

“For how long had she not called him that?” He asked himself. Since they had been physically together for the first time, except in the presence of other people. Then he realized. She hoped he would respond in the same way.

To hide the fact that he had stopped for a few seconds, he kissed her again at the base of her neck and then stopped, looked into her burning eyes, saying in a low, drawn tone of voice that excited her:

“Do you need my assistance... Ma'am?”

“Yes...”

He liked to see her trapped between him and the wall and, pressing her more, asked:

“Where?”
“You know where…”

“No. You have to tell me, Ma’am!”

She brought her mouth to his right ear.

“In the middle of my legs…” Victoria whispered in his ear and kissed his earlobe.

He felt himself rise up even more, and put his right hand between her legs.

She closed her eyes, opened her mouth and took a deep breath, at the same time facilitating the placement of his hand by bending her knees and pulling her thighs apart, causing her body to descend slightly along the wall.

He lifted her body up again with his hand, saying:

“I will give you everything you need, Ma’am!”

She contracted the pelvic muscles and the upper part of her thighs around his hand.

“Then give me… everything you have… Lord M, please!” She replied back with a drawn voice and dilated pupils. Hands around his neck, which she adored.

Then she relieved the pressure, letting him move his hand on her.

He ran his fingers softly and slowly in the outer part of the folds of flesh.

She moaned.

Then he suddenly pressed the volume of flesh between his fingers: the thumb pushing the mount of Venus down, and the other fingers pushing the lips from the crotch up.

“Oh, Lord M!” She exclaimed deliriously at the exceptional, unspeakable sensation of having her femininity stuck for seconds between his fingers. “I’ve missed you so much…” She said then emotional, almost on the verge of tears, in an inner mixture of affection for that man that went from the purest care to the most audacious lust.

This woman made him crazy! He grabbed her left thigh, lifted her leg from the floor, placed it at a right angle, and inserted himself in her vociferously, emitting a snore and pressing her body against the wall.

Victoria vibrated with the sound and the compression!

“Do you like this, Ma’am?”

“Oh yes…! I am all yours; you can do with me everything you want!”

To get more inside her he also lifted her right leg, supporting her with his arms under her thighs and his hands on her buttocks, which rose her torso up along the wall.

“It's so deep…” She remarked.

“You really like to fuck!” He said in that velvet, drawn voice.

F**k? She did not know the word. But by the context it must be one of the ways of designating joining of the flesh.
“I’m going to fuck all of you today, Ma’am!” He exclaimed, as he moved inside her with firm impulses, repeated in a spaced manner.

The determination with which he had said that associated to the position she was in was a promise of originality and pleasure!

As he kissed her, licked and sucked her breasts, Victoria felt his full length embedded inside her.

“Keep going, Lord M! I want more…”

He hit her faster.

In that position, lifted from the ground, the weight of her body was all discharged upon his manly, solid member, which penetrated her deeply, without the relieving complacency that horizontal penetration permitted. The intervals between the movements of his hips were shorter, and the limit he reached inside her was always being touched.

“Aaah... please, Lord M, do not stop!”

“No! Only when you ask! You are the queen... I must please you!” He declared in a voice hoarse with desire.

The clash of his body against hers produced a sound that was also exciting. A sound of friction between two wet bodies. In a way the inner impact even slightly hurt, but it was good! In the abyss of the moment she arched her back and pushed his body forward so she could project hers back stretching her arms but still clinging to his neck. Then she clung to him harder and projected herself forward, sticking her nails urgently on his back.

Now that she had moved away from the wall, her whole body was supported by his arms. Crazy! For both.

“You're so good... Ma’am! It is a privilege to be able to serve the Queen like this!” He exclaimed.

The determination with which he moved her and deepened in her, made it very intense, in a hallucinated desire for it to materialize.

He leaned her against the wall again, unexpectedly stopped moving, and asked:

“Do you enjoy being fucked like this?”

So he would stop at a time like this and ask such a question?

“Yes! Yes, yes…” She answered urgently.

“Then ask me to do it, Ma’am!”

Ask? She would do anything he wanted! Victoria did not clearly distinguish his eyes in the darkness of the room, but she saw the glow they emanated when she asked:

“Please, Lord M! Fuck me!”

The order had an effervescent effect on both.

He had never been so impetuous before, but she would remember that night forever! Not only because it was the first as a married couple, but by the manner he possessed her. The way he grabbed her and moved inside her after she uttered that sort of magical expression had nothing of
delicate, but was all domination and lewd selfishness. For the short time that followed, unconsciously he saw her only as a piece of flesh of divine contours and volumes that allowed him to satisfy himself. Even so he was aware that his lack of restraint was also exhilarating for Victoria.

She understood that fucking was more than a carnal joining, it was more than “fitting in” as Skerrett had explained. Fuck was delivery without reservations! Delivery of body, mind, heart and soul! Fuck was permission and unlimited pleasure. Fuck was freedom! Surely this was the moment when she felt freer. Just being naked was already an incredible release! Having his body against hers, an overwhelming experience! But being fucked by him allowed her to get out of herself and rise above herself!

“Oh, I can’t hold it anymore, Lord M!”

He went on.

“Please, Lord M!” She begged.

He went on.

From the tone of her voice and the movements of her body he knew she wanted exactly the opposite of what she seemed to beg for!

“Now you’re my Queen! All mine! My queen and my wife!”

She screamed and exclaimed:

“Oh, Lord M!”

The world was cloudy. He snorted and threw himself inside her.

William held her like that in his arms a few seconds, cooling off. Then he lowered Victoria's legs to the floor as he stepped out of her, letting her drip off.

As she put her legs together, she felt the moisture on the skin inside her thighs.

They embraced in silence. Only the sound of their rapid breathing was audible in the room. They were tired. She was light, but he was not as energetic as he had been for acrobatics.

“Oh, it was so good... so good... so good...” She said low and slow between breaths.

He kissed her gently on the mouth, repeatedly.

They walked to the bed and lay on their side, facing each other.

He ran his hand through her hair and pulled it back to reveal her face. He was blown away! He had to tell her.

“Victoria, you don’t know, but... many women don’t reach the peak of pleasure with the ease with which you do...”

“No?” She asked in amazement.

“No. Many of them don’t always get there and others, for that to happen, need outside stimulation... Do you understand?”

She nodded and said:
“Yes, but that is strange... Why is it like this with me?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, maybe you have influence...”

He laughed and agreed.

“Maybe, Victoria, maybe it's my influence!”

She ran her hand over his chest and asked:

“Are you calmer than you were this morning?”

“Oh yes I am! There is no comparison! It was the moment the ceremonies were over that I felt calmer. And at this moment then... I feel like I’m floating!”

He kissed her.

“In time you'll get used to this new role.” She said.

“I think so. But about the performance of different roles... who did you marry this morning?”


“Yes... And tonight you chose to enjoy Lord M?”

“Yes... I missed my Lord M...” She justified in a tender tone of voice and stroking his face.

He smiled and informed her:

“Then when you want any of the others, you need only say...”

She smiled.

“I love you, William!”

“And I love you, Victoria!”

Chapter End Notes

Was the marriage worthy, enough? Did they have all they deserved? What do you think?
Sorry "jcshipperj" for not having the court uniform, but you understand that Lord M had to be entitled to the same costume of a prince. And the court uniform was used by the prime minister...so...
Chapter 20

With his back to the window he woke up with the sun invading the bedroom.

He admired her sleeping serenely beside him: covered up to the breasts, but completely naked. With the light projected on her.

How beautiful she was! She had been afraid of being too short, that it would be an impediment for having a regal posture, but everything about her was harmonious. In the right measure and proportion. The face, the neck, the shoulders, the breasts, the waist, the hips, the thighs... For him there was no woman more beautiful than she! And she had a captivating sweetness and an attractive determination. And now it was true! She was here and she was his! Only his! And she would never be anyone else's! In every inch a queen! In every inch a woman! And he had already kissed every inch of her! She thought she was small, but he thought she was big!

She was so young! He realized suddenly. That was so often forgotten. He contacted with her every day, was used to her physical appearance, and in the daily relationship they had he never treated her as someone lesser than him in terms of maturity. Although, given her inexperience, there had been an obvious need to instruct her in countless things and guide her in so many others. But they had always engaged each other with equality, despite the differences in status and age. Her joviality only became more evident when he felt her silk skin on his hands and lips. But now here like this, in the silence of the bedroom and in this moment of contemplation it was so evident how young she was! How did he get the privilege of having this woman? It still seemed like it was not real. But when he felt on his face her hair scattered on his pillow, it was real. And when she had turned in bed at night in her sleep, and had instinctively searched for his body with her hands and cuddled in his chest... it had become evidently real. And every time he was inside her... so there... it was so real!

She began to open her eyes somewhat reluctantly at the confrontation with the light.

He moved closer to her, casting a shadow over her eyes.

She put her right hand on his chest and closed her eyes again.

He kissed her nose.

She laughed.

He kissed her mouth and she returned, putting her arms around his neck as he placed his body over her.

Her mouth was so sweet!

Their skin in mutual contact!

“Did you sleep well, my love?” He asked.

“Very well! I had never slept so well in my life! And you're still here?”

“Of course, where else could I be?” William asked surprised.

“Well, I guess it's already late and I thought you slept little and woke up early.”
“That was before! When I lived alone, and in my uneasiness I couldn’t sleep and also had no reason to stay in bed... Today all that has changed!”

She smiled.

They kissed.

Then she said:

“We’ll walk together from now on. I always felt alone and you ended my solitude. But more than company I needed a soul mate! And you are my soul mate!”

“Oh, Victoria, if you felt alone, you cannot imagine how I lived and how important it was you entering my life!”

They kissed.

He pressed her lower lip between his teeth and pulled lightly.

His skin on hers, his hands running over her body... She was lost! And from here on she would only find herself after she had been allowed to recover...

He reached with his right hand for the interval between her legs and put his hand and arm under her back, lifting her torso. He turned her over, placing her on her stomach over his body.

He had never grabbed her like this before. She had his right arm between her legs and his hand on her buttocks, while his lips and tongue touched different points below her breasts. Lying over him, her elbows resting on the mattress, the only thing she saw of William was the hair on top of his head and felt his nose between her breasts. She squeezed his arm between her thighs and rubbed her wet femininity on him. It was impossible to describe the sensation of not being able to close her legs more and the leaning of his arm against the center of her body.

He snorted under her and exclaimed:

“You're going to drive me crazy!”

Then he turned her around again, placing her on her back over the bed, resting on the pillows, and placed himself on her right side. He ran his right hand down her lower abdomen and went down inside her legs, which she flexed and pulled away from each other. He kissed her mouth possessively as he ran his fingers repeatedly through the intimate sinuosities of the flesh.

Victoria felt the combined stimulation of the fingers and tongue as overwhelming!

Then, without warning, he inserted his two longer fingers.

She moaned in his mouth. Surprised by the action and delighted by the sensation. When he had stimulated her with his fingers before, she had never tried to find how deep they could reach.

He curved his fingers up and dragged them towards the exit, then pushed them back inside her and repeated the movement.

She moaned again.

“Is it good like this?” He asked.

She nodded with her eyes closed.
Then he inserted a third finger and then pulled them away, dilating her.

Victoria moaned louder in a mixture of discomfort and pleasure.

He had never inserted his fingers on her before. This was a different way of feeling her. In a way this was even more intimate than penetrating her manly. He moved his fingers in and out rhythmically.

Her breath quickened as she gripped his shoulders and neck with both hands.

William placed his thumb in the above central place, which would lead her to delirium, and proceeded to make circular motions.

They kissed each other continuously as he kept the combined movement of his fingers inside and outside her body.

“William...”

“Yes...”

“William... your fingers...”

It was approaching, advancing like a seismic wave! He knew she was about to hit the point by the way she moved in his hand, seeking even more than he offered her, and by the way she clasped his neck with both hands.

“Victoria, look at me!”

She opened her eyes. There were his, green and bright, from where the light that had always guided her radiated!

“Don’t close your eyes.” He asked calmly.

She did as he pleaded.

“Let yourself come, my love! Come to me! Only to me!”

She kept her gaze on his as the wave spread.

Her muscles tightened on his fingers, her hips moved wildly and he knew she was there!

Victoria noticed that this was somehow different and was very good! With closed eyes she would have concentrated on what she felt in the flesh under his fingers, it would be great! But like this she had concentrated on him, his features, and his eyes. The delirious feeling was there all the same, but she was focused on the source of that pleasure. And the source was him! It was that body, that face and those eyes!

He watched the movement of her eyes as she completed in his hand. The way they manifested the delight she felt and how she struggled in the last moments to keep them from closing!

At last she closed her eyes and stopped moving.

He took his hand out of her and lay on his back beside her.

She had completed herself in his hand! Victoria was ecstatic! She lay for a few seconds on her back with eyes closed.
Then she felt him moving over the mattress and opened her eyes.

William was on his knees in the middle of her legs, instilling her to bend them.

She leaned on her elbows to lift her body a little higher up the pillows.

Victoria had always found it a little overwhelming to see him finish outside her. It had not been the most pleasant sight. But now deep down, she could even find some beauty in that action. See him self-stimulating the firm member and then the intermittent jet of the flow that fell on her body. In fact, the sight of that thick white fluid, which felt hot in her belly and in her breasts, was impudent and lustful.

He knew she would be a bit shocked, but he also knew that she didn’t refuse anything and that she adapted quickly.

When he finished he dropped onto the mattress beside her.

She kissed his shoulder, right there, near her.

“Perhaps this is not a very fitting sight for a queen.” He joked.

“For a queen, perhaps not, but it is natural for a woman.” She said with a smile, trying to put sincerity in her voice.

He got up to get a cloth from the lavatory stand in the bedroom and then went back to bed saying:

“Let me clean up the mess I made over you...”

“Thanks!”

Then he lied down again beside her.

More comfortable, she leaned her body against his and they kissed.

“Let’s get up?” She suggested.

“Are you sure?” He asked, smiling at her.

She laughed and said:

“Well, I don’t think we can spend three days in bed, we have to do something else... I’d like to get to know every corner of Brocket Hall.”

***

Breakfast was served in the smaller dining room. A table full of delicious-looking food, and with a stunning view to the lake outside. There was tea, milk, coffee, bread, butter, jams, eggs, fruit, scones, biscuits and a variety of cakes.

They sat at the table. Victoria at William’s right.

The Queen dismissed the servants. They could perfectly serve themselves.

Never a breakfast had been such a wonderful experience as this was for both.

“We had dinner together almost every day, but few times had we breakfast together...” She
“Do you know that I hadn’t eaten a decent breakfast in a long time?” He asked. “And even less in the company of someone...”

She rose from the table with a piece of biscuit in her hand and sat on his lap, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him on the cheek.

“From today on we will always have breakfast together!” She exclaimed and put the last piece of biscuit in her mouth.

As he held her with his left arm around her waist, he wiped his mouth with the napkin and kissed her on the lips.

She looked at the table and saw a bowl with slices of pineapple.

Pineapples were expensive and difficult to get, so it was only consumed by the higher classes.

Victoria pulled the bowl and a fork and began to prick the slices of pineapple with her left hand, still sitting on William's lap and with her right arm around his shoulders.

How liberating it was to be able to behave like an ordinary woman!

She picked another piece of pineapple out of the bowl, but this time she turned her fork in the direction of William's mouth.

He quickly picked up the pineapple and Victoria laughed at the funny gesture.

She continued to take pieces of pineapple from the bowl and shared them between the two of them.

“You're going to spoil me like this, Victoria!”

“You deserve everything! And I like taking care of you. Now you are under my responsibility and I intend to fulfill my duties of wife in an irreproachable way!” She said smiling and tapping slowly with her right hand on his right shoulder.

He laughed.

“What you said last night...” She began.

“What?” He asked not realizing what he meant.

“Fuck.”

He opened his mouth looking surprised, and as he looked at the door for fear someone might have heard, he asked in a low tone:

“Shhh... Victoria, don’t say that so someone can hear!”

“Why? Because it is an obscene word?”

“It is Victoria, it's one of the most obscene words out there that should not be known by respectable ladies, let alone be pronounced by them. Even less queens. Only men and women of bad reputation use that word.”

“But I liked that word!”
“I noticed you liked it.”

“I like being fucked by you!”

“Victoria!”

“There’s nothing in the world better than being fucked by you...”

He kissed her!

***

Today she wanted to see all the rooms of the house. After all, now the house was hers as well, and the last time she had been there, he had not shown her everything.

William explained that it had been his grandfather, Sir Matthew Lamb, 1st Baronet, who had bought the property in 1746 together with Brocket Lea, the oldest house on the south side of the upper reaches of the Lea River, visible from almost everywhere in the property. And that it was he who had ordered to build this house around 1760, designed by the architect Sir James Paine. It was a Palladian mansion, considered one of the best exemplars of the period of George II.

The main staircase was magnificent, and the great hall had been decorated specifically for the entertainment of royalty who frequented the house, such as Victoria’s uncle, King George IV, who was said to have been lover of William’s mother when he was still Prince of Wales. The walls were lined with silk purchased in Paris in 1772, the original furniture had been made by Chippendale, the ceiling had been painted by Francis Wheatley, and the seats on the state table sat 80 people. There was also a dessert service in Sèvres China, which had also been bought in Paris in 1772.

However, Victoria felt that the house had a deserted air of solitude, and that it needed a decorative renovation and to be lived.

She especially liked the bright library, with elegant bookcases and cabinets with grid doors that protected the books.

William asked her to sit in one of the armchairs of the library, went to the bookshelves and took out a specific book. He flicked through it looking for something he knew exactly where it was. He found what he wanted. He approached Victoria, sat down on another chair facing her, and read:

"Love is a fire that burns without being seen,
   it is a wound that hurts, and is not felt;
   it is an unhappy happiness,
   it is a pain that rages without hurting.

   It is a longing for nothing but to long,
   it is solitude in the midst of people,
   it is never to have enough contentment,
   it is a care that wins in losing.

   It is wanting to be bound by will,
   it is to serve who wins, the conqueror,
   it is to have loyalty to our killer.

But how can Love’s favor
cause friendship in human hearts,
if so contrary to itself is Love?"
At the end Victoria smiled and, as she stood up and walked to him, said:

“How beautiful!”

She sat on his lap.

“Were you already familiar with this poem?” William asked, putting his left arm around her waist.

“No, who is it by?” She answered as she straightened a strand of his hair over his forehead.

As he laid the book on the side table to wrap his arms around her waist he replied:

“Luís de Camões, a Portuguese poet of the 16th century. In Portuguese culture he is equivalent to our William Shakespeare.”

“I think he knew what he was talking about.” She remarked.

“I believe so! Do you know that I read this poem many times when I loved you in silence? I identified myself a lot with what he wrote. Love is a fire that burns without being seen... it is a care that wins in losing... it is to have loyalty to our killer...”

She grabbed his head with both hands and kissed him.

“When I was living alone, I spent much of the nights in the library at Dover House, or this one, if I was in Brocket Hall thinking of you. The brandy was then a company that mitigated the pain, the absence, and the silence around me.” He told.

“Oh my love! You shouldn’t have waited so long...”

“You know why I couldn’t have let things move on...”

“I know…”

“But that’s over now! Now it's you who makes my senses go drunk! And I like that...” He said moving his knees up and down, making her sway slightly.

“What?”

“To have you constantly sitting on my lap.”

“It's unconsciously William, but we don’t have many chances to be like this, alone, and I want to enjoy every moment.”

They kissed.

They continued the guided tour through the house. There were many paintings in every room. Among them were portraits of William when he was young, and also when he was a child. She found it very curious to be able to see how he looked like before she was born. There were also portraits of other family members. In one room, Victoria saw a large-scale portrait of a young woman leaning on her right elbow and accompanied by a dog.

“Who was she?” She asked curiously.

At that moment he wondered if he should have let that picture remain there or if he should have removed it before Victoria came to the house.
“Caro.”

As soon as he said the name Victoria felt a small thud in the chest. Just because of the surprise. She had never seen her before.

“She was pretty...” She said, testing his reaction.

“She was.” He said with an indifferent expression.

“I'm sorry she didn’t have a happy life. And I am even sorrier that you were not happy by her side.” Victoria said.

He grabbed her by the waist and pulled her against him. He leaned her face against his chest and placed his left hand on her back and his right hand on her head.

“But now I'm the happiest man in the world! My life with Caro is just a memory. The pain I once felt because of her has passed. It's just a sad memory, it ceased to be painful. Thanks to you!”

“It's so good to hear you say that! That night in Windsor, when you told me your story, I wanted so much to be able to hold you like this, to sit you on my lap if that would minimize your pain... But I couldn’t...”

“But you did the best you could. You grasped my hand, and believe me when I say that through that gesture I felt a warm and vibrant energy coming from you that comforted me greatly.”

“Oh, it's good that my gesture had that effect.”

“Does it bother you that this picture is here? Do you want me to remove it?” William asked.

“No. If it doesn’t bother you, for my part it can stay.”

“I cannot erase her memory, so I think it doesn’t change anything to remove the portrait. But I want you to know that she is not a ghost in my life, and that she will not be a ghost in our lives.” He emphasized “our”.

“Then let it stay.”

“There is no comparison between her and you. She was sick, disturbed. You are healthy! She alternated between periods of melancholy and others of insanity. You are harmony, balance, tranquility, peace! There was a darkness in my relationship with Caro, but you are light!”

She smiled.

“But there's someone else I'd like you to meet.” He said.

William turned to another wall and pointed to another portrait, smaller than Caro's, where half the body of a young man appeared.

“That was my son. George Augustus Frederick Lamb.”

Victoria was a bit apprehensive at the effect of this other memory. If he now dealt better with the past with Caro, the son's matter was of a different, deeper, and more painful nature. She didn’t know what to say. She couldn’t imagine what it felt like to lose a child. She didn’t even know what it was like to have a child. And if she looked back for examples she couldn’t find them either. She hadn’t met her father, and had a bad relationship with her mother...
“He looked like you.” It occurred to her to say, and she thought it would be complimentary.

“I think so. Those who see the portrait don’t realize the severity of his mental problem.” He said sadly.

She leaned against him and placed her hands on his chest.

“It’s not possible to prevent these things from happening, you were not to blame and you always did the best you could for him, the best! You always have to think about that.”

“I know.”

“His life was not easy either. Maybe it was better that way. He stopped suffering…”

“I want to believe that.” He concluded, kissing her forehead and giving her his hand to move to another room.

***

After lunch they left the house for a walk outside.

The stay at Brocket Hall was a wonderful experience. The surrounding space was a captivating beauty, the air of the countryside was pure, the silence of an infinite tranquility...

With a shawl on her back, Victoria walked in the garden arm in arm with William.

“Why is Brocket Hall called so?” She asked.

“Because in the 16th century the house belonged to Sir John Brocket, a wealthy spice importer and captain of Queen Elizabeth’s personal guard.”

Victoria's eyes widened and she remarked:

“I don’t know why, but the memory of Elizabeth is always somehow present in our lives...”

“And it's not over yet...”

“No?”

“I'll show you after...”

He took her to see the famous greenhouses of Brocket Hall where he grew the flowers he sent her regularly. He informed her about the names of the different species and explained the hidden meanings behind each flower and each color.

With sleeves rolled up, William took the time to give some basic care to some of the plants, and encouraged Victoria to try. She was delighted with this new gardening activity that allowed her to get her hands on the ground without fear of getting dirty! There was enough earth under the nails! But she was even more delighted to observe the beauty of his forearms exposed like that, and the knowledge he showed on the subject, the delicacy and sensitivity he had! There could not be such a man! And he was hers!

***

Second night in Brocket Hall.

She went into the bedroom in her nightgown.
He was lying on the bed, leaning against the cushions, covered to the waist, but with bare torso.

She walked up to him, climbed on the bed by the right side, and kneeling leaned over his body thirsting for his scent, kissing him on his chest. She climbed up and kissed his neck, slowly and repeatedly.

Her breath against his neck.

She licked his neck and jaw.

He wrapped his arms around her, and when she raised more over him, he kissed her mouth, jaw and neck as he ran his hands over the visible part of her back and shoulders.

“Oh, William...” She sighed in his ear.

Having that doll rubbing herself against him left him burning. Victoria was appetizing anyway, but when she teased him it made him crazy!

He ran his hands over the exposed part of her thighs, stroking them in slow, voluptuous movements, teasing her harder. Then he put his hands on her buttocks over her nightgown, feeling that there was no other piece of clothing underneath, which was terribly exciting. He reached with his right hand under the fabric of the nightgown and the index finger brushed the area between the buttock and the beginning of her left thigh, which Victoria found breathtaking.

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“He wrapped his arms around her, and when she raised more over him, he kissed her mouth, jaw and neck as he ran his hands over the visible part of her back and shoulders.

“Do you want to be in control of things today?” He whispered in her ear.

A new feature? She wanted to try it!

“How do I do that?” She asked without pulling her face apart from his.

“It's easy... and you can control the rhythm... Can you move away a little, get off of the bedsheets?”

She moved a little remaining on her knees, but placing herself on the mattress outside the sheets and bedspread that covered him.

With his left hand he quickly removed the bedclothes that covered him.

He was completely naked.

She looked at it!

She had seen it before so many times! She had already felt it inside her several times! The life he had... But seeing it like this... In that display, in that position, dense and rigid, it was different, it was new! And this sight made her feel the most intimate of herself bubble!

He noticed the excitement in her eyes. He reached out his hands to take hers and said:

“Sit on top of me and insert it...”

There was a clamor from that part of him, of protruding veins, calling for her! She wanted to feel it like that, in that position, inside her awakened body!

Guided by his hands, she did as he asked. She lifted her right leg and rolled her body over his thighs.
He let go of her hands and put his arms along the body.

That member was in front of her. She had never grabbed it before. The other times she had never felt the need for that... But now was the moment. She would guide it to herself. She was going to grab it.

William made a small gesture with his eyebrows, prompting her. That gesture that she had known since her first Privy Council... It was extraordinary how politics, love and sex were always combined in their lives!

She grabbed it! With determination. It was firm and consistent, but flexible. And hot and soft! She had felt it all before, but not in the hand, where the sense of touch was more acute! And she felt its veins protruding and dared to thumb over them! She remembered the night in Windsor’s hallway where she had made the same gesture over the protruding veins of his hand.

William moaned, closed his eyes, and tilted his head back.

He wanted to see her naked! And he wanted to see her down there...

“Take off your nightgown, please...” He asked.

She dropped it, stripped off her nightgown and stood totally naked in front of him, her hair falling back.

Magnificent! This intoxicating combination of girl and woman. Appearance of girl and behavior of woman, in interest and commitment. She said and asked surprising things and acted unexpectedly and determinedly.

Then she grabbed it again.

He moaned again.

She lifted her body and moved forward.

The expectation of the entrance!

She was going to impale herself in him!

He was going to bury himself in her!

She throbbed for it!

She pointed it.

And then she pressed herself against it.

It came in. First a part and then more deeply, feeling the passage of it somewhere else deep inside her.

Now it was all there. She felt it touching the deepest part of herself.

Oh, he was inside her! He was home! There was nothing cozier than this!

“Are you comfortable?” William asked.

“Oh yes! So comfortable...” She replied with closed eyes and dragged voice.
“Now you just have to move over it, however you want and at the rhythm you like…”

He grabbed her thighs and she placed her hands on his belly and did as he said.

She began to possess him slowly, moving her hips up and down repeatedly. She felt like a queen! She had never felt as fully as a queen now! A power of dominion over his body and over her own body that she had never felt before! It was as he had said. The rhythm was hers! She could feel the filling effect he was stirring within herself and that was overwhelming!

He raised his hands to her hips and her buttocks, following the movement she made up and down. He had the most perfect vision of her! Her breasts, which moved in the same direction and with the same cadence as the rest of her body. And there, down below, he watched her consume him and expel him, consume him and expel him...

She advanced with her hands from his belly to his chest.

She leaned forward.

She brushed her breasts against his chest.

Her hair brushed his shoulders and made him shiver as she invaded his mouth with her tongue.

This woman was his perdition!

Then she lifted her body again.

As she moved again up and down he grabbed her breasts with both hands pressing them with intensity.

Then she found that as she leaned back, the sense of pleasure increased. She stayed like that for some time.

“Try to move your hips in a circular way.” He indicated.

She did it.

That was very good!

She reached for his hands with hers.

They held hands.

She continued to move up and down supported by his hands.

But there was something missing. It was the contact of her skin with his skin, and the support and comfort of a mattress or his body!

He couldn’t have realized that for sure, but by coincidence he needed to sink his face on her body and hug her. So, dropping her hands, he lifted his body to meet hers and she leaned closer to him. Then he sank his face in her breasts and ran his hands over her back as she continued to press against him.

Now sat, he was sucking her breasts, and that sensation at the same time he penetrated her was ecstatic to both of them.

She grabbed his head, at the level of her breasts, and ran her fingers through his hair. She loved
doing that!

Then he raised his head, kissed her mouth deeply, and hugged her tightly.

She continued to move on his lap, now much more supported, much more comfortable.

He thrust his hips against her body.

She was almost there and he squeezed her thighs and buttocks to encourage her.

The bed headboard hit the wall more than once, she fragmented and he sprouted inside her!

“William!” Shouting his name now made her go even higher.

Today she had done that!

They remained like that, embraced for some time trying to catch their breath and soothe the blood circulation.

Then she slipped out of his lap and lay down on the bed. He lay down beside her and they stood side by side, facing each other, kissing.

“Every time we... you never wanted to repeat...” He remarked.

“Should I?” She asked in expectation.

“No... But it's common to happen...”

“Do you want to?” She asked again with apprehension in her voice.

Was she not being sufficiently available to him?

“No! I couldn't do it now, either...” He answered laughing. “I just wanted to understand how you... work...”

“Well, every time it happens it's so good, so good... I get fully satisfied, I don't need more... I just want to sleep. It's... so comforting...”

He smiled at her and said:

“Very well, Victoria! I got it. I'm glad it's so good that you don't need more.”

After a few moments she asked:

“Did Elizabeth and Robert love each other like this?”

“We cannot know. Given that she was supposedly a virgin, no. But they were also said to be lovers, so... However, she never had children. But maybe she was infertile...”

“I hope they did, because she would have been much happier!”

“And he, too...” William laughed.

Victoria laughed back.

“When you didn’t want to get married, you held Elizabeth as an inspiration and thought it was great that she had remained alone, saying that you would follow her example. Now that you’re
already married and happy, you wish she was too...” He remarked.

“Because now I know the happiness that marriage brings! Even though they never married, I hope that as companions they have materialized their love like this!”

“Me too…”
Chapter 21

That morning she asked to see the rooks.

He led her on foot to the place they both knew so well – next to a square-based stone pedestal that supported the sculpture of a huge vase – where there was a colony on the top of some trees.

Getting back there was still an experience of mixed emotions for them both, after all.

“At this point the males are looking for the best place to nest. The mating season is about to start.” William explained.

Victoria looked at him and smiled. They had also mated, in tune with the rooks.

Among the sounds emitted by a large number of birds, he continued the explanation:

“Soon there will be three to five small speckled eggs in the nests, and the males will feed the females while they incubate them.”

“And when will the nestlings be born?” Victoria asked interested.

“After 16 to 18 days of incubation.”

“There is something of divine in the cycles of nature, and in all new little creatures that are born...” Victoria remarked looking at the behavior of the birds.

William turned his face to look at her, sensing an underlying meaning in what she had just stated. He agreed:

“It's true, Victoria! All little creatures that are born are a divine blessing...”

“Do you come here often?” She asked.

“Since you were here for the first time, it's rare.”

“Was it hard to come back here?”

He gave her his hands and sat down at the base of the pedestal, making her sit next to him.

“What I did that day was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. You, whom I love to the point of exhaustion, had the courage to come here, so determined, so convinced, to say that you loved me.... and I heard the only thing I could wish for you to tell me... and I had to find the courage to send you away...”

She got up, stood facing him, wrapped her arms around his head and neck and leaned his face against her belly.

He wrapped his arms around her hips.

“My dear William!” She said, tears welling up in her eyes. “Now I'm here, I'm yours and I will stay here forever!”

Victoria leaned over and kissed his head.
"I know. You've said it before, more than once. But it was not easy for you either, what I did..."

"No, it wasn't. I left here crying, though I didn’t want you to see it. I cried all the rest of the day in Buckingham, I cried the next few days... Even when my tears didn’t fall I cried inside. I thought I would never be happy again... But then you sent the orchids... At first I thought they were a provocation..."

He pulled away and lifted his head to look at her.

She put her hands on his shoulders.

"No! I wanted to compensate you, I wanted to give you something beautiful and from which you realized that I cared for you, that I really liked you..." He explained.

"Yes, then I understood. Emma helped telling me that you only reopened the greenhouses because of me, and that to make me believe that you cared only about your wife's memory was just what you wanted me to believe..."

"At the Masquerade I tried to be clearer, but I couldn’t be too concrete either..."

"I understood... You know, in a weird way, even my mother helped me understand why you didn’t reciprocate my feelings. She was very sad when Conroy went to Ireland and I told her I knew she missed him and that I understood, because losing someone we care about is very difficult, and she answered me: “No man would give you up, Drina... unless he knew that it was his duty.” Victoria recounted.

“And she was quite right...”

“She must have sensed what had happened; she saw how I cried after I returned from Brocket Hall that day...”

“And after that day, in fact, I didn’t feel like coming back here. I must have been here twice. Hmm...! You know, it's weird... I've been here these times because, deep inside myself, I secretly wished you’d come back one day, and imagined that if there was a second chance I would reciprocate... But I was convinced that would never happen.” William explained.

“But it did!”

“It did?” He asked confused. “Have you ever been here before that I didn’t know of?”

“No, William! Not here, at this location, no. But I went back to Brocket Hall! In that day...”

“Yes, of course, I understand... And it was precisely because I remembered what had happened here in the past, when I watched you walk away with your back to me without my doing anything, that’s when I felt I couldn’t let it happen again, that I couldn’t let you go away again, and that I had to reciprocate...”

Victoria noticed again the sound of the birds.

“You told me in this place that rooks mate for life and that, like them, you had only mated once. Considering that you ended up marrying me; that was just a way to keep me away at that time...” She remarked waiting for him to specify.

“At that moment it was the best way I found of showing you that I couldn’t reciprocate your feelings without being brusque in my denial. I tried to do it as smoothly as I could, even though I
knew it would hurt you anyway...”

“I understand.”

“However when a rook becomes a widow, she can mate again for life! That's what some of these rooks are doing and it's what I'm doing with you.” William concluded with a smile.

Victoria laughed and said:

“Me too!”

He got up and kissed her.

