Revelation

by Laurielove

Summary

Queen Victoria adores her Prime Minister, the urbane and handsome Lord Melbourne. In her eyes, he can do nothing wrong. But everyone has secrets. When Victoria hears about Lord M’s secrets, she is stunned. But after the shock wears off, her curiosity remains.

NOW COMPLETE.
Multi-chaptered slow-burn leading to a blaze.

Notes

NOW COMPLETE

HISTORICAL ACCURACY: Victoria was Queen, Melbourne was her Prime Minister. They adored each other. In his private life, Melbourne was known for his scandalous and troubled marriage and his affairs. He was also into spanking.

HISTORICAL INACCURACY: Melbourne did not, as far as we know, have any form of intimate relationship with Victoria, but it’s not hard to believe they both wanted to. And if they had ... who knows? That’s what this explores.

This is set in the late 1830s, shortly after Victoria becomes Queen.
In my mind, Victoria looks just like Jenna Coleman and Melbourne like Rufus Sewell, and their relationship at the start of the story is as portrayed by these two in the early episodes of Series 1 of the TV series, Victoria.
The first chapter sets the scene ...

This is explicit, but, I hope, genuine and believable too. Enjoy.

This fic contains artwork inspired by it in chapters 17 and 34. I am hugely touched by these gifts. The one in Chapter 34 is a commission gift from Ariadne created by pandacappuccino, and the other a gift from the artist, lucife56. Please head to their places and show them lots of love. x

(For those interested in continuing the Lord M/Victoria love, do join our very friendly Facebook group For the Love of Vicbourne - Victoria and Lord M. It's a closed group which means only members see the posts, but we'll let you in if you can prove you're human and nice, which I'm sure you are. Welcome. x)

You can find a Revelation Chapter Guide linked to this if you follow the instructions below.
The rain beat on the panes of Windsor Castle with merciless regularity. It had been the same all day. Victoria had been unable to go riding or even take the air in the gardens. Instead, she had been closeted indoors with her ladies while they discussed court gossip. Victoria’s mind, however, was elsewhere.

‘I wonder how the chatter in Westminster is today? Do you suppose the vote will go the Government’s way tonight?’ asked the Queen suddenly.

Emma looked up slowly. Lady Portman was fully aware where the Queen was steering the conversation. She indulged Her Majesty. ‘I should imagine so, Ma’am. It is not a contentious bill … according to Lord Melbourne.’

‘No, he said as much to me, yet I wonder why he feels the need to attend if the vote is straightforward?’

Emma attended to her embroidery but continued carefully, ‘He knows the merits of being seen at such times. It instils confidence within the party.’

‘He has been most involved with it for days now. I have barely seen him.’ The Queen had the familiar edge of petulance she developed whenever her Prime Minister had been absent for more than a day.

Emma glanced at the Duchess of Sutherland.

‘He is a busy man, Ma’am,’ said Harriet.

‘Too busy to see his Queen?’

‘Parliament is a tiresome business, Ma’am … and he must then be allowed his own time too.’

‘Must he? I suppose so. But he could always spend it in my company. I would hope that I could provide conversation away from the strains of Parliament.’

The two women exchanged further glances. ‘I’m sure you do, Ma’am … But he is a man, you must recall,’ said Emma.

Victoria asked directly, ‘And by that you mean?’

‘Men will always have … other needs and ways to seek comfort at the end of difficult days.’

Victoria frowned. ‘Are you speaking of …?’

Emma cocked an eyebrow. ‘Diversions, Ma’am, that is all.’

There was silence for a time. Victoria prodded at her embroidery, stabbing the needle through with near ferocity. A clock chimed the half hour.

‘Are you implying he has a … a mistress?’ she blurted out suddenly, unable to stop herself.

Emma sucked in a breath, aware of how perilously the conversation hung. ‘None that I know of currently, if you must ask, Ma’am.’
‘But women have … visited him?’

‘Ma’am … there are things best left unasked.’

‘But I am asking nonetheless.’

Emma sighed a little but looked the Queen in the eye and stated openly, ‘You cannot expect Lord Melbourne not to live a full life … especially after the death of his wife. There have been women, certainly. You have heard of Mrs Norton?’

‘That author woman? Her husband was beastly to Lord M was he not? Dragging him into a court case?’

‘Her husband felt aggrieved … And not without reason … some say.’

‘You believe Lord Melbourne did have an … affair … with her?’ Victoria’s eyes were wide and she could barely bring herself to say the word.

Emma looked at the young Queen. Perhaps she needed to hear the truth of the world. ‘I know he did, Ma’am. At times, I was party to it from both sides.’

For a time it looked as if Victoria would cry, but then, with a sudden straightening of her back, she reapplied herself to her sewing. ‘Well, it is over now, is it not?’

‘Yes, Ma’am, most certainly.’

Victoria swallowed hard but then said with remarkable straightness, ‘Lord M is not a monk, after all. And, like you said, we all have needs, do we not?’

Her two ladies-in-waiting looked at each other again, surprised at their monarch’s equanimity on the subject, but then, they knew all too well that there was nothing Melbourne could do wrong in the Queen’s eyes. Another silence fell, but the ghost of the conversation still hung about them, needing something further to exorcise it.

‘Some people’s needs are more extraordinary than others,’ said Harriet, her breath catching as she dared. Emma darted her a sharp look but Victoria was already alert.

‘More extraordinary? Whatever do you mean?’

Harriet had said it and was now compelled by that inescapable urge to follow through once the tip of a secret is revealed. Emma kept her eyes down, but did nothing to prevent what was unravelling.

Harriet continued. ‘Lord Melbourne, they say, has rather … exotic tastes.’

Victoria froze, her embroidery held fast in her small fingers which were turning white as they gripped it. ‘Exotic? How do you mean … exotic?’

‘Apparently …’ The Duchess leaned in, her eyes bright with the lure of sensation.

‘Harriet!’ warned Emma, but her own breath was coming fast and she too had a burning desire to see how this would unfold.

‘Apparently … he likes to …’ Harriet blushed and dropped her head.

‘What? What? What does he like to do?’ The Queen’s voice was by now almost a shriek.
‘Harriet!’ Emma tried half-heartedly again.

‘You must tell me! I command you!’

Harriet’s voice was so quiet it was barely audible but Victoria heard it all too clearly. ‘He likes to … to spank his women … to thrash them.’

Victoria forgot to breathe even though her mouth hung open like a cod fish. ‘Sp … spank?’

‘Yes.’

‘But … is that even … possible?’

Harriet let out a little giggle. ‘Oh yes. Some gentlemen indulge in all manner of … diversions.’

Victoria’s brows worked frantically, moving her face through a gamut of emotion from horror, curiosity, wonder and confusion. ‘But have the women been sinful? Do they deserve such chastisement?’

‘I do not know. That is between them and Lord Melbourne.’

‘But … does he …? How …? Through …? What … How does he …?’

Harriet put up a hand to stifle her laughter. ‘Are you asking me how he does it?’

The Queen gave a series of sharp nods.

‘Well, their backsides are quite bare at the time, if that is what you mean.’ Her laughter bubbled out from behind her hand.

Victoria at last lost the grip on her embroidery and threw it violently to the floor. ‘I do not believe it! I will not!’

‘No, Ma’am, quite right,’ interjected Emma suddenly, standing up. ‘You are not obliged to believe it at all. Lord Melbourne remains a gentleman who serves you most well both as your Prime Minister and your Private Secretary, and that is all that shall be said on the matter. Look, the rain has stopped. Let us all take a turn outside. I’m finding it has grown insufferably airless in here.’

Victoria was indeed struggling to breathe, but not because of the quality of the air in her drawing room; she had quite forgotten herself. Her mood did not improve for the remainder of the day nor the night that followed it.

Her Prime Minister was due to meet with her first thing in the morning.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria asks Lord Melbourne a lot of questions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Victoria had not quite decided how to greet her Prime Minister the next day. She should be angry, she decided, but somehow could not muster the necessary rage. She then thought disappointment would be fitting, but that did not emerge either. She was certainly agitated; she had not felt this way since the morning of her coronation – a strange mixture of nausea and excitement. But then, surely excitement was entirely the wrong thing to be feeling.

She paced the drawing room, wringing her hands.

Penge appeared a little after nine and announced, ‘The Prime Mi -’

‘Yes, thank you, Penge!’ She cut the butler off before he could even announce him. Lord Melbourne walked in, those same bright eyes, the same look of quixotic calm etched in the slight smile. Now it did make her angry. Did he not realise that she knew?

He knelt to kiss her hand. She had forgotten to hold it out for him. She considered briefly denying him completely … but she would miss that moment of contact too much. She thrust her hand forward. He took it in his fingers (those same fingers that had done unspeakable things to …) Victoria sucked in a breath as his lips brushed her bare skin. It made her heart quicken more than usual.

‘Your Majesty.’ He rose from kneeling and his smile deepened. ‘How are you today, Ma’am?’

‘Fine. Of course, fine. Why should I not be?’

His eyes darted quickly to the side then back to her. ‘I was merely inquiring, Ma’am … as I always do.’

‘Yes, well … I’m very well …’ She paused, unsure how to proceed, before propelling out in a curiously tight voice, ‘How are you?’

He seemed to be in far too ebullient a mood, she thought. ‘Good, good, Your Majesty. It is a fine morning and the vote went successfully yesterday. It passed with a clear majority which means that we can put the reforms in place sooner than I had expected, which of course is very good news for the mill workers.’

She saw his lips move but heard nothing.

He looked at her, expecting a response. When none was forthcoming he quirked an eyebrow. ‘Your Majesty?’

‘Yes?’
‘Is something the matter?’

‘No. Nothing. Whatever could be the matter?’

‘Forgive me … you seem a little distracted.’

‘Distracted? No. Not at all.’

He studied her carefully. ‘It’s simply that … you were most curious about this vote. You wondered why it was taking up so much of my time and had been asking about it. So … I’m pleased to inform you that it passed easily.’

She stared at him. He looked just as handsome as ever, more so in fact, she noted with dismay. She thought perhaps it would be better if he seemed hideous to her, but the concept of her Prime Minister occupying her senses in any way other than as utterly beautiful was an impossibility, she conceded.

Victoria was beside herself. Her mind threw a myriad of questions and confusions at her, but the only thing that came out in a sudden rush was: ‘Shall we take tea?’

He frowned slightly but could not conceal his amusement at her flighty manner; his mouth skittered with the effort of hiding his smile. ‘Tea would be most welcome, Ma’am.’

She hurried to sit down after ringing for tea. Melbourne strolled smoothly over, flipped up his tails in that infuriatingly beguiling way he had and sat opposite her. Dash bustled in but even he frustrated Victoria today. She dropped him a morsel of biscuit but then sent him on his way with a tut.

‘Are you sure you are quite alright, Ma’am?’ asked her Prime Minister again.

‘Yes! I do wish you would stop asking me that!’

The tea arrived and Penge poured it for both of them. Usually they would have been discussing all manner of things by now, but this morning there was a gleaming silence.

‘It’s a pleasant day, is it not, Ma’am? I believe the rain will hold off.’ Lord M never spoke about the weather. She shot him a glare. He noticed it as his eyebrows rose up in slight surprise and he took a sip of tea instead of continuing.

She could stand it no longer.

‘Lord Melbourne?’ She tried to sound as if she were about to ask him a matter of constitution, but wasn’t sure she succeeded.

‘Ma’am?’ Why was he behaving so infuriatingly normally?

‘My ladies have been talking.’ She had started. She would have to continue.

‘That tends to happen, I find.’

‘But they are discussing things which I find … disturbing.’

‘Oh?’ He drank from the cup again, as coolly as ever.

‘And these matters involve … you.’ She derived a certain pleasure from pointing the word, as if she were in court accusing him. She studied him. He barely seemed to react.

‘Me, Ma’am?’
'Yes.'

'I see.' He took one more sip of tea before replacing the cup on the saucer. He said nothing more.

'Does this not alarm you?'

Melbourne gave a slight, untroubled pout. 'I do not yet know what the matters are, so I am finding it a trifle hard to be alarmed.'

_Surely he should be alarmed!_ ‘They are discussing your private life.’

The corner of his mouth rose up in what could only be interpreted as a grin. ‘This does not surprise me. Speculating on the lives of others is far more interesting than considering the dull monotony of one’s own.’

‘But if you knew what they were saying about you, you may not be so relaxed on the matter.’

He smiled across at her, his green eyes as bright as ever. ‘Well, as you still have not told me what exactly it is they say, I shall remain relaxed until that time.’

_His manner was exasperating!_ ‘Lord M! You are vexing me and I think sometimes you enjoy doing so!’

He merely smirked.

She put down her tea cup and brought her hands to her lap, clasping them together tightly. ‘The thing is, these matters are so salacious, so scandalous, that I am not sure I can voice them.’

His smile wavered for the merest instant before being replaced by his usual imperturbable air. ‘Oh, but now you must, Ma’am, as you have piqued my interest. I am always interested in a scandal, although I confess to preferring ones that do not involve me.’

She steadied herself but could not look at him, although her voice came straight enough. ‘They say that you … entertain women at your home.’

There was a beat of silence. ‘Women have indeed entered my home on occasions. Homes can be used for entertainment, dinners, dances, Christmas gatherings. You yourself have dined there on numerous occasions.’

Still he teased her. She would not be deterred. ‘And that these women engage in … particular activities.’

He grew momentarily quiet. ‘Whist, perhaps?’

‘Not whist.’ She gave a sigh and guarded herself. ‘I feel that you are teasing me.’

‘I am.’

She darted her eyes back to his. His were alight with amusement.

‘Stop it!’ She breathed in rapidly through her nose to calm herself and then continued quickly, ‘It is said that you engage in intimate acts with these women.’

At last he averted his gaze. He adjusted his position and then said, as placidly as ever before reaching again for his tea, ‘Would it shock you if I did?’
She could not at first answer. She licked her lips which had grown dry. ‘That depends on the nature of the acts. I do not expect you to be celibate, Lord M, but …’ Her words deserted her.

‘Yes?’

‘They say that you … That you … discipline them.’ There. It was out. Now he would deny it, laugh it off, or he would beg her to forgive him.

‘Discipline them? By giving them lines perhaps? By setting them pages of the *Iliad* to translate?’

‘No!’ She could not bear his composure! ‘That you … that you … spank them!’

At last he fell silent. Slowly, he leaned forward and placed the tea cup down on the table.

‘Do you not deny it?’ Her words came hurriedly, willing him to dismiss the whole concept with a laugh of scorn.

‘I am not sure how to respond, Ma’am.’ His voice was quieter now but no less measured.

‘So it is not true?’

‘Do you wish it not to be true?’

*What a thing to say!* ‘Of course!’

‘Why?’

*Why?* ‘Because … surely that is against natural law!’

‘Is it?’

‘Surely these women hate it, *hate it* and hate you because of it!’

He gave a little sigh, she barely heard it, and turned his head to the side. ‘Ma’am …’ But still he did not laugh it off.

‘Deny it. Refute it. Lord M, please say it is not so.’ She could feel tears pricking at her eyes.

‘I do not wish to lie to you, Ma’am.’

Her heart was racing so fast she felt almost dizzy. ‘So you … you *do* these things?’

He stared down at the floor but his words came straight. ‘I am a grown man, Ma’am. I have known great difficulty and sadness in my life for which I must find ways of coping. And, as you said, do not expect me to live as a monk.’

She stood up and paced a few steps back and forth, wringing her hands distractedly. ‘But … I cannot bear it. I cannot bear to hear this!’

‘One should never ask questions one does not wish the answer to.’

‘But … I …’

‘I cannot lie to you, Ma’am. You do not deserve that.’

She looked back at him. Her heart raced, her mind was in a whirl; he had thrown her world on its head and yet he sat there to all appearances as exactly the same person she knew and admired; the
same person she adored.

She furrowed her brows, trying to make sense of it all. ‘I … I don’t understand it.’

‘I should imagine not. You are unaware that this can occur.’

She took a step into him. Beyond anything else, her mind burned for answers. ‘Does it? Does it occur?’

‘Yes.’

‘And women like it?”

He tensed his mouth at her persistent questions but answered her nonetheless. ‘Some, yes … quite a few. It would not occur if they did not, not if the man is behaving correctly.’

‘And you …?’

He also now stood up, his hands clasped in fists beside him. ‘Ma’am, as I said, I cannot to lie to you.’

She stared at him, eyes wide. ‘Just tell me then! Lord Melbourne … do you do these things to women in your home?’

He blinked twice and his Adam’s apple lurched before he replied openly, ‘Yes.’

She steadied herself, grabbing onto the back of a chair for support. The room was spinning. ‘I … I … cannot …’

‘Your confusion is understandable,’ he murmured.

‘Indeed! Indeed it is! This is beyond anything I have ever imagined in life before.’

‘I must say … I am somewhat relieved to hear it, Ma’am.’

‘Do not toy with me, Lord Melbourne! I am beyond your teases now.’

He looked at her as if he didn’t quite believe her. She could not bear the way he saw through her so she turned from him. But his next words came with deep sincerity. ‘Ma’am … I shall tender my resignation as your Private Secretary with immediate effect.’

‘What?’ She spun around to look at him.

‘In light of our conversation … I shall resign.’

‘No!’

His eyebrows rose high and he studied her but said nothing.

‘No! You shall not do that! I cannot have anyone else acting as my Private Secretary!’

‘But … I thought that in light of … this … you would no longer want me.’

She strode across, indignation quickly restoring her composure. ‘Lord Melbourne, you forget yourself! I have no intention of dismissing you and neither do I accept your resignation! You shall remain as my Private Secretary and continue to serve me as I see fit!’

He opened his mouth to protest but she gave him a look of such ferocious severity that he closed it
again quickly. ‘Very well, Ma’am.’ He glanced around the room. ‘In that case … I believe we should look over the dispatches.’

He stood as he always did, the picture of calm rationality, and waited. Victoria glanced around the room but her gaze fixed on nothing. But a certain normality had returned, a certain expectation of things proceeding as always. It settled her. She walked over to the red box and sat down. Her Prime Minister came to stand at her right shoulder and placed the first document before her. ‘The appointment of the Dean of Lichfield Cathedral, Ma’am. Already discussed and approved, I’m sure you recall … if you would care to sign here.’

She dipped her pen in the ink and signed with her usual careful script. Melbourne removed the document from her in his long fingers and replaced it with the next. ‘The purchase of a new residence for the Ambassador to Spain.’ The world was still turning.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback is hugely appreciated and will really give me insight into this one, which I'm loving writing but which is requiring careful balancing and direction. As it develops and gets increasingly intense, shall we say, I'd love to hear your thoughts on maintaining the integrity and believability of these characters, whom I adore.

Thank you, LL. x
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is reminded by Lord Melbourne not to ask questions she doesn't want the answers to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Queen was not exactly snippy that night, rather distracted, but Lehzen felt she could become so at the merest inconvenience. The Baroness did not linger after bidding her good night and was only too happy to shut the door and leave.

Victoria was indeed distracted. Lord Melbourne’s confession had thrown her into confusion. She had expected to be horrified, to hate him for what he had told her, but she found she did not.

She sat for a long while at the window, holding his birthday gift of the telescope in her hands and staring through it at the stars. It was a clear, cold night, and she could make out Andromeda clearly. She held the object carefully and twirled it in her fingers, imagining the other fingers that had held it before her.

The reason for her confusion was not due to anger, but because of a lack of it. After the initial shock, her lack of fury was what confused her. And now her mind kept wandering to matters she would never feel comfortable discussing with her mother or Lehzen or Harriet Sutherland … or anyone in fact.

But that wasn’t the only thing, because she had felt that dull ache inside before. She had felt it when a lady at court smiled at the Prime Minister in a way she thought over-familiar. She had felt it when Emma Portman put her hand on Lord M’s arm, leaning into him and sharing a private joke.

Victoria was jealous.

She was jealous of the women who came to his house. She was jealous of the women whom he …

She stood up suddenly and put the telescope back in its box, shutting it resolutely.

Victoria sighed deeply then crept over to her bed as quietly as possible, as if her thoughts would escape and be overheard if she made any noise at all. The cool sheets welcomed her and she sank down into them, pulling the quilt up and nestling deep within its comfort. She lay quite still and thought of how calm she was, how quiet it all was. She wondered if he was asleep yet. She wondered what he was doing if he were not asleep.

Victoria turned over and curled her knees up into herself. Her nightgown had ruched up in bed and exposed her legs. She reached to tug it down but once she had taken hold of it she hesitated. Instead, she held it in her fingers and drew the thin cotton material up over her backside, leaving her skin naked under the sheets.

Victoria let her hand linger there and dared run her fingers lightly over the soft skin. It was very smooth, like a peach almost, and pliant. Her mother had always warned her that if she ate too many
marrons glacés they would dimple her bottom and that would be a most shameful thing. She had never really understood what her mother meant. She could feel no dimples on her bottom, only round smoothness. She waited again for the shame to come. It didn’t. But she was curious.

And so she did it.

Just a little one.

A little tap with the tips of her fingers. Such a little tap that she barely felt it. She did it again, a little harder. It made a slight snapping noise but did not cause her the slightest discomfort. In fact, she let out a giggle which she stifled in the pillow at her own foolishness.

She turned over and lay staring up at the canopy above her. The face of her Prime Minister came into her vision again, as it invariably did. In her mind, he was just as handsome, just as calm and authoritative as always, even now, even now that she knew all that she knew. Her breathing quickened and she wondered how she would ever sleep. But sleep she must.

She was to travel back to Buckingham House the next day where he would meet her for the morning audience. And she could not possibly face him without her full allowance of beauty sleep.

--xxOoxx--

After returning to the palace early, Victoria debated for a while which gown to wear for the remainder of the day. She decided on the blue silk with black brocade trim. At first glance it was dour, but when the light caught it – and the light was streaming in that morning – it brought out an iridescent shimmer which was somewhat beguiling. He had told her she looked most radiant in it one day, the 17th of September to be precise. Harriet had commented on how it brought out the blue of her eyes. She studied herself in the looking glass, thinking that perhaps it did.

--xxOoxx--

As half past ten grew near, she knew he was approaching because she could hear him talking to John Conroy in the ante chamber. She sat down. Then she stood up again, then walked over to the window and sat in the window seat, then changed her mind and stood. The door opened and he strode in. This time her hand was thrust out before he had even got close. He knelt and kissed it. She held it there still. Perhaps he kissed it for slightly longer today, she thought.

‘Lord M, how are you today?’ she asked, although her usual smile of greeting was absent; she was too busy analysing his demeanour.

His smile was as unforced as ever. He was wearing the black coat which made his eyes glint, she noticed. ‘Very well, Your Majesty. I slept well.’

‘Did you?’ she asked quickly. Had he slept alone? Had he been tired out by any … diversions?

‘Yes.’ His mouth ticked at the corner and he glanced to the side and continued, ‘The house was most quiet. Solitude makes for a peaceful night.’

She shuddered in the deepest breath. He had read her concerns and sought to allay them. ‘Indeed,’ she commented. She felt her cheeks growing warm and she turned away quickly to hide her blush before continuing, ‘I, however, did not sleep so well.’

‘Oh?’

‘No … my mind was … distracted.’
‘By what, Ma’am?’

She turned and gave him a sharp look. ‘You know by what, Lord M.’

He searched the room in that way he had when considering her meaning. She wasn’t sure if he did it genuinely or to frustrate her. ‘Ah … you are referring to our conversation yesterday, I presume?’

‘Of course I am.’

‘I see. I am sorry if it led to a restless night, Ma’am.’

‘Yes. You should be.’ She tried to scold but found her tone instead almost teasing.

There was a moment’s silence. She was not sure how to fill it, but she was also not sure if she could focus on anything else.

‘Shall we discuss the Privy Council meeting, Ma’am?’ Melbourne said, as smoothly as ever.

The Privy Council meeting was the last thing on her mind. She frowned in annoyance. ‘Must we?’ she sulked.

‘We must.’ Why was he always so level-headed? How could he remain so in light of all that had been said? His calm normality settled her somewhat but at the same time only made her more curious about it all. How could she reconcile this person with the one who …? She turned away and squeezed her eyes shut. His presence was most disarming, but she could not bear the thought of him being anywhere but at her side.

‘Ma’am?’ he pressed and she felt him approach. Her breath faltered. How close was he? She tried to sense him, to guess. Was he closer yet? Close enough to touch her?

She turned back to him slowly and found him a perfectly respectable distance of at least five feet away. Victoria drew in a breath and went to sit on her chair. He sat opposite and gave her a quizzical look, his eyebrows and lips jigging in amusement.

‘Has Lord Hastings put forward his resignation from the Council yet?’ she stuttered, trying to be as regal as possible.

‘Not yet, Ma’am … I shall see that he does forthwith, as discussed.’

‘Good.’

He placed some papers in front of her and at last they settled into their regular round of discussions. She managed to go through forthcoming committee meetings and appointments and bills with remarkable focus and normality, she thought, because in actual fact half her mind was thinking about something else entirely.

He was talking. ‘And when Parliament reconvenes after Christmas I shall propose that a motion is put forward to recommend Ministers for-‘

‘Does it hurt?’

It came out, just a thought that had to be vocalised.

He blinked in confusion, his thoughts on Ministers’ prerogatives interrupted. ‘Excuse me, Ma’am?’

‘When you … you know, when you … spank … a woman … does it hurt the woman?’
Melbourne’s eyebrows rose up as he focused. ‘Well … yes, Ma’am … that is rather the purpose of the whole venture.’

‘But how? How can one want to be hurt?’

He cleared his throat quietly. ‘It is a mystery, I confess, and one which cannot really be explained … unless it is experienced.’

‘But not all women like it?’

‘No. Of course not … but then … few have the opportunity to experience it.’

‘You think more would like it if they did?’

He hesitated briefly before saying plainly, ‘I suspect so, yes.’

‘I cannot understand it!’ She stood abruptly and crossed to the window, staring out across the gardens distractedly.

‘Perhaps not, Ma’am.’

‘But … I do not like pain.’

There was silence for a moment, as if he were considering whether to steer the subject safely back to government business, but instead, in the considered, thoughtful manner he brought to everything, a manner which invariably reassured her, he stood up and explained, ‘Nobody likes pain in the conventional sense, that is the way it should be, quite rightly, but the pain experienced at such times – how to put it? – changes. It shifts from pain to sensation, to a heightened awareness, and as such it can be confused – amalgamated – in the mind with … pleasure.’

‘Pleasure?’

‘Yes.’

‘So the whole thing becomes pleasurable?’

‘Yes.’

‘For the woman?’

‘Yes. And, I believe, this in turn means that the woman finds it liberating.’

‘And for the man?’ She looked across at him in query.

‘Ma’am?’

‘This is being done to the woman. You say it becomes pleasurable for the woman. So how then does the man benefit from this? Why do it?’

At this he lowered his gaze and cleared his throat again.

‘Answer me, Lord M.’

He did not meet her eyes, but his words came clearly enough. ‘The whole process for both the woman and the man is … arousing.’
She flushed. Hearing Lord M say the word ‘arousing’ evoked a strange feeling within her. ‘I see. And so it leads to … increased intimacy?’

‘It does not have to.’

‘But it can?’

‘Yes, often.’

‘The ultimate intimacy?’

As she pressed him, she could tell his usual calm resolve was faltering somewhat, but for a reason she could not explain it made her braver. He had unsettled her with his revelation; she now delighted in unsettling him with her bold questions. She looked straight at him, expecting an answer.

‘Ma’am … if you are referring to the act for which marriage is ordained, the act which leads to the procreation of children …’

She was so exasperated by his inability to say it that she quite forgot herself. ‘Oh, Lord M, for goodness sake, of course I am! I am talking about intercourse!’

He allowed his mouth to tick at the corners at her frank declaration and swallowed back a surprised laugh. ‘Yes, that can happen, but, like I said, it does not have to. In some relationships of this kind, the participants engage merely in the disciplinary aspect.’

‘And throughout this, the woman does only what the man says?’

‘Yes … as long as it is agreed beforehand. There are certain conventions, certain rules, if you wish, which must be established first. For instance, one must always have a word.’

‘A word?’ How strange it all was, and how she wanted to carry on learning, fitting the pieces of this extraordinary new puzzle together.

‘Yes, a word which the woman will use if she wishes the man to stop.’

‘Why does she simply not say ‘stop’?’

‘Because …’ He hesitated, as if wondering whether he should even be speaking at all.

‘Go on.’

‘Because that can be part of the … enjoyment, so to speak.’

‘Telling someone to stop and being ignored?’

‘Yes.’

She pursed her lips and declared, ‘If a man does not stop something when I tell him to stop, I would be most displeased and he would know it!’

His mouth danced briefly in delight. ‘Quite right, Ma’am, and the man must and would, one would hope, stop instantly if the agreed word is employed, but otherwise … the woman would know that, no matter what she says, he will continue, and he will know that that is indeed what she actually wants.’

Her brows furrowed in concentration that was nearly confusion but not quite. ‘And this is supposed
to liberate the woman? When she is having to obey a man?’

He continued calmly, walking towards her, his rationality so at odds with the subject matter. ‘The liberation comes from the relinquishing of control, from the loss of responsibility to self. One hands oneself over entirely to another, thereby forgetting all that constrains one.’

She stared off, thinking hard on his words. ‘I suppose I can see how that can be something to seek out … for some.’

‘Indeed, Ma’am.’

She twirled her regnal ring on her finger. ‘But how does one … ascertain if a lady is … so inclined?’

At this his smooth discourse faltered. He paused before answering and pursed his lips. ‘Ma’am … please recall that last time we discussed such things I said that you should not ask questions you do not wish the answers to.’

She gave him a look of indignant intent. ‘I do recall that, Lord Melbourne. Therefore, as I am asking, I clearly do wish the answers.’

He gave a slight sigh and swallowed. She fixed him with her eyes, awaiting his response. He eventually said, ‘Sometimes it is agreed beforehand. The gentleman and lady will meet for the specific purpose of such things, an agreement with like-minded individuals.’

Her eyes darted around the room as she processed all this new information. He continued, ‘At other times, one would be at the start of a normal, intimate relationship first.’

‘Intimate meaning?’

He sighed again and his hands came out to the side as if trying to find balance to this strange conversation. ‘Kisses … and the like …’

‘And then?’

‘When the relationship is advanced enough to take another course, then it can be … tested, so to speak.’

‘And what if the lady reacts most badly?’

‘That is a risk that must be taken. One only begins with the slightest of touches.’

‘By that you mean spanking.’ She impressed herself with her audacity.

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

Victoria recalled her own weak attempts at tapping her backside the night before. A little smile crept over her face at the silly inadequacy of it.

Melbourne continued, ‘And one usually has a sense of how a lady will respond. It would be irresponsible and foolish to try something with someone who clearly would not take to it kindly.’

‘And what sort of women do tend to … take to it kindly?’

‘Well, Ma’am, contrary to what one may expect, it tends to be the wilful ones, the headstrong ladies, the ones who know their own mind, who perhaps have great responsibility and a position in which they need to assert themselves in life, hence why the reversal is a liberating experience for them.’
She stared from the window, contemplating his words, and then said quite boldly, ‘Women such as me, then?’

No response was forthcoming. Victoria turned her head sharply to him and stared into him, awaiting an answer. He blinked twice and kept his eyes fixed downwards. She repeated herself forcefully.

‘Women such as me, Lord Melbourne?’

‘I cannot say, Ma’am.’

‘You think I could be someone who would ‘take kindly to it’?’

He clasped his hands behind his back as if he had drawn a line. ‘I would prefer not to answer that question, Ma’am.’

Victoria took a step towards him, forceful in her female coercion. ‘I demand that you do.’

At last he looked up at her and the brilliance of his eyes burned his truth between them. ‘I think perhaps you would, Ma’am.’

Her breath was coming so fast it pained her, although she was barely aware. ‘How long have you thought this way?’

‘Since the Coronation Ball, Ma’am.’

‘At what point exactly?’

‘I really am not sure I should tell you.’

‘But I ask you to.’

He shuddered in a breath, revealing his torment, but continued nonetheless. ‘Afterwards. I was thinking about the evening. Thinking about … the way you asserted yourself, thinking about your …’

‘My what?’

‘Your love of life … and your curiosity, Ma’am.’

‘Curiosity? I do not recall exhibiting curiosity.’

He stared at her and she noticed the slightest curling of his lips. He allowed several heartbeats of a pause and then, ‘Oh … I do.’

The way he said that made her grow very warm very quickly. His voice deepened and his eyes darkened and he looked at her as if he knew the way her mind worked when she was slipping between the waking world and that of dreams. Something deep inside coiled through her in a way that was both delicious and disturbing.

The air seemed to buzz around them and it made her bold. ‘And who would indulge any curiosity on my part?’

‘Ma’am?’

‘You say that you have thought about me being a suitable person to benefit from such things. But who would deliver it? Surely you have considered this too.’
This time he did not respond, but neither of them broke their gaze. ‘I do not understand,’ he said although she suspected he understood all too well.

She asked outright. ‘Have you thought of being the one to bestow it on me?’

Now the stare dropped at last. ‘I will not answer that, Ma’am.’

‘You will.’

‘No, Ma’am, with all due respect, I cannot.’

She stepped forward again and stood right before him, compelling him to look at her. ‘Lord Melbourne, you will answer me. When you have considered these things, when you have thought about me benefiting from them, in those scenarios, in your mind … is it you doing them to me?’

He gave no answer, but she insisted. ‘Lord Melbourne, have you imagined yourself spanking me?’

Melbourne hesitated, but then, after a moment of indulgent silence, he at last said, quite clearly, ‘Yes, Ma’am.’

Chapter End Notes

Oh, yes, my darling Lord M, you imagine all you want.

I know, I know, there’s a lot of talk at the moment, but, you know, this is the Queen and her Prime Minister we’re talking about, we must allow them time to establish the proper order of things. And some things are worth waiting for, after all. ;-)

Thank you for your comments. I sincerely welcome any constructive criticism too, honest.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria voices a decision.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Victoria did not see her Prime Minister the next day, or the next, which was a Sunday. She attended the service at St Margaret’s, Westminster, and squeezed her eyes tight shut, trying her best to focus on the pious words from the sonorous Reverend Timmins.

‘Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men: We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us.’

She couldn’t think of any obvious sins she had committed in word or deed, but in thought … She had had all manner of sinful thoughts recently. A creeping sensation took hold that she recognised as guilt. She opened her eyes and met with the sight of the crucified Christ staring down at her. Had she truly incurred His wrath and indignation? He didn’t look particularly wrathful or indignant, she thought, in fact, He just looked tired.

Throughout the service, throughout every minute that had passed since Melbourne had left her drawing room on Friday, the same refrain echoed around her head, bringing her such illimitable joy that she struggled to keep it contained: He wanted her. He wanted her. He wanted her.

He wanted to focus on her, think about her, take her, hold her, touch her, do whatever he would to her, to her, Alexandrina Victoria.

She sat in the church, oblivious to the chill, oblivious to the droning words, the images and icons fading from her to be replaced only by one: She was bending forward, staring ahead, waiting, hoping. Someone stood behind her, hand raised. Waiting, hoping ... expecting ...

'Drina? Drina! Drina!'

There was a nudge at her elbow. She turned to find her mother’s indignant face glaring at her. The Queen blearily pulled herself back to her surroundings. Fifty pairs of eyes were staring at her. The assembled congregation looked at her in bemused annoyance. She had forgotten to lead them up to Communion.

--xoOox--

It started to rain afterwards and she had to endure lunch with her mother, Sir John Conroy and the Duke of Cumberland. It was most tedious, and Victoria wished she could go for a ride, but the rain prevented it. She pictured Lord M in the dining room of Brocket Hall. Was he alone? Was he thinking of her? She pushed the food around her plate and found she had little appetite. She was desperate to leave the table. She could, of course, but if she stood and left, then so too must everyone
else. She glanced at their plates. They had been chatting and laughing together indulgently and had barely begun. Her heart sank and the food on her plate grew yet more unappealing. But she had felt enough guilt for one day; she didn’t want the added burden of incurring Sir John’s wrath by leaving him half-starved on the Sabbath. So she waited.

‘You do not eat very much, Drina?’ observed her mother drily.

‘I have little appetite today.’

‘Oh? Are you unwell?’

‘No, Mama.’

‘Yet distracted?’

She felt her mother’s sharp eyes upon her. The guilt returned. She took a drink of water. ‘A slight headache, that is all. I shall retire after this and take an afternoon nap. That should ease it.’

Sir John looked at her out of narrowed eyes as he slowly brought a piece of chicken to his mouth. She wished he would hurry up but, despite her complaint, he seemed in no rush to finish his meal.

At last, after a seemingly endless round of trifle, it was over. She stood abruptly. ‘Good afternoon, everyone. I do not wish to be disturbed. I am tired and shall rest.’

With that, Victoria swept from the room, practically running to her bedchamber. Lehzen tried to hurry after her but she closed the doors on her. ‘Not now, Lehzen! I have said I do not wish to be disturbed!’

She allowed her lady’s maid to release her dress and corset, then dismissed her perfunctorily and threw herself onto her bed in her chemise, kicking off her shoes in the process.

She lay back with the deepest sigh. She knew she would not sleep. She had no desire to sleep. The dark, pleated canopy of her bed had become an enclosure for the conspiratorial wanderings of her mind. Here, she could shut out all else: every duty and every distraction. For there was only one thing she could think of and it dominated her every moment. And the more she thought about it, the more the notion, so extraordinary, so alien to all she had previously held to be true, took root, grew and bloomed.

--xoOox--

Monday dawned cold and bright, but Victoria had already been awake since 4 o’clock. She seemed to exist in a state of perpetual anticipation, yet the pretence of tiredness she resorted to for her mother and others was absent. Never had she been so enlivened.

Her Prime Minister had left soon after their conversation on the Friday before. They had said no more to each other; the magnitude of his disclosure had rendered further discussion meaningless. Yet, now, the first morning she would see him since, she was not anxious at all. In fact, she was the most content she had been since that day of Lady Portman and the Duchess of Sutherland’s revelations.

But then, once Victoria made her mind up about something, there was nothing that would dissuade her from it. And William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne, knew that better than anyone.

--xoOox--

When he entered the drawing room that morning, she was, for the first time in many days, utterly
content. Melbourne kissed her hand as usual but she sensed a tension within him which was usually absent. His disclosure had clearly unsettled him and it hurt her to think of his anxiety. As he rose from his knees she smiled warmly and held his gaze. ‘It is a fine morning, do you not think?’ she said gently, intending to reassure.

His eyes brightened and that promise of a smile graced his face. ‘Yes, Ma’am, indeed it is.’

She was still holding his hand in hers and together they turned their attention down to their joined fingers. He let her hold onto him still and did not withdraw his hand. Slowly, she let her thumb run over the firmness of his forefinger, just a little, barely perceptibly; she wasn’t sure he’d even notice. There was such strength contained in those fingers, such power. That sensation within her stretched and her thoughts shone with clarity.

But there were dispatches to deal with. There were always dispatches. They parted and settled to work.

Victoria was remarkably clear-headed in dealing with government business. She spoke with eloquence and they got through the box with almost unseemly haste.

‘You are in a most statesmanlike mood today, Ma’am, if you don’t mind me saying,’ Melbourne grinned.

‘I want to be done with it. There is no point lingering on the tedious when there is so much else to enjoy in life,’ she declared.

‘True, Ma’am, but one must always deal with business carefully first.’

‘How annoyingly sensible of you, Lord M!’ she teased. When they finished their official matters, she stood and crossed to the window. An opportunistic squirrel bounded across the terrace and stole some crumbs she had left out for the birds. She studied it, watching it carefully until it headed off across the lawn and disappeared up a tree on the far side. ‘Lord Melbourne, I must tell you that I have been thinking a great deal.’

‘I am pleased to hear it, Ma’am.’

‘You do not yet know of what. What if it is something about which you prefer me not to be thinking?’ She cocked a cautionary eyebrow.

‘Unless it is a sudden preference for a Tory majority, Ma’am, I cannot think of anything about which I would not wish you to be thinking.’

‘Nothing at all?’ she queried.

He paused slightly and then added with conviction, ‘Nothing at all.’

She drew in a deep, confirming breath. She was ready. ‘You know the matter of which I speak.’

He cast his eyes down to the floor. ‘I can imagine, Ma’am.’

‘I have thought of nothing else.’ She turned her head again to look through the windows. She was standing so close that her breath clouded on the cold glass. She watched as the condensed vapour bloomed before shrinking back on itself with each breath she took. And then she said, ‘And, you see … I think you may be right.’

He said nothing. He made no sound.
She was dying to turn and read his reaction; she knew his subtly shifting expressions better than anyone, but she held back, denying herself the pleasure of it. She continued steadily, hearing herself as if from a distance. ‘I think I may indeed be that sort of woman, and I have decided …’ She took the deepest breath and finished with as much boldness as she could muster. ‘… that I wish to experience it. And I wish to experience it with you.’

It was said. Her words hung there, unable to be retracted, unable to be revoked. They gleamed in the air, fizzing with their potency.

She dared not turn around. She was by now breathing in such rapid, shallow gasps that she could scarce draw in enough air to sustain her. Her blood raced through her veins, pounding in her head as if castigating her for her confession.

Still there was silence. She closed her eyes against it, against the hell of his possible rejection.

At length, there came, softly, the slide of one foot along the wooden floor, and then, ‘Ma’am …’

‘What?’ She darted round to face him at last and searched his face. He was avoiding her gaze. He stood, hands clasped before him in that way that defined him. She was staggered by his beauty. Had anyone ever told him how perfectly, wonderfully handsome he was? He was perfect to her, her perfect man, her perfect other, and she wanted all he could give her. He must give it to her. He must!

‘Ma’am …’ But he was at a loss for words. Her Prime Minister always knew what to say, always chose the right turn of phrase to dissipate any anxiety on her part. Now he did not and she hated it. ‘Ma’am … when you asked me about these matters … if I had known … I would never have -’

‘But I did ask you and you did tell me.’

‘I should not have.’

‘Yes, yes, you should. You were true to yourself.’ She stepped forward, her eyes bright with conviction. ‘Allow me to be true to myself.’

‘Our discussions were merely that, Ma’am – discussions. I never intended for you to imagine that it was something we could actually enter into.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because … because … this sort of thing does not happen between a Queen and her Prime Minister!’ he exclaimed, almost laughing at the assertion.

‘There is a first time for everything!’ she declared brazenly.

‘Ma’am … really … I … I do not know what to say. Having these thoughts alone is tantamount to treason.’

‘Treason? Treason is betrayal. You will only betray me if you disappoint me in this matter. I want this, Lord M, and you want it too. You told me so yesterday. And what is more, you know that I need it. Why should we not give each other what we both need and desire?’ She wanted to rush over to him, to clasp him to her, plead with him to do with her as he saw fit, anything, anything to have his hands on her, to have the warmth of his skin against hers. It took all her strength not to hurl herself at him there and then.

‘Just because we have such feelings, Ma’am, it does not mean we should act on them. Clearly, in many cases, they are not the right thing. I am your advisor, Ma’am, and as such, I will always advise
you to do the right thing.’

She took a few furtive paces in frustration. ‘Oh, I am sick of doing the right thing! In all my life I have done what is right and proper. It stifles me, it suffocates me! You have given me promise of air to breathe, of release. I wish to be free. You must do that, you can do that, only you, Lord M!’

He looked at her, steadily, carefully, and she let him; she let him stare deep into her, right into her nakedness, and read all that she was, all that she could be. Her breath was held, her blood halted for a moment in its frantic progression round her body. She waited. She waited and she watched. Time had truly halted for them, and in that moment she fell into the watery depths of his green eyes and lost herself there, for there was nowhere else she wanted to be. Only he could save her, only he could pull her out.

‘What do you say? Answer me!’ she practically screamed at him, half wanting to throw her arms around him, half wondering if she would start pummelling him with her fists in frustration. Either way, she would feel him, feel that warm strength, that calm magnificence.

At last, he said, ‘I advise waiting, Ma’am,’ as calmly unflustered as ever.

She nearly screamed. She clenched her fists so hard her nails dug into her skin painfully. She had been sure he would agree to it. The look on his face was so certain and implacable; he had stared into her with such a knowing depth that his continuing vacillation was exasperating. ‘Waiting?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. Patience leads to clarity, I find. One must never enter into anything unless there is clarity for everyone involved.’

‘Are you refusing me?’ she bewailed, aghast that he would turn his monarch down.

‘That is not what I said.’

‘So you do not refuse me?’

‘Ma’am, I merely said that waiting would be wise in this instance.’

‘Oh, Lord M! You torment me!’

His eyebrows quirked up a little and the corners of his mouth danced, almost as if he were amused at her reaction. Melbourne gathered his papers and moved to leave. As always, she was dismayed at his departure, but she felt it now more acutely than ever. ‘How long must I wait?’

He glanced up at her as he put the dispatches away. ‘Well, Ma’am, one must be certain of these things.’

‘I am certain!’

‘I do not believe you have thought about it long enough to come to that conclusion, Ma’am. In any case, you are not the only one who needs to be certain.’

‘But you told me you … you wanted to.’

‘I told you a great deal, Ma’am … and I tell you now that patience is a noble and much-desired quality. And at its heart is anticipation, and anticipation can be used to great advantage, I have found.’

He was saying things she wasn’t entirely sure she comprehended. What did this have to do with her
desires? ‘I don’t understand what you mean about anticipation!’

He looked at her with a smile of unassuming warmth. ‘You have much to learn, Ma’am.’

She made a sudden rush at him, almost falling to her knees in desperation, but managing to remain upright and stop a mere foot before him. She practically sobbed out her need. ‘Teach me then! Teach me all of it! I beg of you!’

Her anguished supplication silenced him and he stood quite still, staring down, his fingers clenched tightly. When he at last met her eyes, his were darker, intent on her, and contained something which unnerved but excited her quite inexplicably.

‘Perhaps …’

But he did not finish the sentence. Still he looked at her, taller she thought, his face shadowed, graver than usual, but it only rendered him more desirable than she had ever known before. Her body melted for him, as if he was an opiate of some kind, binding her to him.

She must act on it, she thought, close the narrow gap between them, but then Melbourne seemed to rouse himself. With sudden nimbleness he took two steps backwards, putting distance between them. He turned back to tidying the papers.

‘Like I said, Ma’am, patience … it reveals a great deal. I am unable to attend tomorrow due to important business in Parliament so my deputy will be here instead, but I shall meet with you again on Wednesday.’

‘But … I …’

‘Ma’am?’ he inquired, as if she were seeking an explanation on committee protocol, his usual manner restored.

‘Is that all? Is that all you can say for now? Is that all you can give me?’

‘Yes, Ma’am, I believe it is.’ He met her eyes again before adding, ‘For now.’

She could not bear to lose him. ‘Will you not dine here tonight, Lord M?’

‘No, Ma’am, I regret I cannot. I have a prior engagement.’

‘A social engagement?’ she asked, her heartbeat quickening.

‘Yes.’

Victoria stared hard into him, feeling her eyes burn with the threat of tears.

He continued, ‘It is my nephew’s birthday, Ma’am.’

She let out a laugh in relief. ‘I see.’

He inclined his head and said in the same assuring tones he had done on the day of her first audience. ‘Goodbye, Your Majesty.’

‘Goodbye, Lord M.’

And, for now, he turned and left her.
Chapter End Notes

Anticipation.

LL x
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria receives an answer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Victoria was not sure how she survived the next day or the two nights which framed it. She lay awake for hours, dreaming, imagining, every nerve alert, her body tingling. In the quiet solitude of night’s dark silence, she imagined things, wonderful, terrifying, glorious things. The freedom of her mind allowed shame and pride to take hold in equal measure, and nobody would know, nobody would prevent it.

Tuesday crawled by maliciously. The ticking of the clock seemed to slow the more she focused on it. But she did as she was asked; she waited. She waited and she waited and waited. And one thing she knew, with every minute that passed, she grew more and more certain.

But what if he did not? What if he regretted their conversations? She could not entertain the idea.

In the afternoon she went riding and cantered away from her ladies, leaving them calling desperately in her wake. She rode side saddle as fast as if she were a huntsman astride a stallion and prided herself on her skills. The wind rushed past, buffeting her face, making her skin tingle and hurt with its icy bite, but the more it pained her, the more she needed it. She wondered and she learnt. This was it, this was what she sought. That need, that craving for sensation had caught her and would not be shaken.

--xoOox--

She arose early on Wednesday and wore the red damask silk day gown. Bold, but necessary.

She stood and waited, standing quite still in her own space. He was announced and the door opened.

There followed their usual little dance: the give at the knees, the kiss on the hand, the mutual greetings and inquiries after health. It was as vital to her day as drawing open the curtains or taking a first sip of tea in the morning.

‘The dispatches, Ma’am,’ he said, indicating the box which was awaiting them as always.

‘Of course.’ He wanted her to wait; she would prove to him exactly how patiently she could.

They went through the box quickly; there were fewer papers today, she remarked with relief. When she had finished the last, she rose from her chair and moved to stand in the middle of the room.

‘Lord M,’ she began.

‘Ma’am?’

‘I have waited.’
‘I see, Ma’am.’

‘And I find my feelings remain unchanged. In fact, I am more certain than ever, more certain than I thought possible.’ She closed her eyes and fell silent for a time, concentrating on the stillness between them, the ease of his company. He allowed it. She tried to steady her breathing, in and out, in and out, before continuing, ‘I feel a strange thing … as if I am on the precipice of some great change, almost on a knife-edge between life and death …’ Victoria turned and looked straight at him. ‘… and I choose life.’

She was not afraid of his scrutiny but was relieved when he approached her with his usual measured pace. She wanted to fling herself at him. She wanted him to take hold of her and kiss her and clasp her and do whatever he wished with her. He could. He could at this moment. But then he spoke. It was not what she was expecting, but when it came, she could only obey him.

‘Allow me to look at you, Ma’am.’

Victoria turned straight onto him, standing stock still before him. Despite the heaviness of her gown she felt a strange nakedness over her body, which seemed alive as never before. Melbourne took a step closer so that he was only two feet away and looked directly at her.

He studied her silently and she let him. For long, protracted seconds, he stared into her and she held his gaze unflinchingly. Gone was the reassuring smile, gone was the twinkle in the eyes. Instead she read once more that darkness she had seen briefly the other day, but it only made him more attractive than ever, more compelling, and she longed for him with all she was. It was as if he were searching her out, reading her very soul. And still she waited, granting him what he needed: her patience, her devotion, her transparency.

And then – at last – he spoke.

‘Very well.’

And there it was. That first gasping breath of freedom. She sucked it in in deep quenching gulps. The rush of oxygen to her head made her dizzy and she took a step backwards, reaching out a hand to steady herself against a chair. Slowly, she turned her head to look at him and her face broke involuntarily into the most open smile of sheer, unmitigated relief and delight.

But his expression remained grave. He did not return her smile, and yet it was not concern she read in him, but a deep concentrated conviction. His mouth was fixed in a line of determination and his usually green eyes seemed suddenly a steely grey. But the change that had come over him only to spoke to her more strongly than ever, because there it went again: that writhing, twisting feeling inside.

‘What happens now?’ she dared.

He gave a little pout, the shift in his demeanour moving on as swiftly as it had taken hold. ‘I brief you on developments abroad … the Canadian Governor has proposed a motion which –’

She stood up straight, bewildered. ‘What?’

‘In Canada, Ma’am, there’s a very interesting group who –‘

‘No!’ Her patience evaporated, her whole being screamed with indignation. He had agreed! How dare he toy with her like this! How dare he delay a moment longer! She was as enraged as that time her mother had promised her a new spaniel for her fifth birthday and had given it to her cousin Charlotte instead.
‘Excuse me, Ma’am?’

‘You have agreed to this! I have agreed to this! I … I want you to … oh, you know, you know!’

He looked at her quizzically, his brows dancing in bemusement.

‘Do I … do I … bend over?’ She was flushed bright red but he must do it now or she would burst, surely.

But Melbourne simply stood there and watched her. His mouth jigged a little but he soon lost his humour. He said, quite seriously, ‘It doesn’t work like that.’

She practically wailed in desperation. ‘What, then? Tell me! Tell me what I must do!’

He placed his hands behind his back and said with insouciant precision, ‘You must wait.’

*More waiting!* She practically cried aloud. She began pacing to and fro, wringing her hands, energy fizzing from her. ‘I have waited! I have waited and waited until I think I shall go mad! You have agreed to this! I want you to do it!’

‘You are too used to getting your own way.’

‘Of course I am! I am the Queen!’

‘Not in this matter.’ Something about his tone made her stop and turn to him. It was the same rich, mellifluous voice, but there was that seriousness again, that deep conviction in the way he addressed her which made her catch her breath.

‘What?’

‘In this matter, you do as I say.’

She opened her mouth to speak but no words came out.

‘In this matter, you are no longer Queen and I am neither your Prime Minister nor your Private Secretary. In this matter, you are simply a woman.’

Her heart beat quickened. She stared at him, unblinking. ‘I am not sure I understand, Lord M.’

‘Lord Melbourne.’

‘Excuse me?’

‘My title is Lord Melbourne. You will address me as such. In certain circumstances, I will accept My Lord or Sir.’

She almost laughed, not through amusement but confusion. ‘But I have always called you Lord M. You like it.’

‘Did you not hear what I just said?’

She was practically silenced. ‘I …’

‘Lord Melbourne,’ he corrected again.

‘You like it … Lord Melbourne.’ He had just rebuked her, but she found herself complying with him
He stood before her quite calmly, but the ever-ready shadow of his smile had disappeared and his tone remained deep. It should unnerve her, and what he had said certainly startled her, but she was not put off. In fact, she was exhilarated. He was leading and she would follow.

‘Should I … do anything, Lord … Melbourne?’

‘No. It will become clear when you should.’

‘I must wait again?’

He cocked his eyebrow. She had not addressed him as he had said. She corrected herself. ‘I must wait again … My Lord?’ She could not recall the last time she had needed to address anyone as such. However, she found it came remarkably agreeably to her now. She hoped he liked it.

‘Yes. Like I said, anticipation can ultimately be greatly worthwhile.’

‘I think I am beginning to understand, Lord Melbourne.’

‘Good. In that case, there was one more matter which the Speaker of the Commons wished to draw to your attention. If you’d kindly sit again I must go through this draft proposal with you.’

She returned to sit at the bureau. They settled to more business but, try as she might, she could not steady the excitement which pounded through her. She felt as if the world was spinning so fast she would fall from it. The only thing keeping her grounded was the calm, confident figure of her Prime Minister standing beside her.

‘That will be all for today, Ma’am,’ he said with a smile. Now that they had decided on their new relationship, she liked hearing him call her that again. The dual nature of their paradoxical situation was intoxicating. He gathered his things and walked to the door, but once there, he paused briefly, his fingers already on the handle, and turned back to her. ‘There is one more thing.’

‘What is that, Lord M?’

This time he did not correct her. Their roles had reverted again.

‘A word,’ he said.

‘A word?’

‘Yes. Do you recall? We discussed it before. If you should ever feel the need for things to … stop … you must use a particular word.’

‘Can you not give me one?’

‘I could, but … you may prefer to choose.’

‘I see. I am not sure what …’

‘It can be anything. An everyday object, a colour, anything …’

She glanced around the room and her eyes alighted on the flowers he had brought her some time ago. It was obvious.
'Orchid.'

‘Orchid, Ma’am?’

‘Yes. Orchid.’

‘A good choice, Ma’am, if I may say.’

He gave her the slightest smile again and it filled her with such joy she nearly laughed aloud.

‘I believe that is all for today, Ma’am. Until next time.’


Chapter End Notes

Oh, so near and yet so far!

I know, I know, but like Lord M says, anticipation makes things so very worthwhile.

Your patience, like Victoria’s, will soon be rewarded, have no fear.

In the meantime, if you have a moment to write a comment, I would love to hear your thoughts.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is rather rash.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Every single day for a week, the Queen greeted her Prime Minister. Together, they sat and went through the red box and discussed government business as they always did. When the weather was fine, they rode out together and talked about developments in Australia or tribal cultures of Africa. Most evenings, he dined at the palace with the Queen and her family.

Not once in that long week did he mention what had been decided between them.

It was as if the conversation had never occurred.

Victoria told herself not to worry. She told herself not to fret. She was waiting. He had told her to wait and she would. But as the week wore on, she could not prevent anxiety bubbling up ever stronger, until she became increasingly frantic. Nights were the worst, and by Thursday she sobbed herself to sleep in despair.

But she did not mention it to him for fear he would change his mind. She wondered if she had done something wrong, if he were having regrets, but surely he would have told her if he were?

And so, despite her body clamouring for him and her mind screaming for him, she bided her time and said nothing.

She did not see him at all that weekend and tried to distract herself by endless games of whist and backgammon.

It worked to a point, until she spied a newly placed orchid on the mantelpiece.

-xoOox-

By the time Monday morning came and her Prime Minister arrived for his morning meeting, she expected nothing. She was right not to. He went about business as he had done every morning since she had become Queen. And things did not improve when he reminded her of something she could well have done without.

‘You have a meeting with the French ambassador this morning, Ma’am.’

Victoria’s stomach lurched in dismay. ‘Oh, that odious man! I cannot bear him!’

Melbourne smirked. ‘Well, there are many who would say you are not alone in that sentiment, Ma’am, but we are in the process of rebuilding bridges with the French and therefore, we will, as ever, approach this with the diplomacy it requires.’

‘He is the most condescending person I have ever had the misfortune of meeting, and I have known
many.’

‘Oh, I know.’

She huffed. ‘He dismisses my notions and barely listens to me. And his hair is offensive!’

‘His hair, Ma’am?’

‘Yes. So oily and dyed. And when he sweats it drips down his face.’

‘You are most observant, Ma’am,’ he chuckled.

‘One cannot fail to notice these things!’ She caught his eye and joined him in laughter. ‘I am surprised you are immune to this, Lord M.’

‘Not immune, Ma’am, but I do what must be done. He is an ally and one that must be indulged.’

‘Oh, how I hate diplomacy! He rose out of the ranks of the bourgeoisie and yet he treats his servants deplorably, it is said. Do you know, Skerrett says he threw his valet out on Christmas Day into the streets for not being able to do up his waistcoat buttons even though the reason for it was his own immense consumption of pies and pastries.’

Melbourne listened amiably. ‘Well, I ask merely that you sit calmly and listen. Keep him happy and he will report good things to Paris. And we are getting on rather well with those in Paris at the moment.’

She smoothed down her skirts. ‘I will do my best, Lord M.’

‘I am pleased to hear it, Ma’am.’ He gave her one of his little smiles and her heart caught. Their eyes met and again she was ecstatic. He was pleased. She liked it when he was pleased.

The Ambassador’s audience would take place in the throne room. They made their way there at eleven o’clock. Victoria sat herself tall on the throne, grateful for the commanding presence of Melbourne just beside her. When things fell very quiet she could hear his steady, soft breathing behind her, even if she could not see him.

The footman opened the door and spoke. ‘Monsieur Paul Lepretre, the French Ambassador.’

The man entered. It seemed to Victoria that he was a slug, oozing his way across to her. Clearly his consumption of pastries had increased since their last meeting.

He knelt before her. She did nothing, but heard Melbourne clear his throat to prompt. Reluctantly, the Queen extended her hand and bristled to feel the puffy wet lips brushing her skin. ‘Votre Majesté, c'est un honneur de converser avec vous.’

‘Merci, Monsieur Lepretre, mais nous devons parler anglais ici, car, après tout, nous sommes en Angleterre. And so, there we are … we shall continue in English.’

The man glanced up at her with clear displeasure but she remembered what Melbourne had advised and smiled as sweetly as she could. It seemed to work somewhat as Lepretre returned her smile weakly and stood, nodding calmly. ‘Of course, Your Majesty.’

They continued for some time, quite amicably it seemed. Victoria did not grow to like the man any more but she was proud of the way she conducted herself, as his presence was not one she wished to endure for long. The meeting at last drew to a close. The Ambassador made his final pleasantries and
seemed to be about to leave. But then, just before things closed formally, he threw out, almost casually, ‘Before I leave … if I may ask, Votre Majesté …’ She threw him a sharp glare at his lapse, but he refused to meet her eyes. ‘When do you intend to return the Poussin?’

‘The what, Monsieur?’

‘The painting by Nicolas Poussin of the Bacchanalian Revel. A French masterpiece.’

‘Oh, a painting! I thought you meant a chicken! How very funny! I did wonder why you would wish the return of poultry!’ She laughed aloud, enjoying her little joke, and looked back at Lord M. He was not laughing and that steeliness in his eyes had returned. She steadied herself.

‘Where is this painting?’ she asked, still with a smile after her laughter faded.

‘In your National Gallery, Votre Majesté.’

‘Well then, presumably it resides there permanently?’

‘Yes, but it was bought several years ago under circumstances with which the French government was not satisfied. We were in negotiations with your uncle, the late King, to arrange for it to be reacquired and returned to France, its natural home.’

She frowned, not understanding why he was raising the matter. ‘Why? Was the purchase in some way illegal?’

‘Not exactly, Votre Majesté, but we feel that we were … misled.’

‘How?’

‘It was implied that it would be loaned, and hence the price was considerably lower than would have been accepted for a permanent purchase.’

‘Oh.’ Victoria turned to her Prime Minister. ‘Lord M, what do you know of this?’

Lord Melbourne took a moment to consider his words and then spoke clearly but calmly. ‘It is my understanding that the painting was bought on good faith and acquired quite fairly as a permanent addition to the Gallery.’

Victoria’s eyebrows rose up in dismissive finality. ‘There we are then.’

‘But that Monsieur Lepretre does have reason to investigate the circumstances and possibly renegotiate its return to Paris.’

Victoria was startled at Melbourne’s explanation. She glanced round at him in surprise. He was not looking at her, but had his gaze fixed quite seriously out into the room.

She frowned in frustration and looked back at Lepretre, unwilling to allow him the upper hand. ‘But if it was bought in good faith then your people should simply have been more careful at the time, Ambassador.’

‘They were, Votre Majesté. They were deceived.’

She pursed her lips at his impudence. ‘I doubt that very much.’

‘Nicolas Poussin is a great French artist, as I’m sure you know, Votre Majesté.’
Victoria felt her temper rising. She had never heard of the artist, she had to admit. The Ambassador sneered. ‘It is, as I am sure you can imagine, distressing to see it languishing unappreciated in an English gallery.’

She gripped the arms of the throne in rising fury. ‘Unappreciated? I’m sure it’s seen and commented on every day!’

Melbourne interjected. ‘Actually, Ma’am, it’s kept in the cellar in storage.’

She turned to him, her eyes wide. Again, he refused to look at her. It only made her dig her heels in. ‘Well, it can’t be very good then.’