***

In the afternoon they went horse riding, an activity that was a pleasure for them both, and that allowed Victoria to know the limits of the property.

They were crossing the bridge over Broadwater Lake when William said:

“I'll take you to Melbourne Hall next time.”

“Ah yes. I'm curious to know your other property. The one that is associated with your titles of Viscount and Earl.”

“It's a beautiful property, too!”

“Actually, your title also names the town of Melbourne in New South Wales, founded in 1835.” Victoria recalled.

“It was the Governor’s idea, Sir Richard Bourke, who wanted to pay me homage in the year you ascended the throne... But that is only a small settlement...” He devalued.

“You will see that one day it will be a great city...”

“If my name will be associated with a large city, your name will have to designate a state... Who knows, you could designate an era...”

Victoria laughed and said:

“Well... who knows...?”

She spotted a cluster of trees some distance away and felt like challenging him:

“Shall we see who's the first to reach the trees?”

Having said that she urged the horse and set off in a race.

He was caught unawares, but reacted immediately.

His horse was bigger and faster than the mare she rode, and he could reach the trees first if he wanted to. Even having started slightly later. But he wouldn’t demand too much of the horse. He was afraid that in her attempt to win she would rush in and suffer a fall. And it would be nice for her to let her win! He spurred the horse just enough for her to have him at a distance that would stimulate her adrenaline!
Victoria arrived first and pulled the reins of the mare laughing with happiness for winning the race.

He loved to see her laugh like this! Just to have the pleasure of seeing her laugh like that was worth losing the race.

“1 won!” She exclaimed, turning the mare around to face him.

“I think this race was not fair! You took off first!” He complained smiling at her.

William got off the horse and came to help Victoria get off the mare. He then bound the two animals to the trunks of two trees. When he was finishing she grabbed him from behind, wrapping her arms around his waist, leaning her face against his back and said:

“Sometimes it seems like a dream that we're both here.”

She let go of him and he turned, grabbing her arms.

“It's a dream for me! For sure!”

Victoria searched the trunk of a nearby tree to sit on the ground and lean against it. He followed her, sitting on her left side, leaning against the same trunk.

What a pleasure to be able to sit on the floor! And to have William by her side in the same informality! To be just a woman, and not have to play the role of queen. If she could, she would live forever in Brocket Hall. That space, beyond all that it meant, represented freedom!

“And have your nerves of the wedding day passed or do you think they'll come back in other situations?” She asked.

“Maybe they'll come back when I have to publicly play my role as the Queen’s husband... You'll have to be patient with me...” He said with a smile.

“Always! Just like you were with me. My only goal, almost since I met you, has always been to make you happy...” Victoria said looking at him with affection.

“And you can be sure that you are already granting it. But sometimes I also have other fears...”

“And what are those fears?” She asked, slightly concerned.

“I wonder if I will be, in fact, a good husband, if I will live up to your expectations, if I will make you truly happy...”

“William, please don’t ever doubt that! Just continue to be how you have been so far so that I can live in the clouds... I need nothing more than what you have given me so far.”

“And I also wonder if things between us, in months or years, will continue to work, if this idyll will remain... It's not the first time that I marry, as you know, I have seen this happen before, at the beginning everything is wonderful, but then...” He exposed openly.

“Surely you’re not afraid that I’ll behave like your first wife...” Victoria remarked rather abruptly, regretting immediately what she said! She didn’t doubt that he thought that, the remark came out simply.

“No, Victoria, that's not it! There are countless reasons for a marriage not to work. Even when people love each other madly. It is possible to love someone deeply and yet make it completely impossible to live with that person...”
Victoria didn’t understand how that was possible... But, at least in theory, she realized that he was talking about other reasons that could lead to a ruptured marriage that was not adultery.

“I see...” She replied.

“When you have had a bad experience it is only natural that these questions arise. Sometimes people have habits, behaviors, excesses, faults... that make it impossible for the other member of the couple the daily life together... even if they both love each other. And I have no doubts about our love.”

Victoria remembered that Emily had told her that she had to be patient, that he had been very hurt... She also knew that this was true... But she knew nothing about marriage. She had only been in that condition for two days. Once again she was going to have to learn quickly, now how to be a wife. She would have to develop the ability to perceive what he felt in this new relationship they now had, and she would have to be able to guide the boat for both of them. Surely he would, too. She knew he would.

“Then we'll both have to act to better articulate our lives in this new married condition. Our relationship has always had a variety of facets and we have always managed them without problems, without even realizing it. Now there's just this new facet to integrate.” Victoria ended up saying.

“I would deeply regret that because of this new step, marriage, our relationship would change. It has always been so wonderful that it would be terrible if it ceased to be so. You know that sometimes the more you love someone and the more you want to be with that person – making the relationship evolve into a marriage, as we did –, the more you know characteristics from each other that start to bother you. Then things begin to reverse, there is distancing, indifference, rupture...”

Turning her body toward him she placed her right hand gently on William's left cheek and said:

“That will not happen!”

Then he said:

“You are the person I have loved the most in my life!”

William wrapped his arms around her young wife's waist and kissed her tenderly and gently.

When they parted from the embrace, Victoria looked up at the sky. The clouds had become denser and denser, and some darker ones threatened rain.

“Maybe we should go back. It looks like it might rain.” She remarked.

He got up from the ground and gave her his hands to help her to her feet.

Victoria shook her skirt and was helped to get back on her mare by her husband, who then mounted his own horse.

They headed toward the house, with Victoria to the left of William. The distance was not too long, but soon a few drops of rain began to fall. A slow and pulverized fall, but of great drops of water. However, the slow fall quickly became a more rapid and more concentrated precipitation that began to soak their clothes more seriously. Both spurred the horses to get home faster.

Skerrett, who knew they had gone out with the horses, observed from a window that the Queen and Lord Melbourne were back. She ran to the door, thinking that Her Majesty could need help.
getting rid of the wet clothes.

When they reached the front of the house, William dismounted quickly.

Victoria had never seen any other man dismount with the agility and elegance with which he did it, passing his right leg over the horse's neck and jumping immediately to the ground on the left side of the animal.

He grabbed her urgently to get her out of the horse, while a groom approached to hold the reins of the two animals he would send to the stables.

William gave his gloved hand to Victoria and ran with her to the entrance of the house.

The Queen entered the hall as she removed her hat and laughed, amused by the unexpected.

“Do you need help, Ma’am? Shall we get this wet outfit off?” Skerrett asked, showing sincere concern for the sovereign’s well-being.

Victoria looked at William, who had just taken off the tall hat that had protected his hair, but from where a few drops of water dripped from the ends, and who was shaking raindrops out of his coat. Then she looked at the dresser and said:

“Thank you Skerrett, but I think that I and His Highness can change our clothes on our own. Just make sure the hats can dry.”

The dresser bowed and, with her eyes on the floor, couldn’t help but smile. She then received the hats from their hands.

Victoria held hands with William and they went upstairs. They walked to the bedroom and closed the door.

The fireplace was lit, as were all the other heating structures in the rooms of the house they were using.

The circumstance prompted them both to act the same way by taking off their gloves, and unbuttoning and undressing their coats.

Then he sat down in a chair and took off his riding boots so that he could undress his wet pants.

She undressed the skirt and shirt that had caught water in the chest area.

He took off his vest.

She took off her boots and released the strand of hair that fell in a braid.

Victoria looked at William.

William looked at Victoria and walked over to her.

She wrapped her arms around his waist as he adjusted a few strands of hair that had loosened from the sides between her forehead and ears, looking at her with total veneration.

He loved being able to just stay looking at her, and she loved him looking at her like that! Feeling that at that moment she was the only focus of his attention.

William grabbed Victoria's face with both hands and kissed her tenderly. Then he turned her back
to him so that he could untie her corset, while she put her arms back to untie the ribbon that held the petticoat around the waist, which made the piece fall to the floor.

"I never understood why women insist on wearing so much clothing.” He stated provocatively as he untied the laces from the corset.

“Men don’t wear few clothing, either.”

“But women are trapped inside these infernal things...”

“But that only happens because we have to maintain elegance to please our husbands!” She exclaimed smiling, opening her corset in front and tossing it to the floor.

Then Victoria came out from the petticoat that she pushed aside with her left foot and turned to him.

He stripped off his shirt staying with a bare torso, and she did the same, revealing her breasts.

He undressed his underwear and took off his socks, and Victoria repeated the same procedures.

They stood naked in front of each other.

The rain outside had intensified. As a result the day had darkened, but since it was not night yet there were no lighted candles inside the room, whose light was less intense than usual at that time of the day.

William hugged and kissed Victoria tenderly.

They headed toward the bed, keeping their bodies together.

Victoria felt William's virile member erect against her belly, and was tempted to grab it by wrapping her fingers around the axis. She felt it react in her hand!

Oh, this was exciting! For both!

Arriving to the bed, she tried with her left hand to pull the bedspread partially down, but the pressure of his body over her made her lie down before this attempt was fully achieved...

The rain hit the windows’ glass. The world stopped. It stopped spinning. They were isolated in a dome where the only noise they heard was that of the rain and the branches of the trees that were stirring outside, with the force of the wind that had formed, and the sounds of pleasure exhaled by both.

Lying on her back, it was splendid to feel the volume of his body between her thighs, brushing her skin with each throw inside her. Victoria wrapped her arms around his neck, and her legs around his waist.

For years he had imagined that silken touch of her legs, surrounding her body in a caress. He dragged his right hand along her body from her face, past her shoulder, then her arm over to her elbow. Waist and hip. He circled her buttock by slipping his hand underneath, which allowed him to fill her with firm, soft, voluptuous flesh.

With the agitation her braid had broken down and her hair was spreading over the pillows.

There was nothing more comforting than to have him imbedded in her, she wanted him to use her, to enjoy her, to possess her without limits.
“Fuck me, William!”

He squeezed her left buttock and speeded up the collision against her.

They moved together forming a same mechanism of coupled parts. A well-tuned machine whose sole purpose was to produce pleasure.

As always, it was beautiful to contemplate: Victoria attaining ecstasy, glide, embedded in him!

She enjoyed watching the veins of his neck become more evident when he was coming inside her, and the sounds he produced in the rapture of the moment.

It was over.

The rain fell more slowly now.

After some time lying down, now covered with the bedsheets, the rain stopped outside.

Victoria got up and went to the hanger to get the robe.

He watched her moving around the bedroom naked. Hair down to the waist. A breathtaking sight!

She put on her robe and went to the window, curious to watch the weather outside. There was a comforting sensation of being there in that bedroom, next to that man she loved, while the weather outside had been a bit harsh.

William followed her steps. He put on his robe and went to the window. He stopped behind her, wrapped his arms around her waist and placed his chin over her right shoulder.

The rain and the wind had stopped and the sun seemed to want to rise again behind the clouds, even though it was already getting late. But the leaves of the trees still let drops of water fall to the ground. A ray of sunshine crossed the glass and illuminated them. For some mysterious reason, it seemed that the weather had changed to allow them a moment of isolation and love. Now that the moment of sharing was over, the sun had returned.

Suddenly there was a familiar sound and a couple of rooks crossed the space between the trees.

Victoria turned her face to look at William.

He smiled and kissed her forehead.

***

Third night in Brocket Hall.

William, in his nightshirt, sat on the bed leaning back.

She walked over to him also in a nightgown, climbed up onto the bed, leaned over him, and they hugged each other. She came closer to the heat that he released through the fineness of his shirt’s linen. She put her left hand on his neck and ran up his soft skin, running her fingers over his jaw and lips.

They stood there, caressing each other.

They kissed.
He ran his hands over her body: back, buttocks...

She thought it was lovely to stay like this, leaning on his lap, to be in contact with his chest, to have his arms around her waist, his hands on her back...

He started kissing her neck and undressing her left shoulder and kissing it...

“William... Do you mind if now we don’t...”

He looked into her eyes.

“Of course not, my dear. We were together a few hours ago and in the previous 24 hours we did it three times...” He remarked.

“I really like it, you know...”

“Oh, yes... My shoulders and my back know how much you like it...” He said, laughing.

She laughed too.

“Judging by the way you clench your fingers and nails on them... And other parts of me also know how much you like it...” He continued in a good-humored tone.

She continued to laugh, now more audibly, putting her face on his chest. He was disconcerting!

“But tonight I feel tired and drowsy, I need to sleep.” Victoria explained.

He smiled tenderly at her, and with his right hand he tucked her hair behind the left ear and stroked her head.

“Actually, I need to sleep too...” He admitted.

They laughed again at the understanding of what he said.

“You know I haven’t had this rhythm for a long time... And even though we're married, that doesn’t mean we have to do it every day... And don’t worry because most couples sleep most nights. Which will not be our case!” William concluded.

They slid down the bed headboard and lay down, hugging each other.

***

The next day, the last at Brocket Hall, they asked for lunch to be served outside. A table and two chairs were placed in the area where the green grass surrounding the house was lower.

A long lunch, talking for hours, wishing the day didn’t pass by. But time was running and soon it would be necessary to return to London and face political maneuvers and official commitments.

When they were tired of being seated, William took Victoria's hand and they began to walk away from the house holding hands.

So good! To be there in that place, to have his hand in hers, to enjoy his presence full time, to speak with him for days and nights in a row...

William couldn’t feel happier than he was. She was there with him, at his house, she was his wife! He felt like a young teenager in love, a sense of lightness and impunity that he had never thought
possible to experience again in life.

They went down the green grass to the shore of the lake.

They were approaching an area that had a few oaks.

Then she dared to do as she once felt like doing in Windsor when they had gone horse rising in the woods. She let go of his hand and, without him expecting it, began to run through the grass laughing and turning back, daring him to follow her.

William laughed. She looked like a happy child! He would have to follow her. He ran after her.

Part of her hairdo fell off and the back of her hair fell over her back.

When a few yards after she let him catch her, William grabbed her by the waist and knocked her down on the grass, falling over her.

She continued to laugh.

He kissed her like there was no tomorrow!

She put her hands on the sides of his head, but he grabbed her hands, pushed her arms back until they lay on the grass, stretched out in parallel with her head, and gripped her wrists firmly, impeding her from moving as he continued to kiss her.

When she could speak, still breathless and caught by his hands on her wrists, she said:

“Do you think this is a decent position for the Queen of England to be seen?”

“In my house I do what I want, and the person who is here under me is not the queen, she is my wife!”

“When it suits you that I be the queen, I'm the queen, and when it suits you that I be an ordinary woman, I'm an ordinary woman.”

“You do the same and use, as you please, each of my identities…”

She laughed.

Then he looked serious at her. But a seriousness that showed that some idea was in his mind, and that he was preparing to do something next...

William let go of Victoria’s arms and she could bring them forward again and put her hands on the sides of his back.

“I want you! I want you... here, now.” He said at last.

She was a little apprehensive.

“Now? Here?” She asked, raising her head and leaning on her elbows.

“We're a long way from home. There is no one else on the property besides the servants who are there. The trees cover us up. And we just have to remain as we are, dressed. With just a little arrangements and we can do it.”

She didn’t say yes, but from the expression on her face he realized she was predisposed.
He kissed her on the neck and chest.

She returned by grabbing his neck and kissing his face.

He pulled her skirt and petticoat up and removed the central opening of the underwear she wore. He traced her body with his hands as they continued to kiss. He unbuttoned his pants and inserted himself inside her wildly.

She liked that!

William grabbed Victoria's arms again and pulled them up. With his left hand he fastened her wrists together tightly to the ground. He possessed her with intensity! There, in the middle of the grass, in the light of day, in contact with nature.

He had done that once with Caroline, a few months after they were married. Elsewhere. He wasn’t doing it with Victoria as a memory of this past time, nor to search for any connection with Caro. He did it only because that memory passed through his brain, because Victoria herself brought this episode to his memory when she had run away from him, causing him to grab her and knock her to the ground.

He was wonderfully tender and gentle, but she liked it when he was rough in possessing her! And this revealed the deepest and most unknown side of him! Victoria loved it! Because it was done where it was not supposed to, his aggressiveness, her tightness in the corset and the fact that she was caught by the wrists and couldn’t move. This man was a novelty every day! It served her a menu of alternatives. She thought that marriage with Albert would never have been so ecstatic.

In the end he stepped off of her, straightened his clothes and lay on his back to her right.

Victoria also straightened her clothes.

They lay in silence, next to each other, looking at the treetop above and the scraps of sky that peered through the branches.

After a few moments she asked:

“These things you do to me... Did you do the same to women of bad reputation?”

He was surprised and troubled by the unexpected and the content of the question.

“Victoria, please! What a question…”

She turned her face to him and raised her eyebrows in a gesture of insistence for an answer.

He thought it was normal for her to ask, and he would only have to respond with straightforwardness, as he had always done. William sighed and said:

“Yes, Victoria, I did the same with these women you're talking about... Although there are different ways of doing it, as you have already seen, the procedures used are the same regardless of the condition of the woman in question...”

“Am I as good as them?”

Now he was perplexed by the question! As if there could be any comparison...

“No.” He replied simply and inexpressively.
“No?” She asked with a worried look as she turned her body to him and leaned on her right elbow to face him more directly.

“No, you're a thousand times better than them!”

She laughed in decompression and realized that she had been humorously deceived by him.

He turned his body to her and explained in a tone of slight rebuke:

“Victoria! These women only have one thing to offer, which is their body, physical pleasure. And that's the only thing that men find in a brothel, there's no meaning there.” And then he continued in a more tender tone: “But you represent everything to me! What I have with you, besides the pleasure of the flesh, is an emotional pleasure inexplicable by words. It is strong, deep, extensive and true. And you are pure, delicate, sweet... You are incomparable! I feel myself melt every time I am with you!”

She smiled tenderly at him and concluded:

“You once said that what we have in bed doesn’t exist in a brothel... That's what you meant...”

“Exactly, Victoria.”

She put her face on his chest and wrapped her left arm around his waist.

William wrapped his arms around her.

They were silent, but after a few minutes he said:

“You know, there's a story about this tree we're under...”

“A story? What story?” She asked curiously, lifting her face to look at him.

“According to the memory that has passed for generations, Queen Elizabeth used to sit beneath this oak tree when she visited Brocket Hall...”

Victoria asked surprised:

“Oh! Is that true, William?”

“I don’t know, it's a story that is told... I don’t even know if she's ever been to Brocket Hall...”

“That's why you said you had something else to tell me about Elizabeth...”

“That's right.”

She smiled and laid her face on his chest again.
Chapter 22

They had returned to Buckingham at the end of the day before.

Victoria woke up and saw that William was still sleeping soundly beside her. She looked at his face. The shape of his nose was perfect, and she had never seen a man with such long eyelashes. Gorgeous! She wanted to kiss him. But if she did, he would wake up and she preferred to let him sleep a little while longer.

By tradition, the royal couple slept in separate rooms, even as a prophylactic way to lessen the number of pregnancies, but she wouldn’t admit staying a night away from him! Falling asleep and waking up in William's arms was one of the best things about this new married life, and he loved being able to share the bed with her. So Victoria's bedroom had become their bedroom.

Victoria rose carefully without making noise, and the first piece of clothing she saw was the shirt William had worn the day before. As a joke, she wore it over her naked body, knowing it would be too big for her and too short compared to her nightgowns. It had his scent and that was terribly pleasant.

When William woke up she was not in bed. He lifted his head and looked around searching for her in the bedroom. He saw her with bare feet, her ankles, and a part of her legs. From the horizontal, suspended position of her lower limbs, he realized where she was. She had knelt on the upholstered bench in the recess of one of the bedroom windows, her knees over a quilt that had been thrown over the bench, and she would be looking out through the glass. From the bed it was not possible to see the rest of her body that was hidden behind the thickness of the wall and the curtain.

He got up naked and barefooted to go to her.

When he caught sight of her body in full he had a splendid vision.

Victoria, with her hair down, was wearing his shirt. Leaning as she was on the window parapet, the hem of the shirt reached only the limit of her buttocks. Her legs were completely exposed and she clearly wasn’t wearing anything under the shirt.

She saw him reflected in the window glass. She was going to turn to him. But before that, he advanced to her and grabbed her by the waist, preventing her from turning.

Holding her close to him with his left arm, William diverted her hair with his right hand and kissed her behind the left ear. Then he put his right arm around her waist as well.

Victoria clutched his arms around her. The sleeves of his shirt were too long for her arms and she had to pull them back so she could feel with her hands the skin and the hairs on his forearms.

“Good Morning, my love!” He said.

“Good Morning…”

“Don’t you know you can’t wear my shirts?” He asked playfully, kissing her on the neck and the exposed part of her shoulder.

“I never know where my nightgowns are anymore; in fact, I don’t even know what nightgowns are good for...”
“For me they're only good for hindering me...” He said as he nibbled and licked her neck.

Her anxious breath! The accelerated heart!

“Exactly... if I don’t wear a nightgown, every inch of my body can touch every inch of yours, and I'll be always available for you to have me...” She finished.

He stuck his right hand inside the shirt and slid it across her stomach pressing her against him. So soft!

“Then you'd better be prepared because you have to compensate me for the misuse of my shirt...” He warned.

William raised both hands inside the shirt, felt her ribs beneath her breasts... He left her in anticipation of what he would do next.

Her chest rose up and down faster.

He grabbed her breasts from underneath, filled his hands with them and squeezed her nipples...

Victoria started gasping and laid her head back over his right shoulder. For some unexplained reason there was a connection between the tip of her breasts and the middle of her legs that made her dissolve for him!

“William, I have a scheduled meeting with the Prime Minister in one hour...” Victoria warned, but perfectly aware that she would be unable to stop that course now.

“He can wait! You're the queen! And I need you first than he does...” William said in a drawn voice.

“I never made you wait. I was always ready before you came... because I needed you...”

“I'm here now.”

“And I need you...” Victoria sighed, thrilled by the pleasure and love she felt for him.

He ran his left hand down her left hip, then down her thigh, made his hand slide to the thin, sensitive skin of the inside of her thigh, and exerted some pressure for her to pull her legs apart more.

The proximity of his hand to her pulsating femininity, but without touching it, contributed to further intensify Victoria’s excitement.

He made her body lean forward. He slipped inside her! It was amazing how she was always ready for him!

She felt it! Filling her!

Victoria projected her torso forward and put her hands on the window parapet. She could see the large marble arch and the Mall. The Queen of England was being possessed before the eyes of London, but no one could see.

When he possessed her from behind she missed the eye contact of those beautiful green eyes and his mouth in hers, but the position was extraordinarily exciting because she felt dominated and had no clear idea of what he was going to do next.
Taken by the rising effervescence inside her, kneeling, Victoria lifted her body pressing against William's body and lifted her right arm, placing her right hand around his neck.

He kissed her neck, feeling her pulse racing beneath her skin.

“This is not real…” She said.

“Yes it is…”

The entrapment of the two bodies in each other was tremendously exciting for both. He pressed her with his left hand in her breasts and with his right hand in her belly, and she pressed him in his neck. There was no margin for releasing the torsos, but the agitation of the lower part of their bodies was growing.

Her legs began to tremble.

Continually the excitement rose and rose until it exploded in an inexplicable torrent of deep love and unrestrained lust.

The more times she did it, the more pleasure it gave her. It was as if she were becoming more and more woman, more female. Full of satisfaction, Victoria felt herself faint, unable to stay on her knees any longer.

He sustained her in his arms and they dropped gently to the floor, on the quilt that had been thrown to the bench and had slipped. They stood there, leaning against the bench, embracing each other in silence. The Prime Minister's wait was a distant concern. She pulled his head into her cleavage and he closed his eyes. She ran her right hand on his left temple and his face, and inserted her fingers in his hair, gently massaging his head.

Without moving and without opening his eyes he said:

“I'm the happiest man in the world today. You saved me.”

She remembered the night they had talked in the hallway in Windsor. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

Then, after a few seconds, she leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

***

The meeting with John Russell started late.

After the love session, Victoria still had to wash, dress, comb, and eat breakfast. And only dressing and combing were always time consuming.

“I apologize, Lord Russell, but there has been an unforeseen event…” The Queen said as she extended her hand to the Prime Minister.

“I can wait, Ma'am.”

As the man kissed her hand awkwardly, Victoria thought that an unforeseen event was true! However, this could not happen again or the reason for the delays of the sovereign for the first meeting in the morning, easy to unveil, would begin to be the subject of conversation...
Among the topics brought by Russell, the scene of the Anglo-Afghan war was today a matter on the table.

“The information coming from Afghanistan is still a cause for concern, Ma’am.”

“What news do you have of Kabul?”

“As you know, the departure of the Bala Hissar fortress to a cantonment in northeastern Kabul put the British troops in a dangerous location. The place is indefensible because it is low and marshy, with hills on all sides. But to make things worse, the space is too large for the number of camped soldiers, with a defensive perimeter almost two kilometers long. However, the most maladjusted in the everyday life is that the supplies are in a stronghold far from the main camp, which complicates replenishing and facilitates an assault.”

“And what can we do to change that situation?”

“For now, send a new commander, Major-General George Keith Ephinstone, a man with vast military experience.”

“But the best solution would be...?”

“Well, perhaps the best solution would have been to accept Russia's proposal last year for the realization of a treaty. Lord Auckland of Calcutta pressed for the acceptance of the Russian offer to delineate the spheres of England’s, Russia’s, and Persia’s influence in the area, but, as you know, Lord Palmerston did not want to accept it. He believes that Britain has the advantage, and that accepting Russia's offer to definitively mark the spheres of influence in Asia is a sign of weakness, preferring no such treaty to be signed.”

“Then perhaps it would be advisable to act in the sense that Lord Palmerston might eventually change his mind...”

“Perhaps... The permanence in Kabul of the British troops at this time is almost only an expensive luxury for Britain, since Anglo-Russian tension is diminished. And to continue as they are, we may have a massacre... It is never possible to fully secure peace in the area because of the existence of various tribes...”

“As you know, the queen cannot interfere in matters of government... At least not openly...”

“Not the queen, but... maybe His Highness...”

“My husband has no political functions...”

“But he is very close to Lord Palmerston, either by political relations of the past or by family connections...”

***

After the meeting with Russel it was possible for the Queen to read the newspapers of the last days. The wedding filled the pages of them all. Victoria was much praised, all said she looked beautiful! The Illustrated London News had published an extensive article on the happy event. And the remarks about William in the press, oddly enough, had almost all changed to positive...

He entered the room while she, sitting at her desk, read the latest news.

“Have you read what the papers say?” Victoria asked.
“I have, yes.”

“I don’t think we have anything to worry about, as far as public opinion is concerned about our marriage...”

“It's always like that. When the inevitable becomes effective and there’s no longer anything to do about it, it’s better to stop criticizing and staying on the side of those who have the power... And your meeting?” He asked interestedly.

“John Russell doesn’t know how to kiss my hand like you did.”

William laughed in surprise. That was not at all what he was asking...

Victoria noticed that, but continued:

“He doesn’t kneel and doesn’t hold my hand firmly... No one has ever kissed my hand with the determination and the elegance with which you used to do it!”

“Do you want me to kiss your hand again?” He asked, speaking seriously.

With a malicious grin Victoria replied:

“I like you to kiss everything else... But if you want to kiss my hand once in a while, I'll also appreciate it.”

He grabbed her left arm above her elbow and pulled her up from the chair, kissing her mouth next.

“Now speaking seriously, Victoria. Were there any issues of concern at the meeting?”

“Yes! Russel thinks it would be preferable to accept a treaty with Russia to delimit areas of influence in Asia, which would cost us less resources and fewer lives, but for that Palmerston has to change his stand...”

“And somebody has to act in that sense.”

“Russell clearly proposed for that to be you...”

William sighed and said:

“I happen to go out today to meet Palmerston, and I will use the chance to subtly bring this matter up.”

Victoria smiled thankfully.

William kissed her and left.

When she was alone, Victoria wrote to Cousin Maria, Queen of Portugal, to tell her how the wedding had went, but above all to show her how happy she was! Maybe Cousin Ferdinand would not be very pleased with the news, preferring Victoria to have married their cousin Albert. But that didn’t matter because it was now done and consummated! Actually, it had already been consummated before it took place...

***

That night the first official dinner after being married would take place, with relatives and high individualities.
The Duchess of Kent had gone to live at Clarence House after the wedding. At last Victoria, now in her married condition, could be free of her. Before, as a single woman, she had to live with her mother. But today the duchess was obviously invited to dinner.

Victoria was seated at the dressing table, already dressed and combed, and Skerrett was about to put the necklace on her.

William came over and replaced her in this task, smiling at the dresser.

Skerrett smiled as she retreated. She loved to be an accomplice in the manifestations of love between them.

After closing the clasp of the necklace he put his hands on her shoulders, bent over and kissed Victoria on the neck.

She loved him doing that. She stroked his right hand and stood up.

“You look stunning!” He exclaimed delighted with the vision of her.

It was all she needed. As always his words of affection and encouragement had upon her an immeasurable strength. When the door to the chambers from where they were to came out opened, everyone would see the preciousness of the necklace and the diamond tiara she wore as signs of power and wealth, but only she – and he – knew that the solidity she displayed was the result of the gleam of his gaze upon her, of feeling him beside her, sure of his exclusive love and his stable tenderness.

“Well, let's face them!” She said. “Now we come in together and make the greetings together, but then... you know... My Uncle Sussex will be out there and he's going to accompany me...”

“It's all right, my love! Don’t worry about that...”

“Over time I hope they will see you with other eyes, and that some aspects of the protocol will be overcome...”

He nodded.

William raised his right hand for Victoria to overlap her left hand, and they walked to the door of the chambers, she at his right.

They stopped before the door opened and kissed quickly.

The door was opened by the footmen.

They walked together to the outside and the announcement was heard:

“Her Majesty, the Queen, and His Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh!”

As they walked through the gallery the eyes of all those who were waiting for dinner were in them.

William thought their union was seen as something exotic. It had been approved, it had happened, but it would still continue to cause strangeness for a long time. It remained to expect it to become natural. He felt he was being evaluated; that they were all going to witness how despite being the Queen's husband, he would be surpassed by Victoria's uncle, and how naturally he would react to it.

The attending guests noticed how the Queen was more beautiful, happier, more... It was difficult to
describe... She looked the same, but at the same time, she seemed so changed... It was obvious that marriage and the honeymoon with that man had done wonders...

Then the announcement was heard:

“His Royal Highness, the Duke of Sussex, and Her Grace, the Duchess of Inverness!”

As she approached her Uncle, Victoria said:

“Uncle Sussex!”

“Ma’am!”

The duke kissed her cheek and then her hand.

The duchess bowed.

“Lady Cecilia!” The Queen exclaimed.

The entrance of one more guest was announced:

“His Grace, the Duke of Wellington!”

Arriving at the Queen’s side Wellington bowed his head and said:

“From your countenance I can see that you are happy, Ma’am!”

“It could not be otherwise... And Your Grace contributed to it.”

“I just gave a little nudge.” The Duke remarked as he moved along the gallery, following the Queen.

William was purposely behind.

Then the Duke of Sussex, realizing that the Queen was about to enter the dining room, approached and said:

“As the only royal Prince present, I know that it is my privilege to take you to dinner, Ma’am.”

Victoria smiled at him and said:

“Indeed.”

The Queen placed her hand over the Duke of Sussex's hand, and they walked together in front of the entourage of guests for dinner. They were immediately followed by William accompanied by the Duchess of Inverness. The pair of royal blood was followed by the pair of morganatic marriage spouses!

***

On February 25, Victoria and William went to the wedding of Frederick and Alexandrina.

Victoria wore a lilac dress and her hairstyle was adorned with white Phalaenopsis schilleriana orchids, with shreds of lilac and a little bit of yellow in the center, from Brocket Hall. William wore black pants and coat, a white shirt and lace, and a small patterned vest where lilac prevailed to match her dress.
When they were finishing getting ready to leave, he put the embroidered silk shawl on her back. She loved these gestures of his. He took care of her. And she saw the admiration in his eyes as they landed on her.

She reached out her hand to him and he held it gently.

In meetings like this, things were more comfortable for William in his condition as the Queen's husband, because they were farther from the Court's intrigues and slander. Although he had developed an armor for these situations throughout his personal and political life, it was never pleasant to know that certain gossip circulated in the corridors and halls, especially since it also affected Victoria now. And the strength of her royal image and her emotional stability were his priority.

William was an extremely well-connected man who knew everyone and, as always, helped Victoria to know who was who.

She felt good in the company of Emily and Alexandrina. After the ceremony, interests were shared in the reception. The Queen invited them to have tea at Buckingham, an honor for both.

The topic of the moment was the sinking of Governor Fenner that, on February 20, carrying emigrants to America, had sunk in Holyhead with the loss of 123 lives.

Emily again showed an interest of talking about William. She liked him and the relationship he had established with Victoria very much, and she felt an overwhelming urge to tell things to the Queen because she thought that would help their relationship, for she introduced Victoria to topics that seemed important to her so that things between them worked. Besides, she was relieved in being able to criticize Caroline, whom she hated for what she had done to her brother.

Taking advantage of their being alone and looking at William from afar, Emily said to Victoria:

“I really like to see my brother so happy!”

“And I'm so glad to have contributed to his happiness!”

“He had two lives. One before he met you, and another one after.”

Victoria liked the meaning of Emily's remark. She smiled.

“You know how his easy manners and his apparent indifference tend to hide the excellence of his understanding and the warmth of his feelings. A painfully sensitive man, given to introspection, adopted to the world a mask of cynical indifference. Despite the miseries of his private life, which, thanks to his reckless, unbalanced and promiscuous wife – and his own weakness – were often publicly exposed, he has a generally delicious presence and is always a peculiar company.” Emily described.

“Oh yes! He is a delightful presence and a peculiar company.” Victoria remarked.

“I remember how he was aggravated in the autumn of 1820 when Caroline sported her latest achievement: the young Scottish doctor hired to take care of Augustus! A disgrace! That woman took advantage of all men who crossed her way...”

“Augustus's doctor? I did not know...” Victoria said in shock.

“It is true! Sometimes he would tell me that his life was miserable and that he did not know what to do with Caroline, that he never had a day of peace and that her violence increased so much that he
feared she would do some serious harm to one of her servants. He said he had never known such temper... He was foolish for having carried her for years as he did, nevertheless one cannot help but feel sorry for him... I think that, contrary to what we thought back then, he was not blind about her, but on the contrary, he saw her as she really was...”

“It's curious... that he has gone through all this suffering and has not lost the ability to love and to be so sweet...” Victoria noted.

“Yes! It's his personality. In 1825, before he separated from Caroline, he was quite concerned about the problem of effecting a formal separation, while her behavior was more outrageous than ever since Byron's death the year before. And Frederick and I insisted that he separated... Although he had already realized what the end was, he hesitated about the means and had difficulty dealing with the details, which made him leave for Paris for a while. I have never seen such an irresolute person in my life!”