‘Madame!’ The Ambassador turned bright red. ‘I find your words most … upsetting.’

She would not allow his impudence! ‘Oh dear. Well, perhaps you should leave if you are upset.’

‘I … Votre Majesté …!’

‘And why you have insisted on calling me that I do not know. I told you I was to be addressed in English.

‘Your Majesty … I bid you good day, but this is a matter we regard as unresolved. And, rest assured, the government of France wish a satisfactory resolution very soon.’ He nodded curtly, turned and left.

Victoria was greatly relieved to see him go. She stared indignantly at his retreating form as he finally left the room. ‘What a rude and unpleasant man! Well, at least I put him right on a few things. He cannot simply go picking through our national collections!’ She turned to Melbourne. He did not look her way and stood quite rigidly. His nostrils were flared and he clasped his hands before him. ‘Lord M? Are you alright?’

‘Your Majesty … a word in your drawing room.’

She looked intently at him, willing him to look at her with a smile, but he did not. He extended his hand to motion her forward. She got off the throne and headed for her private rooms. Melbourne kept pace behind her as he usually did, but did not speak once.

When they were back alone in her drawing room, he closed the door carefully. She turned to him, and realised her breathing had become rather rapid since they’d left the throne room. ‘Lord M? What is it?’

His lips were pursed and still he did not meet her eye. He only did that when he was displeased with people. She’d worked that out soon after she’d met him. He opened his mouth, and at first only sucked in a long, focusing breath, before starting. ‘Your Majesty … I told you to be as careful as you could with the Ambassador. He is liable to exaggerate any dispute that occurs. That meeting … did not go well.’

She laughed off his seriousness. ‘What? Why should anyone worry about a silly painting?’

He continued gravely, his voice rising at times in clear annoyance. ‘It’s not about a painting. It’s about national pride. I told you to be polite and respectful at all times.’

‘I was simply telling the truth! The painting can be no good if the gallery does not even choose to display it! Why ever should they want it back?’
‘It has been disputed for several years now. He is justified in querying it. We have been negotiating.’

‘I knew nothing about this.’

‘It was not on the agenda for discussion. I had no idea he was going to bring it up, but even then, you did not handle it very tactfully.’ Melbourne stood rigidly, turned partly away from her, clearly aggrieved by the whole event.

‘You’re angry with me,’ she stated, feeling herself flushing with shame.

He did not refute it, but turned his head in her direction. Slowly, he raised his eyes and met with hers. His eyes burned bright and his breath came hard through his nose. He looked utterly magnificent. She was overcome by an intoxicating blend of intimidation and fervent devotion.

‘I’ve displeased you,’ she said.

‘After what I said to you before … yes … you have somewhat.’

He said nothing more. She could not look away from him. His annoyance was palpable but, more than that, he was so assured and dominant in the situation that it made her heart beat a rapid tattoo.

‘I am sorry.’

She said it instinctively, but the way the words left her mouth, she knew that they had an added significance which she had not considered before. He simply stood there, commandingly tall and straight, his handsome face half-lit through shadows, and appraised her.

‘Are you?’

Why was her heart beating so rapidly? Why was her stomach weighed down with lead?

‘Yes … Lord Melbourne.’

He took two steady paces towards her, taller than ever, it seemed, and looked down. ‘Your behaviour was rash and defiant.’

‘I know. I must not do it again … My Lord.’

‘No. You must not.’

His manner was familiar yet new; he was still her Melbourne yet with a determined, assertive edge which thrilled her. She wanted him more than ever. She wanted anything and everything.

Victoria stood quite still and waited, looking up at him for any morsel he would drop her way. Expectation hung between them like an apple, ripe and red, dangling from the highest branch. Still he stood, silent, magnificent. And then, after the very air itself seemed to await his next words, at last, he spoke.

‘Go to the bureau. Stand before it, facing it.’

Her breath hitched. Her vision clouded. She blinked it away. She wanted to run over, to prove to him that she would do exactly as he bid, but thought that would be unseemly, so she walked quite steadily and carefully until she was standing before her bureau.

She heard slow footsteps, seemingly moving away from her, but she soon detected the unmistakable sound of a key being turned in the lock. And then the footsteps approached. Compulsion made her
move her head round to look for him.

‘Don’t turn around. I didn’t tell you to turn around. Face forward. Don’t look back.’

She darted her head back round to the front and looked out at the gardens instead. How she managed to stay upright, she was not sure. Her legs felt as if they would melt beneath her; her head swam with anticipation. Seconds ticked away. He did nothing. He said nothing, until, ‘Bend over the bureau, reach forward and grip the other side.’

She did so. How strange it felt, how at odds with the staunchly upright stance which had been drummed into her since she was a child. She gripped the wood and felt its solid coolness digging into the underside of her knuckles.

Again, silence, again, stillness. Expectation threatened to force her up, to turn and confront him, to demand of him why he tormented her so … and yet, she knew that what he was doing was right. Whatever he deemed right for her would be so. Seconds passed, minutes it seemed.

And then – at last – she felt it. He had taken hold of her skirts, underskirts and all, and was lifting them. A cool rush of air caressed her ankles and drifted up her legs. He placed the weighty layers over her back and the bureau. She was there before him in only her drawers. Her breath juddered as she felt warm fingers tug at the laces holding them up and then gently guide them down. She was glad she was facing away from him as her face was burning red. And yet she was not ashamed, she was not afraid. She lay there, quite exposed to him, and the strangest contentment sank through her. She could not recall the last person to see her bare backside. Even her lady’s maids averted their eyes when she changed into her nightclothes. Only him.

More waiting, but in that still glimmering, she heard from him the slightest exhalation of breath. He was looking at her, he was staring at her; she knew it.

‘Do you remember our word?’ His voice was close, intimate, and as she focused she could sense him right beside her, sense the strength of him, the heat of him, the very essence of him which she knew and loved so well, now concentrated in pure physicality.

‘Y … yes … My Lord.’

‘Tell me.’ His voice was rich and low, coiling into her.

‘Orchid, sir.’

‘If at any time you wish me to stop, you will say that word. I will stop immediately, but only if I hear that. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

He leaned into her, she felt it, and his words were slipped into her ear like a silken ribbon. ‘What I’m about to do, I am doing for you. You know that, don’t you?’

She could barely speak and gave a short, furtive nod.

He continued, softly, intimately, as if pouring his soul into hers. ‘I believe that you will take this and absorb it. But I will give you one last opportunity. If you wish to change your mind, tell me now, because once I begin this, it will start us both down a path which will reveal more than either could perhaps ever imagine. So I ask you now, Victoria … do you wish to change your mind? Do you wish me not to proceed?’
She drew in the deepest breath, there, lying exposed over her bureau, her backside cool and expectant for him. Victoria hesitated, not due to doubt, but allowing it time to come should it wish. But doubt was nowhere to be found.

‘No, sir. I wish you to continue.’

And she heard the slightest breath out from him, as if he too released the last of his misgivings. ‘Very well. I will give you ten today, and I ask you to count each one. When you feel a slap, you will count it clearly out loud. Do you understand?’

Was this usual? In her confusion, she did not respond.

‘Do you understand?’ he repeated, his voice sterner this time.

‘Yes.’

‘Yes …?’ he prompted, poised, waiting for everything to align.

‘Yes, My Lord,’ she corrected.

Silence again. That bright, sparkling silence with everything held, everything contained in gleamingly potent anticipation.

And then –

Thwack!

A ringing sound echoed around her drawing room, bouncing off the hard walls and windows, and with it there came a flash of pain which shone briefly, brilliantly, over the right cheek of her backside. It did not linger and for an instant forced her to question what exactly it was, but it still forced out an instinctive cry of surprise. The pain was sharp, exquisite, and before she could absorb it it was replaced by warm, ripe heat.

It had started.

How extraordinary, how strangely wonderful. Immediately, her belly writhed and tugged within her. Immediately, she grew curious. She wanted to feel it again. How had it felt? How had she responded? She craved another.

But nothing happened.

She waited. Oh, please, please, another.

Still nothing. She could hear him behind her, his breath faster than usual. Why wasn’t he giving her more? And she remembered. She was supposed to count.

‘One,’ she stated, proud of the clear conviction in her voice.

Thwack! Another. On the same cheek, the sting followed by the glow. How curious it was, how gloriously real and vivid. How utterly different to every single moment of her life so far.

‘Two.’

Thwack! The left side this time, and the pain intensified, but she delighted in it, pushing back for more. She responded instantly this time, ‘Three,’ and he quickly gave her another.
‘Four.’

And again, harder.

‘Five!’

She felt for a moment his other hand rest on her lower back, gently, smoothly. His thumb rubbed over her skin and the softness of it in contrast to the sharp heat from his spanking was the most beautiful thing. And then – *thwack!* Oh, that was the hardest yet and she loved it because it was from him. His hands were on her and touching her and giving to her.

‘S-six!’

*Don’t stop, please, please don’t stop.*

The next one pinged around the room and she gasped with the beauty of it. It hurt, oh, it hurt and her backside was throbbing red, bright and burning, and she was so very, very alive.

He exhaled sharply before the next and his hand connected with her flesh so hard she gasped with the sweet agony of it, but still she craved more. ‘S…seven,’ she managed, her mind and body spinning with it all.

Another. She closed her eyes and a tear fell from one, a tear propelled by release. ‘Eight.’ Her words were fainter now, but only because she seemed to be drifting, floating away, removed to a place where there was only her and him. Only two more. Please don’t end, please don’t end this connection, this perfect communion between them both.

*Thwack!* She groaned this time, as she knew what was coming and it settled in her soul with quickly rooting certainty. ‘Nine.’

And she had to wait and she wanted to wait because with the next one it would be over. Ten, he had said. Only ten.

A sharp intake of breath and then – *Thwack!*

Oh, it stung, it hurt, it gleamed from her, it made her fly. ‘Ten!’ she cried and sobbed. She lay there, sobs heaving from her, not through shame, although she could picture her naked red rump quivering indignantly for his eyes only, not through the pain, although she wondered how she would sit. She was crying because it was over, because he wasn’t touching her any longer and she wanted him to touch her all the time and everywhere. He was right. She needed it. She adored it.

‘I have finished,’ he said, and she noted the deep breaths he was taking. He pulled up her drawers and brought her skirts back down. The cool of the material contrasted with the burn of her rump. ‘You may stand up now.’

Slowly, gingerly, she pushed herself up from the bureau. She turned to face him. A flicker of alarm passed over his face when he saw her tears, and she wanted him to know how wonderful it was so she said something quite naturally for him. ‘Thank you, Lord Melbourne.’ And she spoke her truth. ‘You were right.’

He stared into her and for the merest moment she thought he would take her and kiss her. There was a look of such open adoration in his face she loved him like never before.

He searched her face as if seeing her for the first time. ‘By God, I was,’ he said, almost to himself.
For a time they stood in silence and he continued to study her. Then he drew his hand up to her face and his forefinger caught one of her tears. ‘Are you alright?’ he asked with aching tenderness.

She nodded. ‘Yes. I am the best I have ever been. Are you alright? Your hand must sting.’ She reached out to look at it but he took a step back, giving a slight shake of his head and bringing his hands behind his back.

‘We should … arrange a time for your meeting with the Tenants’ Association, Ma’am, and draw up a speech.’ He backed away from her and drew out some papers from a briefcase.

‘Yes, of course, yes … My … yes, Lord M.’

He glanced up and gave her the briefest smile, affirming the switch back to their usual dynamic. They attended to business with remarkable ease. It made her happier than ever to know that they could still continue as usual, despite the heat still blooming from her backside.

When they had finished, as in every other day, he gathered his things to leave and said, ‘I believe that is all for today, Ma’am. I have business in the House.’

Already she was in despair, but she took a calming breath and tried not to show it. ‘When will I see you again?’

‘Tomorrow, Ma’am. I’ll bring the box as usual.’

She could not prevent herself wringing her hands together and asking, ‘Will … will we … will you … do it again?’

He hesitated then fixed her with his eyes and said, ‘Of course.’

‘When?’

He didn’t answer and he gave her a look which she knew to be reproach. She was not to ask such questions. ‘I’m sorry, I … I can be impatient.’

‘I am aware of that, Ma’am.’

‘I am sorry too for my behaviour with the French Ambassador. It was foolish and naïve.’

‘It can be mended, do not fear.’

‘So you do not hold it against me?’

‘Well, Ma’am … you have – how to put it? – atoned for it, have you not?’

‘I suppose I have.’

He bowed with effortless grace. ‘Good day, Ma’am. Until tomorrow.’

‘Goodbye, Lord M … and thank you for … all you have aided me with today.’

He smiled and moved to the door. When he reached it he hesitated and turned back briefly. ‘Calamine ointment, I believe, is useful in these circumstances.’

Chapter End Notes
You see? Good things come to those who wait. And there'll be even better things to come.

Thank you for your patience.

Thoughts, as ever, are hugely appreciated. x
Aglow.

This was the word which inhabited Victoria’s mind in the hours following what had occurred between her and her Prime Minister.

She was aglow.

Her backside was, certainly.

It stung a little when her skirts rubbed in a certain way, but only a little, and after that, it simply pulsed, a mild throb which served to remind her of what had happened.

But it was not only her backside. She herself glowed. She beamed. She floated. She greeted courtiers with a radiant happiness which caught them by surprise, and bestowed compliments and smiles in a concentrated form of her natural ease.

Her mother was suspicious. ‘You are in a good mood, Drina,’ she commented quizzically over the watercress soup at dinner.

‘It has been a productive day,’ replied the Queen.

‘You met with Monsieur Lepretre, did you not? How was the meeting?’

‘Very good. Very good indeed.’

‘Yet I heard he was in a rage when he left here,’ added John Conroy tersely.

Victoria allowed her shoulders to rise in indifference. ‘Perhaps he was. But there are certain things which need to be said. The meeting was good, I said, did I not?’

Her mother gave a little laugh. ‘You do talk strangely at times, Drina.’

‘And there it is,’ she added.

‘Melbourne told me the ambassador would require placating,’ asserted Sir John with his usual pithy dryness.

‘In which case, we shall do so.’ She shifted in her seat and felt a throb from her rump. She did it again. It spread further, between her legs, and the tugging began, the tugging which had been present for so long now. She squirmed a little more to relieve it; as enjoyable as it was, it a distraction at the dinner table.
‘Are you uncomfortable?’ queried her mother.

‘My corset, that is all.’

A flush caught Conroy’s wolf-like cheekbones at the reference to her underwear. It gave her immense satisfaction to make him uncomfortable. If only he knew the real reason for her fidgeting.

--xoOox--

Skerrett prepared her for bed that night and Victoria was careful not to reveal her behind to her. This was not difficult; her lady’s maid always averted her eyes when naked royal flesh presented itself. But after she had left and the Queen was safely encompassed alone in her chamber, Victoria rose from her bed and padded over to the long looking glass. She turned, and felt herself blushing, but gently lifted her nightgown, revealing her naked behind. It was a little flushed still but had no discernible marks. Victoria ran her hand over it, remembering the last hand which had done so. The skin was warm and smooth to the touch.

Oh, how she longed for that touch again.

She pictured herself, flattened over the bureau, backside brazenly exposed for him, his hand coming down onto it time and again, counting each stroke, needing them, wanting them, craving more. The pulling inside was unbearable, her longing made her dizzy. Would it never end? How to assuage it? How to answer its demands? She knew a little but not enough. She suspected, she wondered, but she could not stop it: that throbbing which threatened to burn her reason, not on the abused flesh, but deep inside, calling for more.

Victoria was emboldened by the earthy vitality of her body and pulled her nightdress completely off, leaving herself entirely naked. She turned full on to the mirror and stared. She had not done so for as long as she could remember. She imagined Melbourne studying her and tried seeing herself with his eyes. Would he be pleased? Her cheeks burned red but she stayed there and looked.

Her breasts were round and plump and sat pertly on the gentle curves of her body. The dark pink nipples hardened in the cool air. Victoria drew a hand up over her waist and gently cupped one breast, relieving the pull of its weight for a moment. Then that same hand ran down again, over her hips, then slowly, daring itself almost, it settled at the downy dark hairs between her legs.

There, something called to her. She sought down further and her belly leapt in anticipation. She closed her eyes and saw him. Only him. Always him. Standing there behind her, staring down, that same look of focused authority on his face. Beautiful, perfect control. Her fingers worked down further and touched … Something jolted inside her and her eyes darted open.

Dash stirred from his basket and whined. Her own wide eyes stared back at her in the mirror and her curiosity turned to apprehension. It was not for her to reveal these things.

He could. He would. She had waited and she would wait more.

Tugging her nightgown back over her head she crept into bed, pulled the bedclothes up tight around her, and tried to sleep.

Her dreams were him.

--xoOox--

Victoria was proud of the way she reined in her anticipation when her Prime Minister arrived the next day. There had never been a day when his arrival had not been anticipated, but on this morning
there was clearly more cause for apprehension.

He greeted her in his usual manner and stood before her, hands clasped before him. ‘How are you today, Your Majesty?’

‘Very well, Lord M. I am most well, in fact.’

‘You slept well, I hope.’

‘I did. And you?’

His eyes did that little dance of consideration which defined him. ‘It took me some time to sleep. I was drafting a letter to Monsieur Lepretre.’

‘Oh. Are you happy with it?’

‘Yes. He will be satisfied, I believe. Shall we?’ He motioned to the dispatch box. She duly sat at it and set about work. Neither mentioned any more on the other matter.

--xoOox--

The following days were similar. As in those intervening days between his decision and the first time, neither spoke about nor referred to it.

On the fifth day after, they rode out together as usual through the tree lined avenues of the palace gardens.

Victoria was jolted gently back and forth by her ride. The rhythm of it, the nudge against her backside, reminded her. She dared.

‘I consider myself a patient woman, Lord M.’

He was silent. She glanced at him and thought she detected a smirk tug at his mouth. He turned his head from her.

‘Would you not agree?’ she pressed.

‘In some matters, certainly, Ma’am.’

‘But not others?’

‘You can be hot-headed at times, Ma’am. You know this as well as any.’

She swallowed back a laugh. ‘Hot-headed? You speak very freely, Lord M.’

His smirk deepened. ‘I apologise if I have offended you, Ma’am.’

‘You never offend me. Perhaps you should.’

‘Why ever would I wish to do that, Ma’am?’

‘Perhaps I am too even-tempered for you. I feel I should be provoking your contempt.’

‘Contempt?’ He turned and looked at her as their horses carried them in a smooth rocking motion along the path. His eyes had not lost their humour. ‘Surely that is not something to encourage, Ma’am?’
'It is if …'

‘If?’

‘If it would mean further … chastisement.’

He did not reply but she marked a deepening of his smile before he turned his head to the front again.

‘It has been five days,’ she continued.

He adjusted the reins in his hands, studying them as he spoke. ‘It is not for you to mark these things. They happen when it is right.’

‘But I feel -!’ She cut herself off and started again. ‘Do you not feel the time is right?’

He turned and looked into her again, that same intense, darkening look which had started them on their venture. Melbourne gave no response but with that look her heart soared and her hopes with it. They continued the ride in silence, but a deep contentment drifted from them like a rising mist, mingling, joining, binding them together.

--xoOox--

There was a council meeting later that day and the Queen returned to her drawing room afterwards to finalise matters with the Prime Minister. They sat a respectable distance apart on the chaise and discussed the appointment of a new Chief Whip. This concluded the business of the day. But Victoria could not bear the thought of him leaving. She stood quickly and stood a little way off, her fingers clasped tightly, the only sign of the tension which gripped her from top to toe. Their discussion earlier had emboldened her, but she was not quite sure how to go about it.

‘Is there another matter on your mind, Your Majesty?’ asked Melbourne, curiosity in his voice, false naivety teasing her.

‘No. We have dealt with it all, have we not?’ She could tease back.

‘Indeed.’

‘Well then, what can you possibly mean?’ She looked straight at him, her words loaded with intent.

He held her gaze but did not at first respond.

‘You seem at odds,’ he eventually said.

‘Can you sense this?’

‘I can.’

‘And you are right … My Lord.’

She watched him intently, how his mouth tensed slightly, the corners of his eyes narrowed for an instant, his chest rose and fell as his breathing accelerated. She dared allow herself a brewing sense of victory. It was happening again.

‘In that case,’ he started, his voice low and slow and seeping into her, ‘it should be addressed.’

‘I would be most grateful if it were, My Lord.’
He proceeded to turn his head away from her, and with slow deliberation, aimed, she knew, at frustrating her expectation, he put each document and paper away with careful exactitude. When at last he had finished and buckled his portmanteau, she moved towards the bureau.

‘No!’

She had never heard him so forceful. It stopped her breath briefly and caused her insides to prance.

‘Don’t move. Not like that this time.’

She turned back, her heart pounding, her limbs juddering.

He remained seated, and leaned back, hands clasped together in his lap. He cocked his head the slightest amount and studied her. ‘You are more needy than even I had anticipated.’

She swallowed. ‘Is that a good thing, My Lord?’

He considered for a moment. ‘Yes. I think it is.’

Silence again. She prided herself on not flinging herself at him there and then.

‘Come here,’ he said at last and the most wonderful sensation brimmed within her, a mixture of insistent sharpness and billowing waves. It reminded her of when she had touched herself the other night. She sensed there could be more if she obeyed him.

She walked over and stood directly before him. Melbourne leaned forward and took first one of her hands in his and then the other.

Her breath caught with the sudden, sweet intimacy of it. He had never held her hands before, except when kneeling to kiss one of them. But now! Oh, it was as good as his thrashing of her. Sensation, touch, sweet, lovely strokes of those warm, strong fingers over her knuckles, running in a circle over her palms, holding her, keeping her safe, close, his, only his. And she could not look at him; the beauty of it, of him, blinded her. She threw her head up and closed her eyes, gasping in a breath. His grip on her tightened.

‘Look at me.’

Was it a command? Perhaps, but it was too good, too adoring for her to resent it. She pulled her head back down and met his eyes. His lips rose at the corners into a smile of sorts and with that he was tugging her down towards him, pulling her inexorably closer.

For a moment she wondered if she were to sit across his lap, but then his hands moved with sudden assertiveness to her waist, making her gasp. He seemed to like that as his eyes flicked briefly to hers and his smile deepened. He turned her to face side on to him and she let his strength guide her. He pulled again and she found herself lying face down on her belly across his long legs.

She could scarce breathe, not only with the heady expectation of what was to come, but with the pressure of lying flat across him. Her corset dug in almost cruelly.

But when she felt him lifting her skirts and tugging down her drawers, any discomfort was quashed.

When the cool air tickled her bare skin again, she smiled a little to herself. Here they were again. Their secret. Their perfect sanctuary.

He was running his hand over her bare bottom, smoothing the flesh, exciting it. It felt so very
wonderful, but it was not enough. She squirmed a little in an effort to draw more from him.

He sniffed out a slight laugh but did not scold her. She almost wished he would. Oh, that he would hurry and spank her again. She needed that awakening, that confirmation of him.

‘Do you wish me to count again?’ she asked, willing him to begin.

He continued to run his hand over her bare skin, and seemed to be considering her question. ‘No,’ he said at length. ‘Not this time.’

And there she had it.

The first spank rang out around the room and she yelped in sudden surprise. He followed it up by stroking the abused flesh, soothing it immediately. Her right leg had jerked up with the shock. He pushed it down again firmly.

Then again, stinging on the other cheek. ‘Oh!’ she gasped. He did it again and then again, five quick spanks in succession. By the fifth her gasps had turned to a blissful sigh.

He stroked her again and she loved it as much as the spanks, but then, before she could get used to it, he intensified the next stroke and administered a blistering thwack. She shuddered on him and tried instinctively to push herself up.

‘Be still.’ His tone was not aggressive but she would not dispute him. She lay steadily across his legs again and stayed as still as she could while he started spanking her concertedly, alternating from one reddening cheek to the other.

She was glad she was not counting as she would have quickly lost track.

Again, as the glow deepened to a burn, that fire spread inwards, seeping into her very being and bringing with it such desire she feared for her sanity. Her eyes closed and she concentrated on all she was feeling, all she was and all she could be. He was not spanking hard this time, instead he seemed intent on prolonging it, and she found herself drifting into some sort of dream state.

But as she lay there, she grew aware of something further digging into her from underneath. Curious, she wriggled a little against it. He gave a groan which was forced from him in time with one of his spanks. She squirmed again. Another groan. It dawned on her slowly what exactly was pressing against her belly.

She had done that, she had made that happen. Despite lying prostrate across his knees, she felt suddenly empowered by this achievement. Their secret deepened. She would say nothing. He need not acknowledge it, but she knew. Arousal. He had told her: "The whole process for both the woman and the man is arousing."

He administered one final thwack, harder than the others, then stopped and sat back, breathing deeply.

She could not imagine leaving him. She could not imagine being away from his warmth and strength. Her desire was so profound that she was weak with it. And his desire rested beneath her, hard, jutting out, pressing against her. Neither moved. Her backside throbbed, but no worse than it had before. He had been gentler than the first time but had gone on for longer.

At length, however, she felt those wonderful hands clasp her waist and with unseemly strength she was hoisted there and then to her feet.
'That is all for today,' he said, standing and turning slightly away from her.

‘Yes, My Lord. Thank you.’

‘You took it well.’

‘I like it, Lord Melbourne. You know I do.’

He turned a little and gave her a soft smile. ‘You take it very well.’

‘And you? Do you like bestowing it?’

‘Why do you ask that?’

‘Because … I do not wish to disappoint you.’

He looked at her quite steadily but his brows furrowed a little. ‘Disappoint me?’

‘Yes.’

‘How could you ever disappoint me?’

‘Because I am the only one who seems to gain from it.’

He gave a lop-sided smile and let a brief chuckle fall from him. ‘What a very generous spirit you have. I assure you, we are both served equally well.’

‘Will you ever …?’

‘What?’

‘Will you ever … do anything else?’

He averted his eyes. A cold fear ran through her that she had asked too much.

‘These are tentative footsteps, Ma’am. The path ahead is not yet clear.’

‘But …’

‘Ma’am.’ He stressed the word, cutting her off and clarifying the return to their proper roles.

She cleared her head and said, ‘Yes, Lord M.’

He gathered his things and sorted times and arrangements for government business in the next few days. Their time together was ending. ‘Oh, by the way, Ma’am, we are negotiating a deal regarding the Poussin in the National Gallery. It will be staying here for the foreseeable future and will be put on display. I am optimistic that Paris will be satisfied with this.’

‘That is good news, Lord M.’

‘Indeed. I bid you good day, Ma’am.’ He bowed and turned for the door.

‘And you, Lord M?’ she called after him.

He looked back.

‘Will you be satisfied?’ she queried.
He met her gaze again steadily, his eyes luminous with assurance. ‘Oh yes, Ma’am. I will.’

Chapter End Notes

Apologies that this update took a while. I am writing steadily but am back at work and extremely busy. But, rest assured, there will be a lot more soon.

Comments, as always, are very welcome. LL x
Melbourne did not arrive the next morning.

He sent a message explaining that there was difficult business in the House and he could not meet with the Queen until later, possibly not at all that day.

It would not be quite appropriate to say Victoria sulked, but her household knew that Her Majesty was best left uninterrupted.

At about 3 o’clock, Emma Portman dared venture into the drawing room to suggest a game. ‘Ma’am?’

‘What?’ came the pithy response.

‘Would you care for Bagatelle?’

Victoria huffed. ‘Bagatelle? Do I strike you as being in the mood for Bagatelle?’

Lady Portman’s inhaled patiently. ‘Forgive me, Ma’am. You seem a little aggrieved, so I thought perhaps a game would distract you from … whatever it is troubling you.’

Victoria held up a hand in confused query. ‘I am not troubled. Do I have reason to be troubled?’

Emma chose her next words carefully. ‘Not that I know of, Ma’am.’

‘So why do you say this?’

Her Lady-in-Waiting wetted her lips before saying, ‘William has not visited today.’ She then added by way of cover, ‘And I know how important it is for you to deal with government business efficiently.’

Victoria started at the use of his first name. A pang of resentment jolted through her that Lady Portman could call him that whereas she could not. But then, she could call him My Lord and Sir, and that pleased her greatly. ‘Lord M sent word,’ she explained. ‘There is much to deal with at Westminster. He may not be able to come, that is all.’

Silence fell between the two women. Emma stood there, her lips pursed. ‘Ma’am …’

‘What?’

‘Have you and the Prime Minister had a misunderstanding of some kind?’

Victoria’s heart rate quickened. She did not like questions about her relationship with her Prime
Minister. ‘I beg your pardon?’

Emma frowned and spoke earnestly. ‘He has seemed distracted of late … as if there is something occupying his thoughts deeply … and you are not yourself. He has not visited today. I am concerned and wish you to know that I will discuss matters with him if need be. Ma’am. I must ask … has there been a disagreement between you?’

Victoria almost laughed aloud. ‘No! Nothing of the sort! I told you – there is troubling business in the House. He has sent me a note.’ She thrust the paper containing his message across to Emma, who glanced at it with serious consideration.

But the Queen was troubled at Lady Portman’s observations. ‘How do you mean, he has been distracted? Do you mean … unhappy?’ Her stomach turned over with anxiety. Had their activities upset him? She could not bear the thought of him not adoring it as she did.

Emma sighed a little and wrung her hands, as if searching for meaning to what she had said. ‘No, I don’t mean that exactly, I suppose. If anything, he has seemed content, but in a more self-absorbed way. William is usually so attentive to others. He has been distanced, I would say, as if there is a matter occupying his thoughts deeply.’

Victoria allowed herself a small smile. Content and distanced … thinking about her, she hoped.

‘Well, it is nothing to do with me, I assure you.’ The mood in the room was fractious, however. She sighed and let her embroidery drop. ‘Perhaps we should do something after all. Bagatelle may well be diverting.’

But just as she looked about for the board, the door opened abruptly.

Her Prime Minister entered, striding forcibly into the room. Lord Melbourne was clearly harassed and swept a hand through his hair distractedly, glancing from one to the other without any real focus.

Victoria stood up instinctively and Emma declared, ‘William! We were just speaking of you.’

He gave a terse smile and mumbled, ‘Oh. Nothing bad, I hope.’

Emma laughed it off. ‘No, not at all. We were not expecting you today.’

‘I couldn’t get away. There’s an infernal debate raging and …’ He glanced at Victoria standing there, her eyes bright, her breath coming fast. ‘Your Majesty, I’m forgetting myself.’ With that, he bent at the knee, took her hand and kissed it, his lips nudging firmly against the warmth of her knuckles.

‘Lord M …’ she started, her mouth open to continue, but she found herself quite overcome at his sudden arrival and could manage no more.

‘We were just contemplating a game of Bagatelle, William. Would you care to play?’ suggested Emma with cloying optimism.

‘Umm …’ He said no more, but his brows knitted together in a ragged line of dismay.

‘Quite,’ added Victoria peremptorily. ‘It was Lady Portman’s idea. I am not the slightest bit interested either.’

‘I …’ he tried again, looking sidelong at the Queen. ‘It is simply that I … have other matters on my mind.’ Victoria hoped she was one of them.

There was an awkward silence, the kind which everyone hoped someone would take the lead and fill
it but which no one managed to. Victoria could not stand it. ‘I suppose we should go through the box. It has been sitting on the bureau since morning.’

Lady Portman laughed. ‘Oh, Your Majesty! You are allowed one day off now and again. I’m sure there is nothing so urgent that it cannot be dealt with tomorrow.’

Victoria knew she was right, but fixed her with a glare nonetheless. Emma Portman did not appreciate the Queen’s silent rebuke and looked to her long-standing friend for support. ‘I’m sure you will back me up on that, Lord Melbourne?’

William gripped his hands before him and did not meet her eyes. ‘Actually, there are certain matters which do require Her Majesty’s urgent inspection.’

‘Are there?’ Emma practically barked it out, angered at the gentle rebuke the Prime Minister had meted out. She stood, her lips pursed, daring him to change his mind. He did not, but instead turned his head towards the Queen. Victoria stared back at him and a faint smile of triumph caught her face.

Emma looked from one to the other and was not entirely sure what to make of it. One thing she could tell: she was no longer wanted.

‘Your Majesty, William … I shall leave you to see to the dispatches … as they are of such vital importance.’ She turned on her heels rather more dramatically than she had intended and nearly knocked a vase over in the process. ‘Ma’am … I am dining tonight, as arranged.’

Victoria barely seemed to hear her. ‘Yes, thank you,’ she muttered, before at last looking at her vaguely and offering a smile.

‘Good day, Ma’am,’ Emma said, offering an abrupt curtsy and leaving, shutting the door loudly behind her.

Lord M gave a slight sigh and let his head hang back a little, his eyes closed. Then, wearily, he paced over to the dispatch box. But, halfway there he stopped and gave a deeper sigh. ‘I am not sure I am in the mood for the dispatches, after all. I don’t suppose it will matter if we wait until tomorrow.’

‘Nothing too urgent?’ asked the Queen gently.

He gave a fleeting half-smile. ‘No.’

‘You look weary, Lord M. Clearly you have had a tiresome day.’

‘A frustrating one, yes, Ma’am.’ He inhaled deeply and she noticed his clenched fists. ‘This bill will be difficult. Peel is … an insufferable prig at times!’ He spat out the word, his wrath quickly piqued. ‘He will not listen to reason! How he expects to maintain order without this bill going through, is beyond me. Yet he insists on egging his members on to oppose even the most obvious measures for the good of all.’

His upset pained her and she resisted the urge to rush to him and comfort. Instead, she stood, her hands clasped together and simply said, rather pathetically she felt, ‘You must not let him get to you so.’

‘Get to me? Get to the country, you mean!’ he exclaimed, his eyes wide with tangible fury. ‘He is stubborn and intractable and he will do very real damage if he has the chance! He drains me, truly he does!’

She wanted to run to him, to embrace him. He was so aggrieved. His face was grey and tired, his
eyes sunken, his hair ruffled.

‘Lord M … it is not like you to be so disheartened.’

He threw his hands out to the sides in a gesture of near defeat. ‘I apologise, Ma’am. I am but human. And perhaps the battles and discourses of Parliament are no longer for me. I should leave them to younger men.’

‘You are not old!’

He looked at her wryly and a slight smile caught the corner of his mouth. ‘I feel it.’

‘Lord M … do not speak so.’

He let his shoulders drop as if the weight of carrying the country’s burdens had truly sapped him. ‘Your Majesty, perhaps I should be going. I feel I am not good company at the moment. I have much on my mind.’ He drew a hand wearily down over his face before turning to leave.

She could not bear it. ‘No! You must not go.’

Melbourne huffed a little, she saw it. ‘I must write a response ready for Prime Minister’s Questions tomorrow. The opposition is sure to be on the attack. They must not get the upper hand again.’

‘Forgive me, Lord M.’ She hurried over closer to him. ‘But you do not seem to be in a mood to concentrate on that.’

‘Perhaps not, but I must focus my mind somehow.’

He stood, distracted, detached, the tips of his fingers working over his troubled brow.

She took a tentative step towards him, wary of his dark mood, but at the same time emboldened by it. ‘Perhaps I can help focus your mind?’

He turned to look at her slowly, clear surprise etched on his face at her query. ‘Ma’am?’

His use of the title dismayed her. Perhaps he really was best left alone today, but she tried again. ‘Perhaps I can help release some of the tension which besets your thoughts … My Lord?’

He closed his eyes and turned away. Her heart beat fast in her chest; the air grew thick around her. ‘You mean …?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘But it was only yesterday that …’

‘I am quite recovered. I am ready.’

He frowned a little. ‘It is not for you to suggest ways to help me. What happens between us is … for you.’

‘You said yesterday you would seek satisfaction too.’

‘Yes, but I derive that entirely through your …’ Here he looked at her, and his green eyes were bright with the communion between them. ‘… own satisfaction.’
She gave him a slight smile. ‘Then today too … I will be satisfied.’

He stood, and she noted his own breathing grow faster. ‘Ma’am …’

She squeezed her eyes shut in frustration. ‘Stop calling me that.’

He quirked an eyebrow.

‘My Lord … I seek satisfaction for us both.’

Melbourne stood in silence, wrestling with an inner conflict. The muscle in his jaw worked fast. His gaze was fixed on a spot on the floor. And then, after what seemed endless minutes, he spoke.

‘Remove your gown.’

She started somewhat. ‘Excuse me?’ She genuinely had not understood.

He turned and fixed her with his eyes at last and she read a dark sincerity in them which made her pulse quicken further. ‘I said … remove your gown.’

‘I … I can’t.’

‘Why not?’

‘I don’t have my lady’s maid.’

He tried to stifle his scoff, a little unsuccessfully.

Silently, Melbourne paced over until he was standing directly behind her. She turned her head a little towards him.

‘Don’t look around,’ he warned. She quickly looked straight ahead again. She could hear his low breaths, feel the warmth of him close behind her. And then she felt his fingers tugging. He was undoing the hooks and eyes. He was releasing her gown. She felt the give as he undid each in turn with strong, assured fingers, working his way down to her waist.

‘There,’ he said. ‘Step out of it.’

Victoria was about to remove her clothing in front of her Prime Minister. It was something she had dreamt about, something that had dictated her night’s dreams and her day’s imaginings, and now it was upon her, she took a moment to sanctify the moment. She turned to him, and with remarkable boldness looked him straight in the eyes. He let his mouth rise at the corner as he had that first time she had called him ‘Lord M’. The profound depth of their compatibility struck home and she reached up to pull the sleeves down her arms. Then, wriggling a little, she pushed the silk down over her hips so that it tumbled to the floor.

He lost his smile and he blinked in quick succession but soon nodded to her. ‘And your skirts. Those too.’

She reached behind, finding the laces, and stepped out of her underskirts with ease and haste.

She stood there before him, in only her chemise and corset, stockings and drawers. Yet instead of shame she felt the deepest pride and an even deeper anticipation came to her.

He approached her again, slower than ever, each step forward placed down as if marking the precise spot it fell. He moved behind her again and his hands grazed over the backs of hers, not quite
holding, but touching nonetheless. Her breath caught but she daren’t look around. She felt his breath whispering at her ear and heard him.

‘I am at odds today, fractious, distracted. Are you content to humour that?’

She nodded.

‘Speak to me.’ Not a demand, but insistent nonetheless.

‘Yes, My Lord.’

He stayed there and now his palms pressed against the backs of hers and he ran them up her bare arms, up, smoothing over the skin, up, warming them, up, igniting her desire so profoundly she would take anything from him. Her head fell back a little and she offered him her neck, she hoped, she needed, she craved … a kiss, his lips upon her soft, inviting skin … But no. She felt his breath, sensed his own coiled lust held in with the most tormented restraint … and the most she felt was his heady desire ghosting over her flesh. For now, it would suffice.

‘What I ask you to do … you will do without question, without prevarication, will you not?’

She nodded. ‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘For you trust me?’

‘I trust you.’

With that he was gone from her and she nearly stumbled at the loss of his presence. She watched as he walked swiftly over to the bureau and brought over the heavy wooden desk chair with its high framed back. He placed it down in front of her, but turned it so that the back was facing her.

‘Take hold of it. Grip it.’

She did so, her skin cast with pimples of anticipation, her breath so ragged it pained.

He moved slightly into her line of sight and brought his hands to his collar. He tugged at his cravat, untying it in nimble fingers and removing it.

Then he moved to the chair and, tenderly almost, moved her hands together. She watched with wondrous bewilderment as he proceeded to tie the cravat around and under her wrists and fingers, over the wood of the chair back, binding her fast to it.

‘Too tight?’ he inquired, genuine concern in his voice.

She merely looked at him in shock. Should she resist this? Should she deplore it? She replied, ‘No, sir.’

‘Good.’

He finished swiftly, giving a satisfied grunt as he tightened the ends, tying her hands inextricably to the cool wood of the chair. He moved behind her again and again dripped his low voice so sweetly into her that she was lost to him.

‘Sometimes … it is good to be limited, to be constrained … to know that there are no options, no choices, to have that taken from you. Do you understand?’

‘I understand very well, My Lord.’
‘Yes … I know you do. And that is why I give it to you. Do you like it?’

‘You know I do, sir.’

‘I am going to spank you now.’

Her heart leapt at the prospect. The ache in her belly grew stronger still. ‘Yes, sir, please, sir.’

‘Move your legs out, away from the chair.’

She shuffled backwards.

‘More.’

She did so again. With her hands tied to the chair, so heavy it would not move, she had to bend right over and knew her backside was jutting out invitingly for him. She was still wearing her drawers, but soon enough he had tugged them down and she felt cool air on her bottom.

He made her wait. Her belly writhed with despairing need. The enforced position made her squirm against the bindings, but when she felt them she was eased. Like he had said, at times it was good to be limited.

When it came, it would be glorious. Touch. Him.

She moaned a little.

‘I beg your pardon?’ he asked, a slight teasing rise in his voice.

‘My Lord … please,’ she whispered, barely audibly, but he heard it.

‘Count,’ he said, sharply.

The brilliance of the first spank shone around the high walls of the room and she gasped with the suddenness of it before managing, ‘One!’ The second followed quickly and this time she groaned with satisfaction. ‘Two!’

Instinctively, she dipped her back, making her backside rise up, seeking out his hand again. He obliged, bringing it down hard on her right cheek. ‘Three.’

He was spanking harder than yesterday; it hurt more. The day had clearly frustrated him, but she would take his frustration, she would receive it and absolve him.

Another thwack. ‘Four!’ Another. ‘Fi … ve!’ The word caught in her throat. It hurt.

‘Remember your word,’ he cautioned.

She glanced up. There before her in the bay window was the white orchid he had given her a few months before. She writhed her hands on the chair, her body instinctively seeking freedom of movement. Another thwack. She paused before counting, the word ‘orchid’ forming instead on her lips.

She stared at her constrained hands, but the more she tried to lift them from the chair, the more reassurance she gained from not being able to do so. He waited, granting her time. She waited too, wondering which way her psyche would fall, and then, when she was ready, she pushed herself back for him again. The word which emerged was not ‘orchid’ but ‘six’.
Another followed, swift and harsh. Her fingers let go of the chair as if reaching out. But she refocused and instinctively gripped it hard again, curling them around the wood, enjoying the firmness of touch. ‘Seven.’

‘There will be ten,’ he said, his voice determined but allowing her foresight. She squirmed, but not away.

Her fingers clenched tight and she delighted in the simplicity of it all. Her. Him. The chair. Nothing else need exist. She could forget all else.

His hand descended again and the sting of it resonated across her warm flesh and echoed around the room. ‘Eight,’ she declared as clearly as she could, determined to show her resilience.

She heard him pull in a sharp breath, not only in preparation but satisfaction, she knew. She wanted to look around, she wanted to smile for him, to show him her pleasure. Not only was her backside glowing after the spanks, there was such a tugging, longing, insistent warmth between her legs that she pressed them together to try to stem it. He noticed.

‘Keep your legs apart for me.’

Her eyes widened in shock. His words sent a jolt of anxious delight through her. Could a man say those things? Should she comply? She did anyway.

She shifted her legs apart again and waited for the next spank. It came quickly and she barked out a ‘Nine!’ with the force of it.

‘Good girl.’

Her already liquid insides bubbled at this. He had always remained silent before, but now, his little words of guidance and reprimand thrilled her and brought a rush of elation, not only from the sensational burn of her skin, but with the knowledge that she, at that moment, was his one and only focus.

‘One more.’

She prepared herself, sensing it would gleam from her. He brought his hand down hard one final time. She gasped in with the force of it but managed a clear, ‘Ten!’

Victoria did not move from her position bent forward, hands on chair. He stood just behind her, his breathing rapid and deep. She adored that sound. It was so rare: Lord Melbourne in controlled disarray. And she had done that, she had drawn that from him.

Eventually, he pulled her drawers back up over her and placed his hands gently on her waist, guiding her tenderly into a standing position.

He did not at first relinquish his hold on her, and his words fell softly into her ear. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

He remained there, his soft breath so close to her that it disturbed the hairs around her ear and tickled. Her eyes closed. If she let her head fall back onto his shoulder at that moment, he would not mind, would he? She sensed she could. But just then his hands moved to her arms and his warm, strong fingers grazed down along the bare skin, making her exhale with delight.

His hands came to rest over hers, still tied to the chair back. ‘You are very good.’
‘Thank you, sir.’

‘Did it hurt your hands?’

‘Not unduly, sir.’ She paused before adding, ‘I liked it.’

‘I could tell.’ With that, he slowly and carefully unknotted his cravat from around her wrists. He placed the tie over the back of the chair but she was in no hurry to let go. When he took her hands in his and lifted them off, she stared down as he held her fingers, stroking them tenderly. She lifted her face to his, wanting his kiss more than ever.

‘I never dared hope you would be like this,’ he murmured, almost to himself.

‘Like what?’ she asked, as softly as him. Still he caressed her hands.

‘So attuned.’

She sucked in softly. ‘I want …’

‘What?’

‘I want more.’

‘More what?’

She wanted to say kiss, but it seemed too daring, too soon, and so, despite not being sure of what she herself asked, the word that emerged was, ‘Touch.’

‘Touch?’

‘Yes … My Lord.’ She called him that not because he asked her to, but because he was. He was the only one she would listen to, the only one she could trust, the only one she needed. She was his and he was hers. Her Lord. She raised her eyes to his and he held them with that same look of intelligent gentility that had defined him since their first meeting.

‘I believe, perhaps … you are ready.’

And he drew one hand from where he still held hers and moved it back to her waist. Slowly, he traced a path around the lacing of her drawers so that his fingertips rested over her belly button, then, still not breaking her gaze, he pushed his hand down into her drawers, down, seeking out the very heart of her.

His fingers were all she existed for. That ache inside was an actual pain, desperate for relief, and now, here, at last … at last.

He was right. She was ready.

Chapter End Notes
Well, that was a bit better than a game of Bagatelle!

Bit of a cliffie for you there. Next one'll be worth the wait, don't worry.

Your comments are still greatly appreciated. Thank you. x
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria finds clothing an encumbrance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he touched her, she wondered briefly if it was real. Perhaps she was asleep, dreaming. All her hopes, all her longings contained in the assured digits of this man.

For a moment he removed his hand, but her bewilderment lasted only briefly when he moved smoothly around behind her. She missed the eye-contact, but relished the mystery of touch without seeing him.

He stood behind but, with a give of his knees, was able to reach down once again to the place he sought.

At first she stared straight ahead, her eyes open but unseeing, her mouth gaping, breaths pulled in and pushed out with ragged confusion.

He touched her gently the first time, gauging her, learning. But he touched something, that place, that little part of her which had intrigued and confused her for so long. That part that was so private, so intensely personal she had guarded it even from self-discovery. She had touched it, rarely, in the depths of the darkest nights when ideas formed, vague and delirious. But it had scared her, and she had never lingered. She had needed another, someone to reveal it to her, someone to give it assent, to open her, to guide her.

And now he was here.

He drew his middle finger down through the valley of her folds, right down, reaching low under her, teasing and prodding the opening he found. Victoria gasped in and Melbourne hushed to her, close, his warm breath ghosting over the shell of her ear. He drew the finger up again and the underside grazed that place again, that place which was crying out for him, swollen, needy, craving his touch.

‘You are so very wet.’ His words were whispered into her, but they were clear and resolute.

They shocked her, prompting her to catch her breath. They seemed so very wicked, so very elemental and shocking, and yet the shock merely made her body behave quite strangely. She released a moan and found herself pressing down onto his hand, seeking out more of his touch. He obliged by stroking more firmly along her, up, circling that nub of needy flesh, drawing such sensation from her that it made her dizzy.

Her limbs seemed to be liquid, and if she wasn’t held up by his hand she feared she would drop onto the floor in an unseemly pile. His fingers and his touch were all. She was becoming him; he was her heartbeat and her every thought and her pleasure. Pleasure. Freedom. This was it. This was what she needed, what he alone could bring her. And she wanted it so much she would die if he stopped.

But he didn’t stop and his other hand moved under her arm and cupped her left breast. She was past
shock, she was past questioning. Everything he did was right. Her corset infuriated her, but she could still feel the searching grasp of him holding her tight. The nipple, frustratingly encased behind cotton and ribbing, tingled and ached, yearning for him. The friction of his touch gave some relief and she squirmed for more. Meanwhile the hand between her legs continued to coax such illimitable joy from her that her head fell back to rest against his chest. Her eyes closed and she gave herself up to his touch.

‘You have not touched yourself this way before?’ he asked, gently, the same charm and sincerity in he always demonstrated in his voice.

‘No,’ she murmured, pushing herself hard against him. She could feel his own arousal pressing against her back, but for now she could think only of what he was doing to her, and he was content to humour that.

She sighed out and arched herself against him and his fingers worked her hard. Her skin was cold as ice yet burning with fire. Her belly churned over inextricably with the approach of something extraordinary. Still his fingers moved over that place, wet and warm for him, circling, rubbing, stroking, feeling, finding.

‘Oh, my girl,’ he hummed against her ear and she sighed for him, reaching up and holding onto the hand clasped to her breast, pressing it harder yet against her. ‘My Victoria.’

She sobbed with the beauty of his voice. ‘Yes, yes, yours.’

His mouth hovered at her ear. How she wanted to turn her head and offer him her own, to let him have the starkest intimacy of all – her kiss. But then, suddenly, irrevocably, he brought his fingers hard over that perfect place – stroking, growing, stroking, drawing it out – and –

She was lost. She was flying yet grounded. Her body was fracturing, surely, but shattering so exquisitely that it would never be the same again. She sucked in a breath of shocking bliss as pleasure raged through her. She shook on him but he held her fast, not allowing her to cast it off, but making her absorb it all.

Eventually it left her, floating off her flesh, rising from her sated limbs, and she slumped against him, thick, limpid, heavy. Utterly, purely happy. Minutes of silent, still beauty passed as they stood locked together, his hands still supporting her.

‘Wha … what happened? What was that?’ She gasped, her hand coming up to her face, feeling for it as if surprised to find her body still intact.

‘Life. Pleasure … You.’

‘But … you did that to me. You did it.’

‘And for that I am most humbled, Ma’am.’

She sighed out a slight laugh at his return to convention, but she allowed him his sincerity. Victoria turned to him and dared to place her hands on the rise of his chest. He did not move away, but neither did he meet her eyes. ‘I didn’t know that could be.’

‘And now you do,’ he said gently, almost reserved.

‘It was beautiful. It was the most beautiful thing. I never knew there could be such beauty.’

‘Yes.’ He smiled softly at her realisation.
'I want it again,’ she said, her eyes alight like a child’s in a sweet shop.

It was his time to chuckle. ‘Still I see you need to be taught some patience, Ma’am.’

She chided him. ‘I have been most patient, Lord M. You have made me wait and I have done so.’

‘Indeed.’

Still they stood there, she resting her hands against him. At length, she let her gaze rise to his and said, ‘I wish to please you too.’

‘You do please me, Ma’am,’ he responded with considered civility.

‘No. I wish to please you in the way you pleased me. I wish to make you feel what I felt. I know now.’

At this he took a step back from her. ‘I would not presume, Ma’am.’ He may as well have been demurring on the offer of more dessert.

‘It would not be presumption,’ she insisted.

He drew in a breath and looked distractedly around the room. ‘Ma’am … I suggest you put your gown back on. I shall help you with the fastenings.’

‘My Lord?’

‘Ma’am,’ he stressed and bent to pick up her gown before holding it out to her and avoiding her gaze.

She took it and turned away from him. ‘Why won’t you let me do these things for you?’ An edge of petulance had crept into her voice.

‘Because I did not enter into this for myself but for you.’ He tied his neck scarf again with determined care.

‘But you told me that the process is arousing for the man as well. You told me you would seek satisfaction.’

‘Indeed.’

‘Well … surely that must be obtained through … a release of your own?’ Her frustration strained her words.

‘I derive satisfaction through yours, Ma’am … I … I exist to please you. It is my role. It is my duty.’

His persistent insistence on duty infuriated her. She spun to him in anger. ‘Oh, hell take your duty!’

It was his turn to stare at her, speechless, his eyes wide with shock.

‘Lord M, you distress me! Saying that you do this merely out of duty confuses me!’

He blinked twice, which she read rightly as his own bewilderment and doubt – she knew him too well. He stood with his fists clenched beside him, his mouth tight, his inner turmoil raging just below the controlled surface.

She was beyond restraint. ‘Do not tell me that what we do we do merely for me, I cannot stand it!'
What is touch when it is not shared? What is pleasure without taking and giving? You profess it yourself – pleasure is at its height when given and shared. I cannot exist for myself alone; it is stifling, it suffocates me! We share everything, Lord M: our thoughts, our hopes, anxieties, laughter … let us share it all! Let us share that intimacy, that pleasure you have shown me!

His eyes had held hers with aching devotion during her speech, but now he tried half-heartedly to return to the familiar. ‘Ma’am … you do not understand …’

‘Oh, but I do, I do!’ And she rushed over to him and pushed her body flush against his. Immediately her hand found the still hardened prominence between his legs. They both gasped with the sudden starkness of it. Her eyes widened as she felt the outline and size of his intimacy properly for the first time. But she was not deterred. He swayed back slightly, a vague attempt to move away from her, but she moved with him, preventing his evasion.

She pushed hard through the material of his breeches and found the outline of him, hard, long, thickly engorged. She held his gaze boldly and he did not look away. She stroked, unsure what to do, but emboldened by desire and need. She was not gentle; her lust dictated it that way. She rubbed over him, letting her hands drag over the length, framing it, building up a rhythmic discovery of shape and size. How she longed to open the buttons and slip her hand inside. She would have had he not let out a sound at that point which thrilled her so much she almost laughed aloud with delight: Melbourne moaned, a moan which echoed in his chest and rattled in his throat. A moan which spoke to her from a place which only they knew of; a place they shared; their secret, heady world of communion. She carried on, enthralled by his response, emboldened.

‘You like that,’ she dared, but it was voiced as a statement, not a question.

‘Yes,’ he swallowed back, unable to deny it.

‘Am I pleasing you, My Lord?’ she teased, still rubbing. He had grown even harder and larger under her ministrations.

His eyes were hooded but he was unable to look away from her. ‘You please me more than anything ever could.’ His words were low but they were his truth.

‘I can’t stop. I can’t stop touching you,’ she said.

‘No. Don’t stop.’ His words emerged as vocal desire.

She stroked every harder, long sweeps along the thick length before rubbing hard over the top, using the material of his breeches to her advantage. But still the cloth frustrated her.

‘I want to see you,’ she murmured. ‘Let me see you.’

But it was too late. With sudden dominance, he took hold of her wrist and held her hand hard against him. She understood and gripped all of him she could a final time. Another moan rose from him, deep, rattling, rumbling, and it was the most extraordinarily erotic thing she could ever hear. His mouth opened and his eyes stared but were blind. And then his breaths were staggered, ragged, but slowly, hesitatingly, he recovered himself.

She had done it. For a moment, the surprise of it made her slacken, giving him time to draw back and turn from her.

He was fumbling for something, his handkerchief she surmised, trying to tidy himself. Her mind worked quickly through her schooling in the biological sciences. She may be inexperienced but she recalled it was a messy business. She blushed that she had made this man so helpless to his natural
inclinations. But it was not a blush of shame, but pride.

‘I … I apologise … Ma’am …’ he stuttered.

‘Apologise? Whatever for?’

‘I was most hasty and unrestrained.’

‘Is that not usually the way?’

He looked briefly over his shoulder and through his clear embarrassment he could not help a little smile. ‘No. Things should be more … paced and … preferably unencumbered by clothing.’

‘So … why this time was it like that?’

‘Because … your touch was … greatly anticipated and …’ He hesitated before finishing softly, ‘it was perfection.’

She was silenced by his sincerity but her curiosity eventually got the better of her. ‘Despite the haste … did you like it?’

He turned around and smiled his little smile, and his eyes danced. ‘Yes. I liked it very much.’ Melbourne glanced down at his breeches. ‘But … I am left in a state of some disarray. I really must …’ Fortunately, he had worn black today and the thick cloth concealed any remnant, but his clothing clearly needed to be attended to. He looked over at the door to indicate his need to leave.

‘Could you … Do you mind?’ she asked, a shyness returning between them, as she reached down to pick up her gown.

‘Of course, Ma’am,’ he said, as if crossing to her to peruse a document. She stepped into her gown and pulled it over her shoulders. She felt it again, that glorious tugging of his fingers. It was as sensual and pleasurable to have him enclose her back into the silk as it had been to have him release it.

When he had finished, she turned to him and gave the softest smile. ‘Am I presentable again, Lord M?’

He looked her over as if she were about to address the Privy Council. ‘Perhaps a little adjustment …’ Reaching up, he tucked the stray locks of hair back into place. ‘There. As ready for your public as ever.’ Then, with a wry smirk, he glanced downwards to himself again. ‘I, on the other hand …’

She stifled a giggle behind her hand. ‘Are we desperately wicked?’

His face lost its mirth briefly. ‘To some, most certainly.’

‘To us?’

He eyed her curiously. ‘Does it feel wicked?’

She considered her situation and all that had transpired between them. ‘At times … but most wonderful too. The wickedness makes it more wonderful.’

His mouth ticked at the corner. ‘Indeed, Ma’am.’ Melbourne then drew in a breath and refocused. ‘I really must leave, Ma’am. I will come early tomorrow and go through both days’ dispatches.’ He turned to pick up his cases.
‘Are you feeling a little less aggrieved than earlier, Lord M?’

‘Aggrieved, Ma’am?’ His eyebrows rose in query.

‘You were most upset after your day in the House. Peel was vexing you greatly.’

He pouted in an effort to recall. ‘So he was. I had quite forgotten.’

‘Then that is a good thing, is it not?’

He smiled. ‘Yes, Ma’am. It is a very good thing.’

He moved towards the door, but she called, ‘Lord M!’ and hurried over to him. He hesitated. Victoria reached out and took his hand. Considering what had happened between them, it was a gesture of innocent simplicity.

And, standing on her tiptoes, she reached up and kissed him on the cheek, a fleeting, soft kiss, barely there, a whisper of a kiss, but the warmest nonetheless. And she imparted against his skin, ‘Thank you.’

He looked down at her, adoration shining from his eyes. She had given the most precious gift of all.

He dampened his lips and stared at hers and she wanted his kiss more than air itself. For the merest moment she thought it would happen, but then those lips instead rose into his tenderest smile and he said, ‘Thank you, Ma’am.’

Lord M bowed a little and left her.

Chapter End Notes

God, I love him.

Thoughts, as ever, very gratefully received.

Incidentally - look away now if easily offended - I so wanted to summarise this chapter as 'Lord M comes in his pants.' But I didn't.
Days passed. Her Prime Minister visited to deal with business, but there was little time to be alone save for official items as either she or he would be called away on other matters. Whereas before this would have brought a feeling of desolation to Her Majesty, as things now stood, she could be patient. She was learning.

His touch endured. It seemed to have seeped into every fibre of her body where the heat of it resided, brewing, reminding her of what they shared. She lay at night and ran her hands over her body, grazing her hardened nipples, imagining his hands on them, then ghosting down over the ever-ready flesh between her legs. She would find that place, that newly discovered key to undiluted wonders, but it was for him. She longed for those sensations again but had no desire to spoil the anticipation and longing of having him draw them from her, and so she resisted. She lay quite still and remembered, remembered his spankings, remembered his soothings, remembered his groan as he released his pleasure under her touch.

And she was utterly happy. Her happiness gleamed off her as brightly as the sun off the sea.

It did not go unnoticed.

‘You seem very content at the moment, Your Majesty,’ commented Lady Portman one day over whist. Harriet Sutherland dealt a hand, turning the last card up for trumps: clubs. Victoria studied her cards carefully, a faint smile on her face.

‘I have no reason not to be content,’ she replied. She started the next trick, placing her card down emphatically. The court had moved to Windsor for a few days and the glare of the sun shone in across their game.

‘It is only that I had feared for you a little.’ Emma played a card.

‘Oh. Why?’

‘You seemed distracted. You recall I was concerned that your relationship with Lord Melbourne had suffered a setback.’

Victoria felt her cheeks reddening. She cursed herself for her inability to prevent the transparency of her emotions. ‘I thought I had allayed your fears on that matter.’

‘Forgive me, Ma’am. Your mood does seem to vary depending on the Prime Minister’s movements. He has not been present much this week … yet the last time he visited he spent a very long time alone with you.’

Victoria’s heart juddered. Her mouth ran dry. She forced herself to train her eyes on the hand of
cards she clutched so tightly they bent. ‘And by this you mean?’

Lady Portman and the Duchess of Sutherland glanced at each other. ‘Ma’am … there is talk again that Lord Melbourne holds too much sway over you.’

She bristled. ‘Sway? He is a good advisor and, yes, a confidante when necessary. A Queen needs people she can rely on and trust. Lord M is most assuring in this way.’

‘Ma’am …’ interrupted Harriet Sutherland.

‘What?’ she shot her lady a glare.

Harriet swallowed but continued nonetheless. ‘They are saying that you spend more time than is necessary alone in his company.’ Harriet placed the six of hearts down on the table.

Victoria struggled to remain composed. ‘They? Who are they?’

‘The court.’

‘Is this discussed in society?’

‘I could not say, Ma’am.’

‘You could as I command you to.’

Emma interjected quickly. ‘Of course it is, Ma’am. You are the most popular topic of conversation throughout the country.’

She stiffened indignantly. ‘And so my spending time alone with my Prime Minister – a necessary thing for the good of the nation! – is gossiped on by all and sundry!’

‘People wonder what it is you discuss for so long.’

‘Matters of state! What on earth else do you think we do … I mean discuss?’

The two ladies pursed their lips and focused on the card game. Emma calmed matters as best she could. ‘Of course, Ma’am. Let us talk no more about it.’

‘No. Let us not.’

Harriet played the eight of hearts. Her Majesty put down the queen of hearts, her highest card. Surely she had won the trick? Emma Portman placed hers next: the nine of clubs. She had trumped Victoria.

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The Queen was agitated before Lord Melbourne arrived in the early afternoon of the next day. She had tried not to think about the unsettling conversation with her ladies, but the thought that her relationship with him was the subject of drawing room gossip filled her with dismay. She had always thought them discreet. Her private rooms were large and closeted enough, with doors thick enough for sound not to travel. She had no fear that the various activities they engaged in were overheard. And surely if she needed to spend time with him, she should! How dare they question her? How dare they disrupt the perfect bliss that had been created?

She paced the room before his arrival, longing for him. He entered, kissing her hand with his usual insouciant grace.
‘My Lord,’ she declared quite naturally. He stood and quirked his eyebrow quizzically. She corrected herself hurriedly, ‘I mean Lord M.’