“Irresolute, William?”

“Hard to believe, is it not? In the things that related to his marriage to Caroline, all was irresolution! Every little thing changed his purpose and made him hesitate. After long negotiations, during which Caroline used every available trick in an attempt to break William's resolution, an agreement was reached and she finally submitted to him by going to Paris. Then William went to Melbourne Hall. At that time I saw him as happy as possible! Although he had to deal with his son’s condition, whom he took with him, which was another inconvenience to his comfort. But after only two months, Caroline was back in London in the midst of a fury... But William, to my delight, acted decisively and confined her to the care of Dr. Goddard. She was allowed to live in Brocket, with the doctor taking care of her full time, and her decline to death began...”

William was approaching and Emily was silent so he would not hear her talk about Caro now that he was so happy! She skillfully remarked:

“Oh, William, I was here commenting with Her Majesty how happy I am to see both my brothers so well married!”

***

Sir George Hayter, who had painted the portrait of Victoria's coronation, had come to paint the portrait of the wedding. The bride and groom had to wear the clothes of that day and stay a few hours at the mercy of the painter. It was not easy, and William thought the procedure a nuisance... But it had to be done...

For several days the painting sessions happened. The painter then added other figures that had been present at the ceremony, which also underwent a few hours of exposure. In other cases, in the impossibility of having the pictured available in the flesh, Hayter copied the faces from other portraits...

The worst was when Victoria decided that Sir George Hayter should paint a life-size portrait of William. This increased the time he had to model for the painter! Most times he made excuses to dodge this torture, but in others he had to put up with it!

***

It was now possible to enjoy the benefits of the marriage they had waited for years and for which they had fought. Now they were even more companions than ever, they were companions in every sense.
William continued to be a member of the Privy Council and Victoria's personal secretary, and this latter function made them spend a lot of time together as they did before they got married. He liked to help her with this task and she loved being able to have him around as long as possible. Victoria was an intelligent and educated woman, but he was smarter and much more cultured, and she adored him for that. Now, while they worked together, it was possible to share the intimacy of a newly married couple. William liked to run his hands over Victoria's shoulders when she was seated and he, standing beside her, leaned over the table to put another document in front of her. And he loved kissing her on the neck and take her concentration away from the documents to dispatch... Victoria was delighted to be able to sit on his lap without reserve and kiss him until the lips hurt! Sometimes work meetings were not very productive... But as always these hours of work, like all other hours spent together, were a pleasure to both of them: he would calm her, and she would revive him.

He had his own office in Buckingham to be able to read and write quietly, and to where he carried books almost every day. He liked to go there after dinner and before going to bed. Even in his nightshirt and robe. But after Victoria went to bed, he didn’t take too long to go to bed too. She liked him to be in bed before she fell asleep and he liked every interaction they had before that.

The marriage also had the delectable part of being able to appear together in public as husband and wife, as in the first performance of Dion Boucicault's London Assurance by Charles Mathews at the Royal Theater in Covent Garden on 4th March 1841. Victoria was a devout admirer of the work of the Irishman Boucicault.

And there were also the boring parts like the weekly religious service in the royal chapel of St. James's palace, which Victoria attended and to which William now, as the Queen's husband, also had to go! He was not a going to church man. But he made that sacrifice for her.

But in all these circumstances William always felt a little uneasy. He was still the object of the eyes of the people around him, and he always felt as the intruder, the Queen's unusual husband who had shaken the rigid rules of the British monarchy.

William was the best of husbands! A sublime man, whom Victoria considered far superior to herself! She would know how to love him as he deserved! It was a pleasure to record in her journal the daily events of her new life with William at her side, from the most political to the most intimate. She could now also describe in the journal the events and feelings of the first time... How life seemed different to her now that she was married to William, and that she had him always by her side! Everything was perfect! Victoria was happy as a woman and as queen, with the English banner reaching the ends of the planet! She just wanted to love William and serve the kingdom. To think that after finishing the day's obligations, he would always be there, so that she could run her eyes and hands over him, kiss his body, it was the greatest stimulus to the intense and sometimes endless days of State affairs and official commitments.

***

It would be William’s birthday on 15th March.

Victoria decided to organize a partly surprise party. She didn’t risk a completely surprise party because she thought he wouldn’t like to be caught unawares. And it was not easy to prepare something big in the palace without him noticing anything. So she informed William that she was going to organize the party, but that she was not going to tell him the details, which he would only know that day.

William began by saying that he didn’t want to have a party, but Victoria insisted and he eventually gave in.
She knew he hadn’t had a birthday party for many years and now that they were married she wanted to make up for it all, as if it were possible to fill up all the faults of the years when he had lived alone or had led a difficult life. She planned the dinner, the poetry soirée to follow, and the dance at the end. She invited William's family and friends. Now that he had no political functions it was also a way of promoting contact with former colleagues of the Parliament. And she wanted there to be situations that fueled his social exposure as her husband, she wanted people to see how proud she was of him, wanted to publicly show that she was in love with that man. She felt that this would be a way of stimulating his acceptance in the royal family and among the more conservative aristocracy who had voted against their marriage.
Chapter 23

Someone knocked on the office door.

“Yes?” William answered from inside where he was seating at his desk.

The door opened, and Skerrett appeared asking permission to enter and bowing.

“Sorry to bother you, Your Highness.”

“What is it, Skerrett?” He asked, noticing the nervousness in the dresser’s face.

“It is Dash, sir...”

William made an inquisitive expression for her to continue.

“He is on the floor of Her Majesty's chambers and he is not moving...”

William's heart fell! Victoria!

“Where is Her Majesty?” He asked worriedly as he rose from the chair.

“In the garden.”

“Good!” He exclaimed in relief and then asked, “Please, Skerrett, go call Her Majesty and bring her to my office. Tell her I asked to speak with her...”

The dresser nodded and turned to leave.

“Thank you Skerrett!” William thanked her and added, “And do not worry... I will take care of Her Majesty.”

She bowed again and left.

After a few minutes of anguish for William, walking in the office from side to side, Victoria came in triumphantly: hurried and laughing at the conversation she had had with her ladies in the garden.

“Oh my love! You sent for me?”

“Yes” he replied, walking up to Victoria and grabbing her hands. He walked with her two steps to the left to the next couch and sat down, sitting her down too.

She noticed that something negative must have happened by the way he acted and by his grave countenance.

“What happened?” Victoria asked expectantly as she sat down.

He ran his thumbs by her knuckles and smiled slightly.

“Victoria... Dash...” William hesitated over the best way to tell the truth.

She felt a fist in her stomach. She moved her head slightly to the side, making an expression as if thinking to have understood what he meant, but needed confirmation.

“Victoria, my dear... unfortunately, the wonderful journey of Dash at your side has ended...” He
finally materialized.

Victoria couldn’t believe what she had just heard! She had noticed that in the past few days the dog was apathetic and ate little, but this... Tears flooded her beautiful blue eyes and she exclaimed:

“No, it cannot be true!”

Immediately she got up from the couch while asking, without looking at William, as if some distant memory passed through her head:

“Where is it? I want to see it!”

He also got up and informed her:

“In our chambers. I didn’t want you to go through the shock of finding it...”

Victoria looked at William and threw herself in his arms, crying convulsively.

He tucked her close to him as much as he could, as if it were possible to neutralize the pain that only she could feel at that moment.

When she calmed down, William accompanied Victoria to their quarters.

Dash was prostrate on the floor of the green room.

Victoria fell to her knees beside the dog, again crying convulsively, and William knelt behind her to support her.

She turned to him in despair, hugged him tightly, like one who couldn’t bear it, and cried out in sobs:

“He was my only friend! William! In Kensington... For many years... Before you entered my life...”

William couldn’t help but cry as well, pressing her against his chest as he said:

“I know, Victoria... I know... I understand.”

***

Victoria felt herself awake, but didn’t open her eyes so as not to wake up fully. She turned to look for William's body, who was still sleeping, and snuggled in the heat radiating from his chest.

He felt her and pressed her harder against him.

He had his nightshirt on, but she was naked.

Victoria thought she had to wake up for the first appointment in the morning, and the day was going to be filled with the orientation of the last details for the party that night. She would stay there all day, but it was impossible! She opened her eyes.

William was looking at her.

“Good Morning! Happy birthday, my love!” She exclaimed, smiling.

“Thank you my dear!” He thanked her smiling in return.

They kissed.
Victoria rolled over to place herself on top of William's body.

He ran his hands down her sides, feeling the smoothness of her skin.

“Today you’ll have your party!” She reminded.

“What color is the dress you're going to wear?”

“Black.”

“So... violets should be a good choice, right?” He suggested as he wrapped his hands around the curves of her body, from the waist to the hips.

“I guess so!” She agreed, feeling the warmth of his hands.

“I don’t want you to have to change the choice of dress because of my flowers. It’s best to bring some that are appropriate.”

“Are you going to Brocket Hall?” She asked in surprise.

“Yes! Anyway, you didn’t want me in the palace during the day so not to see the last preparations for the party... I'll be back in the afternoon and bring the flowers to adorn your hair!” He informed her as he encircled her buttocks, appreciating the shape and volume in his hands.

“And I will love wearing them... as always...” Victoria said and kissed him again.

He squeezed the lower part of her buttocks.

She felt excited and realized that he was evolving in the same direction, but she couldn’t allow things to go that way already.

“Please William, stop touching me... Today I really cannot be late!”

Immediately he took his hands off her body and teased her, saying with a natural tone:

“But it's you who's on top of me.”

Victoria got up immediately laughing. She couldn’t afford to stay another second in that bed!

***

The Queen and His Highness walked down the gallery greeting the guests waiting there for dinner.

Victoria wore a black dress whose neckline exposed her shoulders and was surrounded by a broad lace frill of the same color. She wore white gloves that reached above the elbow, and her hair wrapped, but with several locks that fell in straws over her shoulders, had been adorned with the violets offered by William, brought expressly from Brocket Hall. The flower of simplicity and delicacy, considered by the Greeks as a symbol of love and fertility. As jewels she wore small earrings, a brooch in the center of the neckline, and two bracelets.

William with black pants below the knee, coat and socks of the same color, white shirt, vest and light beige bow.

The nobility was dazzled at their feet! In spite of the strangeness of the way that man had become the husband of the Queen, which was still the subject of comment, no one could deny the beauty and elegance of that couple, seemingly so unequal but with so much deeply in common. Men
envied Melbourne, a middle-aged man married to the most powerful woman in the world, young, 
beautiful, and in love with him. Women envied the Queen who, besides being the most powerful 
woman in the world, young and beautiful, had made a marriage out of love and shared the bed with 
an extremely handsome, affable and cultured man.

William wondered if all the men who stared delighted at Victoria wanted her as well. He 
considered it was best not to imagine the thoughts that might pass through the heads of those men...

As hosts, Victoria and William sat at opposite ends of the huge dining table.

At the end of the meal the Queen rose from her chair, a gesture in which, of course, she was 
followed by everyone. Then Victoria raised her glass, looked at William and said:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to offer a toast to His Highness, but first I would like to say a few 
words about my worthy husband.”

There was silence.

At the opposite end of the table, William shuddered inwardly. His intuition told him that what 
would come next would not be easy to manage emotionally. In fact, he shouldn’t have let her 
organize that party!

With her eyes on him, Victoria declared:

“William... to have known you was the most important fact of my life. You showed me a world 
that I had never contacted with before. With patience, clarity and straightforwardness you taught 
me, advised me and, even walking always one step behind me, guided my own steps in the early 
years of my reign...”

The voice choked, but she could not afford to cry. She continued:

“In your face I found trust, hope, forgiveness... And you did all that in a completely disinterested 
way, just to see me shine, knowing who I was born to be!”

William felt his heart beating hastily and he struggled to maintain his composure, wishing her to 
finish quickly. What she said about him was a balm to the soul, but too touching.

She continued:

“But even more important than all this was the affection you brought into my existence that made 
me want to become your wife. You are the only man I could wish to share my life with. With you 
by my side I will always remain strong and standing!”

The guests at the table were equally moved by the Queen's words, in which truth was recognized.

Victoria knew she was exposing her personal life too much, she knew the nature of the words she 
uttered in public would cause strangeness, but she was taken by the emotion of the moment. And 
she also wanted everyone present to be well aware of the nature and depth of the feelings that had 
made her fight against everything and everyone to be able to marry that man!

Without taking his eyes off her, William continued to feel a contained emotion that made him 
uncomfortable.

Raising the glass, Victoria concluded:
“For all this, William, I must thank you and I want to toast to your birthday, wishing you a long life and the greatest happiness by my side!”

Everyone's cups rose on the table.

Victoria was unable to hold a tear that ran down her face as she brought the glass to her mouth.

William had tears welling up in his eyes.

When the toast was over he also wanted to speak:

“Ladies... Gentlemen... If you will allow me, I would also like to say a few words. First of all, I would like to thank the attendance of all of you this evening and, secondly, I would like to profoundly thank Her Majesty, who organized this whole celebration in an extremely dedicated way. Although she did not let me know the details in advance...”

The crowd around the table laughed.

William had purposefully introduced a note of humor to try to make things emotionally easier. And then he continued:

“But more than that, I must thank you above all for the courage, the commitment and the struggle with which you conducted the process that allowed our marriage, the same characteristics you use daily in the exercise of your sovereignty. From the first day I saw you I knew you would be a great queen, and the greatest honor of my political career was serving you as prime minister and personal secretary... But the greatest honor is to be your husband! Victoria, you just wished me a long and happy life... Surely it will be full of happiness and just for a simple reason... for having you by my side!”

The guests clapped.

Victoria and William were both touched.

The poetry soirée followed focused on William's favorite poets, and then the dance, which the royal couple opened before the eyes of all those present that joined them to dance the waltz.

Victoria looked deep into William's eyes and appreciated the glow she always found there. She was so pleased to be able to make him happy and to use the flowers he had brought her!

“I’m proud to wear your flowers, William!”

“And I'm proud to see you wear them. You know they are planted especially for you.”

“No other woman in the Court wears flowers as fresh and beautiful as I do.”

“You look even more beautiful when you wear flowers in your hair! And I plant the most beautiful flowers for the most beautiful woman.”

Victoria smiled.

“These also mean special thanks for all your dedication in the preparation of this party.” He concluded.

“Today I can dance only with you, William! And if we want to, we can dance together every night... As I always wanted.”
He smiled and said:

“Now we can do it without fear.”

“We have so many things in common, you like the same things that I do... Dancing, horseback riding... And you do it all so well!”

“Maybe that’s why life brought us together…” He remarked.

“I guess so!” She exclaimed convinced, then asked, deeply interested in the answer, “Are you happy?”

“Of course, Victoria! But never do that to me again...”

“Do what? What didn’t you like?”

He shook his head negatively and explained:

“No, Victoria, the problem is not that I didn’t like it. The problem is that I was pleasantly touched by your words, but I don’t want you to make me cry in the presence of all these people...”

She smiled at him tenderly.

“It’s over now! And I promise not to do this again until your next birthday...” She assured him.

William laughed.

“You know that everything I said is the absolute truth.” She said.

“I know.” He agreed, closing his eyes. “And you also know that what I told you later is the deepest truth from the bottom of my heart.”

Victoria smiled.

***

When the dance was over late at night as Victoria liked, the guests, in an organized line, bid farewell to the royal couple.

Once alone, Victoria and William went to their chambers.

They walked through the gallery arm in arm, walking slowly.

Victoria dismissed the dresser.

As he entered the dressing room, he bumped into a large package placed on the couch, which wasn’t there when he had left hours earlier for dinner.

William looked at Victoria questioningly.

“You can open it, it’s yours!” She informed him with a smile.

He went to the couch and tore the wrapping that hid the piece.

William opened his mouth, completely surprised and delighted.

The gift was an oval painting of a life-size half-body portrait of Victoria. But more than that, it was
a special representation. With her back resting on a red cushion, Victoria appeared in a white dress,
adorned with a frill around a wide neckline, where only a bow of purple ribbon stood out in the
center. Her shoulders and breasts were bare, her head turned to the left, and her hair, partially
undeone from the elegant bun, fell in a long strand over the left shoulder. There were no jewels
except for a very fine gold chain with a small glass pendant in the shape of a heart, and only a
simple and tiny earring was visible in the image. It was not a common portrait. It was an intimate
and seductive pose!

“It’s wonderful!” He exclaimed in astonishment without taking his eyes off the portrait.

William took the canvas with both hands so he could look at the picture more closely.

She noticed how his eyes sparkled, even more so now than at any other time of the night.

“This portrait lives up to your beauty! It's the closest picture to reality I've ever seen!” He remarked
with conviction.

Victoria was so happy and proud to have found something that gave him such pleasure! She had
been expecting the effect it would have had on William since when she had had the idea of having
the portrait painted.

He put the painting back on the couch. He turned to her, grabbed her by the waist and thanked her:

“Thank you my love! After yourself, this is the best gift you could give me.”

William kissed Victoria passionately.

“This is my secret image, just for the eyes of my husband and no one else’s.” Victoria explained.

“I’ll put it in my office, so I can see it whenever I want, even when you're not with me.”

“I wanted to give you my image as a woman, not as a queen, because you are the only person to
whom I am not the queen, but only the woman...”

He smiled and said:

“Your words at the end of dinner and this picture mean a lot to me, Victoria! You managed to
make this day one of the happiest days of my life.”

“How wonderful, William, that was my goal! And this is my favorite image of myself, and the one
that represents my love for you.”

He smiled again and hugged her. Then he said:

“I didn’t even ask who the painter was...”

“Franz Xaver Winterhalte, you know how I like his work.”

“It’s perfect!”

“He manages to capture the essence of the women he paints and doesn’t merely represent us in a
formal way...”

He kissed her again enthusiastically and between kisses he remarked:

“Maybe now I can claim a gift of flesh and blood...”
“Oh, well, I’d like to present myself as a gift to you, but right now... my menses came this morning...” Victoria lamented.

He didn’t count on that now. He was surprised:

“Oh...”

“I’m not expecting a baby yet, William... And at the moment I can’t give you another carnal gift either...”

He reassured her:

“Don’t worry. I don’t live anxious for you to be expecting, and I guess that has made you more relieved...”

“Yes, it's true, it did...” She confessed, nodding.

William sighed. He could enjoy her in other ways, but he would let her be. They would have other opportunities to explore alternatives...

“And as for the carnal gift we only have to wait a few days... then I can have my gift...” He concluded in a humorous tone.

She smiled.

They undressed, put on their nightgowns, and lay down.

Victoria thought this was the best time of day, when they went to bed and could stay there warm and hugging. He was so tender and gentle and accepted so easily her condition as a woman, with which she was confronted every day. Harder than being a monarch, was to be a woman and a monarch. In the future when she became pregnant, which she hoped wouldn’t happen soon, she would be limited in fulfilling her obligations during pregnancy, even more before labor and long after. For men, everything was easy. Men didn’t lose their virginity, men didn’t get pregnant, men didn’t have to suffer to bring children into the world, and they didn’t run the risk of dying in childbirth. And then there was this, this bleeding that appeared every month and that conditioned her because it forced her to special and uncomfortable care, to avoid dirtying the clothes; which involved frequent changes and which prevented her from continuing to enjoy William. Since they were married it had happened twice, a few days after returning from the honeymoon and now. It was a good sign because she wasn’t pregnant, but it was an embarrassment in the marriage bed! But he was exceptional, as always! He didn’t complain about the limitations and continued to sleep with her. There were men who couldn’t stand the idea of sleeping with a woman in these conditions, as if she were impure! He not only slept with her, but also didn’t mind when the characteristic odor was stronger and reacted naturally when, upon waking in the morning, there was blood on the sheets. She struggled to keep that from happening, but sometimes it was inevitable.

“There is no one who understands me as you do, William. Only you always knew how to listen to me... even in silence...” Victoria remarked deepening her face on his chest.

“And there is no one that gives me the peace you give... And you reach a part of me that no one else can see...” He concluded before falling asleep.

***
Today they were going to travel to Melbourne Hall.

William tied the ribbons of the hat of an expectant Victoria, to know the property where she had never been, and which he claimed to have beautiful gardens. But Melbourne Hall was much more distant from London than Brocket Hall, and the journey would be long and tiring.

After almost a day's travel – accompanied by suitcases, baggage, servants and horse-guards – with a few stops along the way, they finally arrived. Victoria got very tired in these journeys, and the late hour determined that they had dinner and that she knew only a few parts of the house. But the next day, after the sunrise, it would be possible to take a guided tour with William through the house.

When Victoria appeared ready for breakfast, as always William thought she looked resplendent! The dress was new; he had never seen it before. Of a light beige, the skirt had three overlays of different heights that ended in a narrow fringe. The body, which ended in a V at the front, marked the waist masterfully. The sleeves were long, with a narrow fringe applied at the elbow’s level. The neckline exposed her chest, shoulders, and back, and in front, over her breasts, she had an application of inverted triangle-shaped tissue that had interspersed ribs in two shades of beige. The hair was caught in a simple bun above the nape – a hairstyle he adored – and small, suspended, pearly earrings adorned her ears.

The visit to the house began in the dining room where they had breakfast. It was the oldest part of the mansion, with several portraits of the 17th century. The office followed; the large and bright living room; the library... Victoria was always impressed by the libraries.

“Wherever you are there's always a library, isn’t there, William?” She asked smiling, noting the informality with which he was dressed: beige trousers; white shirt, unbuttoned in the chest, and a bordeaux vest.

“It seems so…”

“How many books do you have?” Victoria asked looking at the shelves.

“I don’t know exactly. Lots of hundreds, I suppose…”

He was adorable! Beautiful in that unpretentious way of being. The way he answered her, as if he was completely indifferent if he had half a dozen books or hundreds of them… She walked over to him, hugged him and said:

“I wish I knew all those things you know.”

When William looked down he saw the rounded volume of her breasts on the line of the dress’s neckline. The sight was breathtaking!

“You haven’t had the time for that yet. One day you will know.” He said.

“But I don’t read as much as you do, I will never have your knowledge...”

“Knowledge is not wisdom, Ma’am!”

A serious life lesson with a humorous ending!

She smiled. He always knew how to say the right thing. And that “Ma’am” at the end made her remember the past. That was the way Lord M spoke to her. She felt that comforting sensation he give her at that time. Now he continued to give her comforting sensations every day, but the
relationship had evolved. The natural order of things. Everything she had ever wanted. It was different. Even better than it was then. But there was always a sense of nostalgia associated with the memory of that time.

Then he gave her his arm to stroll through the gardens created in the early 18th century.

William went out only with the vest and Victoria put on her head a thin mesh hat, the same color as the dress, adorned on the left side with a bow of light blue ribbon.

He wanted to show her the flowers, lakes, statues, and the vase of the Four Seasons – a baroque sculpture on a pedestal by Jan Van Nost, offered by Queen Anne in 1705 to the owner of the house at the time, the architect Thomas Coke.

They descended from the house, down the garden’s main street in the front. They passed the statue of Mercury and skirted the great bowl of water on the right so that he could show her the most impressive construction of the garden. On the other side of the bowl, facing the front of the house, although far from it, was the Birdcage. The beautiful and original garden folly. A masonry division, closed by a wooden door and an atrium, in turn preceded by a wrought iron structure (black, green and gold) that reproduced a gigantic bird cage.

Victoria found the piece wonderful and romantic.

“I had never seen such a garden folly.” She remarked as she walked through the always opened cage door, looking up at the sky through the dome-shaped structure above.

He watched the perfection of her shoulders and felt the urge to kiss them.

“The iron structure was made in the early 18th century by Robert Bakewell when the gardens were under construction.” William informed her.

“Very original.”

“Actually the iron structure is a pergola. It could serve to support the growth of a plant, like a bougainvillea.” He explained also already inside the cage.

“Besides books, in your life there are always flowers and birds, isn’t it?” She asked looking at him.

“We could say so.” He answered grabbing her by the waist.

Then William led her backwards to the wall and kissed her.

“I even have in my collection of flowers one that is unique and the most beautiful that exists in England.” He stated expecting her reaction.

“How’s it called?” She asked curiously, just as he had predicted.

“Victoria!”

There! From then on the visit to the garden was suspended.

He kissed her nibbling her bottom lip.

She wanted him!

He wanted her!
He gave her his right hand while with his left he took a key from the pocket of his pants. He opened the wooden door to the folly and took her inside. He had the whole folly cleaned before Victoria's visit.

There was a single empty room, with only a bench with turned legs.

He left the door ajar.

Under cover of the walls of the folly they hugged and kissed.

She took off her hat and he reached for the clasps on the back of the dress with both hands.

She turned her back to him to facilitate the task.

Her dress, petticoat, corset, shirt and briefs were removed in sequence as fast as circumstances permitted.

Naked, only with stockings above her knees, and shoes, she collaborated in the removal of the vest and the opening of his shirt.

He remembered a different element! He turned her back to him.

She put her hands on the wall.

He ran both hands down her sides. He started in her breasts, went down her waist and hips as he knelt behind her. Then he ran his hands down her legs from her ankles to her buttocks. He kissed them, grabbed them, and pulled them away with to get access with his mouth and nose to the folds in the middle of her legs.

She pulled her legs away to ease his access as she sighed and closed her eyes.

He licked it. He introduced the tongue. It smelled and tasted delicious!

Victoria felt warm and activated.

Then, moments later, he stood up, opened his pants, grabbed her by the waist with his left arm, pressed himself against her and invaded her, kissing the back of her neck! Her nape was beautiful. He could kiss her incessantly. Fucking her with her hair down was wonderful. But fucking her with her hair wrapped, with that bun above the nape was equally astonishing!

Every time he took possession of her Victoria was in a state of fullness. But like that, standing, from behind, pressed against the wall, maybe it was above that! She felt his arms and hands rise up along the sides of the torso, then through her belly and through her breasts, covering them. The tips of the fingers as they climbed. Then the nails pressing lightly as they descended.

The volume of her buttocks, the curvature of her back, the softness of her skin, the little pearly earrings she wore that fluttered with his every thrust... He was losing control of reason! He grabbed her arms, pulled them behind her back and held them together in his hands.

Victoria leaned against the wall with her chest and face.

“Fuck, Victoria! You're so good! So good!”

His words excited her more.

“Oh, William!”
Not being different in the mechanisms, it was alternative in the form! She felt how much he wanted her and how it transformed him every time they connected. A frenzy that made him do things she hadn’t seen him do or experienced before, but that she always enjoyed. It was good, good, good! Her inside throbbed with him!

“I've never had a woman like this!” He exclaimed in the heat of the moment.

She felt pride rising! She was better than all the others!

He squeezed her right buttock with his right hand as he continued to hold her arms behind her back with the left hand and pressed against her with more determination.

She thought her arms were going to hurt after that, but right now that didn’t matter at all.

“You’re wonderful!” Victoria said in delirium.

He thought her body could end up marked from the pressure against the wall, but he couldn’t stop now. And if she didn’t complain...

“This is so good! Fuck me all William!” She prodded him delighted.

He couldn’t wait much longer... It was all innovative and exciting... He needed her to get there quickly!

She was in full swing, but it would take a few more seconds to rise. But with his right hand he touched her there, in that place that stirred the lust and made her lose consciousness.

It was magical!

She wouldn’t need this additional stimulation, but the conjunction of the inner touch with the external incitement made her scream! Hooked on William, with her arms fastened behind her back and the hips imprisoned between his body and his hand!

Her muscles contracted around it, squeezing it! He blinded! For a moment, everything went dull as he allowed that sensation to consume him and threw himself inside her. She was sidereal!

Victoria felt the release of her arms and realized that, as she had supposed, they hurt. It didn’t matter!

The stripping of the space had determined that they did it standing. The unusualness of the place and the bold manner with which it had been done, had made the moment different from any other previous times.

She turned to him, panting, grabbed his perspiring face with both hands and kissed him.

He hugged her and kissed her back.

It was hard to tell if the kisses were more devouring at the beginning, when desire desperately needed to be placated, if at the end, after it had just been satiated! These kisses made her pulse again between her legs...

They collected the clothes from the top of the bench and got dressed.

The walk through the gardens could then continue.

Never before had a bird cage served so literally as a love nest like this!
Chapter 24

Victoria had just approved the marble inscription she would place on Dash's grave, buried at Windsor:

“Here lies
DASH
The favourite spaniel of Her Majesty Queen Victoria
In his 10th year
His attachment was without selfishness
His playfulness without malice
His fidelity without deceit
READER
If you would be beloved and die regretted
Profit by the example of
DASH”

The sculptor was still leaving when William entered the room.

She was intrigued by the fact that he brought in his hands a closed basket shaped like a small chest with a swinging lid.

“What do you bring in there?”

“How curious you are, Ma’am!”

Victoria smiled and thought it could be flowers, but normally the basket wasn’t closed...

William smiled and stooped to put the basket on the floor. However, he didn’t sit the bottom on the floor, but rather one side of the basket carefully, leaving the lid facing the side where Victoria was.

She smiled intrigued, looking at what he was doing.

“William...”

He motioned her to not make noise by placing the index finger of the right hand on the nose, and then, when he thought the staging was set, he got up waiting for the effect.

Victoria looked at him and he looked at Victoria in silence. And they both looked at the basket.

The lid moved.

Victoria raised her eyebrows.

The lid moved again and began to be pushed.

She looked surprised.

Then the lid was forced to move forward and from inside the basket came out a Scottish Collie puppy. Black and white, a little beige in the snout.

Victoria opened her mouth in surprise and smiled with happiness as she moved toward the puppy and picked it up delighted.
William smiled, satisfied with her happiness.

“Oh, William! It's a lovely puppy!”

“I thought you'd like it...Collies are sensitive and intelligent dogs, known by their eternal loyalty and incredible ability to predict their owner’s needs. They’re a great company for a family…”

“Oh my love!” She exclaimed, turning to him as she held the dog.

Victoria kissed William and thanked him:

“Thank you! You are adorable!”

“Oh... I can be as adorable as a dog...” He said with a tone of false resentment.

Victoria laughed and clarified:

“You're adorable in a different way...” And then she asked, “Does he already have a name?”

“Achilles!” William exclaimed solemnly, as he patted the dog’s head.

“Oh...That’s a great name!” She exclaimed surprised.

“His previous owner called him like that, but if you’d like you can still change it... He isn’t used to be called like that yet.”

“No, it shall be Achilles, the hero of Greek mythology!”

“And whose name means beauty and bravery!” Added William.

***

Social events followed one after the other, especially weddings. It seemed that everyone had decided to marry in that family. On 9th April 1841 William's niece, Frances Cowper, married Robert Jocelyn, Earl Jocelyn.

Already prepared and rectifying in the full-length mirror of the dressing room if everything fitted her properly, Victoria spoke in a high tone for William to hear her from the bedroom where he had gone to get the coat:

“After the wedding I'll make Frances one of my ladies of the bedchamber.”

“Oh, she will love such honor.” He replied.

Victoria observed her belly in the mirror. For now it was still smooth and elegant. Every night before bed she prayed that she wouldn’t get pregnant soon, that God would give her at least six months of marital life in which fear of childbirth was further delayed. She wanted to have William’s child, of course! She wanted very much to give him a child because it was a very important accomplishment for him, the rectifying of a lacking and great grief in his life. But she was scared! Scared of pain and death! She had already told him about it. However, she couldn’t deliberately delay that realization because time for him was shorter. So she allowed them to have complete carnal relations, trusting that God's mercy would give her some time. And then there was also that about which she hadn't spoken to William: she had no empathy for this new role of mother, she wasn’t attracted to babies and children, and she didn’t feel maternal instinct. And there would also be changes in the body and limitations of her personal activities and as sovereign...

There was, therefore, a mixture of different feelings. All that remained was to hope that divine
providence could counterbalance the importance of a pregnancy that wouldn’t be too late for him with her emotional need to postpone it!

When William got near Victoria, already fully prepared to leave for the ceremony, she looked at him dazzled. Trousers, vest, coat, gloves, everything fit perfectly. The top hat in his hand to put on when they got to the street.

Victoria exclaimed:

“Oh my God! You look gorgeous! Breathtaking! I married the most handsome man in the world!”

William laughed and said:

“It's your eyes, Ma’am!”

“The worst thing is that it's not my eyes, it's the truth! I don’t think I can be safe letting you leave the palace alone.”

“And why not?”

“I'm sure all the women in London have a crush on you!”

“Poor creatures!” He exclaimed contemptuously.

“Why?”

“Because I am faithful to only one woman.”

“And who is that woman?”

“The Queen!” William exclaimed, wrapping his arms around her waist.

Victoria smiled and straightened the bow around his neck as she said:

“You're a smart man! You gave the right answer! Otherwise I would send you to the Tower, just like Elizabeth did with her opponents.”

“I think she also had them beheaded!” He said teasingly.

“But that I could never order to be done because we’d lose too much beauty...” Victoria stated putting a hand on either side of William's head. And then, watching him closely, she added: “This face, these eyes and this mouth...”

He kissed her and with his right hand he felt her behind over the perfect crimped of her dress.

“In the Tower I could still visit you...” She added to the performance.

“And I'd appreciate all your visits, especially if you could spend the nights in my cell...”

“William! We’ll be late!” She reminded as she quickly let go of him and moved toward the door, pulling him behind her.

***

At that morning's meeting with the Prime Minister William was also present. He made no point of being in the meetings. It was not necessary and he didn’t want to invade the space between the
Queen and the Prime Minister, and he should even show the possible distance from the government matters, but naturally his presence became regular. If he was in the palace and had no occupation at that time he ended up attending the meeting or part of it. If he went out or if he was busy he wouldn’t attend.

William’s conversation with Palmerston in the sense of the eventual acceptance of the Russian proposal of a treaty to end hostilities in Afghanistan had had no effect, but there was news that George Keith Ephinstone was coming to Kabul to command the British troops and its allies in the area, which gave some hope of controlling the situation.

“When we began the war in 1839 all reports and correspondence of our envoys in the area convinced me and Palmerston of the need to act to reduce Russia's influence in the area. The Russians, allied with the Persians, were a threat to the interests of Britain…” William, who was Prime Minister at the start of the war, recalled.

“And in only half a year our troops dominated Afghanistan, but then the troubles began…” Russell remarked.

“And it was necessary to defend India, to ensure that it was surrounded only by friendly states.” William said, to justify the unleashing of the conflict.

Victoria heard the argumentation from the two men sitting in front of her desk, Melbourne on the right and Russell on the left.

“Yes, but today it seems that the possible threats from Russia and Persia at that time were overestimated and we are in a complicated position…” the Prime Minister lamented.

“Palmerston continues to be relentless… And partly, I understand his argument. We were the ones who started the war, and if we now agreed to make a treaty with Russia it would be a sign of weakness…” Melbourne admitted.

“But it will be far worse if we have to recognize defeat only not to sign a treaty that promotes peace…” Russell warned.

“That's why I spoke to him… It seems to me at the moment that it would be more favorable to reach agreement with the Russians…” William concluded.

Seeing that the conversation about the war would lead nowhere Russell decided to show the Queen something that he found more interesting. He took a few sheets of paper out of his briefcase, and as he got up and walked to the Queen's desk, he said:

“If you will allow me, Majesty, I have here the project for the progress of the construction of the Thames pedestrian tunnel.”

The Prime Minister placed the papers on the desk so that the sovereign could observe them and, as he changed the sheets, he explained:

“The lighting, the spiral stairs... A work that began in 1825 and it seems that it could come to an end in a short while…”

“I confess that the idea of walking underwater causes me some suffocation.” Victoria said observing the drawings.

“But we'll have the first tunnel in the world to be built under water under a navigable river, and that will make the crossing of the Thames quicker.” Russell declared proudly.
William got up from his chair, walked to the desk so he could also look at the drawings and added:

“A fabulous engineering work! The most important achievement of the engineer Marc Brunel.”

“Let's hope the lives lost in the accidents of these works have not been in vain.” Lamented the Queen.

“Two more years, and Your Majesty will be able to inaugurate it. An event of great national importance.” Russell declared.

“I do not know if I will feel like walking underwater...”

“But you will have the opportunity to inaugurate something over the water soon.” William reminded.

“Oh, it's true! At last, HMS Trafalgar can be launched at sea in June. Another work that had begun in 1825...” The Prime Minister said with a look of relief.

“It seems safer to get aboard the ship than to walk in the tunnel...” Victoria concluded.

***

William had gone to the study/library after dinner. Usually he didn’t take long going to bed, and as she waited, Victoria read tucked in the bed.

Today she was re-reading Walter Scott's – her favorite author – The Antiquary, but she thought William was taking too long. She put the book on the bedside table, got up, put on her slippers, put on her robe, and went to the study.

Victoria opened the door and peered.

He was sitting on a settee facing the door, in his nightgown and his Paisley silk robe, reading some paper he had in his hand. Beautiful, wonderful! Even brighter in the candlelight! She loved to see him in his nightshirt and robe. Halfway between the sober elegance of a dressed William and the dizzying stimulation of a naked William. He was adorable like that, after having shaved and bathed. Soft, fragrant, soft and voluminous hair where she loved to stick her fingers. So appetizing!

He smiled at her, but looked back at the document.

Victoria came in and closed the door behind her.

“What you're reading must be very interesting...” She teased him, leaning against the doorpost and changing her arms.

“Oh, you don’t even want to know how much...” He answered ironically with his eyes on the paper.

She walked towards him looking like someone preparing to do something, but he pretended to remain focused on the document, although it had become impossible to read another syllable since she had appeared at the door.

She stopped in front of him.

He looked up from the document to her.

She untied the ribbon that closed the robe on her chest, let it slip down her body and fall to the
He tossed the document to the right edge of the settee.

She lifted her nightgown halfway up her thighs, straddled on his lap, and kissed him.

William ran his hands and arms down her back from the base to the nape.

So good! To feel like this so enveloped by him!

A delight to have this woman in his arms!

She pushed the opening of his shirt farther away to have access to his chest and wrapped her hands around his neck. She kissed his exposed chest, neck, and jaw.

He parted the two front parts of the robe so she could explore him more easily as they kissed in the mouth.

She slipped her right hand between the robe and his nightgown, pressing his ribs on the left, and inserted her left hand fingers through his hair.

He pressed her against him with his left hand and passed his right hand down the soft, desirable skin of her left thigh as she squirmed with desire on his lap and continued to kiss him thirsty, longing for him!

Then she grabbed her nightgown, undressed it, and tossed it to the side of the settee. She was completely naked.

He waited expectantly about what she was going to do next. He was going to let her act on him without interfering. He was loving that resourcefulness!

She steadied herself on his shoulders, lifted her body higher and, stroking his head, placed her breasts in his mouth.

He thought all that was going on a very promising path! Her body in his hands, her breasts in his mouth... To touch her, to taste her, to breathe her... He felt with his lips on the inner limit of her left breast the throbbing of her heart intensifying. “I believe when you give your heart it will be without hesitation. But you cannot give it to me”. He had told her near the rooks in a desperate attempt for her to give up on him. “I think that you have it already”, she insisted. “I gave it to you and it will never be anyone else’s!” She had said at the top of the stairs in Brocket Hall. It was here now! Offered to the same extent as she offered him her body.

Without looking at what she was doing, with her right hand she searched on his lap for the cloth of his nightshirt and tried to pull it up.

The fabric was tucked under her legs...

He helped the fabric rise to the waist.

Now she was naked over his naked lap, though he still had his nightshirt and robe on.

She continued with her right hand in the direction of the certainty she would find between his legs. She grabbed it at the base! Hard and erect! The fingers lower, the palm of the hand higher up. She passed her half-closed hand by it, from the bottom up, to the tip. It was thick and long and she wanted to feel it inside her! Victoria knew the tremendous effect it had when incorporated in her!
She surrounded the tip with the palm of her hand cupped.

William was ecstatic! By her disinhibition and by what he felt in her hands! Not that she had ever been inhibited, but at the beginning things were of course guided by him, and in time she had come to work things out herself. That was normal, but it was still pleasantly surprising!

She rose a little higher and mounted on it, fitting in it!

Happiness was here! Again! For both.

He enjoyed every inch tight inside her!

She moved over it!

William suddenly remembered Ma Fletcher's Nunnery prostitutes. This was something they would do! How many men had at home a woman who would behave like this? How many men had at home a woman with her beauty? How many men wished to have at home such a woman, who would behave like this? And she was his and he had the privilege of fucking her!

She started to move more frantically!

No, she was fucking him! It was her! He had taught her and now she used the knowledge he had given her! Would anyone imagine that the Queen could fuck in this way? She had no idea of the innovation and excellence of the things they did in comparison to what happened in the beds of so many couples, where a single position was allowed for carnal gathering, where the woman should be passive and couldn’t even have or show pleasure! Most didn’t even know how to get it and others still lived the act with discomfort, shame or pain. Between them everything was permitted because it had been so from the beginning. There were no prohibitions, neither in the conversations nor in the acts. Before him she knew nothing about that, and then she only knew what he showed her, and he didn’t want a woman who didn’t move in bed, much less a woman who didn’t take pleasure when she did it! Her pleasure was his priority! Her pleasure was a pleasure to him!

William ran his hands over Victoria's thighs. His thumbs climbed on the inside, feeling her sweaty skin. He covered her hips and buttocks with both hands. Accompanying the movement, he squeezed them...

With the hands on his shoulders she moved up and down.

The tongues intertwined. Her hair had fallen forward, partially covering her face.

When she put her head back he grabbed the volume and density of her breasts, which filled his hands, and watched her face, dizzied by the fire that ran through her body! He felt her throbbing around him! Her climax took him to the abyss and he let himself go!

She stopped moving. She stood hugging him catching her breath.

He waited, holding her, for her to move.

Oh, he smelled so good! She stood there on his lap feeling the silk of the sleeves of his robe on her bare back and the reduction of the thickness inside her. Then she slipped out of his lap onto the settee, looking for the nightgown she put on again.

He lowered his nightshirt to his knees and thought it strange that she hadn’t said anything. She liked to talk after every time they...
She began to cry beside him on the settee.

He was worried about this reaction. She was not supposed to react like this after such an act. Moments before it had all been wonderfully well, he had just seen how she had enjoyed it.

She laid her face on his chest as he pulled her closer and they hugged.

“What's the matter, my love? Why do you cry after something so good?”

She explained:

“It's magnificent! It's beautiful! I love you! I love you!”

They kissed.

“Oh my love! So you cry for something pleasant?” William asked.

“It's moving what I feel for you and what you make me feel in these moments…”

“Oh, Victoria! How I love you! Each day always more…” He said kissing her forehead.

“The depth of what I feel for you in these moments... it's wonderfully scary…” She materialized and then questioned him: “Do you understand?”

Oh, how he understood what she was saying! How he understood!

“I understand Victoria, you can be sure that I do! Because I feel the same for you!”

***

When Victoria began to open her eyes that morning she noticed that William, behind her back, was kissing her naked shoulder. She turned to him, placed her right hand on his face and said:

“It's so good to wake up at your side!”

“Sorry, but it's getting late and you weren’t waking up…”

She turned her whole body to his side, but plunged her face into the pillow, refusing to keep facing the light. She felt him running his hand through her hair, but she allowed herself to stay still enjoying the warmth of the bed. Never had the bed been as warm as ever since he slept with her. She remembered what had happened the night before in his office and realized that somehow it still had on her the physical memory of the peak of that moment! She felt satiated, full! It had been extraordinary! How had she survived all the years she had lived without the companionship and love of that man? She forced herself to open her eyes and removed the face from the pillow. She kissed him intensely.

“Such enthusiasm!” He remarked when he could breathe.

“I'm still completely surrendered to what happened last night. This is a thank you…”

He leaned over her, squeezed and kissed her breasts.

Victoria moaned in a way that wasn’t usual, but William thought he hadn’t been too abrupt.

“Did I hurt you?”
“No. It's just that my breasts are sore and when you squeeze I feel more…”

“And what is the cause?”

“Sometimes it happens a few days before my menses come…”

Without squeezing again, he kissed her breasts softly.

“And like this, does it hurt, too?”

“No, it doesn’t hurt like this!”

“And like this, does it hurt?” He kept asking as he spread kisses in her breasts.

Victoria laughed.

There were no appointments outside the palace today, but there were several matters to attend to at the desk.

At the meeting with the Prime Minister the concern was the rise of social discontent about import taxes on wheat, as winter had been severe and even bread had been scarce. Besides, on 18th May Russell’s government had been defeated on its position on a project of reduction of custom duties on sugar, which would weaken the Whigs’ power in the House.

Still during the morning, while Victoria and William worked together, it was the turn of the railroad to invade the dispatch box! The Manchester and Leeds Railway continued the works on the rail link between Manchester and Leeds. There were lots of complaints and petitions on the subject. No one wanted the railroad passing through their lands. Victoria was already tired of the subject, but William said that it accelerated communications and it was a factor of development.

“You who like speed will love the train!” He said.

Victoria smiled unconvinced.

In the afternoon the Queen received her sisters-in-law Emily and Alexandrina for the promised tea at the palace.

Emily, the most popular of the great ladies of the high society, patron of an Almack – one of the clubs of London high society – talked about the dinners and dances of the club she ran. It was notorious how she had in her hands the possibility of elevating or excluding someone in the highest sphere of society, since these clubs were highly selective. Giving anyone access was recognition of their belonging to an elitist circle, while their removal from the club could be the final decree for their social exclusion. When her sister-in-law Caroline satirized Lady Jersey in her novel Glenarvon, published in 1816, she banished Caro from Almack, of which she was patron, but Emily, though she didn’t like Caroline, pleaded in her favor to get this ban lifted. Clubs were prime locations for arranging weddings and lovers. Emily's own relationship with Lord Palmerston, known as the Cupid, had begun at these high society parties. Although Emily was an older woman, over fifty years, she monopolized the conversation by speaking much more than the young Victoria and Alexandrina. She told, for example, how one night the prestigious, respected, and powerful Duke of Wellington had been barred from attending a ball by a watchman only because he was wearing long trousers instead of knee-length trousers as stipulated in club regulations. A man who had always have great respect for orders and regulations had no choice but to leave in silence. He had thus submitted to norms stipulated by women!

After a relatively quiet day, and already after dinner, Victoria and William went to their private
chambers.

She had started a painting of William a few nights ago and wanted to continue. She strategically placed him sitting in profile in front of her to be able to draw him. The way to keep him sitting for a while was to allow him to read.

“You have a perfect outline.” She remarked as she alternated between looking at him and the paint stand.

“Isn’t that exaggeration from you?”

“I am an artist! I understand proportion... In you everything is harmonious!” William laughed.

“But today I feel very tired and sleepy... I need to go to bed earlier...” She informed him.

“Go to bed, I'll stay here a little longer reading...”

Victoria packed up the materials and went to sit on his lap. She ran the index finger of her right hand from his forehead to his chin, outlining his nose and lips, and remarked:

“I was right, everything is perfect!”

They kissed and Victoria went into the bedroom.

After some time concentrated on his reading, he had the instinct to go and peek.

She was already sleeping soundly.

William thought she had fallen asleep very quickly compared to what was usual. And the day hadn’t been particularly demanding. There had been no official engagement outside the palace, only the dispatch of matters at the desk and a ladies’ tea...

***

That night there was a soirée to listen to Mozart. William adored it, and Victoria wanted to please him.

She already felt tired when it started, but she would have to put up with it until the end.

The Queen and her husband sat in the front center to listen to the musicians. To the sides and back sat the remaining family members and guests.

At one point Victoria began to feel nauseous.

Oh, what a bad time to feel like this. She wished it to pass quickly.

The sickness continued.

Instinctively, she brought the hand to her mouth.

William had already noticed that something was going on by the sound of her breathing, but he didn’t want to look at her so as not to draw attention. Now that she had put her hand on her mouth he turned his head slightly and looked at her.
She looked at him, looking rather unwell.

Then she got up suddenly and the whole room rose too.

Victoria left quickly and William followed her, reached her at the door and grabbed her left arm, asking:

“What's the matter, my love?”

“I'm feeling ill.”

She ran off down the corridor followed by Lehzen.

He wanted to go after her! But now he was the Queen's husband and if she left he should stay. Before all those people he couldn’t leave...

A few minutes later she came back and sat down again. William sat down beside her, and the rest of the people in the salon sat down too.

He asked covertly:

“Are you alright?”

“It's nothing.”

Then her left hand and his right hand placed in the arms of the chairs touched each other disguisedly.

After the soirée, when they were alone in the bedroom, he asked her what had in fact happened.

“I felt ill, I was nauseous... It was unpleasant, but I'm well now.”

He already knew what was going on, but he didn’t want to say anything. She had to figure it out on her own. If he thought about it, he could ascertain that for the past two months she hadn’t refused him in bed because she had the menses. Now she had breast discomfort, tiredness and nausea...
Chapter 25

The next morning the same scene was repeated. Behind his back, she got up from the bed first, but as soon as she set foot on the floor looking for her slippers, the nausea returned. Even so she still stood up. The nausea seemed to stop, but then it got worse. She sat down on the bed again.

He felt her weight on the mattress again and turned to see what was going on.

“My dear? Are you feeling unwell again?” William asked.

“I'm not feeling very good…”

He got up, put on his robe and walked around the footboard to go to her.

He stooped by her feet so he could see her face. He took her hands in his and asked:

“Victoria, your menses haven’t come yet, have they?”

“No…”

In fact, the menses hadn’t come in April, but Victoria had said nothing. She didn’t want to know why they hadn’t come, didn’t want to be consulted by Sir James Clark, and thought they would come the following month. But in May they hadn’t come either... And now there were this uncomfortable nausea...

He smiled at her and advanced:

“You know what that might mean…”

“I know.” She replied almost expressionlessly.

“Then maybe we should send for Sir James Clark...” William suggested.

“No!”

“That isn’t wise, my love. You know it isn’t. The sooner you know the better. Your menses are late; you have breast pain, tiredness and nausea. These are all symptoms of…”

“I know…” She said before he finished.

“That's it... Do you want me to call another doctor?”

“No. It can be Sir James Clark.”

“Very well, I'll have him called.” William said as he rose and kissed her forehead.

He left briefly and came back quickly.

She was still sitting on the side of the bed in the same position.

William sat on the bed beside her. He pulled her against him, kissed her head, and asked:

“Are you concerned?”

“A little... Although it’s not a complete surprise…”
“This may be unexpected, but it was predictable... Let's wait until we hear from the doctor.”

After a while the doctor arrived.

William waited outside the bedroom for the medical check to take place.

The doctor left smiling, but made no remark. He just told him he could come in.

She was sitting on the bed, leaning against the headboard.

When he came over to sit on the edge of the bed beside her, Victoria projected her body forward and stretched out her arms for him to hug her.

He sat on the edge of the bed and hugged her.

“The doctor says I'm expecting a baby.” Victoria said with her mouth on his right ear.

William was flooded with a sense of indescribable fullness, closed his eyes and exclaimed:

“That's wonderful, my love!”

Then he bent back to look at her, and then tenderly put her hair behind her ears so that he could see her face more clearly.

A few tears fell from her eyes as she said in a whisper:

“I'm scared…”

“I know, my love, but I also know how much courage you have.”

She recognized that same phrase from another moment in their lives, some years before, when she had had to visit Flora Hastings on her deathbed after the humiliation she had put her through. That phrase in his tone of voice, always so warm and soft, gave her strength.

“Being pregnant can be good because a baby is on the way... but childbirth can be very dangerous. You know... Princess Charlotte…” She remembered again.

He pressed her against him.

“Shhhh... That will not happen. You are young, strong, healthy... and that was over 20 years ago. Today, medicine is more advanced.”

“But I'm worried…”

“Think of your mother, she had no trouble bringing you to the world, and you must have inherited her sturdiness. Besides, to make you feel more rested – and I also – we'll ask for the services of the best obstetrician in London. And it would also be good that you talked with other ladies about this subject to be informed.”

She remembered that her mother used to say that her labor had only taken six hours and thirty minutes, and nodded affirmatively.

“You can talk to your mother, Victoria. Your relationship has never been easy, but she can help you, and I'm sure she'll enjoy collaborating in this. You know how she has helped in other circumstances…” He reminded her.
Victoria remembered when she had hugged her mother because she suffered with William's resignation as prime minister in 1839, and how she had done the same when she was heartbroken because he didn’t correspond to her declaration of love at Brocket Hall. She nodded again.

Then he bent over, went down her body, and kissed her belly over her nightgown as he said:

“It's wonderful that you're expecting a baby, my love...”

“Are you happy now?” She asked.

“Of course I'm happy! Having you and now this child is all the happiness I could wish for!”

She smiled because he was happy.

They kissed tenderly.

She was frightened, which was perfectly understandable. But fear didn’t come only from the known example of Princess Charlotte. At the time, childbirth was always wrapped in pain, and being pregnant could always become a death sentence for the mother and/or the baby. It was, in fact, a very eminent danger that caused a very real anguish, especially in women who had never experienced it. The first birth was usually more difficult.

Victoria lay in bed to rest.

Lehzen was called to give her something for the nausea, but the matter was kept as a domestic secret until Victoria thought it could be publicly disclosed.

***

After seeing that Victoria was better William left the palace and walked in the garden.

He was happy! So happy that she was pregnant! So happy to have a child of hers! Boy, girl, it didn’t matter! A baby, a son! And hers!

But suddenly he felt a tightness in his stomach and was terrified!

What if things went in fact wrong?

He entered the classic style garden folly.

What if the baby had a disability like Augustus? Why had Augustus had a disability? Had it been inherited from Caroline or from him? No, he couldn’t go through that again! And she couldn’t go through that, carrying that weight in her life! When she would be left alone...

What if she had a miscarriage? Caroline had had two miscarriages before Augustus’ birth.

What if the baby died? The daughter he had had with Caroline had died in 24 hours. How would Victoria react to that? Outside the bedroom, he had heard Caro's screams! He had seen the blood on the towels the maids carried! He had seen how Caro had been bedridden for months without physical strength and spirit!

He leaned against the wall of the folly.

Tears welled in his eyes.

What if she died?
Tears welled up in a sob.

He slid down the wall and dropped to the floor.

No, no, no! What a despair! No! That couldn’t happen! Not now! Not with her!

He put the hands on his face and stood there crying convulsively.

Victoria would never know of this moment.

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Now things had changed.

It was as if she were another Victoria. She felt different in her body and in her emotions. It was strange to know that there was another being inside her. And it was scary to think about what could happen in a few months. And it was worrying to think about how her life would be like for the next few months. She had asked for six months! At least six months! But only three had been given to her without knowing she was expecting a baby, and by Dr. Clark’s calculation, little more than one without conceiving, for he guessed that she had been pregnant for two months.

William knew he had to reassure her, only he could do that. And he couldn’t let her feel that he too was scared of what might happen; therefore he would also have to do something to calm himself down.

She hadn’t eaten anything at dinner, she didn’t want to eat, the smell of food was unbearable.

They were now in bed, lying on their side, Victoria with her back to William. He had put his left arm around her body, ran his hand over her belly in a circle, over her nightgown, and asked:

“Is everything all right now, my love?”

“Yes, but my mother says nausea should come back in the morning...”

“It must be like this for a while, but it will eventually pass.”

She turned to him, ran her hand over his hair and left ear and said:

“You know, today I asked myself what I should do to be a good mother...”

He registered her remark.

She continued:

“I don’t have a good relationship with my mother, as you know...”

“It’s easy. Just do with our child what you would have liked your mother to have done with you, and don’t do what you didn’t like that she did.” He suggested.

She thought about what he had said and began to tell:

“I'm scared of mice... One night in Kensington, while I was sleeping, a mouse ran over me... I woke up scared and screaming, but my mother didn’t believe me... She said that such a thing couldn’t have happened... It was horrible! I still feel today the paws and the tail... It's creepy...”

“Shhh... There are no mice here...” He tried to reassure her, running his left hand through her hair.
She continued:

“The hardest thing was remaining cool when I was angry and they tormented me. In 1835 I was bedridden, sick, for five weeks. My nervous system couldn’t stand the oppressive environment, in which I lived anymore, and I didn’t have the strength to get up, my head hurt, and my hair fell abundantly. But my mother and Conroy thought I was pretending!”

Despite the attempts to direct Victoria to improve her relationship with her mother, at that moment William felt a desire to rip those two beings in two!

But she went on:

“Dr. Clark gave me opium for the pain, and only Lehzen was on my side. I had circulation problems and every day she massaged my feet to warm them.”

Instinctively, he brought his feet closer to hers.

Victoria had been surrounded by many attentions, but without tenderness or consideration! And he had given her tenderness and consideration! That’s why she fell in love with him!

“They still took advantage of the fact that I was sick to try and compel me to sign a document that guaranteed that Conroy would be named my private secretary the day I ascended the throne. Backed by Lehzen, I resisted! In spite of their rudeness and my state of health!”

Victoria started to cry. From the memory of the past and the nervousness provoked by her condition in the present moment.

Touched, he squeezed her tightly against him and kissed her on the forehead.

She wanted to keep talking and moved slightly away from him to say between tears:

“A long time after I was still thin, pale, had difficulty walking and was unable to ride... But I came out victorious! From that moment on no one would bend me! That's why we're here today! Because I would never let anyone stop me from marrying you! Whatever the consequences!”

He pressed her against him again, kissed her cheek, and said:

“I'm so sorry that they put you through that, my love! And I'm so proud of your strength and determination! Like in everything else, you will quickly learn to be a mother and you will make a wonderful mother! I am sure of it!”

***

He had to do something to help. He needed to feel useful in that situation. For her and for him. Normally men lived away from the issues of pregnancy and childbirth, considered to be women’s concerns. He himself hadn’t interfered with Caro's pregnancies and hadn’t attended his children's births, for at that time most men waited outside the bedroom, only entering after the birth. But now it was different. In an absolute desire that nothing should go wrong, because what had happened in the past couldn’t be repeated, much less could something worse happen, he, who was an intelligent and educated man, was going to do whatever he could to help. And what he could do was read about the matter; study the compendia, manuals, and medical treatises of obstetrics, and to be aware of procedures, complications, and alternatives. That way he could be more prepared about what could happen on the day of delivery, and to inform Victoria about the functioning of her own body.

He searched, read, took notes.
What he found was not reassuring. The complications could be diverse and the procedures were scary, which made that mortality among newborns and parturient women was high. A baby who didn’t turn around was a very serious problem. Cesarean section was a very old but very rare practice, and the rate of success in living women was almost non-existent. The use of forceps had spread precisely after the death of Princess Charlotte, which helped in some cases, but was harmful in others, when they caused lacerations in women and newborns. In the most extreme cases, and in order to avoid a cesarean section, which would almost certainly lead to the death of the parturient, the solution was embryotomy, a horrendous practice which consisted in severing a dead fetus inside the generating organism when it was impossible to extract it all at once.

However among so much information there was an interesting aspect. Until the 17th century women had given birth squatting, sitting or standing. Only later they started giving birth in a more difficult and painful position which, in turn, gave rise to the need of using forceps. Keeping the back in a vertical position was the best way to have a successful delivery: it enlarged the passage space, used the force of gravity, and was faster, easier and less painful.

Some books had very high-quality drawings of the inside of pregnant women's bodies, forceps, childbirth chairs… It was good that Victoria saw some of them, but it was better for her not to see others...

***

On 24th May it was her birthday, but her health condition didn’t allow her great celebrations. She couldn’t move too much, nor could she eat freely. Information that the Queen was sick was circulated, but the reason for her illness wasn’t explained. However suspicions of a pregnancy easily began to spread in court.

Victoria didn’t nullify the possibility of receiving the children choir that would come to sing for her, since this activity wasn’t demanding, and the decorations and special illuminations that marked the date were maintained in the streets, so that the people had the birthday of their sovereign present in their minds.

There was no party, but there were gifts.

When Victoria returned from the children's reception, there was in the green room a volume above a pedestal covered with a red cloth. William was waiting for her next to it.

“What is hidden in there, William?” She asked curiously.

“Something for you!”

“May I see it?”

He pulled the cloth showing the piece.

A marble bust was revealed. William represented as a Roman Senator!

“Oh! It’s you, William!” She exclaimed.

“I think we're balanced now. I have you in my office and you can have me here in your workroom!” He explained.

“Thank you my love!” She exclaimed as she stretched to kiss him. And then she added, “This is a role that suits you perfectly: Senator!”
William laughed.

“John Francis made a good interpretation, don’t you think?” He asked.

“I do, but I also think that I prefer the real Lord Melbourne! He’s more handsome and, above all... warmer!” Victoria remarked as she hugged him.

***

The Duchess of Kent was now a frequent presence in the palace, for she felt she had to give Victoria numerous instructions, especially how to overcome nausea. William gave her a polite but firm warning for her to avoid making unnecessary or improper comments in front of Victoria that would make her even more worried about her present condition.

Politically the situation was also complicated. On 27th May 1841, Robert Peel presented a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons against the government of John Russell, whose party had already lost four partial elections.

The public announcement of the sovereign's pregnancy was made a few days after. The baby on the way wouldn’t inherit the throne, but it would be the Queen's child, and that was in the public interest.

After five days of debate the motion against Russell was adopted in the House by a vote of 312 against 311. John Russell lost by only one vote and then asked for the Queen to dissolve the Parliament.

The sickness continued. Victoria was apprehensive and grew slower and quieter. She was also less affectionate and the physical interaction in bed ceased to exist. She was worried and couldn’t be emotionally released from the long wait that would follow for the result of that pregnancy. Dr. Charles Locock, London’s best obstetrician, was hired to accompany her.

William watched her, understood what was going on, but didn’t speak directly to her about it. He gave her time to reorganize herself. He felt almost guilty for what Victoria was going through. To try to minimize her apprehension, he gave her even more attention and was extremely affectionate to her. She needed to get rid of the tension that had settled since the doctor confirmed the pregnancy.

***

The launch of HMS Trafalgar was scheduled for 21st June. If the sickness wasn’t controlled the situation would be complicated! Why did she have to go through that? Being a woman and being a monarch were two realities that hardly combined, and she was confronted with that every day. A man monarch didn’t have these problems and could go wherever he wanted whenever he needed to. It seemed that a female monarch was a fragile figure and had to fight against this image! And how could Cousin Maria write her from Portugal about the blessings of motherhood? She had had terrible deliveries! But she liked being a mother...

To help her, William wrote her the speech for the next day's ceremony while she spent a few hours in bed with little Achilles. It wouldn’t be a long speech, but she couldn’t even think of five lines. When he finished he went to the bedroom with the sheets.

“Here's the sketch for you to read and change as you see fit.” He informed her as he walked over to her and sat on the edge of the bed.

“It's great for sure! I don’t want to read any of it!” She answered in despondency.
“Are you sure? Are you just going to read this tomorrow at the ceremony?”

“Oh my love, you know better than I what should be said! Thank you!”

He kissed her forehead.

The nausea was worse in the morning, but the launching of the ship would take place in the afternoon at the Woolwich Dockyard.

Victoria drank ginger tea, supposedly a good controller of nausea before she left in the carriage to the port, wearing a coat and a hat, accompanied by William.

For many miles the Thames was covered with all kinds of boats, and hundreds of thousands of people were present at the event.

In the ornamented harbor, Victoria climbed down the carriage, leaning on William's hand. Then a girl went to her and gave her a bunch of flowers. The Queen smiled at her, pleased with her gentleness.

He noticed that child who must have been about 8 or 9 years old, with blond locks and blue eyes, and remembered that the daughter he had had with Caroline could have never reached that age. However he also thought that soon another child would be born and this time he hoped not only that it would survive, but also that it would be healthy.

Victoria spoke and watched the launch of yet another ship with 120 arms for the Royal Navy from the platform where she was accompanied by William.

At the Queen's request, the ship was baptized by Lady Bridport, the niece of Lord Nelson, the Admiral who had commanded the British fleet against the Franco-Spanish fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, where he had died, although securing victory for the British forces. The wine used was some of what had been saved from HMS Victory – Nelson's flagship – after returning from Trafalgar. At the time of the launch, there were five hundred people aboard the ship, of which a hundred had been in battle.

Although everything had gone well during the ceremony, and there had been no embarrassing nausea, in the end Victoria returned to the palace with a headache and tired. She made the return trip leaning against William's chest and went back to bed.

He thought that her prostration was more a result of emotional apprehension than of physical malaise caused by nausea and headaches.

When William peeked from the bedroom door almost at dusk he saw that she had already woken up and was sitting in the bed, having rested a few hours. Only wearing pants and a shirt, and with his shoes on, he sat down on the bed beside her and took her left hand.

“Are you feeling better?” He asked.

“Now yes!”

“Victoria... Is there anything you want to tell me? About your condition...” William asked, giving her an immediate opportunity to talk about what worried her.

She looked at him for a few seconds and then asked:

“William, do you like babies?”
He was surprised by the question, but didn’t let it show in his expression.

“I think they inspire us with tenderness, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know... I feel nothing for them... It's not that I don’t like them, but I don’t feel that I like them either...”

“You don’t feel the desire to be a mother?” He asked to help her materialize what she was saying.

Victoria swallowed and with a distressed look she confessed:

“I’m sorry, William, but in fact I don’t feel any desire to be a mother.” And then she continued in a more distressed voice: “I want to give you a child! I thought things would change, that I would feel different after I expected a baby... But nothing has changed...”

He was surprised by this confession, but he couldn’t react negatively because it would only make things worse. It was not supposed for her not to feel empathy for babies! All women loved babies! Or not? Well, if he thought about it, maybe he had already heard some stories... He chose to pick up the familiar part:

“Well, Victoria... I know you’re afraid of childbirth, and I understand, it's natural... That must be why you don’t feel the urge of having this child...”

“It’s not just that, William... I think that I will not know what to do with a baby...”

He spoke quickly:

“But that's normal, Victoria! No one is born taught. You will have to learn and you will not be alone, you’ll have people who will help you in this function: your mother, Lehzen, your ladies, the nanny... You always learn everything so quickly...” He sighed and then finished: “And I have also already told you that you’ll quickly learn how to be a mother...”

“At this moment I think this child hinders me...”

William dropped her hand, placing both hands in his lap.

“A hindrance, Victoria?” He asked in astonishment. Now he was hurt for his barely formed child.

She knelt on the bed and turned to him, and exclaimed in affliction:

“I’m sorry! I just wanted to be free! Free! Do you understand?”

Her tears began to stream down her face. She was scared of dying, she didn’t want that child for many reasons, she was sensitive and now she had realized that she had hurt him! And she didn’t want that to happen! And he was the only person with whom she could vent, and only he could help her see things differently... Well, she hoped that, as always, he could do it... But now... maybe she had gone too far...

Weeping she explained in anguish:

“I was a prisoner in Kensington! You know that William! And I’ve wished for years to be free! I dreamed that when I would be queen I could do everything I wanted, I could determine myself, I could enjoy life. And that's what happened in the first years! With you! Only with you! You know... And then I wanted to marry you, to be even freer! Free to marry the man I loved! Free and happy! Only you know how happy I am by your side! So I wanted my freedom and our happiness
together to continue! A baby changes everything! I no longer know if I will continue to be happy, I feel threatened with death…”

He thought she was confused and frightened and that, as always, she needed him. And he was already old enough and had enough experience to be able to deal with this situation; to assuage his own shock and, as always, reassure her. And he understood what she was saying about the past… And she was so young…

“Victoria, that will not happen! You are strong and healthy!”

“And my body will change… Will you like to see me with a huge belly?”

He felt touched by this concern so naive and so natural at the same time. He knelt down on the bed, turning to her. He took her hands and said:

“Oh, Victoria! When you love someone you don’t stop loving them because that person's body has changed! And I am sure that when your belly grows you will look beautiful! A pregnant woman can be something very beautiful!”

She smiled. If he said so...

“But now I will not be able to do a lot of things, I feel like a prisoner of this baby, conditioned in my existence by it, and after this child is born there will be someone for whom I will be responsible… It's strange…”

William thought that over time, with patience and tenderness, as he had always done, her understanding of motherhood would improve. He said:

“Victoria! You can continue to do some things even if you are pregnant, especially in the coming months, but others you will not, but only more towards the end of the pregnancy… But it’s for your health and the baby’s that will be born, and it will only be temporary. Then you will do everything again as before. And as for taking care of this child you're not alone, I'm here too! And you know how I have experience in taking care of children… And the palace is full of people too to help. A baby doesn’t have an instruction manual, but neither is it a scary thing!”

That said, she thought maybe it was not so difficult. Him saying “I'm here too” had sounded encouraging.

She felt guilty for not feeling anything special for that little being that was forming inside her! She should definitely adore it! That's what all women said they felt for their children! And she had confessed that lack to the father of that child; to the man she loved…

Victoria hugged William hard and asked:

“Forgive me, William, for not wanting our child the same way you do!”

He was moved by her request. It showed she felt guilty. But he realized that she was not to blame, that this was something that supplanted her. He felt her back in his hands through the fabric of her nightgown. And the warmth and shape of her body were now so familiar! And they made him feel so good! He answered:

“You will love it! You will... And until then I will love it for us both!”