He immediately detected her agitation. ‘Are you quite well, Your Majesty?’

‘No. My ladies say we spend too much time together.’

She noticed a fleeting glimmer of anxiety cross his face before he dispelled it quickly. ‘We do, Ma’am. But … these things are to be expected given our roles.’

‘Prime Minister and Monarch?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘And … our other roles?’

His face remained impassive. ‘What other roles, Ma’am?’

She allowed herself the slightest smirk. ‘Exactly, Lord M.’

And with that, he had done what he did best: reassured her that all was well. She drew in a deep breath. ‘Shall we ride out? It is a fine day and unseasonably warm.’

He smiled and inclined his head in agreement. ‘And why not, Ma’am?’

After she had changed into her riding clothes, they were soon riding together with the ease and rhythm of two people entirely comfortable in the other’s presence.

In the safety of being away from the castle, she turned the conversation back to the comments of her ladies. ‘I am silly to worry about these things.’

‘Not silly, Ma’am. It is understandable, but the trick is not to react in such a way that indicates your apprehension.’

‘I fear I am not good at that.’

‘Well, you will learn that too.’

She frowned, thinking the unthinkable. ‘But what if … what if we are discovered?’

‘We shall not be.’

‘You are certain?’

‘I am a very careful man, Your Majesty. And, as you know … I do not enter into these things lightly. There has always been speculation on the nature of our relationship, Ma’am. That will not change.’

‘But now there is a basis for that speculation.’

‘They do not know that.’

‘Are you certain?’

‘Yes.’

‘But …’
He turned to her and said plainly, ‘Ma’am … if you wish to stop what we are doing then –’

She could not bear it! ‘No! No! You must not stop, oh, Lord M, please do not stop!’

He grinned and looked down at the reins clutched in his hands. ‘Very well.’

Her heart stuttered. ‘Do you wish to stop?’

He turned his head towards her. ‘What do you think, Ma’am?’

‘I … I would not presume to second guess you.’

He smiled mildly. ‘No, Ma’am, I do not wish to stop.’

They had reached a dense wood situated near the edge of Windsor Great Park. Victoria looked into it. ‘We have ridden a long way but I am not in the mood to return yet. Shall we explore the wood a little? I have not been this way since I was quite young.’

‘As you wish, Your Majesty.’ He was perfectly accepting today. And his voice coiled and curled its way into her with sensual intimacy in a way which made her skin prickle with the anticipation of what could be.

They were quite alone. Nobody ever came this way. It was far from the various paths and trails which had been forged over the years. Melbourne led the way, and together they went deeper and deeper into the woods. It grew darker as the canopy of leaves above let only dappled splatters of sun in, creating a strange atmosphere of light and half-light.

And then, in the densest part, he stopped abruptly, pulling up his horse and dismounting in that way he had by throwing his leg over the horse’s head. It made her belly twist with illimitable desire.

He tied his horse to a tree a little way off and then returned to her and held her horse’s bridle. ‘Dismount here.’

That tone. She knew what it meant, and as much as she wanted it she was unprepared for the suddenness. Her pulse accelerated rapidly. ‘Dismount?’

‘Yes, you heard me.’

‘Here?’

He looked up, his eyes grave and reprimanding. She corrected herself. ‘Here, My Lord?’

‘Here.’

He did not offer to help her down and so she slid from her horse and landed with a short gasp on the soft earth below. He took her horse and tied it beside his then returned to her and stood, saying nothing now, simply looking. She stared back but for once her regal defiance evaporated. She suddenly felt completely and utterly naked.

‘You are wearing too many clothes,’ he stated quite factually.

‘Yes, My Lord,’ she agreed.

‘Take off your riding coat.’

With barely any hesitation, save for the shortness of breath his dominant voice wrought in her, she
set about doing as he asked. She removed her coat quickly and let it fall to the ground.

Raising his hand he twirled his finger once through the air to indicate for her to turn around. It was such a beguiling gesture that her belly leapt with ardour and warm heat seeped through her pelvis. She turned.

His agile fingers made light work of the hooks and eyes and soon her light riding gown had joined the coat on the floor. ‘Boots and stockings. Bare feet,’ he demanded.

She reached down and fumbled for the laces of her boots. She never tied them and wasn’t even sure how to untie them. But she managed it and pulled down her stockings quickly to leave them discarded on the dirt.

‘And these.’ He stepped forward and, casting once over her face with a deliciously wicked but slight smile, he set about stripping her of her drawers.

Once again, she stood before him in only chemise and corset. She wriggled her bare toes in the soft earth. How glorious it felt! How very real and very human.

Melbourne took off his silk hat and placed it on top of her coat, and with languid certainty, he unbuttoned and removed his own coat. Then, not taking his eyes off her, he proceeded to roll one shirt sleeve up to the elbow and then the other. This alone caused her belly to roll with hopeless longing. There was a masculine sensuality to the workings of his fingers and the exposure of his forearms that made her almost gasp in delight. The heat in her lower regions was threatening to become an inferno.

He approached her and took her chin in his hand, holding it between thumb and forefinger. For a moment she wondered if he might kiss her, but no, he studied her, and she let him, holding his gaze boldly.

‘Don’t listen to them. Do what you want. You are an extraordinary woman. You can do whatever you want.’

An extraordinary woman. Not a queen. A woman. She adored him for calling her that. He, of all people.

‘What do you want to do?’ he asked, openly, brazenly.

‘I want you, My Lord.’

He quirked an eyebrow. ‘What do you want me to do?’

‘I want you to do whatever you see fit.’

‘Are you sure?’ he asked, almost teasing.

She swallowed hard, those feelings he evoked so easily in her almost driving her mad. ‘Yes. I am certain of it, My Lord.’

‘Then you shall kneel down. Right down on your haunches.’

She did so. He paced away from her, back to the horses. She did not turn round, allowing expectation to render her feelings even stronger. He returned and stood behind her, just out of sight.

‘I am going to use something else on you today.’
She daren’t reply. What? What was he going to use?

‘Can you imagine what it is?’

She shook her head.

‘I didn’t hear you.’

‘No, My Lord.’

He took two paces to come and stand before her and placed something under her chin. He used it to push her head up, directing her to look up at him. The position made her belly writhe. To be kneeling before him, staring up, gave her a perverse sense of humility – at least she guessed it was humility; it was such an unfamiliar feeling in her.

He drew the object out from under her chin, drawing the line of her gaze up with it and she saw what it was – his riding crop. He held it, the end clasped in one hand, the thin switch resting in the other.

Surely not? She must have quivered, she must have jolted out a ragged breath of anxiety for he knelt to her and smiled softly. ‘Are you afraid?’ He asked so gently, so tenderly, that it eased the concern that had taken hold in her.

She gazed upon his beautiful face, his head cocked a little to the side as he studied her every reaction, and nodded briefly. ‘Yes, My Lord. I confess that I am.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it is something new, a departure from the familiar.’

‘But this entire venture is a departure from the familiar, is it not? Is that not what you set out to achieve?’

It was. He was her companion and guide on this journey. She knew not to fear him. ‘Yes. It is, sir.’

He reached out a hand and cupped her face, stroking his firm thumb over her cheekbones. She wanted to turn her head and press her lips into his palm, to connect with the warm skin and bone and reality of him. But she resisted as he looked at her with such adoring intensity that it provided welcome distraction.

‘You need not fear. You need never fear me. If for one moment I thought I would cause you real, penetrable distress, I would abhor myself, do you not know that?’

Tears threatened before he had even laid a stroke upon her. ‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘I do not deny that this sensation will be different, it will be new. It is more focused than my hand. Look at it.’ He held out the crop to her, and she studied the little triangle of leather at the top, dark, mottled from use. She wondered if it was only his horse which had felt its sting before. But for the first time she didn’t care. Jealousy was quashed by curiosity and desire. Her tears of devotion became a sob of hopeless need. ‘It will sting, and it will leave a little kiss – let us say – on your skin.’

Kiss. Any kiss he could give her she would take.

‘How many?’ she stuttered, thinking he may say five or so.

‘I will give you what you can take. Twenty, perhaps more.’
She shivered. Anxiety tugged at her again but it was anxiety masked with intense anticipation.

‘You are fearful. Use it, Victoria.’

His use of her name thrilled her. She would use it. She would do anything he asked of her. She trusted him, a man who was about to thrash her with a riding crop, a man who was willingly about to hurt her, abuse her flesh … she trusted him more than anyone else she could ever imagine.

‘Yes, My Lord. I will, My Lord.’

‘It is a beautiful thing, you know.’

‘I know, sir, I do know. Thank you, sir.’ Again, her thanks came so naturally and honestly that she barely knew she’d voiced it.

He stood up again and moved behind her. ‘Kneel forward on all fours. I am ready to begin.’

And there in the woods, clad only in chemise and corset, her bare backside pale and luminous amongst the ferns and bark, Victoria knelt before William Lamb in expectation, not as Queen and Prime Minister, but as a man and a woman so devoted to the other that they would pour out their very souls.

It cut through the air with a swish the first time he brought it down on her.

The sound was the first thing that surprised her. But when it struck her flesh it surprised her more. Oh, it bit! Oh, it stung, it burned, small, slight but so very sharp and so very good. So very good. She suddenly exhaled the breath she’d been holding at the relief of connection. ‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, but it was not a cry of pain but of rapture. She listened for it again, that sound of the crop parting the still air, aimed at her demanding backside.

Swish! Sting! Another, on the other cheek. And then swish, sting! Again, quick, hard, sharp, flashing into her.

‘Ohh!’ she cried again, pushing back for more. She liked this. Oh, she liked this very much. Nothing could replace the feel of his warm, firm hand on her skin the first time he had spanked her, but there was something so perfectly focused and intent about this that she glori ed in it. And here, outside, anonymous among the trees, she could scream, she could plead, she could beg for more and adore him for it.

‘Shall I count, sir? Shall I count them for you?’ she asked, if only to indicate her delight in what he was doing.

‘Not today. Focus only on what you are feeling.’

‘Shall I tell you what I am feeling, My Lord?’

He chuckled a little and hurled it down onto her again, hard, so that her body instinctively flinched and shuddered off it, and the breath was pushed from her.

‘Yes. Tell me.’ Another. Swish, strike, burn.

‘Oooh!’ she exclaimed. ‘It burns! Little tiny fires on me, but they are so perfectly lovely.’

‘Lovely?’ She heard the amused disdain in his voice and he brought the crop down harder than ever, lower down onto her thighs, at a tender place which brought tears brimming to her eyes.
‘Oh, that hurts, sir!’

But he could hear the slide into bliss in her voice so he did it again, feeding the brilliant glow of abandon as she moved beyond herself.

Swish, sting. He caught the tender flesh of her upper thighs again and now started tapping the crop with focused little hits all along her thighs and backside so that she shook and shuddered under it and tears fell relentlessly.

‘You are quite marked,’ he observed, and if she had had a looking glass, she would have taken such delight in the little bites the crop had left: red, raised kisses, as he had said, kisses which would be his, kisses which she would carry with her for days.

He continued and she sobbed with each bite of the crop. Her backside and thighs were on fire, surely? It hurt so much – that, sweet, perfect, sensational pain of removal, of removal from the earthly – that she wondered if she was still real, if she could ever return to her normal state. She did not care. She forgot. She forgot it all: the Palace, her mother, her duty, her reign. Here, she was pure being.

And then it stopped, and she sobbed because it was no more. And he was kneeling beside her, stroking her face. ‘Look at me. Victoria, if you can, look at me.’

She managed to turn her head and meet his eyes, and his face was transparent with adoration and awe. ‘My perfect girl, my beautiful creature.’ And he knelt beside her, his hand cupping her chin to support her drooping head, and his other hand moved tenderly, gently up her agonised thighs and between her legs.

He didn’t hesitate in finding her. Those glorious, certain fingers were on her again, and she was so wet that she blushed, although she was so flushed already that the red of her blush went unnoticed. His fingers glided through the result of his thrashing, and she wondered for an instant if she should be ashamed that her body should react in such a way, but he was touching her again and nothing else mattered and after the burn and the scorching it was like floating, cosseting, embalming, soothing, finding, loving.

He stroked her sodden folds, dabbed at her opening, that place that she kept so secret and safe. She pushed back, willing his further exploration. He dipped a finger up, testing perhaps, preparing … daring? Oh, if he wanted, she would give. Two fingers now, gathering up the juice of her passion, welcome, searching. But her maidenhead would bar him, she knew it, and he did too as he returned to stroking and smoothing the valley of her sex. Kneeling beside her, he pushed his fingers down under her as she knelt before him until they found that glorious place he’d coaxed such wonders from before.

‘Ohhh!’ she whined, knowing this time what to expect and pushing back onto him. ‘Please, please, please, My Lord!’

He could not prevent sniffing out the slightest satisfied laugh. ‘What a ready creature you are.’

When he spoke like that she adored him even more. ‘Yes, I’m ready, I’m ready for you.’

A strange noise caught in his throat and he seemed then to find her clitoris with determination. He rubbed it hard, grinding over it to make her whine with approaching pleasure. Her body would melt, surely, it would sink into the ground in a pool of melted bliss. ‘Ask me again. Ask me properly,’ he demanded.
Anything, she would do anything. ‘Please do that for me again,’ she begged.

‘Do what?’ he insisted.

Victoria frowned, pushing her body back to work his fingers harder upon her. He was frustrating her with his questions and she heard a petulant whine in her voice despite wanting to please him. ‘I don’t know … I don’t know what to call it, My Lord.’

‘Ask me to let you come.’

She didn’t understand. ‘Come where, sir?’

‘You know where. What is it, Victoria? Tell me.’

His fingers were tormenting her but she held back, wanting to please him, wanting to do his bidding. ‘Pleasure. Happiness. Us, us, us.’

He exhaled his smile. ‘Good girl. Say it. Ask me to let you come.’

Come, come, come. That was it. Coming. Becoming. It made sense, that strange word. Coming to perfection, to him. Coming for him.

‘Please, My Lord, let me come. I want to come for you.’ She spoke the only truth she had there and then.

‘No, not for me. For you. Come for you. Only for you.’

‘For me. Let me come, sir, please, please, I’m ready, I’m ready to come.’

He held back but still he touched and stroked her so perfectly she would surely die. But she could not let it break yet. She must wait for his consent. He was her. He was her everything.

At last. ‘Then come. Come hard. Come now.’

And so she did. She could do nothing else. That perfect tension, that ball of tight brilliance burst out with such calamitous force that she screamed. And she could, for no one but they would hear. Her body shook, her limbs juddered with the force of it and his fingers still worked her hard, drawing another wave from her so that she almost begged for it to stop.

And afterward she would have fallen down onto the earth but he moved swiftly and held her, his strong arms clasping her round the waist and pulling her into him. He knelt on the ground and caught her, leaning her back against him. She rested there, propped up along the reassuring firmness of his body, panting, delirious, eyes closed, mind clouded. She was vaguely aware of the throb of her backside where his crop had dug into her flesh and she smiled with the memory of it.

He breathed against her, hushing through her hair, warming her ear, and she loved the intimacy of it more than anything else. Here. Close. Time stood still.

After some time he asked softly, ‘Are you alright, Ma’am?’

She collapsed into hopeless and delicious laughter at the incongruity of his normality, and reaching up a hand she ran it over his face, feeling the emerging afternoon stubble and the thickness of his hair. ‘Yes, my Lord M, I am.’

There, lying barefoot against her Prime Minister in the middle of a wood, the Queen of England had never been more alright.
I apologise for the wait on this one but I hope it's worth it. Thank you all so much for the comments. I love reading them. Please keep letting me know what you think if you have a moment. More soon. x
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria gets a grip.

Chapter Notes

Many thanks for all your continuing interest and comments on this story. It is an erotic tale and will continue to explore that side of their relationship intimately, explicitly and regularly, but this story is essentially about need, devotion and, ultimately, that other word which you'll have to wait for.

I hope they are, despite what they're getting up to, still in character. God, I love writing for these two. Watch out as I have a Vicbourne one-shot nearly ready to go as well.

Meanwhile, back in the woods ...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victoria sat on the ground resting back against Melbourne. She felt only the strength of his body and heard only the sound of birdsong. It was all she needed. It was all that mattered. Her breathing eased into a rhythm attuned to the ebb and flow of nature around her.

‘You will be sore for a day or so,’ he said after a while, softly against her hair.

She smiled. ‘That way I will not forget you.’

‘You may also feel a little tired, distanced. It may be necessary to retire to your bedchamber.’

‘How is that?’

‘What I did to you was more intense than usual. Your body will need time to recover. You could inform people that the ride out has given you a chill.’

She stretched her arms up to curl around his head. ‘And yet I feel so very warm indeed!’

‘And you must not allow your lady’s maid to see you.’

She started at this. ‘I will try, but that may be difficult. I am to bathe tomorrow.’

She felt the slight but sudden tension in his body and his otherwise smooth tone tightened. ‘Ma’am … That would lead to curiosity … and curiosity leads to gossip, and gossip, in my experience, invariably leads to scandal. And scandal, I would recommend, is best avoided.’

‘But Skerrett does not notice these things! She does not speak of anything!’

Melbourne gave a silent laugh but she felt it in his chest.
‘Why do you laugh?’ she inquired, turning her head as best she could to look up at him.

‘Ma’am … the staff are people, just as you and I. They see, they hear and they feel as acutely as any. And they talk.’

She wrinkled her brow as if she really had not considered this. ‘Do they?’

‘Yes.’

‘But you said earlier we would not be discovered. You assured me.’

‘We will not be discovered, Ma’am, because we will take precautions.’

She considered his words. He was right as ever. ‘Well then … I shall be most careful. I do like Skerrett, Lord M. She is a very good lady’s maid.’

‘I am pleased to hear it, Ma’am.’

‘I cannot imagine her betraying my trust.’

‘I am sure not … but it would be wise not to put that trust to the test.’

She sighed. ‘I understand. Very well. As ever, I shall follow your advice most assiduously, Lord M.’

‘Very good, Ma’am … Now …’ He gently eased her away from him and pushed himself to his feet. ‘It is time we returned to the castle.’

She looked up at him from her position at his feet. He was so effortlessly tall and elegant. He began tugging down his shirt sleeves and she watched, almost hypnotised, as his fingers worked over the material. Her longing for him was as strong as ever and the ache inside reasserted itself.

How curious it was, desire. What a strange thing to need the physical presence of someone so much that it hurt. Would she want him so much if he were not also her dearest friend and confidante? She thought perhaps not. It was the whole of him, the completeness, the *all* that enthralled her so. A sudden need to reciprocate, to please him as he did her took hold. She could not endure their one-sided encounters and she would not bear for him to either. She pushed herself to her feet, ignoring the pang which darted across her tender backside.

Victoria stepped towards him. His head was down to concentrate on his clothing and he instinctively took paces back from her to give himself room to do so. He was soon backed up against a tree trunk.

‘Must we leave so soon, My Lord?’ she asked, impressed with the low resonating seduction she employed.

He avoided her eyes and concentrated on buttoning his cuffs. ‘We must.’

‘But we haven’t yet finished.’

He swallowed hard and caught his breath. ‘Yes, Ma’am, we have.’

‘My Lord, we have not.’

At this he raised his eyes to her. ‘Ma’am …’ he warned, but she heard the hesitation in his voice, detected his faltering will power. It was exhilarating.

She stepped into him and grew heady with carnal intent. Melbourne was caught between the tree and
her and could not escape, or rather, he chose not to escape. He stood, his breathing heavy, staring down at her, eyes alight with his own desire, his beautiful face shadowed in the dappled light.

‘I want to see you, My Lord,’ she said, softly, for him only, and with that she brought her hand between his legs. What met her touch was not yet as hard as it had been the previous time but soon grew so under her fingers.

‘I told you, Ma’am … we have finished.’

‘I want to see you, My Lord,’ she repeated. ‘Part of you is a mystery to me, and I do not wish it to be any longer.’

And with focused determination, she applied herself to undoing the buttons on his breeches. He sucked in a breath of reproach but did nothing to stop her.

He had risen fully and quickly and, after she had released only a few buttons, he was suddenly there, naked before her. She gasped – she could not prevent it – for this was after all the first time she had seen such a thing fully exposed. But her gasp turned quickly to the broadest smile of happiness. How had such a thing been contained in his breeches? It seemed unfeasibly large and long now.

How fascinating! How glorious! And she had done this to him! The power she felt coursing through her at this moment was more potent, more real and visceral than at any point in her life, even she, Queen of England!

‘Ma’am …’ he tried again and she glanced up, almost having forgotten that it was part of a person and not some extraordinary independent being. His eyes were closed and his lips pursed. He was embarrassed. She could not bear it, and so she did the only thing she could: she curled her fingers around it. How hard it was under her touch, almost like rock, but warm, living, pulsing. Here was life contained in her hands, seeping into her being where it pounded and raced wildly through her veins.

Melbourne dragged in a breath as sensation jolted through him.

She stared down, enrapt. At its head there was an opening, a slit, and at the tip of this was a drop of moisture. Out of curiosity as much as anything, she ran her thumb over this and caused him to jerk under her touch. A noise caught in his throat, low, and she adored it so she ran her hand up towards the mushroomed head and squeezed it a little. He gave another sound, almost inhuman.

‘Tell me what to do,’ she said boldly.

He did not at first answer, but neither did he move out of her hold. His head was back resting against the bark, his eyes closed. ‘Tell me, sir,’ she repeated.

‘Stroke it … from the bottom to the top.’ So she started. It was quite hard to get her small fingers fully around the ample shaft and she fumbled with her grip. ‘Slowly,’ he warned, the tone of authority creeping back into his voice. She liked that, but on this occasion, she was the one who could control.

She slowed her strokes and grew tender, unsure how much he wanted. ‘Don’t be gentle,’ he said. His breathing had steadied, his face relaxed. He had given himself over to her.

She adored the feel of it, the way the skin moved over the rigid core, the way a vein bulged on the side, the way the smooth head showed itself from its sheath as she worked over it, the way it leaked his need. She became bolder and suddenly he hissed and tensed.
‘Dampen it,’ he urged.

She had used the drops escaping it, but they had not coated it. ‘How?’ she asked.

‘Spittle,’ he said.

She frowned a little at the starkness of his demand. Such a thing had not occurred to her, but now it was suggested it seemed most obvious. Lifting her hand to her mouth, she hesitated only briefly. A sudden shyness came over her but she did what was needed and returned her hand to the shaft. Immediately, he gave a groan of undiluted pleasure. ‘Yes!’ he hissed and she was thrilled as never before.

‘Is that right, My Lord? Is that good?’

‘Yes, yes! Oh God, that is so very good.’ His head was back and his neck strained. His words were slurred, voiced almost unaware. She had rendered him quite besides himself and she adored him more than ever.

Victoria took his encouragement and tightened her grip on him. Whereas earlier he had resisted it, he now clearly adored it as he gave that groan again and pushed harder into her. And then, suddenly, he tore his head back down to look at her and reached up a hand to grip the back of her head hard. Desperately, he clasped her to him. He pressed his forehead against hers and his breath came hot and ragged against her. She would have given him her mouth but he was beyond that. Pleasure was set to capture him and he was in utter thrall to her.

‘Victoria,’ he muttered. ‘Don’t stop, don’t stop that.’

‘Come for me, My Lord,’ she said, recalling the words he’d used for her. Her hand worked faster.

‘Harder, harder,’ he moaned. She did so, realising how his tolerance rose with his approaching ecstasy. She was gripping and plying the shaft with determination borne from his own lust.

And then he gave the most profound groan and she felt him pulse under her touch. She glanced down. Stream after stream of white liquid suddenly burst from the slit at the top. She stared in wonder. She knew how things worked but to witness it so intimately gave her such a feeling of joy she wanted to weep.

He was panting, gasping in deep recovering breaths. She stared at him, studying his face, fascinated by the abandon and transparent humanity it revealed. When she had touched him through his breeches before it had been hasty and sudden for them both. Now …

What sheer beauty life contained!

Still he rested against her and slowly opened his eyes to meet hers. ‘Thank you.’ He drew in a deep breath and tuned back into his surroundings. ‘You are … your arm … you have … here …’ He quickly crossed to his clothes and returned with a handkerchief. She glanced down at where he indicated her arm. His seed lay in white streaks above the wrist, like some sort of Neolithic body paint.

He took hold of her hand and gently rubbed her arm clean with the handkerchief. The action brought a strange sense of regret, of finality and waste.

‘I am sorry,’ he murmured.

‘Sorry for what?’
‘For the mess. It is unavoidable.’

‘It is not mess. It is you.’

‘There is none on your clothing, I hope?’ They both looked over her corset and found nothing.

‘Would it matter if there were? It would be cleaned.’

‘And while it was cleaned the stain would be remarked on.’

‘Such a silly thing?’ she laughed. ‘Surely it could be anything?’

He gave a half-smile. ‘You have much to learn, Ma’am.’

He turned from her and tucked himself away, doing up the buttons on his breeches quickly.

‘Was it … adequate, My Lord?’ she dared ask, a sudden awareness of her naivety overcoming her.

He looked over his shoulder at her in surprise and cocked his eyebrows in that way he had when she said something pithy about the Tories. His lips quirked up at the corner. ‘Adequate? Could you not tell?’

‘Tell what?’

‘It was magnificent. You are magnificent.’

She blushed but took hold of his hands, rubbing her thumbs over them, absorbing the power and purpose contained in them. ‘Pleasing you is as glorious to me as your touch on my body.’

He did not answer and his face lost its mercurial dancing expression. ‘My Lord?’ she asked, unsettled. ‘Is that not how it should be?’

He gave a slight smile and it eased her concern a little. ‘That depends on what you mean by ‘it’.’

‘I suppose I mean … togetherness.’

‘Then, yes, if that was the intent, that is exactly how it should be. Two lovers, together as equals – the ideal is to please only the other, and in so doing, all is well.’

‘Is that what we are – lovers?’

‘It would be hard to find another term, Ma’am.’

‘But why do you look so serious?’

‘Because … we are not equal, Ma’am. We cannot be. What we are doing Ma’am … it is not about me. This is done for you, only you. It is enough for me simply to see you deriving pleasure.’

His insistence on selflessness frustrated her. She spoke forcefully. ‘But it is not enough for me.’

‘Why not?’ His elegant brows furrowed together.

‘Why? You ask me why it is not enough for me to be selfish?’ She laughed at his strange question.

Melbourne sighed and ran a hand over his jaw. The conversation juddered to a halt. Moving away from her, he picked up his coat and quickly threw it on, forcing the buttons almost violently through their holes. ‘We really must return to the castle, Ma’am. Step into your clothes, please. I will assist.’
‘Assist?’ she muttered, dismayed at his use of such a dispassionate word. ‘I have angered you, Lord Melbourne. I do not understand why. Is it because of what has passed between us?’

‘No, Ma’am, you have not angered me.’

‘Yet you are angry.’ She picked up her clothes distractedly and stepped into them so hastily they almost tore.

‘Not angry. But I always feared …’

‘What did you fear?’

He turned to her, wrestling with himself, and said vehemently, ‘When I agreed to this, I thought it was a way to … to assuage some of those needs, some of those desperate longings I … you … were feeling. And you were so curious, so full of life and vigour … I thought it would provide you some relief without …’

‘Without what?’

‘Without … without starting to care!’ He threw his arms out to the sides, his palms open in uncertainty, despairing and at a loss.

They stood there as silence surged in around them. For a time he could not meet her eyes but, eventually, he looked up at her and she saw the open confusion of his soul.

‘But … do you not realise?’ she asked, her eyes hot with threatening tears.

‘What?’

‘Lord Melbourne … I started to care from the first moment I met you.’

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Lord M, you never really thought either of you were going to leave emotions out of it, did you? You know what they say about that thing that isn't just a river in Egypt?

Lots to mull over in this chapter (as well as a handkerchief in need of a hot wash at 90 degrees). Let me know your thoughts. LL x
Melbourne turned away and stood, back stooped as if he carried unspeakable burdens. Victoria took a step towards him, her hand poised to place on his shoulder, not as a lover this time, but as a friend, his dearest friend. But before she did, he looked half over his shoulder and said, his voice moderated to the point of flatness, ‘Are you able to ride?’

She started and answered out of surprise. ‘Yes.’

‘Is it paining you?’

She suddenly became aware of the throbbing rawness of her backside. It hurt and she resented it for the first time. ‘Somewhat.’

‘Calamine is best.’

She was dismayed at his flippant comments and answered with terseness of her own. ‘You have recommended that before. Yet if I ask for some will this not rouse Skerrett’s suspicions?’

‘I will bring some tomorrow.’

She said nothing. He turned a little more towards her, but still kept his head lowered. ‘Ma’am?’

‘I did not speak,’ she said pointedly.

‘You seem somewhat aggrieved.’

This time she responded with her silence.

He gave a brief but audible sigh. ‘Ma’am … if you are unable to tolerate this situation, then we should end the arrangement.’

‘Arrangement?’
‘Yes.’

‘Arrangement? Is that what this is? An arrangement? Lord M!’

‘Ma’am?’

She paced around to stand before him, forcing him to meet her eyes. ‘You are my friend! You are my dearest companion! I allow you to do all manner of things to my body. This is not an arrangement!’

‘You allow me, Ma’am? Yes, you do, but please remember that you instigated this. I would have been quite content to continue exactly as we were.’

Her brows knitted together in despair. ‘Would you?’

‘Yes.’

Victoria’s breath caught painfully. ‘So this means nothing to you?’

‘That is not what I said. You questioned me on personal matters which I did not feel I could lie to you about. You insisted on knowing things which are better left unknown. And now …’ He floundered for meaning, holding his hands out to the sides as if searching for it in the woods around them.

‘Now what?’

‘We find ourselves …’

‘Arguing?’

‘That would seem to be part of it, although I would hope never to argue with you, Ma’am.’

‘We never argued before.’

‘Indeed.’

‘And so where does that leave us?’

He stood tall and his face looked as it did when he conversed with Sir John Conroy. ‘As I said, Ma’am, perhaps we should desist in our activities.’

‘Desist? This is not a military campaign, Lord Melbourne!’ She laughed derisively and with a brewing hysteria. How dare he even suggest it? Her blood pounded through her veins so hard she felt a dizzying mixture of empowerment and loss of control. ‘And you could do that? You could simply stop and revert to how things were before?’

He avoided her gaze again. ‘I believe so, Ma’am.’

‘I do not believe you.’

He said nothing.

She forced him to acknowledge the truth. ‘You need this as much as I do, Lord M.’

The muscle in his jaw worked frantically. ‘Like I have always told you, Ma’am, I will do what is right.’
‘This is right.’

‘Not if …’

‘Not if what? We start to care? We start to feel?’ She darted her gaze over his face, imploring him to meet her eyes, but he would not. ‘Lord M, why are you so afraid of feeling?’

He bent to pick up the rest of his clothes. ‘Let us return to the castle,’ he said and crossed to the horses. Neither spoke further.

The ride back was silent and painful.

Each step the horse took made the burn in her backside throb relentlessly. And with each agonising step of her horse, she replayed every moment of their conversation.

He tried to bring up the debate in Parliament on the new naval fleet. She spoke not a word. Never had she been so utterly miserable.

--xxoOoxx--

Lehzen met her as she returned from the stable yard. The Queen hurried past her housekeeper, acutely aware of the rub of her skirts on her backside. She hoped the Baroness did not notice her occasional flinch.

‘Is Lord Melbourne dining tonight, Your Majesty?’

‘I do not know. I do not care.’

‘Majesty?’

Victoria continued up the stairs towards her bedchamber followed at a trot by the Baroness. ‘Majesty! Has there been a disagreement between Lord Melbourne and Your Majesty?’

‘One cannot spend too long in another’s company. We have spent the afternoon together. Perhaps he chooses to spend his evenings elsewhere. He does, after all, have many options available to him.’

‘But should I instruct the kitchens to lay a place for him at table or not?’

She turned exasperated in the corridor and exclaimed, ‘I do not know! Ask him!’

A footman appeared just then and announced, ‘Your Majesty, Baroness, Lord Melbourne requested that I inform you that he has returned to Brocket Hall.’

Victoria’s heart nearly fell from her. It seemed he truly had had enough of her. She reached out to grip the bannister lest she should fall. ‘There it is then. You have your answer.’ And she continued to her room, locked the door behind her, threw herself on her bed and wept.

--xxoOox--

When Skerrett arrived to dress her for dinner she thankfully did not need to change her underwear. Victoria hoped she did not notice her red-rimmed eyes or the way she sucked in a breath when her lady’s maid brushed her backside a little too abruptly with the weight of her evening gown.

It hurt. It hurt to walk. It hurt to sit down. It hurt to think.

She had little appetite.
'You say little tonight, Drina?' queried her mother at dinner.

'It has been a tiring day.'

'Ah yes. Your ride out with Lord Melbourne. You were gone a long time. I trust you resolved many Parliamentary matters?'

'We did indeed. We have talked through a new bill on housing for the dockland poor.'

'Charming,' added John Conroy. The Queen glanced up to see his lingering smirk.

'How is that charming, Sir John?'

He looked up, eyes wide that she would question him with such a forthright tone. But the stare quickly narrowed. Her disdain for him curled through her veins with icy contempt. He continued, his sneering tone ill-concealed. 'It was a fine day for riding. And yet you spend it discussing houses for the great unwashed.'

'It is an important topic.'

'I am sure Melbourne has been most attentive on the matter, Your Majesty.'

'He has indeed.'

'As he is most attentive to your every matter,' he muttered before taking a spoonful of soup.

'Excuse me, Sir John? I did not quite catch what you said.'

He smiled with oily deference. 'It is of no consequence, Your Majesty.'

Victoria contented herself for the rest of the meal by imagining taking each plate of food she was served and emptying it over Sir John’s head.

--xxOoxx--

Skerrett entered Victoria’s room to prepare her for bed. When it came time to remove her undergarments and slip on her night gown, the Queen ensured she kept her backside firmly away from her Lady’s Maid’s gaze. But a slight gasp escaped her when she sat to have her hair brushed.

'Your Majesty? Are you alright?'

'Yes, Skerrett, quite well.' She cleared her throat and gave a tense smile.

'Have you hurt yourself?'

She grappled for an explanation. An obvious one presented itself. ‘I went for a long ride today. Too long in the saddle can lead to … how to put it? Chafing.’

'I see, Ma’am.'

She glanced at her maid in the mirror. A blush had caught Skerrett’s face. ‘I’ve embarrassed you, Skerrett. I apologise.’

'Not at all, Ma’am. I have some ointment which may help.'

'Calamine?'
She had spoken hastily. Skerrett looked surprised. ‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘Lehzen used it on abrasions when I was a child. I remember it well.’

‘Very good, Ma’am. Shall I fetch some?’

‘That would be helpful, Skerrett, thank you.’

Her maid returned shortly afterwards with a small pot of white ointment. Skerrett opened the lid but then hesitated. ‘Would you like me to apply it, Ma’am?’

‘No!’ Victoria blanched at the idea. ‘No, that won’t be necessary, thank you. I am sure I can manage myself.’

Silence fell. Victoria felt the need to fill it and she found herself voicing the sole topic which throbbed in her head. ‘I went riding with Lord Melbourne today.’

‘I see, Ma’am.’

‘We were discussing housing for the poor.’ She may as well perpetuate the lie.

‘Very good, Ma’am.’

Silence again. She could not stand it. ‘What do you think of Lord Melbourne, Skerrett?’

‘Beg your pardon, Ma’am?’

She looked up. Her maid had paused in her regular brush strokes along her hair and was staring at her Majesty in the mirror, clearly surprised at the question. But Victoria was firmly on a path she wished to continue down. ‘What do you think of Lord Melbourne?’

‘He’s a fine Prime Minister, Ma’am.’

‘He is.’

‘And a good advisor to Your Majesty.’

‘Indeed.’ A beat of silence. ‘Do you think him handsome?’

‘Ma’am?’ Another slight hesitation with the hairbrush.

‘Do you think him handsome?’

‘I … couldn’t say, Ma’am.’

‘Surely you and the other maids discuss such things?’

‘Well, perhaps a little, Ma’am.’

‘Well then. Tell me.’

‘Lord Melbourne is a most handsome gentleman, Ma’am.’

‘Hm. He can, however, be infuriating.’

‘Ma’am? I thought you and he got on like the best of friends.’
‘Well, the best of friends can have moments of disagreement.’

‘They can. I know that from my own experience, Ma’am.’

Her maid spoke with warmth and sincerity. Victoria liked her greatly. She continued unabashed.

‘You don’t think him too old?’

‘Too old for what, Ma’am?’

‘You said you thought him handsome …’

‘He is.’

‘So his age does not change that perception?’

‘No, Ma’am. Some gentlemen … they only become more handsome as they get older – not that Lord Melbourne is that old. They age like a fine wine, as Mr Francatelli might say.’ She giggled a little and Victoria joined her in it.

Victoria studied herself in the mirror as Skerrett reapplied herself to brushing the Queen’s hair. ‘A fine wine … let us hope it does not leave a bitter aftertaste.’

--xxOoxx-

The boxes arrived the next day, not with the Prime Minister, but with his Private Secretary, Sir Hector Beaulieu. Lord Melbourne, according to a note, had to remain at the House to attend an important debate.

After reading the note, Victoria paced over to the fireplace and burned it.

The burn of her backside had faded to a dull throb but sitting still gave her a powerful reminder of what had occurred the day before. She had applied the calamine before sleep, and it had helped heal the red bites left by the riding crop. As much as she tried to be annoyed with him, she adored it, and found it hard to focus on the dispatches. She hoped Sir Hector did not notice her occasional squirm as she sought out the ache again.

By the afternoon she missed him hopelessly. A walk around the rose garden did nothing to distract her from his absence.

When he did not arrive the next morning either, she was in misery. More calamine had by now rid her backside of any lingering effect of the time in the woods, and the agony of no longer having a tangible reminder of his touch hurt more than anything else. But he sent word at 10 o’clock that he would arrive for counsel at 3 o’clock that afternoon. This note she kept tucked into her gown, next to her left breast.

Never had five hours dragged so interminably.

But at 3 o’clock precisely, he was announced. At the first sight of him her heart leapt and her belly twisted. But she remembered that she was supposed to be angry with him. She waited for him to kiss her hand and remained silent.

‘Your Majesty. I trust you are well?’

‘I am, Lord Melbourne.’

He hesitated, clearly expecting her to speak more, at least to ask after him as she would usually do.
His gaze moved to the side in that tell-tale way he had when he was amused. ‘Excellent.’ She remained silent. He drew his hands behind him and continued. ‘I apologise for my absence yesterday, Ma’am. I was unavoidably detained at the House.’

‘Were you?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. A vital debate on education reform.’

‘And it just so happened to be the day after we found ourselves at odds. The day after you left for Brocket Hall without bidding me goodbye.’

‘True, I did not manage to do that, but, as I recall, Ma’am, you were in most haste to return into the castle once we arrived back with the horses. I stayed to speak to the stable hands. The horses were tired and needed water.’

‘I am glad you are so concerned for the beasts’ welfare, Lord Melbourne. And what of my welfare? You said you would bring me calamine.’

‘Ah yes. Again, my apologies, Ma’am. Apparently, I no longer have any. I did inquire.’

She cocked an unimpressed eyebrow. ‘Luckily for you, Skerret provided me with some.’

He inhaled deeply and looked steadily across at her, a mixture of frustration and amusement dancing in his eyes. She tried to stare him down but found his expression so entrancing that it was destroying her resolve.

‘Your Majesty … I sense that you still hold some grievance against me after our last conversation.’

‘Perhaps.’

‘That is unnecessary, do you not think?’

‘Clearly I do not think that.’

He allowed himself a brief smirk and it annoyed her more.

‘What is it that is troubling you, Ma’am?’

She said nothing and crossed to the window, wringing her hands together.

‘Ma’am? You must tell me.’

She spun back to him and declared with exasperation, ‘Oh, you know, you know! You told me we should stop! And I cannot bear to stop! I cannot!’

He regarded her for a moment, his lips pursed, but then, taking a reassuring step towards her, he said, ‘I did not say that exactly. I recommended that if things continued as they were, then it might be better if we did stop.’

She was beyond reassurance. ‘But you want us to stop!’

He huffed a little in frustration. ‘I do not see how you can believe that when I told you the opposite only the same day!’

‘But you said you could cope if we did stop.’
He blinked several times before saying, ‘Yes. I can.’

‘But I cannot!’

‘Of course you can, Ma’am.’

She ran her hands down over the skirts of her gown distractedly. ‘Oh, Lord Melbourne. I am at sixes and sevens!’

An almost frantic undertone laced his usually measured delivery. ‘And this is precisely why I was reluctant to enter into this. Emotion, confusion … you do not need this amidst all else you have to deal with in life. Perhaps, Ma’am … it would indeed be better to have a period where we do not … do anything.’

She turned to him, her mouth open, her eyes burning. ‘You see? You say it again! You think we should stop.’

‘Only to see if things improve.’

‘Improve? How can things improve when I adore them as they already are?’

‘But …’ He was fumbling for an explanation. She had never seen him so at odds.

This was not about her at all. It was about him. She stared at him; it was suddenly so very obvious. ‘Lord Melbourne, it strikes me that it is not me struggling with emotion and confusion … but you!’

‘I … Ma’am, I …’ He fell silent and it told her all she needed.

For a time they stood, the only sound the ticking of the carriage clock on the mantel. Slowly, she crossed to him and, without thinking, took both his hands in hers. He stared down at them. She clasped his fingers in hers and ran her thumb over the warmth and palpability of him.

‘Lord M … why do you do this to yourself? What you do … what we do … I have never known anything so glorious. You give me a gift so precious and for that I remain eternally grateful. You are my all.’

He closed his eyes against it. ‘Ma’am … do not voice things which you will regret.’

‘Why regret? I do not regret.’

He sucked in a breath and forced his eyes open again, looking heavily at her. ‘I have many regrets, Ma’am.’

She would be his strength, she would be the comfort he was to her. She tightened her grip on his hands. ‘Then they can be banished now.’

He gave the slightest rueful smile. ‘No, Ma’am. I have seen it before. I have lived it before, many times. And it hurts.’

He gently removed himself from her clasp and moved away to sit down. He rubbed his hands together as though absorbing the memory of hers upon them, but he stared a little way off and his eyes glazed. ‘I have never told you about my marriage.’

She stuttered somewhat. ‘I do not ask you to. You do not have to.’

‘No, I shall. I want to.’
So Victoria sat in a chair a little way apart from him and waited.

For a time, he just sat, looking ahead of him, still rubbing his hands distractedly together. He seemed to be retreating back into his mind, through moments and remembrances. She allowed him silence. And then he began.

‘The first time I saw Caro …’ He smiled, sad, slight, remembering. ‘… she was tiny, fragile, and yet never had I encountered such life, such spirit. I thought that I could absorb it into me, that she would bring me that same spirit. And she was beautiful, so very beautiful.’

Victoria lowered her eyes. A jolt of pure, purple jealousy dashed about her, but she steadied herself and listened on.

‘My mother arranged it. She knew Caro and her mother well. I listened to my mother. I loved my mother. And when I met Caro, she liked me. She laughed at my jokes, she held my eyes, she blushed when I complimented her. She told me I was handsome, openly, brazenly. I laughed at it but allowed myself to believe it. We married quite soon and all was well. We were so very happy. I did not look once at another woman, which, I confess, was always a weakness of mine.

‘And then came our son, Augustus. Beautiful, perfect, tiny feet and hands, all so immaculate. We adored him. He grew, as children do, and … things seemed at odds. He did not behave in the way other children did. He did not speak, that was one thing. He reached two years and had never said a word. But Caro was with child again and nothing mattered. The world was a glorious place. But Caro … she began to laugh a little too loudly, to talk when she should listen, to run when she should walk. I delighted in it, yet I worried that I could not hold her. That somehow there was this life force which was uncontainable. And I felt so very inadequate against this wild spirit that was her. Already I was guarding myself against caring too much.

‘We ignored the increasingly obvious difficulties with Augustus, we did not wish to acknowledge them, perhaps. And he was still young. There was time, we said. And we had another child to anticipate. But Caro’s fragile body could not hold another within it for too long. My daughter was born two months before her time. She lived only a day. I remember holding her, her bones like the newest, tiniest twigs, her skin like gossamer, and yet, she was perfect. She was a perfect thing, like her mother. Like her mother.

‘Caro did not cope. She began to drink copiously. And Augustus continued to grow but did not develop as he should. We could no longer pretend all was well. He would not look at us. He would not speak. And, worst of it, he would not allow us to touch him. He would fall into a demonic rage if we so much as reached out a hand, especially Caro. I had more success. I was patient. I loved him so very much. I would sit with him for hours while he played with his toy horses. He had one, which he would not be parted from, and he would spend hours, hours and hours simply walking the horse along the back of the chaise and back again. Back and forth, back and forth. Caro would grow cross with him and shout. I would not. It fascinated me, this strange world he found himself in, which I never quite managed to enter. But sometimes he would let me peek inside, briefly.

‘Once, I simply sat and watched him as he did this. Back and forth, back and forth, quite content with it while I sat and watched. I was not even sure he knew I was there. He did so from after breakfast until the afternoon. Neither of us ate lunch.

‘And then he stopped and looked at me. I had said nothing to him. He approached me, quite suddenly, and he touched me, with a single finger, once, on the knee. And he said, ‘Papa.’ And I reached for him and he let me hold him. I held him so close, because I knew that when I let go there would not be another time. That was all. Just once. He never spoke again or let me hold him again, save for one time.
‘I still remember holding that slight, small body, the warmth of it, the realness of it. My son.

‘Caro came in and saw us. She saw us and stood there and cried and then she walked out again and never mentioned it, not once. By then, of course, she had already met him, the poet.’

Melbourne paused briefly and sucked in the deepest breath, as if drawing in the energy to carry on.

‘I knew him, you know. I was his friend.’ At this he let out a rueful laugh. ‘We knew each other at Cambridge. I was part of his circle, or rather he tolerated me, more precisely. He tended to regard me with amused contempt. I was never fully accepted, or perhaps I did not require myself to be.

‘We met again, years later, at some gathering, and Caro was with me. She was drinking heavily by this time, but there was that crucial moment between sobriety and inebriation where the alcohol would infuse her with such a heady effervescence that it was irresistible. Everyone found her irresistible at those times, although, I confess, I no longer did. But he was introduced to her and he did too. She was rude to him at first, I understand. She did it deliberately. By treating him with disdain it only served to increase his interest.

‘And I stood back and watched, and when I could no longer watch, I turned my gaze away and ignored it. But the pain remained. Always, pain. People would tell me everything. Everyone knew everything, more than me, because I shut it out. I hated them for it but I sat and poured them brandy and gave a shrug and I took other women because that distracted me. And it gave me layers. It covered it up. But deep down, under all the layers, the pain remained. Augustus, our daughter, and Caro.

‘I worked. I worked hard. You’ll be Prime Minister one day, they said. I did not believe them but I used it. It gave me reason. But it gave me momentum, at least. It gave me reason.

‘It ended eventually, her liaison with that man. And people questioned me. I was entitled to dismiss her, divorce her, cast her aside, surely I would? But when I looked on her … I wanted to try to give her back what she had been, to fulfil the promise which our lives had held. And she needed me. She needed me so terribly badly, although she would never have admitted that. She grew ill. She could not forsake alcohol. It worsened her condition quickly. And still they questioned me. Why keep her? You owe her nothing. And therein was the answer. I owed her nothing because she demanded nothing. She never expected anything of me, I do not think. She rarely asked for my money, she rarely asked for my kindness, and she did not ask for my love. She simply destroyed herself and in so doing I was the only thing she had left. But there came a time when we were such complete strangers to each other, that living together seemed ridiculous and so we separated. We separated but we did not leave each other, I will put it like that.

‘Augustus grew older and his needs greater. He could not enter into society, he could not live a life among others. And so I gave him a home and for her too, if she wished it. What are we if we cannot provide the basic comfort and security of a home?

‘I was in Ireland when I heard she was close to death. There was a terrible storm on the voyage back, as if God himself wanted to persecute me for my marriage right until the end. She died in my arms. I wept and wept. But I wept not because she was gone from me, not because I loved her … but because I did not love her. I had not loved her for so long. At the end, she had nothing, not even me.

‘A few years later, Augustus stopped eating. The doctors could find nothing wrong, he simply refused to eat. And he grew so very angry. He simply did not wish to live any longer. It was the only other time he let me hold him, the night he died. For one moment, he turned his head up and looked me directly in the eyes, and I thought he’d say it again … Papa. But he didn’t. By morning he had
gone. And it hurt so badly. It all hurt so very, very badly.’

He turned to her, his gaze pulling back through the years and returning to the slight, dark figure beside him, whose face was damp with tears. He said, quite simply, ‘You see, Victoria … I cannot bear any more pain.’

Chapter End Notes

What can I say? He needs all the love and reassurance he can get. Have no fear, the other stuff will continue very soon, but I hope you got a glimpse into the torment this glorious man has been through and is still going through.

I read that it was likely his son was on the severe end of the autistic spectrum, and so I have tried to incorporate elements of how he may have been here. Clearly and tragically, this was not a condition which was remotely understood back then, but Lord M certainly had the patience and love to accept it and give his son what he needed. (Incidentally, his son lived to be 29 and did not die in childhood as seems to be implied in the TV series.)

Would love to know what you thought of this chapter, if you have a moment, you lovely lot. Thanks in advance. LL xx
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria dries her tears.

Chapter Notes

Before reading, I'd like to tell you of a new facebook group I've set up for those of us who love Vicbourne. It will hopefully provide a more accessible place to post anything Vicbourne related and have discussions. The group's called 'For the love of Vicbourne' but if you search Vicbourne in groups on Facebook it's the only one you find! I'm the admin under the name Laurie Hart (with a red-haired cartoon avatar). It's a closed group but as long as you're human and know Vicbourne exists, you're in. Send a request and come and join the Vicbourne pain/love.

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Now, where were we?

Thank you so much for the response to the last chapter, which I loved writing. But then I wrote this one, and I loved writing this one even more ...

This chapter isn't as long but I hope you'll forgive me. Only one thing really happens in it. I shall say no more.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Silence fell, and the potency of his tale hung upon the air like a fog, thick and heavy, seeping into them.

What broke it was the slightest gasping sob from Victoria as she remembered suddenly to breathe. Her face was wet with tears although she had not been aware of them. Now, she hurriedly scrambled to brush them away, ashamed that her own emotion should be so luridly on display when he, who had more reason for it than any, could keep his so carefully concealed.

And then she did something which she did not plan or consider or even think about. With a rush like a frantic east wind, she dashed across to him, knelt at his feet and turned up her tear-stained face. ‘I’m sorry.’ Her despair heaved from her. ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’

He reached for her hands and cupped them within his, tender as a lamb yet with tiger-like conviction. ‘No,’ he murmured, stroking her fingers with his own, studying them as if they were an ornament too precious to hold. ‘No, you must never be sorry. You have nothing to be sorry for.’

‘I am selfish and stupid and so very young.’ And the tears fell more freely now. ‘I didn’t understand, I didn’t understand.’

‘You should not have to understand. And now I have burdened you and that is very wrong of me.’

‘No, you must tell me. I want to know. I need to know, but I’m sorry. I’m sorry for it all, for you deserve none of it, none of it. You are the purest and best, my darling, darling.’ And she brought his
hands to her mouth and touched his knuckles to her lips, pressing them against his skin again and
again.

‘Shh, shh,’ he murmured. ‘Don’t cry. Don’t cry. You are my precious girl, my dearest girl, you must
not cry for me.’ He cupped a hand under her elbow and stood, helping her to her feet in the process.

‘But I do! I cry for you always!’

He let her hold both his hands in hers again and moved his face down to study where they were
clasped. ‘No, no, don’t.’ And for the first time throughout the afternoon, she saw genuine pain on his
features.

‘I think I will forever cry for you.’

‘Why?’

And his gaze was too raw and she tore her eyes away, looking everywhere but at him. ‘Because I
don’t have you! Because I want you and I adore you and I don’t have you.’

His brows furrowed together as he took her words and tried to make sense of them, but still he
soothed her. One hand left the clutch of hers and rose to cup her face, smoothing, stroking, letting the
warm, soft pad of his thumb graze over the line of her chin, and she wanted to turn into it, to feel it,
love it, use it.

‘Shh, shh. But you do have me, don’t you see?’

She raised her eyes to his and blinked away a last roll of tears, but she let them fall, for now he
looked into her so profoundly that she felt completely certain. For the first time in an age, she knew.

His other hand rose up now to hold her face within both his palms, the tips of his fingers seeking
through her hair to find the soft, secret places behind her ears, his thumbs running over her
cheekbones, stroking away the salty wetness he found there, encompassing her chin in the warmth of
his hands.

‘My girl, my only girl.’ And he was moving closer, his face approaching hers. Only seconds, but in
that time she saw him more clearly than ever, noted the way his cheekbones cut lines across his face,
the way the fragile skin around his eyes was paper thin and perfect, the way his lashes were too long
for their lids, the way his mouth twitched at the corner in anticipation … in anticipation.

And there.

Lips met hers, barely, lightly, unsure in that first instance but unable not to. As soon as he had
brushed against them, he pulled back, granting them both a moment to flee, to retreat. But neither
did. He remained there, whisper close, cupping her face, holding her there. And she read in the
immeasurable green of his eyes the tangle of contradictions he was grappling with.

She waited, a mere breath away, for as much as she could reach into him, press her lips against his
again, it must be his doing. It must be his intent, his determination.

But she did open her mouth, almost unaware, her lips parted the merest amount and her sweet breath
floated up to him. His brows danced for a brief second, and in that moment conflict and certainty
blended together. And he moved to kiss her again.

Those lips met hers and did not this time retreat. He pressed against hers and the soft pliancy of her
mouth absorbed the questing pressure of his. Her heart beat pounded in her head, blood and desire
mingled to rush headily through her veins, coursing through her, upending her belly, causing the ache between her legs to throb and scream, but she banished it all for he was kissing her. Kissing her. It was all that mattered: his lips, his mouth, his starkest intimacy, on her, given to her.

She dared, just a little, the merest amount, to move under him. She did not know what to do so she did what she imagined she should. She pressed her lips against his and moved them. Would he stop? Would he let doubt take him? She had her answer when the fingers behind her ears flexed through her fine hairs and the thumbs pressed in on her cheeks and he gave her more. He too moved his mouth now, meeting hers, and she heard a moan rise from his throat to catch in his mouth.

After all he had done to her, all she had wanted and explored and demanded, this, this was what it meant. Here. Now. His lips. His giving, approving, advising, calming, patient lips, kissing, brushing, nudging, pressing, kissing, kissing her. And in his kiss she knew him. And, knowing him she would give him all of herself. And so, with a new boldness lithely uncoiling itself to meet him, she kissed back, meeting each rub and brush and push of his lips with hers. He liked it, surely, as he inclined his head a little to the side and nuded harder.

His lips opened fractionally and while still kissing her he drew in a deep breath only to return to the giving warmth of her mouth again. And then he moved away, but still kissed, planting his soft, petal-like blessings over the corners of her mouth, her cheeks, on her nose. She opened her eyes to look at him but he was so intent on covering every part of her with the press of his lips that she closed them again and felt immediately the softness of his kiss over her eyelids.

‘My girl,’ he murmured. ‘My perfect girl.’ And he was back to her mouth and a new force seemed to be moving in him. His kisses grew harder, searching, and her breath was snatched from her. She opened her mouth to gasp in but found him over it, his lips matching hers, and she breathed him in and loved it. She held herself open for him, warmth to warmth, and their breathing was matched and their pulses were matched and their bodies were matching for he pulled her into him and she fitted. Her slight frame was pressed against his firm length, as her limbs, liquid in her euphoria, melted into him.

He pulled back, only a fraction, and he held her head still, as if she would fall from him if he did not. He searched her eyes. And he would read only adoration and acceptance and hope beyond hope. She looked back into the deep green of his and never had he been younger, never had he been so very real. He smiled, a smile gifted to her so entirely privately, secretly, a smile of acceptance and relief. And – ah! – she sighed out with the beauty of it, just a little. She blushed upon hearing it, her transparent joy embarrassing her, and his smile deepened.

‘I want to kiss you again,’ he said.

‘Yes, yes.’ She could manage nothing more.

Slowly again, he brought his mouth down and met hers, learning it, teaching it, opening, emboldening her to give and take. He would break away every so often to study her again, as if confirming that she was still there for him, or gauging her reaction or seeing which part of her he had neglected. She did not care. Her lips were bruised, plump and red, but they sought only more.

This time when he broke away he worked along the line of her chin, planting kisses along the length of it and when he reached her ear she heard the whisper, ‘My beautiful girl’ and she sighed again and bared her neck for him. One hand curled around the back of her neck and she let her head fall back to be supported by it. The other dropped to her shoulder and she felt his thumb hush over her collarbone, running over the valley above it where her pulse was quick and hot. This time her sigh was a gasp and when his mouth found the soft whiteness of her neck she let the gasp linger on the air, giving him consent, feeding his need.
He breathed on her neck as she bared the line of it for him, inviting him into her for more. He slowed, nipping, nuzzling, and through the damp warmth of his breaths she felt a cool wetness, darting, tasting … tongue.

At this, her breath juddered and her belly danced and the arms she had held limp by her side rose unbidden, as if she were some strange marionette puppeted by desire, trying to move in this new state but unsure how. Her fingers reached for him but felt only air and they searched, fumbling, and found him. Her right hand came upon his arm and her fingers pattered over the wool of his frock coat. She curled them in, clasping the material, searching for the firmness of bone and muscle beneath. Her sighs and mewls were a constant litany now and were only silenced when he returned at last to her mouth.

And after all he had done to her, this was what she had lived for. This was who she was. The blistering blows he administered, which made her needy flesh shudder for more, the pleasure he gave her, which made her float out of herself, all could be traded for this one kiss, this one blending of him and her. Acceptance.

At last, when they were too giddy to do more, he pulled back, still holding her, still gazing and stroking. She stared up, skin pink from his skin, lips bruised from his lips.

‘This time …’ she murmured.

‘Hm?’ he asked, scouring her face for truth and finding it openly and transparently.

‘…this time … was there pain?’

His brows knitted together for a moment and she feared she had returned to what should not be returned to, but the tension worked its way quickly out and his mouth rose up gently at the corners.


‘There, my darling,’ she confirmed. ‘I will take your pain. I will remove it. Always.’

He smiled softly and she wanted to read conviction in his smile but under the warmth she thought she saw a shadow of melancholy.

But then he was kissing her again and it was forgotten and all she could do was hope and wish that he would never stop.

Chapter End Notes

So there we are. 2000 words for one kiss. But he's worth it.

Love hearing from you and will love to see you on the FB group if you fancy it! LL x
They only stopped when they heard the footman outside the door. Lord M’s last kiss was tender and drifting.

Victoria grew instantly bereft without his touch but could not prevent a wry smile cross her bruised lips at the insouciant ease with which he drew back from her, taking up his position over the dispatch box as if he had been studying the new poor bill for hours.

‘It’s due to come into effect next February, Ma’am, so this grants the institutions time to put the measures in place.’ He spoke with effortless discourse as the footman entered.

‘Is that so, Lord M?’ she smirked.

‘If you think this is an appropriate time frame, Ma’am?’

‘Yes, Lord M. Most appropriate.’

The footman stood a little way off and, if he noticed the glint which passed between the gazes of Queen and Prime Minister, he gave no indication of it. ‘Your Majesty,’ he began, ‘the Duke of Sussex is here. He and the Dowager Duchess of Kent are waiting in the garden room.’

‘Oh, bother!’ she exclaimed. ‘Mama arranged this a while ago but I had quite forgotten. Lord M, it seems we must cut short our discussion on workhouse reform. And I was so enjoying it.’

He moved his hands behind his back and inclined his head to her. ‘As was I, Ma’am.’

‘I find you have presented it with such attention to detail.’

‘I’m glad to hear it, Ma’am.’

‘Your knowledge is quite penetrating and your skills in the matter deeply satisfying.’

For a brief moment the second Viscount Melbourne – renowned for his ever-ready eloquence – was lost for words. His mouth opened but on this occasion a response eluded him.

His eyebrows rose up. ‘I … Ma’am.’ He resorted to a deferential nod of the head and took a few steps back to allow her to pass.

With a smile etched on her face, the Queen swept past Lord Melbourne. Someone who was not accustomed to the Prime Minister’s mannerisms would not have noticed the pinking of his sharp cheekbones. But Victoria, as attuned to his expressions as her own, saw it all too well. It only served to deepen her smile.
Victoria walked quickly into the garden room, Melbourne his usual two paces behind her.

‘Uncle Sussex!’ she greeted as the portly man knelt to kiss her hand. His dimples deepened and the cap atop his head always made her think he was preparing for bed. She liked him immensely. ‘How lovely to see you today. And how well you look.’

‘As do you, Your Majesty.’ He bowed low and his cap nearly fell off. She laughed and put out a hand to prevent it.

She turned to her mother. ‘Mama, it is raining so we are prevented from a walk. Shall we instead sit inside? Or perhaps a game of cards? What say you, Uncle?’

‘Whist would serve me well,’ he agreed.

‘It would seem there is little choice,’ said her mother. She turned her attention to the man still standing behind the Queen. ‘Lord Melbourne, you have completed your duties with my daughter, I presume.’

‘For today, Ma’am.’

‘In that case, do not allow us to keep you. I am sure you have much to attend to in Parliament.’ She turned to the footman. ‘Prepare a card table for three. Lord Melbourne will not be playing.’

Victoria tensed in annoyance, her hands clasped together so tight the knuckles blanched. ‘Lord Melbourne can join us, Mama, if he so wishes.’

Her Prime Minister was quickly at her side. Immediately, the scent of him made her want to turn and clasp him to her. ‘Actually, Ma’am, Her Royal Highness is correct. I do have business to attend to. I will bid you farewell until –’

She turned into him. ‘Tomorrow?’ she prompted, her mouth running dry at the prospect of his departure.

‘I hope so, Ma’am.’

‘In the morning.’

He darted a look to the side as he registered her need. ‘I will try, Ma’am.’ And he gave her the slightest smile before turning to the others. ‘Good bye, your Grace, your Highness … your Majesty.’ He bowed and left the room. Victoria stared after him, all that had occurred between them – his disclosure, their kiss – all seemed to fade with his departure. If he was there, if she could look at him, the memories were as fresh as if he was still holding her, but a sudden fear took hold that the details would slip from her. She hated it. She wanted to cling onto it all, to cling onto it and keep it as real and vivid as if she were holding it in her palms. As she watched his retreating form, it pained her acutely, more so than she could ever remember before.

She tried to settle to cards but conversation deserted her and she found herself often being asked the same question twice. Her mother tutted frequently.

--xxOoxx--

She spent the first few hours after she retired to bed lying awake, staring at the canopy above her, remembering. Remembering and hoping and dreaming.

His kiss. It was like a nectar dripped into her from heaven itself. It would sustain and nurture her. She
ran her fingers over her lips, remembering the force of his pressed against them. If she didn’t have it again soon, she would die, surely? She turned onto her side and let her hand drift to her backside. And what of that? She longed for it. She adored it … but his kiss. She could not settle and tossed her body over dramatically to lay on her back again. Her fingers instinctively found her lips once more and she smiled to herself and then giggled hopelessly. Eventually, after hours of darkness, which slipped in and out of her mind and senses, sleep claimed her.

--xxoOoxx--

Despite a restricted night, she was awake early. Skerrett dressed her assiduously as ever.

‘It is a fine morning today, Skerrett.’

‘Indeed, Your Majesty. Have you plans today, Ma’am?’

‘My audience with Lord Melbourne as usual.’

‘And after that, Ma’am?’

‘I do not know. Possibly. Probably. I have forgotten.’

‘Is there important government business to attend to with the Prime Minister?’

‘Oh yes. Many bills and motions to consider etcetera etcetera etcetera.’

‘It seems to take up so much of your time. Lord Melbourne spends a great deal of time in your company, Ma’am.’

Her maid realised what she had said immediately and her eyes widened. Victoria looked at her in the mirror. ‘Do you think so?’

Skerrett reached for a comb and fumbled with it. ‘I mean … there is much business to attend to, Ma’am.’

‘Indeed,’ said the queen with pointed conviction. ‘Running the country takes a great deal of time.’

‘Of course, Ma’am.’ Skerrett focused on pinning her mistress’s hair. The pins were proving most stubborn this morning. Silence fell.

Victoria stared at herself in the mirror. Was her guilt obvious? She had thought not. More quickly than she had intended, she asked, ‘Is that what people say? That I spend too much time with Lord Melbourne?’

A pin snapped in Skerrett’s hand. She reached for another. ‘I couldn’t say, Ma’am.’

‘But I ask you.’

Her maid was flushed as bright red as the carnations she had placed in the room a few minutes before. ‘They know you have much to discuss, Ma’am. People are pleased that you clearly attend to business so dutifully.’

‘Yes, that is it. Duty. That is all.’

‘Of course, Ma’am.’

‘I think I am ready. Thank you, Skerrett.’ And the queen rose quickly and hurried from her chamber.
She received him as usual in her private rooms. If people were concerned with the amount of time they spent together surely it would have been stopped. She wondered sometimes why nobody ever disturbed them, but they did not. The relationship between a monarch and his or her Prime Minister was such that, even if suspicions should be raised, any discussions would always be conducted in strict privacy. And this morning her anticipation was so illimitable that gossip be damned!

Her Prime Minister knelt to kiss her hand. ‘Good morning, Your Majesty.’

‘Good morning, Lord M.’

He stood again and questioned, ‘You slept well, I trust?’

‘Not at first, but then, yes. And you?’

‘Most well, Ma’am.’

Whereas she would usually retreat to her desk to set about opening the box, today she simply stood and looked up at him, imprinting his features onto her mind as if she had been away from him for months, not a few hours. He raised a quizzical eyebrow. ‘Ma’am? Shall we settle to work?’

‘I was wondering, Lord M …’ She let her voice trail off and said no more.

His eyebrows jiggled a fraction and his lips ticked in amusement. ‘I quickly grew to realise that you wonder a lot, Ma’am. This does not surprise me. What have you been wondering on recently?’

She smiled softly at his tease but held his gaze with a confident sparkle. ‘I was wondering if the kiss on my hand was the only kiss of greeting I was to receive today?’

His eyes narrowed momentarily as he appraised her. ‘I am duty bound to kiss your hand, Ma’am.’

‘And what of inclination? Does that bind you in another way?’ She found herself dampening her lips a little and held them fractionally open so that her hushing breath cooled them as she waited.

His mouth rose a little at the corner and the fine lines around his eyes creased, whether in amusement or contemplation she was not sure. He said nothing and she thought he inclined his head to her, drawing closer, closing the distance. She waited, her breath now held, her heart pounding, blood dashing. Please … please …

‘Ma’am.’ He came no closer. ‘We have much to do. Let’s look through the dispatches.’ And with that he turned from her, paced across to the bureau and opened the red box.

She stuttered with disappointment bordering on outrage. ‘Lord M!’

He looked up, an expression of bewildered ignorance at her reaction affixed to his face. ‘Ma’am?’

‘You tease me!’

‘No, Ma’am, I ask you to work.’

‘But…!’

He looked across at her, his face now focused and serious. ‘Ma’am, you are the reigning monarch of this nation, I am your Prime Minister. Nothing must ever come before duty. If I teach you one thing above all else, then let it be that. We must complete the draft for the Poor Bill, appoint at least two
deans and one Lord Lieutenant, draft a letter to the Viceroy of India and sign innumerable papers requiring your patience and consideration. Other things can wait!’

She opened her mouth to retort, but he was so statesmanlike, so magnificent in his assertiveness that she found instead that she was smiling.

‘Very well … Prime Minister.’ She let him see the admiration in her eyes. He gave a brief nod and cleared his throat.

Victoria came across and sat down. He placed the first document before her. She turned her head up and said, ‘And when we have attended to all these matters?’

‘After we have done them … we shall see … Ma’am.’ He pointed to the line for her signature. ‘A bill guaranteeing the freedoms of former slaves, Ma’am.’

This focused her mind. Duty had its advantages. She signed confidently, aware of the power and responsibility she wielded. ‘How ghastly that we have had to fight so hard for this.’

‘Yes, Ma’am, things are at last progressing well, but there is still much to be undone that should never have been done.’

She smiled up at him. The sun was shining in behind him and cast a halo-like glow around his head. Her angel. ‘What is next, Lord M?’

‘An amendment to the Workhouse Bill we are formulating, ensuring all have access to these institutions should they require them and putting in place measures to ensure the good running and order of each workhouse.’

‘Indeed. Yet I have heard that many find it preferable to be on the streets rather than in those ghastly places.’

‘You have been reading Dickens again, Ma’am. I assure you most workhouses are benevolent and well-ordered establishments. They are helping the poor immeasurably. They ensure that all will have access to food and shelter should they seek it.’

‘Should I trust you on this matter, Lord M?’ She quirked an eyebrow.

He allowed himself a smirk. ‘As much as you can trust me on any matter, Ma’am, I assure you.’

She hovered the pen over the place where she was to sign, teasing him with her hesitation, but then, with a regal flourish, she signed ‘Victoria R’ and looked up, fixing him with her gaze. ‘Next, Lord M.’

They dealt with it all with studied care and attention. He was right. Duty came before all. But now, duty had been done. He placed the final document back in the box and she put down her pen.

‘We appear to have finished, Lord M.’

‘Indeed, Ma’am.’

Victoria turned her head to look up at him and he gave her a masked half-smile, but the brightness of his eyes could not be hidden.

As she pushed back her chair and stood, her skirts brushed against his legs. He did not back away but still concentrated on packing away his work.
'Did I perform my duties well, Lord M?'

‘As you always do, Ma’am.’

‘Must you return to the House immediately?’

He glanced at his fob watch. ‘We worked quickly today. There is no urgency.’

He did up his portmanteau slowly and deliberately. The air was silent save for the clunk of the buckle sliding into place. He turned half towards her. She kept herself close, so close she could see a little nick on his chin where the razor must have caught him that morning. She wanted to touch it so much it pained her.

‘Have you plans, Ma’am? A walk perhaps?’ His voice was low, measured, a heady throb rising from his chest.

‘I am content to remain here.’

His eyes flitted between hers and her lips. She caught her bottom lip in her teeth and noted his gaze darkening as he stared at it. She continued, soft, murmured, allowing her words to coil their way indulgently to him. ‘Lord Melbourne … you are always so intent on humouring me, so instead I ask you … what is your inclination?’

She had not realised, but she was caught between him and the bureau. She reached back and grasped it to steady herself and felt her breath dragging through her as the weight of desire crushed her coherence.

‘My inclination, Ma’am?’

Now he was moving into her, she was not imagining it this time. He leaned closer, focusing on her lips which she wetted and parted for him, urging him in, yearning for his upon hers.

‘Yes … yours.’

And after the slightest tease of a smile, he pressed his mouth to hers, and at first it was as chaste as his lips on her hand each morning, and it was so pure and good that she thought perhaps it was all she’d need. But when he nudged against her, she found herself opening a little for him, willingly, wantonly. He moved his lips with a brewing need and his hand rose to hold her head, fingers curling through the warm hair behind her ear.

She kissed him back, confidence simmering, and he gave the slightest moan, prompting her to press herself along him. His other hand slid immediately around her waist and pulled her tight against him. She was captured, caught between the bureau and him, held in his grip. And she revelled in it. That ever-present tightness in her belly stretched itself, reaching out for more, curling and twisting and writhing inside her. But for now his mouth was all, his lips, his breath, the tip of his tongue which she tried to meet, to touch, to draw deeper.

He breathed in, a deep rushing breath through his nose to continue his attentions to her.

They could live like this, could they not? Joined, breathing together, heart beats settling to rhythmic harmony, the warmth of their bodies indistinguishable. She could stay like this forever and it would sustain her.

She gave him her neck and he kissed down it, hot, open now, his breath murmured along the pale skin he found there. She gazed above, her eyes falling on the cornicing above her. How intricate it
was, as intricate as the whirl of feeling now making her dizzy.

She brought up a hand to tangle through his hair and hold him to her as she bared her skin brazenly, letting him move down to that perfect join between shoulder and neck where he found her pulse point and sucked. She gasped with the beauty of it. 'Please don’t stop that. Please don’t ever stop that.'

He was back to her mouth and she opened for him, thinking herself quite wanton. But after all they had done, surely not? This was innocence, this was pure adoration, and nothing had ever felt so good.

‘I cannot stop … I cannot …’ he returned and she laughed at the wonder of it and held his head, pulling him into her to kiss him in turn, deep, hard and full.

She found the little cut on his chin, running her thumb along it at first then planting healing kisses over it. ‘Your valet has cut you,’ she mused.

He drew back a little and put a finger to his chin. ‘Not my valet. Me.’

Her eyes widened in surprise. ‘You shave yourself?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. Every day. Having someone else do such an intimate act seems an indulgence.’

She laughed. ‘Well, you are clearly not very good at it. Perhaps you should seek some advice.’ She reached up and kissed it again.

‘I was in a rush this morning, Ma’am.’

‘Why is that, Lord M?’

‘Why do you think?’

‘I cannot imagine. Perhaps you wished to see the mists rise over Hyde Park? Or perhaps you wanted to catch the flower sellers at Covent Garden?’

‘You know the reason.’

‘Indulge me, Lord M.’

‘I wanted to be here. With you.’

‘I see. The dispatches are such a lure, after all.’

‘Not the dispatches, Ma’am.’

‘What then?’

‘This.’ He cupped her face and kissed her right eye. ‘And this.’ He kissed her left eye. ‘And this.’ Her right cheek. ‘This.’ Her left. And so he continued over every part of her upturned face, prefacing each kiss with a ‘this’ until she was a helpless vessel for his adoration and he was back to her mouth and absorbing her sighs.

Yes. Yes. At this moment it was good and it was right and it was her everything. The feel of his hand on her backside, so startling and sudden and wonderful at the time, seemed a world away. Would she need it again? Last time it had made them argue, and she could not bear that. She had wanted his disciplining touch so much and yet now the softness of his lips, the sweetness of his breath ghosting
over her … it fed her very soul.

‘Is this enough?’ she sighed aloud as he worked down her neck again, coming to rest at her collar bone and nuzzling along it.

He paused briefly and glanced up. ‘Enough?’

‘After what happened last time when you … when you disciplined me, Lord M … perhaps …’ He cupped her chin lightly and grazed over her cheekbones. She breathed out her devotion. ‘… this is better.’

‘You think it better?’ He pulled back but still held her tenderly, his eyes dark with contemplation.

‘Do you not?’ She searched his face, scrutinised his tone to ascertain his meaning, but she could not.

‘I wish you to be content, Ma’am and … if I can seek some happiness too, then … all is well.’ He met her eyes again and smiled softly.

‘I do not wish to argue with you. I hate that. We must never let that happen again, surely?’ She frowned and his eyes darted to the little lines formed on her forehead.

‘No, Ma’am, it was not a pleasant moment, but these things do happen.’

‘I would rather they did not.’

‘You know that I suggested desisting from those activities for a while. You did not take to it kindly.’

‘Yes. I did not see how I could bear it, but … this is …’ He smiled and let his lips brush over hers again. ‘This provides me with a great deal of happiness.’

He drew back slightly and asked, ‘So … you are content?’

‘Content with kisses?’ she inquired.

His smile deepened and he gave a little nod.

‘I am most content with your kisses, Lord M.’

‘In that case, Ma’am,’ he intoned, deep and luxuriant, ‘we shall continue as we are.’

And she curled her arms around him and pulled him back to kiss her again. He obliged.

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Chapter End Notes

So she is content.
But once you've got a taste for something ... can you really give it up so easily?

Thank you for your continuing support and comments. Please keep them coming; they feed the muse. This story has a long way to go. xx
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria has a bit of a hissy fit.

Chapter Notes

A short chapter to lead us into the next phase of this story. But he's still so very lovely in it. ;-)  

The Queen carried her secret with her and treasured it. If her mother was sharp with her, if John Conroy criticised her demeanour, if her duties sat heavily, she would tap into that place inside and examine her moments with Lord M, drinking them in thirstily.

His kisses nourished her, gave her a vitality which coursed through her. Her ladies commented on her complexion, how radiant it was. Skerrett noticed her brightness and how well clothes hung on her. She smiled at the compliments and studied herself with a new-found confidence in the looking glass.

All for him. All for her. Their private collusion. Their own perfect conspiracy.

Every time at the dispatch box ended with lips meeting and breaths mingling. Their kisses were rich with adoration, heady with devotion, but both maintained such inestimable dignity in their intimacy that Victoria could tell herself this was the most natural and conventional relationship in the world.

Weeks passed. They would attend to business and kiss. They would walk through the gardens and – when far from the spies of the Palace – kiss. They would ride out and, if their horses paused to crop the grass, lean in and kiss.

All natural. All normal. So normal as to be divine.

She was happy, she knew that. But with her happiness came an innate and heightened sensitivity to moods, both his and hers.

Melbourne had long been acutely aware of her mood swings and would indulge her accordingly, refraining from lengthy political debate if she was terse, placing a soothing hand on her shoulder if Privy Council business tired her, laughing along with her if amusement bubbled from her like the fountains in the gardens.

And she was growing to read him too, how he would sometimes become withdrawn and distant, never at her expense, but at those times she would honour him with her stillness and they would sit or ride together in silence, content simply to be a presence for the other.

But her deepening understanding of all he was meant that she was attuned to the slightest shift in his
attitude.

During the last week of August she noticed the occasional catch in his usually smooth discourse. She detected a reluctance to hold her stare for too long, how he would steer the conversation elsewhere when she asked a question.

On the first of September, she could deny it no longer: he was at odds, and it made her fraught with worry.

The air was rich that day, dripping with indulged fecundity in the last over-ripened days of summer. A hint of rot threatened. It made her a little nauseous. His manner did not help. Still, they settled to business and progressed through the dispatch box as efficiently as ever. Nobody else would have detected a change in the Prime Minister. But the Queen did. And she could not keep silence.

Melbourne was finalising the document before her. ‘The Lord Mayor feels that perhaps a later date would be more suitable next year, Ma’am.’ She looked up at him and said nothing, waiting for him to turn his head and look down at her. He did not.

‘Lord M?’

‘Ma’am?’ Still he did not meet her gaze.

‘Are you unwell?’

‘Unwell? Not in the slightest, Ma’am. As I was saying, perhaps a date in April would be preferable owing to the other duties which fall during-’

‘Yet something is troubling you.’ Her breath quickened. He was evading her and she would not allow it.

He drew in a breath and at last turned his eyes to hers. Her heartbeat faltered under the intensity of his gaze. He inhaled deeply before turning to look elsewhere. His words came quickly. ‘Ma’am … the Chief Minister of Prussia is hosting a gathering of statesmen from across the continent.’

‘Oh?’ She would remain dignified. There was no cause for alarm yet, but why had goose pimples already risen on her skin?

‘Yes. In Berlin.’

She swallowed. A sudden pain had taken hold in her very core despite the fact that he had told her barely anything. She could not speak.

He continued. ‘Next week.’

‘Oh.’ It would have been a cry if she had enough breath to propel it.

‘I am attending.’

‘Oh.’ There was a beat of silence. Her mind went blank but she heard herself saying, detached almost, ‘Well, there it is then.’

‘I shall be gone three weeks.’

Oh, but it may as well be three hundred! ‘Three weeks?’ she stuttered.

‘Yes.’
'I see.'

‘I leave the day after tomorrow.’

And now she could no longer mask her distress. ‘The day after tomorrow?’ Victoria stood abruptly, her body rigid, her mind dizzy with despair. ‘The day after tomorrow? For three weeks! Lord M! You cannot!’

The muscle in his jaw worked fast. ‘Ma’am … I must. It is a state duty.’

‘You cannot! You shall not!’ She paced from side to side, her gaze darting over everything and nothing.

At first it seemed as if he would reach out to catch and hold her, but instead he clasped his hands behind him and spoke evenly. ‘Ma’am … I am expected. I must go. There is much to discuss. Europe is a volatile place. I did mention this trip to you several months ago.’

She turned on him caustically. ‘I do not recall any such discussion! You have not mentioned it recently!’

‘No, I have not.’

‘And why not?’

He paused momentarily, ensuring she was focused on him, and then said, ‘Because I did not wish to distress you.’

Her eyes widened indignantly. ‘You have distressed me more by withholding this from me!’

‘That was not my intention.’

She began pacing again, wringing her hands distractedly. ‘You cannot go! I forbid it!’

‘It is too late, Ma’am.’

She stopped and faced him with the full burning force of her fury. ‘Tell them … tell them your Queen needs you!’

He pursed his lips and blinked twice. His hands rose to his sides, half in exasperation, half in acknowledgement. ‘Ma’am …’

And her rage suddenly gave way to despair. She rushed across and took his hands. As she turned a pleading gaze up to him, her eyes misted through brimming tears. ‘Lord M … Please.’

At this, her fevered agony now tender and needy, he gave her a gentle smile of reassurance and brought up a hand to cup her face. ‘Ma’am … All will be well. You do not …’

‘What?’

He spoke softly but with sincere intensity, almost daring himself. ‘You do not … need me.’

She opened her face, aglow with passion, damp with tears, to his appraisal. ‘Oh, but I do! I do! I cannot live without you. I cannot think. I cannot breathe!’

His smile deepened and he sniffed out a slight laugh of contradiction. ‘That is not true.’ She drew in a deep replenishing breath. He smirked. ‘You see, Ma’am, you are breathing quite adequately.’
She at last allowed herself to release the tension with a spluttered laugh. ‘But I … but …’

‘Ma’am …’ He placed a finger under her chin and raised it up so that she was looking at him. ‘Three weeks. It is nothing. You will barely notice I am gone.’

‘I will, I will! I will miss … your kisses.’

He let a smile push at his mouth but not break across it, and, with almost insolent idleness, he lowered his head and pressed his lips to hers.

She sighed into him, so utterly adoring of the sensation which immediately pranced through her belly. Instinctively, her arms rose up to curl around his neck and she delighted when she felt long fingers close on her waist and hold her tight.

‘Does that help?’ he murmured, breaking away and working his way down her neck.

‘Yes … I think so …’ She gasped as she felt the slightest graze of his teeth on the join of her shoulder.

‘You think so?’ he hummed.

‘I am not sure … if it is enough for me to remember …’

‘Then I must ensure you do.’ He was back to her mouth, gentle, giving, but so deeply soothing that she wondered if she would be absorbed into him. She sighed into his mouth and felt him smile on her before he moved over her face again, kissing as he went.

‘Is that enough?’ he murmured.

‘Nearly … but not quite,’ she mused, and a smile at last captured her lips. He kissed it into him, slow, deep and intoxicating.

‘Enough now?’

‘Perhaps … just …’

He broke away and held her face, stroking over her cheeks with his thumbs. The intensity of his gaze almost blinded her. He smiled that soft, affirming smile which eased all the troubles of the world and whispered, just for her, ‘Victoria.’

And with that, she would be able to survive three weeks without him.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the continuing support. Any comments will be adored, even the ‘orrible ones. (Well, maybe not adored, but appreciated … ;-) )

A reminder that I’ve set up a Vicbourne Facebook group for discussion, debate and lots of other good stuff. Come along and join in. Very honoured to have Daisy Goodwin, the writer of Victoria, among us. It's called 'For the Love of Vicbourne' and is a closed group so you don't need to worry about your non-Vicbourne loving friends reading what you post. You'll need to ask to join but, don't worry, I'll be sure to approve you!
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria puts pen to paper.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your patience. Again, due to the point we have reached in this story, this is a slightly different, but no less important chapter. Much of it is written in letters between Lord M and Victoria, which I LOVED writing. I've tried to capture the tone of their actual letters to each other, but there are bound to be some historical inaccuracies. Apologies.

Anyway, onwards. You know what they say ... absence makes the heart grow fonder ... and all that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Prime Minister had barely stepped foot into the carriage which would take him to Dover when the Queen began writing. Every day, several times a day, she penned letters. In her hurry to send them off, they were often brief, but her need to remain connected with him was so strong that it was her only means of coping.

And, being Queen, her letters were transported with unseemly haste across the roads of southern England and then Europe, with a convoy of couriers and horses pounding the earth, riding fast through every minute of the day to get the missives to their destination quickly. And the Prime Minister responded immediately. It was rare that the letters passing between them took more than two days to reach the other, over 500 miles away.

As befits the correspondence between a monarch and her Prime Minister, the content adopted – at the start, at least – a predictably formal tone.

--xxoOoxx--

The Queen hopes Lord Melbourne is able to pass the time quickly and pleasingly in Prussia. The Queen has moved to Windsor for the next three weeks as life in London without the conversation and pleasing distraction of the Prime Minister is tedious. Lord Cottenham goes through the dispatch box with a monotonous lethargy and it takes far longer than it should. And the extreme rotund nature of the Lord Chancellor means that there is barely room for her Majesty to position herself when signing. The inestimably amiable, illuminating and humorous discourse of Lord Melbourne is greatly missed.

Victoria R

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Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty and is sorry to hear that your Majesty is not currently enjoying matters of state, but hopes that the pleasant aspect of Windsor will prove distracting. The convention at which he finds himself takes place in a fine palace on the edge of the city; the countryside here is most pleasing. Yesterday a deer approached closely when Lord Melbourne was walking, so closely that the creature began nibbling his boots. This gave pause for thought of how much your Majesty would have delighted in seeing it had your Majesty accompanied Lord Melbourne.

(As it was, the Prime Minister of France did not appreciate Lord Melbourne’s recounting of the story.)

Your devoted servant,

Melbourne

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The Queen is pleased to hear that Lord Melbourne is befriending the local wildlife and would indeed have greatly enjoyed accompanying Lord Melbourne on his visit. She can, in fact, think of nothing she would rather be doing. She took a ride out yesterday. It was most tedious without the erudite wit of her Prime Minister. The wildlife of Windsor is not so inquisitive as the animals Lord Melbourne has met on his perambulations. Or perhaps they are as downhearted as the Queen at the absence of Lord Melbourne. There is a dinner tonight for the Fishermen’s Society. One supposes one will converse on the relative merits of mackerel versus salmon. No doubt if Lord Melbourne were here he could make it infinitely more tolerable.

In anticipation,

Victoria R

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Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty and hopes that the dinner for the Fishermen’s Society took place with great distinction and that every sole present enjoyed themselves immensely, praise cod! He is certain that your Majesty was breaming with wit and exuded a luminous and brill-iant radiance. He hopes that the fare was fresh and of the finest quality and not a load of old pollock as can sometimes be served on such occasions.

Your turboted devoted servant,

Melbourne

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As much as Lord Melbourne’s most recent letter provided considerable mirth to Her Majesty – who saved reading it until she had retired to her bedchamber last night – it also reminded her how awfully deeply she feels his absence. His consideration, humour and companionship is so dreadfully missed. Yet she hopes that he spends his time so busily in dealing with European matters that time passes swiftly for him. As well as conversation with various animals, how else is Lord Melbourne occupying himself?

In anticipation,

Victoria R
Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty. Your Majesty is correct. Lord Melbourne is occupied each day with many convoluted and tortuous diplomatic matters. The evenings, however, can be passed in a more relaxed fashion. Last night, for example, there was a ball held at the Stadtschloss. Guests included the great and good of Prussian society. The gentlemen and lords befeather themselves like peacocks and the ladies are quite brazen in their dress and manner. There was much dancing until a very late hour.

Ever, your devoted servant,

Melbourne

Her Majesty reads with interest of Lord Melbourne’s nocturnal activities and his detailed descriptions of the people present. She assumes he will not be attending more events of this kind as it would be most tiring.

Victoria R

--xxoOoxx--

Victoria did not sleep well, if at all, after replying to her Prime Minister’s latest letter. Going through the box with the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Cottenham, was more tedious than ever, but it was her ladies who bore the full brunt of Her Majesty’s resulting irritability.

‘As you have no other duties for the day, Ma’am, would you perhaps care to take a carriage to Kew later?’ Emma Portman offered after tea as they sat in the morning room.

‘Why ever would I want to do that?’ came the curt reply. The Queen sat stiffly, her hands clenched in her lap.

Lady Portman tried again. ‘It is a lovely day and the gardens do look so magnificent at this time of year.’

‘I am not in the mood for recreation.’

Harriet Sutherland glanced at Emma, who knew all too well how to manage her monarch’s variable moods. ‘Very well, Ma’am. A book, perhaps? Shall we read? We could continue Nicholas Nickleby. I understand the next instalment is out.’

‘I do not enjoy it. I find it turgid.’

This did surprise her ladies. ‘Ma’am? You normally enjoy Mr Dickens’ works,’ Harriet asked in surprise.

‘I am allowed to change my mind.’

Silence fell. The three women sat, hands clasped before them.

‘What are Prussians like?’ came the sudden interjection from Her Majesty.

Her two ladies looked at each other, unsure how to respond. ‘Prussians, Ma’am?’

‘Yes. Are they good conversationalists, for example?’
‘I am not sure, Ma’am. Your family is German for the most part. You probably know better than us. What are your cousins like?’

‘My cousins bore me.’

‘Well, then, perhaps you have your answer.’

The Queen paused and Emma hoped the conversation would move elsewhere. It did not. ‘But I know few Prussian women. What are they like?’

‘Much like English women, I imagine, Ma’am.’

Another brief silence, then: ‘Are they pretty?’ It was almost squawked out.

Emma tried not to reveal her surprise in her tone. ‘Some, I should imagine.’

‘But not most?’

Emma and Harriet could do little but exchange another knowing look. ‘Ma’am … this is a curious line of questioning, if you don’t mind me saying.’

‘Well, I am curious.’

The conversation faltered briefly until Harriet, always one to extract intrigue, added, ‘Lord Melbourne is currently in Prussia, is he not? Your Majesty should ask him when he returns.’

The queen inhaled sharply through her nose. ‘Lord Melbourne is far too busy to be distracted when abroad!’

‘Distracted, Ma’am? Whatever do you mean?’

‘I mean … well …’

Harriet, her intuitions prickling, persisted. ‘By women, Ma’am? Do you mean … distracted in the matters we discussed a while back?’

The Queen’s back stiffened yet further. ‘He will have little time, surely.’

‘He will be busy certainly, but I understand entertainments are laid on nearly every evening. Entertainments and diversions for the various dignitaries.’ The chink in Her Majesty’s armour was exposed and it was too tempting not to see what weaknesses lay beneath.

‘You mean?’

Emma sighed but added to the simmering atmosphere. The Queen, after all, needed to be put right from time to time. ‘We have discussed this before, Ma’am. Lord Melbourne does not often get away from his work. And, when one is on foreign soil, the scrutiny is not so intense as when one is at home. It is easier to … relax, so to speak.’

‘Lord Melbourne is perfectly relaxed enough when he is here! Why should he seek to relax further?’ Her Majesty’s voice had grown very insistent.

‘Ma’am … we are merely speculating … and, of course, as long as he is discreet, surely it is of no consequence to us what Lord Melbourne gets up to in his spare time, whether abroad or not.’

Victoria hated the way she pointed the word ‘us’. She licked her dry lips and stated as straight as she
could, ‘Well … I wish my Prime Minister to behave with the utmost decorum.’

‘Of course, Ma’am … but there is a saying … matters of which you know nothing will not harm you.’

She could not stand it! ‘I will not have Lord M betraying me!’

But neither could Emma Portman stand it. ‘Betraying you, Ma’am? Lord Melbourne is your Prime Minister, Ma’am. You can expect his dependability in terms of government service, but conducting discreet relationships does not amount to a betrayal of Your Majesty.’

The Queen tried to steady her breathing. ‘Do men do that? When they go abroad? Do they always have relations with the local women?’

Emma pursed her lips. ‘No, Ma’am, of course not. But some do. There is no saying what Lord Melbourne will do and, quite frankly, it is no business of ours.’

‘Oh, I cannot bear it,’ Victoria murmured to herself. ‘After all that has been said and done between us.’

Harriet’s ears pricked. ‘Ma’am? Of what do you speak?’

The Queen composed herself rapidly. ‘Nothing. I speak merely of … business. Lord Melbourne and I have been through a great deal. I admit to expecting a certain … loyalty.’

Emma drew in a deep breath before saying what she had wanted to say for some time. ‘Ma’am … I feel I should advise … caution. Lord Melbourne is a man of the world. He is handsome and charming and he dotes on you. But … you must not …’

‘What? What must I not?’

‘Ma’am … I urge you to keep your feelings for Lord Melbourne strictly those between a Queen and her Prime Minister.’

‘But of course. What on earth else could they possibly be?’

No more was said on the matter. The Queen thought it best to read Nicholas Nickleby after all.

--xxoOoxx--

Her Majesty did not to dwell on the conversation with her ladies too much. Her extreme dismay at what he may be doing eclipsed any concern over court gossip. She knew the court speculated on the amount of time they spent in each other’s company but they were so careful that she never worried that they had been seen or heard doing anything inappropriate. For now, her agitation still rested squarely on how Lord Melbourne was occupying his time 500 miles away. Jealousy made her belligerent. She had not written to him for days. It did not go unnoticed.

--xxoOoxx--

Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty and trusts your Majesty is happily occupied. He imagines that your Majesty’s many duties and activities have prevented your Majesty from writing to him for over three days now. The discussions continue apace and the Prime Minister’s time is largely occupied in nodding sagely and adopting an air of considered interest, while all the while instead contemplating whether your Majesty is in the mood for Bach or that new fellow Chopin. Personally, in his absence, Lord Melbourne would advise Bach. He hopes that your
Majesty is not so busy that your Majesty is unable to partake in more relaxing matters, such as penning a letter or two.

Your devoted and hopeful servant,

Melbourne

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Her Majesty trusts that Lord Melbourne is not so busy that he is unable to partake in more relaxing matters, such as conversation with many and varied Prussian ladies. And it may be of interest for Lord Melbourne to note that in recent days Her Majesty has opted squarely for Beethoven. The Pathétique Sonata.

Victoria R

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Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty. He detects a certain recalcitrance on the part of your Majesty. He is not certain what may have occasioned this, but your Majesty’s reference to conversation with Prussian ladies gives him an indication. Lord Melbourne would like to assure your Majesty that for the most part it is conversation with Prussian gentlemen, most of whom are well-advanced in years and girth, which takes up practically all his time. There is only one lady with whom he wishes to converse and she is, regrettably, far away, playing the Pathétique Sonata.

Your devoted and reassuring servant,

Melbourne

--xxOoxx--

Suffice to say, his letter worked.

--xxOoxx--

Her Majesty thanks Lord Melbourne for his previous letter, which she read graciously. This morning she realised that Lord Melbourne will be returning in a week. Although this still seems such a long time away, she is relieved that there are only seven more nights which she must pass knowing that she will not have her dear Prime Minister take her hand in his and press it to his lips as he kneels before her each day. Oh, to feel those lips upon her again! She writes this letter at nearly midnight from her bed. She should be sleeping but finds her mind distracted and her body enlivened. She misses Lord Melbourne more than she could ever imagine.

With ardent anticipation of his return,

Victoria

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Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty and thanks your Majesty for the letter which wrought both happiness and expectation in him. He is currently at yet another convention on the development of agricultural machinery across the continent. The Prime Minister of Spain believes him to be taking copious and detailed notes on the Spinning Jenny but in actual fact he is
penning this note to your Majesty. He wishes to tell her that he has her previous letter upon him now, in an inside pocket where he can feel it against his chest, separated only from his skin by the cotton of his undershirt. Your Majesty’s words gave rise to many things last night as he read it. He wishes to make it clear to your Majesty that he shares those feelings most fervently and the distance between them is proving most frustrating.

He remains, most humbly and ardently, your most devoted servant,

Melbourne

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Her Majesty is finding it hard to write this letter as her eyes are constantly filled with tears. Oh, my darling! Oh, my dearest, darling Lord M! Come back to me! V

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I will. I will, I will. Be patient, my darling girl. Remember what I have taught you about patience. W

--xxoOoxx--

And for the next few days, Victoria dug deep into every ounce of her resolve and tried.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know. I know what you want. Many of you have told me. Like Victoria, you must remember what Lord M has taught you about patience. It'll be worth it, trust me.

He'll be back in England very soon. *rubs hands gleefully*

I loved writing this chapter. Let me know what you thought if you can spare a moment. x
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is surprised.

Chapter Notes

The artwork in this chapter was a gift from the amazing lucife56. Different versions of this incredible piece can be found here. Welcome Back Go and leave her lots of kudos and comments.

Are you sitting comfortably?
Then I'll begin.

Enjoy.
x

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Seven days. It may as well have been seventy. But Victoria managed to pass the hours with long walks with Dash, canters across Windsor Great Park and retiring to her bedchamber early. She returned to Buckingham Palace two days before her Prime Minister was expected back.

And so there came to be only one day and one night left to endure. He had said in his last letter that, all being well, he would return the following morning and come to her as soon as was feasible. She kissed the letter, folded it in four quarters and tucked it under her corset, close against her breast.

Fortunately, perhaps, there was a reception that evening for the Knights of the Garter. It would distract her, at least, although the prospect of conversing with some of the dullest and most gout-ridden men in the land hardly filled her with hope.

Dinner was easy enough. The banquet hall was laid out splendidly and she allowed the wine to infuse her with heady expectation at the thought of seeing him in the morning. As the evening wore on she found herself at her most effusive, and her charms delighted even the most curmudgeonly of the Garter Knights.

There was chatter afterwards. In normal society, she would have been excused with her ladies at this point to leave the gentlemen to their own discussion, but as she was Queen they were in no hurry to retire. She found herself in discussion with one after the other; her fixed smile and her mind began to ache.

‘And one would hope your Majesty will be able to come and visit the gardens at the next opportunity. They do look most splendid,’ muttered Sir John Beaulieu through his increasingly toothless gums.

The Queen smiled sweetly. ‘It sounds charming, Sir John. I would very much like that when I have
time."

‘Oh, do come soon, Ma’am. There is a charming path down through the wisteria which leads into the rhododendrons and then onto a rose garden which …’

Sir John continued his droning horticultural tour of his garden. But Victoria did not hear another word.

Glancing up from the conversation, she was immediately taken beyond it, beyond her surroundings, beyond herself.

Lord Melbourne had walked into the room.

For a moment she questioned herself, questioned whether she was imagining it, whether this was some imposter. But it was not. He was the same man, his posture, his countenance, the half-quizzical look on his face. It was him.

He looked about rapidly, his manner restless, and then his eyes fell on the one thing for which he searched. He found her.

She imagined this was what it felt like to be struck by lightning. She could not move; her limbs were paralysed, her eyes unable to look away. And surely her very core had been ripped from her and replaced in some haphazard, chaotic manner. Voices faded, the garish brightness of the room dulled. There was only him.

Melbourne looked dishevelled. He was dressed informally in day clothes and there were mud spatters reaching halfway up his breeches. His hair was unkempt and his chin clearly unshaven.

People approached him, inquiring after him, offering him a drink. Cumberland and Sutherland tried to engage him in conversation. Her mother stood nearby. He barely acknowledged them. Just as he was her only focal point in the room, so she was his.

‘Thank you, Sir John,’ Victoria murmured, ‘how fascinating. If you will excuse me, there is someone who …’ And without finishing her sentence, she abandoned the man who was still muttering about his roses and practically flew across to her Prime Minister.

‘Lord M.’

She said no more. She fell once more into those large, green eyes. He did not prevent her. ‘Ma’am … how very good it is to be back.’ His voice lacked a little of its usual meticulous smoothness.

Her chest was rising and falling visibly as she laboured to control her breathing. ‘I was not expecting you until tomorrow.’

‘No, Ma’am … I managed to intercept an earlier sailing after a … hasty journey from Berlin. And then I procured a horse to ride here.’

How beautiful he was. She could not take her eyes from his face. Had he always been so handsome? She supposed he had, but seeing him again after such a long absence reinforced his beauty so much that it almost overwhelmed her. ‘Not a carriage?’

‘No, Ma’am, mine wasn’t yet ready so, rather than wait several hours, I … purchased a horse … some horses, I suppose.’

‘You bought some horses, Melbourne?’ queried the Duke of Cumberland gruffly.
'I did.'

'How many?'

He cleared his throat briefly. 'Three.'

'And you rode them here?'

'Yes.'

'Simply for the purpose of getting to London a few hours earlier?' scoffed the Duke. 'How very bizarre and, for you, indulgently extravagant.'

'Well … one can never have enough horses.' Still he could not look away from her.

By now Victoria’s laboured breathing was paining her but she dismissed it. 'How very good it is to see you again, Lord Melbourne. Your counsel has been greatly missed.'

He inclined his head. 'Ma’am.' That was all.

She tore her eyes away from his only to dart her gaze about the room. She took in nothing and thought nothing except how she must escape all these people, all of them except one. ‘Excuse me … I … find I am a little tired.’

'Drina? Do you wish me to fetch Lehzen?’ asked her mother.

‘No! I wish to be alone. Leave me, thank you.’

And with that she hurried out, hoping beyond hope, knowing that one person would follow when he could. He would know where to find her.

She walked with as much dignity as she could muster to her favourite portrait of Queen Elizabeth. The corridor was only dimly lit at this time of night and not visited by anyone.

She stopped before it, staring up at her ancestor: Elizabeth’s knowing eyes, her slight smile made the awareness of what must be only stronger.

Eventually, footsteps approached behind her. Victoria resisted turning around, although it was hell not to do so.

‘Did you really buy three horses?’ she said, almost reluctant to let her voice break their perfect communion of silence.

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘Why?’

‘You know why.’

‘Tell me. I want to hear it.’

‘Because I could not bear to be parted from you for a moment longer.’

She squeezed her eyes tight shut as she spoke her truth. ‘I have been living in hell these last three weeks.’
‘I am sorry.’

‘Has it not been ghastly for you too?’

‘Yes, Ma’am, but I have been very busy.’

Her heart quivered. ‘And with many Prussian ladies to attend to you.’

‘I told you in my letters not to worry about that.’

‘But I did worry.’

‘There was no need.’

Now she turned to him, spinning around suddenly, her eyes burning with longing and the threat of tears. ‘How do I know? How do I know there was no need to worry? Oh, I hated it! I hated not knowing, I hated not being with you and wondering what –’

And with that he pulled her into him and he plunged his mouth onto hers and silenced her.

Her breath was robbed from her by the force of his kiss but here he was again, here were all her hopes and needs and longing contained in the muscle and bone and flesh of this man enclosing her into him.

He moved her with sudden strength, pushing her back into an alcove around the corner: dark, silent, secret, unseen.

‘Tell me you missed me,’ he slurred, his mouth hot as it grazed down her neck.

‘Yes, yes, yes, you know it, I missed you, I missed you. I could not live, I could not breathe.’ And he was back to her mouth, opening it with his, moaning into her. His passion robbed her of thought and instinct took over. She pressed her hips against him, brought her arms up to grasp at any part of him she could gain purchase on.

And with a grunt propelled from his own lust, he encircled her wrists in his hands and pulled her arms above her head, pinning them there against the wall in the strong grip of his left hand.

‘Tell me what you missed,’ he said again, his voice deep with his own desire. Was she scared? This was not the Lord M of the dispatch box, the polite, deferential Prime Minister who stood ever a step behind her, his eyes cast down. No, this was the man she dreamed of when night was at its deepest and most incubating. This was the man who had opened a different box to her, revealing all manner of wonders within. This was the man she wanted. Now. Here. This was the man she craved. Victoria writhed her arms above but could not escape and she adored him for that. She was pinned by his strength, secured by it. ‘Tell me exactly,’ he repeated, his tone demanding.

‘I missed your words … I missed your kisses … I missed your … touch.’

‘You missed my touch?’ he slurred, gruff with lust.

She nodded, biting her lip, the throbbing ache between her legs unbearable. She squirmed but could barely move, making the sensations all the more potent.

‘Yes … so much … so very much … My Lord.’

He seared her eyes with his, and she read only conviction and acknowledgement in them. And then, with barely a pause, he gathered up her skirts in his free hand and pulled them up. She gasped, not
with shock but need, and let him. Still he held her wrists in his hand, still he stared into her.

His hand worked its way under her layers until those long fingers were able to find the slit in her drawers. And after three weeks of separation, there was no need to delay. He pushed up between her thighs and touched her. Her head jerked back and she hissed out in delight.

She was wet – wet and hot and ready and he would use it. Not taking his gaze from her, he began to stroke, up along the dampness of her sex, parting the slick folds, up to find that ripe little bud which had longed for him, swelling and crying out in his absence through long nights with nothing but her imagination to drip feed it.

‘Yes, yes, my girl,’ he said, low and dangerous. ‘You have indeed missed it.’

She moaned, pushing down onto his fingers and being rewarded by the most perfect rubs and strokes and plucks at her ready flesh. And he moved in and kissed her again, his lips mimicking the workings of his fingers.

She opened her mouth to him, craving more, wanting that heated togetherness, there in the dark, surrounding silence. The stubble on his chin grazed, adding to the kaleidoscope of sensation which assaulted her.

He edged his tongue between her lips as his fingers edged their way between her other lips.

She opened her mouth wider, adoring this new exploration, this new harmony of body upon body. She had begun to rock herself upon his hand, pushing her body into him regularly, seeking out synchronicity. He met it with his fingers, a pushing, pulsing, rhythmic rubbing.
Her body was so expectant she nearly broke there and then. She tore herself away from his mouth only to drag in air and exclaim, ‘Oh, I adore that, I missed that, I need it, I need it, My Lord!’

‘Yes, you need it, you always have, and I will give it to you. Let me give it to you.’

She writhed under him again, as if seeking freedom, but when his grip on her denied it she loved that even more.

His fingers blurred upon her, through her, building that perfect pained expectation higher and higher so that she sobbed out helplessly. He let the sob fall from her but when another formed in her throat he caught it in his kiss. She was panting under him now but her breaths were all for him. He kissed and retreated a whisper away to absorb her sighs and moans. Their eyes saw only the other.

‘I want to see you, I want to feel you coming apart for me,’ he muttered, his own voice ragged. ‘Do it.’

And his fingers rubbed with near brutality over that part of her, now so acutely, potently primed that she was lifted to the final crumbling edges of the precipice.

‘Yes, oh yes, oh yes, My Lord!’ she sobbed. With a groan of his own he plunged his mouth to hers as a cry broke from her along with her climax.

Her body convulsed under the rage of pleasure which consumed it, but he held her still, one hand on her wrists, the other strong on her sex, open and wet, his fingers drawing yet another surge through her as the first wave died away.

Only when the last twitches of euphoria had left her, only when her breathing steadied and settled again, only when he felt her body slacken and slump on him, did he take his mouth from hers. Gently he released his grip on her wrists and she slowly brought her arms down, wincing a little as the blood rushed back into them. She hadn’t noticed the discomfort before and now felt strangely proud of her endurance of it. His other hand remained between her legs, as if she would evaporate if he let go.

He was panting himself, not from the effort of pleasing her but the exhilaration, and rested his head on her forehead. For the first time they both closed their eyes, and slowly, reluctantly, his hand dropped from its place nestled between her legs.

Minutes ticked by. They spoke not a word. There, in their quiet, still togetherness, there was no need. She rested her head against his chest and curled her arms around him, placing her palms flat on his back where she felt him strong and certain. He smelt of stables and exhaustion and she knew how he had toiled to reach her so soon.

At length, when awareness of time encroached upon them insolently, she lifted her head and said, ‘Thank you.’

‘You did miss me,’ he observed, a wry smile capturing his face.

She smiled back. ‘And you missed me.’

He gave his response by bending to her again. Tears formed hot in her eyes and he kissed them away. Cupping her face with tender adoration he planted kisses over all her face. She sighed into him. ‘I don’t want this to end. I don’t want you to end.’

So he continued until sense forced its way back and, reluctantly, she drew away. ‘We cannot stay. It grows too late.’
And the mantle of statesmanship covered him again. He cleared his throat and drew himself up straight, stepping back from her. ‘I shall call tomorrow at around 10 o’clock, Ma’am.’

‘Very well, Lord M.’ She said and afterwards dropped her head with a soft giggle.

His mouth ticked at the corners. ‘Why do you laugh, Ma’am?’

‘You are a little muddy, Lord M. I am not accustomed to seeing you dishevelled.’

‘I apologise, Ma’am.’

‘Do not apologise. As you can tell … I rather like it.’

He smiled. ‘Can you return to your chamber unaided?’

‘Yes, I shall go through the reading room and up the west staircase. No one will know where I’ve been.’

‘I shall return briefly to the gathering, it will dispel speculation. Good bye, Ma’am.’ He nodded briefly and turned to leave.

‘My Lord!’ She called him back, using the term instinctively, compulsively. ‘It was never going to be enough, was it … just kisses?’

His gaze fell from her briefly as he considered her words, but then, he lifted his eyes to her again and said, ‘No. It was never going to be enough.’

Chapter End Notes

There aren't many times my own writing turns me on. This was one of them.

God, he's good.

Thanks for all your support. I know you don't like commenting on the more, err, 'descriptive' chapters, but if you do feel like it, I'd love to hear from you.

More soon. And if you thought this was hot ...

;-) x
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria acquaints herself with a pair of gloves. Amongst other things.

Chapter Notes

It's June, it's summer, and, as is hopefully the case, it's getting hotter. Hold on tight.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The note arrived at around quarter to ten o’clock.

She recognised the scrawl of his handwriting immediately, the way the M of Majesty looped chaotically over the paper. She opened it in trembling fingers. Anything from him made her tremble.

‘Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty and writes to inform her that he is unable to attend at ten o’clock as he had previously arranged, but will instead come at three.

He remains, etc,

Melbourne.’

She stared at the note. And then she stared some more.

How dare he?

How dare he?

She had not slept. At all. She had lain awake listening to the chimes from the bell towers of London. Three o’clock … four … five. When she had heard the bells chime six times she had thought of there being only four more hours to wait and considered that perhaps she could cope with that. But now he was telling her that she must wait another five hours again! It was quite intolerable!

Victoria turned on her heels and threw his note into the fire, watching it glow into flames and curl in on itself as her burning anger curled in on her.

She had waited for him for three weeks! And now, despite the glory of their reunion last night, she was having to wait again.

Oh, she could not fathom the man sometimes!

She paced the room, wringing her hands, despairing of the torment he put her through.

‘Your Majesty?’

‘What?’ she spat at Lehzen, who had just entered. The Baroness raised her eyebrows in disapproving
reproach. Victoria sighed and tried to calm herself. Patience. Patience. This was his plan. This was his intent. And he was teaching her so very well of the benefits of controlling anticipation. She offered the Baroness a reconciliatory smile. ‘I apologise, Lehzen. I did not sleep well.’

‘Why not, Majesty? Was it a hot night for you?’

‘There is much to sort through with Lord Melbourne today and he has just sent word that he is delayed! It is most vexing.’

‘I am sure there is good reason for it, Majesty.’

‘Yes … I suppose.’

‘You must not sulk so.’

She turned to the Baroness, taken aback. ‘Do I do that? Sulk?’

‘You do, Majesty. It is most unbecoming.’

Lehzen shut the door on her. Victoria sat down and sighed. If she was being petulant, then she really must be taught otherwise.

--xxOoxx--

The hours passed, slowly, tormenting, but they did pass.

She sat in the room adjacent to her private sitting room and waited, trying not to focus on the ticking of the clock. It chimed three. She steadied her breathing. Another minute passed, then another. Her pulse raced, but still she sat, trying to calm herself. At last, at four minutes past, the door opened and he was there.

Without a word, without a look at her, he knelt and kissed her hand. The same routine as he had done for months. The same manner, the same man.

Melbourne rose from kissing her hand and allowed his gaze to flit about as was his wont. ‘I apologise for my delay in attending today, Ma’am.’

‘You have not given me sufficient explanation for this, Lord Melbourne.’

He detected the flinty tone and narrowed his eyes. ‘No, perhaps I have not.’

He said nothing more. She cocked an eyebrow, expecting it. Nothing was forthcoming.

Oh, it was too much! She clasped her hands tightly and insecurity burst from her. ‘Perhaps … Perhaps you were writing to your new Prussian lady friends!’

‘And what new Prussian lady friends would those be, Ma’am?’

‘I do not know! The same ones with whom you were dancing and talking and complimenting on their dress and … and … doing all manner of thing with!’

He dropped his head and chuckled. She was puce with indignation. ‘You laugh, Lord Melbourne? Why do you laugh?’

‘Because you have such an amusing way about you, Ma’am.’
She stepped into him. ‘You would dare laugh at your Queen?’

For a moment his face grew deathly serious, and he said, as controlled and measured as ever, ‘No. I would dare laugh at a woman who allows emotion to overcome sense.’

She should dismiss him! She should force him to remember his position and station. He was quite incorrigible!

She held his gaze and he held it right back and the anger inside was so hot it burned her, but at the same time that feeling throbbed and brewed and settled low, low down in her in that familiar way. And as he looked at her he knew it. He knew it so very well and so she said nothing as his stare seared its way into her.

Melbourne walked slowly over to the window, hands behind his back, gloves clasped in them, and looked out over the lawns. ‘Your petulance is not an admirable quality.’

‘By that you mean?’

‘You must try to suppress it, to control it.’

‘I find that hard.’

‘I know.’

‘How can I suppress it?’

‘You know how.’

She steadied herself, understanding. ‘You made me wait today on purpose.’

‘Yes.’

‘You did it to torment me.’

‘That was not the specific reason, but if that is what the outcome was, then so be it.’

She took a pace towards him but stopped short of throwing herself at him in an unseemly mess. ‘My Lord … I am trying so hard to learn.’

He looked back at her, his face dark with intent yet still with that radiant brilliance in his eyes.

‘Go into your sitting room.’ It was not a tone to argue with.

And, again, as last night, as all the times she lay in the darkness thinking of him, her pulse began a dash and her breath dragged through her.

‘Go on.’ He was insistent.

She turned and walked although her legs already felt weak. She stood in a space near the chaise and waited for him. He approached slowly, still with his hands behind his back, but on reaching the doors which separated her private sitting room from the larger reception chamber, he shut them and turned the key in the lock.

Melbourne turned around and appraised her. ‘Your gown. Remove it.’

She did not know what he meant at first. There was no lady’s maid to do it for her. But then she
reached behind her and fumbled for the hooks. It was impossible. ‘I … I can’t.’

He tutted. He actually tutted then approached her. ‘Turn around.’ With palpable frustration, he set about undoing the hooks. ‘You should not rely on others for these matters.’

‘I am sorry, My Lord.’

And the gown was loosened enough to let him push it from her shoulders; it tumbled to the floor and she stepped out of it.

‘Skirts.’

These she could manage, but her fingers felt thick and useless as she scrabbled at the laces in her hurry to please him.

He approached and placed a hand on her waist around her corset, studying it carefully. ‘Do you like wearing this?’

‘I have to wear it.’

‘That is not what I asked.’

She was bewildered. ‘I have never thought about it.’

‘Think about it now.’

‘It restricts me.’

‘When?’

‘All the time.’

‘Sometimes restriction can be a good thing.’

‘Can it?’

‘Hm,’ he hummed, now entirely focused on her corset and waist as he ran his hand along the curve and up to the swell of her breasts. ‘It looks well on you.’

This made her glow inside. ‘Do you like it, My Lord?’

‘I like aspects of it. I like to look upon you in it and feel you in it. But today … I want to look upon you out of it.’ He leaned in and whispered in her ear, ‘Turn around.’

Oh, he tormented her so; she would not immediately humour him. ‘Turn around, My Lord?’

A flicker of amused intolerance caught his expression. ‘You heard me.’

She held his eyes and enjoyed the brief moment of defiance. But then, with calculated insolence which melted into deference, she turned, slowly, offering him the back of her corset.

‘Petulance and defiance,’ he mused. ‘You seem to have forgotten quite a lot in my absence.’

‘Perhaps not forgotten it, My Lord, perhaps let it slip … much time has passed.’

‘Well …’ he said, and she felt a tug as his fingers loosened the laces. ‘… that must be addressed.’
‘Yes, sir.’

Nobody, not a single person, had ever unlaced her corset save her lady’s maid, alone at night in the privacy of her bedchamber. And now he was doing so, and it was as if it was crafted for him, only him, to do just this with it.

He took his time, pulling out the laces, loosening, releasing, until she felt air rushing into her lungs. He gave her that, air to breathe.

He tugged out the laces completely and her corset fell away from her. She was left only in chemise, drawers and stockings and those, from behind, he quickly removed as well. She stepped out of them hastily as he tugged them down.

‘There,’ he said, satisfied. ‘You are quite undone. Turn back around.’

She did so and felt her cheeks burning. She dared not lift her head to his. For the first time since the start of their intimacy, she was embarrassed. She knew her chemise was sheer enough for him to see through and expectation had made her nipples stand out, hard and red. When he had abused her backside before, she could not see what he was doing and there was a certain privacy in that. Now, he was looking directly at her and there was nowhere to hide.

He studied her, his eyes flitting downwards, but she resisted bringing her arms over to conceal herself. His expression grew serious and she noted the deep rise and fall of his chest. The thin cotton of her chemise dropped over the sculpted rise of her breasts as if hewn in some Grecian statue of ancient times. Only this was not a myth from thousands of years before. This was now.

‘Why do you blush?’ he asked.

‘I’ve never before … you’ve never … seen …’

‘Does that trouble you?’

‘Not as such, My Lord. I simply do not know if I shall please you.’

His eyes closed. Had she offended him? Had she said something wrong? But when he opened them he took a step into her. His gaze fell once again on her breasts and she breathed so hard that any attempts not to draw attention to them were impossible. They rose and fell visibly before his gaze as desire and bewilderment overcame her.

‘Victoria,’ he murmured, almost a whisper. ‘You are so unknowing. Do you truly not realise?’ And, taking in the sight before him as if he was starved of it, he reached up and cupped her left breast.

She drew in a gasp. The cotton kept little from her. She could still feel the warmth of each finger as he gently held the heavy flesh.

And then, tilting his head slightly to the side, entirely rapt in what he was doing, he tightened his grip, barely perceptibly but enough. His fingertips massaged, rubbed and stroked the softness of the underside and then his thumb rose up, stroking over her until it caught her nipple. And, oh, such a shot of sweet sensation dashed from it to throb between her legs. At her gasp, his eyes flicked up to hers before concentrating back on the nipple. He drew his thumb down again, harder now, brushing over the tight flesh so that it was grazed under his touch. And again. She instinctively pushed into his hand. He turned his palm over so that the backs of his knuckles ran across the nipple, flicking it, catching it.

‘My Lord …’ she managed. She wanted to tell him. She wanted him to carry on. Was it always as
And then he brought up his other hand to her right breast and bestowed the same attention on it.

She took the slowest, deepest breath and held it as her body attuned to this new sensation, this new wonder. This man revealed more and more to her, day upon day.

‘Look at me,’ he said. She dragged her heavy eyes up to meet his.

And then – oh! He squeezed, slightly but perceptibly. He had taken both nipples between his thumbs and forefingers and was rolling them, only a little, the merest, slightest amount, but, oh! He released them then did it again and release and again and all the while her body took and absorbed and delighted in this and she knew if he touched her he would find her dripping with longing.

‘Oh, oh, My Lord!’ she sighed, and pushed her breasts wantonly into his touch.

“You see. No more embarrassment, no more hesitation. And yet …’ He cast a final look down over her breasts and said, ‘… I am not addressing this petulance of yours.’

And immediately his hands dropped from her and he stepped back. She almost wept at the denial. She missed that delicious touch painfully and felt her nipples hard with expectation. He was unconcerned. ‘Move around to the back of the chaise.’

‘My Lord?’

‘Did you not hear me?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Well, then, I’m waiting.’

She refocused and moved to stand where he’d said. There was a fire behind her and she knew that her naked figure would be silhouetted by the light shining through the thin material, but she stood quite proudly as he positioned himself behind her.

‘It has been some time, has it not?’ he said.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Bend down, over the chaise.’

She did so.

‘Move your legs apart.’

She did.

‘You have not forgotten our word?’

‘No, sir. Orchid, sir.’

‘You have never yet had cause to use it.’

‘No, sir.’

‘Does this disappoint you?’
She hesitated, about to answer no, but she wasn’t entirely sure. His question threw her.

‘I don’t know … My Lord.’

‘Hm.’ And he placed his hand on her back, warm, firm, fingers splayed. It made her catch her breath. He ran his hand up her spine, right up between her shoulder blades, causing the material of her chemise to bunch up with it. When he reached her neck he stroked his fingers over one shoulder and gave a little squeeze, easing out any tension. He did so on the other shoulder too, then drew his hand back down until it rested in the small of her back.

Thwack!

The first spank took her completely unawares and she jerked away from it, trying to stand up instinctively, but his hold on her prevented it.

‘You have forgotten,’ he purred, almost amused.

‘It has been a while, My Lord.’

Thwack! This one she took and pushed back for more.

‘I will help you remember.’

He delivered ten spanks, each one sharper and harder than the previous, but she took them and craved the next. And then there was a different sensation, not as hard but spreading out and leaving a lingering glow which she adored but could not understand.

‘What is that?’ She had to ask.

‘Excuse me?’

He was bringing whatever it was down concertedly, not pacing it as he did with his hand, but tapping and sweeping and brushing it over her time and again, across her already flaming buttocks then further down onto the softer parts of her thighs. It barely hurt but it was so curious that she craved turning around.

‘What is that, sir?’

He paced around to her and she looked up at what he held in his hands.

He was spanking her with his riding gloves.

‘On the long ride back, I wore out the old pair … and so I acquired some more.’ He held up the new gloves, black, soft, buttery leather. After giving a self-satisfied smirk, he went back to his task. The gloves kissed her red flesh, inflaming it further yet also caressing. She moaned audibly.

‘You like it?’

‘Yes.’

‘What?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘Do you not miss … this?’ And he brought down his hand with sudden vigour, making her yelp in surprise.
‘I will take what you choose to bestow, My Lord.’

‘Good.’ So he finished with his hand, raining down several hard slaps which translated into pure lust as the burn spread to the damp heat between her legs.

He stepped back, his own breathing deep, and gave her time to recover. ‘There. I have finished.’

She waited, expecting him to reach between her legs, expecting his fingers to find her and feel her and bring her that beautiful, perfect gift he gave so well. But he did not. At length, she pushed herself up gingerly, her backside sore from the concentrated blows.

He stood, taller than she had ever realised, indomitable, sovereign. ‘Will you accept that I saw nobody, touched nobody and thought only of you when I was away?’

She nodded slowly. ‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘Will you accept that I want only your touch, your body and your mind to sustain me?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘Then show me. Show me that you accept this.’ And he took hold of her wrist and guided it towards the buttons on his breeches. Already he was large and prominent. An almost childlike glee raced through her. She had almost forgotten what it looked like and the awareness that she could take it and hold it and give him her adoration made her bold.

Victoria stepped into him, quickly undoing his breeches enough to reach in and release him. He was so ready, so long and hard, that it was easily done. She glanced down, enthralled by the extraordinary thing that she now had power over.

‘You remember?’ he forced out, his own desire making his voice gruff.

‘Yes, sir.’

She barely hesitated to spit on her hand. Curling her fingers carefully around the shaft, she then drew them up, tight and firm, sweeping over the head. He sucked in a sharp breath. She paced herself, moving her hand slowly down to the root of the shaft before, with a slight twist, pulling it back up, not gently.

‘Like that, My Lord?’

He let the corner of his mouth tick up. ‘Yes. You know.’

‘It pleases me to hear you say that.’

She dragged her hand over the head, running her thumb lightly through the slit and causing him to hiss in satisfaction. ‘It pleases me to have you do that.’

She repeated her actions again, building up a rhythmic pumping of his member. ‘To have me do that, sir?’

‘Yes.’ His Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed. As much as he was trying to focus, his eyes had closed and he gave himself up entirely to her.

She gripped the engorged head hard and ran her thumb along the ridge. ‘And this, sir?’

‘Yes.’ It was followed by a moan.
She dampened her other hand and brought it down too, now gripping more of him in her two palms.

‘And that, sir?’

‘My God, yes, that!’

He was almost beside himself and euphoric glee coursed through her; she went at him with yet more conviction. At that he took hold of her left wrist and pushed it off him slightly, urging her further down. ‘Hold them, cup them.’

At first she was not sure what he meant, but he pushed her hand onto the heavy sac which sat beneath the shaft. With no hesitation, curious at what they felt like, she took hold of them. Immediately, he hissed and she relaxed her grip. ‘No!’ he demanded. ‘Hard. Take them hard.’

She did, cupping them lightly but then squeezing, tightening her grip as her other hand continued its regular stroking. She worked firmly over the head before plunging down to the root and up again.

He swallowed again, entirely at her submission. ‘Don’t stop doing that. Please … please, Victoria.’ His abandon pleased her greatly.

She kept plying, squeezing, priming, rubbing him. She had eased into a natural rhythm and it emboldened her to ask, ‘Did you think of this when you were away from me, My Lord?’

‘Yes.’

She tried something quite brazen. ‘Did you touch yourself, sir?’ She had never really thought of it, but why should he not?