Victoria thought there couldn’t be such a man! With such a great capacity to love!
Chapter 26

On 23rd June Victoria dissolved the parliament as requested by the Prime Minister. This led to the holding of elections.

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The nausea had passed, which was a significant improvement.

In order for her to leave the palace and amuse herself, enjoying something she appreciated, Victoria and William went to the opera.

When the Queen entered the royal box God Save the Queen was played by the orchestra of Her Majesty's Theater.

The royal couple heard the hymn standing in the box.

Victoria loved showing William off beside her at public events! Expose to public opinion that she had managed to marry him and that they were a happy couple, even more now that there was a baby on the way. Actually that wasn’t something that made her happy. In fact, it was something that worried her. However no one knew about this and for that hypocritical society what mattered was appearances and, among them, a family with children was the peak of achievement!

They were now on their way back to the palace in the royal chariot.

Victoria had sat down on William's right side. She lay down on his lap and said:

“My head hurts.”

With his right arm he wrapped her against him, placing his hand on her belly. There was a public Victoria and another Victoria in private. Just for him! She was majestic in public, but humble, sweet and human in intimacy.

Victoria put her right hand over William's hand and asked:

“Do you think things will change? That I will feel for this baby what other women say they feel for their children?”

William closed his eyes. It was not easy to hear her say that she didn’t feel anything for that child. But he hoped that with time things would be better.

“In the coming months you’ll see that you will begin to feel affinity with this child. Otherwise, it will happen after the birth, when you first see it... or after that... It will be your child and I am sure that you will love it!”

He calmed her and gave her strength, even when it required him to find even a greater force inside him!

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They were both already in the dressing room in their nightshirts.

She stared at the full-length mirror, observing her reflected body and face. The hands on the belly. The three-month pregnancy was barely noticeable.
William watched her from some distance, from the bedroom door.

He approached her, grabbed her by the waist and kissed her exposed left shoulder and then the neck.

She closed her eyes.

“My head hurts, William…” Victoria reminded.

“I know…”

He pushed her hair further to the side and continued to kiss her shoulders and back. He ran his teeth across her neck...

She turned to him. She kissed him on the mouth. First softly, then more excited.

He led her backwards to the bed as he continued to kiss her.

As they reached the side of the bed, she sat down and he knelt so he could continue to kiss her. He went down her chin, her neck, her chest. Then he kissed her breasts and belly over the fabric of her nightgown as he clutched her hips.

Victoria let him do it without reacting, enjoying only what she felt in his hands and mouth. She remembered he had acted in a similar way the first time they had been physically together in Brocket Hall. She let her body drop across the bed, as if she had fainted.

William followed her to get access to her mouth again. He ran back down her body with his mouth, over the cloth.

Victoria closed her eyes, sharpening her ability to feel his kisses. She was languid. Halfway between the need to take advantage of anything physical that he did to her and a certain prostration that didn’t allow her to give much in retribution, but only to receive.

He lifted her nightgown and kissed her bare thighs. Then he pushed the nightgown up to her waist. There was no other piece of clothing underneath.

She dragged herself further into the bed and flexed her legs, raising her knees.

With the body positioned between her legs, he kissed her belly in the womb area.

Victoria thought it sweet that he kissed the child that was forming inside her!

He traced the skin of her body with kisses and with his tongue upwards, rolling the nightshirt in front of him.

She was willing to help and raised her arms above the head so he could undress her.

William undressed his nightshirt as well.

Then he kissed her breasts, now a little more bulky because of the pregnancy.

Victoria put her hands around his neck... on his head... the fingers through his hair... He was delicious! She missed him! That he activated her! There had been four weeks without them physically enjoying each other.

Then he came back down, kissing her continually as he used his hands to cup her breasts and
squeeze her nipples progressively, measuring her reaction.

When he hit the end of her belly she expected him to... But he changed direction. He started to kiss the inside of her thighs. One and then the other.

Victoria moaned with pleasure.

He placed his arms around her hips, grabbing the top of her thighs, and pulled her closer.

Then his mouth came down! There, in the middle of her legs. He began to run his tongue from the bottom up between the folds of pink flesh, delicately separating them like they were petals of a flower. From one side to the other. First the tip of the tongue, then the surface... He kissed it. She was lubricated.

“Ooooh...! It's so good...” She let out.

The lower-abdomen, the mons veneris, the folds of flesh between the legs, everything was perfect! William encompassed with his open mouth all the inside of her legs, rumbled and sucked.

Victoria felt her core sucked in by him! She squirmed on the bed!

He inserted the tongue in it, moved it and then, coming from the inside out, ran it through the center. He went up. He concentrated on the highest, central point. He kissed, licked, sucked...

She was now very wet.

Victoria grabbed his head with both hands as he continued to act on her. She sank her fingers into the waves of his hair and listened to the guttural sounds and fiery sighs that made her desire spread even more. She wanted to lift her body higher; she wanted to see him better... She pulled one of the pillows on her right and placed it under her head to raise the viewing angle.

He alternated soft licks and faster ones.

She was on the verge of madness!

Victoria looked back to the middle of her legs and saw his head more explicitly there. The image was as exciting as what he was doing to her, alternating vertical movements, horizontal movements and circular movements...

Her breathing was growing faster and faster.

“Don’t stop!” She asked.

He looked at her and continued to stimulate her.

She looked into his beautiful, bright, green eyes, and asked again:

“There, there... Don’t stop, don’t stop!”

Victoria closed her eyes, concentrating on the heat he made flow from her, she laid her head back and raised her feet soles, only her fingers resting on the mattress, in a movement that reproduced the crescendo of voluptuousness she felt in the place where he ran his tongue. She gripped the surface of the sheet on either side of the body with both hands, rested her soles again on the bed, arched her back, and it was extraordinary... In the continuous vortex of excitement she lowered her back and lifted her hips in spasms, squeezing his head between her legs.
He countered her movement, pressing her body on the bed with his arms and the middle of her legs with his mouth.

“Please! Please!” She exclaimed.

She was there! In his mouth!

Victoria let herself lie prostrate on the bed, breathing, recovering.

He ran over her belly again with kisses and tongue, her breasts, mouth... His mouth still tasted like her sex!

However, after this there was a void inside her. A void that needed to be filled!

“I want more!” She asked as she gave her neck to his mouth. “Inside me…”

He did it!

A few minutes of continuous agitation followed in contradance.

“Oh... Here it comes again!” She exclaimed.

“Yes, yes, yes...” He tried to rush her.

It was relatively fast. He was already very excited.

She got there again, already after he had spilled on her.

It ended.

The two of them were still lying on their backs across the bed.

He asked:

“Does your head still hurt?”

“No. The pain has gone.”

“I thought it would.”

He knew how to relieve the tension she had felt in the past weeks. It had only been necessary to wait for it to happen naturally, at the right moment.

“Doesn’t it hurt the baby?” She asked.

“There are doctors who recommend abstinence throughout pregnancy and others who recommend containment only in the last months...”

“Abstinence for nine months?” She asked, turning her head to him looking worried.

“Well, Victoria, in our case, I don’t think it will be for nine months anymore... And as for being harmful, actually, before we knew you were pregnant, we did the same thing...”

“But I cannot imagine being without you in the next few months...”

“Let’s ask Dr. Charles Locock what he recommends.” William counseled and kissed her forehead.
Victoria was tormented by that prospect. She couldn’t conceive having his body away from her in the next few months! In the last few weeks she hadn’t been willing, but now... And this perspective... She just needed him not to pull his body away from her. That would be torture and it wasn’t fair! She had married for pleasure and not for being deprived of her own body, she had married to have him always with her, to be able to enjoy him as a man, to be his wife, not to carry babies...

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The doctor advised moderation in nighttime activities and abstinence only in the last months. After the sixth month they weren’t recommended because it was thought they could cause lesions in the mother's organs or interrupt the harmonious development of the fetus.

The prospect was not as bad as it had seemed, being moderation a subjective thing… Sharing in bed became frequent again; with the advantage that now she didn’t run the risk of being with child... She was already with one…

Victoria integrated the idea of being pregnant.

She felt with strangeness and astonishment the first time she thought the baby had moved inside her.

***

The Whig party lost 70 seats in the general election and the Tories took control of the House of Commons.

The Queen opened the new Parliament on 24th August. But the government party was again defeated by an additional vote of no confidence on 27th August with 269 votes in favor and 360 against. It was the second time that Russell’s government lost in a vote of no confidence in the same year.

As a result Russell resigned on 30th August, and Victoria was forced to invite the conservative leader Robert Peel to become prime minister and form a government. This time things were less complicated than they had been in 1839 because Victoria had already had the intermediate experience of having another prime minister who wasn’t Lord M, but he was a Whig, and because now William was already her husband, she didn’t miss him as she had at the time.

But that fact obligatorily determined changes in the Queen's house. Emma remained as a Lady of the Bedchamber, but Harriet ceased to be her Mistress of the Robes, being replaced, at Peel’s proposal, by Charlotte Montagu Douglas Scott, Duchess of Buccleuch, a thirty-year-old woman. Victoria couldn’t stop this change and settled to it.

William reminded her how he had been right when he told her that it didn’t matter to resign the post of prime minister to be able to marry her, since soon his party would eventually fall in parliament.

***

Victoria sat at the piano. She played Alla Turca. William could already hear her from the corridor.

He stopped at the door of the piano room to hear her play.

To feel more at ease Victoria wore a wrapper, a dress opened in the front, looser and more comfortable for pregnant women.
She was engrossed in the music and didn’t notice his presence.

Victoria finished the piece and the music stopped.

There was applause coming from the door, she turned her head and smiled.

William walked up to her smiling and sat down on the piano bench beside her, but with his back to the keyboard.

“Mozart! Piano Sonata...” He identified.

She leaned her head against his shoulder and he kissed her forehead.

Victoria moved her head away again.

William looked at her belly with a little more than 5 months.

Noticing his gaze, she asked:

“Will it always be like this?”

“What?”

“Every time we... I might be expecting another baby...”

“Well Victoria, you know... We can do as we did before... or we can try to use the barriers I've already explained to you. And it’s not necessary that I enter you at all times...”

With determination in her voice she said:

“I desire you ardently, I always want you inside me, I love everything we do...” And then more calmly, “But I wished the result wasn’t always this... Because my life changes so much in this condition...”

“I know, Victoria. But in the future we will be careful to prevent you from conceiving again soon. Maybe there’s a time of the month when you're less likely to conceive, but medicine hasn’t been able to set that deadline safely yet... After the menses, before the menses, in the middle of the month, all these theories have failed...”

“William!” She exclaimed suddenly, in a tone he didn’t understand if it was surprise or fright, as she stared at her belly and grabbed it with both hands.

“Yes, Victoria! What is it?” He asked, seeing that she had placed both hands on her belly.

She stood silently staring at her belly, her hands over it.

After a few seconds of doubled attention to Victoria, which seemed like an eternity of waiting for William, she answered with a mix of discomfort and delight:

“It moved!”

William smiled and asked:

“Did our child move?”

Without answering, she grabbed his right hand and placed it on her belly with her hand on top.
They were silent.

It hadn’t been possible for William to feel the baby move yet, and she had noticed that this time the movements were more evident.

It moved again! William felt it! His child! Their child! It had moved inside her! For him that was a unique moment, to feel the pulsating life of that tiny little being that was forming inside her, fruit of their love!

He rolled over on the bench, facing the piano keyboard. He put his left arm around her shoulders and placed his right hand on the round volume of her belly again. He declared in astonishment:

“Oh, Victoria! This is wonderful!” And then he asked, “Do you see how beautiful it is? The life you have inside you?”

She thought it strange, but in the face of his contentment she could only be softened. Victoria smiled and exclaimed:

“By the reaction, I think it must like music!”

William laughed and nodded.

“It seems so! Maybe if you play more often it'll enjoy it.”

After a few seconds of silence he asked:

“Remember the day I sat next to you on the piano bench years ago to encourage you to appear again in public after the scandal with Flora Hastings?”

“Oh course! For as long as I live, I will never forget that day!”

“In that conversation I told you for the first time about my son who had died...”

With tears welling up her eyes, she interrupted him:

“I thought it was so sad! I was so moved! You told me that, after he died, you no longer had any reason to live, but that through me a new reason had been given to you...”

Equally touched, he fulfilled the explanation he wanted to make:

“It's true Victoria! And now I have two strong reasons to live! You and our child! And today I felt its life for the first time on the same piano bench where I told you about Augustus’ death for the first time... This child doesn’t replace the son I lost, but it is as if my life story is being repositioned... Today I have the woman I wished for and I will have the child that I dreamed of. There is a family where before there was only loneliness, and there is love where before there was only pain!”

Victoria smiled and added:

“And our child likes Mozart, like you do, William!”

“Maybe, Victoria, maybe...” He said making a smile with an underlying sadness.

They kissed tenderly.

Victoria felt that his love for that child was so great that she could only love it too!
The Duchess of Kent was always recommending that Victoria should rest, but she didn’t feel like resting. Conversely William gave her freedom to do whatever she wanted, as long as it didn’t endanger her safety and the baby’s. He realized that it was necessary to give her freedom so that she could live that pregnancy as healthy as possible, she couldn’t bear to live confined.

Theater, opera and music were safe amusements. Walking in the garden, painting... However, some activities were out of the question. Two of them were Victoria’s favorites: dances were out of bounds of possible entertainment and riding was too risky and therefore completely impossible. Since she couldn’t ride, William didn’t do it all by himself, as that would only annoy her more. She insisted for him to go, but he wouldn’t, he would keep her company. He cared about her, not just the baby. She felt valued by him. She was as important to him as the child she carried inside her.

In addition to the meetings, the dispatches of daily affairs, and the official appointments she kept going to as long as she could, what remained still was sitting and reading. He liked to put his hand on her belly, over her dress, while they worked or while they read next to each other. Obviously he didn’t tell her about the many circumstances in which labor could go wrong. On the other hand, William would show her the Atlas with the drawings of the inside of pregnant women’s bodies so that she would know how the process would work at the time of childbirth. Some were very detailed about the moment of the expulsion of the fetus which, in a way, made this approach more reassuring.

In her situation, as a reigning monarch with no chance for her sons to ascend the throne, there wasn’t the pressure to have a male heir, nor was her function seen as if she were only the reproducer of a dynasty.

Food intake increased, of sweets especially.

William reassured her. Victoria really began to live that pregnancy in the best possible way.

***

They were both lying on the bed at night.

Victoria wrapped her hands around her belly, a gesture that was now repeated more and more constantly.

Though strange at first, the feeling of life within her began to feel pleasant, as if that baby communicated.

William put his left hand on her belly and leaned over her kissing her over the cloth. Then, slowly, he lifted her nightgown exposing her belly. He stroked her skin and kissed it tenderly. He loved kissing her belly!

“You’re wonderful Victoria! And your belly is beautiful!” He remarked.

Victoria smiled slightly. She felt beautiful, loved and desired as a woman, regardless of the fact that her belly was growing more and more.

William laid his head carefully on her belly.

She put her hands on his head and caressed his hair and face.

He heard the baby’s heartbeat, smiled at her, and said:
“His little heart... is beating!”

Victoria smiled more deeply and continued to caress his face. She was fond of the affection he showed for a child who hadn’t yet been born and felt that the prospect of birth appeased him; that this child was to occupy the emptiness left by those who had died under different circumstances. As he himself had said, she knew they would never be replaced by this other baby, but in a way, this child would be a restitution in William's life.

In recent times Victoria felt more relaxed, more cheerful, and more enthusiastic about this new perspective in her life.

He lifted the head from her belly and kissed her mouth. He caressed her breasts and thighs.

The pregnancy had made Victoria somewhat more excitable, and William loved to enjoy the body of a pregnant Victory who had grown round and voluminous in various parts: legs, hips, breasts...

Now there would be a moment to enjoy each other...

For Victoria the best way to do it was lying on her left side, with William positioned behind her back. The belly was then comfortably supported and she didn't have to make any effort. With the left leg stretched out and her right leg bent, it was enough to wait for him to slowly enter her, to move slowly and gradually intensify the movement. If she arched her back and lifted her right arm above the head, the sensation was even more pleasant.

***

William was in the hallway on his way to the office while thinking that his comments on the Greek homilies of St. Chrysostom were now a distant enterprise. After the wedding there had been no more time for this task, or that partial identification with the real and legendary life of the saint. Like St. Chrysostom, it seemed that he had already atoned for all sins and had been welcomed into a kingdom of bliss!

He heard the music coming from the piano room. The first movement of Mozart’s Sonata No.16.

He smiled.

She was playing for the baby! And she was specifically playing Mozart!

He knew that through the example of love for that child he gave her, she was learning to love their child!

***

In the seventh month of pregnancy Victoria and William continued to enjoy each other in nighttime activities. By medical recommendation, they should have already stopped, but it wasn’t possible to comply with abstinence, just try to have some moderation...

This practice was, in fact, attenuating the pain on Victoria's back, and she loved that he continued to desire her.

From the start of the eighth month things started to get tough again. Her tension and nervousness increased before the perspective of the delivery approaching. The physical relationship between them subsided. She wasn't willing. Before her frame of emotions, he didn't feel like it either.

Victoria was sitting on the edge of the garden lake.
Achilles was playing in the proximities for the delight of Viscountess Jocelyn, William's niece, and the Duchess of Buccleuch, two more recent presences in Victoria's life, but with whom she had a friendly relationship.

William was seen walking towards the Queen and the two ladies turned away calling Achilles.

He sat on the edge of the lake beside her.

After a while in silence - which he found strange - she began to cry.

“My dear, what's the matter?” He asked, grabbing her hands.

“I'm scared of the pain…”

He hugged her and said:

“I cannot say that there will be no pain, because we both know there will be, but try not to live it by anticipation. Childbirth is difficult, but you are strong. You are such a fighter. If you weren't we wouldn't be here now…”

She smiled at him and William kissed her forehead.

***

Now in addition to her feeling bad, there was something going on with him. She knew there was. He was quieter and more silent, and there was an underlying sadness. He was very affectionate with her, as usual, but he was different. As if some thought that worried him was haunting him. She knew him very well. She didn't ask anything to give him the opportunity to tell her if he wanted to. But that was becoming an enigma and a concern for her. She thought about what Emily had said; that sometimes it was difficult for him to deal with some emotions, but that didn't mean that something had happened in his relationship with her. She remembered the birthday and death anniversary of his son, but none of those dates were approaching. There had to be another reason.

Despite her physical discomfort, they decided to travel to Brocket Hall to stay there for a few days. Perhaps the change of air, the calm of the countryside and the distance from the political affairs of London would have a reassuring effect on her. She let that be the reason for the trip, but she wanted to be alone with him in a place with more privacy that would maybe help him to open up to her.

***

At Brocket Hall her mood improved, but things didn't change with him.

That day at the end of the dinner, still sitting at the table, she placed her left hand on his right hand, which rested on the towel, and asked:

“William, what's the matter?”

“Nothing. Why?”

“I think you are very quiet. Something seems to worry you.”

“I'm tired, that's all.” He said as he removed his hand from under hers and placed it on top, caressing it tenderly.

“Have we had much work lately? I didn't notice much difference.”
“The work may not be much different... I'm the one who no longer can handle as much as I could...”

Victoria thought she had understood what was going on.

“Do you want to reduce the number of hours you work with me?”

“No!”

“I'm serious, dear! It doesn't matter. You can collaborate less...”

“But I don't want to. The fatigue will pass; it's just a phase... That is why these days here are also good for me. You'll see that when we get back to Buckingham we'll both be recovered!”

Victoria didn't insist.

When they lay on the bed he hugged her tightly, pressing her against him and kissed her forehead. Her belly between them. It was a normal gesture. He did that many times. But there was something in the way he did it that day that made Victoria apprehensive. He had done it as if he was comforting her for something that had happened to her or that she had lost. And this was strange because nothing had happened in her life that would justify that way of embracing her.

No, the matter wasn't only the fatigue he alleged. She knew better. It was only that she couldn't read him as well as he read her! She was an open book to him. He sensed everything about her. But he was difficult to read, to interpret more deeply what really happened with him.
Chapter 27

The next day when Victoria woke up it was later than she usually woke up in Buckingham, and William was no longer in bed. Ever since they had married, she had never woken up without him in bed. She wanted to justify his absence because it was later, but she couldn’t help but be apprehensive, especially because she thought something was wrong with him.

She got up and prepared with the help of the dresser.

She asked the butler where His Highness was, and he replied that he had left after breakfast. He should have gone to take a walk around the property as usual.

Victoria had breakfast alone. They had agreed that they would always have breakfast together. The food didn’t come down easily and now it was no longer due to her pregnancy.

She left home to try to find him. Where could he be? The rooks! That was where he went when something was bothering him, right?

She walked as fast as she could to the place where he used to watch the rooks. She had to sort this situation out as soon as possible or she wouldn’t take it!

She saw him! There, sitting on the base of the stone pedestal that stood at the bottom of one of the garden halls. He was behind the structure and she could only see his right shoulder. He must have been very distracted because he didn't notice her footsteps on the leaves until Victoria had already gotten really close to him.

When he felt her coming he stood up as if he had caught a fright, turned to her and said:

“Victoria!”

“William!”

She observed him. He was crying!

He quickly wiped his eyes with the back of his left hand, trying to hide what was impossible to hide.

She had never seen him like this! He had had tears in his eyes several times in front of her, he had cried with her after he had first possessed her body and soul but she had never seen him cry like this!

“William, what's the matter, my love?” Victoria asked worriedly as she wrapped her left arm around him and wiped the tears from his face with the fingers of her right hand.

“Nothing, there is nothing the matter!” He tried desperately to deny, freeing himself slowly from her and moving away.

He had always been the embodiment of strength, and therefore he didn’t want to show weakness in front of her. And he was her motor, the incentive, the motivation, he shouldn't take that away from her, much less bring her even more concern.

“William, please! You can no longer pretend like nothing is wrong, you're crying! And you have to tell me the reason, because I am distressed and I need to know! Please!” Victoria pleaded.
Tears streamed down her face.

He sighed and shook his head in a typical gesture of counteracted surrender that she knew so well. He sat down again on the base of the stone structure.

She sat down beside him, turning to him and holding his hands in hers. She ran her thumbs along the backs of his hands, on the protruding veins.

He looked at her tenderly, trying to pluck up the courage to speak.

She didn't want to ask any more questions. She gave him time.

He was taking his time, but he had a lump in his throat.

She was getting desperate.

The tears began to flow again in his face.

She still didn't know the reason for his crying, but her tears intensified as well. Just by watching him cry.

Trying to keep his voice steady, he said:

“Lately... I've been thinking a lot about...”

“Yes…?” Victoria asked yearning for the answer.

“Finitude...”

“Finitude?” She questioned, not understanding for seconds what he meant.

“About my finitude...”

She understood everything!

His crying intensified.

She hugged him tightly against her, sobbing violently over him.

He squeezed her, crying like a baby.

Her belly with their child between them.

“Oh, William! My love, my love…”

They had never spoken of that. This was the only forbidden subject that existed between them, and that they both held, one against the other, as if the circumstance didn't exist.

After a while, when he managed to speak again, still holding her, he said:

“Victoria, I love you so, so much, that I cannot imagine that one day you will be alone... And with our child that will be born...”

She didn't know what to tell him. She couldn't say that this was not going to happen because they both knew that one day it would. Forty years, forty long years separated them from eternal happiness! Of that happiness that young couples swore because they had a whole life ahead, that they wished for and imagined shared with each other for decades.
Victoria moved away from him so that she could look him in the eye.

“William, when I will be alone, many years from now for sure, I will certainly have the memory of the most beautiful love story to remember! And I will remember having lived with the best man in the world...”

A sob came back to her face that prevented her from saying anything else.

His emotion grew again, making him squeeze her against him again.

“I didn't want to worry you about this... Especially because you're pregnant and already sensitive enough...” He said in her ear.

She moved back a little to contemplate him again:

“Everything that worries you matters to me! Very much, William. You know that. And you also know that I get more distressed when I don't know the reason of the things that happen around me than if I am confronted with them, even if they are difficult.”

“And I will not be able to follow for many years the growth of our child...”

“William, you are not an old man. You still have many years ahead of you.”

“Some, yes, maybe...” He agreed.

“I have to say that when I think of your absence...” She began to confess, but tears streamed down her cheeks once again in a cascade.

Then she tried to pull herself together and continued:

“There are no words to describe the anguish... but I have faith that such will only happen in a long time. You will teach our child everything you know: to read and to write, to ride a horse, to take care of flowers... If it is a boy, you can teach him how to be a gentleman like you... And if it is a girl you will teach her how to dance...”

Before this perspective William smiled. It was stimulating and inspiring.

“I need to tell you something, Victoria.” He said urgently, as if time was running out.

“Yes...?”

“It's important for me to tell you this... I wanted to say, but I couldn't, there was no right time to say this... and I didn't want to have this conversation now that you're pregnant...”

“Do tell, William!”

“And I don't want you to be offended...”

She nodded, and he began:

“When you're alone... if someone else comes into your life...”

“Oh my love, please don't say that!”

“Please, let me finish!” He asked.
She waited for him to continue.

“If someone else comes into your life, if you think he could make you happy, don't block that possibility; don't remain clinging to the memory of something that will never return...”

“William... I'll never want anyone else in my life. You are irreplaceable! You are my first and only love!” She said crying continuously.

“I'm very happy to hear you say that, Victoria. You are my last and my greatest love! I will love you until my last breath! But I know that my words today will remain in your memory, and that if the circumstances of your life make them necessary, you will remember them.”

Blending their tears, she kissed him on the mouth, placing in that kiss all the purest and deepest love she had for him.

***

As the end of the pregnancy approached, Victoria asked Lehzen to provide a wet nurse for the baby. It was a common procedure among high-society women to have wet nurses for their children. In fact, it was an element of social distinction. And the idea of breastfeeding was not appealing at all for her. The Duchess of Kent had nursed Victoria, and she liked to invoke this as a sign of interest in her daughter's well-being, but Victoria knew that she had done so to save the money she would spend on a nanny.

Lehzen made sure to find the best nurse for that baby.

In the last weeks Victoria hated being pregnant. She was feeling uncomfortable, tired and hot all the time. She had back pain and the volume and weight of her belly were uncomfortable. And that condition took William away! Her own body was no longer hers, but of that baby, who no matter how much she wanted it, she couldn't help but see it as a usurper of her freedom in bed. And fortunately her physical relationship with William was not as she had been told that happened with most women, who spent the long months of their pregnancies without enjoying their husbands! Either by medical recommendation or by common belief, or because their husbands repudiated them during this period. How was that possible? This was also what most recommended her, to keep her body still. But she didn't want to still her body! Desire didn't diminish with this condition, in a way it even increased... And he had corresponded for several months! More than was recommended! But that was a secret only between them. Not lately however. There was no physical comfort or emotional tranquility for that.

The Queen complained to the dresser that she had no idea she would be so uncomfortable. Skerrett told her that she had a friend who had felt the same at this stage, but that when she had held the baby in her arms she had said that all the fatigue didn't seem to have existed. Victoria hoped so.

***

Even though their child was not an heir to the crown, her subjects sent out countless gifts that were accumulating. Victoria, although she was flattered as she opened the gifts with Lehzen's help - especially since their child was not an heir - was a bit overwhelmed by all that, fearing that something could go wrong and that those gifts would never be used... Also the name of the baby would always be chosen after its birth, because it was never known if the newborn was going to survive or not.

The Queen and Lehzen were sitting next to each other opening gifts.
“I’m scared!” Victoria confessed as she looked at another rattle that had come.

The baroness smiled tenderly.

“Scared of childbirth, scared of the pain, scared of the consequences. No queen on the throne gave birth before me.” She materialized.

The Baroness got up from her chair, walked over to her and hugged her, saying:

“There has never been a queen like you before!”

Victoria smiled.

Lehzen continued:

“And you're very lucky because you have the best husband in the world! A man who sees you and values you above all things. There are men who, when their wives become pregnant, stop seeing them and just look at them as ships carrying babies.”

Victoria smiled again. On the one hand because Lezhen, who had always been apprehensive of Lord Melbourne, now saw William as the best of husbands; and on the other, because what she said was a huge truth. He was, in fact, the best husband in the world!

***

Dr. Charles Locock came to see Victoria with some regularity. He asked several questions. She was ill at ease with his presence, but it was a necessary presence. However in addition to questions he now needed to make sure of some things in a more direct way so he could predict if everything would go well during the birth. A pelvic examination and an abdominal palpation were necessary.

Pelvic examination had become a largely used clinical procedure. Pelvimetry was a technique that began to be developed in the 18th century to know the diameters of the pelvis, bearing in mind the problems that osseous narrowing could bring to the birth. To this end the pelvimeter was one of the tools created by obstetricians to obtain the measures of the female pelvis with the purpose of recognizing vitiations that could compromise the good progress of the birth.

Abdominal palpation was a method to establish the diagnosis of pregnancy and birth. The doctor's exploring hands traced the surface of the pregnant abdomen to make sure of the fetus’ position.

William watched the exams to make Victoria feel calmer, and both were made over a nightgown with no other piece of clothing underneath. The direct look on the body was avoided, thus preserving the female modesty and that of the doctors’.

The results were reassuring. Victoria's bone structure showed the appropriate measures, and the baby was in the desired position, being upside down. To reassure her further, the doctor told her that Princess Charlotte must have had a health problem prior to the unfortunate delivery because she had already had two other premature ones before the fateful episode...

When she was alone, Victoria confided to Achilles:

“I just want this to end!”

***

Victoria wanted the delivery to take place in Brocket Hall. She liked to associate the important
moments of their lives with that place, and if their children were not to be heirs to the throne they didn’t have to be born in Buckingham.

William strongly advised against it. Brocket Hall was two hours from London, and if there was an unforeseen event and if something was needed that didn’t exist there, it would be difficult to resolve the situation.

She deduced that for him the approach of the birth would also bring about apprehension. She knew the facts of the life of his first wife and his children well, and she remembered Emily's warnings again.

The delivery would take place in Buckingham.

Following all recommendations, Victoria was confined to await the baby's arrival. And the obstetrician began sleeping in the palace fifteen days before the expected time for delivery.

***

They slept.

Victoria woke up with an abdominal pain that spread to her back. She stood still and quiet waiting to see if it would pass or repeat. After some time the pain repeated. She didn’t want to wake William up and continued to wait. The pain came again!

She got up, sitting on the bed with the feet out and called:

“William!”

“Yes, Victoria!” He answered immediately, turning his body to her.

“I think it's time!”

He knelt on the bed behind her and wrapped his arms around her, placing his hands on her belly.

“I'm scared.” She confessed.

“Shhh... I'm here! Calm down, my love.”

He moved on the bed and sat down beside her.

She looked at him.

“What do you feel?” He asked.

“Intense, spaced pain...”

“You know it has to be that way, my love, but all women go through the same, and every person there is in the world is proof of successful births. You have to think all is going to be okay. And in a few hours it will have passed. What do you want me to do?”

“Call Lehzen and tell her to call Dr. Locock.”

Victoria felt a humid heat invade her underwear.

William put on his trousers and shirt, and then his shoes. He kissed Victoria's forehead and left briefly to ask the baroness to call the doctor and go to the Queen's room.
When he was in the hallway he thought: Oh my God, please, I know I have no right to ask anything of You, but make everything go well!

William returned to the room and Lehzen arrived shortly after.

They both helped Victoria remove her underwear and change her nightgown.

The palace woke up! Candles were lit, water was boiled, and cloths were prepared in abundance.

Before the birth there had been no talking whether William would watch it or not, but for him it was absolutely natural to stay. This time it was not even a question for debate. It was also obvious to Victoria that he would stay there.

She slipped back onto the bed, leaning back against the pillows, Lehzen sitting on her left and William on the right.

The contractions and consequently the pain were repeated in a spaced way.

When the doctor arrived with his assistant Mrs. Lilly, she learned of the situation. It remained to wait for nature to evolve.

The room was quickly prepared for the birth. Basins, water, towels, cloths and various instruments for dubious functions were arranged, and a basin was there to wash the baby after the birth, and a table covered with a sheet to put it. Skerrett stood there waiting for orders to help in whatever was needed.

The contractions began to become less spaced between each other, more intense and longer, wherefore Victoria began to have more difficulty in handling them.

When the pain reached the peak Victoria grabbed William’s hand, who supported the strength she made in him and kissed her forehead soothing her.

Maybe someone in that room thought he didn’t need to be there, but he wasn’t a conventional person, his relationship with Victoria was unconventional and no one dared to say anything.

The situation was becoming more painful for Victoria and William was getting more and more troubled. Besides, she was tense, her muscles tight, frightened, in anticipation of what would happen next, fixated in the pain that would intensify. And that position lying on her back, propped up on the pillows, but firm on the bed, with her legs immobilized, was making him lose patience. That couldn’t facilitate the evolution of the process!

“Dr. Locock, apologies, but we are going to have to change the procedures.” William said politely, but very determinedly.

Victoria looked at him.

“How could the Queen's husband think he knew more about births than he? The doctor wondered.

“How do you know how women gave birth until nearly two hundred years ago?” William asked.

The doctor was surprised by the question, but replied:

“Sitting, standing... squatting...”
“Exactly! Does it not seem like a more natural and appropriate way to hasten the process and minimize the pain?”

“Well... that is not the most usual procedure these days... And maybe these positions are not the most dignified for Her Majesty...”

“Please, Dr. Locock! When it comes to giving birth all women are the same!” William exclaimed a little exasperated with this intention of introducing protocol into an act of this nature.

“What does His Highness suggest, then?” The doctor asked in a tone that revealed that he felt he had run out of points of reference to act on.

William explained:

“According to the observations that were made the delivery will still take a while. So I will move Her Majesty out of bed and put her in a better position to relieve her tension. If you do not mind, so that Her Majesty will be more at ease, I will ask you all to leave for a while and come back when I call.”

The doctor nodded affirmatively and went out accompanied by the assistant and followed by Skerrett.

Lehzen looked worriedly at William and asked:

“Your Highness, are you sure of what you are going to do?”

He replied:

“My instinct tells me so, Baroness.”

Then he looked at Victoria and said softly:

“My love, I think if you stand up and put yourself in a position where your back is in the vertical it will be easier, faster and less painful. Shall we try?”

She nodded.

With the help of William and Lehzen, one on either side, Victoria stood at the side of the bed.

“Please Baroness, can you open a sheet on the floor and then leave us for a while?” William asked, “I'll call you again.”

Lehzen did as he asked and left.

William wanted to be alone with Victoria so that he could physically relax her and emotionally soothe her. It would be impossible to do that with her lying in the previous position and with so many people inside the bedroom.