‘Yes.’

‘And when you touched yourself, did you imagine it was me upon you, sir?’

‘Yes, only you, only ever you, my darling.’

Oh, how she adored this man! She craved more and more of him. ‘My Lord,’ she implored, desperate for more connection.

He tore his head down to meet her eyes.

‘Kiss me, My Lord. Please kiss me.’

And, his breath shallow from rising ecstasy, he lowered his head and bruised her lips with his. Their kiss was open and hungry, teeth catching lips, tongues searching. He gripped her head and tangled his fingers so desperately through her hair that it pulled her scalp and spoiled the neat coils.

And then it was there, that moment of exquisite tension. His lips paused in their kiss. She felt him upon her, his breath held, his mind emptied. He sought out her mouth again and groaned into her. Her hands gripped, pumped it out of him and there ... His seed shot from him out onto her chemise and she felt its wetness warming her belly. Still he moaned and as she moved her thumb more fell onto her hand.

At last, when his body had relaxed and his breathing steadied, she pulled back and smiled softly up at him. For a time neither could speak a word but, when he had released a final sigh of deepest satisfaction, she said, ‘There, My Lord. I hope I have shown you that I will subdue my petulance from now on.’
And in response he simply kissed her again, a long, deep, slow kiss, feeding her every ounce of his gratitude and adoration. Tears pricked at her eyes and she was grateful for his closeness so he would not see. But when he at last pulled away, she saw his own eyes blurred and shining.

‘I missed you so very much,’ he said, gently stroking her face.

She smiled, at last reassured. How silly she was to worry. How petulant indeed. There was no need for the sulks and the childish concerns.

‘I realise that now. But, our separation … it has made your home coming rather splendid, has it not?’

He chuckled but then glanced down and tutted. ‘I had quite forgotten myself. I have spoiled your undergarments.’ He reached for his handkerchief, wetted it in a glass of water and washed her chemise as best he could.

‘Perhaps, in that case, it would be better to dispense with undergarments altogether?’ she tried as boldly as she could muster.

He eyed her carefully. ‘You would be content with that?’

‘Oh yes, My Lord.’

‘Perhaps then … you are right.’ After a slight shared smile he picked up her corset and began lacing her back into it. The feel of him doing so was even more delicious than him undoing it.

‘But I am not the only one wearing undergarments, My Lord,’ she teased.

He sniffed out a laugh behind her and tugged the laces even tighter. ‘There are limits to what can be attempted in one’s sitting room.’

‘Then perhaps we should move to another place. The corridor served us very well last night.’

‘I would not recommend that very often.’

‘Well, then … a bedchamber, perhaps?’

He said nothing in response and focused on tying the laces before reaching for the rest of her clothes. Together, silence falling heavily between them, she dressed again.

When she was at last finished, she turned to him. He was avoiding her gaze. Her insides felt hollow with unrequited need. He had not brought her to a climax today and, although she knew why and adored pleasing him instead, she longed for him yet more because of it.

She tried again. ‘Could we not do that, somehow? A bedchamber? You have your rooms at Windsor; we stay there together frequently. We could find a way, I am sure.’

He resorted to his usual stance of careful exactitude, hands clasped before him. ‘That would be very difficult and exceptionally dangerous, Ma’am.’

They were back to Ma’am. Victoria swallowed back her disappointment.

‘I find myself quite drawn to danger,’ she disclosed.

He looked across at her, his face serious but not entirely through reproach, she thought, more through interest. The aching pull between her legs reflected an oppressive yearning for all he was.
‘You see … I want …’ Her words cut through the heavy air.

‘What? What do you want?’ There was expectant inquiry in his voice.

So Victoria held his gaze resolutely and said it. ‘I want you inside me.’

Chapter End Notes

Tell it like it is, Vicky.

Please excuse any over-heating caused by this chapter. Word of advice ... you may want to get used to it. ;-)

If you're so inclined, comments are still hugely appreciated. Many thanks in advance.

And don't forget to join our 'For the love of Vicbourne' closed Facebook group. Lots of fun and discussion to be had for all Vicbourne lovers!
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is emboldened.

Chapter Notes

Many apologies for the delay in updating. I've been incredibly busy but now have some time. Updates should be more regular.

This is a short but important chapter. It brings things to a new point.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Melbourne glanced about the room, as if expecting someone to appear from behind the curtain. He clasped his hands and took a step towards her, furtively for him.

‘Ma’am … do you realise what you are saying?’

She stood tall, the beauty of the man, body and soul, making her ardour ever stronger. ‘I realise all too well, Lord M. I have known it for an age now. I have dreamt it, every night, dreams of longing, of need. After all we have shared, I cannot live with it in my dreams alone any longer.’

The line of his mouth thinned and he avoided her gaze. ‘Ma’am …’ Melbourne could find no further words and instead resorted to a slight sigh.

‘Lord Melbourne … this is the only way.’

He at last glanced up at her, his expression grave. This time she did not allow him to look away and continued undeterred. ‘After all that has been said and done between us … how can it be any other way?’ She stepped in closer. ‘When you first discussed all this with me, you yourself said that it usually led to the ultimate intimacy.’

‘But not always. I said that also.’

‘But what we have … you know it has gone beyond the mere play of discipline. And then when we stopped and it was only the kisses I adored that too, as did you … but now …’ She wrung her hands together; the hollowness inside her and memories of his touch made her breath drag. ‘Oh, let us know it all!’

He said nothing and again dropped his gaze. She would prompt him; she would draw it from him. ‘Do you not want it?’

His eyes darted up; he could not lie to her. ‘You know I want it.’

She smiled and reached for his hand. After the visceral dealings between them and amidst the nature of the discussion, it was a tender and innocent act. ‘Then … there is no more to say … only to do.’
'Ma’am … there is much to say … We are already living a dangerous deceit. And with that particular act comes much more to consider. It could bring down the monarchy if you were to …’ Here he trailed off, the magnitude of what he was saying sitting tensely between them.

‘If I were to become with child?’ She finished for him, bold and determined.

‘Exactly.’

‘I am no fool, Lord M. I understand that there are times to desist and times when one can be assured of avoiding such consequences.’

His hands rose to the sides as if grappling for reason. ‘Perhaps, although it is far from assured.’

‘My monthly inconveniences occur very regularly, so I presume other things occur regularly too. Surely that helps matters.’

He brought a hand to his forehead and rubbed over it wearily, as if the discussion was exhausting him. ‘I suppose, Ma’am.’

‘And … there are other ways, presumably.’

His brows furrowed briefly as if trying to banish the thought. ‘Only the one other. And aside from that, I would not recommend anything more for … Your Majesty.’ His gaze dropped again, as did his head.

Her mouth ticked into an amused smile. ‘You are blushing, Lord M.’

‘These are intimate matters, Ma’am.’

‘More intimate than what we have just done to each other?’

He sniffed out a laugh. ‘No, indeed.’

‘So tell me, what is the one other way?’

That expression of discomfiture flittered across the immaculate features again. She found it utterly charming. ‘Well, one can … withdraw before … the inevitable …’

She thought back to the times he had come off in her hand, the sound he made, the sheer beautiful abandon and release of it. Surely the whole purpose of intercourse was to allow that to occur while joined. ‘Oh, but that must be deeply unsatisfying! I could not abide it!’

‘You could not abide it?’ he muttered sardonically, mainly to himself.

She frowned but pursed her lips. ‘Well, there are ways then, not entirely satisfactory ways, but ways nonetheless.’

He allowed himself to look at her again and smiled softly. ‘Yes, there are ways … but … the consequences of them failing are too horrendous to contemplate.’

‘Then we must ensure they do not fail.’

‘Ma’am … I am not sure I can allow this situation … The dangers are too great.’

But his conviction was faltering. She sensed she could crush it completely. And so she stepped in and curled her hands around his waist, pressing her body fully along his and cocking a teasing
eyebrow. ‘Lord M … have you not been exposing my backside to your gaze for the last few weeks?’

‘I have, Ma’am.’

‘And spanking it until it is red and burning?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘Have you not been kissing me with such passion that it makes me giddy with desire?’

‘Indeed, Ma’am.’

‘And have we not been touching each other in ways which connect us more profoundly than any other … bar one?’

‘We have, Ma’am.’

She brought her hands to his chest and slid them up and around his neck to pull him down for a kiss. ‘So I ask you, Lord M … do you think that we can avoid this next step?’

He hesitated but she tugged harder than his resistance. ‘Ma’am …’

When her tongue dampened her lips momentarily, his prevarication was gone. He found her mouth and she kissed him with pure, simple adoration, knowing how he loved the cossetting warmth of her pliant lips.

She pulled back briefly for his answer. ‘Lord M? Do you really think we can avoid it?’

Another kiss. Now his hands were at her waist, pulling her into him, and she pressed herself against the hardness she felt between his legs. He groaned and kissed her harder. ‘No,’ came his answer. ‘We cannot avoid it.’

‘Tell me,’ she muttered through his kisses, which were growing ever more heated and bruising.

‘Tell you what?’ he moaned, his voice muffled against her enticing skin.

‘Tell me what I told you.’

He drew back, his eyes needfully dark but with an emerald glint which almost startled her. ‘If I may observe … Ma’am.’ And with this he uncurled her arms from around him and, with determination verging on brutality, pulled them behind her back and enclosed them in one large fist. She gasped in shock but her desire leapt so excitedly within her that it quickly morphed into a moan of undiluted need. ‘You are becoming somewhat forward.’

‘I apologise … My Lord.’ She squirmed against him, not through the need to escape but to reinforce the constriction.

‘Hm,’ he hummed and the corner of his mouth twitched in satisfaction. He pulled her in harder yet and she found herself immobile, pinned to the man, the evidence of his own desire pressing determinedly against her waist. Melbourne leaned down, his warm breath ghosting over the shell of her ear. ‘Yes … I want to be inside you.’ His free hand had risen to her breast and, even through the layers of cloth and corset, he somehow managed to rub the nipple to immediate and needed expectation. ‘I want to be inside you so much that it is as much as I can do not to lay you back on this bureau now and take you.’ His dominance thrilled her and she moaned out her approval, baring her neck for his searching lips, pressing into the hand at her breast, pushing harder yet against his
manhood. ‘I want to be inside you so much that my sense is lost and my reason crushed and I could forget myself and bury myself in you, bury myself in all you are, here and now.’

She gasped with revelation and felt tears prickling at her eyes. ‘My darling, my darling, please, please …’

‘But,’ he slurred, dragging his mouth up the swan-like length of her neck to whisper hot in her ear again, ‘I will not.’

And his hold on her was gone and he stepped back, making her dizzy with the loss of it. She staggered and gripped the back of a chair to steady herself.

‘When it happens, it will be right and it will be perfect … And in any case, Ma’am …’ He reached down and picked up the dispatch box. ‘We have work to do.’

Chapter End Notes

Your comments still feed the muse, thank you! And don't forget our Facebook group 'For the love of Vicbourne', sharing the love of all things Victoria and Lord M.

x
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria - with a little help from her friends - hatches a plan.

Chapter Notes

You are a patient lot. Just like Victoria. I've been a little waylaid recently by some bloke called Rufus who was in a reasonably high-profile poll for Drama Champion. He made it to the semi-final and it was all lovely (apart from the finger-numbing, soul-destroying parts) but now I'm really, really, really glad it's over. Now I can write again. And I have. You will be pleased to hear that the next chapter is pretty much ready to roll too. And the ones after that keep hopping all over me with their little plot bunnies all night too.

Anyway ... when it comes to inappropriate relations between a Queen and her Prime Minister, there are one or two logistical matters to deal with first ...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She bided her time. She was patient. She kept her petulance at bay.

There settled between them a calm companionship which nurtured and sustained her as well as his touch or kisses. Not that those were absent. It was rare that a meeting between them finished without a caress or a kiss and at those times the embers inside would smoulder and spark once again.

But now that the pieces of the jigsaw were coming together, now she could make out the picture clearly, confusion and frustration were quelled.

--xxOoxx--

She sat one morning while Skerrett coiled and knotted her hair.

‘You seem content today, Your Majesty.’

She glanced up. Her lady’s maid and she now had such an easy relationship that she would allow her to speak first. ‘I am, Skerrett. How can you tell?’

‘You were humming, Ma’am.’

‘Was I?’ She let out a ripple of a laugh. ‘I had not noticed.’

‘I think matters of state are not troubling you, Ma’am.’

‘No, they are not, not at all. The government seems to be handling things most effectively. But of course Lord Melbourne steers it admirably.’

Skerrett hesitated briefly before adding, ‘Of course, Ma’am. He is a fine Prime Minister.’
‘The finest.’

Skerrett cocked a self-deprecating eyebrow. ‘I have had little experience of Prime Ministers, Ma’am, so I could not comment.’

Victoria deepened her smile. She adored chatting informally to her maid; it was so rare she did so with anyone, save for him, of course. ‘To be frank, Skerrett, neither have I … but I do not know what I would do without my Lord M.’

‘Your Lord M, Ma’am?’ She giggled.

‘Should I not say that, Skerrett?’

‘You are the Queen, Ma’am. All things belong to you, I suppose.’

‘Oh no, that is not how it works at all. It is exactly the other way round. I belong to all. I belong to everyone, all my subjects, you included.’

‘And Lord Melbourne. Do you belong to him too, Ma’am?’

She should be cross with her dresser for stating such a thing, but Victoria looked at herself in the mirror and held her own knowing eyes. ‘Perhaps I do. And I think I rather like it.’

She glanced up. Skerrett had paused in her braiding and was looking at the Queen in the looking glass. Victoria caught her breath. But, oh, how she longed to speak to her, to tell her. She needed a friend, did she not, a confidante? Skerrett was, like her, a young woman, a young woman of a similar age, with thoughts and dreams and a future. She wanted to confide in her so much that she opened her mouth, but Skerrett seemed to sense the urgency to turn the conversation around. Her pretty cheekbones were pink. ‘Like you say, Ma’am, Lord Melbourne is a fine Prime Minister … in many ways.’

The Queen smiled gently. ‘Yes, Skerrett … in many ways.’

The two women held their gazes in the looking glass and the slightest smile passed between them, but Victoria knew its significance.

--xxOoxx--

The days passed. He would arrive for his audience. He would kneel and kiss her hand. He would rise and they would settle to work and complete it. He would stand and she would stand and he would kiss her mouth and murmur in her ear and she would urge him on and lean into him and they would press their bodies together and warm each other and seek out each other and she would sigh into him for more, more when he dragged his mouth along her neck as if trying to drink her in and he would groan roughly against her skin which burned for him and she would feel the sharp edges of his teeth as if he would mark her as his own and she would adore it and crave more, more … But always time imposed itself or Lehzen would knock or Parliament would summon him and they would part. She minded and yet she did not. She knew now to wait. Like he said, it would be perfect.

When the weather was fine they would ride out or walk in the gardens. One morning, a few weeks after his return from Prussia, they walked together through the rose gardens of Buckingham House – ostensibly a walk to discuss the new shipping routes from India. When they were far enough from her ladies, who were lagging behind, he said, ‘I must ask you something, Ma’am. Forgive the nature of the question.’
‘I do not yet know what the question is, Lord M, so there is as yet nothing to forgive.’

‘Ma’am … the court moves to Windsor soon, does it not?’

‘On this very Monday coming, Lord M.’

He said nothing more although held himself as if he would. She stifled a giggle. ‘If that is your question, Lord M, then I can reassure you that there is indeed nothing to forgive. That question is not at all controversial – I am most disappointed.’ She laughed again, but his next question stopped her laughter abruptly.

‘When did you last bleed? Your monthly time, I mean.’

She stood, her eyes wide, not with indignation that he had asked but with the realisation of what it meant. ‘I … It was …’ She frowned, trying to think back.

‘You must be sure of the exact date. When did it finish?’

‘It finished … umm … finally on the 20th. Yes, I remember as I had not felt like riding out and it was the first time I wanted to again. I had a marvellous gallop along the avenue which I recorded in my journal.’

He smiled softly. ‘You are sure? That was seven days ago.’

‘Yes, I am certain.’

‘And we move to Windsor in five days’ time.’ His brows were furrowed as if he were thinking hard. ‘And – do excuse the personal nature of these questions, Ma’am – you bleed regularly?’

‘I can time it almost to the minute it will begin.’

He glanced at her but still seemed deep in concentration.

She continued, stepping a little closer. ‘You know your rooms at Windsor are always ready for you. Will you join me at Windsor, Lord M? Will you stay?’ Her eyes lit up and her body gleamed. If Emma Portman was not just around the corner of the box hedge, she would have wound herself around the elegance of his body.

‘I think perhaps I will, Your Majesty.’

--xxOoxx--

The royal household was busy preparing the move to Windsor where they would remain for several weeks. For Victoria, the departure to the castle could not come soon enough. She was skittish, unable to sit still, and it had been necessary for Skerrett to accompany her to her sitting room to try to tame her hair, which seemed to have a mind of its own that morning. It was the last Friday the Queen would attend to official business at Buckingham House for some time.

Skerrett tutted as she wrestled with a pin. ‘Ma’am … this coil is vexing me! It’s like herding kittens in a field of shrews!’

The Queen let her laughter rise freely. ‘You do amuse me, Skerrett, but I do not like to be reminded of rodents!’

‘I am sorry, Ma’am.’ The maid giggled some more. ‘I’d forgotten the incident at your birthday. We
did have some moments with those rats though. I remember one day Mrs Jenkins thought she saw one and she jumped up on the table, lifting all her skirts and petticoats with her. Mr Penge’s eyes nearly popped out of his sockets while she stood there revealing more than any woman would normally even show her husband. Screaming the place down she was!'

The Queen clutched her hand to her chest and joined her maid in laughter. ‘I wish I had seen that, Skerrett.’

‘Oh, I can scarce control myself thinking about it now. We didn’t know where to look and she just stood there with her legs jigging around for all to see and screaming blue murder!’

At this the door opened and the Prime Minister entered, finding the Queen and her lady’s maid quite overcome with hysterical laughter.

‘Oh! Lord M!’ tried the Queen. ‘We were just -!’

‘Lord Melbourne!’ squawked Skerrett, blushing scarlet and dropping a hasty curtsy. ‘I apologise. I was just telling her Majesty about a very amusing incident.’

A smile skittered around the Prime Minister’s mouth. ‘I see. Hopefully not one involving me.’

Victoria laughed some more. ‘Oh no, Lord M! Not unless you jump on the bureau and start a reel!’

‘If it’s all the same to you, Ma’am … I’d rather not.’

‘Oh, I don’t know … I think that would be a most interesting sight, don’t you, Skerrett?’

At this her dresser at last grew serious and tried to regain composure. ‘I couldn’t possibly say, Ma’am. There, Ma’am. I have sorted your hair now.’

‘Thank you, Skerrett, you have done splendidly. Don’t you think my hair is looking marvellous, Lord M?’

He studied her carefully, his admiration evident, and she allowed her cheeks to tinge with pride. ‘Indeed, Ma’am.’

Skerrett curtsied and left them. Melbourne watched her go with interest and, when she had departed, turned to ask the Queen, ‘Tell me about your dresser, Ma’am.’

‘Skerrett?’

‘Is that her name? You seem to have a very easy relationship with her, a strong relationship.’

‘I like her very much indeed. Why do you ask?’

‘You trust her?’

‘Of course. I trust all my staff.’

‘By that I mean … presumably she is privy to much that no one else is. Private matters, Ma’am.’

‘Well, she washes and dresses me, and she sees me at my most intimate, deals with me when I am sick and the like, so … yes.’

‘And beyond that? You speak to her, clearly.’
'Occasionally, why, yes, often, in fact.' Here she blushed red, thinking back to the silent camaraderie she and Skerrett had shared only recently when discussing the very man now standing before her.

‘Do you tell her things?’ he continued.

She grew wistful and her attachment to Skerrett struck her forcefully. ‘I do. Sometimes … sometimes I think she is the closest to a friend I have.’ But the true nature of what he perhaps meant took hold and she blushed, darting a look at him. ‘But I have never told her anything I oughtn’t! Lord M, if you are implying that I have betrayed your tr-‘

‘Perhaps you should.’

She stopped in her tracks. ‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Perhaps you should. I see no other way.’

‘Perhaps I should what?’

‘You need a confidante. You need an ally. It may make things easier.’

‘Things?’

He cocked an eyebrow. ‘Things … Ma’am.’

‘Things … between … you and I?’

‘Indeed.’

‘But … how might Skerrett help?’

‘I am not certain. That is for you to discuss with her.’

‘You wish me to tell her about …. about us?’

He pouted in consideration. ‘Tell her as much as you need, but no more, as long as you can be utterly certain of her discretion.’

The import of his words sank in, but so did the realisation that she had no reason at all to doubt Skerrett. ‘She is devoted to me; I would trust her with my life.’

‘There it is then.’

And with that they settled to work.

--xxOoxx--

There was no point in delaying it. That Saturday night, as Victoria sat having her hair brushed by her dresser before bed, she dared.

‘Skerrett?’

‘Ma’am?’

‘Do you sleep well?’

‘Usually, Ma’am. I get very tired after a long day. Why do you ask?’
'I ... am often distracted at night. Sometimes ... I find myself unable to sleep at all. Sometimes I find myself awake and alert and thinking on matters other than sleep.'

'Ve all do that from time to time, Ma'am. What sort of matters would they be, Ma'am?'

Victoria worried her lip as she steered the conversation carefully. 'Well ... sometimes ... I think about ... matters of state, for example.'

'Matters of state, Ma'am? Surely that would put you to sleep, not keep you awake!' Skerrett giggled.

'Well ... no ... I find them most distracting sometimes, and I find that ... I find that there is only one person who can talk them through with me.'

Skerrett paused in her brushing, but only briefly. 'I see, Ma'am.'

'Do you see?' Victoria looked up at Skerrett in the mirror.

The girl met her eyes and the two women once again shared an understanding. 'I think so, Ma'am.'

Victoria continued boldly. 'And I often wish ... quite late ... to have that person nearby ... with whom to discuss those matters of state.'

'To discuss matters of state ... late at night, Ma'am?'

'Yes.' Silence. 'I speak of Lord Melbourne.'

Skerrett hesitated before replying gently, 'Yes, Ma'am.'

'I often wish Lord Melbourne was around at night for me to ...' She trailed off, unsure how to word it.

'Discuss matters of state with?' helped Skerrett.

'Exactly. And when we are at Buckingham House, he, quite naturally, retires to Dover House, or to Brocket Hall, but, you see, we are off to Windsor next week and Lord Melbourne will be accompanying us to stay in his apartment there so I will be able to ...'

'Discuss matters of state with him ... at a late hour.'

'You have understood well.' She smiled softly.

Skerrett returned the smile. 'That will be a comfort to you, Ma'am.'

'Yes, a great comfort. Lord M is a great comfort to me.'

'I realise that, Ma'am.'

'Do you understand exactly how great a comfort Lord Melbourne is to me, Skerrett?'

'I ... believe I do, Ma’am.'

'I wish you to know that.' With this, quite instinctively, surprising herself, Victoria reached behind and clasped her maid’s hand in hers. And, equally instinctively, Skerrett gently squeezed Her Majesty’s hand.

'Yes, Ma’am. I see, Ma’am.'
‘But … nobody else is to know how great a comfort he is, Skerrett. Nobody. Ever.’

‘No, Ma’am. I understand that.’

‘You can assure me of that?’

‘I swear on my mother’s grave, Ma’am.’

The two women locked gazes and the deepest understanding passed between them.

With a deep breath, Victoria continued. ‘Now, supposing next week at Windsor, I find myself lying awake contemplating … matters of state … and I wish to seek Lord Melbourne’s advice late at night, around midnight or even later … how … how do you suppose I might go about obtaining his counsel?’

Skerrett had by now stopped brushing altogether. She stood quite calmly, eyes locked in the mirror with her sovereign’s and said, ‘Umm … well … it may not be wise for him to come to your rooms, Ma’am.’

‘You think not?’

‘The Baroness Lehzen is alert to people wishing to see Your Majesty, and even if Lord Melbourne were able to come to your room unnoticed … if you were to then engage in a … in an … animated discussion … on the constitution, say … it may disturb the Baroness.’

Victoria frowned with annoyed realisation. ‘That is true.’

‘But …’ continued Skerrett with a rise in her voice. ‘I believe Lord Melbourne’s rooms are quite isolated and in a place where any … animated discussion … could occur quite unnoticed.’

Victoria’s face lit up. ‘Is that so?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘But it would not be wise for me to arouse the staff at such a late hour. I would not wish to disturb people unduly.’

‘Of course not, Ma’am.’

‘So, therefore, perhaps when I go to his rooms I should be …’

‘Incognito, Ma’am?’

‘Exactly. Incognito.’

‘Perhaps … dressed as a servant, Ma’am?’

‘A splendid idea!’

‘There are many servants at the castle and many that travel from here, nobody will notice another late at night. If your Majesty were to wear a plain dress and maid’s bonnet or some such, and if you were accompanied by me on an errand, you could move through the castle without arousing any suspicion at all. And, if I may be so bold, Ma’am, I do know a few passageways and staircases only the servants go, I doubt you would be seen at all.’

‘Oh, Skerrett, this is wonderful news. I will be able to go to him … for the most meaningful
discussions.’

‘Yes, Ma’am, and I believe that those meaningful discussions will bring you great comfort.’

‘Oh, they will, Skerrett, they will.’

--xoxoxxx--

The letter which arrived for Lord Melbourne from Buckingham House on the day before he departed for Windsor read as follows:

The Queen wishes to inform Lord Melbourne of her most constructive conversation with Skerrett, her dresser. The Queen conveyed to Skerrett how ardent she was to receive the counsel of Lord Melbourne at even the latest hour and how, seeing as Lord Melbourne would be resident at Windsor at the same time as the Queen, she may like to seek out his advice in the night time while staying there. At such times, of course, it would be most rude to disturb people, and it was therefore deemed unsuitable for Lord Melbourne to attend upon the Queen in her chambers, and therefore she would attend upon Lord Melbourne in his. To avoid further disruption, the Queen, with the aid of Skerrett, will approach Lord Melbourne’s apartments incognito, dressed as a servant, and will arrive through passages and staircases rarely used by anyone.

Still it seems too long before she will see Lord Melbourne again, but, as Lord Melbourne has taught her so well, there is much pleasure to be found in anticipation.

And, therefore, in most ardent anticipation,

Victoria R

An hour later, Victoria received a reply.

Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty. He would recommend her taking out his birthday present of the telescope and looking through it tonight. For if she does, she will see the stars aligning in our favour.

He remains, with utter devotion,

Melbourne

Chapter End Notes

Patience, remember? But not for long, trust me. I really mean it this time. Thoughts and comments still hugely valued. x
The Queen was not always the earliest riser, but on the morning of the move to Windsor, she was up at dawn and, therefore, the court was up with her. She was happily sitting at lunch in her dining room at the castle by one o’clock. There was to be a ball to welcome the court later that evening. It was not a grand affair as balls went, but there would be dancing and champagne.

There was no sign of him yet. She thought it wise not to enquire too eagerly after him in Sir John’s presence but managed to catch Lady Portman as they moved through the gallery after lunch. ‘Do you know if Lord Melbourne has arrived yet?’

‘I believe he is expected in the early evening, Your Majesty.’

‘Will he be attending the ball tonight?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. You are expecting him to, I imagine?’

She tried to appear relaxed on the matter. ‘Well, he is my Prime Minister and he is in residence here after all, so … yes.’

‘And you have requested that the lords and gentlemen wear the Windsor uniform, Ma’am?’

‘I think that is right, don’t you? It does look so well on Lor– … on them all.’ She corrected herself hastily but a glance to her side let her see the slight smirk catch Lady Portman’s mouth.

He was not at dinner before the ball, and she grew anxious that he would not emerge at all, but just after she had led the court into the ballroom she spied him walking in.

She was robbed of breath. Not only was his mere presence enough to make her reel, but he was wearing the Windsor uniform with such effortless distinction that the twisting in her belly nearly upended her.

She took a large drink from her glass and stared entranced at him over the rim.

‘I see Lord Melbourne is here at last,’ remarked Emma. ‘And wearing the uniform. I must say, your Majesty, it is most flattering on him, don’t you agree?’

Victoria’s gaze did not leave the man clad in dark blue and gold across the room, but she managed to sound pleasingly indifferent when replying, ‘I suppose so.’

She had put him down for a dance. He would not ask her himself, she knew that, but she was not going to allow him not to. She danced with all the people she was supposed to, waltzes and polkas and gavottes, but there was only one partner she truly wanted.
And, at last, it was time. She had tried to avoid being near him until now; she was learning the art of anticipation well. When the time for his dance was near, she stood quite calmly and waited for him to approach. With a measured pace and the slightest smile of hinted intent on his face, he did.

‘Ma’am … I believe I am next on your card.’

She glanced down at the card – a pretence of ignorance – and raised her eyebrows in mock surprise. ‘Indeed you are, Lord Melbourne. I had quite forgotten.’

His mouth ticked briefly with amusement and he gave a characteristic glance sideways before holding his arms slightly open and asking, ‘May I?’

Victoria stepped into him and let his right hand slide around her waist and pull her towards him. She placed her own in his open palm and let him draw her effortlessly into the dance. For a while neither spoke, but their eyes did not leave the other and Victoria could forget that there was anyone else in the room. She was aware of each of his fingertips as they held her, aware of the strength of his hand supporting hers, aware of his warmth and firmness guiding her.

‘You dance so well,’ she said, fact, not flattery, although she was happy to flatter him; he liked that too.

‘You have told me so before, Ma’am.’

‘Have I?’

‘Yes, at the Coronation Ball.’

‘That was the first time you danced with me.’

‘Indeed.’ He continued to turn her, fluid and graceful. She anticipated his moves and met them so that they glided seamlessly across the floor. ‘If I may say, Ma’am, you too dance well.’

‘You are too kind, Lord M.’

‘Not at all. It is rare to find a partner with whom one is so attuned, with whom one can almost read the mind of the other and match them at each step and every turn. That intuitive harmony is elusive for most.’

Her body continued to move in time with his, fulfilling his words, and her soul too was his: all of her, all the time. She fed him her gaze and her understanding.

‘You told me then that you wanted to dance with me every night,’ he said.

She stared into him. ‘Yes, I remember.’

‘And when I led you into the corridor you said again that you wanted to dance with me.’

‘I remember that also; it is etched on my mind. It was the first time I touched you. I needed to touch you; I needed to feel you. You see, it was always there, my longing.’

‘I denied you then.’

‘Why?’

He looked away briefly for the first time throughout the dance and she could see his thoughts darting through his mind. ‘Because … you did not understand, and I … I understood too well.’
'You told me – not tonight. It hurt so much I cried myself to sleep.'

'You think it did not hurt me?'

He moved her still, rhythmic, in and out, forward and back, push and pull, and she was held by his body and his gaze.

And then, not taking his eyes from hers, he said, ‘Tonight, Victoria … I will dance with you.’

And at that the music ended and he bowed and backed away. And she understood.

Victoria stood, her mind tingling, her body throbbing. Her breath came in rapid, deep gasps and she glanced around the room but saw nothing.

Tonight.

There, in the middle of the ballroom of Windsor Castle, as the dancers dispersed around her, she waited for the doubt to come, for the anxiety to hit. It did not.

Alexandrina Victoria was completely and utterly certain.

--xxoOoxx--

She retired to her chamber shortly after her dance with him.

She could barely think. Any patience had by now evaporated completely. Her clothes were removed and she was washed as if in a dream. Her night gown was placed over her and she sat at her dressing table for her hair to be brushed.

There was no need to wait any longer. She glanced up at her dresser. ‘Skerrett?’

‘Ma’am?’

Here, now, it was beginning. ‘Tonight … I … I feel I need to seek Lord Melbourne’s counsel.’

Silence captured them both briefly and then, with a swallow, Skerrett said, ‘I see, Ma’am.’

‘Will you be able to aid me in that?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘What is the time?’

‘It is after half past eleven, Ma’am.’

‘Do you think it is too early?’

At this, taken by a new found energy, her maid hurried to the dressing room but returned quickly with some items of clothing: an outer coat and a bonnet.

‘No, Ma’am. I think if we prepare you now I can find a way to get you there unnoticed.’

Victoria smiled. ‘There we are then. Thank you, Skerrett.’ She turned to her maid and took her hands in hers. ‘I could not do this without you.’

‘I will always serve you, Ma’am.’
‘I know.’ Victoria stood up. ‘Should I put on a dress of some kind? I have only my nightgown on.’

‘No. This coat will cover it completely. I daresay, it is a little long on you. You need only wear your slippers underneath.’

‘And my hair?’ She ran her fingers over its length as it hung thick about her shoulders.

‘We’ll tuck it into the coat, Ma’am, and the bonnet will cover the rest.’

‘Very well.’ Victoria stood up and Skerrett held out the coat for her. She slipped her arms in and buttoned it up. It covered her nightgown completely, nearly swamping her diminutive frame and causing her to giggle. ‘Was this made for a giantess?’

Skerrett joined her in the laughter. ‘It’s from my cousin, Ma’am. She’s a tall lady. But at least it hides you.’

‘I daresay it does!’

Skerrett reached up, still giggling, and tucked the bonnet over the Queen’s head. It was a plain one, one that a serving girl would wear as she went about errands at the market, but it had a long brim which hid Victoria’s face effectively. ‘There, Ma’am.’

‘Am I incognito?’

‘I think you are, but I have a few more tricks up my sleeve. Come along.’ At that she turned and led the way to the dressing room. Victoria hesitated.

‘Is that the way?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. How do you think I can come into your chamber at a moment’s notice?’

‘I had no idea there was a passage through there.’

‘It’s hidden behind a panel, Ma’am. I don’t live in your dressing room, Ma’am!’

Victoria laughed but still did not follow her dresser.

‘Is everything alright, Ma’am?’

‘Yes.’ But her voice lacked strength.

Skerrett came back to her. ‘Are you nervous, Ma’am?’

Victoria thought hard. ‘No. Not nervous, not at all, but … a little wondrous.’

‘Ma’am … I want you to be happy. You must only do something if it makes you happy.’

She looked straight into her maid’s eyes and the bright clarity she found there brought her strength. ‘I am so very happy.’

‘Well then … follow me.’

And with a final smile between them, the two women left the Queen’s bed chamber and went into her dressing room. Skerrett walked to a corner and pressed on a panel. It opened and revealed a narrow staircase behind. Skerrett turned to Victoria with a smile and stepped onto the staircase. Victoria’s heart was pounding, but, once again, it was exhilaration not anxiety which prompted it.
She gathered up the length of the coat and followed. The staircase led up and around but soon they emerged into another room, plain and simple, unlike anything Victoria had ever seen. But she did not pause to wonder at it. Skerrett led on, cautiously, pausing frequently to assess any dangers or interruptions. They moved through narrow corridors, up and down other staircases, through empty rooms. If they heard voices they would pause and wait for them to pass. Once a footman moved along a corridor ahead of them but even if he saw he did nothing to stop or question them.

Soon they emerged into the sort of corridor with which Victoria was far more familiar, gilded, red-carpeted, with portraits of her ancestors staring solemnly down at her. Would those faces from the past judge her? Would guilt finally take her? But her little feet carried her swiftly onwards until Skerrett stopped outside a high door and turned to her with a reassuring smile. ‘Here. This is it, Ma’am.’

Victoria nodded sharply. ‘Thank you, Skerrett.’

‘I shall wait just over there until I see you’re safely inside.’

‘Very well.’

The two women paused briefly and then, with a sudden rush of emotion, the Queen threw her arms around her dresser. ‘Thank you, oh thank you, thank you.’

When they parted, Skerrett whispered, ‘Be happy,’ squeezed the other woman’s hand, and hurried off down the corridor to hide briefly around the corner.

Victoria turned to the door before her. She could not linger long out here. Her heart beat so fast and loud she thought perhaps it would rouse the entire household, and so she did the only thing she could; she raised her hand and knocked.

For a time nothing happened and the silence surged around her and she grew suddenly and hopelessly terrified. Perhaps he would ignore her. Perhaps he had changed his mind.

But then, after what seemed an eternity, she heard the clunk of a lock being turned and the door was opened to her. There he stood, and as soon as he saw her, even under the bonnet and overcoat, he smiled softly and pushed the door further open. Victoria dropped her head and walked into his chamber.

She took a few paces into the room and heard the door closed and locked again behind her. Melbourne walked back over and stood before her, not speaking. He was still dressed, but had removed his jacket and neck scarf.

At first, neither of them moved and she allowed her breathing to steady. But then she drew her hands up to the bonnet and tugged at the ribbons to remove it. She let it fall to the floor and wriggled out of her slippers. After that she made light work of the buttons on the coat and it too was soon removed.

Victoria stood before him in only her nightgown, her hair loose about her. ‘Here I am.’

He simply stood and looked at her. Victoria remained quite still and allowed it. There was a soft solemnity to the moment which she daren’t fracture. The air was heavy but calm, the room lit by the amber glow from the dying fire.

He approached and pushed her hair from her shoulder, then grazed his fingers over her chin before trailing along her neck to trace the softest line over her collar bone. She tried to steady herself but expectation was already at such a height that she could scarcely draw breath.
Her loose night gown was barely clinging to her and he soon aided its descent from her right shoulder, stroking the skin that was revealed to him there. The gown was sheer and she noted his gaze move to her breasts. They ached for him already, tingling as if crying out for attention. Already her nipples were hard and prominent and the thin cotton hung down as if hooked from them. She wanted his touch on them so much a mewl of need escaped her. He glanced up briefly and, as if reading her, brought his hand over to cup her right breast, easing the weight of it and stroking his thumb over its softness.

‘Victoria.’ The sound of her name was so rare on his lips that she was prompted to turn her gaze to the compelling handsomeness of his face. ‘I will ask you again, a final time, are you certain of this?’

She hesitated, not because she doubted, but because she could scarce believe he needed to repeat the query. ‘Yes. I am entirely certain.’

‘It will hurt this first time.’

‘I am aware of that.’

‘But I will make you ready.’ Still his hand stroked, still his eyes held her transfixed. ‘I will make you ready for me.’

‘I am ready for you. But … perhaps I should ask, are you ready for me?’

His brows furrowed, a fleeting, brief moment where he was caught unawares, but the moment passed as quickly as it had occurred, and a look of revelation captured his face instead. ‘I have been ready for you all my life.’

And with that he leant in and kissed her.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Don't hate me. It would have been ridiculously long if I'd continued it there. But the next chapter is ready and will be up at roughly the same time tomorrow, if not a little earlier. And it will be worth the wait. Trust me. It really will.

Feel free to vent frustration in the comments. ;-)
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is happy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was as if he had never kissed her before; it was as if he was learning her for the first time, discovering her anew. His lips brushed and nudged and she met them but did not insist. All the while his hand rubbed concertedly at her breast, plying it gently, absorbing its feel. And then, as his mouth made her dizzy with adoration, his thumb caught the nipple, rubbing, pressing and grazing over it.

She moaned against his kiss and pressed herself into his hand. And that ever-ready throb, that ache of emptiness, demanded more, demanded him. She pressed her legs together to relieve it and moaned into his mouth. Now he nudged harder, deepening the kiss, and she breathed into him and he into her. And her belly writhed and screamed for him but she waited and waited and let him kiss and stroke and rub.

Her nipple was as hard as rock under his touch. He began to squeeze, softly at first, but when he got the response he sought – a fluttering of the eyes and a droop of the lower lip – he took the tight flesh harder and rolled it between thumb and forefinger. Her eyes shot open to meet his and he paused in his kiss, hovering close to read her every reaction.

‘I like that,’ she murmured. ‘I like that so very much.’ So he did it some more, rolling and pinching the nipple until that exquisite sensation dashed through to spark and pulse at the heavy, needy place between her legs.

‘Tell me,’ he said softly against her lips which he kissed again, barely giving her time to answer. ‘Tell me what you feel.’

‘It makes me want, it makes me need. If you were to stop it would hurt.’

With a groan of his own he was back to her mouth, kissing her with a thirst she met with her own. But just as she thought she could stay like this forever, with him plying and coaxing the most exquisite sensation from her breast, his hands dropped instead to bunch up her nightgown. She willingly raised her arms to help him remove it.

And she was entirely and utterly naked before him.

There was no shame. The certainty which sat so easily simply grounded itself further. She stood boldly before him as he stared at her again, his eyes taking in the hardened nipples, her full breasts, the curve of her waist, the way her hips guided his gaze to the dark entrancing V of downy hairs.

‘You are so very beautiful.’

She met his eyes and saw that they were damp. Melbourne moved into her and cupped her face, holding her as if she would break. But his kiss was passionate and deep and he opened her mouth with his and slid his tongue inside. It was her turn to act. She fumbled at his breeches, breaking away
from the kiss to murmur, ‘You have too many clothes.’

He immediately helped her, ridding himself of clothing quickly and easily. Victoria helped push off his breeches and he was soon large and hard and ready before her. She could not help but wrap her hands around it, wanting to rediscover its wonder immediately. But with a groan he drew her hand away. ‘Not yet, not yet, my darling, or else I’ll …’

So she resorted to kissing him again and as she did she felt herself being guided back to lie upon the bed. He came and lay beside her, leaning over, still wearing his shirt, open at the neck and beguilingly loose on the arms. It gaped occasionally to reveal his chest and she thrilled to glimpse the dark hairs scattered over him.

‘Do you not want me to bend over?’ she asked.

He frowned briefly. ‘Bend over?’

‘Do you not want to … spank me?’

He let out the slightest laugh. ‘No, not now, not this time. This time will be just as it should be.’

The briefest flicker of disappointment passed through her – she adored his hand on her backside as much as anything – but with what was to come, it barely registered.

He stared down as she lay beneath him. ‘I am ready,’ she said, the hollow throb inside so overwhelming that she squirmed over the sheets, demanding his touch.

He smirked. ‘I know you are, but I will make you so utterly needing of me that I will have you begging for me to take you.’

She whined and bucked her hips, quite instinctively. ‘But I am begging now!’

‘Wait.’ That voice, that deep, resonant insistence. Immediately, she obeyed.

And slowly, surely, his fingers worked their way over her body, tracing over her breasts, down through the valley between them … down over her belly, making her squirm and sigh and bite her knuckles … down further … down, ghosting over her hungry skin, working their way through the soft hairs … down, down … until he found her.

His touch was as necessary to her as air itself, touch that sustained and nurtured.

She sucked in a breath and pushed herself against his fingers, causing him to press hard onto that place he knew so well. ‘Oh!’ she cried out sharply, a flash of pure desire igniting her.

‘So wet,’ he muttered, turning his gaze down, sliding his fingers greedily through her. ‘So wet, my darling.’

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ she repeated, craving more of him, always more.

But then, just as she thought that everything was beautiful and right, he made it more so. Lowering his head, he placed his lips around the already ripe tautness of a nipple and sucked.

‘Oh, what? What are you doing?’

She practically screamed. The fingers between her legs slowed to a halt as the pleasure he was inflicting on her breast grew concentrated. His tongue rolled around the tight flesh, building it, working on it until she was a hopeless, heavy mess of utter desire. His hand remained nestled at the
dripping heart of her but he deftly avoided that tight little nub, or else she would have shattered instantly. He continued to nuzzle and suckle and pull and tug and lick her nipple until she thought she would disappear up into his mouth. But then he moved across to the other, and, with a needful moan, plunged his mouth onto it and sucked so that it almost hurt, the sweetest, most delicious hurt there had ever been.

‘Harder, harder, more, oh, more and harder,’ she moaned, increasingly incoherent, tangling her fingers through his thick hair, holding him on her, arching her back so that her breast was propelled yet further into him.

With a groan of his own he went at her with powerful intent. He held the breast in his free hand so that his tongue could play on the nipple dizzyingly before his mouth enclosed fully on it again and he sucked harder than ever. Her fingers instinctively clenched in his hair but that seemed only to make him more determined. She was glad the hand between her thighs had stopped stroking as she would have come so profoundly and immediately she was not sure she could have survived it. But occasionally he’d test her out, little nudges and presses, dipping up into her very core, opening her, gauging. Her legs fell open brazenly, imploring him into her. She brought her hands from his head and ran them down over his back, trying to move him into position. When she came across the cotton of his shirt, as glorious as it looked on him, she tugged, wanting to feel all of him against all of her.

With a final, long drag on her nipple, letting it pop indulgently from his mouth, he lifted his head and raised himself up. His face gravely beautiful, Melbourne dragged his shirt off and tossed it to the side. Victoria saw him fully naked before her for the first time. Never had she wanted anything so much. It was as if she were a wild thing, her body leading her ever onwards to chaotic bliss.

‘Please, please,’ she implored, her words coming with panting gasps, her hands grabbing for him, running over the firmness of his arms, chest, his back, any part she could hold onto.

He slowed himself a little and leaned over her carefully before bringing his hand between her legs again and opening her, parting the folds. He hissed as his fingers were coated in her lust.

‘Please,’ she begged again. ‘Please come into me.’

‘Yes, Victoria … now.’

She nodded, her face tight with anticipation.

She glanced down. Holding himself in one hand, he moved between her legs again and opening her, parting the folds. He hissed as his fingers were coated in her lust.

‘Please,’ she begged again. ‘Please come into me.’

‘Yes, Victoria … now.’

He leant down so close she could see the flecks of his eyes and whispered, ‘I’m here for you. Open for me.’

‘Yes,’ she whispered back and noted the lurch of his Adam’s apple. He pushed forward and … there!

The head of him was inside her and her eyes widened with glorious wonder, but he settled and waited, leaning down and kissing her softly. She whined for more but detected the caution in him, the care and attention before the breach.

‘More,’ she whispered; ‘More,’ she implored.

He drew himself up slightly, bracing himself on the bed, and then, with a sudden surge, with a sudden deep cry of intent, he thrust powerfully forward.
She cried out, not because it hurt, although it did, but because she was full, so completely and utterly full of him that nothing would ever matter again. And he moved again. A guttural moan caught in his throat and his eyes closed as he pulled back before pushing strongly back up into her, all the way, long, hard, into her, inside her, all of him.

It stung but she did not care. She held him, she took him, she had him.

And when he was as deep inside her as it is possible for a person to be, he steadied himself and stared down at her, his breathing ragged, his eyes glazed but knowing.

She was stretched, full, brimming with him, at last, and when her eyes met his, she released a sigh of such profound satisfaction that if it could have been her last breath. The corners of his eyes creased momentarily and his own mouth opened to gasp for air.

‘There,’ he exhaled.

‘There,’ she confirmed.

He stayed quite still, leaning over her, embedded deep and high, but he did not stir. She was desperate to feel him, to feel the strokes of him through her body, the length and breadth of him moving inside her.

She clenched on him, urging him to move, wanting to move for him, but he hushed her and held her still. ‘Shh.’

Her brows pinched and she sobbed with frustration, but his gaze pinned her to the bed as much as she was pinned by his member.

‘Don’t move,’ he said, his voice low but present.

How could she not when every hard inch of him was embedded inside her? ‘But I want to move.’

She dared try to lift her hips a little but his strength and his indomitable tone forbade it.

‘Don’t. Move.’

Her eyes fluttered shut as sensation robbed her of reason.

‘Look at me.’

His voice. She opened her eyes and locked into his. He did nothing. He did not move. He did not speak. She wondered if he was even breathing. And in that moment she knew him completely. She knew all of him and life was sudden and bright and brilliant.

And then, barely perceptibly at first, he started again, slightly, slowly. With agonising deliberation he withdrew just a little but she felt the rigid, warm length of him pulling through her flesh.

Then, just as slowly, he pushed up again, inhabiting her, taking her, filling her, deep, high, slow and sure.

She sighed out and a bewildered smile broke over her face.

‘Do you feel that?’ he asked.

She nodded.
‘Do you feel me?’ he asked again.

She managed, ‘Yes, I feel you. I feel all of you.’

Then slowly out once more, pulling through her, leaving her, abandoning her, before thrusting forward again, higher, deeper, more and more of him, so long, so hard. She gasped loudly and found herself tightening her muscles on him.

He gave a grunted moan and swallowed, his words muddy with pleasure. ‘My God, you fit me.’

‘Shall I do that again?’ she asked timorously.

He gave a half-wondering smile. ‘Yes. Do it again.’

So she did, clenching tight around the length of him, and at the same time he pushed deeply back into her. He groaned profoundly before edging himself back and forth inside her, only an inch or two but enough for her to feel the fullness of him parting her giving walls time and again. One hand was holding her backside, the other cupped her face while his thumb stroked her cheek. His breath was ragged but he still looked hard into her. ‘It is right, Victoria. It is so completely right.’

‘Am I good?’ she asked, clamping down on him as he moved up through her.

This time he almost laughed aloud. ‘By God, yes! You are perfection, you are glorious.’

He looked down again and brought both his hands under her backside then guided her legs up, bending them over his. He angled himself carefully and pushed in, positioning their bodies so he could achieve the deepest penetration.

With a gasp, she arched her back for him, propelling him deeper than ever in such a way that he stroked along a place inside that made wonderful things happen to her.

His breath caught in his throat and she delighted in the near animalistic sounds she was drawing from him.

‘Does it hurt?’ he murmured.

She had forgotten the pain. If she thought about it, she realised that the place he’d broken past twinged her, but it was nothing compared to the delirium of taking him fully inside her. She shook her head. ‘No. It doesn’t hurt.’

‘I want to move faster in you. I want to move in you so much. You’re so tight for me, so tight and warm and wet.’

She nodded. ‘Yes, yes, my darling, please, please move.’

And he did. Long, deep strokes, withdrawing almost fully and causing her desolation, before pushing fully back into her, revelling in inch upon hard inch of him sinking into her accepting, willing body. And she found herself matching him. Her hips rose to meet each thrust and pleasure stirred and stretched and coiled its way through them both. She fell into an easy rhythm with him. Pull, push, take and give, rise and fall. In, out, in, in, into her.

At times she reached up and he caught her lips on his and they breathed into the other as their limbs moved for each other.

And amidst it all his hand reached between them and found that place nestled between their
conjoined bodies. He stroked it but it needed little, as primed and potent as it was.

‘Oh!’ she gasped, bucking high on him and causing him to suck in his own breath.

‘Victoria …’ he slurred. ‘Come for me … come on me …’

And at that, as he ploughed deeply into her and his fingers grazed a final time, she shattered on him, and – oh! she had not lived until now – the force of her climax took her beyond all else. Her body pulsed around his hard flesh still buried deep inside, feeding off it, using it and growing so that every limb shook and every ounce of her knew rapture. She cried out, shrill, beyond herself, as pleasure continued to rage through her.

As her body gripped him in ecstasy, he was undone. His fingers on her backside clenched and he reached up a hand to grip her shoulder – she would later find bruises – and he was held in some strange paralysis for the merest fraction of time before he opened his mouth and gave a sound of such impenetrable release that tears formed hot in her eyes. He surged deep into her and she felt it in him: twice, three, four times, each burst of his seed accompanied by a groan of such abandon that she was his forever.

When every drop of that perfect tension had at last left him, his body slackened to rest on top of her. He was heavy but she delighted in it and brought her arm over to rest along his back. His recovering breaths were muffled with muggy satiation in the curve of her neck where he had buried his head. It was some time before either of them could move. She could still feel him inside her; how could she ever let him go?

Eventually, as if having absorbed a new state of being, he lifted himself slightly and looked down at her. He smiled, that was all.

And in that moment, she was perfectly and entirely happy.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience. I hope it was worth it.

I'm going to have to say this - I loved writing this. So much. I have written literally hundreds of sex scenes in the last few years ... for fanfics that I've adored; scenes which have won writing competitions; for publishers; first times, last times, in between times; but I'm going to say it, this is possibly the scene I have enjoyed writing more than any other, ANY OTHER. I absolutely frickin' LOVED writing it. I hope you enjoyed reading it. Let me know if you feel like it. Lots of love, LL x

Oh, and PS, I did 'borrow' three lines of dialogue from a film (a film that's been around a while) - lines my little erotic heart loved when I first heard them and which I thought would work well here. Bonus points for telling me which film. ;-)
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria learns a new word.

Chapter Notes

*blissful sighs*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘Are you alright? Have I hurt you?’

After the melting bliss of a moment before, concern was now etched deep on his face.

She smiled and reached up to plant a soothing kiss on his lips. ‘No. A little pang, only to be expected, but … I still have you.’ She tightened around him, making him catch his breath. They kissed again, slow and deep and never-ending.

At least she never wanted it to end. But as the kiss drifted to a parting she realised he was softening inside her. She arched her back, trying to keep hold of him. ‘I don’t want you to come out of me. Must you come out of me?’

He smiled gently. ‘It would be rather difficult not to.’ They kissed again, inextricably drawn to each other.

But Victoria let out a sudden forceful exhalation and realised she had been holding her breath. His brows furrowed with concern again. ‘I’m crushing you. I shall have to move.’

And with that, slowly and carefully, he turned over to lie beside her and, as he did so, fell from her. At the loss of him, tears immediately pricked hot at her eyes.

He glanced over and lifted a lazy arm to stroke her face with the back of his hand. ‘Don’t cry. I cannot bear to make you cry.’

‘It is only that I can’t stand you not being inside me.’

He smiled again. ‘Not for long.’

She propped herself up quickly to look down at him and, unable to hide the eagerness in her voice, asked, ‘When can we do it again?’

This prompted him to chuckle aloud. ‘It’s been all of two minutes!’

‘Yes, but …’

‘You need to heal. Not until tomorrow night.’
She gasped in outrage. ‘Tomorrow night!? But that is evil! You mean I am to lie here with you all of tonight and not have that again?’

He raised himself onto his elbows and quirked a cautionary eyebrow. ‘Victoria … you will have bled. Look …’

He indicated the covers. They had not even made it under the sheets and the pale silk of the bed clothes was now vividly marked with several drops of bright red blood.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, surprised that something so exquisite had wounded her. Instinctively, she reached between her legs. Her fingers came away coated not only in blood but in his seed. She held her hand up and studied it curiously. Melbourne averted his eyes.

‘How strange,’ she whispered, half to herself.

‘Ma’am … I …’

She turned her head sharply to him. ‘Do not call me that now, Lord M.’

‘Ma’am … really …’

Do not!’ She turned her attention back to her fingers. ‘Is that you on me?’

He cleared his throat, clearly embarrassed by the starkness she seemed so bold to embrace.

‘Lord M … is this you?’

‘Yes … Ma’am.’

She smiled broadly, forgetting to scorn him for calling her that, and immediately fell upon him to kiss him hard and deep. He could only clasp her head to his in desperate need. His hands were all over her again and he moaned as he planted kisses over her still expectant skin. But then, with the loudest groan of suppression, he flung his head up and tore himself away from her. ‘We must be careful. I will not have you hurt more tonight … and we should cleanse it. There is a jug and basin in the room next door … allow me …’ He started to push himself off the bed to fetch it.

She reached out to hold him back. ‘No, wait there. I like seeing you lying here. I shall go.’ With a parting kiss full on his lips, she pulled herself from the bed, reluctantly leaving the place which to her now seemed sacred, and padded off to the room next door.

Victoria poured the water into the basin and dipped a cloth into it. She was loath to clean him away, but the cool water cleansed and soothed her as if wiping away the last remnant of her former existence. She waited for the shame to come as she had done at so many times on this journey, but again, it did not. She had left the doubt and hesitation of her past behind. She was unshackled, remade and she would take it and run with it.

Not bearing to be parted from him a moment longer, she returned.

‘There,’ she said, standing by the bed, arms out to the side. ‘I am quite new.’

He simply lay back and smiled.

‘What is it, Lord M?’ she asked, wondering why he did not speak.

‘You have not got any clothes on,’ he remarked, his gaze sweeping over her body.
‘Oh, well, no … I am sorry … shall I fetch some?’ She looked around for her night gown.

‘No! Please don’t. I simply … am rather thrilled to see you. You are quite extraordinarily beautiful.’

She stood there for him, quite at ease in her nakedness. But she was being stared at by a man who was equally naked himself and lay with his long limbs stretched languidly across his bed. She quirked a teasing eyebrow. ‘I must point out, Lord Melbourne … that you do not have any clothes on either.’

‘That would appear to be correct, Ma’am.’

She giggled and rushed to the bed, climbing up onto it and crawling over to him. She kissed him deeply and enjoyed leaning over him, braced on the firmness of his chest. When they at last parted she sighed, ‘Do we really have to wait until tomorrow night?’

He glanced at the clock on the mantel. ‘Well … it will actually be tonight. It’s nearly two in the morning. It’s already tomorrow.’

‘It is still too long.’ She lay down beside him with a huff and let her head rest on his chest as he brought his arm around her.

He stroked her arm idly. ‘There are … other things that can be done.’

She turned her head a little, smiling up at him before letting her hand drift down over his stomach. With deliberate idleness, she eventually reached her goal. Gently, she curled her fingers around him and he inhaled long and slow.

‘That doesn’t have to be one of them …’ he said. She tightened her grip and immediately felt him hardening again. ‘… unless you so choose.’

‘Oh … I have so chosen.’

She took a moment to dampen her hand and then returned to her task. His ample length was rising quickly. His eyes were closed and his mouth open slightly as he concentrated on what she was doing.

‘Tell me, Lord M,’ she said, a lilt in her voice.

‘Hm?’ he queried, barely focusing.

‘What do I call it?’

He was by now fully erect and rigid. Small drops of expectation leaked from the tip and she swept over it with her thumb, using it to smooth her rhythmic plying of the shaft.

His breath caught and he spoke with some difficulty. ‘Call it?’

‘Yes. The proper name for it is a most unpleasant word – I shall not use it. I presume there are others … what do you call it?’

‘Ma’am?’

‘I told you not to call me that.’ She had picked up a steady rhythm and the only response she got was a moan. She slowed her strokes, demanding an answer. ‘Lord M, what should I call it?’

‘Well … umm … all terms are … quite crude.’
‘I don’t mind that.’

‘Then … I suppose …’

‘Go on.’ She paused in her attentions, removing her hand for a time. ‘I wish to know.’

He groaned in frustration at the loss of her grip and turned to her. Then, with a smirk, he leant over and whispered a word in her ear.

She looked at him, brows creased in bewilderment. ‘As in the bird?’

‘Yes.’

‘How strange … appropriate though, I suppose.’

‘Appropriate, how?’

‘Well …’ she mused, recommencing her task with unfettered purpose, ‘he stands up proudly and he crows.’

He sniffed out a laugh which turned into a groan of undiluted pleasure. ‘My God, you do that well.’

A ripple of satisfied pride rolled through her.

‘Come here,’ he murmured, dark and needing.

Not stopping her ministrations, she curled herself over, twining a leg around his, offering him her mouth again, all the while pumping and squeezing and rubbing along his glorious length. He held her head close and kissed her so hard her lips bruised. Dragging his mouth to her ear, he murmured darkly into it, ‘Say it.’

‘What?’ she smiled.

‘I want to hear you say it. What do you call it?’

Her cheeks pinked for the first time. She had never said such things before. To speak them aloud took a decision which seemed harder than allowing instinct to do things.

‘Say it,’ he urged, a wicked glint in his eyes. She squeezed the head of it, making him grunt as sensation took him, but he held himself back from his approaching climax.

She kissed him again, and then, for his ears only, whispered, ‘Your cock.’

His lips caught hers quickly, then, ‘Again.’

‘Cock.’ She was becoming bolder. It was a very pleasing word to say. It sat in her mouth nicely.

‘I like you saying that.’

‘I like saying it.’

‘Repeat it.’

‘Cock.’ She spoke as proudly as the object in question stood in her hand. She looked down at it. It had grown so thick she could barely curl her slight fingers around its girth. ‘And I like it. Very much.’
‘Tell me how much.’

In time with the stroking of her hand, she spoke, becoming more intentionally seductive with each phrase. ‘I like your cock. I adore your cock. I adore holding your cock in my hands and taking it inside me. I want your cock inside me again. I don’t want to have to wait for it.’

‘Good girl, good girl,’ he moaned, although his words were now merely breathed out as his head fell back and his neck strained. ‘Coming … coming …’

And his seed shot out in three long jolts, falling onto her hand as he groaned out his rapture.

For a while he simply lay back, eyes closed, breathing heavy. She stared from his beautiful face to the still thick length of flesh she held in her hand, which now dripped with his remnant. Should she not be disturbed? Disgusted? But to her, it was all so utterly glorious and perfect. How had such things been denied her for so long? Surely all people should live this way and know these things all the time?

When he at last stirred, he looked down at her hand with a smirk. ‘You are a wonderful and wicked creature.’

‘Am I wicked, Lord M? Then it is all thanks to you.’

‘I think I rather like this wickedness.’ He reached across for a handkerchief from the bedside cabinet. Taking her hand gently, he wiped his seed from her.

They lay back again, she resting on his chest. A still and perfect silence engulfed them.

‘What time do you rise from bed in the morning?’ he eventually asked.

‘When I am at Windsor I try not to stir until eight o’clock. I do not enjoy early mornings.’

‘I would advise leaving here no later than half past six. You must ensure you are back in your chamber before they come looking for you.’

She sucked in in sudden realisation. ‘Oh, but no! I do not know the way back to my chamber! I need Skerrett to guide me!’

‘Don’t trouble yourself. I will send word to her through my valet. Wait a moment.’

With that he pulled himself from the bed and paced over to a bureau. She noted how tall and slim he was, his long legs, the way the muscles moved in his back as he moved his arms. She stared over at him with a smile; could anything be more beautiful? He turned as he reached for paper and noted her looking. ‘You are staring at me. Did no one ever tell you it was rude to stare?’ he teased.

‘You did the same to me earlier. Allow me my turn. You are, after all, utterly magnificent.’

He sniffed derisively. ‘Nobody has told me that before.’

‘Then I shall make it my duty to tell you every day.’

He smiled softly and wrote a note. ‘I shall tell my valet that I have a matter of utmost national importance which must be discussed with you at the earliest opportunity. As Skerrett is the first person to see you in the mornings, she must deliver it to Her Majesty at the first moment she sees her. That way, I have a reason for him to give her this straight away.’

‘And what have you written in her note?’
‘To come to my rooms at half past six in the morning as there is a package requiring careful delivery back to Her Majesty’s chambers.’

Victoria laughed. ‘Am I a package, Lord M?’

‘The most precious.’

He stood up and reached for his dressing gown, putting it on hastily. ‘I shall be only a moment.’ With that, he hurried from the rooms through another door. She lay back with a sigh and stared at the canopy above her. Turning her head into the pillows, she inhaled deeply. It smelt of him, sandalwood, fresh paper and ink.

He returned a few minutes later. ‘There. It is done.’

‘What time is it now?’

‘Half past two.’

‘Only four more hours!’

‘And I would recommend that you sleep, Your Majesty, or else you will be most fretful tomorrow.’

‘Fretful? Am I ever fretful, Lord M?’

He quirked an eyebrow but said nothing. Stripping off his robe, he climbed into bed beside her, kissing her deeply again as if he had been starved of it in the few minutes they’d been apart.

She curled her arms around his waist and planted kisses over his chest. ‘How can I sleep when I have you beside me?’

Turning onto his side, he smiled gently down at her. ‘I can help you sleep. Shall I help you sleep?’

And gently, slowly, his hand grazed down her body again until his fingers came to rest between her legs.

She inhaled slowly and pushed onto them.

He reached right down underneath her before drawing his middle finger up through the valley of her folds. His mouth fell open in wonder. ‘You are so wet again. Are you always so wet for me?’

‘Is that not normal?’ she asked blearily.

‘Not always.’

She sighed as his fingertips worked their way perfectly through her. ‘I want you, I want you. I want you always.’

‘Then … let me give to you.’

She sucked in sharply and arched her back, bucking against his hand. His thumb reached over the mound of her pelvis while his fingers curled around into her sex. He held her on his hand, keeping her steady on the mattress. ‘Shh, shh,’ he hushed. ‘Don’t search for it. Let it come to you. Let me bring it to you. Settle … calm.’

His fingers rubbed up and down, grazing over her tight nub, circling it, gathering up the flood of her juices from the ripeness of her womanhood.
'Ohh,' she sighed, locking eyes with him, steadying her excitement, focusing only on the slow, long strokes, and rising, rising with careful deliberation. ‘I love that. I love you touching me so much.’

With a frown of concentration, he angled his fingers and dipped one up inside her. His own words were strained with lust. ‘Does that hurt? I don’t want it to hurt, but I want to feel inside you. I need some part of me inside you.’

The finger inside glided through her wetness. She shook her head. ‘No. More, put more. I want you deep in me.’

He slid in another finger to join the first, pushing them both right up inside her. ‘No pain?’ he asked, although she was not sure he could have stopped himself. She shook her head again and he allowed her to work herself on his fingers.

‘No pain,’ she confirmed. She was so wet, her desire dripped so relentlessly from her that she wondered if she could wash him away in its flood.

He groaned with the intensity of his focus as he continued stroking and pumping inside her. ‘Good, good girl. You will be ready again this evening.’

‘Can I take your cock again tonight?’ she asked greedily.

He laughed at her new found boldness. ‘Yes, yes, my darling.’

His thumb was circling her bud, two fingers were deep inside her, and, working with rhythmic certainty, he built and built and built her until she came completely. Pleasure poured its way in wave after wave through her and over her. Her head was thrown back and her eyes wide as she came apart on his hand. She sobbed this one out, a long, moaning sob.

After her limbs had shaken it off, after she had regained a semblance of awareness, she fell deeply back into the bed, heavy and sated.

‘There,’ he said, ‘there, my beautiful, needy creature.’ He stroked over her forehead, kissing her tenderly. ‘Good?’

‘Good. All completely good.’ She gasped in little pants of awe.

‘Now …’ he murmured against her lips, ‘sleep.’

And the deepest, most blissful satisfaction sank through her, and with his hand still nestled at her sex, she fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, he's so desperately good.

Love your comments. Thank you.

x
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria turns her attention to taxation. Eventually.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Victoria awoke to something nuzzling her ear. It was tugging at the lobe, a little licking, the occasional warm, wet, insistent nibble.

‘Dash,’ she huffed, burying her head in the pillow. ‘Dash! Stop that!’ She reached back, still not looking, to bat her spaniel away.

But instead of coming across the soft furry ears of the dog, her hand fell instead on soft curly hair.

‘I’m not Dash,’ came a low voice, laced with that tell-tale rasp that caught it occasionally. She turned over and found herself looking up into a familiar face hovering just inches above her. ‘I’m your Prime Minister.’

Victoria released a laugh which was immediately taken by a kiss. Melbourne kissed her to a slow awakening, pushing back the fog of sleep with his lips and leisurely caresses. When he at last pushed himself off, she smiled at him in adoration. ‘I’m sorry I hit you. I’m not used to people nibbling my ear in the morning.’

‘Well, you have a very fine ear.’ He leant down and took one lobe between his lips again.

She giggled. ‘It tickles!’

‘Hmm …’ He moved down her neck and she held him there, immediately wanting more. Victoria could feel something between her legs and knew exactly what it was. With deliberate provocation, she drew her leg up so that she stroked along it.

‘Why, Lord M,’ she mused, ‘it’s morning, and I do believe your cock is crowing.’

It was his turn to pull back and laugh aloud. ‘I see sleep has not diminished your wickedness.’

She carried on rubbing her leg along him. His face lost its humour and his mouth fell open to drag in his breaths. ‘My God, I want you.’

‘Then have me,’ she said, shifting herself into position under him.

He dropped his head to her neck again and sucked hard before grazing her with his teeth. ‘Do you know how easy that would be?’ he growled, moving himself between her legs and pushing them together so that he was clamped between them. He moved along her, squeezed between her thighs, but never quite entering her. ‘Do you know how much I could bury myself in you and stay there for the rest of the day?’

She sighed out, letting him work himself between her legs, clasping him against her. The ache inside
was already protesting its emptiness and she pressed herself wantonly along him. He lowered his head to her breasts and took a nipple in his mouth as if it were his oxygen.

Oh, the way he did that! It sent the most delicious shots of feeling dashing through her, almost as good as being touched in that other place. She whined as he rolled the nipple on his tongue, mewled as he dragged and tugged on it.

But suddenly, with a groan of profound desolation, Melbourne pulled himself off her and twisted around to the edge of the bed where he sat, running his fingers through his hair distractedly. ‘This will not do at all. Your maid will be here any minute to accompany you back. And … at some point I really must remember that I run this country!’ He stood and moved around the room, picking up his clothes where they had been discarded the night before, then returned to sit on the bed and get dressed.

‘Run the country instead of this? Oh, must you?’ she sulked, crawling across and coiling herself around him. ‘But surely this is so much more satisfying.’

‘Satisfying perhaps, but hardly within the oath I took on taking up office. It is my duty, Ma’am.’

She slid her hands over his shoulders and down his chest. ‘Am I terribly wicked for tempting you so, Lord M?’

‘Yes, you are,’ he smirked, buttoning his breeches with some difficulty due to what lay beneath. ‘Terribly.’

‘And what do you think should be done about that … My Lord?’

He paused briefly and looked around at her. His mouth rose at the corner but he said nothing. Then, unhooking her from around him first, he reached for his shirt and pulled it on.

With a sigh, Victoria lay down, stretching her limbs out on the sheets, remembering with delight all that had taken place there the night before. Melbourne kept his back firmly turned on her while he buttoned his waistcoat. ‘You must get ready, Ma’am. You will have to leave at any moment.’

‘I have only my nightgown and the coat and bonnet to put on.’ She cuddled into his pillow and inhaled the scent of him.

‘Do so then.’ He sounded almost annoyed. She contemplated taking the pillow and throwing it at him, but she found herself merely grinning. Instead of resenting him for it, she wanted to obey. She sat up and forced herself at last from the bed.

‘We have important papers to go over from the West Indies, Ma’am. Taxes on cotton are not benefitting those who need it most and I wish to discuss how best to change things regarding this. There is also the education bill to discuss with new laws coming into effect regarding the teaching of reading.’

Bending down to pick up her nightgown with a huff, she moaned, ‘Taxes! Education bills! How tedious and dull, dull, dull! I really am in no mood for the dispatches today. I do not think I shall bother.’

And at that she received a blistering thwack on her bare buttocks.

‘Ow!’ she yelped, standing straight up in shock and clapping a hand to her stinging backside. She stared at him open-mouthed.
Melbourne cocked an eyebrow but remained implacably calm. ‘Duty,’ was all he said.

At first she was indignant and her temper bubbled inside, but then the sting on her rump changed to a glow and the glow crept along to pulse between her legs. He was right, of course. But once was not enough, even now, even when expecting Skerrett at any moment.

And so she held his stare defiantly and said, ‘I am sick of duty.’

Melbourne lifted his head, staring down his nose at her, his breath coming fast. He took two paces around to stand to her side, brought his hand up and threw it down again so that it sang across her backside with blistering force. ‘What was that?’ he asked.

She sucked in as the heat bloomed across her skin. ‘I cannot be bothered with it … My Lord.’

*Thwack!* This time she gasped and her body instinctively recoiled from the sting.

‘Sometimes … I hate it … sir.’

*Thwack!* Again, on the other cheek.

‘I will not do it, sir.’

‘Oh,’ he murmured in her ear, ‘you will.’ And he spanked her again, making her quivering bottom burn red.

‘And if I refuse … My Lord?’ she turned and swallowed, her backside alight but demanding yet more.

He hit her again, fast, sharp, exquisite. She groaned and knew her sex was even wetter than he had made it earlier.

‘You won’t … because,’ he said, ‘I ask it of you.’

And she looked into him and instinctively dampened her lips. His gaze darted to them and he reached in and kissed her, deep, opening her mouth, soothing with his tongue. She could exist on him alone.

They pulled back for air and he rested his forehead on hers. ‘I still like that too,’ she whispered.

‘I know.’ He kissed her again.

And at that there were two muffled but very real knocks at the door.

He drew away immediately and she tried to hold him back but was unable. He took her nightgown from her hands and pulled it over her head. ‘Hurry. Put the rest of the clothes on.’

Melbourne crossed to the door, undid the locks and opened it slightly. ‘Come in,’ he said and a red-faced Skerrett tiptoed in hurriedly, averting her gaze from the Prime Minister.

She moved over to the Queen and gave a furtive curtsy. ‘Good morning, Your Majesty.’

Victoria smiled at her maid. Now that the reality of getting on with the day was dawning, she was relieved to have someone at hand she could rely on to keep this whole business secret. ‘Good morning, Skerrett.’

Skerrett helped her on with the coat and bonnet. She flitted her gaze to the Queen’s at one point and
Victoria gave her a soft smile in return, but nothing else was done to acknowledge what had happened during the night.

As they moved towards the door, Melbourne turned to Skerrett. ‘Thank you for your help and for your … discretion, …?’ His voice rose to ask her name.

‘Skerrett, My Lord.’

‘Skerrett … thank you,’ he repeated.

She curtsied for him and gave him a shy smile. ‘It is no trouble, My Lord.’

Something twisted inside Victoria as she heard her dresser call him that. That was her term for him, all hers. No other woman was allowed to use it, although it hit her forcefully all of a sudden that they must have done, frequently. She thought back to all that had happened between them – his skills and awareness did not happen by chance. He had much practice. She raised herself tall. ‘Come, Skerrett, we should be going.’

Victoria paced across to the door but paused when she drew near him and turned to him. How strange that she could not bid him a proper farewell now that Skerrett was here.

‘Lord M … shall I see you at breakfast?’

He opened his mouth in surprise; it had clearly not occurred to him. He inclined his head a little, retreating to his usual manner. ‘Why not, Ma’am? Of course.’

She smiled. ‘Good, and then … the dispatches.’

She observed one of his characteristic glances to the side before he answered. ‘Yes, Ma’am. We should never neglect duty, after all.’

‘No, Lord M, you are correct.’

She smiled at him and then, with a half glance back to the rumpled sheets on the bed, pulled her bonnet over her face, and followed Skerrett from his room.

--xxOoxx--

It was still gloomy enough for them to hurry anonymously and undetected through the corridors and staircases. They arrived back in the queen’s chamber in several short minutes. Victoria handed Skerrett the servant’s clothes and climbed back into her own bed.

Then, with images and sensations and dreams floating through her head, she closed her eyes and slept until half past eight. This time, she truly was awoken by Dash.

--xxOoxx--

Skerrett washed her before dressing and it was not until half past nine that she arrived at breakfast. She only ate with a small group of close family and advisors, and they would most likely have been provided with tea and toast in their chambers, but as she swept in, she could not ignore the frosty looks of impatience which greeted her.

She crossed to her mother and kissed her warmly on the cheeks. ‘Good morning, Mama, how are you today?’

‘Hungry,’ came the response. ‘Drina, I do not see why we are bothering with breakfast when it is
now nearly time for luncheon!’

She ignored her mother and reached for a grape as she passed the table. ‘Oh dear, were you waiting for me? I suppose it is a little late. I enjoyed a bath this morning.’

John Conroy coughed. He did not need details of the Queen’s toilette.

Her eyes fell on a figure standing further down the table, apart from the others. ‘And Lord M! How wonderful that you can join us for breakfast. I trust you passed a contented night?’

‘Yes, Your Majesty. And I hope you did too?’

‘Oh, most contented, thank you for asking, Lord M. Shall we?’ She sat down at the table and immediately the food, which had admittedly by now grown a little cold, was served.

‘What are your plans today, Your Majesty?’ asked Sir John.

‘Lord Melbourne and I shall be discussing the cotton taxes and the new education bill. I have been so looking forward to it.’

‘Have you?’ asked Conroy with ill-disguised scepticism.

‘Why, of course, these are important issues, aren’t they, Lord Melbourne?’

‘Indeed, Ma’am.’

‘And I would be negligent in my duty if I did not give them the attention and scrutiny they deserved.’ She dared a glance at her Prime Minister. He kept his head firmly down as he cut his bacon, but she thought she saw a tug at the corner of his mouth.

‘And after that?’ continued her mother.

‘Oh, perhaps a ride out. Who would care to accompany me?’

‘Not today, Drina,’ sighed the Duchess. ‘And you told me you would join me in a game of whist, Sir John.’

Conroy turned and gave her mother a sickly smile which made Victoria most disinterested in her porridge. ‘I have been looking forward to it, Your Highness.’

‘Very well. Lord M, will you join me for a ride through the Great Park?’

‘Sadly, Ma’am, not today. I fear I must attend to other matters. The paperwork I have brought with me requires considerable attention.’

Her stomach dropped from her in disappointment. She was rather hoping they could revisit the wood they had been to before. ‘Oh.’

‘I am sure your ladies would be happy to ride out, Ma’am,’ he continued.

‘Perhaps … or perhaps I shall simply stay in and read.’ She quirked an eyebrow at him and took a bite of toast.

--xxOoxx--

When he arrived to go through the dispatches it was as if the night before had not occurred. He knelt,
he kissed her hand, he rose and waited silently for her bidding.

‘Lord M,’ she began but hesitated. Her mouth remained open, to say … what? His indomitable silence quashed her tingling curiosity. She swallowed back her desire, smiled modestly and continued, ‘Shall we set to work?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. A good idea.’

And so they did. The cotton taxes, the education bill and much more besides were all attended to without a single kiss, caress or sigh of longing. When she was finished, Victoria put down her quill and turned to look up at her Prime Minister.

‘Did I do well, Lord M?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. Very well indeed.’ She noted the glint in his eyes.

‘I am pleased to hear it.’

‘Is my good opinion important to you, Ma’am?’

‘You know it is.’

He paused for a mere moment, his eyes locked into hers before responding, ‘It need not be. There is very little you could do which would not please me. And in any case, you should not worry what I think. I will serve you, come what may.’

Oh, but she would serve him too! She would do whatever he wanted, whatever he craved! Her arousal demanded movement and she pushed herself abruptly from her chair and paced across the room.

‘But you will not ride out with me this afternoon?’ she continued, trying to suppress her body’s awakening.

‘No, Ma’am. I was most sincere when I said I had much to deal with.’

She turned to him, stemming her despair as best she could. He stood quite statesmanlike, holding himself tall, noble, as if he were addressing his cabinet and not the woman whose maidenhood he had taken last night.

It made her want him all the more. She breathed in deeply through her nose and clasped her hands tight before her. She could let him take her now, right now, here, on her bureau. She could lie back for him and let him ravish her.

But she did not.

‘Very well, Lord M. You will join us for dinner, I presume?’

‘Of course, Your Majesty.’ He bowed and made to leave, but then paused and looked back at her. ‘Oh, there was one other thing, Ma’am.’

‘Yes, Lord M?’ The way he said it made her heart begin a frantic tattoo in her breast.

He paced towards her, hands clasped behind his back, and leant down so that his mouth nearly brushed the shell of her ear. ‘Tonight,’ he murmured, low, whispered only for her, ‘I will come inside you and I will be inside you and I will stay inside you. Do you understand me?’
She turned her head and met with his piercing gaze. Her breath held, her desire brimming from her, she nodded furtively. ‘Yes,’ she exhaled.

‘Very good … Ma’am.’ And with a final bow, he turned and strode from the room.

Victoria took a shuddering breath in and grasped onto the bureau to steady herself. He had left her with a wash of such arousal that she could barely stagger to a chair and slump down into it to recover. But her dizziness gave way to elation and she found herself giggling at the wonder of it all.

She glanced at the clock. It was a quarter past twelve. She could reasonably retire to bed at ten o’clock. Nine hours and forty five minutes. It was going to be a long wait. She reached for the bell and rang for her maid; she would change immediately. Riding was always a good distraction.

Chapter End Notes

He. Is. The. Best.

I really must learn to write characters I don’t become so obsessed with I can barely think straight.

Thoughts, as ever, adored. More soon. LL x
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria expands her vocabulary yet further.

Chapter Notes

The Windsor Uniform.
The gift that keeps on giving.

That's all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lady Portman could barely keep up with the Queen as they rode across Windsor Great Park. Her Majesty urged her ride onto a trot for much of the way and her lady tolerated the experience rather than enjoyed it.

It was with some relief that the Queen at last slowed to a halt to admire the view across Eton.

‘Your Majesty seems particularly invigorated today, Ma’am,’ commented Emma.

‘I am! I do so love being out of London. Here I can think more freely and breathe more freely.’

‘I agree, Ma’am, although you must not tire yourself.’

Victoria threw her head back and laughed. ‘Tire myself? We have only been here a day! I intend to occupy myself most admirably while I am here.’

‘Really, Ma’am?’ Emma held her horse’s head tight in. ‘And how else to intend to do that apart from riding out and discussing taxation law with Lord Melbourne?’

Victoria turned abruptly to Emma. There was something in the Duchess’s tone which unsettled her. ‘Well … there are other ways to pass the time.’

‘Of course, Ma’am … but not all of them with Lord Melbourne.’

Victoria felt the colour rise in her cheeks. ‘What do you mean?’

Emma paused before answering and Victoria sensed the import she was to put on her words before she had said them. ‘It is very good that the Prime Minister could join us at Windsor, and I am sure you will need many hours to discuss parliamentary matters … but I would advise you spending time away from his company, Ma’am.’

‘Why?’ Her query sounded defensive, she knew.

‘Ma’am … it has been noted how much time you and Lord Melbourne spend in each other’s
company. I have been meaning to say for some time.’

Her blood started pounding so hard that her pulse beat like a funereal drum in her ears. But she would not give in to gossip. She drew herself up and steadied her rapid breaths, allowing the cool air to calm her. ‘Lord Melbourne is my advisor, he is my Prime Minister and my Private Secretary – of course I spend a great deal of time in his company. What are you implying?’

‘I am not implying anything, Ma’am, I simply feel you should know that people do talk.’

The wind gusted suddenly and with it she threw her head back to Lady Portman and found herself almost laughing. ‘Let them talk! I shall spend as much time with him as I so choose. I trust and rely on him more than anyone in my life and that is a good thing, a valid thing, you must know. He is my guide, my mentor and my teacher. I still have much to learn from him and learn it I shall. Life is a glorious thing and I am curious about it all!’

With that the Queen turned and cantered rapidly away.

‘Yes, Ma’am,’ said Emma Portman to her retreating form. ‘That is what I’m afraid of.’

--xxOoxx--

When Victoria returned from her ride she found her mother waiting for her. The Queen’s heart sank. Her mother had the same look on her face that she had used on her as a child when she had refused to concentrate on her lessons on the European dynasty. She smiled sweetly but did not stop to talk. She was called back sharply. ‘Drina, I am told you have requested the Lords and gentlemen to wear the Windsor uniform again tonight.’

Victoria at last stopped and turned back. ‘That’s right, Mama.’

‘Why? It is not always necessary to adhere to such formal rules.’

‘Just because Sir John doesn’t enjoy wearing it does not mean others don’t.’

‘I do not know of any man who enjoys wearing it, Drina. It is most heavy and cumbersome. It is only supposed to be worn on ceremonial occasions. I pity the poor men.’

‘Lord Melbourne does not complain.’

‘He cannot complain to you!’

‘Does he complain to others?’

‘I believe he has expressed some displeasure, yes.’

‘Then he tolerates it very well and is to be commended for it.’

‘And the others? It is not only Lord Melbourne who wears it.’

She huffed. ‘Oh, let them wear it for one more night! We are at Windsor, after all! And I and all the ladies are expected to wear layer upon layer of skirts and corsets and undergarments all in the stifling heat. Why does no one protest about this? Why, if it were up to me I would strip all my clothes from me and run naked through the halls!’

Her mother stood aghast, mouth gaping like a cod fish, her face red with embarrassment. She glanced around quickly to see who might have heard. Luckily, the two of them were quite alone. ‘Alexandrina! You shall not say these things! You must remember your position!’
Victoria laughed at her own bravado and the horror it had evoked in her mother. ‘I spend my whole life remembering my position, Mama. Sometimes, it is rather wonderful to let it slip!’ And she turned, picked up her skirts and hurried up to her chambers.

--xxOoxx--

Skerrett attended to her Queen as carefully and warmly as she always did while dressing her for dinner. Victoria studied herself in the mirror. Did she look different? Was the change in her body noticeable from the outside? Perhaps it was, she considered. Her eyes shone a little more, her cheeks were dusky with awareness. She smiled back at herself. Time was passing and night time approached.

‘Thank you for your assistance last night, Skerrett,’ she offered. She wanted to say something. She wanted to speak of it.

Her lady’s maid did not answer immediately, but then, with a rising smile, asked, ‘Was Lord Melbourne able to provide you with enlightening counsel last night, Ma’am?’

Their eyes met in the mirror. ‘Yes, Skerrett. Most enlightening.’

Skerrett’s voice lilted conspiratorially. ‘Were you … engaged in discussion for a long time?’

‘Most of the night, Skerrett, although I did manage some sleep.’ A tingling took hold inside at the memory of it. She bit her lip before continuing, ‘But I was, after all, so in need of his counsel. And, I must say … the length and breadth of his knowledge is most impressive.’

The two women’s eyes locked, and after a moment’s hesitation where Victoria wondered if she had gone too far and Skerrett wondered if she dared acknowledge it, Victoria let a smirk dance around her mouth. Skerrett could no longer contain herself and splurted out a laugh, which she tried unsuccessfully to hide behind her hands.

‘Begging your pardon, Ma’am … I couldn’t help myself.’

Immediately the Queen joined her in a fit of such hysterical laughter that she clutched at her belly.

‘I’m very pleased to hear of the greatness of Lord Melbourne’s ability, Ma’am,’ spluttered out Skerrett while wiping away tears of mirth.

When at last they had calmed down, Skerrett asked, quietly and seriously, ‘Did it hurt, Ma’am?’

Victoria thought back, picturing his face as he thrust into her, feeling him within her, reliving that exquisite fullness. ‘A little, but not so that I minded in the slightest.’

‘Was he able to please you? If he can do that first time, then he’s a keeper, Ma’am.’

Could she do that? Keep him? ‘A keeper? I wish I could keep him for all time. Yes, he pleased me, so very much.’ After all that had been, she delighted in confiding in somebody. ‘But it is not the first time he has brought me pleasure. He has touched me before.’

‘I thought so, Ma’am.’

She glanced at her maid. Was it so obvious? ‘How did you think so?’

‘Only from what you told me the other day, Ma’am. I guessed from that.’

‘Lady Portman warned me again today not to spend so much time with him. She said people gossip.’
She sighed.

‘They always do that, Ma’am.’

Victoria turned around to look fully at Skerrett. ‘Do you hear gossip, Skerrett … about Lord Melbourne and I?’

‘Sometimes, Ma’am, but that’s all it is, gossip.’ Skerrett spoke with as much reassurance as she could. ‘No one has any real cause to suspect you.’

‘What is it they say?’

‘That you like him and … that he likes you.’

‘In … that way?’

‘Yes.’

Victoria frowned with concern. ‘Oh, is it so obvious? We spend so much time behind closed doors alone together … they must think all sorts.’

‘Well … let them think, Ma’am. If their own lives are so shallow and dull that all they can do is chatter on about everyone else’s, then let them get on with it. And I’ll help make sure you and his Lordship can go about your business with no chance of discovery. As long as they don’t walk in on you, you’re alright! Like me gran used to say when she told me to lick out the cake bowls – You can carry right on so long as you don’t get caught!’

_Don’t get caught. Carry on but don’t get caught._

She would carry on, how could she not?

‘Skerrett …’

‘Yes, Ma’am?’

‘Have you … done it?’

Skerrett hesitated and Victoria worried that she should have kept her curiosity locked away, but then her maid smiled softly. ‘I have, Ma’am, and I’m not ashamed to say it no longer. But it were only a few times with a lad who …’ She hesitated and drew in a long breath.

The Queen urged her. ‘Tell me.’

‘He’s not with us any longer, Ma’am. He died, drowned. He were a sailor. His ship went down in the Bay of Biscay one night.’

Instinctively, she reached for her servant’s hand. ‘Skerrett, that is horrible to hear. Did you love him very much?’

‘I did, Ma’am. That’s why we decided not to wait, although we were engaged. It were only ever me for him and him for me. And we were proper careful. Only did the whole works, so to speak, when we knew it would be safe. We thought of ourselves as good as married anyway.’

‘As good as married …’ A strange knot took hold in Victoria’s stomach. She turned back and studied herself in the mirror. How time ticked relentlessly away. And now it ticked so loudly that it compelled her to glance at her carriage clock. It was already after eight o’clock. ‘I suppose I should
not keep people waiting for a meal a second time today. Do you think I’m ready?’

‘Yes, Ma’am. You look beautiful.’

‘Do you think he will like it?’

Skerrett placed the final diamond pin in her Majesty’s hair and smoothed down a stray tress. ‘He will love it.’

---xxoOoxx---

Victoria found she was not in the mood for roast venison.

Her Prime Minister sat opposite, slightly along the table from her, and he seemed remarkably adept at avoiding her glances. It frustrated her but only resulted in her longing growing so acute that her belly actually ached with desire. Normal conversation with the Lord Chancellor who sat to her right was proving difficult.

The Prime Minister wore the Windsor jacket. She kept getting distracted by the way the stiff collar sat upright and set off the gloriously firm line of his jaw. It was not helping her situation. She had no appetite for her food. She did, however, have a great appetite for wanting to lick the gloriously firm line of his jaw.

---xxoOoxx---

She managed to wait until half past ten. And then Skerrett helped her put on the bonnet and coat again and, masked by shadows and determination, they hurried along the dark corridors and staircases to his apartment.

She knocked as she had done the night before. The door opened and she stepped inside. She turned to him. He was still wearing the Windsor jacket. In the candlelight it made him so dreadfully handsome that she was robbed of breath.

Victoria quickly tugged off the bonnet and removed the coat. Once again, she stood before him in only her nightgown.

Melbourne took a step forward and reached behind her neck to pull her hair loose from where she had tucked it in.

Cupping her face in his hands, he looked over her, as if learning her again. ‘I missed you,’ she said, meaning it acutely.

He leant in to kiss her, still holding her head tenderly in his hands as if she would break.

But his kiss soon became stronger and she responded instantly. The ever smouldering embers flamed to a blaze again. As soon as his lips tested, she opened for him and let him take. Her hands came to his chest, fingertips exploring the gold brocade, running up the hard firmness of him before curling over his shoulders. She pressed the length of her body along him and was rewarded when he grasped her waist and pulled her potently against him.

‘Want you, want you,’ she repeated over and over and together they quickly undid and removed his breeches, laughing at the urgency and awkwardness of it as they tried to hold onto the other.

He immediately reached for the buttons on his jacket, but she batted his hands away. ‘No. Wait.’
Melbourne drew back from kissing her, surprise amusing him for a moment. But when Victoria’s hungry body pressed itself flush along him again, hands clasping, her breasts caught between them, he let her. Their bodies were so entwined, so indistinguishable, that they could only topple backwards upon the bed they were aiming for. Victoria found herself lying atop him. Instinctively she drew her leg over and sat straddling him just below where he already rose up, hard and long.

A heady rush of confidence took hold and she grabbed hold of her nightgown and pulled it off. His eyes immediately fell on her breasts with astonished adoration which thrilled her. Victoria, Queen of England, was empowered like never before. With a coquettish bite of her lip, she placed her hands on his chest and lowered herself to kiss him.

His hands found her breasts and, gently at first, squeezed and stroked. She moaned against his mouth and felt him pushing into her kiss. But she was enjoying this new found liberation and, as much as it pained her, she pulled herself up and rested her hands enticingly on the uniform.

‘Victoria …’ he urged. His cock stood up straight, nestled against her belly. She knew what he wanted. She wanted it too, but for once, she was the one in control.

She traced her fingers up over the brocade until they reached the first button on the coat, high up at his neck. ‘Buttons …’ she mused, drawing a single finger down over each one in turn. ‘So many buttons.’

He was staring up at her with a mixture of adulation and shock. His hands dropped from her breasts to let her do what she would.

She slipped the first golden disk out of its eye. ‘One,’ she said. Moving to the next, she proceeded to undo that. ‘Two.’

‘What are you doing?’ he asked, although he did nothing to stop her. He stared at her, transfixed.

‘I’m counting, Lord M. You like it when I count, don’t you? Three.’

He lifted his head a little to watch as she continued slowly, deliberately. ‘Four … Five … Do you know how long I’ve wanted to do this? Six …’

He smirked. ‘And there I was thinking you insisted on us wearing this infernal uniform in deference to the traditions of Windsor.’

‘Oh, but I am most deferential too, Lord M. Seven … eight …’ She had reached the last one.

‘You are not exhibiting much deference at the moment.’

‘Nine.’ she pushed the last one out. ‘Perhaps not … but I do not detect any protestation on your part.’

And with a flirtatious smile, she placed her hands flat on his stomach just under the thick cloth of the jacket and pushed up, parting the two sides of the jacket as she went. His chest was enticingly warm to her touch even through his shirt. She pushed the jacket to the sides but left it on him so that it sat broadly on his shoulders.

Dragging her hands down over his shirt, she then edged her fingers underneath. She slid them up inside, pushing the shirt up with it and causing him to swallow back a groan. ‘Victoria …’

‘Yes?’

‘What you do to me …’
With deliberate sensuousness, she rubbed her hands along his abdomen and felt the muscles harden under her touch. ‘I hope you admire my restraint, Lord M. I have, after all, been thinking about one thing only all day.’

‘And you think I have not?’ he swallowed.

‘I thought you were occupied with many and sundry documents?’

‘I was … but I confess to finding my mind drifting at times.’ With that, he took hold of her hips and let his gaze drag over her body; her pulse quickened.

‘Do you want me to lie down?’ she asked.

‘No. Stay like that … just … lift …’ Melbourne guided her up so that she was poised over the searching tip of his cock.

She glanced down, perplexed. ‘Can we do it like this?’

‘Oh, yes.’

‘But … how …?’

He smirked. ‘Oh, you’ll learn, very quickly, I imagine, based on your approach thus far.’

She braced her hands on his chest. ‘Will you guide me?’

‘Always.’ He slid one hand between her legs. ‘Are you ready?’ At the first touch of his finger, she threw back her head with a moan. He slid two more through her dripping sex and dipped them up inside her. ‘More than ready,’ he confirmed with lilting satisfaction. ‘Now … Ma’am … I think we have both been patient enough.’ He looked at her, an expression of concentrated intent darkening his face. ‘Down.’

And with a pull on her hips, he guided her down. He held her tight and, as much as she wanted to sink down immediately and feel him filling her, she let him control her descent so that he rose up into her slowly, inch by inch.


Slowly, she engulfed him. Slowly, she took him. Slowly, he fitted her.

At last she sat fully upon him, impaled, grounded, solid and firm and full.

She focused on the stretch inside, that glorious sensation she’d felt for the first time yesterday, that feeling she craved more and more. Closing her eyes, she let out a long, slow breath of utter contentment.

Victoria adjusted to this new state of being, this conjoining, this oneness, and, reasserting it, she tightened herself on him, gripping him inside her. It was only when he sucked in as his own pleasure spiked that she opened her eyes and looked down at him.

‘Hullo,’ he said, his voice low.

She leaned forward for a kiss but her breath was taken from her as the head of his cock nudged something deep inside her. She smiled against his lips. ‘Hullo. That is what I have longed for all day.’
‘Have you grown accustomed to it already?’

‘I think I have.’

‘No pain?’

‘No pain.’

He kissed her deeply but the lurch of his Adam’s apple belied his need. ‘Move on me.’

Taking hold of her arms, he sat her upright and started to guide her again. She felt him sliding through her, inhabiting and retreating from her body as if crafting her.

‘My God, you are so tight,’ he breathed, almost to himself. She adored him for it.

He brought her up until he nearly fell from her, at which point she missed him so much that she sank down along his length quickly. He hissed in reproach. ‘Slowly!’

But Victoria loved the stretch of his cock inside her; taking it slowly frustrated her. She whined in frustration.

‘Slowly,’ he urged again, his fingers tightening on her hips. She raised herself up as slowly as she dared, her thigh muscles clenched tight to control it.

‘Yes,’ he moaned, ‘yes, like that.’

She soon worked out what pleased him. It pleased her too, greatly, this slow undulation, this languid rise and fall, give and take. He tried to maintain his gaze on her but his eyes blurred and his mouth dropped in wonder. She worked herself on his cock, entranced by his abandon to her.

Victoria eked it out, drawing herself up so that he barely clung inside her and then sinking down again so unfeasibly slowly that she could register every inch of him entering her. Melbourne was lost. His eyes were closed shut and his back suddenly arched so that he flung his head back. ‘Yes, oh yes, oh fu -!’

‘What was that?’ she queried. He had said something. She wasn’t sure what.

‘Nothing, nothing,’ he panted, his hands gripping her tight again. ‘I’m so close, so close, my darling. Move faster.’

She built her pace and now leaned back a little. This way she felt the nudge of his cockhead catch a deep and perfect place inside. If he was close, she was too, and then she had more … his thumb found that place between her legs, exposed, expectant, just above where he slid in and out of her. He stroked it and she whined; he plucked it and she groaned. All the while she rose and fell on him, milking him with the wet grip of her sex.

‘Yes, yes,’ he slurred and she forced her head up from letting it hang back indulgently to stare into him, eyes locked.

He came first with a sudden sharp breath and a wordless groan as his fingers dug hard into her hips. She barely noticed, although she would later bruise. She sank down fully and was held there as he released chaotically inside her, his mouth slack as he gasped it out, his eyes wide and unseeing.

Only when his rapture had passed did she start moving again. Although his thumb still stroked her, this time pleasure took hold from a place deep inside. Surely it was uncontainable? Surely it would
take her and shake and ransack her of reason? And it did. Her climax hit her so hard it flung her
body about like a rag doll, his cock her only means of grounding. She opened her mouth and wailed,
loud, long, all the while letting her ecstasy billow from the hard length of him inside her.

It was completely silent afterwards, as if they had somehow brought the world to a halt. Victoria
wasn’t sure she could move, and even if she could she felt it would somehow disturb the perfection
of it all.

But slowly, eventually, as awareness crept back into her limbs, she lowered herself to lie flush upon
him, ensuring she kept him firmly embedded inside her.

He drew a heavy arm across her back and she laid a hand over the rise of his chest. ‘Was that … was I … acceptable?’ she asked faintly.

He looked confused for a moment, almost annoyed, but then his eyes uncreased and his mouth
curled up. ‘Acceptable? You are exceptional. You are perfect.’ And as she looked at him she saw his
eyes mist. She kissed him to prevent his embarrassment.

Victoria curled her fingers through the fine hairs on his chest. ‘I must say … I do so enjoy it.’

He gave an audible laugh. ‘You are not the first, although not everyone takes to it with such …
vigour.’

She giggled against him. They lay quietly for a while as she ran her fingertips slowly over his
collarbones. ‘What was it you said earlier?’

‘Hm?’ he queried.

‘When we were … just now … when we were making love … you said something. It started with
‘f’. Fu- something.’

She felt him tense under her. He took longer to answer than she expected. ‘I do not recall anything,’
he said, turning his head away from her.

Now she was intrigued. Victoria lifted herself up and smiled at him. ‘Oh, but you did. It was when
things were … particularly good, let’s say … You threw your head back and said, “Oh fu.”’

Melbourne coughed loudly and tried to sit up. It prompted him to slip from her and she rolled off him
disconsolately. ‘I’m sorry, Ma’am. I need some water.’ He got up hastily and went to pour some into
a glass. It was swallowed down hastily.

Victoria was energised. She knelt up on her haunches, leaning forward expectantly. ‘Lord M! I do
believe you have something to hide!’

‘Do not concern yourself with it.’ He would not turn to face her.

‘You did say something. What was it? Oh, do tell me. It sounds most intriguing!’

‘Ma’am, honestly, put it from your mind.’

She pulled herself from the bed and rushed over to him, curling her arms around his neck and forcing
him to look down at her. He resisted. ‘Oh, but you must tell me now. What was it? Tell me.’

‘No.’

‘But you know how I like to learn new things. And you teach me so well, after all.’
‘Your Majesty, truly, I cannot tell you.’ He was flustered. Melbourne extricated himself from her half-heartedly. A pink tinge had caught his cheekbones which made her want to reach up and kiss them. He continued, scrabbling for explanations and excuses. As he did when explaining things to her, he held his hands before him, palms open, as if they could take the burden of understanding for him. ‘It is a crude term, the crudest term. I have not had cause to say it for as long as I can remember. But I should never have said it now and I can only apologise profusely that the word crossed my lips. These things happen at times of … extreme emotional experiences.’

‘Were you going through an extreme emotional experience, Lord M?’ she crooned, winding herself around him again, warm and seductive. His resistance was melting.

‘You know I was.’

‘And you said a naughty word?’ she teased, her hand slipping to cup his manhood.

He swallowed. ‘Like I said, Ma’am, I apologise.’

‘Tell me what the word is.’ She squeezed, not hard, but enough to make him suck in sharply. ‘I think you want to say it again.’

‘Stop it.’

‘But I don’t want to stop it.’

‘Victoria … That word is not one a Queen should ever hear.’

‘But … as your monarch I demand that I do hear it.’ His burgeoning cock stiffened under her determined attention. Holding her eyes, he steadied his breathing. She let her tongue ghost over her ever ready lips. ‘Go on.’

Her hand stroked fully from root to tip once, twice, three times before she got what she wanted. And then he said quite plainly: ‘Fuck.’

She hesitated. Oh, that did sound wicked.

‘Fuck?’ she repeated, quite boldly.

He frowned against it. ‘Your Majesty … please …’

‘I’m sorry, Lord M? Am I neglecting you?’ She picked up her pace again.

‘No! I didn’t mean that! I meant … you must never say that word. If you said it within earshot of anyone … the monarchy would be in crisis.’

‘How exciting!’

‘Hardly!’

‘Fuck. Fuck,’ she repeated as if rehearsing a new speech. ‘I like it, very much. But what exactly does it mean?’ He groaned just as her hand swept over the head of his cock.

‘It can be used for various reasons – in anger, surprise, wonder – but it means …’ He sighed, beyond censure. ‘… what we have been doing.’

‘Intercourse? Sexual union?’
‘Yes.’

‘We have been making fuck?’

He let out a sudden laugh but managed to turn it into a reprimanding groan just in time. ‘No. We’ve been … we’ve been … fucking.’

‘I see … fucking.’

‘Victoria, please … please stop saying it.’

‘Why? Fuck is a wonderful word. I think it is my favourite new word. Why should I stop saying fuck?’

‘Because … because it is so …’ He opened his eyes and dropped his voice. ‘… so incredibly arousing.’

And with that he grabbed her by the arms, pushed her over so that she fell back onto the bed, lifted her legs around his waist, and plunged into her.

Her back arched as she took all of him to the hilt in one go. A gasp was pulled from her with the force of it. He pulled out then drove in again with a harsh grunt of need.

Melbourne leaned over her, braced with one hand, the other between her legs, immediately finding her nub. She met his eyes and, as his cock stretched her, said, ‘I love that … I love that, My Lord …’

If someone were to ask what she had called him then, she would not have known. Instinct conquered sense. Lust triumphed over reason.

He leaned over her, his body as tight and hot as his desire. ‘Ask for it,’ he urged, low, dark.

His voice, his words made her belly twist as much as his cock, which filled her, hard and deep. She could scarcely breathe, let alone think. She managed only a whine.

‘I said … ask for it.’ He stopped moving and she thrashed her head to the side in frustration.

Forcing herself to look at him, she resisted the urge to hit him for his presumption. The man above her stared down, expecting nothing but her compliance. And she would give it to him.

‘Fuck me.’

There was the slightest curl at the corner of his mouth, but still he did not move. She panted out her need and tried again, her plea coming remarkably easily. ‘Please … fuck me, My Lord.’

And so he did. With long drives through her pliant body, he buried his cock deep in her before dragging it indolently out, then in again, over and over, until they both came hard, clinging to the other so brutally that the next day he found scratches on his back.

They came down slowly and carefully turned towards each other so that he could stay inside her.

She smiled in wonder as he stroked her face. ‘Is it always like this?’

‘No.’

‘Why us?’

‘I do not know. Fortune, circumstance … I do not know. It simply is.’
She kissed him, a blessing of adoration. ‘Thank you for my new word.’

He cocked a cynical eyebrow. ‘I cannot believe the Queen of England now knows that word … and that I am responsible for it. Please do not ever say it anywhere but for my ears only. The establishment would be rocked to its very core.’

‘You asked me to say it, Lord M.’

‘Hmm …’ he mused, stroking the line of her body down along her waist. ‘There are certain times when its use is most propitious. Do you know …?’ His fingers reached her hip before retracing their path back up to find her breasts and circle a nipple. ‘I do have a first name.’

She giggled. ‘I know … but you are my Lord M.’

‘Do you even know my name?’ He was concentrating on the nipple, letting his forefinger trace the areola in dizzying circles, inciting it to pert prominence.

‘Of course.’

‘Say it.’

She hesitated. He was Melbourne, Prime Minister, Lord M, My Lord.

His fingers paused and he looked at her, his gaze as dark and determined as it had been earlier. ‘Say it.’

She did not immediately, not because she doubted, but because she wanted to let the moment seep and brew. And then –

‘William.’

And he smiled. A smile of such complete perfect happiness that tears filled her eyes immediately.

‘William,’ she repeated. ‘William, William, William.’

He took her in his arms, rolled her onto her back and kissed her so deeply she was robbed of breath. When they parted she clung to him and laughed out her euphoria. ‘I think I have a new favourite word already.’

He pulled back and teased, ‘Oh no. I like the other one too.’

‘But you have forbidden me from using it.’

‘Not all the time. Not here. Not when we are alone.’

She giggled and stroked his face. ‘You told me earlier that you would stay inside me all night.’

‘And?’

‘Was that not perhaps too much to expect?’

‘Your Majesty … don’t underestimate me.’

‘Would I ever, Lord M?’

He quirked an eyebrow.
'You’ll always be my Lord M … William.'

And as he kissed her again, the clock struck once. Morning was still a very long way away.

Chapter End Notes

Could I bottle him, please?

At some point, I may actually add some plot, but for now, let's just let them enjoy themselves. They're having so much fun. After all, she has so much to learn and he is such a very, very good teacher.

You get bonus points for spotting the nod to Obergruppenfuhrer John Smith. ;-)
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria dispenses with an item of clothing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The still darkness carried time with it. Victoria and William explored and discovered new things in each other that only come from acceptance and curiosity: a scar on his left shoulder (he had fallen from his horse onto a branch when he was twelve); a little mole in the shape of a beetle behind her knee (he kissed it so often she wondered if he would kiss it away); his second toes were longer than his big toes; she could touch her nose with the tip of her tongue.

He did not enter her again for some time, but if she considered that he had broken his promise to be inside her all night, she did not mind. This new awakening led to such a deep certainty that she felt she carried him inside her all the time. But, when her yawns became unstoppable, he kissed her softly. ‘You need to sleep.’

‘I know. You would not wish me to be fractious tomorrow, would you, Lord M?’

‘Oh … I would find ways of dealing with it.’ His voice deepened in that way that made her long for him on another level.

‘In that case, perhaps I should stay awake all night,’ she pondered.

He gave what was nearly a growl as he kissed down her body, guiding her onto her side and lying behind her.

‘You didn’t stay inside me. You said you would,’ she admonished, but only lightly, for he was perfect.

‘My apologies. I am, regrettably, merely human and not without fault.’

‘Merely human, Lord M? That will never do!’

He was nuzzling at her neck, kissing and grazing on it softly. ‘Would you like me to make amends?’

‘I thought I was supposed to be going to sleep?’

‘You are.’

‘But …’

‘Shh … Let me … Just let me. May I be in you while you sleep?’

She turned a little with a curious smile. ‘Whatever do you mean?’

His face was openly honest. ‘I would not presume.’
‘Of course. I can think of no more wonderful thing.’

She turned more to allow him to kiss her again. When they broke away she asked, ‘But, how …?’

‘Shh,’ he hushed again.

Stroking a hand down her leg, he brought it under her knee and lifted it a little. She felt him there, between her legs, nudging, questing. ‘Oh!’ she gasped and immediately moved back to ease his search.

He found her opening and pressed the head of his cock in slowly. They both released their breaths as more of his length squeezed its way inside her. When he had found his way, he lowered her leg so that he was caught fast. He pushed again. ‘Oh, that’s -!’ she managed before her words evaporated.

‘What? Tell me,’ he purred against her ear, pressing himself yet deeper inside her.

He felt larger than ever, contained, pressed tight. She moved on him and prompted a moan so she moved again with a moan of her own at the fullness of it.

‘That is so very … present.’ She sighed, unable to stop her constant vocalisations from escaping.

He laughed low and withdrew a little, but only so that he could push in again, easing his way through her succulent warmth.

He brought his arm around her, pulling her hard against him so that their bodies spooned together, matched and even. He found her breast and let his fingers play with the nipple. At this she arched her head back to seek out his kiss, but he teased her, denying her his mouth.

A whine of frustration caught her so she pushed hard back on him to keep him as deep inside her as she could.

When his hand worked its way between her legs to find her nub, ready, ripe, she sucked in sharply. Victoria clamped down, trapping his fingers there just as she trapped his cock inside her. But still he managed to stroke and soon, growing, building like a wave riding up the sand, she crashed, her climax long, spreading and reaching through her body, rising to lift into the air around them.

William carried on moving through her, allowing his own release only when he was assured of hers. He came with a low, long breath as his body tensed against her.

‘I love that, I love that,’ she murmured, the remnants of her orgasm seeping heavily through her limbs. Her mind clouded along with her body. Her voice softened and faded. ‘I love that … I love …’

Victoria was asleep.

William swallowed hard and, when he had given her the last drops of his rapture, he let his head fall back onto the pillow and inhaled the scent of her hair which lay around him. ‘Yes, Victoria,’ he whispered, to her, to himself, ‘I love.’

And, still embedded deep inside her, he too fell asleep.

--xxOoOxx--

When he roused her at 6 o’clock the next morning, she already felt an accustomed familiarity to their routine. He helped her with her corset, tugging the laces tightly to enclose her into it.
‘Do you feel it necessary to wear drawers?’ he asked.

She glanced over her shoulder at him. ‘Drawers?’

‘Surely you have no need of them.’

‘I have never really considered it. I simply wear what I am given.’

‘They have only recently been worn at all. Most women not of your station still do not.’

‘Well … what do you suggest?’

‘If you are willing … dispense with them.’

‘Not wear drawers?’

‘No.’

‘But …’

‘I find they can be a hindrance,’ he stated with only the merest lilt in his voice.

William finished tying her corset and she turned to him, her eyes bright. ‘Oh, but you are so wicked, Lord M! Just think, if your cabinet knew you were instructing the Queen to dispense with her drawers!’

He pouted a little in consideration. ‘Today, I intend to brief my cabinet on the situation in Afghanistan, on the price of wheat and on the latest reform bills, Ma’am. Your wearing of drawers is not on the agenda, although, if you insist, I could add it.’

She laughed and gave him a playful tap on the nose. ‘I am certain the cabinet would not find that a suitable topic for discussion!’

‘Oh … I wouldn’t be so sure. Anyway, Ma’am … what is your response?’

‘Will I dispose of my drawers?’

‘Hm.’

She let a playful smile dance around her mouth. ‘If you ask it of me, I believe I could consider it. Do you ask it of me, My Lord?’

‘I do.’

‘In that case … I shall think about it.’ If he could tease, so could she.

He opened his mouth to retort but at that there was a knock at his door. ‘And there is your maid.’ William threw on his dressing gown and crossed to the door to let her in.

Skerrett hurried in and continued dressing the Queen. Soon Victoria bid Melbourne farewell and hurried secretly and silently through the dark, hidden passages of Windsor to her own rooms. It was only when she returned to them that she brought up the issue of undergarments.

‘Skerrett … I shall no longer wear my drawers.’

‘Oh? Very well, Ma’am, they are not necessary, after all, but … may I ask why not?’
She turned to her dresser with a wicked smirk. ‘Ease of entry, I believe.’

The two women held their stares for a moment before they were overcome with laughter.

--xxoOoxx--

The cabinet met once a week at Windsor while Lord Melbourne was in residence. It caused some grumbling, not only from the well-padded ministers gathered for the occasion, but also from Her Majesty, because it meant that she was deprived of her Prime Minister in the mornings when he would normally advise her.

She tried to distract herself by a venture down the Long Walk, but the picnic provided was not nearly as delicious as it would have been had he been there.

She had to wait until three o’clock – three o’clock! – for her Prime Minister to attend to her. When she returned to the castle, she sat in her day chamber and stared at the clock, willing the hands to turn.

Just after the chimes tingled three times across to her in welcome, he walked in and locked the door behind him. She stood quickly and moved to stand just in front of her bureau, hoping that it would give her an air of authority and determination and not one of helpless lust, and held out her hand.

He knelt to one knee, the most fluid, graceful gesture as always. His lips brushed her knuckles, just as they had done the morning after her uncle’s death at his first official audience. Or, perhaps more. Perhaps they lingered, they pressed harder. Perhaps the hand holding hers caressed her palm with the soft strength of his fingertips.

And he did not rise to his feet.

‘Lord M? Are you quite well?’

He glanced up at her and there, in the depths of those green eyes, was a darkening which made her catch her breath.

‘My Lord?’ she asked, tremulous. Still he held her fingers in his and his thumb began a slow stroke over her forefinger.

‘I always kiss you in greeting when arriving for an audience, Ma’am, don’t I?’

‘Yes …but of course, that is the order of things.’

‘I kiss your hand.’

‘Yes.’ Why was she finding it so hard to draw breath? How, after all that had passed between them, was he able to do this again and again?

‘A little monotonous, don’t you consider?’ he continued.

‘I don’t understand.’

‘I think perhaps we should try … a kiss of a different kind.’

Her free hand came to her breast as if trying to give herself strength. ‘Lord M, why don’t you stand? I will gladly take your kisses, but why don’t you stand?’

‘Oh no, Ma’am, I don’t think you understand me.’ At last he relinquished his hold on her hand.
'Lean back against the bureau.'

His tone was not one she would question. She reached behind her and clasped her hands along the wooden edge.

Still he did not stand up. Instead, without taking his eyes from hers, he brought his hands to her hips then drew them down, slowly, so achingly sensuously that she drew in a slow breath of wonder. He reached the bottom of her skirts but then gathered the hems in his hands and pushed them up her legs as slowly as he’d dragged his hands down.

Her eyelids fluttered, her belly uncoiled its desire. *Oh, dear God, what this man did to her!*

But at every moment she expected him to rise to his feet, to stand and take her in his arms, push her across the bureau and enter her.

He stared up, his eyes grave with lust – she read that well now – and said, ‘Hold your skirts up, right up, hold them for me.’

She took hold of the heavy, cumbersome material as best she could. Still he knelt.

‘Higher,’ he insisted.

She drew the silks up to her mid thighs.

‘Higher. Right around your waist.’ She gathered them up, exposing herself to his gaze.

He smirked. ‘You heeded my advice, I see.’

‘My Lord?’

‘No drawers.’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

His hands were at her ankles and he drew them up again, slowly, running up the stockings until he reached her knees, then higher still, up, up, and she felt a push as he moved her legs apart.

‘Lord Melbourne … What …?’

‘Shh. Don’t speak.’

His hands continued their journey up until he came to the top of her legs. With careful deliberation, he brought his thumbs to her tender folds and pulled them delicately apart, his eyes flitting between what he was doing and watching her reaction.

He was going to touch her; he was going to study her closely as those perfect fingers brought her pleasure once again. She let her head fall back and awaited the questing of his thumb.

‘Look at me.’

*Oh, but he frustrated her!* She mewled with annoyance but tore her head back to glance down. He was smirking, an infuriating little rise of his mouth; he was toying with her for his own amusement.

But when she fell into those eyes, large, deep, pulling her into them, she could not object.

‘Remember,’ he said, ‘kiss.’
Her brows creased in bewilderment. How was he to kiss her from –

‘Oh!’

Melbourne did kiss her. There. Right there. He brought his mouth to her and kissed. He licked, he licked again, he sucked, he opened her to him and licked again and again.

‘Oh! Oh, God in heaven!’

She was beyond thought, beyond sense. All she knew was goodness: wet, focused, warm yet cool, firm yet soft, him, him, him.

One hand maintained her grip on her skirts, the other waved vaguely in the air, wanting to touch him, wanting to connect yet more, but she was lost in the feeling of his mouth on her. He dragged his tongue along her then laved right over that perfect place, that tight little ball of flesh he now knew so well. And then, drawing back to breathe, he attached himself again, sucking this time, gently at first but growing stronger.

‘Oh, harder! Yes, that, yes, there!’ Her desire voiced itself inexorably, and with that she threw her hand down to grip his head and push him against her.

Victoria gave instinctively at the knees, easing his attentions, and was rewarded when two fingers pushed up inside her and started scissoring, stroking, tapping away.

She gasped, but when he pulled back again briefly, the air cooled her and she whined for more. ‘Back, go back,’ she slurred (although when she thought about it later she considered herself quite demanding.)

But he did go back. With a moan of his own, he let his mouth, tongue and lips, tug, pull, drag over her time and again, building pleasure in her with unstoppable force. The two fingers inside supported her and so she ground down onto them and found herself held on them and his mouth.

It would not take long and it would be strong.

She tried to prepare, to delay it, for she adored that prickling anticipation almost as much as the climax itself, but he was too good and she was too gone.

When his tongue swept, when his lips sucked, when his mouth closed over her completely, it broke.

She juddered and her legs could no longer hold her. As pleasure ripped through her and her cry sounded, her knees gave way and she collapsed to the floor, sliding down the side of the bureau. He followed her with his mouth and fingers, not letting her escape him, and she found herself lying supine on the floor, her skirts bubbling up around her.

But he stayed there, lying prostrate between her legs, his fingers still embedded, his tongue still licking, slow now, soft but not stopping. She stroked his hair as her pleasure faded.

She panted in delirium. ‘Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you. I never knew, I never knew …’

‘Again,’ he murmured against her.

She laughed a little, trying to push herself up, trying to regain a semblance of decency. ‘No. You can’t, I can’t.’ She would be too tender.

‘Yes, come again for me,’ he slurred and carried on, his licks seeming to soothe and renew.
‘But … I …’

‘Lie still.’

‘Oh God, I can’t!’ she muttered, bewildered, but already it was working, already her body was readying itself again.

He paused briefly, his fingers still inside her. ‘Do you not want it? I’ll stop if you say.’

‘No, don’t stop. Don’t ever stop.’

And so she spread her legs wide for him and let him feast. Her pleasure had soaked her already but he took it all, tasting, licking, sucking her into him. She moaned and instinctively arched her back but he held her down with one hand pressing against her belly. He held her open so that her clitoris was fully exposed for him to trill over with just the tip of his tongue. Its sensitivity seemed to have subdued itself back into throbbing need.

‘Don’t stop, don’t stop, don’t stop,’ she repeated over and over and with each repetition she bucked her hips against his mouth, building up a rhythm which made her forget her surroundings, forget the hard floor she was lying on, forget the high ceiling enclosing her. With him she was uncontained, with him she was free.

His fingers curled inside her, pressing against that sweet spot only he seemed to know of, and his tongue pressed itself hard and laved so slowly it seemed to drag her with it. She came again, slower than last time, reaching out, stretching, her fingers clawing the carpet, her groan low and protracted.

He held her there on his mouth and fingers while every ounce of rapture flooded her limbs which were paralysed in their absorption of it.

As ever after their love making, time stopped. She was not sure when he rose to stand again, but when she refocused on her surroundings he was upright, adjusting his clothing, tugging down his waistcoat.

He held out his hand to help her to her feet. She tried, but her arm felt unseemly heavy and fell limply back to her side. She stared up at him helplessly. ‘How will I survive this, Lord M? How I will I survive you?’

He smiled briefly before his face took on a far graver expression. He turned slightly from her and said under his breath, ‘How will I survive you?’

‘I would be most grateful for your hand again.’

He inhaled deeply and, redrawing his smile, held his hand out. She took it and allowed herself to be pulled to her feet, falling against him and running her hands up his chest immediately, gazing at him in wonder and admiration. ‘How do you do these things to me so well?’

‘I told you, Ma’am, it is a rarity. It only happens when two people have an innate compatibility.’

‘I do not know what I would do without you.’ She stared into him, her eyes dampening. ‘No, that is not what I mean. What I mean is, I do not know what I would be without you.’

He smiled softly, a sad smile, she thought, and leant down to kiss her gently. She could taste herself on his lips but was not at all appalled. He broke away from her mouth to murmur in her ear. ‘Duty calls, Ma’am.’ He referred to the dispatches. She groaned.
Melbourne pulled back and she noted the rise of a disapproving eyebrow. ‘I hope that is not recalcitrance on your part, Ma’am?’

‘Perhaps it is.’

‘Perhaps I should address it later.’

‘Perhaps you should … My Lord.’

‘Perhaps for now you should sit at the bureau and open the box.’

‘Perhaps …’ she teased again.

He cleared his throat and grasped his hands behind his back, then, raising his head to hers with a look of such severity she caught her breath, he said, ‘Perhaps you would do well to remember the consequences of such wilful and headstrong behaviour. You have a duty to perform and it is my duty to ensure that you perform it to the best of your ability.’

‘Sometimes I need reminding of the consequences.’

‘Oh … I fully intend to remind you … later. But for now … you will sit … and you will do your duty.’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

For a moment his eyes flashed, for a moment his nostrils flared, and she knew how hard it was for him to rein in his own needs. She watched his hands, how he kept them clasped tight behind his back, as if he didn’t he would take her, bend her over the chaise, throw her skirts over her hips and thrash her. Oh, how she wished he would. What he had done to her earlier, far from slaking her desires, only seemed to render them more potent and aggressive.

Should she torment him more, defy him, goad him into giving her what she craved? Their gazes burned between them. His Adam’s apple jogged along his neck. She waited a moment longer, testing him, testing herself. But then he cocked his head slightly to the side, let his eyebrows dance briefly in prompt and relaxed his shoulders.

Victoria turned towards the bureau and sat. He approached and stood to her left, keeping one hand firmly behind his back the entire time as he handed her each document in turn.

Even then, Victoria noted with satisfaction, it was not until they were halfway through the box that the prominence in his breeches at last subdued itself.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all your continued interest. I love the dialogue with my readers. I know this is erotica, but it's just as much about their hopes and emotions and self-perception. Sex is one (vital) part of the good ol' human condition in all its complexity. It's all part and parcel of what makes us tick. I hope that comes across.

Remember to join the Facebook group 'For the Love of Vicbourne - Victoria and Lord
Melbourne' for more Vicbourne goodness. As Series 2 is only a few days away in the UK, we're going to need it more and more.

LL x
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is forlorn and Melbourne converses.

Chapter Notes

A slightly different chapter. They need a break (only a slight breather, have no fear). This is the first chapter I've written which is written from Melbourne's POV (partly). Loved doing so and will probably do more. Bit odd that it's only happened now but there we go. It was necessary and enjoyable.

And a little revelation from the past. Not a game changer but an extra nugget.

Enjoy. x

They worked sensibly, with no further distractions.

Eventually, Melbourne took the last document from her. ‘Excellent, Ma’am. Your proficiency in diplomatic matters far exceeds your uncle’s, and in what, only a few months?’

She laughed. ‘I do not like to dwell on these things, not unless they are of great importance. Improvements to the slums is more engaging than a new suite of rooms for the Duchess of Marlborough, the most dreary, self-absorbed soul I have ever had the misfortune of calling a relative, however distant.’

‘It is not every day one hears a monarch extolling discussions on the slums, Ma’am.’

‘And why not? I understand they are ghastly places. We should not lose touch with the common man, Lord M.’

‘No, Ma’am, you are right to keep me reminded of that.’

There was a knock at the door but when the handle was turned it remained closed.

The Queen and her Prime Minister glanced at each other, guilt flitting across their faces. ‘I locked it.’ Melbourne hurried over and turned the key. The footman entered.

‘My apologies. Her Majesty and I were engaged in a most arduous discussion on slum improvements. It required the utmost concentration and we were not to be disturbed.’ The footman glanced quizzically at Melbourne, more bemused by the fact that the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was apologising to him than the fact that the door had been locked.

Victoria tried to subdue the smirk tugging at her mouth. The footman bowed to Melbourne and handed over a note.
He took it and read it rapidly, his brows furrowed in concentration. As his eyes darted over the page his lips pursed tighter.

‘News?’ she queried in concern.

He looked up, distracted. ‘I must return to the House, Ma’am. There is some fuss over a bill we thought would pass easily. It seems I am needed after all.’

‘Return? To London?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

The room spun around her immediately. ‘But … you can’t!’

‘Well, I must. It will only be for a day. I should be back late tomorrow.’

She rushed over. ‘Lord M! You cannot abandon me!’

‘Ma’am, I am not abandoning you, but this is an important matter for the country.’

She spun from him, wringing her hands together. ‘Oh, sometimes I wish … I wish … the country would disappear and it could only be you and I alone in the universe!’

He approached her and took her hands in his, holding them gently and stroking. ‘Victoria,’ he said, calm, soft, soothing.

She drew in a breath and steadied herself. Raising her eyes to his, she said, ‘I will miss you.’

‘And I you.’

‘You will come back, won’t you?’

He smiled in bewilderment. ‘Of course. As I said, it will only be a night and a day.’