“Let's walk a little?” He asked in an encouraging tone.

She started to walk, leaning on him, moving away from the bed. Then she put her hands on his shoulders and pressed her face to his chest.

He wrapped his arms around her waist.

They stood there like this, she swaying while supported by him or groaning from pain in intervals,
to the rhythm of the contractions.

Outside the bedroom door, the Duchess of Kent wanted to come in. Lehzen informed her that she couldn’t.

“Will you dance with me, my love?” William asked between the contractions.

She laughed as if asking: “Now? You really think so?”

“Remember the coronation ball. When I put my hand on your waist for the first time, the two of us dancing in the hall... the two of us alone in the gallery, you saying that you wanted to dance with me all night... clinging to me...” He reminded.

The voice failed him, touched by the memory. The first time he had realized that her feelings for him were of the same nature as his for her... The fear and anguish that had started that night...

She looked at him.

“Oh, William... Only you to remind me of such a thing right now... Such fond memories!”

Her tears streamed down her cheeks.

He kissed her tears and then kissed her on the mouth gently.

“Why didn’t you kiss me that night in the hallway?” She asked. “We were alone...”

“You know I couldn’t have done it back then... It wasn’t for lack of desire...”

Victoria smiled.

William continued:

“I love you, my love! In addition to Augustus, you are the most important thing I have ever had! You and the baby that will be born now...”

From the translucent green of his eyes the tears rolled as well.

She hugged him with intensity and exclaimed:

“Oh, my dear, my love, I love you so much! There are no words! There is no man more wonderful in the world!”

Victoria began to sob.

Then she felt another contraction and screamed in pain.

He reached over his right arm and pulled a chair next to the sheet lying on the floor.

“Put your hands on the back of the chair and squat down, I'll stand behind you and support you.” He said.

Victoria did as William told her: she put her hands on the back of the chair and stoop down, squatting while leaning on the chair and her body over the sheet.

He knelt behind her back and leaned his body to Victoria's body. He slipped his hands under her nightgown and ran them across her belly.
The touch of his hands was warm, tender, and soothing, as always. She felt relieved. Then he ran his right hand up her back going up and down repeatedly.

She screamed in pain again.

“Think of Brocket Hall... the flowers... the greenhouses... the rooks... the lake... the two of us, there... the first kiss at the top of the stairs, the first time in our bed, the wedding night...” He spoke slowly.

His voice was tender and smooth, a soft whisper that calmed her and moved her at the same time.

“William... Like this I'm going to cry again...”

“Then cry, my love... cry!”

“But it's not the pain...”

“I know...”

She started sobbing again and a little after said:

“I cannot be in this position anymore, I have to kneel...”

Victoria got down on all fours, and then sat down with her knees bent and her heels beneath her buttocks. She was still crying.

He stood behind her, his right hand on her back. With his left he pulled her hair back and leaned his head against hers, also crying from the emotion of the moment.

“I want to get up.” She asked.

William helped her to her feet.

She leaned back against his shoulders and stood.

The contractions were now regular, stronger, and longer. That's why her complaining intensified.

The waters broke causing the expulsion of fluid.

Someone knocked on the door.

William gave permission to open.

Lehzen apologized and asked if she could come in because she was getting nervous outside.

He allowed her to come in and asked her to call the doctor too.

Lehzen came in followed by the doctor, his assistant, and Skerrett.

It was necessary to check the size of the dilatation and the position of the baby's head.

Victoria had more and more pain and was not comfortable exposing herself that way. Many women refused this medical observation, but she knew she had to allow this humiliation, and being the doctor's assistant looking at her was a little more reassuring. But if things got complicated and if it was necessary to use instruments the doctor would have to act.

Victoria felt another contraction and shouted:
“Mother!”

The duchess hurried into the room.

Victoria realized that there were more people out there and asked:

“What are they doing here?”

She knew it was customary for there to be individualities outside the bedroom to witness the birth and sex of an heir or its or the progenitor’s death. But in this case her baby was not an heir...

William searched for the best way to respond:

“In case of replacement...”

The unborn baby was not an heir, but the mother was a queen, and if she died she would have to be replaced. That is why the Prime Minister - Robert Peel - the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London were waiting outside. The doors of the bedroom had to be open, according to the ancestry of the archaic ritual, but in this circumstance nobody dared to do so.

As she entered the room, the Duchess of Kent was shocked by what her eyes saw: Victoria standing clinging to William, her nightgown stained, the bedroom in a mess... However, she tried to keep calm and approaching Victoria took her left hand and said tenderly:

“Drina, my daughter... It's going to be okay!”

By some unexplained emotional connection those words had a positive effect on Victoria.

According to the medical procedure used, Vitoria was laid across the bed, supported by cushions, with her legs bent over, covered with a sheet, so that the doctor's assistant could observe her.

She had 8 fingers of dilation. It was necessary to wait for about 10 fingers.

The pain continued to intensify.

William was next to Victoria, sitting on the bed, grabbing her right hand.

Victoria felt the urge to push to free herself of the pressure, but was told to wait.

After a while Mrs. Lilly checked the dilation again. She had hit 10 fingers. The contractions were almost without intervals. Now it was necessary to push.

William placed himself on the bed, supporting Victoria in the back to keep her torso higher and so that she was more supported. He put his arms under her chest.

The doctor gave directions on breathing and Victoria began to push.

By indication of the doctor Lehzen and Skerret stood on either side of the Queen to support her legs and feet, so that they could help her use more force, easing the process of expulsion.

Victoria reached for William's hands to squeeze, interlacing the fingers, which helped her withstand the peak of pain and the rise of her belly, which hardened with spasm. But the pains in the lower abdomen grew worse, like a break in the guts, as if the baby was breaking her from the middle! The screams were now frequent and the way she gripped his hands was intense and distressing.
If he could transfer to him at least some of that suffering... It was a strange feeling to be so close to her and not be able to help, to be able to do nothing to minimize her pain!

Victoria was still pushing hard.

“I can’t take it anymore...” She said in despair.

“You can. You can take it all, my love!” William said as he pulled her hair from the sweaty forehead.

“Push harder, Majesty.” Ordered the doctor.

“I cannot... I’m cold.”

“Yes you can, Victoria! Come on, push!” William insisted, stroking the intense tremor, while Lehzen brought a shawl to tuck her in.

The doctor gave instructions on breathing.

Victoria struggled to use more force.

The contractions lasted longer now and had much shorter intervals, she was tired and the fear was an eminence! What if she was not able to expel the baby out?

Seeing that she was weakening William told her:

“My love, you never give up!”

“No, I never give up!”

“I, here and now, am proof that you never give up.”

“Yes, you, you are proof...” She said breathlessly, trying to control her breathing. She pushed harder.

The contractions were intense and the effort, physical and emotional, was increasing more and more. She tried harder again.

Why was it that making children with the right man was so good, and bringing them into the world was so painful?

The pressure and the pain were now also in the lower part, deep within herself.

“You're almost there, Your Majesty...” Lehzen said to encourage her.

The Duchess of Kent didn’t say a word because she couldn’t...

“I can see the baby's head.” Said Mrs. Lilly.

“It's almost, my love! Push harder!” William encouraged her again.

Victoria insisted.

The baby's head was expelled.

The doctor asked her to stop pushing, and slowly and carefully the baby's body was pulled by Mrs. Lilly.
Victoria felt the complete release of that volume.

“It’s born, Victoria!” William exclaimed when he saw the whole body clearly.

She sighed in relief. Finally the months of waiting and the physical suffering were over! And she was alive and that baby too!

“It’s a girl, Your Majesty.” The doctor informed immediately.

While they cleaned the fluid from the baby's nose and mouth, William and Victoria wept, as did the Duchess of Kent and Lehzen. Skerret tried to hide her emotion.

The sound of the baby's crying was heard for the first time.

The doctor cut the umbilical cord and was going to deliver the baby to Skerrett to be cleaned.

“I want to see her!” Victoria asked in a tone of regal order, which somehow astonished everyone present, including William.

At the Queen's determination, the doctor placed the baby on top of Victoria's body, which allowed her and William to see her face for the first time.

“Oh, my love, she was born...” She said, stroking the head of her newborn daughter.

William also stroked the little baby's head. He touched her for the first time, as if he was touching something precious and fragile and is afraid that it breaks. He wanted to talk to Victoria, but he couldn’t.

“The baby has to be cleaned, Drina...” The duchess warned.

Victoria nodded with her head.

The doctor took the baby from her lap and took it to be cleaned.

William was then able to speak:

“It's all right, my dear... You and our daughter. You are wonderful!” He said kissing her on the forehead.

William left the bed, leaving Victoria on the pillows.

Light, spaced contractions promoted the expulsion of the placenta half an hour later. Bleeding was normal in quantity, not inspiring care.

Twelve hours had passed.

Victoria was cleaned and changed clothes with the help of Lehzen and Skerrett.

William went to change his clothes, too.

Although it was not an heir the London bells rang to announce the birth.
Victoria was tucked in bed propped on pillows, and continued to feel some pain.

The baby, already cleaned and dressed, and after being fed by the wet nurse, was brought to her mother's lap.

She was not sure how to hold her newborn daughter, but did the best her instinct dictated. For all the associated fears, she had been reluctant to the pregnancy, and had felt like jumping in the dark in that experience of being a mother, but now she was there with a baby in her arms that she would have to care for and educate. Fortunately, her loving husband would do that with her.

William went to sit on the bed next to Victoria. He was delighted looking at the baby he caressed in the hands and face.

“I'm so happy, my dear, to have you with me and this baby!” He said kissing her forehead.

“Did you really think I'd let George be king?” She asked.

He laughed.

“She's so beautiful, my love, just like you!” William exclaimed.

“Deep down didn’t you prefer a boy?”

“No. I could never enjoy having a daughter... This girl is a treasure...”

“Maybe next time it’ll be a boy.”

William was surprised by the possibility of another baby coming from her with this naturalness. He said:

“Maybe... But that doesn’t matter.”

They were both silent observing that little pink being.

Victoria had always thought that newborn babies weren’t pretty, and that they looked a little slippery, but there was something about this baby that was special... Seeing that the baby's little tuff of hair turned dark, she observed:

“I think she has your hair because I had blond hair when I was little.”

“But we should call her Victoria, like a great queen!” William suggested.

“No, I have another suggestion.”

“What is it?”

“Alice...”

William looked at her and smiled.
“You told me once that you really like the name Alice.” She explained.

“If my first daughter had survived, she would have been called Alice.”

“Then she will be Alice.”

“Can it be Alice Victoria?” He proposed instead.

“If you like it, then so shall be it!”

They continued to watch the sleeping baby. It was not yet possible to see the color of her eyes, which had looked grayish after the birth. They should be light like her parents’, blue or green... Now there was a sense of relief for both of them, a feeling that all concern had already passed.

“We mated at the same time as the rooks, and I think she was conceived in a bird cage.” Victoria said smiling.

“Most likely…”

“I'm sleepy.” She informed.

“Sleep then, my love. I'll take the baby.”

William kissed Victoria's forehead, picked Alice up, and moved to leave the room.

As she closed her eyes to fall asleep Victoria still saw how naturally he did it, how good he was at holding the baby...

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After leaving Alice in the nursery, William was in the hallway when he heard someone call behind him:

“William!”

Recognizing the familiar voice at once, he turned around:

“Emma...”

She approached him smiling and remarked:

“I see you are happy!”

“Very happy, Emma, but do not ask me to explain how or even to measure how...”

She smiled deeper and said:

“I wanted to congratulate you! I think that now you have achieved everything you need to feel fulfilled and peaceful...”

“It's true Emma! I do not think I have ever thanked you enough for all the help you gave us whenever it was needed, and that allowed us to get here...”

“You know you do not need to thank me. You know that you have always had a devoted person in me, and that I am happy if I can see you happy...”

William smiled. He knew that it was so.
Emma moved closer to him, stretched out a little and kissed him on the right cheek. Then she walked away quickly, but he still noticed that she held tears in her eyes.

Only Emma could have done that...

***

Once alone in the study, seated at his desk, after all those hours of tension and anticipation, William felt himself decompress. Although it was necessary to wait for the evolution of the baby and the mother in the coming days and months, the most difficult and dangerous moment had already passed. The martyrdom of pain for her was already overcome, and Victoria had done very well. And the fear of death in birth of any of his two most important beings no longer existed. He had kept that pose of strength and calm when she needed it, but now it seemed that all the repressed fear was pouring out of him.

He remembered the past: Caro, Augustus, the newborn daughter who had passed away... From the interval of time in his life between the loss of all of them and the appearance of Victoria. The time between her entrance into his life and the arrival of Albert. In those afflicting days with the prince's presence in which he thought she would propose to him... And then the earth had swayed beneath his feet the day she informed him that she wouldn't marry Albert! And some time later the world had turned, the day he had allowed himself to be a man, instead of just being the statesman, and he had possessed her for the first time in Brocket Hall! From then on he had lived in earthly paradise! And today their daughter had been born... And even now there had been Emma's words in the hall... He needed no more!

William rested his elbows on the desk, put his hands on the face and allowed himself to cry until all the tears had dried.

***

Late in the afternoon, reclining on the bed, Victoria thought of the latest occurrence of her life. Besides the fear of death and the pain that had to be endured, she thought that childbirth was a disgusting thing. She had felt like a cow calving in a stable! Exhausted in fluids and blood, a queen was equal to an indigent. There was no dignity in that brutal act! The embarrassment of exposing herself to the gaze of people outside her intimacy who peered into her body...

But now she felt free from that agony. The months of discomfort with pregnancy, the anticipated terror of childbirth, and the pain and humiliation of the moment! And now she could return to William's arms as a woman! In spite of the pain she felt, she could tell that her body missed him! It had been too long since she had given herself and received... It was necessary to wait until the time of guard had passed, of course, but as soon as it was possible...

William entered the room.

Victoria smiled at him immediately.

He leaned back on the bed on her right side saying:

“I just came from the nursery! Our daughter sleeps peacefully.”

Victoria grabbed his left hand and said:

“It was very important to have you here always with me...”

“I would never leave you.”
“You managed to relax me, and then you gave me the strength I needed.”

“You did very well, my love! If you think it better, I can sleep in another room today, or I can stay here in an armchair, just in case you need anything... You know how I have experience in sleeping in armchairs...”

Victoria frowned as he spoke and then said:

“Please William, sleep with me in our bed! I want to have you with me. And I think your back is no longer used to sleeping in armchairs...”

“I just don’t want to hurt you...”

“You never hurt me, you wouldn’t hurt me now... I would feel lost in this bed if you were not here.”

He tucked a strand of hair behind her left ear and said:

“I’ll be very careful then...”

***

In five days it would be Christmas day. But this year the holidays had always coincided with complicated times... On Victoria’s birthday there was no party because she had just discovered she was pregnant and had nausea; now that it was Christmas she had just had a baby and had to stay in bed... Babies really were a limitation... She thought Christmas was a beautiful and magical time, and remembered the Christmas in Kensington. They didn’t give her much freedom, and she was sent to her bedroom early, but she liked to watch the lit and decorated yew, and there were always some sweets and presents. Now that she was already grown-up and self-determined, she could stay for dinner as long as she wanted, and arrange the decoration and presents as she pleased. But not this year! There was a tree in the ballroom for the court’s appreciation, and there would be presents and a dinner which she wouldn’t attend.

William had to be present at dinner, where there would be relatives from both sides and members of the Court. Especially now that his integration into the role of the Queen’s husband was evolving very favorably. He had to be a host at these events. But as soon as possible he left to be with Victoria.

He entered the room with his right hand behind his back and Victoria smiled, realizing immediately that he had brought her something. Reaching out his arm as he came near her, he said:

“My gift... for you...”

Victoria grabbed the box William showed her and opened it as he sat on the bed on her right side.

She opened the box and, surprised, opened her mouth.

“Oh, William! It’s beautiful!”

The gift was a large, gold bracelet, made up of several elaborated pieces linked together, ending in an oval medallion in which there was a miniature portrait of William. It was a type of jewelry common at the time, the kind of piece that allowed to carry the portrait of the groom, the husband or the children, a frequent gift among relatives, but Victoria still had none with her husband's portrait.
“When Alice grows up, I'll have a jewel for you with her picture done.” Said William.

Victoria smiled, turned to him, put her left hand on his face and kissed him passionately.

“Thank you! I'm very happy with your gift. Even being bedridden I guarantee this is the best Christmas of my life, because it’s the first one in which I have you as my husband. And we have our daughter...”

“I'm glad you liked the bracelet and I guarantee this is also my best Christmas! I had the best gifts I could wish for: Alice and you here by my side.”

“But your gifts are not over yet.” Victoria said. “I also have a gift for you!”

William looked at her intrigued.

“For me? How did you take care of that? I know, you had an assistant... Someone with whom you've been arranging things on my back...” He said laughing.

“You know we have good friends! Emma helped me, of course. But I had already placed the order some time ago, before the birth...”

“Order?”

“It's over there in the closet.” Victoria said looking at the back of the room. “If you don’t mind, you have to go get it, because they won’t let me get out of bed.”

William got up and went to the closet to get a box much bigger and heavier than the one he had brought Victoria.

“You'd better put it on the table.” Victoria suggested.

William did as she said. He set the box on the table and opened it. Inside was a rare and beautiful desk set: a glass inkwell with a silver lid; an ink and pen holder, a fountain pen, a blotter, a spatula to open letters, a candle-holder and a matchbox holder, all in integral silver. The pieces were all decorated by an elaborated frieze. He picked up the spatula to open letters, and as he observed the pattern of the frieze on the handle, he returned to Victoria and sat down on the bed again.

“These are pansies!” He realized.

“It's not just you who knows the meaning of flowers...”

He realized that she was delivering a message, that the love she had for him would never be forgotten. That it was a powerful love, whose memories would remain in thought. He put the spatula on the bedside table and hugged her, letting the body slide on the bed to lie down next to her.

She realized that he had understood the meaning.

“You can always surprise me with such beautiful and meaningful gifts!” He exclaimed.

“I can say the same about you!”

They loved each other so deeply, the realization of their marriage had been so difficult, and their relationship had a deadline, in a way that all gifts they could give each other were the materialized expression of that feeling, and they would never be enough to demonstrate the full force of their mutual affection.
Victoria would have to stay in bed for two weeks. The baby was brought to her a few times a day.

When the baby was not with Victoria, William often went to the nursery to see Alice... Lehzen and the nurse found that constant presence a bit uncomfortable, but the Baroness struggled to understand it.

When he was not in the nursery, William spent hours keeping Victoria company. She felt completely moved by his attentions to her and to the baby. It wouldn’t be possible to find a sweeter or more sensible caregiver. He would only leave her to have his meals, which they sometimes ended up sharing in the bedroom, or if it was inevitable for him to leave the palace.

The butler sent a footman to the nursery to advise His Highness that the Prime Minister and the Duke of Wellington were waiting for him in the study.

He wondered what Peel and Wellington would want from him as he moved to meet his old political adversaries with whom he had a polite relationship.

When he entered the office he noticed that there was concern in their countenances.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen... Please sit down.” William said entering the office and greeting them affably.

The two men said a few words of circumstance as greetings, and sat down in front of William’s desk as he settled into his chair.

William made a gesture with his hands and put on an expression of someone who expected them to speak.

“We came here because we think we might be in the eminence of a disaster...” Peel began.

“A disaster?” William asked, waiting for them to finish.

“Elphinstone gave the order to withdraw from Kabul, our troops must reach Jalalabad within a month...” Peel continued.

“In January the weather is very cold and throughout the Khyber Pass they will be in a single file, being very easy to ambush.” Wellington added, in an opportunity to quickly demonstrate the reasons for the danger in that retreat.

“I'm afraid there is no alternative.” Peel interjected. “Elphinstone believes that Kabul is indefensible. They have no choice! And there is guarantee of safe passage...”

“But I would not have faith in Afghan promises...” Wellington said.

William was apprehensive at that possibility. He said:

“I understand, gentlemen. And that perspective makes me very worried. But... why did you want to communicate this to me personally? I do not have political functions...”

“Her Majesty the Queen... The moment is delicate. We do not know if we should transmit this to her...” Peel finally explained.

William understood their problem. He gave them the solution:
“Well, I think the Queen should be informed of everything that goes on. She is not sick, she is not a child; she just had a baby... But you can rest assured that I myself will pass on this matter, ensuring that it is managed in the best way.”

***

At night as he dined with Victoria in the bedroom William began:

“I received some very important information today.”

“Information? About what? From who?”

“From Peel and Wellington.”

“Were they here at the palace? And why did they come to talk to you?”

“Poor men, they were afflicted... Victoria, you know, your condition as woman and queen still leaves some men uncomfortable. They didn’t know if they should tell you the news they had, since you are recovering from childbirth, and they asked for my help...”

Victoria made an expression of indignation against that attitude of wanting to preserve her just because she was a woman and had had a child... Moving away from the table and leaning back in the chair, as if preparing for a clash, she said:

“Very well, William! I already understood! But what did they tell you?”

“Elphinstone will withdraw from Kabul to Jalalabad because the place is indefensible, and he was given guarantee of safe passage...”

“But?” She asked, noting his stop during the speech.

“The climate and the territory are hostile. The cold and the possibility of an ambush put our army in danger. Wellington doesn’t believe in the Afghan promises...”

Victoria felt a tightness in her stomach and said:

“I understand. If the duke says so... I believe in him quite a lot.”

“Me too.” Confirmed William.

“You want to tell me that we should prepare ourselves for the possibility of having bad news...”

“Unfortunately!”

Victoria smiled at William. He didn’t withhold information from her! And he didn’t treat her like a fragile being who needed to be protected from all storms. He protected her! Always! A lot! So that he made her feel absolutely safe! But he knew how to do that without ever treating her like a child, or a weak or ignorant being.

“Thank you, William, for making me aware of this situation!”

He smiled back and concluded:

“You’re the Queen!”

***
To everyone's amazement the Duchess of Kent proved herself to be a very affectionate grandmother, captivated by that little being named Alice. Clarence House was a ten-minute walk from Buckingham, which allowed the Duchess to visit the palace frequently. Her relationship with Victoria was also tenderer, and William's acceptance as son-in-law was now more natural.

After two weeks Victoria got out of bed, but medical recommendations and those of the women around her demanded that she made no efforts, that she didn’t get tired, and that she didn’t leave the palace. Moving entailed inclusively the use of a wheelchair that allowed her to be pushed through the halls, but required that she was carried up and down the steps. Life was boring!

Now that it had been fifteen days since the birth and everything seemed fine, William went to Brocket Hall. On the way back he brought a bunch of white lilies to Victoria. Symbol of motherhood, and also of marriage and innocence. The gesture managed to bring a smile to her face and, deposited in a crystal jug, the flowers brought joy to her life of confinement.

Although Victoria couldn’t go out, she gradually resumed political activity involving matters that could be taken care of at the desk. But William helped a lot with the red boxes of the dispatches. He read documents, made an oral summary of its content, wrote letters... However he never imposed, didn’t try to control things. He gave his opinion on possible decisions, but left the choice in her hands. A young, inexperienced "little prince" husband would feel insecure in his position as “husband but not the househusband” and could take advantage of this phase, in which Victoria was recovering from childbirth, to take the reins of power. William didn’t do that. He was neither insecure, nor did he need to assert himself. He didn’t want to be boss or king. No, not only he didn’t govern for her, but he also helped her to do it in the best way. His accomplishment was in her, in that she shone as queen. That which was between them was a perfect balance, and that inexplicable completeness!

They were both at the same table working together when the Prime Minister was announced by the butler.

Peel came in with a distressed look and said:

“Your Majesty! Your Highness!”

William thought about what nerves were doing to the man. In the past Peel had already treated him roughly in Parliament, and now here he was saying “Your Highness”! Peel changed color in the presence of the Queen, not knowing how to act and what to say to a woman monarch. And something must have happened for him to show that breathless expression as if he had come running from the House to the palace.

Before his countenance Victoria and William rose worriedly from their seats.

“Sir Robert... What is going on?” Asked the Queen.

Peel looked at William as if asking permission to speak.

He made him a sign with his eyebrows for him to talk.

“I'm sorry to say, Ma’am, but the worst has happened...”


William already guessed what Peel would say next.

“Although we were guaranteed safe passage in the withdrawal from Kabul, our troops were
ambushed near a village called Gandamak...” Peel reported.

“And?”

“We lost 4,500 soldiers, Ma’am! Europeans and Indians...”

Victoria felt her stomach tighten.

William thought how wrong the perceptions of what was happening on the field at the beginning of the war were. And he was one of the responsible for them...

“They were accompanied by 12,000 civilians... families of the British and Indian soldiers, workers, servants, field followers... Women and children...”

“And these people...”

“They were all slaughtered, Ma’am! More than 16,000 people...”

William closed his eyes.

The ground seemed to slip beneath Victoria's feet.

Peel continued:

“Maybe some have been captured... There are no exact numbers... As far as we know at the moment only one British soldier survived: assistant surgeon William Brydon.”

Victoria had tears in her eyes, but she couldn’t afford to cry.

She sat down on the chair, her eyes on the floor.

William positioned himself behind her and placed his right hand on her back.

“Thank you, Sir Robert!” Victoria thanked in a tone that made the Prime Minister understand that she would like to be alone and it was better to leave.

Peel bowed and went away closing the door behind him.

William ran his hand over Victoria's bare shoulders as he passed to her front. He knelt and hugged her as she threw herself into his arms. It was extraordinary how he knew how to respond to what she needed at every moment. She needed him to hug her and he hugged her. Simply.

Victoria wept over William's left shoulder. Only in front of him could she cry.

“I’m sorry, Victoria!” He apologized. “I sent them there...”

Victoria shook her head negatively and said:

“You couldn’t have predicted... The reports from our envoys on the field before the war began indicated that this was the right way...”

“This is the worst British military disaster...” William said.

“They were my soldiers... they were there in the name of the crown that I wear on my head, they were there for me...” Victoria sobbed.

They comforted each other in that embrace. Two people who shared the same life story and the
same political story. It seemed like this way it was less heavy to bear. He knew exactly what she felt, what it was like to have the responsibility of lives in one's hands. No other man coming from another state, without government functions, would understand this. Her life with such a husband would be a loneliness. But not with William!

***

After a week of riding on wheels Victoria rejected the chair and started to walk by herself! She couldn't take it anymore! She was not an invalid! Lehzen appealed to William so that he would make the Queen see sense, but he supported Victoria's decision. He let her be what she was like. A free spirit. He had the perfect knowledge of her, which no one else could reach...

The news of the defeat in Afghanistan began to spread. The political criticism against the party that was in office when the war had begun and against the ministers of that time began to circulate in Parliament, in newspapers, in pamphlets, on the streets... Melbourne and Palmerston were the names attacked. Britain had been humiliated in Gandamak. The British army had been defeated by tribes with only a dozen muskets among them!

Victoria wanted to speak with Wellington. She had always admired the old marshal whom she had a lot of respect for and believed in. Ever since she was a child she had heard stories of his military exploits. And she felt that he admired her condition as woman and queen. She hoped that he, as a war man, would be able to calm her down on this subject. If she could go out, she would talk to him in the garden to clear her head. But she couldn't. She received Wellington in the green room.

The Queen and the distinguished marshal were seated in front of each other.

Wellington watched the Queen's worried countenance. So young, so beautiful (Melbourne was definitely lucky) and with so much weight to carry...

“And Elphinstone?” Asked the Queen.

“From what is possible to know, he is still captive to the Afghans. This man's leadership is a striking example of how the ineptitude and indecision of a senior officer can compromise the morale and effectiveness of an entire army. A fool who instead of leaving, was undecided until the snow came... Elphinstone couldn’t lead his soldiers, but he fatally exercised enough authority to prevent any of his officers from exercising proper command in his place.”

“But there were a few more survivors...”

“It seems so, some who came to Jalalabad after Brydon and a few others who were captured by the Afghans... Afghanistan is a miserable place, Ma’am, abandoned by God! Nothing but rocks, sand, and members of tribes that fight like tigers! We should have left them as they were... Those who did not die at the hands of the Afghans died of cold, sickness and hunger... There were those who lost their fingers because of the cold...”

Victoria was struck by the description and realized the implicit criticism of the decision to start the war, but she appreciated Wellington's frankness. He didn't treat her differently for being a woman.

“And now, Duke?” Asked the Queen.

“Now you have to lick your wounds, lift your head and walk forward...”

“But what happened... is too heavy a loss for England...”
“That is undeniable! But disasters of this nature have always occurred throughout History, in various states of the world... We are not the only ones, nor the first, nor the last to go through this.”

Victoria thought that put like that, it even seemed simple.

“But how can this disaster be overcome, how will my subjects get past this?” She asked.

“The way it's always been done in the past... making more war. Peel has already started this discussion with his ministers, he should speak to you soon. We are sending an expedition to Kabul in a punitive campaign.”

“Revenge?” Victoria asked, looking alarmed.

“Revenge, Ma’am! Now there is nothing else we can do... And that will make it possible to assuage, in part, the hearts of men...”

***

The doctor had recommend abstinence in the 6 weeks after the birth.

Victoria was eager for William and the fullness she found only in his arms, the pleasure of his skin spreading over hers. There were no words to describe the whirlwind of sensations that spilled through her body when she was under him! She needed nothing more than the delight of fitting into him! No strings attached! She thought of the satisfaction she felt every time he touched her, concentrated only on her and the intensity of the groans she produced with her mouth glued to his ear. She wanted to drive him crazy by running her tongue over his chest and neck, entangling his body with the nakedness of her legs open to receive him, to revolve again with him in bed or on the floor in the darkness of night, by candlelight or just by the flames of the bedroom fireplace crackling. She wanted to enjoy him again with her eyes closed, floating in the exuberance of the vibrant joy, lost in her. It had been so long! Before and after the birth... But she had to wait.

After one month, which seemed too long, Victoria was finally allowed to leave the palace, which was already an achievement. She would like to run in the garden or to go on horseback to commemorate the end of the confinement, but she had to undergo a postpartum purification ceremony that seemed to her to touch the limits of discrimination. Why was she impure? Because she was a woman? Because she had had a child? There was no other way. If she wanted to return to society, she would have to be welcomed back into Church, as the Duchess of Kent had explained.

Victoria submitted to the ceremony in the church, kneeling before the altar, with the Archbishop of Canterbury standing in front of her saying a few words and blessing her. Behind her were William, the Duchess of Kent, the Duchess of Buccleuch, Emma, Lehzen, and a few other members of the court. She noticed the words of the archbishop when he said that he thanked the Lord for having rid her of the pain and danger of childbirth and for expelling sin from her. Sin? Why was it that what she did with William, who had given source to their daughter, was considered a sin? A sin? It was a blessing! That yes! The Archbishop didn’t understand a thing!

The first thing Victoria did after that was ride on horseback across the park with William by her side!

Chapter End Notes
Dear readers, writing this story is a pleasure and knowing that there are people who take pleasure in reading it makes this process even more wonderful. But I must warn you that To Love in Brocket Hall is on the way to the end ... I wondered myself whether or not to give a warning, but when we read a book we also know that it is coming to an end and so I thought it was fair to make this warning.
Chapter 29

Victoria caught up with her mail by writing letters to her sister Feodora and her cousin Maria, Queen of Portugal, giving an account of the events of the last weeks.

William was in the nursery again, a number of times he couldn’t possibly tell, and watched Alice sleeping peacefully in the bassinet covered by translucent white curtains. He liked to stay there alone, in silence, just watching her.

Victoria peeked from the door. It was easy to know where he was when he wasn’t in the study. There was the elegant silhouette on his back! In pants, shirt, vest and riding boots. He hadn’t even taken off his shoes after returning from the horseback ride!

She walked over to him and hugged him leaning her face against the satin back of his vest. She took a deep breath, breathing him in. She would have his scent on her forever... Then she moved to his right side as he put his arm around her shoulders.

They were both holding each other in silence looking at Alice.

The christening of newborns should take place with just a few days of life, but in the upper classes, for the mother to be able to attend the ceremony, they waited between six weeks and two or three months. The baby's christening would take place on the day of William and Victoria's first wedding anniversary, on 8th February.

“We need to finalize the choice of godfathers” Said William.

“So... we have already agreed on your brothers, Emily and Frederick, my Uncle Sussex and my Aunt Adelaide.”

“And your mother, Victoria!” He added in a tone of slight rebuke, for her attempt to have the Duchess of Kent off the list.

“Yes, and my mother…”

He sighed, looked at her and explained:

“I understand your anguish with the past, but I think you should promote a different relationship with her in the present and in the future. As far as possible, Victoria... I don’t expect you to become best friends.”

Victoria nodded.

“And I think there's someone else you should invite.” He said.

“Who?”

“Your Uncle Leopold...”

Victoria freed herself from William, looked surprised, and asked:

“The king of the Belgians? It even seems that you don’t know what his stand was on our marriage, and how he left London angrily the last time he was here because I didn’t abide to his will and married his favorite nephew...”
“You don’t know, but he went to my house before we got married...” William said.

She was puzzled when she asked:

“My uncle went to your house? And you never told me? What did he want?”

“To ask me to give up and not marry you.”

“And what did you do?”

“I married you!” He said smiling.

Victoria laughed bewildered. He always managed to bring the boiling down when her nerves began to rise!

“That I know, William! But what arguments did he use and how did you respond to him?”

He sighed. At that time he hadn’t had the courage to repeat that conversation with Victoria, but now it had been a long time already. He moved away from the bassinet to keep the conversation from waking Alice and explained:

“He told me that I should think hard about what I was doing because I was too old, and that it wouldn’t be good for you. If I loved you I shouldn’t bring you the inconvenience of age and... of solitude... In addition, he also said that you were very young and therefore voluble in your feelings. That you were probably just charmed by me and that it could pass quickly...”

William couldn’t tell Victoria that Leopold had even insinuated that she could betray him, which would make her furious.

“How could he say those things to you?” Victoria asked in shock.

“I told him that I wouldn’t give up because I believed in your feelings, and wanted to share as much as I could of living with you.” William finished.

“And after that you still want me to invite him to be Alice's godfather?” She asked indignantly.

“Deep down, he likes you! You know that’s true. What he was doing was because he cares for you, even though that was blinding him... And he never forgot Charlotte...”

Victoria looked at William surprised.

He continued:

“You and Albert were the embodiment of his dream of ruling England together with Princess Charlotte.”

“How do you know that?” She asked in amazement.

“Because we talked about that.”

“I see that your conversation with my uncle was profound...”