‘I know … and I will anticipate your return.’

‘You may do so, Ma’am.’ He smirked.

‘When must you leave?’

‘Immediately, I’m afraid. I must ask them to prepare my carriage.’

She drew in the deepest breath. ‘I have grown used to sharing a bed with you.’

‘Well … it will be wise to have a night of undisturbed sleep … neither of us have managed much of late. Now … I really must leave.’ He hurried over to gather his portmanteau then turned for the door.

‘Will you not kiss me farewell?’

Melbourne stopped, put down his bag and moved back to her. Taking her head in his hands as if it were a precious rose bloom, he kissed her. ‘Farewell.’

‘Farewell. Come back to me soon.’

‘How can I not?’

He kissed her again and then, with a short bow, turned and left.
William paced to his rooms to get ready. Taking his leave of her was always painful but now more than ever he felt it acutely. He tried to focus on the Corn Law bill which was the reason for his summons back to London. Recalcitrant members were disputing the amendment. Recalcitrant … he had scolded her for her recalcitrance, he had told her he would address it. And now … she would be alone, waiting, anticipating. His fists clenched in frustration.

‘William!’

A familiar voice halted him in his tracks. He turned. Emma Portman was hurrying down the corridor towards him. Her easy conversation was a frequent balm, but on this occasion, his heart sank. He needed to leave and leaving Windsor was hard enough as it was. Emma bustled up quickly, her eyes bright with intent.

‘William, you have been here for days and yet we’ve barely spoken.’

He smiled in polite apology, his hands extended slightly to the side before he clasped them before him, defensively he realised. ‘Well … work keeps me busy, Emma, you know that. I am readying myself to go London at this moment.’

‘How are you, William?’

‘Very well, yes, very well. And you, Emma?’ He was in no mood for conversation. His words stuck to his tongue.

‘Quite well. Little Vicky has barely been troubling me of late. She seems quite enrapt in other matters.’ It was pointed, he recognised that all too well.

He feigned surprise. ‘Oh? Well, there it is. When we return to London you and Edward must visit Dover House for tea, dinner, whatever you so wish. Goodbye, Emma, I must return to the city.’ He inclined his head politely then turned away.

‘William.’ She kept pace with him.

‘Yes?’ He paused, inhaling in frustration and turned his head reluctantly to her.

‘I have been meaning to speak to you for some time.’

He glanced around, anywhere but at her. ‘Now is not the best time.’

‘But … there is something that has been troubling me. Can we talk? In here?’

She led the way into the nearest room and waited for him to join her.

William guarded himself against reaction but could not help a dull thud of anxiety sink into his stomach. Emma knew him too well. With a sigh, he followed her. She closed the door behind them as he rubbed his head wearily.

‘You look tired, William.’

‘Perhaps, a little.’

She approached and studied him, her keen eyes casting over his face. It made him uncomfortable. ‘But not unhappy,’ she continued. ‘In fact, you have been most relaxed and content of late, I have found.’
‘Excellent. Yes, I am. Was that all?’

‘The Queen has been tired too. She has been waking very late. Today she did not stir until 9am. Neither did you.’

His heartbeat was accelerating. *Damn this!* ‘The Windsor air can be tiring.’

‘She seems very happy too.’

‘I am pleased to hear it.’

‘You know she is. You are rarely out of her company.’ Her voice softened but gained in intensity. ‘William … I know how fond you are of her.’

_Fond._ He almost laughed at the meagerness of the word. The thudding ache in his stomach made him nauseous.

‘I have to ask you …’ Emma stepped in and looked from one eye to the other as if trying to read a response before even asking the question, the question he sickeningly anticipated. ‘… have you been doing something you oughtn’t?’

He moved his feet apart rapidly; if he had not he would have stumbled.

Melbourne’s mouth ran dry but, ever the diplomat, he replied without hesitation. ‘I don’t know to what you are referring.’

‘Oh, but you do. You always were the most charming, William, the most handsome. You still are. She adores you, it is no secret, and you … you adore her.’

The tell-tale reddening of his cheeks made him drop his head. He glanced to the side, for once his usual quick wits and eloquence deserting him. Emma was not somebody to lie to. She knew both him and Victoria too well. And underneath the nausea came something else, a strange sense of relief, of being able to share. Emma had proven her trustworthiness many times over their long acquaintance. He sniffed out in defeat and muttered, ‘Is it that obvious?’

She pursed her lips but inhaled, as if the relief came to her too. ‘To me, yes. To others … they do not believe that anything could actually happen, but … William, please.’ Her voice was thin with concern.

He sighed and turned away. ‘Do not trouble yourself with it.’

‘How can I not? She is the Queen! And she is a friend … as are you, William. One of my truest and oldest friends.’

He drew in a deep breath and turned his head up to the ceiling. ‘She is … intoxicating.’

‘William! What have you done? How far has it gone?’

For the first time since deciding on it, he felt guilt. He could not answer.

‘Have you … have you deflowered her?’ Her voice was hollow with outrage.

He groaned. ‘Do not put it like that!’

‘William! What of the consequences?’
Now defensive anger rose in him. He turned to her, his eyes hard, his voice rasping. ‘I am no fool. This is far from the first time I have engaged in such matters, matters requiring discretion, as well you know.’

‘Requiring discretion? The last one landed you in court! If this got out the scandal could bring down the monarchy!’

He threw his hands up to the sides. ‘Well … it will not get out.’

‘Does anyone else know?’

‘Her maid. Utterly devoted and trustworthy.’

‘And now me.’ Emma wrung her hands together in confusion. ‘But how do you …? Where …?’

He gave the tersest of sighs but, as if in confession, he kept talking. ‘She comes to my rooms. It has only been two nights, although …’

‘Although what ….’

‘There has been some intimacy for a while now, months.’

‘What sort of intimacy?’

He said nothing. She would deduce it from that alone.

‘Old habits die hard, do they, William?’ Emma paused, allowing her understanding to hit him. ‘Does she take kindly to it?’

He ran his hand constantly over his forehead. ‘It was she who demanded it. I was determined to resist, but she … insisted.’

Emma’s brows creased as she thought back to a conversation with the Queen. ‘I remember now, talking to her about it. Harriet let it slip about your … proclivities.’

‘Yes, Victoria told me. That is how it started. She was very curious.’

Emma tutted as the reality of it hit home again. She paced towards him indignantly. ‘And how noble of you to pander to her curiosity! You fool! You must stop at once! You must stop this madness.’

He looked at Emma. He wanted to nod, to agree, because all she said was right. Duty compelled him, decency demanded it of him. But he could still smell the fragrance of her hair as it tumbled upon him, he could still feel the smoothness of her skin on his fingertips … he could still taste her on his tongue. And so he spoke his truth.

‘But you see … I don’t think that I can.’

Emma frowned, but in her eyes he read her understanding. Still, she tried. ‘William, please. I care about you both too much to allow this to continue. It is madness.’

‘Yes, you are right. But I have found over the years … that I manage madness quite well.’

‘Perhaps you do. You have, after all, had to find ways. She is not the first, William.’

He sucked in, the names of women who had shared his bed running like coursers through his memory, yet their faces were curiously hazy. ‘You do not need to remind me.’
She sighed. ‘And perhaps, even now, I am still … a little jealous.’

He glanced up. He had almost forgotten, that time when he had confused friendship with desire. A time when things had been at their darkest, when Caro had been at her most disturbed. ‘Emma … It was a long time ago. Twenty years.’

Emma smiled, a slight, sad smile. ‘You are still a fine man, William. Her devotion to you is no surprise.’

‘And you are happily married now.’

‘Yes.’ She turned her gaze away from him. ‘I know you never cared for me, not like that. If I had been interested in those things, would that have made a difference?’

Another dash of guilt writhed briefly. It had not been right, not at all. He looked at her honestly and shook his head briefly. ‘No. You are a true friend … but one cannot manufacture the rest.’

‘And you think you have found it with her?’

He did not need to think. He knew. He had known from the moment she took the first strike of his hand. He had confirmed it when he first entered her.

‘I know I have. Illimitably.’

Emma’s face regained the expression of disapproving schoolma’am. ‘She is young enough to be your daughter.’

‘Don’t remind me.’

‘And how do you see this ending?’

‘I don’t know. I cannot think that far ahead.’

‘You cannot marry her.’

He glanced up. Hearing it so starkly made it seem like ice was suddenly encasing his heart.

‘You cannot,’ she reiterated, sensing his grievance. ‘How? It is impossible.’

‘Like I said, I have not thought about it. At the moment we are simply …’

‘Making the beast with two backs.’

He smirked ruefully.

‘I imagine she is very keen.’

‘Oh … she is.’

‘Can you keep up, William?’

Her pun was not lost on him and he cocked a disparaging eyebrow. She let a hint of a smirk play on her lips.

Melbourne took a step towards her, his voice low in its gravity. ‘Emma … I can be assured of your discretion, can’t I?’
‘Of course you can. You know how devoted I still am to you. And to her, the silly little thing.’

‘She is not silly. Far from it.’

Emma sighed, as if resigning herself to a new order. ‘Now … run along to London, so that you can run back to her as soon as possible.’

‘Thank you, Emma.’ He bent and kissed her on the cheek. She sucked in a breath and drew back, her cheeks pinking.

‘You are a wicked man.’

‘I was told that by another only this morning,’

‘And I do not wish to know the circumstances which prompted it! Now go.’

With a soft smile, William Lamb, the second Viscount Melbourne, took his leave of Lady Portman, and made ready to depart for Westminster.

Chapter End Notes

Normal service will soon resume, but the poor lad needs to give his hips a rest. Hope you enjoyed this one ... interesting ... things are getting ever so slowly more complicated ...

Thoughts are as appreciated as ever. x
It was a lonely night. Victoria managed to sleep but she shivered through isolation and chill. Dash provided much needed comfort, but he lacked long limbs and warm strength.

The next day proved equally vexing. She rode out, she went through the dispatches alone with almost ruthless efficiency, and she managed some painting.

By three o’clock, she began to allow herself expectation. Her ears were attuned to his return. She asked frequently if there had been any arrivals in the mews. Nothing.

Tea came and went. The minutes crawled.

Lehzen suggested she dress for dinner. Victoria made her way to her bedchamber where Skerrett prepared her. She glanced at the clock. Half past seven.

‘Surely Lord M should be here by now!’

‘I imagine he is busy in the House, Ma’am. And it is a long drive out from London,’ said Skerrett with her usual calm sense as she pinned her hair.

‘I suppose, but he promised me he would be back this evening at the latest. He promised.’

‘Then I’m sure he’ll keep his promise, Ma’am.’

Victoria sighed and fiddled with the hair pins on her dressing table. ‘You must think me a fool, Skerrett, fawning over a man like this. I deplore it too, I must admit.’

‘I do not see it as fawning, Ma’am.’

‘What then?’

‘Well, you miss him. You … care about him. I think it’s rather wonderful.’

‘So you don’t think me petulant and silly?’
‘No, Ma’am. Although you’d be wise not to let your ladies or your mother see your anxiety.’

‘That is true. And I do miss him, so very dreadfully. But it has only been a day! Is it always like this?’

‘Is what always like this?’ asked Skerrett gently.

She opened her mouth to say a word, an obvious one, a clear one, but she closed it again and dropped her head. ‘Never mind. It is time for dinner.’

Through dinner she turned every time someone entered. It was never him. But she quelled any obvious disappointment on her part and ensured she chatted freely and openly. Emma Portman watched her very carefully, she noted.

Still she waited. The clocks ticked relentlessly. Her mother retired, Lehzen retired. She had no choice. Subduing her brewing sobs, she made her heavy way up to her bedchamber.

‘He has not returned, Skerrett. He has better things to do in London!’ She tossed her ear rings aside and sat down in a sulk.

‘Oh, Ma’am, it’s not that at all! He’s the Prime Minister, Ma’am. I imagine it’s … quite a demanding job.’ Skerrett tried to laugh off her queen’s woes, but it only made things worse.

‘He’s probably in his club or in some corner of a house of –’

‘Ma’am! You stop that immediately. He adores you and I’m sure he’ll return to you in no time!’ Victoria glanced up with shock in the mirror and saw her maid frowning at her. Skerrett threw her hand over her mouth on realising she had just reprimanded the Queen of England. She dropped a hasty curtsy. ‘Ma’am, forgive me, Ma’am, I forgot myself. I am sorry, truly, I am sorry.’

Victoria sighed. ‘Oh, don’t be silly, Skerrett. You are right. I really must be more sensible. But … my thoughts run wild.’

‘It’s only natural, Ma’am, but from what I’ve seen … he’s devoted to you.’

‘You think that?’

‘I know that, Ma’am.’

Victoria reached behind to give her maid’s hand a squeeze. ‘Thank you, Skerrett, that will be all for tonight.’

But when she was left alone in the dark quietude of her chamber, with the high canopy of the bed above her and the dim moonlight creeping through the curtains, the poking, prying torment returned, the agonised emptiness gnawed away at her. The clock on the mantel said eleven o’clock. He would not return tonight as he had promised. Desolation welled up within her.

Victoria turned over in bed and pulled the covers tight around her, muffling her sobs unsuccessfully in the down. She missed him. She missed him, she missed him. She cursed herself for it but knew that this was her lot. He had promised! Her childish petulance rose up grievously again and her fingers curled in on the sheet, clasping it so tightly to her that her nails almost tore through it.

Her dressing room door opened, barely perceptibly, barely audibly. Skerrett would have forgotten something and was replacing it on her dressing table. She would not turn around. The girl should be more organised! Victoria huffed disconsolately.
'Why are you crying?'

It was not Skerrett’s voice.

She spun around. Melbourne had opened her door, Melbourne now stood in her room. He wore his travelling clothes; his long green overcoat still hung around his shoulders.

She sat up and stared. Her final sob caught in her chest and stuck there painfully. ‘You came back.’

‘Of course I came back. I told you I would come back.’

‘But … it is so late. You said early evening, you said late afternoon.’ She ran a hand through her hair in her own confusion. ‘I have been going mad with despair.’

He closed the door and walked to her bureau, lighting the candles he found there with the one he was holding. ‘I said I would return today and I have.’

Lord M was in her bed chamber, passing through it and illuminating it not only with the light in his hand but with his very presence, which was so radiant it almost scorched. He had never entered this room and now, unbidden, here he was. This was her most private space and yet it felt so perfectly right that he was here. And he had returned, he had returned to her.

She threw back the covers and rushed over, throwing herself against him. ‘You came back to me, you came back!’

He was warm and firm and everything she needed from him. She pressed herself hungrily against him, wanting to absorb his reality, wanting to make him part of this private world he had just entered.

Victoria curled her hands around his neck and reached up to try to kiss him. But he held himself back. Whereas normally his body melted into hers, absorbing her as she wanted, now he restrained himself, stiff and straight. She searched his eyes with hers, as wide and pleading as they had been that night of the Coronation Ball. But he kept himself from her just as he had then.

‘What?’ she implored, anxious, a creeping unease taking her. ‘What is it?’

‘You must stop these doubts and demands.’

‘What?’

‘You know what I mean. Here, with me, you will stop it.’

‘Lord Melbourne?’ she practically cried, indignant at his apparent detachment.

He put up a finger to his mouth to silence her and his eyes flickered around the room, falling on the door opposite. ‘Who is through there?’

‘It is a small hallway which leads to Lehzen’s room.’

‘Not directly into it?’

‘No.’

‘Are their footmen outside?’

‘No.’
He paced over and opened the door a fraction, quietly. The hall was empty and silent. From behind another door came the loud snores of the sleeping Baroness. Melbourne closed the door again and looked back at Victoria. ‘The key?’

‘It is never locked.’

‘It will be tonight. Fetch me the key.’

‘I … I’m not sure where it is.’

He looked back and quirked an indomitable eyebrow. ‘Find it.’

A rushing need surged through her and she hurried to the bedside cabinet, opening it and scrabbling around. The key wasn’t there and she tutted in frustration. He simply stood and waited, watching her intently. She hurried to the other and looked in it. At the back her fingers closed around cool metal. She pulled it out gleefully and presented it to him.

Melbourne took it and locked the door immediately.

‘Shall we not go to your chambers?’ she asked, clasping her hands together tightly.

‘No. Not tonight.’

He turned and looked at her. He seemed taller, broader, and her desire reared up so forcefully she reached out to hold onto the bed post for support. ‘I am sorry for being so forward and demanding.’

‘Are you?’

‘Yes … My Lord.’

‘But you see … you have said this before, and, I hope you realise … it is not enough to say it.’ He shrugged off the green overcoat and folded it across the back of a chair. His jacket followed, then, as she watched, her belly twisting its need, her sex already hot and heavy with desire, he undid the buttons of his waistcoat and removed that too, leaving himself in only his shirt and breeches.

Melbourne turned his gaze towards her. ‘Remove your nightgown.’ His voice coiled its way into her and she barely hesitated in grasping the thin cotton and pulling it over her head, revealing herself naked for him.

He did not smile, neither did he frown nor express a reaction of any kind, he simply studied her, and then, with relaxed determination, he unbuttoned his cuffs and began rolling up his left sleeve. The action entranced her. She questioned herself momentarily. Was it usual to have such a strong reaction to such an innocent act? But the sight of his strong fingers working on the material, the slow reveal of his forearms dusted with dark hairs, veins running along them, was enough to make her gasp.

‘Turn around,’ he continued. ‘Turn around and take hold of the bed post.’

She started, unsure what he meant. When she hesitated he lifted his eyes to her and said, ‘Do it.’

Victoria’s skin was cast suddenly with goosebumps, cold and hot, unnerved but certain. His dominance was sudden, undeniable and addictive. She padded over to the bottom left post of her bed and gripped it.

‘Lower down. Both hands.’ She moved her hands down a short way. ‘More.’

She slid them down further. ‘More. Right down.’ Again, she did so and the position made her bend
from the waist at a right angle. She became acutely aware of her backside jutting out.

‘Legs apart.’

She shuffled them apart slightly.

‘Shoulder width apart,’ he insisted.

Victoria did so and felt the cooling air sweep over the aching heat of her sex.

He stood a little way off from her. She tilted her head to watch as he rolled up the other sleeve, hypnotised by his hands, transfixed by his every movement.

Melbourne then tugged at his neck scarf and drew it off in one hand. Without another word, he swiftly came over and began coiling it around her wrists and the bed post. He was tying her to it. She let out a sudden gasp in surprise.

‘You’re shocked? I’ve done this before. It is high time I did it again. I’ve told you – restriction can be a very liberating thing.’ He coiled and curled it around carefully. She flexed her fingers but could not tug them out. ‘Too tight?’

‘No, My Lord.’

‘But you cannot remove them.’ She tried, pulling and twisting her hands. She was held fast.

‘No, My Lord.’

‘Good.’ He finished the binding with a final tug and gave a slight grunt of satisfaction. She turned her head to look back at him. ‘Don’t turn around. Keep your head and your eyes forward.’

She did so immediately, staring at the wall opposite, fixing her gaze on a small painting of the gardens of Kensington. ‘Yes, My Lord.’

She heard movement behind her, tried to work out what he was doing, where he was.

‘How have you spent your day?’ he asked, the usual lilt in his voice absent, not that she minded. This tone was as good as his touch.

‘Umm …’ She could barely think, let alone speak. Her backside craved his touch and quivered in anticipation, the heat between her legs demanded relief but she knew she would be scolded if she drew them together to find it.

‘Tell me clearly.’

She swallowed. ‘I … went riding, My Lord.’

‘With whom?’

‘With Harriet Sutherland and Lord Alfred, My Lord.’

‘What else?’

‘I went through the dispatches.’

‘Alone?’
'Yes.'
'I am pleased to hear it. You do not need support from anyone else.'
'I need you, My Lord.'
He did not respond. ‘Anything else?’
'I painted. I sketched and painted Dash. I needed distraction.'
'Distraction?'
'Yes.'
'From what?'
'From your absence, Lord Melbourne.'
'You were preoccupied with this?'
'At some points, yes. I have grown used to your being here. I do not like to think of you too far away.'
'But you must. We have discussed this before. You must discipline yourself into it.'
'You have needed this for some time. Your recalcitrance must be subdued. I have been negligent in attending to it.'
'I am sorry, My Lord.'
'Perhaps you are, but considering how I found you this night, not enough, clearly. And therefore …'

Swish! Sting!

She jerked back with a cry. It bit! That was not his hand. She turned her head to look back but he scolded her quickly. ‘I told you not to turn around. You will keep yourself focused.’ Victoria forced her head forward again and bit her lip hard to concentrate.

Swish and bite again, tingling, pinching, inflaming in a single bright point. She knew what it was; he was using his riding crop on her. Instantly she accepted, instantly she craved. Brazenly, she bared her backside for him, pushing back and offering it. She was rewarded. He brought it down in five sharp taps, connecting with both cheeks and smiting the flesh with burning little kisses.

She whined and wriggled, wriggled and whined, but found herself only wanting more. Her hands twisted in their binding, her fingers stretched as her body craved him, searching for more, seeking that freedom of sensation. She got it. He carried on, harder now, and she found her eyes prickling. With the pain of it? Perhaps, but that sweet agony took her beyond herself, beyond her surroundings, beyond propriety, and she needed it and she wanted it.

The crop swished through the air and spat on her burning body time and again. He guided it with exactitude and care and now, especially now, she trusted him with every ounce of her purpose. It hurt and tears fell freely with accompanying sobs. But he did not slow or stop. In the back of her mind was a word, growing, swelling … orchid, orchid … but, no. She met each blow, each bite of the crop, and as she grew with it, it was as if her skin had risen from her, as if he were crafting her
anew, casting off duty and responsibility and care. Here, now, she was his and she was her own and that was all.

He paused, his breathing ragged, his own desire evident in the thick gruffness of his voice as he now lowered himself to whisper in her ear. ‘Good, good girl. Sweet, amazing woman of mine. You take it so well. You need it so truly.’ And he brought his hand down instead, his palm singing over the inflamed skin of her rump. But he did not desist and she moaned rapturously with each asserted thwack, now glowing, warm through the pain of before. And then, instead of his palm, fingers, and instead of over the rounded curve of her bottom, down to her slick, hungry folds.

She sucked in through her tears and nearly sobbed out her orgasm there and then. He knew her so well he was attuned to the changes of her body as it readied itself. ‘No,’ he said gravely. ‘You are not to come yet. You will not, do you understand?’

She groaned in frustration. How was she not to when his fingers plied and stroked so perfectly, when her body was so ripe for release she would surely fly? Victoria tried to escape his touch but he moved with her, pressing, rubbing, stroking, never too hard for her to tip over, never too much for her to come, but enough for her to sob with hopeless need.

‘Shh, shh,’ he soothed and his fingers slowed until at last they stopped and he withdrew his hand only to stroke softly over her burning, reddened skin. She shuddered in her breaths chaotically but began to regain sense, began to calm herself. She was in his hands and she adored it. She would listen and she would do.

Melbourne leaned over her again and murmured in her ear so that his breath tickled her. ‘Do you know what I’m going to do now?’

She yearned. ‘I hope that … I hope that you will make love to me, sir.’

‘Make love to you?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘What do you mean by that?’ His words drifted into her mind.

‘You know what I mean.’

‘Tell me.’

‘I want you to … be inside me, sir. I want to feel you inside me. Please, please, sir.’

‘How much do you want it?’

His cool detachment was now as agonising as the bite of his crop. ‘So much, sir! I want it more than I have ever wanted anything. I want it now, I want it now.’

‘I know you do. I know exactly what you want. And that is why, this time, I am not going to make love to you.’

She wailed, pushing back to find him, bereft at the thought of being denied further.

‘Listen to me, Victoria, listen.’

She would. She always would. She settled again and attuned to his voice which he still poured soft but certain into her ear. ‘You will have me and you will feel me, but I am not going to make love to
you. You know what I’m going to do, don’t you? You remember.’

She thought back to his own abandon, to the word which had escaped unbidden from his lips. She nodded.

‘You know and you need it and so that is what I am going to do … I’m not going to make love to you … I’m going to fuck you.’

And her belly jerked with such extreme sensation she thought she had come there and then. But she kept it in check and sighed out as if all the blessings of the world had fallen on her.

‘I’m going to fuck you now, right here, tied to your bed, with your backside flaming from my touch, I’m going to fuck you.’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

And within her peripheral vision she saw him stripping off his boots and breeches. He left on his shirt, still rolled up to the elbows, then positioned himself behind her.

She bit her lip, expectant, ready. Her toes curled as he took hold of her hips in strong, long fingers. She felt briefly the search of his cock head at her opening.

And there. A harsh groan of his own. He was inside her with one thrust. She was pushed forward with a grunt at the shock of it but immediately he pulled back then did it again, causing her to curl her fingers around the bed post they were tied to. She braced against it and readied herself for more.

He pulled out nearly completely, only the very tip of him remained inside, but then with a surge propelled from his core, he drove into her again to the hilt and she met every inch of him with her giving wet warmth.

‘By God, your quim fits me well,’ he moaned and again she did not know the word but understood it quickly enough.

He leaned over her again to question: ‘Do you feel me? Do you feel all of me?’

She nodded in assent and he raised himself up only to continue to pound into her, relentless, demanding, and she took it and loved it. Gripping her shoulder to brace himself, he drove hard and fast, retreating only to sink back into her to the hilt time and again, each thrust accompanied by a deep, rasping grunt of determination.

No, this was not making love, but this she loved. She loved it as much as his gentle soothings and strokings. She loved it as much as his words and his wit. She loved his cock and she loved him fucking her and she would scream it through the halls of the palace if she could.

Taking her from behind, he was surging against some place deep inside her which made pleasure build inexorably. She had felt it before but usually needed his touch on that other part of her. Not now. She would come hard and full and deep and she knew it, just from this, just from him.

But there was a need in him this time and soon he voiced it. ‘I’m coming into you, Victoria. Take it, take all of me.’ And with that he released, snapping his hips hard against her in time with the grunted moans of his ecstasy. And at that sound only did she let herself go. Only then, after he had taken what he needed from her, did she come, slowly, profoundly. In her own time, from the hardness of him which filled and stretched her very existence, she came, shuddering it out, shaking, her fingers splayed as ecstasy escaped the captivity of her body, her toes rigid, her mouth gasping.
They stayed there afterwards. It must have been minutes. They did not count, but they could not move. He softened but still stayed within her. She was aching by now, her back stiff, her arms deadened, but she did not care. Neither spoke. Words would have sullied the purity of pleasure which still hung about them.

But, eventually, reluctantly, it had to happen. He slipped from her and, without saying a word, moved to untie her hands. As soon as they were released her body gave way, as if finally making sense of its experience. But he caught her. With swift strength, he held her in his arms and carried her to the bed, laying her down on it with the tenderest care.

William climbed in beside her and bent to kiss her, soft and tender. ‘Thank you,’ he whispered against her lips.

‘It is I who must thank you,’ she managed, although her words were hazy with bliss.

‘No. You must never feel indebted to me. Never.’ He kissed her again and by the time he pulled back, she was already asleep.

Chapter End Notes

There we are. And still we go on. Thoughts if you dare and thanks in advance. xx
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria finds sitting difficult.

Chapter Notes

More, mostly, after the start, from Melbourne's point of view again, which I've love writing. It's about time we delved into his psyche a little more. ;-) See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first thing Victoria felt when she awoke was the rise and fall of warm, firm chest under her fingertips. The first thing she heard was the warm, slow hushing of breath, and the first thing she smelt was the sandalwood-laced aroma of warm man beside her. He was still asleep.

She lifted her head from where she lay against his arm and looked up. He had such ridiculously long eyelashes. It was so tempting to reach up and stroke them, but she couldn’t disturb him. She planted the softest kiss instead on his arm and stretched up her own while rolling over.

‘Ow!’

Her exclamation was loud and sudden, but could not be helped; her backside was still acutely sore.

Her cry roused him and he groggily blinked his eyes and turned towards her, muttering, ‘What is the matter, Ma’am? Are you alright?’

She gingerly lay back over on her other side. ‘Perhaps a little tender this morning.’

Melbourne pushed himself up quickly, immediately awake, and tenderly lifted the bed covers from her. He frowned down, concern etched deeply across his face. ‘Damnation, that is inflamed! I should have applied calamine last night. I am a fool!’ He quickly rushed out of bed to search, but immediately realised he was not in his own chambers.

She half turned towards him, keen not to lie back on her throbbing rump. ‘There is some in the drawer of the dressing table, I believe.’

‘Has it soothed you before?’

‘Yes, but …’

‘What?’

‘Last night was … the most intense, My Lord.’

He rubbed his hands over his knotted brows with a sigh before reapplying himself to the search for calamine. ‘Ma’am … do not call me that now, I am hardly worthy. Clearly, I overstepped the mark
and for that I am most desperately sorry.’

‘No, you did not, not at all.’ She rolled over towards him carefully and propped herself up on her elbow. ‘I did not use the word, did I?’

He released another sigh and stood tensely. ‘No, but I will admit … I forgot myself.’ Melbourne began pacing from side to side, pulling his hands through his hair.

She hated seeing his guilt. They were together in this. Indeed, it was she who had insisted they embark on it. She could not bear to see him burden responsibility. ‘If you did, then so too did I.’

He halted and turned towards her, holding his hands up in that familiar preventative gesture of his, as if trying to forestall further damage. ‘Yes, but … it is my role to … prevent this from occurring, Ma’am. I have failed.’

She smiled warmly but knew it would do no good. ‘But … I liked it. I like it still, I adore it,’ she tried, meaning it entirely.

He closed his eyes and dragged his hands down over his face in despair. ‘Do not say that, Ma’am, please.’

‘But why not? You know I adore it. You told me from the start that that was the entire purpose of entering into this – to please the lady, and never have you done anything to make me question that. Lord Melbourne … you must never doubt.’ A tightness had taken hold inside. Was he regretting? Was he considering whether or not to continue? She stifled a sob, unable to bear it.

If she lost what they had she would go mad, surely? What would her life be without him, without his touch, without his fulfilment?

She tore herself from the bed, wincing at the discomfort but loving its reminder of their communion, and rushed over to him, pressing herself against his long body. She searched his eyes. ‘You must never doubt. Never, never, William, never.’

William Lamb held her eyes, his own dark yet seeing. He stared down at the woman before him, so open and giving, so trusting. What had he done to deserve her? How could he ever do anything but devote himself to her? ‘I do not doubt … but I must not lose control.’ For it would be so easy to confuse devotion to the woman with devotion to the Queen. The woman who made life so vivid and glorious and palpable. At last … at last.

Melbourne staggered in a breath of mortality. How easy it would be to lose control, to take her and run with her and keep her only for himself, for herself, secret, silent and only for them.

‘You did not lose control,’ she reasserted and he felt the soft pliancy of her breasts pressed against him.

He averted his gaze. ‘You do not know.’

‘I would have used the word and you would have stopped.’

She was right. He was not so far lost as to ignore her. He let the corner of his mouth rise a little. ‘Yes … I would have.’ He took a step back and looked down over her. His hands followed his gaze, gently, tenderly, running down her arms, over to cup a breast, down over her waist. ‘You are so beautiful, all of you. I will never damage that beauty.’

‘You don’t. You enhance it. You make me come to a realisation of who I am. How can that be
He bent and kissed her, softly, giving. He gave her his own insecurity, his own need to realise himself, and tears pricked at his eyes. ‘Victoria,’ he murmured against her lips.

‘Yes, yes,’ she replied, holding him gently against her. ‘I am here.’

For a time they stood, quite naked, their foreheads resting together, his hands on her hips, grounding him, occasionally swaying when the world spun for them.

‘Calamine,’ he said after a while and she smiled softly and planted a kiss on his lips.

Victoria slid from him and lay belly down on the bed. The shape of her beguiled him, the rises and falls, the undulations, here stripped bare, here entirely human and entirely his. He approached and began to apply the ointment, carefully, delicately, but ensuring it would provide much needed relief.

‘Is that better?’ he asked as his cooling fingers soothed her reddened flesh.

‘Hmm,’ she hummed into the pillow. She was pushing her bottom up for him, although he doubted she was even aware. Even now, her desire reared its head. And so did his. He grew hard again quickly. He almost cursed it, how the damned thing would not lie still whenever he was with her. But then … did he really wish it to?

He had rubbed in the ointment as best he could, but the woman before him was so exquisite, so giving and so taking that he could not help but give more. He let his forefinger and middle finger seek down the cleft of her backside, down, under. She parted her legs willingly and wantonly.

His cock stirred again. Her eyes were closed, her face half buried under the dark silky mass of her hair, but even then he saw her eyelids flutter, saw her mouth open in that way he’d come to recognise as her drawing in breath to sustain her lust.

He could not stop. He worked his fingers down and dipped them up inside her. She was always so open for him, always so ready. She let out a little moan and he took the consent and pressed in deeper. The warm glove of her body provided him with such surety against other turbulence. He was quickly coated in her desire; he had never known her not to be dripping wet and ready. He drew his fingers out to find her clitoris. At this she pushed up onto her knees so that she bared herself quite brazenly for him.

Did she know what she did? What effect she had on him? What perfect madness it was for the Queen of England to behave in this way? He had known women – too many, perhaps – from the most elegant duchesses to whores bidden in times of lonely, drunken need – yet she was the most sublime, the one, the only one, not because she was Queen, because she was Victoria.

He was so hard it pained him, but he would restrain himself. If he entered her now – as every ounce of his being compelled him to do – he would hurt her further and he could not forgive himself. But he wanted to feel her coming, to see her and hear her. Her ecstasy sustained him when nothing else did. Had he not earned that, at least?

Melbourne worked her with his fingers, skilled fingers – he took some pride in that – fingers that had quickly acquainted themselves with the nuances of her flesh and needs. He teased her nub before sinking two fingers deep inside her again, before retreating and circling, rubbing harder now. She knelt quite compliantly for him at first, her face masked by her hair, her sighs muffled in the down. But when he started determinedly to build her pleasure, she began to seek it. She pushed back, trying to capture his fingers, trying to find the fingertips and use them. He would resist. She would come in
his time and she would benefit from it. She enjoyed his dominance, he knew too well, and he enjoyed exerting it. It had almost surprised him, rediscovering the thrill of such dynamics between man and woman after such a time of having it quashed and trampled.

‘Ahh,’ she whined, her head lifting from the pillow a little. She turned and, wordlessly, stared back at him, cat-like, feral, moans and whines emerging from her perfect little mouth like a wild creature. He allowed himself a smirk. A smirk, not a smile. He enjoyed the moment of power. It would pass, after all.

The red of her backside blazed in his vision and her sex pulsed for him, pleading for release as she bucked against his hand. He could not make her wait longer. He found her clitoris and rubbed concertedly. ‘Come, come … come …’ he said, asking it of her, for him.

She did. Hard, long. With a wail propelled from her core, Victoria came apart on his fingers and he struggled to hold her. He felt the judder, the ecstasy pouring from her, and at that moment he wondered if it would cause his own disintegration, the own crumbling of his control. Her rapture was illimitable, so nourishing that he was not sure he could exist without it. She threw her head up and dipped her back to keep hold of his fingers. He could only push them deep inside her again to feel the last spasm of her pleasure upon him.

She fell, sated, back into the bed, a bleary smile on her face, and pure, clean happiness washed through Melbourne.

But he remembered himself and stood quickly, rushing around to pull on his clothes. ‘I must not be discovered here.’ His own stupidity suddenly consumed him. He was in her chambers. The Baroness Lehzen could enter at any moment.

‘Oh, but I do so enjoy your counsel, Prime Minister,’ she slurred, still flirtatious and brazen. ‘I am in constant need of it.’

He adored it. He adored her. He adored her calling him that, especially under these circumstances. Did she know how licentious she was? How perpetually arousing?

He turned away, and applied himself to getting dressed in an attempt to subdue his erection. He picked up his watch. Ten minutes to six o’clock. Too close for comfort.

‘Ma’am … I must return to my chambers.’

‘You will be at breakfast?’

‘If you wish it.’

‘Of course I wish it.’

He smiled. Apart from coffee, at home he rarely bothered with a proper breakfast. Here, being forced to sit to kedgeree with Conroy was hardly an ideal start to the day, but it was tempered immeasurably by Victoria beaming opposite him.

He smiled softly, bid her farewell, then crept from the room.

Lehzen entered ten minutes later. Luckily, by then, Victoria had found her nightgown and put it back on.

--xxOoxx--
He sat next to Emma at breakfast. The coffee was not strong enough. Its bitterness stuck cloyingly in his throat. It was not helped by Cumberland and Conroy both sitting with narrowed eyes and pursed lips, eyeing him with cold resentment.

The Queen had not yet entered. When she did, there was a cacophonous scraping of chairs as everyone stood. She looked radiant, although he noted her stride was slightly less forceful than usual. She hoped she would remember to sit cautiously.

She did not.

Victoria swept in and sat quickly in the chair as it was held out for her.

She emitted an audible intake of breath and her face winced in pain. Melbourne darted his eyes immediately to Conroy to gauge his reaction. He was staring hard at the Queen, his brows furrowed in confusion.

‘Drina?’ asked her mother. ‘Is something the matter?’

The Queen adjusted herself in the chair and forced a smile to her face. She reached for a drink of tea. ‘I must have slept in an awkward position, that is all. A twinge in my neck.’

‘Oh? Shall we summon the physician?’

‘No!’ Her alarm was clear. ‘No, not in the slightest. It is easing already. I am perfectly well, thank you.’

She must not look at him. He tried to keep his own gaze down and focus on his toast, but he needed to know if she would look up at him. She must not.

Her breathing was rapid and she kept drinking from her tea cup, but she did not look his way.

‘William? You do not eat?’

He tore his gaze away to turn to Emma who had spoken. ‘I am not especially hungry.’

‘You never were one for breakfast … as I recall.’

‘Even less so now, I find.’

Emma hesitated before stating pointedly, ‘I am told you returned late last night.’

‘Indeed.’

‘And yet …’

‘What?’

‘I suspect you did not retire to bed as soon as returning to Windsor.’

He took a bite of toast.

She continued, ‘And the Queen is finding it hard to sit this morning.’

The toast required more jam; it was not to his taste.

Emma’s voice dropped further. ‘Be careful, William. Every single moment of that woman’s life is
scrutinised, you know that more than anyone. Conroy is no fool, and your tendencies are well
discussed. He could easily put two and two together.’

He sniffed out derisively, the fog of scandal encroaching again, putrid and thick. He drank from his
coffee but it was too weak and tepid to dismiss it. ‘The Queen slept awkwardly. It can happen to us
all. She handled it well.’

‘Just as you handle her well?’

He glanced at Emma, surprised at her brazen tease. ‘All is well, Emma. I ask you not to worry about
it. I cannot concern myself with your opinion of me as well as my other burdens.’

‘Oh, you stopped concerning yourself with my opinion of you many years ago, William.’

Her words pained him. Had he been so callous? She would see the light dim from his eyes and so he
covered it with a soft smile her way. Emma Portman drew in a deep breath and turned her attention
back to her breakfast.

--xxoOoxx--

As he left the breakfast room, he was halted by a voice he had no desire to hear. ‘Melbourne.’

He turned reluctantly to see Conroy sliding his way towards him. ‘How was London?’

‘As London always is, Sir John, crepuscular and stench-ridden.’

‘And the vote?’

‘It passed.’

‘Not by much, I hear?’

‘It passed.’

‘I should imagine with government matters in such a fragile state, you would be keen to return to
town as soon as possible.’

Melbourne glanced to the side. He would not fall into the grip of Conroy’s snake-like manipulation.
‘Not especially. I dealt with things yesterday and am able to keep well on top of matters from here.’

‘Yet here you are so very far away.’

Conroy stressed the word ‘far’ as if it were smeared on his tongue. It turned Melbourne’s stomach.

‘As I said, I am well on top of matters. Speaking of which, I have business to attend to. The Queen
must go through the dispatches.’

He turned away but Conroy interrupted his departure again. ‘She takes an inordinately long time to
do so. Has she not yet learnt to be expedient with the box?’

The muscle in Melbourne’s jaw worked tightly. ‘She is most efficient in dealing with it. I am not sure
what you mean.’

‘And yet you spend so very long with her … alone.’

Melbourne caught his breath but experience had taught him to cover such reactions with charismatic
smoothness. ‘She is the monarch and I am her Prime Minister. As you can imagine, we have a fair amount to discuss.’

‘And increasingly often behind locked doors … I am told.’

Again, his diplomatic charm needed to be put to use. ‘The Queen does not wish to be disturbed and, you know how it is, ladies and staff coming and going. It is most distracting.’

‘And heaven forbid you should be distracted from your intense tutelage, Melbourne.’

This time he could stand it no longer and took a step into the man. ‘What exactly are you implying, Conroy?’

‘You know people say that you hold far too great a sway over her, and she over you. Have you seen the latest cartoon in the Times? She as Little Bo Peep, you, Lamb, … trotting along behind, wagging your tail.’ He sneered openly.

Melbourne over-egged his amusement. ‘Ah well, my name will always be a gift to the satirists. I am accustomed to it.’

‘Perhaps you shouldn’t be. These comments do much harm. I wouldn’t get too used to the comfort of your position, Melbourne.’

‘I have already lost my position once, nearly twice. Believe me, I have never had time to get used to the comfort of it.’

Conroy stepped in again, so close the Prime Minister could smell his stale breath. He narrowed his eyes to speak and Melbourne inadvertently clenched his fists. ‘Her Majesty must be weaned off this ridiculous dependency on you. Can you assure me that you are doing that rather than … the opposite?’

Melbourne steadied his breathing and replied with conviction. ‘Her Majesty is no longer dependent on anybody, as much as you clearly miss her dependency on you, Sir John. She is a very clear-minded, determined and independent woman, and will only grow to understand her own mind and abilities with great insight and aptitude. She has no need of my guidance in that respect, and I wish only to offer her support and care. Now, I bid you good day. As I said, I have business to attend to, as, I would imagine, do you.’

Melbourne turned his back abruptly on Conroy and paced down the hall.

Chapter End Notes

That thin ice is starting to crack … are they too far out to continue safely?

Please let me know your thoughts - I love reading your comments. I'm interested to know how you find the story from Melbourne's PoV. x
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria sits.

Chapter Notes

Enjoy. I did. ;-) x

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victoria sat tentatively, perched on the edge of the chaise. She found it hard to concentrate on her sewing.

Emma Portman kept glancing at her, she noticed. Her mother seemed oddly taciturn, as if she were storing up something for disclosure at an appropriate juncture. The two of them, coupled with the relentless throb of her backside, unsettled the Queen.

She eased her position a little and looked up to notice Emma’s eyes upon her.

‘Are you well, Ma’am?’ asked her lady.

‘Yes, of course.’

Her mother tutted. ‘You are sitting awkwardly, Drina. You look as if you will fall from your seat. Do sit back a little.’

‘It eases my neck like this.’

‘Is it still troubling you?’

‘A little.’

Her mother huffed. ‘I wish you had allowed me to send for the physician.’

‘That is not remotely necessary.’

She met Emma’s eyes again. Her lady quickly lowered them.

Her mother soon announced with glee: ‘Oh, Drina … I had almost forgotten … Dear brother Leopold is arriving next week.’

Victoria’s hand paused from her embroidery. The pain in her rump was forgotten. The arrival of Leopold could mean only one thing. ‘Oh?’

The Duchess cocked a disparaging eyebrow. ‘Oh? Is that all you can say? Are you not pleased to hear that your uncle is coming to visit?’
‘Of course, but … I am sure he will be most pleased to spend time with you rather than me.’

Her mother gave a secret little smile. ‘I think not on this occasion.’

Victoria’s breathing quickened, almost to the point of paining her. ‘Why is that?’

‘Oh Drina, you know why … there are important matters to discuss with you.’

‘I can think of nothing pressing.’

Her mother smirked with a knowing condescension that infuriated her. ‘Of course you can. You cannot remain a child forever.’

Remain a child? She had left her childhood behind on the red stained sheets of her Prime Minister’s bed. ‘I assure you, I am certainly no longer a child.’

‘Then you know of what I speak.’

She said nothing. Her mother tutted audibly and put down her own sewing, coming over and sitting beside her daughter, leaning in to try to get her to look at her. Victoria resolutely refused to do so.

‘Marriage, Drina! He wishes to discuss your marriage.’

She stabbed at her embroidery so hard the needle pierced a finger and blood seeped onto the pale blue of the child’s dress she was working on. ‘Damnation!’ she declared.

‘Drina! You must not employ such language!’

‘And why not, Mama? I thought it would please you to hear I am a grown woman, able to command my own mind and tongue.’

The Duchess sighed to calm herself. ‘You know you must marry and should not leave it long. Leopold will guide you well. He knows better than me of the suitable princes and political matches around Europe.’

‘Suitable princes? Political matches?’ She glared at her mother. ‘And what of love, Mama?’

Her mother gave her a simpering look of ill-disguised scorn. ‘Well, that will come with time. It usually does.’

‘I do not want it to come with time. I want it to take me immediately and shake me and let me know that there will never be another who will consume me so completely. I want love. I want desire!’

‘Drina!’

‘And you know full well that Uncle Leopold only wishes to marry me off to my cousin. I shall not have it. I shall not!’ She stood quickly, causing her to gasp suddenly with the pain.

Her mother stood too and put an instinctive arm around her. ‘My darling, this is too much. I shall summon the doctor.’

‘Oh, do not, I beg you. I think … I think perhaps the start of my monthly inconvenience afflicts me too.’

It was not as far as she was aware, but it would provide another cover for the true reason for her pain.
‘Oh, Drina, you should go and rest. I shall instruct the kitchen to send up some sweet tea.’

She took a deep breath. Her mother could be so trying but she meant well, she knew that. And at least now she was no longer speaking of marriage to her dull cousin. She turned and gave her a gentle smile. ‘Thank you, Mama. That would be welcome.’

Victoria paced to her room; Emma followed. She stopped abruptly in the corridor and turned to her lady. ‘I do not need you to stay, Emma. I am quite alright.’

‘You do seem to be out of sorts, Ma’am. As if something were … smarting you.’

The choice of word made Victoria start. She fixed her Lady-in-Waiting with a look of intent curiosity. ‘Smarting?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘I have told you. I have a crick in my neck and I believe my bleeding shall start soon. You know how it can pain me.’

Emma pursed her lips and held herself tall. ‘Nevertheless, Ma’am, I shall ensure you have plenty of calamine at your disposal.’ There was a soft complicity to her words which could not be ignored.

Victoria’s mouth ran dry. ‘Calamine? Why ever would I require calamine?’

‘It can be most soothing, Ma’am. And if you should need more in future … it would be best to have plenty available.’

She stepped into her lady and searched her eyes. She knew. She knew. ‘Lady Portman. You talk most peculiarly.’

For a moment Emma did not respond, but then, evenly, she said, ‘Do I, Ma’am? I only seek the best for you, Ma’am, and to ensure your welfare.’

Victoria clasped a hand to her waist as if trying to hold in her burgeoning panic but at the same time control it. She asked quite seriously, ‘Do you know what is best for me, Lady Portman?’

Again, the response came with measured calmness. ‘I think I am learning, Ma’am.’

‘And … who else do you believe knows what’s best for me?’

‘I think perhaps … Lord Melbourne does, Ma’am.’

‘Lord Melbourne?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

She licked her dry lips but replied openly, ‘He does, Emma. I am certain of that. I trust him completely.’

‘That is good to hear, Ma’am.’ Emma lowered her gaze but took a step forward and said gently, ‘Ma’am?’

‘Yes?’

‘You can trust me completely too.’
Victoria swallowed hard and felt tears pricking at her eyes. But the panic had gone. ‘Thank you … Emma. Now, I shall retire for a few hours. I find myself … somewhat weary.’

‘Very well, Ma’am.’ Lady Portman curtsied low and watched her queen pace – somewhat unevenly – to her bedchamber.

--xxoOoxx--

Melbourne sat at his desk and read through the last few bills and documents he had been trying to attend to all day. Conroy was not entirely wrong; Government matters were far harder to deal with from Windsor. He leant back and sighed before reaching for the decanter of brandy and pouring himself another.

It had been such a busy day he had not even arranged with Victoria if she would visit that evening. He would not be surprised if she chose to stay away. He had hurt her earlier and as he closed his eyes and pictured her reddened rump a throb of guilt sank into his gut. But coupled with that was the other throb, further down, ever present now – throbbing, stirring. His desire for her was only heightened by her ardour and ability to take all he threw at her. No one had been like this, not even Caro, whose desire had always been dulled by alcohol and opium. Victoria’s appetite was so pure and luminous that it radiated into him.

But, like an opiate, he was now so inextricably tied to it that he was not sure he could do without. He took another drink and glanced at the carriage clock. Twenty minutes before eleven. He had taken supper in his rooms to get through business and so had not spoken with her all afternoon and evening. He started to ache. Perhaps she would not come. He rubbed a hand down his face. The thought of not seeing her, of not touching her, of not being inside her made the ache so pronounced it sickened him.

He tried again to focus on his papers and managed to finish at least two drafts of bills which had been hanging over him for weeks. Melbourne had not yet undressed and sat bent over his desk in his breeches, shirt still tucked in, sleeves rolled up but waistcoat unbuttoned. He sniffed into his glass. He was in a state of some disarray. Only a few short weeks ago the thought of being discovered like this by his queen would have made him contemplate sending himself to the Tower, now … he rather hoped she would discover him like this.

Just after eleven, there was a brief knock on the door.

‘Come,’ he said. It could be his valet.

The door opened. It was not his valet. Victoria entered and shut the door quietly behind her. She was in her usual disguise of the long coat and bonnet, which she quickly removed, revealing herself in only her nightgown. She moved into the room and stood before the glow of the fire, making the light shine through it and silhouetting her perfect figure through the sheerness of the cotton. He took another drink and stared at her, unable not to. His cock was as hard as rock already. He had given up trying to deny it.

His Queen had just entered the room and he had not even stood for her. She looked across at him and smiled softly. ‘You are tired.’

‘Yes. I have been … dealing with … matters.’ He waved a hand vaguely towards the papers.

She crossed to them and picked one up, reading his scrawled title out loud: ‘The provision of a pension for the widows of seamen of the Peninsular Wars.’
‘Hmm. It is important … but … not particularly engaging.’

‘Important enough to keep you from dinner?’ she asked teasingly.

‘I apologise, Ma’am.’ He pulled himself at last to his feet.

‘Don’t get up.’

‘I don’t wish to sit at my desk all night, Ma’am.’

‘Well … sit somewhere else then.’

‘You wish me to sit?’ He glanced at her with a smirk and stared down at her.

‘You are tired, Lord M. I think sitting would be wise.’

He looked around and sat himself in his armchair, still with glass in hand.

‘May I have some?’ she asked openly, brazenly almost, he thought. He liked it.

‘Brandy?’ He held his glass out to her. She took it and drank. ‘There is more in the decanter.’

Quickly, she moved to it and poured herself a generous amount before bringing it over to refill his glass. ‘It seems it is not only me who has had a long day, Ma’am,’ he chuckled.

She took a fair gulp and grimaced as the fiery liquid coursed down her throat, then, shaking it off, she turned and looked at him and said, ‘Emma knows.’

‘Ah.’ He dropped his head, shame at already knowing this taking hold. ‘Yes.’

‘How does she know?’

He sucked in. ‘She … is a perceptive woman … and she knows me well.’

‘She guessed?’

‘Yes.’

Victoria sighed, but no more. ‘I find I do not mind her knowing. In fact … it is something of a relief.’

‘As it was with Skerrett?’

‘Indeed.’ She looked at him intently. ‘We can trust her, can’t we?’

‘Yes. We can trust her.’ He took another drink before asking, ‘How are you feeling?’

‘Better than I was earlier. But still a little sore.’

‘I am sorry.’

‘For what?’

‘For hurting you.’

‘I do not consider it to be pain. It is sensation, certainly, but it brings me such wonder and joy that I cannot possibly describe it as pain. And it is a constant reminder of you. I want that. Always.’
He stared up at her, unable not to. He adored her. He adored all she did and said. But he must not forget himself and so he resorted to propriety. ‘Do you wish to sit down, Ma’am?’

‘No. Standing is preferable at the moment.’ She took a step towards him but stopped herself and averted her gaze. ‘Uncle Leopold is visiting next week.’

Melbourne’s stomach twisted. He tried to mask the discomfort with another swig of brandy. ‘Oh?’

‘That is what I said. You know what it means.’

He hesitated and stared into his glass, swirling the liquid until it nearly fell over the rim. ‘Yes.’

She sighed. ‘It was bound to happen soon.’

Melbourne darted a glance up at her. Was she so resigned to marrying? ‘What?’

‘Discussion of marriage.’

Relief washed through him. Discussion, that was all. ‘I see.’

‘It is of no consequence. I shall simply reject his suggestions.’

Still he stared into his glass. ‘You shall have to marry at some point … Ma’am.’

She looked down at him, her eyes bright, a gleaming intent in them. ‘I know that.’ She took another step towards him. ‘William—’

An oppressive weight descended on him with such force he thought he would pass out. He sat forward quickly to try to shake it off and made as if he would stand, although he was not sure his limbs would allow it. ‘How was dinner? Did I miss that fine watercress soup?’

He heard her smile softly – he knew her so well that he could now hear her smiles – but he did not look at her. She humoured him in not continuing the conversation. The weight which had pressed down so potently and rapidly was quickly removed. ‘Yes, it was fine indeed.’ She drew in a deep breath and looked around the room. ‘It is growing late.’

William put down his glass at last and stretched. ‘Yes, and it has, as I have said, been a long day.’

She came over and knelt beside his chair, reaching over and taking his hand. ‘Do you not wish to do anything tonight?’

He smiled tenderly but his eyes sparked. ‘I did not say that.’

She knelt up and reached towards him for a kiss which he gave. At the first touch of her lips, his manhood, which had slackened somewhat during the previous conversation, stood immediately upright, as eager and needy as always.

‘But you are tired,’ she murmured amidst her kisses, planting them softly and soothingly over his troubled brows then down again, returning to his mouth and breathing joy back into him.

‘Never too tired.’

Her hand came to his leg and stroked up, making what was already hard now painfully erect. She found it and drew back from their kisses a little. ‘So it would seem, My Lord,’ she smirked. She had fine-tuned the art of seduction so acutely that he had forgotten the meaning of resistance.
He drew his hands to the sides of the chair to push himself up, but she tightened her grip on his leg and held him there. ‘But if you are weary … perhaps you should simply relax.’ And with a smile which made his heart soar and his belly writhe, she moved her fingersconcertedly to undo the buttons of his breeches.

If she had done such a thing a few months ago he would have baulked and protested; a few weeks ago, he would have gently removed her hand; a few days ago even he would have tried a cautionary word. Now, he simply sat back and let her. For now, William Lamb would take all he could.

She released him (it was not difficult considering the extreme strain he had been under) and quickly guided his member out to sit naked and free. It took little for him to slide forward in the chair so that his pelvis extended beyond the arms. Then, with a lithe sensuousness which robbed him of breath, she stood and drew her leg over him. For a moment she held herself poised above the tip of him. He took hold of his cock and placed it against the open heart of her beauty.

She looked down, letting her hair fall around her like some dark halo. She bit her lip – a gesture she knew drove him to distraction – and slowly, so deliberately, insolently slowly, lowered herself onto him. He tried to hold her eyes but could not help but glance down to where he was being swallowed up into her body.

Even spread open as she was she was still the tightest thing. He had never fitted inside a woman so perfectly, he could admit that now. He drew in the deepest breath of satisfaction as she engulfed him and he felt himself back in the cosseting wet warmth of her being.

Down she moved, down and down until she sat fully upon him. And when she was there, grounded to him, plugged by him, she broadened her smile and he had to reach up to kiss her as she was his everything.

She kissed back, slow, heady, her tongue teasing, twisting. She rocked along him and his cock rejoiced, causing him to gasp a little. She broke off, winding her arms around his neck and murmuring against his lips, ‘You like that?’

‘You know I do,’ he breathed and instinctively brought his hands to her backside to hold and guide her.

She sucked in sharply in pain. ‘Ow!’ Her head fell back, a grimace captured her face briefly, but still she moved.

He withdrew his hands quickly. ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, my darling, I forgot.’

But she let go of her hold around his neck to grab for his hands aggressively and guide them back to her tender buttocks. ‘Put them back, hold me, I like it,’ she breathed, her rise to rapture already taking hold.

Her abandon intoxicated him and he stared at her as she moved on him, her eyes half-glazed, her nipples hard against the cotton of her night gown, her cheeks flushed, her mouth open to draw in ragged, lustful breaths. He tightened his grip on her backside and caused her to gasp. This time he did it again. She moved faster on him and he aided her by guiding her pace, holding her when he wanted the tightness of her quim, pushing her up when he needed the friction on his cock-head.

She bent down and whispered in his ear, ‘Am I fucking you this time?’

The sound of that word on her tongue was almost too much for him and a jolt of such pure pleasure dashed through him that he thought he’d come off there and then. He swallowed it back and
squeezed his eyes shut to focus. He couldn’t find words so she asked again. ‘Lord Melbourne … like this … is it me fucking you?’

She rolled her body, slow, steady undulations which clenched her flesh upon him and dragged pleasure inexorably and potently to the fore. ‘Yes,’ he groaned, ‘yes.’

‘Hold me tighter,’ she moaned, her head flung back, and he dug his fingers into her already agonised backside. She whined – a sound of pure rapture – and she worked herself on him yet harder.

‘God, oh God,’ he moaned, almost unaware. ‘My darling, my darling …’

And he came so hard he forgot himself, forgot his surroundings. There was only him and her.

He looked up at her as he released, shot upon shot of his seed bursting high into her. Her eyes widened, her mouth gaped and he felt her own orgasm pulsating upon him, as powerful as any he’d felt before. His perfect lover, his perfect love.

She collapsed atop him, panting, sated, blissful, and he held her. And then, with strength borne from his rapture, he stood, still holding her, still inside her, and walked with her coiled upon him and about him until they collapsed onto the bed.

With the canopy above and the dimming darkness encroaching, buried inside her, enclosed, safe, in the still, perfect silence of togetherness, he spoke.

‘Victoria … I love you.’

Chapter End Notes

So there it is. *deep sigh*

More soon. Let me know your thoughts if you have a moment, you lovely lot. xxx
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is tweaked.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She listened to the words but at first hardly heard them. And then they replayed in her mind and tears filled her eyes unbidden with a force which robbed her of rational thought. They were lying on their sides, their limbs entwined. He was still deep inside her. His eyes also were damp.

‘What did you say?’ Victoria asked softly, barely daring.

‘I told you my truth.’

She lifted a hand to cup his face, almost wanting to affirm his reality. ‘Say it again.’

William softened his smile. ‘I love you. How can I not? You have given me life, you have given me reason.’

‘I …’ She could not speak, not because she didn’t want to shout her own love loudly, but because she felt inadequate. ‘William … I …’

‘Shh,’ he hushed and moved to kiss her.

‘But I want to …’

He kissed away her words. ‘Don’t. That is not why I said it. I do not say such things to have it returned.’

‘Oh, but I want to! I have wanted to for so long!’

Victoria wriggled free of his embrace to kneel beside him. Taking his head in her hands, she turned it so that he had no choice but to look at her. ‘William Lamb, I love you … I love you, I love you. I have loved you for longer than I ever realised, from the first moment you told me I should choose my Private Secretary, from the first moment you whispered those names in my ear, from the first moment you danced with me … I have loved you. And now day in and day out you reveal to me such wonders, such perfect joys, that I know I will never love another ever!’

And she bent to kiss him again and he was grateful for it as he too was crying.

They kissed for so long that late evening bled into early morning, but still they lay entwined, indistinguishable.

‘I am so happy,’ she murmured against the warmth of his skin, ‘I cannot imagine any happiness beyond what I feel now.’

He stroked her arm. ‘No. I will never be as happy as this again.’
She glanced up at him; there was a melancholy in his expression she couldn’t quite define. ‘But …
why then do you look sad?’

‘Do I?’

‘Yes, somewhat.’

He cocked an eyebrow. ‘I am not sad. Not now. But I know that happiness is finite.’

She propped herself up. ‘Why do you say that? Must it be?’

‘Not for all, not for you, I hope.’

‘But for you?’

He averted his eyes. ‘So far … it has proved that way, but … it is very selfish and wrong of me to
dwell on these things.’

‘William … I will make you happy.’

He gave a gentle smile but could not quite bring himself to give her the depth of his eyes; his soul
was too naked in them. ‘You do, because you let me love you, and that is all I have ever wanted …
to be able to give my love.’

Her devotion surged through her and she held him and kissed him again and felt longing against his
pliant lips. He deepened the kiss and moved her onto her back, pushing her into the bed with such
passion he stole the breath from her.

He broke away from her mouth and trailed his mouth down her neck, pausing at the indent of her
collarbones. She pressed up against him, seeking him out. When he reached her breasts, he held
them, cupping them, stroking the nipples. They were already tight with desire, but when his thumb
grazed over one, it stood up pert and hard as if begging for his mouth. He obliged. Dragging his
tongue over it first so that she twined her fingers through his hair to hold him close, he then closed
his lips hard over it and sucked, unable to muffle his groan of need. He held her breasts and went at
the nipples, first one, then the other, with a hunger which fed into her.

‘I love that, I love the way you do that, my darling, my love,’ she purred and bucked her hips
towards him, the throbbing heat in her belly quickly igniting again. His left hand relinquished its hold
on her breast to reach between her legs. He pressed the heel of his palm against the soft curls and
held her down, preventing her from lifting her hips.

‘Steady,’ he crooned before returning greedily to her nipple.

She whined. ‘I can’t be. With you, I can’t be.’

He tugged his mouth from the hardened flesh, letting it slip languidly from his mouth. ‘You will be.’

Despite the aching tenderness of his attentions, he could still elicit a quivering compliance in her with
his tone, which he could switch from devoted entreaties to assertive demands in an instant.

‘I want to taste you,’ he slurred, working his way down her body, kissing, licking, nipping the flesh
he encountered on his way. ‘It has been too long. Lie still.’

This was no longer new to her, and she threw her head to the side, biting down on her fist to staunch
the surge of expectation. She forced herself not to move, not to writhe towards him, to grab him into
her. He had taught her well. She knew that with patience came reward.

When he drew her leg over his shoulder so that his head sat perched just over her sex, she knew her reward was not far off. But she waited and watched. And when he carefully parted her lips and knitted his brows to study her, when he darted his eyes up to lock with hers and let the corner of his mouth quirk to tease her expectation, she let her head fall back and gave herself up to touch alone.