“It was. That's why I'm telling you: invite him to be Alice's godfather, and you’ll see that he will accept. By this time he already realized that the pressure he made was exaggerated, the tantrum because of Albert has passed and he needs a way to resume his relationship with the niece he loves.”
Victoria was thoughtful. She said:

“I liked him. For years he was the only closest figure to a father that I had. We wrote each other regularly. He followed my life and was a good adviser. But the marriage matter separated us... He had always wanted me to marry Albert...”

“It's good that you reconcile with him, because one day he may be necessary for political or family reasons. And I don’t want you to have a broken relationship with your uncle because of me...”

“It's not because of you, William! It was because of me! And because of his incomprehension...”

“You're right, but you understand what I mean. The worst that can happen is that he refuses... But in that case, the fault of your relationship still being deteriorated is not yours...”

“You're right. It might be a good idea. I'll write to him.” Victoria agreed, smiling.

***

That other day in the middle of the afternoon Victoria was taking a bath. The tub in the middle of the room and she was inside it, with her back to the door. She wore a long shirt of fine fabric, which preserved her full nakedness, but which exposed her shoulders, and she rested with closed eyes in a moment of evasion.

Sitting on a bench behind her, Skerrett brushed her wet hair with a comb...

William, just in his pants and shirt, came quietly inside.

The dresser sensed someone coming in and looked back.

He smiled at her and signaled with his head for her to leave.

She got up and he held out his hand for her to give him the comb.

Skerrett handed him the comb - as he smiled back in thankfulness - and left the room. She couldn’t help but smile to herself.

William took the place of the dresser and began to brush Victoria's hair with the comb.

She noticed that Skerrett had stopped, and that the force that was exerted on her hair after had changed. It was gentle, but more vigorous.

But before she could make a remark, William said:

“You must arrange for a larger bathtub, my love.”

She opened her eyes and immediately turned her body sideways and the head back smiling at him:

“William!”

“Victoria...” He said quietly with an expression of adoration.

“Why do I have to arrange for a bigger tub?” She asked curiously.

He looked at her lips. He longed to disarray the perfect design of those lips with the heat of his kisses.
“Because both of us don’t fit in this one together…” He replied, seemingly undisturbed.

She smiled amused and moved, sitting in the bathtub facing him, legs bent underneath her body.

He looked at her wet torso, visible through the damp cloth that clung to the flesh and made it visible. The volume of the prominent and evident breasts beneath the cloth...

“Did you want to bathe with me?” She asked provocatively.

He nodded and she saw the look of desire that he sent her, and that burned her senses. Even now, wet and inside the water.

“Then I’ll provide a tub big enough for us both…” Victoria suggested.

He was still motionless observing her with the same burning gaze.

“But if you cannot get in, I can get out.” She concluded as she stood in the tub intending to get out.

He got up suddenly, following her movement and grabbed her impetuously, to which she corresponded in the same way. They hugged and kissed uncontrollably! His mouth on hers was unexpected and hot!

Some of the tub water jumped out over the bedroom tapestry.

Her hair and body dripping water to his body, soaking his shirt and pants inflamed his desire even more. As he continued to kiss her, he rolled the soaked fabric of her shirt up, running his hands over her wet thighs, from which droplets of water fell, in an urgent urge to melt into her.

William grabbed Victoria by the waist and lifted her in the air, pulling her out of the tub and landing her on the floor as she held his face in both hands and they kissed.

More water was spilled on the tapestry.

That unpredictability and all that eagerness of his left her ecstatic.

He led her backwards to the bed, kissing her and touching every part of her body at his mercy.

Feeling his hands on her thighs and buttocks was something sublime!

“I missed you so much…” Victoria confessed in a voice that vanished.

William dragged the bedspread down with his right hand, exposing the sheets, and made her lie down on the diagonal.

She was so delicious like that! Totally wet! A new sensation! He ran his hands over her body and kissed parts of her skin completely exposed and other parts through the wet fabric glued to the flesh. He didn’t know which the best sensation was. He wanted to possess her in either way, with or without the shirt! He pulled the shoulders of her shirt down violently, exposing her breasts so he could plunge his face into them. Inevitably from the force exerted the cloth ripped.

Victoria was burning with desire for that ecstatic man! Now she was free, she had her body back to herself. She felt that she loved their daughter, but the last few months had been a discomfort and her body was demanding William! She abandoned herself to the madness of loving him so much!

The soles of his boots, which he hadn’t been able to take off, left traces of dirt and dust on the white sheets.
He lifted his body, knelt, and stripped off his shirt.

She got up on the bed and unbuttoned his pants.

He crawled off the bed to take off his shoes and the rest of his clothes. Then he lay back down on her, enjoying her breasts with his mouth. He pushed her shirt up to the lower abdomen. Now he had the best of both worlds! The direct contact with her skin on her breasts, shoulders, legs and buttocks, and the wet cloth on her belly and arms. She smelled like a spring morning, when the sun wakes up after the rain has fallen on a field of flowers! He lifted his body and put his right hand in the middle of her legs. He wasn’t gentle in the approach. He pressed it sharply, pushing her a few inches upward along the bed.

Victoria contracted her pelvic muscles in exaltation.

He wondered if all the moisture he felt in his hand was from the bath water or from her. He realized it was a mix of both. He wanted to squeeze himself whole inside her, make her scream under him!

Her legs were open and bent. Her mouth opened in a wordless plea, as he touched and kissed her entire body.

William grabbed Victoria's hips, lifted them a little from the mattress, and in one abrupt movement buried himself in her. Now she was free and he could use her without reservation!

Victoria let out a low, muffled scream from the sudden entrance, which made her feel every inch opening in seconds in a somewhat jerked way. But she would take it all, she wanted him to fuck her memorably. Her body accepted him!

The fervor of the kisses!

“You are so good!” She exclaimed.

He emitted a snort in her ear whose exciting vibration Victoria felt in the skin of her ear.

“Oh, it's so big!” Victoria whispered in his ear.

“Do you like it? Hmm? Are you enjoying it?” He asked as he moved inside her. The voice hoarse with desire.

“I love it! It's so thick... I'm so dilated…”

He loved to feel her around him, she tasted so good! And it was terribly exciting that she told him in his ear what she felt by the pleasure he gave her.

“And what else do you feel?” He asked as he hit her again.

She was feeling it whole! Now in a softer way. Filling her! Her body in rejoice in a sweet agony...

“And it's long... all of it inside me... there, in that spot…”

He hit her again, penetrating her to the limit.

“Where?”

“At the top! The deepest spot inside me... Where it’s better to feel you…”
“Here? Is it here?” He asked entering her fully again with every new impulse of his hips.

“Oh! Please! More, more, more...” She begged.

“You want more?” He asked, piercing her violently.

Increasingly faster! Growing stronger! The impetuosity, the passion with which William always devoured her body...

William thought he couldn’t empty himself inside her! He couldn’t!

Victoria dropped her left hand open on the pillow next to her head.

He entwined his right hand in hers squeezing it.

She kissed his left shoulder. She knew he would get out of her before the end.

His forceful charge on her and the energy propagated between them grew. It was so carnal, so raw!

No, at this moment she didn’t want him to get out! It was not the same thing! It was not complete! It was not a fair exchange nor a total surrender! And she wanted to feel his vibration inside her at that final moment! And the warm balm that flooded her and that would drain from her...

She noticed it was coming, slow and gradual, and that when it arrived it would be strong!

“It’s coming, William... I’m getting there!” She warned, smiling with her eyes closed.

“Cum, my love...” He encouraged her. “For me... just for me...” He asked again.

“Finish inside me! Please!” She asked.

Inside her? In fact, William’s sensations were disordered and the thoughts chaotic at that moment. That would be so welcomed!

He unleashed the body and especially the mind.

Victoria felt herself reach the top of the elevation and run on the plateau!

“Oh God! William!” She shouted spectacularly, squeezing his left shoulder tightly and pinching his flesh.

William felt her tighten around him, sucking him, bringing him to an intense climax that made him lose sense of himself, lost in her, exhausting him.

It was stellar!

She squeezed his body with her legs, locked him inside her and shivered in aftershocks...

His face was filled with satisfaction. In hers there was gratitude!

Moments later she moved her legs apart releasing him.

He remained over her for a while to catch his breath. Head resting on the pillow, leaning against the left side of her face.

With William’s body in the middle of her bent legs, she was delighted by the touch and warmth of his skin along her body. Even in the parts where the fabric of the shirt still stood between them.
The familiar, intoxicating scent of sweat... She kissed his sweaty neck and placed her right hand on his head, stroking it tenderly. She loved to pamper him after he possessed her. She loved him even more at the end of each session in which he left her completely satiated. How could she not love him even more after this?

He loved that she did that. That simple gesture had an inexplicable comforting effect on him.

She thought this was a kind of first time again. A renewal, a restart.

After a few moments he got out from inside her and lay on his back on the bed by her left side.

“I’m sorry...” He asked when he could speak.

“For what, my love?” She asked raising her body and placing herself sideways, leaning on her elbow to look at him.

“If I was too abrupt... I didn’t think of you...”

“Did it sound to you like I was bothered?”

“No...” He answered, taking with his left hand a strand of her hair and wrapping it around his index finger.

“So... And if I was uncomfortable, I would have said so, right?”

“Of course. But it was a thought that struck me now, suddenly. It’s the first time we do it after the birth... But I was crazy with desire to have you again...”

“And I was crazy to feel you in me again. I just thought this could happen later at night...”

He smiled.

She continued:

“But like this it was much more surprising... and exciting...”

They kissed.

“It was...” He said. “And I couldn’t wait until later... But I didn’t expect you to want... everything...”

“It’s more rewarding like this! And my menses haven’t come back yet, so I shouldn’t be able to conceive again yet...”

William understood the underlying logic, though he wasn’t sure she was right...

Victoria continued:

“There is nothing more beautiful than this! Nothing more beautiful than you!”

“And there never was a woman I could love and desire more than you, Victoria!”

Caressing his face with her right hand and peering carefully at the beauty of every crease in his face, she said:

“There’s nothing better than when you touch me inside...”
They kissed again.

“I’ll have to call Skerrett, my hair must be a disaster, it has to be untangled, and it has already begun to dry...” Victoria said coming back to the reality of the situation.

“You look beautiful! As always…”

“And there’s a wet mess to dry in this room...” She added with a smile.

***

Leopold’s answer was positive as if nothing had happened in the past. William was right!

A few days later Leopold arrived!

Victoria waited for him alone in her quarters to make things more intimate and easier to manage. Receiving him in the throne room would be too formal and awkward. She had done that when he had come to London to say barbarities about her marriage, but at that time she had needed the majesty that the throne gave her to impose over her uncle's will. A throne that William had so lovingly replaced because that of her old Uncle William IV was too tall for her!

Leopold was announced and came in smiling, although it was notorious that he did it to disguise the nervousness.

He went to Victoria saying:

“My niece!”

While he kissed Victoria in the face she returned:

“Uncle Leopold.”

“Congratulations to the young mother! You cannot imagine how happy I was when I received your letter and... the invitation...”

“Thank you! I am glad that you have accepted.”

“I would very much love to meet your daughter, who is my niece too, and I imagine she is a lovely baby...”

“She is!”

They were silent for a few seconds. So to break the moment Victoria asked, pointing to a settee:

“Would you like to sit down?”

The King of Belgium nodded.

Victoria sat down and he imitated her movement.

Leopold thought he could no longer avoid this conversation. He began:

“Victoria, my dear, you know I always wanted the best for you...”

“I know Uncle.” She answered with sincerity in her voice.

“So... You know... I was reluctant to support your marriage to... Lord Melbourne. There were only
adversities, which you also know... But today I have already overcome this fact and I think I may have exaggerated... Well, I wanted to apologize...”

“You know, you are only here because my husband asked me to invite you…” Victoria clarified, stressing the expression “my husband”.

Leopold slightly opened his mouth in surprise.

She continued:

“If it were only me, I would not have remembered to invite you. But because William is a good man, sensible and more forgiving than I, he talked to me about you and showed me how the most noble and Christian gesture would be for me to do something so that we could resume our relationship.”

Leopold was speechless. After all the idea of the invitation hadn’t come from his niece, and besides, he still had to bear the fact that it had been Melbourne’s idea.

Victoria finished:

“However, I thought that he was right, and I also felt in myself that will, that we could resume our suspended relationship. After all, it has been a long time... And before the wedding matter, we were very close...”

Leopold felt calmer. And he had to say something nice, with which he even felt that he agreed at that moment:

“Your husband seems to be a really good man!”

Victoria smiled.

Leopold returned, grabbing her hands.

They both noticed that he had just recognized qualities in William.

“Well, now I would like to see Alice.” Leopold asked to finish the conversation, and as he got up he added, “And also Lord Melbourne...”

Victoria got up from the settee and informed him:

“Alice is in the nursery, I will show you, and William must be in the garden...”

***

William was in fact in the garden. At the moment standing by the lake watching the swans. He had left the palace, for besides wanting to leave Victoria alone to reconcile with her uncle, he also thought that if Leopold wanted to talk to him he had to look for him. He was not going to make it easy for him to meet casually in any corridor of the palace.

After meeting Alice in the nursery, Leopold appeared alone to see William and said, somewhat embarrassed:

“Lord Melbourne...”

“Your Majesty!”
“My niece told me that I would find you here...”

“You have found me, then... I hope you had a good trip.”

“Oh, yes, I did... I just came from the nursery. I offer you my congratulations, you have a lovely daughter...”

“Thank you, Your Majesty!”

Leopold took a deep breath and then went on:

“Lord Melbourne, I think I owe you an apology… Last time we met, I got out of control, said things I should not have... But I just wanted the best for Victoria and you know, as well as I do that there were many constraints between you...”

William sighed and said:

“Although your stand made it difficult for me to marry your niece, and even though it was becoming extreme, believe me that, deep down, I understood what moved you... Today we are already married, we already have a daughter... There is no longer any reason for not being able to overcome this moment of the past.”

“I do not believe so either...” Leopold agreed relieved and continued, “And... I also thank you for promoting the reconciliation between me and Victoria... She told me...”

“It is as I tell you, there is no longer a reason to keep a distance.” William finished.

***

The painter Charles Robert Leslie had asked William if he could paint the christening. He put the matter to Victoria's decision, who agreed that the artist should do it.

Alice's christening gown was commissioned in white satin adorned with fine lace from Honiton, the same locality that had provided the lace of Victoria's wedding dress.

But the most splendid piece, purposely commissioned for the christening, was the Lily Font, a baptismal font in gilded silver, requested to the goldsmith Edward Barnard and Sons. It was structured like a cup with a foot, and at the base were three "putti" seated playing the harp, and the edge of the cup was adorned with water lilies, a symbol of purity.

The christening took place at night in the throne room. It was removed for the occasion and was replaced by a temporary altar made from a plaque that came from the Royal Chapel. The font was placed on a table of the period of George IV and chairs of the same period were distributed.

The ceremony was celebrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the water used came from the Jordan River.

The godfathers were present: Emily Palmerston and Frederick Lamb, the Duchess of Kent, the Duke of Sussex, the widowed Queen (Adelaide), and King Leopold. Also their spouses: Lord Palmerston, Alexandrina, and the Duchess of Inverness. And other guests including Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington; Frances and Robert Jocelyn; Emma Portman, the Duchess of Buccleuch, Harriet Sutherland and their husbands; and Lehzen.

Charles Leslie was admitted to the ceremony to make a sketch from which to paint the christening portrait, but the artist would have to continue to make studies of the baby, the Queen and the
godparents in the months that followed.

The baby was named Alice Victoria Elizabeth. Alice was William's favorite name. Victoria was the mother's name, and it could be said that it also paid homage to her maternal grandmother. Elizabeth was the name of William's late mother, with whom he had had, unlike Victoria, a close relationship.

A dinner followed.

Later, after everyone had left, William decided to stop by the nursery to see Alice before going to sleep.

As he approached the door he had the impression that an angel was singing in German in the nursery:

"Guten Abend, gute Nacht,
mit Rosen bedacht,
mit Näglein besteckt,
schlupf 'unter die Deck!
Morgen früh, wenn Gott will,
wirst du wieder geweckt..."

(“Good evening, good night,
With roses covered,
With adorned cloves,
Slip under the covers.
Tomorrow morning, if God wills,
you will wake once again...”)

William smiled and didn’t enter.

When Victoria came to the bedroom in her nightgown and robe, he was already tucked in bed lying on the cushions with an open book in his hand.

When he saw her coming in, he closed the book that he put on the bedside table.

She undressed the robe, which she threw on a chair, took off her slippers and threw herself into his arms laying over him.

William held her around the waist and said:

“I thought I heard an angel singing in the nursery...”

She lifted her head to look at him and asked with a smile:

“Did you hear me sing to Alice?”

He nodded.

“It's an old German folk song that Lehzen used to sing for me. And you didn’t come in?”

“No, I wanted to leave you alone to revel in our daughter... I already spend a lot of time in the nursery...”

“More than I do, you mean...”
“Yes, more than you... But that is because our daughter was an impossible dream for me for many years, and I have a past of losing children that you didn’t have... So I need her very much...”

Victoria kissed him tenderly and said:

“I didn’t want our daughter as much as you did, I don’t spend much time in the nursery, but I really love her...”

“I know, Victoria!”
William returned from the visit to the construction works of Westminster Palace, where the House of Lords and the House of Commons were being rebuilt since 1840 after the fire of 1834. He himself had helped save a part of the building, and was now following its reconstruction, directed by the architect Charles Barry.

Victoria was sitting in her quarters reading, accompanied by Achilles who slept beside her on a cushion.

He came in, stripped off his coat, which he placed on the back of a chair, and informed:

“The works are in progress, but it will be many years until they are finished... But I saw the design with the architect, and in a couple of years you will put the first stone of the tower...”

“You mean my tower?” Victoria asked without looking at him.

“Yes, from the Victoria Tower, where we'll put the books and documents in the hope that they will not burn again...”

Seeing that she didn’t take her eyes off the book, he approached her, sat down beside her on the settee, peered at the pages and asked:

“What are you reading?”

“The Old Curiosity Shop.”

“Dickens?” He asked in a tone of aversion.

“Yes...” She replied, knowing that he didn’t like the author or the books he wrote.

“I don’t think it's a good choice...”

“I know you dislike him... But the book is very interesting and is intelligently written... In this edition of 1841 there is an illustration with me in my coronation garment, and also Edward Oxford, have you seen it?” She asked as she turned the book over to him to show the drawing.

“That doesn’t interest me, Victoria!” He exclaimed looking annoyed, and added, “He only writes about the scum of society...”

“William! Before we got married you criticized Oliver Twist, and even advised me not to read the book... But what Dickens writes is the truth, through him I can know the lives of my poorest subjects better, I know what is going on in places where I've never been... I read him for the first time in 1837 and my mother was shocked because I had read my first novel... I read what is going on in the world, that's all!”

“The stories of outlaws... By a writer of low rank...”

“Not all poor are outlaws, William!”

“Did you read The Pickwick Papers?” He asked angrily.

“Some fascicles, not yet the complete work...”
“In that book Dickens satirizes the alleged romance between me and Caroline Norton…” He ended up saying.

Victoria felt her stomach sink and she changed her expression, saying:

“I didn’t know…”

He opened his mouth and shook his head as if saying “You see how I am right”.

“Now you know why I dislike him…”

“I’m sorry, William, I didn’t know, of course I think it's horrible that he has ridiculed you…”

“That’s a story from the past.” He tried to devalue, “But I cannot help being bothered when hearing his name…”

Victoria closed the book and placed it on the table next to the settee. Then she leaned closer to William and hugged him, placing her face on his chest. She took a deep breath and said:

“Today I will not read anything else, I will stay here until dinner time!”

William ran his hand through her back affectionately.

***

After dinner William was already in the bedroom, in his nightshirt, sitting on the settee reading. He only waited that Victoria would come to bed so he also could.

She was in the dressing room changing clothes to go to sleep.

Victoria entered the bedroom in her nightgown and closed the door.

He noticed that she didn’t have her hair brushed and loose as she did every day. Sometimes with some locks of the front wrapped back, to divert the hair from the face. Today her hair remained wrapped behind, curled up in a bun above the nape of the neck, just as it had been all day. He liked to see her combed like that, but this had never been combined with a nightgown...

She approached him and said:

“I think you read too much…”

“Are you complaining? Do you think I'm not performing my duties as a husband?” He asked, raising his eyes from the book.

She leaned over him, her hands clasping the back of the settee, one on each side of his head.

“No... You’re very compliant and... very competent…” Victoria replied in a languid way and provocative air.

He laughed and closed the book, which he tossed aside.

“But we can enjoy our time even better…” She concluded.

He was going to grab her and lay her on his lap, but she escaped before that. She backed away, preventing him from reaching her.
He laughed but didn’t get up, just sat there waiting for what she would do next.

Victoria knelt at his feet and smiled.

That wasn’t obvious. He wondered what she was going to do next.

Victoria lightly touched William's left ankle with the fingers of her right hand. She ran her fingers up the bare leg, and closed her hand on his muscles. She continued to slide her hand up his leg, feeling the hair and the solidness of the flesh as the fabric of his shirt lifted. She passed the knee, feeling the definition of the bones. With her left hand she repeated the same movement more quickly in his right leg. She now had both hands on William's knees, which had lifted his nightshirt above them. She grabbed his thighs and progressed feeling the shape, hardness and masculinity of his muscles as she dragged the cloth in front of her hands.

William's body reacted! It was not common to have a woman running her hands on his legs like that, and he didn’t expect this one to remember doing so now.

With both hands she tugged the fabric to expose his erected limb. Victoria looked at William. Then she passed her right hand open, fingers joined, from base to top, pressing it against William's belly.

“Victoria...” He sighed, closing his eyes.

She withdrew her hand and the phallus moved away from his body again. Victoria found the vision of the movement, of own life, of that masculine addition delightful. Something moved inside her belly. There was an urge to move forward, and a need for release. Remaining on her knees, she undressed the nightgown, getting naked.

William's breathing quickened.

She grabbed it with determination at the base.

He moaned, closed his eyes, and put his head back.

Victoria watched the protruding veins and definite glans, and asked looking at William:

“Can I kiss it?”

He was pleasantly stunned. He hadn’t expected the question, and he could already foresee that the unfolding of this interest would be dazzling. And her image was sublime! Victoria was naked, kneeling his feet, had his virile limb in her hand, and looked at him with those big, beautiful blue eyes asking him if she could kiss it! He responded with the possible naturalness and a touch of humor as usual:

“I was waiting for the day you would do that.”

She laughed. Maybe she should have already kissed it a while ago...

“And you didn’t ask me to do it?” She asked curiously.

“I hoped you would discover that desire on your own.”

She smiled and then, slowly, brought her lips closer and kissed it. She felt the sensations. Hers and his. Oh, it was good! She was impelled to continue. Now more determined. She handed kisses to the tip.

William couldn’t enjoy more what was going on with them! He undressed the nightshirt that he
threw down to the floor.

She pressed his organ between her hand and face, and ran her face on it, feeling the softness of the skin.

He thought this could not be happening!

Victoria kissed it again along the length...

“You can lick too, my love…” He pointed.

She did it! She went on kissing and licking, and when she reached the tip, instinctively she was moved to wrap it with her lips, putting it in her mouth and touching it with her tongue.

He thought she was on the right track! On such a right track...

However Victoria took her mouth out, ran her open hand again through that mast of stupendous effect from the bottom up, looking at it as if in perfect adoration, she realized that it had gotten bigger and said:

“It's beautiful!”

She was disconcerting!

“Good thing that you think so, but could you continue what you were doing?” He asked, sighing.

She put the tip back in her mouth, and moved her lips kissing it.

“Can you suck it?” He asked.

She began to suck the tip, but as she did so she was impelled to deepen it inside her mouth.

“Oh, Victoria! You're perfect! Continue!” He asked with his right hand on her head.

She was perfect! The hairstyle was perfect! He didn’t want to push her head suddenly, deepening it inside her mouth, but he needed her to let it happen.

However, she continued to test herself to see how far she could put it in her mouth. She felt him touch her throat. She thought that was like having him inside her, it just didn’t cause the same sensation. Yet for some unexplained reason, she felt increasingly wet between her legs, and with an increasing desire to be touched there.

Well, he would have to give her more indications so that it could work fully, and if she was so interested in innovating, here was the opportunity to teach her the best way to act. William took her right hand and guided her movements and the pressure exerted until she picked up the right rhythm.

She set about doing what he told her on her own. Hand and mouth in accordance. Victoria was enjoying the innovation, her own performance, the taste and the effect it had on both.

“Before I’m done, I'll pull away…” He warned.

She stopped what she was doing and asked:

“Is it bad to swallow?”
Did she want to swallow? He wondered.

“No... But maybe you will not like the taste...”

“I want to taste it…”

He made no further remark. He just wanted her to continue!

She continued the task.

“Oh, Victoria! Victoria!” He exclaimed as he pushed her head harder against him.

She felt it! A spurt of hot virile masculinity came down her throat. At that moment Victoria reacted, moving away to remove his organ from inside her mouth, which caused the regression of the flow. The fluid around made bubbles on the lips and ran down her chin.

William was delighted at the sight of her, as his self-stimulation caused subsequent jets to fall on Victoria's face and breasts. It had never been so good with any of the whores he had fucked! With whores that was supposed to happen. With her it was an ecstatic practice! Though everything was permitted between them, and though she had never found anything that happened between them strange, to have the Queen of England - a figure of veneration, an image of regimented behavior and morals - in that role gave him a stirring emotion, for the act, in an underlying way, could be interpreted as prohibited. To the surrounding society it was not supposed that the Queen, example of principles, wife and mother, behaved that way. He had already imagined that with her several times... He had imagined it when he was only his Prime Minister and she was the Queen, virgin, who was forbidden. On the dawns when he didn’t sleep, after pouring several glasses of brandy... He would present this possibility to her - even for the need of not always have to enter her, to avoid subsequent pregnancies - but he didn’t expect it to happen today!

She felt the taste running her tongue on her lips and pressing them. It was strange, it was not like anything she had tasted before, but it was not bad... And it was so exciting, so intimate! She received all of him, including this! The most raw and intrinsic! His definition as a man!

William grabbed Victoria's arms under the shoulders and pulled her off the floor as he rose from the settee. He grabbed her by the waist with both hands and carried her, placing his body between her open legs, then his arms under her thighs and his hands under her back, which made her hips rise and expose her sex more for him.

He led her to the bed, laid her down urgently across the mattress, and knelt down. He put his mouth on the space between her legs licking and sucking. She was soaking wet and he just wanted to be able to smear himself on her!

Victoria needed this so much! She was already so aroused that his devouring touch almost made her explode instantly. But the rhythm of the tongue slowed down and it soothed her. She felt the hair clips pressing on her head, but that didn’t matter. It reignited after! It began to be built. Slowly, rising. It happened once at a moderate intensity. It repeated on a more advanced scale! Her legs trembled in the propagation of the vibration from the center of her world to the tip of her feet. Instinctively, she placed her legs over his shoulders, fitting more tightly into his mouth and raising the hips he grabbed with both hands. Her whole essence spilled into him! She realized that several of those moments of ecstasy could follow. Smaller, bigger, and something else she wanted to come and that would satisfy her fully. That sequence was good, but it was not enough! Then came the grand finale, as if she were being sucked into the spiral of a hurricane! Victoria arched her back, grabbed the sheets on either side of her body, squeezed William's head between her thighs and felt her toes twist uncoordinatedly as she screamed:
“William! William!” And then lower, “William... Oh, my love...”

When she calmed down he stood licking her slowly.

It was almost impossible to bear. She was so sensitive! She could almost cry! Not of pain, but of pleasure! Beyond the limit...

He dropped her and lay down on the bed beside her with a gasping breath.

“Why didn’t you undo your hairstyle today?” He asked curiously looking at her.

“Because I know you like to fuck me with my hair wrapped!” She replied, turning her head to him.

He smiled. That word in her mouth was always mind-blowing. He said:

“A very appropriate hairstyle for what you did today! It prevents the hair from interfering...”

“Did you enjoy it? Do you think I did well?”

“I loved it! All men love what you did today. But the vast majority of couples don’t fuck like this, Victoria... like us... In most cases the woman is always lying underneath the man, and the act is always the same... The generality of people considers immoral all the practices that differ from that behavior. And the wives’ pleasure is not a concern for most husbands...”

Victoria frowned and said:

“I would find that kind of marriage very dull, and very frustrating to have a husband like that...”

William laughed.

“I thought so. That's why I give you alternatives!” He said smiling as he rolled over onto the bed getting on top of her.

They kissed.

He observed her hair again. Now a bit ruffled. He ran his right hand over her left temple affectionately. It would never be the same to look at her in an official ceremony again. There used to be a public hairstyle, with her hair wrapped in different styles, and an intimate hairstyle with her hair down, loose to the middle of her back. Now he would look at her in public ceremonies with that hairstyle, and he would always remember her naked, kneeling at his feet, her blue eyes wide, and his manly organ tucked inside her mouth! And the thick white fluid running down her chin! He had already fucked her with her hair wrapped before, but then it had been unexpectedly in the middle of a walk in the garden of Melbourne Hall, not in the privacy of a bedroom, in nightclothes, and she hadn’t given him oral sex!

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There were reports that Sir William Nott, the military leader sent to Afghanistan, had caused a severe defeat to the enemy near Kandahar in March 1842. It was not news to be happy about, but it was relieving news. At least it was possible to publish it in the press and elevate Britain's morale.

But on that day, when Victoria returned from the hospital visit accompanied by William, some folk along the way shouted words that the Queen couldn’t understand as they tried to approach the carriage. Apparently they were unhappy. The guard on horseback who accompanied them prevented the people from approaching, but Victoria wanted to know what they had to say.
“William, have them stop the carriage, please.” She asked.

For moments he feared for her safety, but for the harmless appearance of the poor men and given the amount of guards, he asked the coachman to stop.

The carriage stopped.

“What are you going to do, Victoria?” He asked a little worried.

“Go out and listen to what these men have to tell me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course! If I don’t listen to my people, who will?”

Agreeing with the wisdom of her words, and considering the danger minimal, William stepped out of the carriage, turned around, and after the lackey opened the door, he reached out his hand for Victoria to lean on him when descending.

Once out of the carriage Victoria asked the guards to step aside and let two of the men approach.

William positioned himself to her right, immediately behind her.

“Ma’am! Your Majesty!” One of them said as they both held their hats in their hands and bowed.

Victoria lowered her head a bit accepting the greeting and said:

“It seems to me that you are discontent. I would like to hear what you have to tell me.”

“Ma’am, we are silk weavers from Spitalfields.” Said the second man.

Victoria nodded.

“We came to beg you to protect our profession from the silk imports from the Continent...” The last man materialized.

“I am not sure if I can help you…” The Queen said.

“Our silks are the best, as Your Majesty well knows... But we cannot compete with foreign silks. Cheaper, but of inferior quality...” Explained the man who had addressed the Queen first.

Without knowing how to help them, and to praise the work of the two men, Victoria said:

“I really appreciate the quality and beauty of Spitalfields silks...”

The second man who had spoken to the Queen took a piece of cloth out of his pocket and held it out to the Queen, saying:

“But if we allow this inferior material to ruin our business, there will be no more Spitalfields silks, Ma’am, and our children won’t have a profession, and they will be some more starving young men on the streets of London looking for work...”

Victoria grabbed the cloth. She herself realized how that which was in her hand was quite different from the silk she knew. Then, looking at both, she concluded:

“Perhaps I cannot do much, but I promise I will do everything in my power to try to help you.”
“Thank you, Your Majesty!” The two men thanked and bowed, stepping back.

Victoria turned to the carriage and held out her hand to William for him to help her inside.

Once back in the carriage, which began to move, she looked at the cloth. What could she do to help them?

“William, what should I do?” Victoria asked looking at her husband.

He sighed and replied:

“I don’t know my love!”

“I will speak to the Prime Minister.”

“You can even talk to Peel, but I cannot see what he can do...”

“Change the law, create a new law... anything that defends our industry...” Victoria suggested uneasily.

Though disbelieving that a solution might come from Peel, he agreed:

“I think you're oversimplifying things, Victoria, but talk to him, then...”

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When they got to their chambers in the palace, Victoria took off her hat and entered the dressing room followed by William. She put down the hat, gloves, and the bag she carried, and William helped her take off her coat.

“I can’t wait to talk to Peel.” She said as she stripped the piece.

“Don’t you have a meeting with him tomorrow?” William asked as he stripped off his own coat and placed it on the back of a chair.

“Yes! I'll have to think about this matter very well still today...”

She went to the green room and sat at her desk.

William followed her and informed:

“I'll drop by the nursery to see Alice...”

Victoria nodded.

He left and she stood thinking about the silk weavers. The dressing room door was open. Victoria glanced at William's coat on the back of the chair. Something white peeking over its left pocket caught her attention. It looked like there was a paper in the pocket. Victoria picked up some of the documents she had to read, but she couldn’t concentrate because she was thinking about the silk weavers. She rose the face from the desk and saw again the piece of paper peeking from the pocket of his coat. In an unconscious impulse she got up from the chair and walked to his coat. She put her hand in the pocket and took out the paper. There was a slight curiosity to know what it was. It was actually a letter. The exterior didn’t identify the sender, but the recipient was clear: His Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. Victoria opened the document and read its content:

“Bolton Street, 1st April 1842
Thank you so much for the flowers."

Victoria felt her stomach strongly tighten.

"I had not received flowers from you in a long time. I was happy to see something that reminded me of the happy old days. Although I cannot put them in a jar without sitting down to cry."

Victoria's heart raced violently.

"I also thank you for your words that have brought me much comfort. I believe you did many things to try to please me, and some others to upset me, without knowing the true extent of any of these effects, and your flowers have always been amongst the random shots that flew on the pleasant side."

Her heart was pounding so hard that she could hear it as if it were beating inside her head.

"I would like you to write me more often. When I do not know how you are faring, as I used to know, I feel the same melancholy in the heart one feels when they are sick, and they watch the room from their bed: all is very cold, very dark, very silent, and the clock always ticking too loud."

She was on the verge of not being able to breathe. It felt like the lungs were being crushed.

"But I understand that you should not do so in your present condition as a married man and husband of the Queen of England."

Tears flooded her beautiful blue eyes.

"You know the only thing I ever wanted was for us to be at peace with each other. God bless you. Yours ever truly, Caroline”

Victoria's tears ran down her face. She felt herself running out of strength as if her blood was melting into water.

William came in!

She looked at him, completely terrified. The letter in her hands.

The ground seemed to disappear beneath his feet!

For seconds neither of them spoke.

“Victoria... my love...” He started low with his hands up in front, asking for her to keep calm.

“What does this mean, William?” She asked raising her voice and at the same time the letter in her right hand.

His words, the low tone, made it all the more annoying!

He sighed and shook his head in surrender, knowing he was going to say something that everyone said in that stupid situation:

“Nothing that you are thinking...”

“Flowers? Flowers William? Did you send her flowers?” She screamed in despair. Tears streaming
down her face like a waterfall.

He swallowed, but didn’t answer.

“Flowers?” She asked softly. “How could you? I'm so stupid! I thought you only sent flowers to me! William! Just for me...” She finished with a look of disappointment as her body bent forward, as if unable to bear its own weight. The pain was so great! Her stomach and heart were twisting in pain at the sharing of the flowers of Brocket Hall’s greenhouses with that woman! She had to bow to the pain, it was impossible to keep her body straight...

Victoria began to cry compulsively dropping the paper and placing her hands on her face.

He felt excruciating pain at seeing her like this. He approached her with the thoughtless intention of hugging her. It was he who comforted her always, in everything, and he didn’t think that now, being the cause of her suffering, he couldn’t do it, she wouldn’t accept it...

Victoria stepped back, preventing him from grabbing her, and with an angry look she shouted:

“Do not touch me! You told me you were innocent, that you had not been her lover, that this was all a misunderstanding! I believed you!” And she added in a lower tone, with an expression of realization that she had been deceived: “I always believed everything you said!”

Anger grew and she screamed again:

“But she speaks here of the happy days of the past! With you? What happy days were these?”

“Victoria... If you let me explain, it will be easier for both of us.” He tried to interject without raising his voice.

She kept screaming even louder:

“Was it the days when you used to fuck her? Did you use to fuck her like you fuck with me?”

Victoria felt her blood boiling with jealousy and rage! The face red and bathed in tears!

His world was falling apart seeing her like this! He remembered the past, Caro's furies... It was horrible! Horrible! He didn’t want not even a bit of that in this marriage! There had never been any of this between them! How was it possible that this was happening? He had been so stupid! Why write to Caroline, and why send her flowers? Stupid, stupid, a thousand times stupid! But he had always had a hard time managing women like Caroline Ponsonby and Caroline Norton... And now Victoria was here. He knew she could have difficult furies. Lehzen used to talk about them, but he had never seen anything like this!

William grabbed Victoria by the shoulders and squeezed her tightly, preventing her from freeing herself, and forcing her to look at him. Not uncontrollably, but with firmness in his voice he spoke loudly:

“Victoria! That didn’t exist! The happy days of the past were the days when we were friends and we saw each other often, before the scandal... We used to go to the same friends' houses, the same parties, the same dinners...”

“She says she feels sad when she doesn’t know how you are faring, that she would like you to write her more often, but that she understands your condition of married man... She even speaks of me...” Victoria said with contempt, and continued, “Do you write to her? I thought you did not have any contact with each other.”
Seeing that she was getting more controlled and spoke now lower, he freed her and walked away saying:

“And we didn’t! But she wrote me again...”

“And you answered!”

“Not for a long time! Why do you think she complains? But now I’ve sent her a letter... Just one! This is her thank you letter.”

“And you sent her flowers? What flowers did you send her?” She asked worriedly. Depending on the species of flowers sent there would be a different meaning in the offer.

“Freesia.”

Victoria didn’t know what they meant... She could only ask him...

“What do they mean?” She asked in annoyance.

William sighed and replied:

“Friendship... tranquility, innocence. Victoria, as you know flowers don’t all mean the same. Flowers aren’t sent only when you love a woman. Flowers are also sent just as a gesture of friendship.”

“Does she also know the meaning of flowers?”

“She does.”

“Was it you who taught her?” She asked uneasily at this prospect.

He admitted:

“Some things, but she learned others by reading some books.”

Victoria considered. William couldn’t be the only person knowing about flowers. And she couldn’t be the only person receiving flowers. But she had always lived to this day so immersed in this magic of flowers, in this enchanted dream, that now it was very difficult to wake up. Flowers had always been interpreted as his unique gift to her, like a secret language between them...

Victoria was calmer now. But she needed to ask more questions:

“Why did she write to you? What does she want from you?”

“Caroline Norton is a lonely woman, excluded from society, a woman who lost everything, including her own dignity because her name was dragged in the mud by an alleged involvement with me, motivated by political reasons in which I was the central character. She writes to say that she feels lonely, that she is sad, that she misses the time that went by, when things were easy between us, before the scandal. She wants my attention. We were friends...”

Victoria shook her head and said:

“Her words are not of a friend... I read...”

Seeing that she understood well the nature of Caroline's feelings, William confessed:
“No. She's in love with me...”

“But you've never told me that before!”

“What good would have come for telling you? It would only create jealousy, discomfort, fear. And there is nothing to be afraid of. When I said we were friends I didn’t lie. That's what we were. And I also told you that she wanted to be more than that. I said... I just didn’t say that she's still in love with me.”

“And you didn’t answer her letters, trying to make her forget you.”

“Now you see everything very clearly.”

“But you ended up replying to a letter because you feel involved in the cause of her current situation, and because you feel sorry for her.”

He sighed and agreed:

“Yes. I ended up giving in because I pity her...”

“And you sent her flowers? You're a fool William! An idiot! What do you think a woman feels when she receives flowers from a handsome, intelligent man like you?”

“But they are flowers of friendship...”

“But that's not what she wants from you. And that only gives her hope that one day you can give her a little more...”

“She knows I'm married and happy.”

“And since when in this society we live in has that been an impediment to the existence of lovers?”

“You're right.” He admitted. His young wife taught him a lesson!

“You know, deep down, I also feel sorry for her.” Victoria said.

William looked at Victoria in surprise.

“Because I know what is like to love you and not have you. But I was privileged when I could marry you, and she can never have William Lamb!”

“No! She will never have me because you're the only woman I love. Victoria...” William said in a tender tone, getting closer to her.

“I'm sorry, William, I got out of control... But when it comes to matters relating to you, I... jealousy is a terrible thing... I've seen you as mine only for almost five years! I cannot even think of the idea of sharing you with other women! You are sacred! What we do in bed is sacred! I go crazy just imagining that you could do with another woman what you do with me...”

“I’m sorry to have made you go through this!” He said as he hugged her and she allowed him.
Chapter Notes

Dear readers, today, To Love in Brocket Hall comes to an end! This story has reached a point where it no longer has significant and innovative argument to continue. It fulfilled all the aims I set for it: corrected history and gave the deserved happiness to Victoria and William! Enjoy the last chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At the next day’s meeting with Robert Peel, Victoria addressed the problem of the silk weavers. However, as William had foreseen, the Prime Minister didn’t share her concern.

“The government cannot present a tariff to protect every industry threatened by cheaper imports.” Peel warned.

“But is that not what the Corn Laws do? Protect English farmers from cheaper corn imports...” Victoria insisted.

“The two cases are different, Ma’am...”

“Yes, Sir Robert, Spitalfields silk weavers have no seat in the House of Lords!” Cried the Queen.

Peel shrank and fell silent, but Victoria realized she couldn’t get anything through him.

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She would have to find a solution on her own. Peel would see that there should be something she could do. When a subject occupied her mind Victoria didn’t rest until she could find a solution.

In a card game with Emma, Alfred Paget, and the Duchess of Buccleuch, the Queen expressed her concern for the silk weavers, and how the Prime Minister didn’t give her government solutions.

“As Queen, Ma’am… If you let all know that you only wear Spitalfields silk, maybe that would foment its usage by English aristocracy...” Paget suggested.

“And what if you presided over an event where the guests were forced to use it? I think that would bring the matter to the attention of the public, more than anything else...” Emma added.

“What an excellent idea!” Victoria exclaimed. “A dance! We can organize a ball! A masquerade!” She added as the idea materialized in her head.

The Duchess of Buccleuch, who normally didn’t share these Queen’s enthusiasms, warned:

“I wonder, Ma’am, if with the considerable discontent among the lower classes at this moment a ball would not be misinterpreted...”

“Misinterpreted?” Asked the Queen.

“I think of Marie-Antoinette, Ma’am, the late Queen of France, who when the crowd asked for
“Do you think it will be all right for us to have a ball when so many people are still hungry?”

“We're helping them!”

“But it will be a luxury spectacle!”

“This spectacle is a way of showing the rich that they must remember their obligation to the poor!” She insisted.

He sighed in surrender.

“And you will have the most important character of the ball: Edward III!” She informed him amusedly.

“What?” He asked in astonishment. “Are you crazy?”

She sat beside him on the settee and explained:
“William! I’ll have to be a medieval queen, obviously, and you, as my husband, will have to play the role of king!”

“Do you know what public opinion will say? That I took the opportunity to pretend to be King of England!”

Victoria complained, frowning and looking annoyed:

“Oh, William! Please! It won’t be fun like this! If I dress myself like a queen and you don’t dress like a king it won’t make sense! Who will be my partner? Or how does the Queen have a partner that is not king?”

“Look, maybe I should dress as a lowly noble, which is what I am, and in fact you are married to a nobleman of low status!”

“Please, William! You are no longer of low condition. And Edward III was the founder of the Order of the Garter. It's a great choice!”

“It's a great choice for what you want, but not for me!”

Victoria sighed heavily.

Seeing her like this he said:

“I’ll think about it, Victoria...”

She smiled slightly.

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There was no other way! He submitted to what Victoria desired.

The royal couple's clothes were designed under the supervision of James Robinson Planché, a specialist in historical costumes. Philippa and Edward's costumes were copied from their tomb effigies, lying down on their respective tombs in Westminster Abbey, with some adaptations. And two medieval crowns came from the Tower purposefully to be used at the occasion by Victoria and William.

The Plantagenet ball, the dynasty of Edward, took place on 12th May 1842. Uncle Leopold who still remained in London would also attend.

William looked at himself in the mirror with the crown over his head. An extravaganza! How had he allowed that?

Victoria approached, already dressed, and exclaimed:

“You are a beautiful king, my love!”

He took a good look at her and remarked:

“You are the one who looks wonderful! The things you make me do, as a queen and as a woman!”

She laughed as she gave him her hand to leave for the ball.

The gallery was full of people. More than two thousand people flocked to the event. The halls were filled with food spread over several tables. Elaborated dishes with exquisite decorations.
The royal couple entered the ballroom - followed by two pageboys holding the edge of the queen's mantle - to the sound produced by the trumpet players, set in a row forming a corridor. The Court bowed at their passage. Although the Duke of Sussex was present, with the passage of time in practice that pre-matrimonial clause which established that before princes of royal blood William would have to be deprived of accompanying the Queen had been forgotten...

The kings of the ball sat on thrones placed on a dais under a Gothic canopy whose background was made of purple velvet cloth that displayed the royal arms of Edward III.

The ball would be immortalized by the painter Sir Edwin Landseer.

In the first part of the ball the members of the Court reproduced medieval dances, previously rehearsed, to the sound of music of the same period. But then the waltz was played, much more in vogue at the time.

“It's a Waltz William! Shall we?” Victoria asked.

He gave her his hand and they headed for the center of the hall.

When they started dancing she said:

“I am always delighted when we have the opportunity to dance together... Since that first time at the coronation ball...”

“I think that besides what we do in bed, dancing is the best thing we do together...” He confided in a low voice and getting closer to her.

She laughed and asked:

“William... Do you think that sometimes I am a little immature?’”

“Immature? How so?”

“The argument I created a few weeks ago because of that letter... The idea of this ball that seemed foolish to you...”

He sighed and smiled at her.

“It's part of your age and the process of growth... Regarding the letter you exaggerated a little, it's true, but it was out of jealousy, I understand, and that to me is a compliment, at my age...”

“You are not old!”

“You say that many times! I'll have to convince myself...”

She smiled.

He went on:

“As for the ball you are just being dreamy and wanting to change the world... At your age I also thought it was possible...”

“Do you really think the ball might not be of great help?” She asked sadly.
“I do Victoria, and I also think you should prepare yourself for criticism in the press and public opinion.”

“But I only wanted to help.”

“I know my love! And people of good common sense also recognize that. But there will be those who use this to criticize the monarchy.”

“And you don’t get mad at me over these things?” She asked.

“With you? Never!”

She smiled, realizing that he had said the same thing at the coronation ball!

After dancing with William, Victoria danced with Uncle Leopold. It was good to also be able to be friends again with Uncle Leopold!

“Tell me, my uncle, who is your character because I cannot identify... A knight, I suppose...”

“William Marshall, one of the most famous medieval knights for his bravery, who served five English monarchs!” Leopold replied proudly.

“Oh! Seems like a good choice.” Victoria nodded amused by her uncle's vanity.

“Initially I had thought of Richard the Lionheart, but out of respect for you and your husband... There would be two kings at the ball like that...”

“Of course...” Victoria merely said. How much presumptuous always existed in Uncle Leopold!

A few seconds of silent dancing followed.

Then the king of Belgium commented:

“My niece, you have organized a wonderful dance!”

“Thank you Uncle! But I no longer know if it will be successful...”

“You became a great queen, Victoria! Just as I had always dreamed for you...”

She smiled moved.

“And I must acknowledge that you have also become a good wife and a good mother...”

“Thank you Uncle! I never wanted to provoke you with my marriage, but I had to fight for the man I loved...”

“I know Victoria! I also know what it's like to love someone... But at that time I only saw the practical embarrassments.”

Victoria remembered Albert. She hadn’t wanted to marry him, she didn’t love him, but she didn’t wish him any harm. She had never contacted him again, had nothing to say to him, and calculated that he wasn’t willing to hear from her, but she would be glad if she knew that he was all right.

“Have you heard from Albert?” She asked.

“Often, yes. He is well, analyzing marriage possibilities with some European heiresses...”
“Oh!” Victoria exclaimed, opening her mouth slightly and raising her eyebrows. “I hope he is lucky in his choice.”

“Maybe one day in the future you could resume your relationship with Albert; he is your cousin and the time when he was your betrothed is past...”

“Maybe one day...” She agreed.

At the end of the ball Victoria had the food distributed to the poor.

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Leopold returned to Belgium happy the next day, promising to return at a new opportunity.

Newspapers melted Victoria’s idea. Some still praised the Queen's intent to organize the ball to help the silk weavers, but the generality said that the event, besides being a luxurious affront to those who were starving, would be of no use, for the labor which had been given to the workers had only been temporary, and the profits that came from it would soon be exhausted.

During breakfast as she read the papers and put down the cup of tea, Victoria said to William:

“I wish I didn’t have this stupid dance! You were right!”

“There was a good underlying intention, the silk weavers learned that the Queen cares about them, and that she tried to help them as promised, and eventually received the proceeds from the organization of the ball. It may not have continuity in time, but it was something.” William clarified.

“Only you to give me timely warnings about the negative consequences of my actions, which I don’t listen to, and then to make me see the positive consequences later, even when everything seems to have gone wrong!”

“At least having husband with my life experience would be of some use to you!” He concluded smiling, and to provoke her, he added, “Notice I didn’t say I was old...”

Victoria laughed, picked up the newspaper, folded it, and threw it at him.

William ducked laughing but was still hit by the newspaper.

***

Victoria had barely recovered from the agitation and the aftermath of the medieval ball, and she already had the reception of the diplomatic corps: Ambassadors, members of the government, former prime ministers, the archbishops of Canterbury and York, and other public figures.

Considering the state ceremony, that night William wore his dark blue, gold-embroidered with oak leaves Court uniform, to which he added the Order of the Garter garter on his left leg below the knee.

Victoria wore red, a color she didn’t wear often, but gave her a lush image, in contrast to her pale skin and blue eyes. Diamonds gleamed on the chest, on the ears, and on the tiara, making her resplendent.

She was ecstatic when she saw William ready for the reception. The Court uniform on him was stunning! However, he was not less dazzled when he looked at her, realizing that she was no longer
an innocent girl, ready to discover the pleasures of life, but a woman who knew everything that life
could best offer her.

The reception began with the greetings of the diplomats in a line. Among them were Edward
Everett, the ambassador of the United States; Louis-Clair Beaupoil, Count of Saint-Aulaire, French
ambassador; and Cristóvão Pedro de Morais Sarmento, 1st Viscount of Torre de Moncorvo,
amassador of Portugal, much appreciated by the queen, who presented compliments from Queen
D. Maria, Victoria’s cousin.

Dinner followed.

Throughout all evening Victoria didn’t take her eyes off William. In fact, she lost much of what the
closest ambassadors talked to her about during the meal.

He noticed her eyes on him during all those hours of the reception.

She realized what his eyes and his imperceptible smile told her.

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Toward the end of the night William went to his study/library to find a document on a subject he
had been talking to the United States ambassador about, and Victoria had gone to her private
quarters to get ready for bed with the help of the dresser.

Already in the study he freed himself from the garter of the Order of the Garter that he placed on
the desk.

Victoria opened the door and entered the study without warning. In her nightgown and robe, and
brushed hair down her back.

He was standing by his desk, his back to the door. He turned and was surprised, first by the sound
of the intrusion, and then by her presence there when he thought she was in the bedroom.

She stood for seconds at the entrance of the study looking at him, but then turned and closed the
dero. She looked back at William and walked over to him.

“What’s the matter, Victoria? I was going to bed soon...”

“I didn’t want to wait!” She exclaimed as she ran her hands up his chest, feeling the oak leaves
embroidered with gold on the dark blue background of the uniform.

The experience of that other time told him that her visits to his study at that hour could be very
interesting.

She kissed him fiercely, resting her hands on his shoulders and then wrapping them around his
neck.

Victoria stopped to breathe and said:

“I want you! Now!”

He stared at her with a look of desire, and unbuttoned the top button of his coat with the intention
of doing the same with the remaining eight buttons, to be able to undress the piece.

“No! Don’t take it off... I want you to keep your uniform...” She asked.
He knew that the uniform, as she had previously stated, had a power of excitement over Victoria. He realized now that she wanted to use it in practice as an additional stimulus.

She kissed him again ardently and hugged him, running her hands down his back appreciating the touch of the fabric and embroidery in the area below the neck and at the waist.

He responded to the hug and the kiss.

Then she brought her right hand from his back to his chest, and ran down his belly, continuing to feel the V-shaped embroidery. Once she surpassed the edge of the coat, at the waist, her hand came down over the opening of his pants, feeling it hard. Victoria wanted him to touch her inside, dressed in that uniform, and she wanted him to do it quickly...

He freed himself from her, grabbed her arms almost shoulder-length, and as he breathed heavily he asked:

“Calm down, Victoria! You will have everything you want, but you have to enjoy this more slowly or it will end too soon...”

William dropped her arms.

She nodded, and now with her arms down along her body and eyes closed, she struggled to catch her breath.

Their bodies were a few inches apart.

William didn’t touch her for a brief moment, waiting for her to stabilize.

She concentrated to calm down. She wanted him so much!

When her breathing slowed down, he grabbed her face with both hands and kissed her gently on the lips.

Victoria raised her arms with the intention to grab him.

“Don’t touch me…” He said. “Trust me…”

She dropped her arms again and said:

“Always…”

He kissed her softly again.

He stopped.

William untied the light blue lace bow that bound Victoria’s robe at chest level. He stuck his fingers between the robe and the nightgown, and moved them to make the piece slide to the floor.

She was expectant, but tried to remain calm.

He kissed her again, gently and slowly. He went from the mouth to the jaw, and then to the neck. He distributed sweet kisses, never leaning his body against hers.

The nightgown had a wide neckline showing the chest and part of the shoulders, and a central opening in the breasts that closed with a narrow ribbon that crossed three times before ending tied in a bow. As he kissed her he pulled the fabric of her nightgown further away with his right hand
exposing her left shoulder. He kissed her shoulder. Then he untied the ribbon that closed the
nightgown on the chest area and could extend with both hands the neckline so that the gown went
down her shoulders.

The gown went down a few inches and then continued to slide down her arms as he slowly pulled
it down. Victoria's back and breasts were being revealed. At one point the nightgown was only
stuck in the limit of the breasts, leaving uncovered only the areolas of the nipples.

William watched, dazzled and excited, the exposed part of her body, the rounded volume of the
breasts and the space between them.

Victoria felt ardent the eminence of the moment when he would drop her gown and she would be
naked. The breathing, again accelerated, was audible, and combined with the stronger heartbeat
made the breasts rise and fall above the edge of the fabric.

He pulled the cloth down again, and the gown fell off her breasts and fell at Victoria's feet. Now
she was completely naked!

Suddenly, he hugged her and kissed her on the mouth, squeezing her naked body against his
clothed body!

Victoria felt almost all those buttons sinking into her belly skin and between her breasts. It was
tremendously stimulating! And all the embroidery that scattered all around brushing on her skin as
he moved against her and moved her against him...

He grabbed her by the waist with both hands and lifted her off the floor.

She freed herself from the slippers and wrapped her legs around his waist, feeling the embroidery
on the inside of her thighs and between her legs.

The study had the walls almost all lined with bookshelves, floor-to-ceiling, but up to 31.5 inches
from the floor the furniture was wider than from there to the top. There was therefore at this point
an edge of wood without books.

As they kissed he walked with her in his arms to the nearest bookcase. With the clash there was a
shudder of books on the shelves, but because the shelf was fixed to the wall the furniture held the
shock without collapsing. He propped her over the wooden edge of the bookshelf.

She had always wanted to do something like this! Even before they were married, even before he
stopped resisting reciprocating her feelings, even when she was not quite sure what she could do
with that man. That uniform had a mesmerizing effect! And now there was a new continual
discovery in that marriage and a maturing of sex. She was more knowledgeable and more woman.

He appreciated every inch of her body with his eyes and hands. Steady, full, round! A woman in
the prime of life! When he was just the Prime Minister she was highly desirable for being young,
pure and innocent. Now she was highly desirable for being more mature, bold and more
experienced! And since she had had a child, she had grown more voluminous and her curves even
more sharp. She was so good!

As they kissed each other in a hug, brushing against each other, she watched excitedly as her bare
breasts pressed against his chest, over the gold embroidery. She thought she could get there just by
continually moving her femininity against that embroidery!

He grabbed her breasts with both hands and squeezed them making them rise in his hands.
In a way that hurt. But she found it so exciting!

Keeping her breasts tight in his hands William licked the areolas in a circular motion. One and then the other. Then he sucked her nipples! One and then the other.

She moaned as she ran her hands around his neck and stuck her fingers through his hair.

He moved away a little from her to unbutton his shorts.

She wanted to consume him!

“I think we're going to ruin the uniform.” He warned in a tone between the desire for her and humor.

“I have enough money to have as many uniforms as I want made...” She returned, exhaling quickly.

She was waiting for him to penetrate her quickly. She positioned herself in a way to facilitate his action.

He came in. Slowly. Just a part.

She sighed rather audibly.

He insisted on rubbing her in the same place. It was good! She knew he would come in more next, that it would be deeper, but now it was good like this! Feeling opened by him, that intrusive sensation was the best thing that could happen!

He was fucking her in his uniform! Oh God! This is what she wanted!

William went deeper inside her!

Oh! It was getting better and better! Have him trapped inside her...

His rhythm increased.

Though fixed, the shelf structure was less stable than a wall, and therefore the impact of the bodies on the wooden shelves and on the books caused a rhythmic sound that Victoria thought should be audible in the hallway or in some other room of the palace. She was fully aware that any other human being would easily identify what was happening in there. She didn’t care about that at all. On the contrary. She found it exciting and also amusing that it ran in the parlor talks among the nobility that His Highness competently satisfied Her Majesty's needs! Let the ladies of the Court be green with jealousy! Let them all perceive how, in this aspect too, she was right to insist on that marriage! And she was the queen! She was free and no one would ever dare to make any comment on this happy event!

William decided to move her to the ottoman lined with bordeaux velvet that was nearby, so that the situation became more comfortable and less demanding. Remaining inside her, he carried her as she kept her legs around his waist. He laid her on the ottoman.

He moved his hips, thrusting inside her, while Victoria – feeling a fire running through her body – watched the multitude of expressions on his face, and that splendorous uniform above her.

Then he moved her again, making her turn, reversing the positions. She was so easy to handle! William lay on his back with Victoria on top of him.

She liked this change. She placed both hands on the firm surface of his chest and was able to have
her breasts and belly pressed again over the embroidery and the uniform’s buttons.

He wrapped his arms around her waist and held her against him, which arrested her movements. The sensation of being trapped by the waist as he fucked her and the hips moved was astounding! All her energy was concentrated on that particular spot within herself!

Now he pressed hard inside her and they kissed devouringly! Alternately she lifted her body a little and he sucked her breasts. His combined actions on all those points of her body left her on the brink of eruption! She felt as if her body was about to explode and dissolve!

Reaching a stifling peak, Victoria screamed in triumph and felt herself dilute! It didn’t matter if anyone was listening in the hallway, in the garden, or in the Mall... Let them know that the Queen fucked and she liked it!

Seeing her satisfied, he reversed the positions again and pressed a little deeper inside her before his excitement course ended. She supported him.

He quickly stepped out of her and got to his feet.

Seeing him rise, Victoria sat on the ottoman.

He approached her and asked:

“Open your mouth! Show me your tongue!”

She did what he asked and everything culminated in a state of liberation!

Victoria noticed a whitish stain on the dark blue of the uniform’s shorts that were probably doomed.

He felt so sweaty and trapped in that uniform! He would have to undress, but she was transcendent!

***

It was now June 1842 and the royal family went to Brocket Hall for a few days.

Emily and Palmerston, Frederick and Alexandrina, Frances and Robert Jocelyn were invited to accompany them. Even the Duchess of Kent was invited by Victoria to accompany them. They would all be together for only two days, and then Victoria wanted to be alone with William and the baby.

Emily and Palmerston weren’t the example of punctuality. It was a joke among London society that the couple was always so late for dinners that none of them had ever heard of soup! Now on this stay in Brocket, Emily left Victoria waiting for her for one hour for a carriage ride!

Luckily they all left after two days, so that Victoria and William could be alone with Alice, only surrounded by the servants of the house and those they had brought from Buckingham.

That house and those 500 acres of land, for various reasons, was what Victoria could actually call home. It was a smaller space, more intimate, more comfortable and more familiar than Buckingham. And there was a very strong attachment to that space. Now she could dedicate herself to make changes and improvements in comfort and decoration. There she felt like an ordinary woman, behaving almost as if she were one, guiding the servants more closely at household chores, and helping William in the greenhouses.
Having Victoria and Alice in his life now, allowed William to say that he had a family. Now he had a happy marriage. Now he had a child, a girl, just like the one he had lost! He had a family! Now things were as he had dreamed. Home. He was at home now. In Brocket Hall with Victoria and Alice. The two of them would be his legacy, Victoria as Queen and Alice as descendant.

They both agreed to spend as much time as possible there with the children they had, to raise and educate them. Outside London, they could grow up in freedom and in touch with nature, and be further away from the Court's socially asphyxiating environment. There would be so much to learn in which William would strive to teach: riding, ornithology, gardening...

***

Alice was now six months old, and she was a chubby and beautiful baby! William liked to sit her on his lap and be the one to give her the food.

Victoria was delighted to see William bring the spoon to Alice's mouth during lunch that day.

“Her eyes are turning green like yours!” She remarked.

“Is my girl going to have Papa's eyes?” He asked Alice, looking at the baby.

“I don’t know what is it about you, but she gets delighted when it's you who gives her food... Nothing that compares when it’s me or the nurse…” Victoria stated.

“Papa’s really good at it, isn’t he Alice?” William asked the baby again and placed a kiss on her forehead.

Alice smiled.

William and Victoria melted smiling also at the baby's reaction.

“I move my leg under her as I bring the food to her mouth, I think she likes the swing... And I think she also appreciates the expressions on my face. Sometimes she gets so surprised looking at me…” He explained.

“It would be impossible not to be surprised! All people are amazed at your facial expressions! And you're so handsome! I think she's in love with you!” Victoria exclaimed. And then asked looking at the baby: “Isn’t it so, Alice? Are you in love with Papa?”

The baby laughed again.

Victoria added:

“Besides all this, I think she loves the sound of your voice! Like me... It's so soothing…”

William looked at Victoria and smiled.

Having finished the meal she got up from the table and took two steps to go to William’s side with her hands on his shoulders. Then she said:

“I think Alice is Papa’s princess.”

William replied:

“She's my princess and you're my queen!”
Victoria leaned forward and William stretched out a little so they could kiss each other tenderly. Alice reacted by moving her body up and down on her father's lap and waving her arms. William and Victoria melted even more than before!

***

Photography was a recent apparatus. Victoria was accustomed to enjoying the services of the best painters to record the most important moments of her life, and even simple everyday aspects, but now she wanted to experience photography and wanted this first experience to portray what was most important in her life right now: William, Alice and Achilles. And the best scenario to integrate those she loved most was the space where she felt best. So the hired photographer was invited to go to Brocket Hall in those days to get the family photo taken. Her first family photo.

That day, 20th June, the day Alice was six months old and five years since William and Victoria had met in Kensington, the photographer would come to take the photograph. Early in the morning William went to the greenhouses.

Victoria wore the beige dress William adored, the one she had worn by the first time in Melbourne Hall the day she thought Alice might have been conceived in the Birdcage.

Then she left the house and went to him.

William had his back to the greenhouse door, and delicately picked up red roses into a basket.

When he heard her footsteps he turned.

Victoria smiled tenderly and he was delighted at the vision of her sight in that dress.

She approached him and asked:

“Are you picking up roses?”

William set the scissors on the nearby table and said:

“They must be picked up in the morning.”

“They are beautiful!” She exclaimed, looking at the contents of the basket.

“They are the flower of passion, and are for you!”

Victoria smiled, took his hands and said:

“I'm so happy, my love! You are the best husband in the world! And the best lover…” And then she asked: “You are happy today, aren’t you, William?”

“You know I am!” He replied smiling. “My home is you!”

“And our home is Brocket Hall.” She said smiling back.

William dropped her hands and turned to grab a rose from the basket. He cut its foot to shorten it, then turned back to Victoria. Gently he fixed the rose on the top of her hair on the left side. Then he looked closely at her, delighted with the result and said:

“The perfect flower is a rare thing. You could spend your whole life looking for one and it
wouldn’t be a wasted life. It took me 58 years to find the perfect flower!”

Victoria hugged him and they kissed each other passionately.

***

Back home with the basket of red roses, Victoria asked Skerrett to work for a while to fix the flowers in her hair tied up, getting a magnificent hairstyle for a stunning dress. The perfect combination for her first photo.

At the photographer’s suggestion the picture would be taken outside the house, in front of the facade.

William and Victoria walked out of the house, crossing the hall holding hands, while Alice's nurse carried the baby outside.

On a settee, Victoria and William sat side by side. Victoria with Alice in her arms, so that she was facing the photographer with her cap and a very long white dress. Achilles sitting at the feet of the couple. The doll 123, with which Alice still couldn’t play with, but one day would be hers, held over her by Victoria's hands. Everything that they were today had begun in Kensington with that doll.

This was the photograph of a united, faithful and happy family!

THE END

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EPILOGUE

In the bedroom she undressed and untied her hair with the dresser’s help. The roses, still perfect, were placed in a bowl with water because they could still be reused.

When she was alone, Victoria took off her nightgown, climbed into bed, and lay completely naked on the sheets, on her stomach, with her arms folded and her hands on either side of her head, feeling the softness of the cloth. She closed her eyes.

She anticipated the moment when William would come to bed, and they would make love as if the world would end tomorrow. She liked to lie in that position when she was alone because the touch of the skin of her belly and breasts on the bed allowed her to imagine that she was in contact with his body. Especially because the pillow and sheets had his smell. She preferred the sheets that had been in bed for a few days to the washed ones, newly put in the bed, because in these his smell wasn’t yet impregnated. She moved her hips in a circular motion. The movement was exciting. She imagined him opening her again. No matter how often it happened it was always an amazing experience! She wanted to give him her body in supplication, in snaked motions, to devour him more deeply... always more deeply...

She rolled over lying on her back.

There was nothing she wanted more in the world than that man who buried himself in her, who consumed her and who she felt needed her to oxygenate the blood that flowed in his veins.

It was getting cold. She pulled the bedclothes until over her breasts.

She had been shocked to learn from William's conversations with her and from the buzz she heard
at Court that there were women who rarely had physical contact with their husbands, who didn’t like to be possessed or who not only didn’t enjoy it, but were also disgusted by it. Most conceived their children dressed in their nightgowns! How privileged she was to have such a man! Nothing was better than what they did in intimacy!

She was going to stay awake waiting for him to come to bed. She didn’t want to sleep without having made love to him, and without them having kissed each other until they fell asleep together...

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When he entered the room Victoria slept. The candles lit. She had been waiting for him. Her back was turned to the side of the door. Covered diagonally, with the bedclothes up to her waist and one part over her breasts, her bare back was exposed, and he knew she had no more clothing underneath. She had waited to make love to him, but he had took his time and she had fallen asleep.

William sat down on an armchair from where he could keep that angle of view of her. It was a pleasure to watch her. He could stay there and look at her all night like someone contemplating a painting. The curve of the hips, the perfect back, the hair falling over the cushions... Even today he still asked himself how it was possible to have that woman in his bed. So precious! He would have to wake her or she wouldn’t be happy at all if she woke up in the morning to find out that she had fallen asleep, and that he hadn’t woken her so that they could merge and kiss and fall asleep together. He would kiss her shoulder and neck and she would wake up, turn to him, and smile. And he would make love to her like it was the last time, as always.

But now he was only going to stay there a little longer, just looking at her.

She was his! His earthly paradise. After so many years of pain and loneliness it was possible to obtain paradise. She was his home, his port of refuge. When he was inside her everything made sense, encapsulated from the world, he was complete. And she would never be anyone else’s! At least as long as he existed. After the day he would leave this world, she might come to belong to another man. He didn’t demand her not to do it, he understood if she needed to, he had told her himself not to cling to the memory of someone who would never come back. However, even if that happened, he wouldn’t witness it. And William knew that no matter what might happen, until the end of her days Victoria would always have a place for him alone in her heart!

Brocket Hall was a sanctuary! “I think perhaps now I'm speaking as a woman and not as a queen.” The words she had used that day echoed inside his mind. There, as it had always been, since that first day by the rooks, they were just a man and a woman...

Chapter End Notes

Thank you very much to everyone who has read this story, and especially to whom have commented every week! Writing this story was a great pleasure! I hope the end has lived up to expectations. Now you have a new Vicbourne group on Facebook: "Vicbourne - Queen Victoria and Lord Melbourne". Join us!
End Notes

My objective is to write a credible story that might have been, in fact, true. I have done a lot of research to introduce here several real historical aspects. However, my knowledge of the History of England is limited and I may have made some mistakes.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!