It was cool at first, the tip of his tongue, focused and intent. She shuddered out a breath. He teased her a while longer, but then licked hard over the ripe, ready bud. She whined. He did it again, harder. She moaned. He closed his mouth over her and sucked so hard she imagined herself being drawn up into him. Now she cried out, not afraid of her wonder, of her vocal happiness. ‘I want this for always. I want you for always. I love you for always.’

As much as she adored abandoning herself to him, Victoria couldn’t help but reach down and hold him against her. He didn’t fight it. One hand delicately held her folds apart so he could suck on her with exquisite accuracy, the other reached under. Two fingers eased their way deep inside her.

‘Oh yes!’ she mewled. ‘I want you everywhere!’

He’d clearly heard her as he went at her as if starved while rubbing and pressing his fingers hard and deep, tapping away at that place which made her pleasure stretch and billow.

‘You speak of happiness,’ he moaned, pausing briefly. ‘This is my happiness – your abandon, your pleasure, to taste it and hear it and feel it.’

‘Don’t stop that,’ she panted, pushing herself against his mouth, clawing at his scalp to pull him back. With a groan, he reattached himself as if he would starve if not. ‘I want to come for you, please, please let me come for you.’

He hesitated for a moment, as if he were considering making her wait further, but then, as he moaned his need so that it reverberated against her flesh, she let herself go. His fingers moved inside her with such perfection that she came upon them. With his other hand he held her down and pleasure raged through her body. It was so powerful that she threw her head up to stare down in awe. He turned his gaze up but didn’t remove his tongue and lips from her sex as he drew wave after wave of rapture from her.

Her right hand clenched on the sheet, her fingers gripping it so hard they almost tore. ‘Oh, William, please, please!’ Her words were squeezed out as ecstasy continued to race through her. He gave her no respite. Just as she thought it would end, he tapped inside, he sucked again, and it took hold another time, relentlessly, mercilessly, forcing pleasure from her until she wondered if she could survive it.

Just as one climax faded, another began. She was wailing now, long, unstoppable.

‘Oh, I can’t … I can’t again, it’s so good it hurts,’ she sobbed, tender to the point of soreness. She had come three times over and her body quaked, stunned into stillness at last.

‘I need, I need it,’ he moaned, dragging himself away from her drenched sex. William knelt before her and she saw his cock large and dripping.

‘Inside me,’ she slurred, opening her legs instinctively.

‘No, I won’t hurt you,’ he said, holding his cock, engorged and livid with need. There was rasping desperation in his tone. He moved over her, kneeling across her waist, and began pumping the shaft hard. Victoria watched, enthralled at the harshness with which he did it, transfixed by the length of
him, the way the eye seemed to fix on her. ‘I’ll come on you. Take it, take it,’ he moaned, and with that his head fell back and he squeezed his cock with brutal desperation. She lifted her head a little and, as he moaned it out, a white stream burst out, then again and again to land warm and soft on her breasts.

She stared down, wondrous. It had been a while since she had seen that, and now that their intimacy had come so far, she felt empowered like never before. She glanced up at him. He was still kneeling, his head back, his pants coming hard, his hand holding onto his still hard cock. Slowly, he drew his head over and gave her a bleary smile. Bracing his hands on either side of her, he bent to kiss her, long and deep. ‘By God, you are a wonder,’ he smiled.

‘I did nothing but lie here. It seems to me that it is you who are the wonder.’

He chuckled a little and fell to lie beside her. ‘I apologise,’ he said, still recovering his breath.

‘Whatever for.’

He glanced over at her breasts. ‘I appear to have painted you somewhat.’

She looked down and, without thinking, gathered some of his remnant on her finger. And then, curiosity overwhelming her, she brought her finger to her mouth and tasted.

He said nothing but she could feel his gaze on her.


She glanced at him briefly. ‘Am I permitted to do that?’

He smiled softly. ‘Permitted? You may do what you wish. You are Queen, after all, Ma’am.’

‘But … it will not make me ill?’

‘No … it will not make you ill. But …’

‘What?’

‘It is not common practice amongst …’

‘Queens?’

He gave the slightest chuckle.

‘But I am not, as I think you know, an ordinary queen, Lord M.’

‘Indeed, Ma’am.’

And so she gathered up more on her finger and closed her mouth around it. She felt a strange surge of longing but at the same time the most profound connection with him. She turned to him, her finger still in her mouth. He was staring at her with what could only be described as awe. He swallowed but then averted his gaze. ‘Ma’am, I …’

‘What?’

He hesitated before stating: ‘You are extraordinary.’

‘Well then that is a happy coincidence, as you, my Lord Melbourne, are also extraordinary.’
He reached for a handkerchief, wiped the remains of his seed from her and then, with a sigh, lay down beside her. ‘You flatter me, but, more realistically, I am also weary. Morning is not far off.’

‘No … you have quite worn me out.’

‘I’ve worn you out?’ he scoffed.

She nestled against him and, stifling a yawn, breathed, ‘Sleep well, my love.’

They managed to wake up before she needed to return, although parting was proving harder and harder.

Victoria stretched idly and listened to the burgeoning birdsong outside. ‘I have an audience with representatives from the Guild of Weavers today,’ she announced with a giggle.

‘And I must return to Westminster.’

She glanced at him but kept her petulance in check. ‘But you will return later?’

‘Yes, Ma’am, but … we cannot stay at Windsor forever.’

‘No,’ she sighed. ‘Uncle Leopold will prefer London. I shall have to return to Buckingham House for his visit.’

‘When is he arriving?’

‘Wednesday next, I believe.’

He said nothing.

She glanced at him. ‘You do not like Uncle Leopold?’

‘I do not like his attitude to you, Ma’am. The way he assumes guidance.’

‘My darling William … you know full well that you are the only man who can assume guidance over me.’

He smirked and lowered himself to kiss her again. Immediately, her desire stirred, immediately, she wanted. And, immediately, he humoured her, reaching down and working his fingers astutely over her sex. Eyes locked, and with fingers plucking, testing, rubbing and stroking, he brought her to a swift and needed climax.

She sank back with a sigh of satisfaction.

He kissed her softly then said, ‘You’re bleeding.’

‘Oh!’ she tried to sit up, shame capturing her quickly. Her blood not only covered his hand but the sheets. ‘Oh, no, how ghastly. I am sorry, I am so terribly sorry.’

He laughed. ‘Why are you sorry?’

‘You just … touched me. You didn’t know until it was too late.’

‘Oh, I knew.’
‘But …’

He smiled softly. ‘It is you … it is part of you, and, I confess … I am not unhappy to see blood.’

It dawned on her – they had avoided getting a child on her. His relief was obvious; perhaps she had not realised the gravity of his concerns until now.

She leant forward to kiss him. ‘But what of the blood on the sheets?’

‘I shall find an explanation, do not concern yourself with it.’

‘But …’ Desolation now took hold. ‘This means we can no longer …’ She was crestfallen. ‘How will I survive without you inside me?’

‘Well, Ma’am … we managed to amuse ourselves for some time before engaging in that particular act. And … there are other things to try.’

She giggled. ‘Still?’

‘Still.’ With that, he bent to her breast and took a nipple in his mouth. His hand occupied itself with the other. She pushed up into him. He began gently but soon became more concerted, rolling one nipple between thumb and forefinger, taking the other between his teeth and nipping it with surprising sharpness. But she adored it.

‘Oh!’ she gasped as sweet darts of pleasure pulsed through her. ‘Oh, I like that, you know I do.’

‘Good … because you are so perfectly delectable … Ma’am,’ he growled before sucking the nipple hard again. She responded with a moan and held him against her. He pinched the nipple in his fingers and she sucked in a breath, but soon enough it translated only as simmering rapture.

‘Oh, more, harder.’ He tightened his hold and caused her to gasp as pain shifted into pleasure.

‘And so very responsive.’

‘For you … only for you.’

There was a knock at the door. With a moan of despair, he dragged his mouth from her nipple but kept hold of the other as he called, ‘What is it?’

The voice of his valet answered from behind the door, ‘My Lord, it is six in the morning. You wished to be called.’

‘Go away!’ Immediately, he returned to his suckling. She could only giggle and tangle her fingers through his hair to hold him there; pleasure was rolling too powerfully through her body. If he continued, if she concentrated hard enough, she thought perhaps she could …

‘My Lord?’ the valet asked again.

With a loud exclamation of frustration, Melbourne tore himself from her and threw on his dressing gown. He paced over to the door (which fortunately opened away from the bed) and said tersely, ‘I will ready myself today. Go and … feed the swans or some such.’

Victoria could not quite stifle the laugh which bubbled from her. The valet asked something which Victoria strained unsuccessfully to hear. William glanced over at her. ‘Yes … last night I, umm, entertained a guest and, as you can imagine, I require some privacy. Thank you.’ He closed the door and ran a hand through his dishevelled hair with a sigh.
She crawled to the end of the bed and knelt there. ‘A guest, My Lord? What manner of guest?’

He shrugged. ‘What more could I say? And, if truth be told, it will perhaps allow me to explain the state of the sheets.’

‘I am causing you much trouble, My Lord,’ she teased. Victoria was still in such a state of arousal that she turned without hesitation and proffered her backside to him. ‘I require chastisement.’

‘Ma’am …’ he tried, extending his hands to the side hopelessly, but she could hear no conviction in his voice.

‘I am sorry for the trouble I put you to, My Lord.’ She looked behind at him and bit her lip enticingly.

‘Victoria …’

‘My Lord?’

There was a pause and, although she didn’t look, she knew he was moving to stand directly behind her. ‘You are … a wicked, wicked creature.’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

_Thwack!_

His hand connected with her rump with blistering force. She yelped loudly.

‘And there is only one thing for it.’ That tone of his, suddenly indomitable.

_Thwack!_ Again, harder yet. She cried out but this time it morphed into a whine of unashamed joy. ‘Yes, only one thing, sir.’

‘Take it then.’

And he brought his hand down time and again until her backside was red and trembling from his onslaught. And then he reached around her waist and pulled her up so that she was pressed back against him. He found a nipple again and rolled and pinched it while continuing to spank her concertedly. ‘You are wilful, insolent and demanding.’

She gasped. He pinched her still while his hand spanked her so hard tears filled her eyes. ‘Ohh, My Lord!’

‘Do you know what you do to me, how you torment me, how you occupy my every moment? I have so much else to engage me, so much to do, and all I want is you. You, always you.’

_Thwack!_

‘I am sorry, sir. I am truly sorry.’

‘Not sorry enough. Never.’ He held her tight by the breast, his finger and thumb eliciting such intense sensation that she could scarcely breathe let alone speak. After throwing his hand down on her five more times, he stepped back, gasping, and she fell forward onto the bed, denied an orgasm but more sated than she ever thought possible.

‘My God, girl … you will be the ruin of me,’ he gasped, and there was such stark truth in his words she let the tears fall.
Victoria pushed herself up and off the bed and, padding across to him, to curl her arms around him. He did the same, holding her to him so hard it almost squeezed the air from her. They clung there until the noises outside signalled that day was well underway. They would have to part.

‘Farewell,’ she whispered against his lips. ‘Don’t be late back tonight.’

‘I will try,’ he muttered. She pulled away from him, letting her fingers stay entwined in his for as long as she could, then put on the coat and bonnet and left him.

--xoOox--

In the afternoon, Victoria sat reading with her ladies. Her belly ached with the twisting pull of cramps. She shifted in her seat to relieve it. Her backside was also a little tender, it must be said.

‘Still sore?’ asked Emma.

Victoria held her eyes and Emma’s eyebrow rose up the merest amount. Victoria considered giving her a smirk of complicity, but resisted. She did, after all, have good reason for her discomfort. ‘It is that time of the month.’

‘Ah!’ Emma’s tone brightened considerably.

Harriet could not help laughing slightly. ‘Why, Emma! You sound positively happy at Her Majesty’s affliction.’

‘Not at all, I am simply relieved that … your neck is no longer troubling you, Your Majesty.’ She eyed Victoria, and this time the Queen did indulge her with a slight smile.

Silence fell again for a time and then Harriet burst out quite suddenly, ‘Oh, have you heard?’

‘No, but I feel sure you are about to tell us, whatever it is,’ said Victoria. She was not in the mood for gossip about the Duchess of Buccleugh, Harriet’s favourite subject.

‘They say …’ She leaned in as if about to impart a grave secret. Victoria sighed but humoured her by leaning in too. ‘They say that Lord Melbourne entertained a guest last night.’

Neither Victoria nor Emma said anything. Victoria returned her attention to her book.

‘Well? What do you say? A guest – a lady guest!’

Victoria gave a dismissive sniff. ‘As discussed before, Lord Melbourne is hardly expected to live the life of a monk.’

‘But who do you suppose it is?’

‘It would be remiss of us to speculate,’ said Emma tersely, but Harriet’s curiosity was getting the better of her.

‘What about Lady Dorchester? She has always flattered him.’

‘I have never see this,’ said Victoria quite sharply.

‘Or perhaps he has been seeing Mrs Norton again.’

‘I shall not have strange women being brought into the castle!’ she announced, almost a squawk.
Lady Portman continued, ‘Well, Ma’am, I am sure that if such a guest existed at all, she most likely was a moment of weakness relieved by an acquaintance from one of the establishments on Alma Road.’

Victoria was not pleased that Emma covered for her by suggesting William had been consorting with ladies of ill repute. The ache in her belly worsened.

Harriet gasped. ‘Emma! Surely we cannot allow ... prostitutes to parade around the castle at all times of night!’

Victoria sighed. ‘Well, they were hardly parading and, like I have said, what Lord Melbourne gets up to in his private time is no business of ours. I do not wish to speak further on the matter and ask that you do not indulge the gossip mongers.’

‘I apologise, Ma’am,’ said Harriet hastily and dropped her voice.

The ladies eventually decided to go for a walk. As Victoria stood to leave the room after Harriet, Emma whispered to her, ‘Be careful, Ma’am. Once the gossip mills begin turning, it is very hard to bring them to a halt.’

Victoria stood tall. ‘I am careful, Lady Portman.’

Emma took a step closer and said quietly, ‘Is it true?’

‘What?’

‘Your monthly affliction? You have it?’

‘Yes.’

Her lady’s eyes closed in palpable relief.

‘We are not fools, Lady Portman.’

‘No, but ... you are still only human. The consequences of any mistakes are too horrific to contemplate ... for either of you.’

Victoria blinked rapidly and clasped her hands together. ‘I shall not give him up, Emma. He is my everything.’

‘I know.’ There was a tenderness in Emma’s tone which touched her deeply.

Victoria sighed and turned away. ‘I wish to return to Buckingham House as soon as possible.’

‘Already?’

‘Yes, certainly before Uncle Leopold arrives.’

‘You know the matter of which he will be speaking.’

‘I do.’

‘It must be addressed ... the business of your marriage.’

The word pierced Victoria through and she grabbed at her stomach. She turned to Emma and her eyes filled with hot, bitter tears. ‘I shall not give him up, Emma. I cannot give him up.’
Chapter End Notes

Slowly, slowly, so slowly they are barely noticing, things are getting so very complicated. Be careful indeed.

By the way, if you follow Man in the High Castle (some bloke you may recognise is in it), I'm so loving writing Deliverance, a longer MitHC fic. You'll find it on my profile page here.

As ever, comments are like manna. Thank you in advance. xx
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria’s hair is imperfect.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The court prepared for the move back to Buckingham Palace that same day. With cramps gnawing at her belly and their intimacy thwarted, the little private idyll she and Melbourne had created at Windsor was disintegrating and she could not face Leopold chipping away at it further. A return to London seemed wise.

Melbourne, in any case, was summoned on urgent Government business and would have found it hard to travel out to Windsor. The Queen was back in residence in London the following afternoon.

The Lord Chancellor arrived the next day to go through the dispatches. This was not a surprise to the Queen; Melbourne had written to explain that he must be present for a debate, but it dismayed Victoria nonetheless. Already, she missed him. Dreadfully.

Further days passed similarly. He was too busy in the House to attend. Four days after returning to London, after going through the box, she excused herself for the rest of the day and took herself to bed. Her stomach still gnarled with the last throes of her monthly pains; her mood sank further. She turned over in her empty bed and reached for pen and paper.

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My dearest darling,

Do not be concerned that I write to reprimand you for your absence or to sulk like the petulant scullery maid I can be, but I do write to tell you how I miss you. I miss you every time I sit down and every time I rise. I miss you each time I dress and each time I undress. I miss you every time I lay down to sleep and every time I wake up. I want to be with you. I want to talk to you and look upon you and hold you. I want to feel you. I want to feel you against me and beside me and inside me.

That is all.

Yours, in longing,

Victoria

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The letter which reached her by return of post did nothing to diminish her ardour.

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My beloved girl,
I wish you to know that each sentiment of yours is mirrored in my own life and heart. I find myself virtually ensconced in Parliament while this damnable trade bill goes through amendment after amendment. I sleep on the divan in my study most nights. Well, sleep is a generous way of putting it. I drift at best, and those driftings are imbued with thoughts of you and you only. It is cold and lonely here and I wish to be enveloping you and enveloped by you in all the ways that can be. Know that your longings are shared entirely and utterly and are the only thing which give me the motivation to rouse my weary limbs each morning.

In devotion,

W

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Oh, my heart!

You write with such passion that I cannot contain myself. I sit here and my skin fizzes with need, my body aches and stretches out to you. I am so hopelessly empty and it is both a spiritual and a physical agony to know that that emptiness cannot yet be assuaged. Oh, it is desperate and I cannot help but weep. Forgive me as I know that you would be most stern with me over this, but that in itself only makes me more desirous. If I cannot feel your touch on me soon, the pleasure and the pain of you, for both feed my existence, I will surely go mad.

My darling, darling, darling, hurry.

Yours, only yours, for always,

V

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My only one,

How can I rebuke you for your impatience when I feel the same? I lie here in a considerable state of agitation (you can imagine), I want you to know that. I want you to know how you affect me each and every moment I think of you. I want you to know how much I want to be inside you, deep inside you, contained in you, for you give me such strength, my darling, you give me such hope and happiness, such that I never thought possible.

With fervent imagining,

W

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Oh, William, come to me tomorrow, come to me, please, please, come to me.

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And so at half past nine the next morning, the Prime Minister strode into Her Majesty’s rooms. The door closed, he walked over, she stood and ran to him and their mouths met even before their hands did. He clasped her head to him so hard her braids came loose; he kissed her so brutally, her lip was cut; he pulled her so hard against him, he hissed when she jolted against his livid erection.

He pushed her back against the bureau and reached under her skirts. ‘I’m still bleeding,’ she muttered
between dragged breaths.

‘I don’t care,’ he rasped. His hands were underneath; his fingers were there, finding her, on her and in her.

She gasped. It had been so long, although in reality it was only a few short nights and days, but it had felt like an eternity. And his touch was new and good again and she wanted it so much she forgot that she was unclean, forgot that she was brazen and sinful, and she let him give what he gave so well.

She wanted his kiss again and pulled him into her, opening her mouth wide so that he could take all he wanted. But something was missing and her hands instinctively sought him out, undoing the buttons on his placket with frantic haste. He burst out quickly.

‘There!’ Victoria practically sobbed, spitting on her hand without a thought and curling her fingers around the rigid shaft.

His fingers paused briefly while he moaned out the sudden pleasure which captured him.

She would not go easy and she would not be slow. They both craved release through touch. Breaking away from their desperate kiss, they stood, hands in the other, hands on the other, and, with their gazes locked, built each other’s pleasure right there, upright, fully dressed.

She smiled at him in wonder, but when his under-knuckles dragged over her bud, when his fingertips swept through her sex, it shifted to a bewildered gasp. But her own hand didn’t slow, pumping, stroking, milking him to a point where ecstasy would break.

‘Yes … yes …’ he hissed and his eyes were glazed. She loved that; she’d missed that, that sign of his abandon: his slack jaw, his ragged breath. She worked him harder.

‘Come first,’ he urged, circling her nub with vicious intent. If her arousal had not been at such a peak, it would have hurt, but the pain she would have taken too.

With her hand still wrapped around his cock, she gave up her rapture, coming hard and fast, her body jerking unbidden through it. But she quickly focused back and her hand was a blur along him. ‘Oh, fuck me, wait,’ he groaned, beyond decorum, as he fumbled for his handkerchief. She gave him no respite and he only just managed to put it in place before his release burst from him in long, explosive shots.

Melbourne stood quite spent and rested his forehead along hers while trying to steady his breathing.

At length, he drew himself up again and looked down at her. ‘Good morning, Ma’am.’

She brought up a hand to stifle her laugh. ‘Good morning, Lord M. How very good it is to see you again.’

‘Indeed.’

He coughed a little, suddenly aware of his surroundings, wiping his hands on the handkerchief and tidying himself away.

Victoria smoothed down her skirts and adjusted her hair as best she could. ‘How is the bill coming along, Prime Minister?’

He sighed. ‘It is proving most troublesome. I cannot stay long, I’m afraid.’
She gave a little sigh but added, ‘Well … you have at least come today.’

He quirked an eyebrow. ‘I have indeed, Ma’am.’

She smirked and settled herself at the bureau to attend to the dispatches.

‘I’ll only be able to direct you on the most important business today, Ma’am. I really must return urgently to the House, I regret.’

‘I also regret …’ She reached for the first document and gave it the scrutiny it deserved while also letting him know how his absence pained her.

They went through the relevant work quickly but she still had much to do. Melbourne took a step away. ‘I’m afraid I shall have to go now, Ma’am. I trust you can sort through the rest alone.’

‘I can, although it is never quite the same.’

He smiled softly then gathered his things to leave.

‘Lord M …’

‘Ma’am?’

‘When can we … do it again … properly?’

He frowned. ‘Your bleeding began six days ago, did it not?’

‘Last Wednesday, yes.’

‘In that case … two more weeks.’

‘Two weeks!’ She stood up in shocked dismay. ‘Surely sooner than that?’

‘No, Ma’am. We cannot risk it. You must allow twenty days after your bleeding starts.’

‘How do you know this, Lord M?’

He blinked twice as if he would not at first answer and his cheeks tinged pink. ‘Experience, Ma’am.’

She turned away, unwilling to be reminded of his past liaisons. But the pain of not having him was too much and she sobbed. ‘But I think I shall go mad!’

‘Ma’am … it is difficult, believe me … I wish it were not so, but, as we have just now shown … there are other ways.’

She rushed over to him and ran her hands up his chest. ‘I want all the other ways. I want you to teach me.’

He sniffed out a laugh. ‘Ma’am … You must exercise caution. Curiosity, as they say …’ He let his words trail off with a sardonic lift.

‘But I am not a cat, Lord M!’

He cocked an eyebrow. ‘No, but you are rather kittenish.’

Teasing her like this made him more handsome than ever and she coiled herself around him again. ‘And you, Lord M, make me purr and purr.’
Just as he let himself be pulled down for a kiss there were noises outside the door and they moved apart rapidly. The door opened almost immediately and her mother entered. ‘Drina, I need to discuss your uncle’s arrival with you.’ The Duchess turned coolly to the Prime Minister. ‘Lord Melbourne, you said you would not be staying long today?’

‘Indeed, Your Highness, I was just leaving.’

He turned back to Victoria and tried to catch her eye.

‘Farewell, in that case,’ continued her mother dismissively. ‘Do not call tomorrow as my brother will be arriving and Drina has important matters to discuss with him.’

He glanced briefly at the Duchess before averting his eyes abruptly. ‘But the dispatches will still need attending to, Your Highness.’

‘Well, send them by equerry and let Drina look at them herself. There is no need for you always to go through them with her.’

He sniffed in. ‘I do that in my role as Private Secretary, Your Highness.’

The Duchess stepped up to the Prime Minister, her hands clasped tight before her. She fixed him steadily with hard eyes. ‘Lord Melbourne, your presence here is not required tomorrow.’

At this Victoria swept up to her mother. ‘Mama, Lord Melbourne shall attend upon me as and when he deems it necessary!’

Her mother’s lips pursed and she turned a disparaging gaze on her daughter. ‘And when you deem it necessary, Victoria?’

Victoria bristled and raised herself as tall as she could. ‘Mama … you will remember who is Queen.’

Her mother’s eyes narrowed. She gave the faintest sneer and dropped into a deep curtsey before her daughter, before stepping to the side.

Victoria wrung her hands together and stepped up to her Prime Minister. ‘Farewell, Lord Melbourne. I shall see you tomorrow. Come in the morning unless Parliamentary business prevents it.’

‘Oh, it shan’t tomorrow, Ma’am. The bill will be settled by then.’ He said it audibly so that the Duchess would hear.

Victoria could not help but smile. ‘Excellent. Tomorrow morning it is then.’

She extended her hand to him. He took it and knelt and kissed it, letting his lips fall open across the knuckles so that his damp breath moistened her hand. Her belly twisted in response yet again and as he paced out she watched him go reluctantly.

‘Drina,’ came the voice behind her, heavy with warning.

She spun around. ‘What, Mama?’

‘You see far too much of that man. You allow him to influence you excessively.’

‘He is my Prime Minister and my Private Secretary, of course I see a lot of him.’

Her mother sighed and turned away dismissively. ‘Anyway, your Uncle Leopold arrives tomorrow. He will provide a welcome distraction.’
‘Will he?’

‘You know why he is coming.’

‘I believe he likes the gardens at Kew at this time of year.’

‘Oh, Drina, do not be childish.’ The Duchess looked across with serious intent. ‘You need to marry.’ Victoria could not help but let out a hopelessly frustrated sigh. She paced over towards the window. ‘So everyone keeps telling me.’

‘Then you know it to be right.’

‘I am not yet twenty, Mama. I do not see why it should be so soon … if at all.’

‘Drina, there are many reasons to marry, most of which I feel you will enjoy and which I believe you need.’ Her mother was trying to soften her tone. ‘Marriage is not only important to cement your role as Queen, but … as a woman, Drina … marriage brings with it great comforts and, if I dare say … pleasures.’

She cocked an eyebrow. ‘What on earth do you mean, Mama?’ She knew exactly what her mother meant but enjoyed watching her squirm.

Her mother let out a strange little titter. ‘Perhaps I have been remiss in instructing you in certain things. I left it to Lehzen, but I fear she has done so in a rather stark manner.’

‘You’re talking most peculiarly.’ Victoria was curious as to how her mother would approach this.

The Duchess sighed and took hold of her daughter’s hands, leading her to the chaise and sitting them both down on it. She did not let go of her hands.

‘Drina … I do not need to tell you how we humans procreate, do I?’

‘Mama!’ She was exasperated at her mother’s ineptitude but it came out more as embarrassed shock, which was not the true nature of her outrage at all.

‘You do know what a man does on your wedding night?’ Her mother’s voice had dropped as if she could barely tolerate hearing the words cross her own lips.

Victoria quirked an eyebrow. ‘Presumably not only on the wedding night?’

‘No …’ She gave an embarrassed laugh and continued. ‘You do know that he places … the … his …’

‘His penis inside the woman’s vagina?’

The Duchess closed her eyes tightly and muttered a brief, ‘Yes.’ She continued, ‘But … there are feelings that can be wrought in you, delightful ones. A husband can make you feel … very good.’

‘Very good? If he reads me Milton, for example?’

‘No. I mean … through touch and … affection. Why, I used to adore the little kisses your dear Papa gave me and the way he stroked my arm. You have all this yet to discover … with a husband.’

Victoria raised her eyes to the bureau where she and her Prime Minister had a few minutes earlier wrapped their fingers around and into each other and brought them both to orgasm. She considered
that they had moved rather beyond the stroking of an arm. Victoria said straight out, ‘Some people call the penis a cock. I prefer that, don’t you?’

Her mother let out an audible gasp. ‘Drina! How could you?’

She pulled her hands away from her mouth and stood quickly. ‘Really, Mama, this is so desperately boring. Do not discuss this with me at all.’

‘But … I am only trying to inform you of the pleasures a marriage can bring.’

‘And why should I be married to attain them?’

‘Because … you … simply must!’

‘But I am the Queen. All the kings throughout history have taken a myriad of lovers. Marriage meant nothing to them. Why should I limit my pursuit of pleasure to some stuffy old prince to whom I must be tied in wedlock for political reasons?’

‘Drina! You shock me! Who has been filling your head with such things?’

‘Me, Mama! I can think for myself!’

Her mother steadied herself and her eyes gleamed as if a sudden realisation had come to her. She stood and took a pace towards her daughter and Victoria felt that same sense of jarring unease she had felt when she had run down the wrong staircase at Kensington and been caught.

‘Are you certain it is you thinking for yourself? Or perhaps … another?’

Her breath caught. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Someone very close to you … someone with whom you spend an inordinate amount of time?’

‘If you refer to Lord Melbourne, you are mistaken.’

Her mother’s eyes narrowed but she did not remove her gaze. She looked straight into her daughter’s blue eyes. ‘I did not mention Lord Melbourne, Drina … but you have.’

Victoria suddenly felt as if her mother had been witness to all that she and William had done, as if she had been secreted somewhere in each room, watching, spying. Her face blushed puce and she turned away to hide it.

‘Lord Melbourne and I are busily engaged in discussions of parliament and state. You know how taxing that can be.’

‘And yet you speak so freely.’ Her mother appraised her daughter as if she were seeing her for the first time as a woman. ‘There is gossip, Victoria. There are rumours. I choose not to heed them, but I do not think your Uncle Leopold will be so forgiving.’

Victoria struggled to control her breathing, and knew her anxiety would not be hidden from her face. She kept her back turned from her mother’s oppressive scrutiny. ‘People can say what they want!’

‘Yes … but you may not be able to marry who you want. And you must accept that. Uncle Leopold is coming to arrange your marriage, you know that. It is high time. You will remember your duty … Your Majesty.’

Her mother dipped into a curtsey and turned to walk out. But before she had taken two paces, she
looked back and said, ‘Oh … and do tidy your hair.’

And with that she left Victoria entirely alone in the room.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this one took a while. Life is very busy, although I managed to write a little Christmassy Vicbourne fic called The Fall of Snow if you haven't read it yet. It was written for the Vicbourne Advent Calendar which is happening until Christmas over at the For the Love of Vicbourne Facebook page. Come and join if you haven't. If you're human and nice, we'll let you in, have no fear.

Meanwhile, your thoughts - any thoughts - on this chapter and Revelation generally are very welcome. There is a shift ... can you sense it? xx
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria wishes to even things up.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the delay in updating. Life, Christmas, other writing commitments ... but here we are. x

Melbourne briefly considered sending the Lord Chancellor to the palace the next morning.

He did not want to see Leopold. The man dismayed him: his self-importance, his sham obsequiousness to the Queen – all of it merely a mask to hide the blisteringly acerbic sharpness of his observations.

Melbourne had drunk too much brandy the night before and awoke with a thick head and weary limbs. Would she mind so much if he sent a deputy?

He dragged himself from the bed and reached for his dressing gown. Pushing his arms through the sleeves, he shrugged the material over his shoulders. Melbourne sighed deeply. Mornings were never easy … But then, that wasn’t strictly true; he allowed a smirk to cross his face. Mornings with her took years from him. With her in his bed, he awoke as alert and ready as he had been twenty years before. He rubbed a hand over his face, enjoying the rasp of beard growth, thinking of how she giggled when it scratched her.

He exhaled an audible groan. He could not lie to himself. He would not send the Lord Chancellor, not because he knew how aggrieved she would be if her Prime Minister did not arrive, but because he himself could not bear to be away from her. Already the nights were lonely. Windsor had been an idyll, one of such illimitable happiness that he could not remember another like it. He stared at his bed, the half of it untouched, neat and folded. It was all too easy to picture her on it: the things he could show her, the things she would love, the things she could do to him.

Again, he was aroused. He briefly considered indulging it: the brewing heat, that tingle of desire was nearly omnipresent now. For a moment he cursed her fertility. But she was certainly experimental, he’d grant her that. He waited for the guilt which used to come, guilt, surely, that he should feel: he was instructing the Queen of England in some of the basest and most depraved acts, acts he himself had learnt only in the darkest brothels of Paris and Vienna. But no guilt came. When he pictured her face, bright, eager, when he heard her cries of orgasmic joy, and when he felt the rejuvenation in his body from unfathomable pleasure … guilt was suppressed.

‘Baines,’ he called for his valet, needing to shake off his restricting lust. ‘Baines!’

‘My Lord?’ His man arrived quickly.
'Could you instruct the stable to saddle my horse? I’ll be leaving for the palace after breakfast.'

'So soon, My Lord?'

'Yes, there is nothing to keep me here.'

'Very well, sir. Am I right in thinking that King Leopold is visiting at the moment, sir?'

'That’s right, yes.'

'Will Her Majesty not require less counsel during the king’s visit?'

Melbourne sighed as his valet passed him his clothes. ‘She will require just as much; whether he deems that she will is another matter.’

‘Pardon me, My Lord, but I have always thought, from what you have said, that King Leopold is not someone you take kindly to. It is a shame he seems to try to exert such influence over Her Majesty.’

‘Tries …’ he muttered.

‘I assume he has come to discuss her marriage, which must surely happen soon?’

‘I assume so.’

‘You must wish her married too, sir. It will provide certainty and clarity.’

Melbourne practically snatched his coat from the valet’s hands and strode from the room. ‘I shall breakfast and leave immediately.’

--xoOox--

The Queen was sitting with her ladies when he arrived. It frustrated him, having to share her. He kissed her hand as usual but rose and gave them a brief but terse smile each. Emma quirked an eyebrow. He turned away from her so that she could not read his expression.

Victoria pursed her lips. ‘My uncle is arriving at any moment, Lord M. Apparently, his ship docked last night.’

‘I see.’

‘I cannot say I relish the prospect of his visit.’

‘No, Ma’am.’

‘And we all know what he will be discussing,’ said Harriet Sutherland, her eyes agleam with intent.

There followed a stony silence.

Victoria stood. ‘Ladies, I ask that you leave us. I must see to the dispatches before my uncle interrupts me.’

Harriet and Emma rose and bobbed in curtsey before glancing at each other as they left the room.

Once they had gone, Victoria sighed deeply and threw her head up. ‘Oh, I hate it so!’

‘Ma’am?’ He took a cautious step towards her. She was fractious and he knew to exercise caution on such occasions.
‘His interference, his insistence on … on … oh, you know!’

But even Melbourne could not bring himself to mention it. He cleared his throat. ‘Do not distress yourself, Ma’am. Come, we should settle to business.’

She turned to him with a frown. ‘Why are you so formal today?’

‘Am I, Ma’am?’

She tutted and wrung her hands in displeasure. ‘Yesterday was quite different.’

Once again the heat in his groin stirred as he recalled how he had greeted her the previous day. He wanted to tell her how much he needed that again, how much he wanted to bury himself in her now, but instead, with supreme restraint, he said, ‘Well, you yourself said that your uncle could arrive at any minute.

But with that the Queen hurried over to him and pressed herself flush against him, her eyes turned up, wide with seduction, her lips dark with a twist of carnal intent, her breasts pushed hard against him. His cock immediately demanded.

‘Oh, My Lord,’ she purred, ‘do not lie to yourself.’

*Lie to himself. How could he?* She stole his breath away. He could carry her to the bureau now and take her.

Melbourne inhaled desperately, his nostrils flaring. She pressed harder yet against him and her tongue dampened her lips. Oh, she had crafted herself into the most skilled seductress … or he had crafted her. A faint swell of pride took him and with lust dragging him along he acted promptly. He gripped hold of her hands and pulled them suddenly and tightly behind her, clasping her wrists together in his fingers. This forced her hips to buck against him and he rejoiced in the sensation it gave his cock, forcing blood to pound through it, making him seek her out even through her skirts. With a gasp, Victoria wriggled further, deliberately rubbing against him, he knew. A heady rush of control took him and he lowered his voice. ‘I said … your uncle will be arriving at any moment. To do anything would be foolish and dangerous.’

‘Foolish and dangerous?’ she asked, a whisper, her eyes bright with longing, and her breasts heaved against him as she dragged in breath. She writhed in his grasp so he strengthened it. Melbourne pulled her in so tight he would come from her proximity alone. ‘My Lord …’ she sighed, and he read brazen desire in her darkening eyes. ‘Danger, My Lord … I think perhaps I like it.’

She moved her hips and he suppressed a groan as she nudged and jerked against him.

‘Does that danger feel good, My Lord?’ she murmured, her hands held tight in his grasp behind her back, her hips rolling against his agonisingly stiff cock.

‘Yes.’ It was all he could manage. She could bring him off like this, right now.

‘I like it too, My Lord. I adore it. I cannot end it.’

*Neither could he. Neither could he.* He tightened his grip yet more and she ground herself against him. *Right here. Right now.*

But then, noise. Voices in the corridor.

They pulled away from each other suddenly and he moved swiftly around to the other side of the
bureau and placed the dispatch box in front of his obviously tented breeches. Victoria retreated to the bay window and allowed a placid smile of contentment to grace her features, which were a little flushed but gave no other indication of what had just occurred.

The door opened and her mother walked in with Leopold. Melbourne’s erection was instantly subdued.

‘Victoria!’ oozed the King of the Belgians, opening his arms to his niece. She walked over, a fixed smile on her face, and allowed him to kiss her on the cheeks.

‘Uncle. I trust you had a pleasant voyage.’

‘As pleasant as these things are, but the delight of seeing you makes it all worthwhile.’

He turned and noted Melbourne. ‘Lord Melbourne. I was about to say it is a pleasant surprise to see you, but I find that seeing you here yet again … is no surprise at all.’ His voice was jagged with sarcasm.

‘Your Majesty.’ Melbourne kept his hands firmly behind his back and let his nails dig into the palms. ‘I trust you are well, sir.’

‘As well as a man of advancing years can be … as you yourself would know all too well.’

Melbourne smiled and said nothing.

Victoria tutted loudly and hurried over. ‘Lord Melbourne is here to go through our daily business.’

‘I had thought you were adept at dealing with it without constant supervision now, Victoria?’

‘Matters of state require considerable expertise and, I’m sure you agree, uncle, there is no better person to provide expertise than the Prime Minister.’

‘No … I am sure Lord Melbourne is most dedicated to providing you with his expertise.’

For a while nobody said anything and then the Duchess of Kent let out a strange squawk and approached Leopold. ‘Dear brother, let us take tea in the morning room. Drina, you will accompany us, surely? The dispatches can wait. Leopold has, after all, travelled a great distance to be with you.’

Melbourne glanced at Victoria. She was restraining her fury as much as him. He could not bear to be in the man’s presence a moment longer. ‘Your Majesty, your mother is correct. You should entertain your uncle after his long and arduous journey, tiring for a man of his age and disposition. I have much business in Parliament and will return tomorrow.’

She blinked in annoyance. ‘No, you will return for dinner this evening, Lord Melbourne.’

He opened his mouth to protest, but made the mistake of fixing on her plump, promising lips. He nodded slightly. ‘Very well, Ma’am.’

After kneeling to kiss her hand, he paced out without a glance at the King of the Belgians. If Leopold resented the Prime Minister’s lack of protocol, it showed only in the slightest tick at the corner of his left eye.

--xoOox--

Dinner was extravagant at Leopold’s insistence. He enjoyed the lavish expense the British monarchy could afford and saw no reason why it shouldn’t be lavished on him. They sat formally. Leopold
ensured he was next to his niece. Melbourne was directly opposite.

The Queen was not in a good mood. He burned to talk to her privately, but the opportunity had not presented itself. Melbourne tried not to look up. Victoria’s mother sat beside him, and as much as wit and eloquence came as easily to him as any man on earth, he found his usual discourse had this night deserted him. Neither did the Duchess seem in a particular mood for conversation. He tried to keep his eyes fixed on his food but made the frequent mistake of glancing up at Victoria. She was wearing a dress of such a vivid red it highlighted the rose petal flush of her cheeks. That in turn reminded her of how her cheeks had flushed earlier as she ground herself against his –

‘Lord Melbourne, tell me how your party fares in Parliament. I am told your majority is most unreliable.’

He turned his eyes to Leopold who looked across with an expression approaching a sneer.

‘We have passed most bills, so … it is of no matter.’

‘But Peel and the Tories remain a thorn in your side?’

‘As they should rightly be. Parliament is no place for complacency. Democracy is only strengthened by vigorous debate.’

‘True, true, and yet … I am told that, once again, you may have to relinquish your position as Prime Minister. This is becoming something of a habit, Lord Melbourne.’ Leopold chuckled as he reached for his glass of wine. Most around the table joined in. The Queen stuck her fork into a piece of venison.

He replied with smooth ease, ‘As and when that happens, so be it. And I shall continue to work for my Queen and country until that time.’

Leopold put down his glass and said, ‘And of course, soon enough, the Queen will be married and her husband will take on many if not most of your duties. So you will not be needed, after all.’

Melbourne felt nausea swirl in his gut so quickly he had to take a large gulp of claret to staunch it. The tannins caught in his throat and he coughed abruptly. When he looked up, Leopold was staring at him with a fixed expression of froideur.

Slowly, the King turned to look at his niece beside him. ‘Victoria was not keen to discuss the matter earlier but I have mentioned a most suitable candidate.’

Victoria turned to her uncle. ‘If you are referring to my cousin again, Uncle, you know how I feel on that matter.’

The tickle in Melbourne’s cough lingered. He took a drink of water instead. It did not help.

‘Victoria, Albert has grown up since you last met him. He is a man of keen intelligence and a questing mind. He would match your curiosity and passion well.’

‘Passion!’ she sniffed out and Melbourne noted her gaze flick to him. He coughed again. Damn it. Damn it all.

He stood up. ‘Excuse me, Your Majesty … I find I am …’ He pointed to his throat and hurried out. Once outside the cough seemed to go but Melbourne paced down the hall and went into a sitting room. He sat in the dark with only the glow from the fire to light the gloom.
Soon after a footman entered. ‘Lord Melbourne? Excuse me, sir, the Queen asked me to find you. She says that clearly you are developing a chill.’

He scoffed. ‘Not at all, what does she mean?’

‘You were coughing, sir.’

‘Some wine caught in my throat, that is all.’

‘Nevertheless, the Queen says that you are clearly in no fit state to travel tonight and you are to stay in the palace until fully recovered.’

He sighed slightly and let his head fall back. ‘I had intended to return to Dover House.’

‘Her Majesty was most insistent.’

Melbourne sniffed out a slight laugh. He could not resist, neither her insistence nor his own need. ‘I see. Tell Her Majesty that I am most grateful for her offer and accept it.’

‘She also wishes you to return to dinner.’

‘Tell her that I will take port after dinner … but I will not return to the table.’

There was a slight hesitation from the footman. Melbourne said no more and eventually, the man bowed. ‘Very well, sir.’

He stayed in the dark until he was certain they had finished the meal. He could not bear to look upon the smug, flinty-eyed face of Leopold for longer than necessary. Or tolerate his conversation.

Melbourne went to the sitting room a while later and immediately felt her eyes on him. He glanced over. Her face broke into an immediate smile of unbridled happiness. He was certain Leopold would notice and wished she wouldn’t, but at the same time it felt so very good to have those bright eyes fixed on him, to have that smile warming the all too familiar throb between his legs that he did not care.

‘Lord Melbourne,’ said the Duchess of Kent, ‘my daughter informs me you are staying the night due to developing a chill. Yet your cough seems quite recovered. Are you indeed unwell?’

He turned to the Queen’s mother. ‘I have no inclination nor need to return home tonight.’

Leopold let out a slight laugh which he made only a vague attempt to mask while taking a drink. Melbourne took a large gulp of port and glanced at Victoria. She was staring at him as if he were the only person in the room. It would not go unnoticed, but yet again, he enjoyed it too much to worry.

The evening wore on but Victoria soon excused herself. ‘I shall retire for the night. Good evening, all. Lord Melbourne, you shall stay in the Baron’s room tonight. I have instructed the staff to make it up for you and I trust it will be to your liking.’

‘Thank you, Ma’am.’

Her mother leaned forward. ‘The Baron’s room, Drina? That is a most isolated chamber in the northern wing, far from where your guests usually stay.’

‘Yes. I thought Lord Melbourne would appreciate quiet and calm.’

‘Indeed, Ma’am, most thoughtful,’ he added.
Leopold took a step forward. ‘My rooms are in the southern wing, as usual. Clearly, Victoria, you
did not think your uncle needed quiet and calm.’

‘You like those rooms. If you have any complaints tomorrow, inform the staff.’ She turned away
from him dismissively. ‘Good evening, Lord M. I hope you sleep well.’

‘Thank you, Ma’am, I’m sure I shall. I trust you will too.’

‘Oh, I am certain of it.’

She turned to the others. ‘Good evening, everyone. I bid you good night.’ And with that she swept
from the room. It was not long before the remaining members of the party dispersed.

--xoOox--

It took Melbourne some time to find the Baron’s Room. It was located down various corridors,
tucked away in a far corner of the north wing. He smiled to himself as he opened the door. He had
declined the offer of a valet and took off his neck scarf, coat and waistcoat slowly, enjoying his
solitude.

He did not have long to wait. There was a knock at his door fifteen minutes later.

Melbourne paced across and opened it silently. Victoria stood outside, a hood pulled over her head
as she had always done at Windsor. He took a moment to enjoy her duplicity.

But she quickly slipped in past him and tossed aside the coat. ‘Urgh!’ she exclaimed. ‘I hate, hate,
hate it all! I hate the conniving, I hate the judgement, I hate the manipulation and the –’

He cut her off by kissing her with such force he had to catch her in his arms to stop her from falling.

She pulled back to gasp in breath. ‘But I love that. I love that, I love you, I love you.’

She was already reaching for his placket, scrabbling to undo it with greedy fingers. ‘My bleeding’s
finished,’ she slurred, tearing at the buttons so that one fell to the floor and rolled away. His desire
was so acute, so painfully hot and focused, that he almost forgot himself. He almost threw her on the
bed and plunged into her there and then.

Victoria fell back on the bed and stretched her hands across the sheets, biting her lip in that way she
knew he couldn’t resist. He leaned over her and couldn’t prevent leaning down and kissing her with
such intensity he drew blood. He pressed his already hard cock against her and caused a moan to
stick in her throat. By God, he had dreamt of this all day. Hell take Leopold and her mother and all
of them! They could all be damned if it denied him this sweetest of happiness.

But suddenly he remembered himself and with a groaning sigh rolled off her to the side, staring
above at the canopy in desolation. ‘This is madness. We cannot.’

‘I do not care!’ She sat up and straddled him, undoing his buttons and revealing him fully. Victoria
took him in her hand and guided him towards her. How easy it would be to let her sink down, to be
enveloped once again in that beauty and warmth and wetness and perfect joy.

He gripped her hips and held her poised over the searching tip of his eager cock.

But then, with a roar this time, he moved her off him and stood up, pulling his hands through his hair
desperately. ‘No! I must not forget myself! I could so easily get a child on you at this time.’
But she approached, her hair flowing freely about her, her nightgown slipping off one shoulder. His desire and his rage was so furious he was not sure he could control it.

‘My Lord,’ she said, coming up and closing her fingers around him again. ‘Look at me, My Lord, please.’

Slowly, he opened his eyes. She was not moving her hand, but the pressure she put on it was doing nothing to stem his arousal.

‘I have been thinking, My Lord. I have been wondering.’

‘What?’ he asked, thinking only of the pleasure she gave him.

‘You know what you do to me with your mouth?’

He could scarcely breathe. ‘What do you mean?’

‘When you … kiss me … when you lick me … down there.’

He swallowed back a response and simply waited. She was looking up at him with such need he wondered how he would survive it.

‘Is it possible … for me to … do the same to you?’

Melbourne closed his eyes, trying to block out the immediate image of her doing that precise act from his mind. He threw his head back and moaned. If he was not in such outrageous need of release he would have laughed. The Queen of England was suggesting fellatio, an act even his wife had only performed when at her most manic.

‘Victoria,’ he murmured and tried to move back from her. She did not let him and – admittedly – he lacked any conviction.

‘Oh, do answer me. I have wondered. I tasted you the other day, do you recall, and you told me that it would do me no harm.’

‘Please!’ he could not bear to hear her speak of such base things, but at the same time he never wanted her to stop.

‘Is it? Is it possible? Can I put it in my mouth … can I … suck it?’

He threw his hand over his face. ‘I … I … Oh, if there is a God, I am surely damned!’

Victoria gently pulled his hand away. ‘My Lord … can I?’

‘Yes.’ He stared into her. ‘But … this is an act which only … certain women perform … I would never ask it of you. I would never expect it of you.’

‘I know you don’t. This is my decision entirely.’

He groaned. ‘Victoria, you drive me to the brink of insanity with this.’

‘Well, let me pull you back. I want to. I know I want to. It is like an insatiable hunger which has niggled and niggled at me. Except … I don’t know how to do it. My Lord … tell me how.’

He stared down at her. She held him tight in her hand and he dripped relentlessly over her thumb. He was beyond prevarication, he was beyond refutation. A heady surge of authority gave him strength
and resolution.

‘Kneel down.’

She did so immediately, sinking to her knees before him with such fluid grace it caught his breath.

He reached down and swept her hair from her face. As he ran his thumb over her cheek she tried to catch in on her lips. He let her and she took it in her mouth and sucked.

‘Open,’ he said, tugging her bottom jaw down with his thumb before withdrawing it. She opened her mouth, her lips damp with anticipation.

‘Wider.’ She complied without question.

And so he took hold of his cock and fed it between her parted lips. She closed around it and he felt the warm, wet pad of her tongue holding him. He sucked in a breath and wondered if he could remain standing. Her eyes were turned up to him, and his grew hot with the sheer beauty of it.

‘Victoria …’ he muttered.

She sucked in and he gasped. Never, never had there been such perfection. If he died tomorrow he would be content.

He pushed in a little more and she took him. Instinctively, he put a hand on her head and held her there.

‘Suck,’ he said and immediately her cheeks tightened.

‘Harder.’ More. His head fell back and he cried out, unbidden: ‘Fuck!’ At that she moved along him more determinedly. ‘Yes! That, do that!’

He could watch this and never want for more. She knelt as if in servile humility, but the conviction contained in her mouth staggered him. Everything he instructed her to do she fulfilled immediately.

‘Move on it. Yes, pull on it, drag along it.’

She knew. He need not tell her. Like everything they did together, she had an instinctive feel for what he wanted. She picked up a rhythm so quickly that he was soon able to match her, pushing himself into her mouth slowly and surely in time with her sucks.

‘I’ll come off too soon. Wait,’ he groaned and pulled out. Already she seemed bereft. Her brows furrowed in that sweet way they had and she opened her mouth as if seeking him out again.

‘Go gently for a time,’ he instructed. ‘Hold it near the bottom and just lick.’

She took the shaft in her hand and let her tongue dance over the head, gently, softly, lapping.

‘Oh Christ alive, my darling!’ he exclaimed.

She kept up this soft licking for some time and he let himself drift, curling his fingers in her hair, observing her complete absorption in her task. But his pleasure, which he had kept in, could not be contained any longer.

‘Can I come in your mouth? I cannot presume …’ he muttered, beside himself.

She nodded. ‘Yes, oh yes. Please, you must.’
‘Suck me hard again,’ he said and was surprised at the harshness of his tone.

She took him as deep as she could and pulled her cheeks in, dragging hard over him time and again while she gripped him and worked her hand in time with her mouth.

The room was spinning, surely, his world, his whole life was upended. He came so hard it blinded him. With his mouth gaping, with his eyes wide but unseeing, he released into her mouth, holding onto her head as his only means of support.

‘Oh, my girl, my darling, my love,’ he groaned out.

When at last it stopped, he looked down, short of breath with the glory of it. He withdrew gently from her mouth and could only stagger back to sit on the bed in near shock.

She stood up and stepped forward, looking down at him as he had only a moment before been looking down at her. He fumbled for a handkerchief but, on looking at her, quickly realised it was unnecessary.

‘Thank you,’ he murmured, hopelessly inadequate.

‘Was I alright?’

He could not prevent the tears forming hot in his eyes. ‘You were … you are … my everything.’

She climbed onto the bed beside him and they clung to each other before ridding themselves of their remaining clothes and coiling together.

Of one thing he was certain: without this woman, his life was meaningless.

Chapter End Notes

Well ... there it is. More soon. Quite a full on chapter, so to speak.

Any comments would be hugely valued. x
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria insists.

Chapter Notes

The image in this chapter was a gift to me from the lovely Ariadne in the For the Love of Vicbourne Facebook group. It was created by the super talented pandacapuccino on Tumblr. Do check out this artist's other incredible works. x

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Melbourne was kept away from the Palace for the next few days on Government business. This was, it should be said, a fortunate thing. If he had been privy to the conversations the King of the Belgians had been imposing on the Queen he would have perhaps allowed his usual restraint to be tested.

As it was, on the day he did arrive for his morning audience, he found himself intercepted by Leopold.

‘Lord Melbourne. May I have a moment of your time?’

Melbourne adopted his usual stance of refined forbearance, hands clasped behind him, a brief, resisting glance to the side. ‘I was on my way to see the Queen, Your Majesty.’

Leopold’s eyes narrowed. ‘I am sure you were, but she is not busy today. It will wait.’

‘I haven’t seen her for several days. There is much business to attend to.’

‘Lord Melbourne … please.’

Leopold stood, his arm extended to indicate into a room. There was no doubting his intent. Pursing his lips, Melbourne paced reluctantly in as Leopold closed the doors behind them.

‘Sit down, Lord Melbourne.’

‘I prefer to stand. I shall not be long.’

‘Sit, I insist.’ Leopold sat and took out a cigar case. He offered a cigar to Melbourne, who perched on the edge of a chair reluctantly.

‘No, thank you, Sir.’

‘You do not smoke?’

‘Rarely, any longer.’
'Why ever not?'

'I was surrounded by an excess of it in my younger days. I find now the memory of it, like the smoke itself, to be somewhat … cloying.'

Leopold smirked as he lit the cigar and blew out a long trail of smoke which drifted straight towards the Prime Minister.

‘You have been busy in Westminster?’ Leopold inquired.

‘Yes.’ Melbourne saw no need to elaborate.

‘But you must have missed your visits to the Queen?’

‘It is important to keep on top of the dispatches and to keep Her Majesty duly informed of matters of state and of the world. But I shall put that right today … as long as I have adequate time.’

‘And you assume she misses you too?’

‘Like I said, it is important to keep informed. Her Majesty likes that.’

‘She does, does she?’ He inhaled deeply on his cigar.

Melbourne eyed Leopold coolly. ‘Your Majesty … what exactly are you asking?’

‘Lord Melbourne … you know why I am here. Over the course of the last few days I have instructed Victoria in preparing herself for marriage to my nephew, Albert.’

A rush of acidic revulsion rose in his throat but his diplomatic flair subdued it. ‘Instructed her?’ Melbourne smirked. ‘If there is one thing I know about the Queen, it is that she will not be instructed.’

‘Even by you?’

‘Only in matters in which she is willing to learn.’

A momentary pause.

‘And what is it you teach her exactly, Lord Melbourne … hm?’

Leopold was looking directly at him with a flinty gaze while dragging on his cigar.

Melbourne did not answer. He would not succumb to this man’s serpentine guile. He turned his attention to the gardens. The clouds were growing dark. It would rain later.

‘I have seen the way my niece looks at you,’ Leopold continued. ‘But, also … I have seen the way you look at my niece.’

At this Melbourne did turn, abruptly, meeting Leopold’s gaze with clear surprise.

Had they been so obvious? Had their restraint and suppression not been enough? Damn the man to hell! Damn him and his intentions!

‘She is beautiful and you are still, as much as it irks me to say, being of similar age, a handsome and virile man. It is clear to me – she has fallen for your seduction.’
His seduction? He recalled her resolve to keep on and on at him until he had no choice but to give her all she demanded. He felt again her body pressed so willingly and wantonly against him. How he had resisted, how he had ignored his desires for as long as was humanly possible! He knew of no seduction in this matter save her own, not that he held her to account for this in anyway. Victoria’s seduction was his happiness.

Anger at Leopold’s assertion billowed so furiously that he had to force himself not to launch himself at the devil now and hurl him to the floor. Instead, he said quite plainly, ‘You are mistaken, Sir.’

‘Am I?’

‘Never … never have I seduced her.’

‘Then she … has seduced you.’

Truth. When confronted with it in all its stark reality, he was robbed of the smooth logic which he usually relied on. Melbourne could scarcely breathe. Every drag of air into his lungs pained him. His vision swam, his mind clouded.

Leopold’s mouth quirked into the slightest smirk. ‘It is interesting what you learn when you talk to the right people. I have learnt so much since coming here, although my suspicions have been raised for some time. I, unlike others, am all too happy to accept that the strongest urges of human nature affect us all, from beggars to the Queen of England herself … and even her beloved Prime Minister.’

Denial, that would serve them best now. Even he, the most human of politicians, could resort to rhetoric when needed. ‘This is all speculation and malice.’

‘Is it? I have heard stories of stained sheets, of hooded figures visiting your chambers in the dead of night … of curious sounds from behind the Queen’s doors … noises one does not normally associate with a perusal of the dispatch box.’

Damnation, his throat was dry. He swallowed hard. ‘This is nonsense. Never has any of this been brought to my attention before.’

‘That is because nobody wishes to know, nobody wishes to believe, but I … I make it my duty to know precisely what is going on.’

Silence. Melbourne felt himself clammy with outrage and discovery but managed to sit quite still and calm.

‘Come now, Your Majesty,’ he said, leaning into the man and allowing a sly smile to capture his face. ‘The matter of the sheets and the lady visiting me … one does, after all, have needs. There is a most excellent establishment which provides very personal services to whichever location one needs, if you catch my meaning. Ma Fletcher is most obliging and helpful in matching her clients’ needs to the services on offer. I will supply the address of this fine house for you. I’m sure you would benefit most excellently and find something to suit even the most outrageous predilections.’

Leopold smirked. ‘Outrageous predilections? Well … you would know of those, Lord Melbourne, so I am told. And what of the noises in broad daylight in Her Majesty’s private chambers?’

Melbourne shrugged. ‘I have no explanation. Dash, perhaps? She does so like her little games with him.’

‘Yes … we all like our little games, don’t we?’ He leaned forward and extinguished his cigar. ‘The Queen will marry, and soon. I think, however, that her husband will find her already most adept at
marital duty. I think she has been well-instructed.’

‘Well, in that case … her husband will be most fortunate.’ Melbourne stood abruptly. ‘Now … if you will excuse me, the Queen awaits me.’

‘As always, Lord Melbourne.’

He inclined his head slightly and turned for the door.

‘Melbourne!’

The Prime Minister looked back reluctantly.

‘My niece’s reputation is everything. Scandal is not something which will serve anybody well. This secret must remain just that … secret, for all time. But it will stop now, do you understand? It will stop and she will marry my nephew. I am sure you are growing tired of public office … perhaps it is time you considered retiring. I hear the glass houses of Brocket Hall are a wonder. They must require considerable attention.’

He clenched his fists so hard that if Leopold had seen them he would have thought the skin across his knuckles almost transparent. ‘They do, hence why I employ a most excellent horticulturalist. I pay him most highly. You may wish to visit the glass houses, Your Majesty, or even make use of his services yourself. I shall provide the required information along with those other services we discussed. I’m sure you would benefit greatly from them all. Now … I really must go, Her Majesty will be wanting me.’ He inclined his head again and left.

--xxOoxx--

Melbourne paced furiously down the corridor. _Hell take it all!_ They had been careful, they had been discreet, but now he cursed himself – fool that he was! How could he have ever expected it to go unnoticed? He had denied it, he had ignored it. He knew as well as Leopold that he relied on the wish to contain scandal as much as the avoidance of discovery. And he knew also that it was his desire, his hopeless, uncontainable lust, his boundless love which could not prevent it.

Could it now? He leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes, his breath coming in deep, hard pants. As much as he knew he should end it, should deny them both what they so needed, he could not, of that he was certain. She was his oxygen, she was his very existence. He needed her now. He struggled to breathe and she was the only one to ease it.

But if Melbourne was hoping for a private reunion with the Queen, he was disappointed. On reaching her rooms, he found both her mother and Emma Portman in attendance.

Ignoring them, he marched over to her, knelt and pressed his lips to her knuckles, taking the moment to hush over them, to inhale the scent of her, to impress his flesh onto hers.

‘Lord M, how I have missed you. It has been four days. It has been some time.’ She seared his eyes, her longing so clear it made his own eyes mist.

‘I apologise, Ma’am. Business has been most arduous in recent days.’

Victoria threw a poisonous glare in the direction of the other women. ‘As you can see, we are not free to go through the box – as laden as it is – without distraction.’

‘We shall not distract, Drina,’ called her mother.
'Your very presence is a distraction, Mama. Lord M and I do not like to be disturbed.'

Melbourne noted the glance between the two Duchesses. He looked away. This was Leopold’s doing; his spies were out in force.

'It is no matter, Ma’am. Come, let us get down to things.'

She huffed and went over to the bureau. Carefully, considerately, he guided her through the many issues that had arisen over the last few days.

Her right hand held the pen. Her left was free, however, to begin a slow progress along his right calf, caressing, smoothing, stroking, up as high as she dared before her attentions would have been noticed by the women.

She turned and looked up at him, her face alight. ‘Is that correct, Lord M? The way I am approaching this?’

‘Yes, Ma’am, given the circumstances, I would say that was most effective.’

She glanced to his placket and noticed the considerable prominence within. ‘I see, Lord M. Indeed, most effective. Shall I continue?’

‘As you wish, Ma’am.’

‘You do not object?’

‘Not at all, Ma’am.’

‘You do not think I should desist in this venture?’

‘I do not see how you can, Ma’am. Both parties are most ardently in need.’

‘I agree.’

However, her ministrations were soon ended when Emma approached too close not to notice the proximity of the Prime Minister’s leg to the Queen’s arm. Melbourne stepped smoothly away before she could detect anything.

‘Are you nearly finished, Lord Melbourne? The Queen is due to go riding.’

‘No, we are not finished,’ interjected Victoria sharply. ‘In any case, it is now raining. Lord M and I have much more to sort through. I suggest you leave us. This must be most tedious for you.’

‘Ma’am, I …’ Lady Portman stood there resolutely with her mother.

Victoria looked from one to the other, their scrutiny suffocating her. ‘Oh, for goodness sake!’ She threw the pen down and strode from the room. ‘Do not follow me, Mama! Don’t you dare! Leave me!’

Melbourne quickly started out of the room after her.

‘Are you returning to Westminster, Lord Melbourne?’ called the Duchess of Kent.

He turned to her and offered a faint smile. ‘Eventually. Now, if you will excuse me, I must insist the Queen finishes her state duties.’
Melbourne bowed quickly before hurrying out and along the corridors. He found her soon enough, still marching furiously ahead; her little legs had not taken her as far as his long ones afforded.

‘Ma’am!’ he called. She seemed not to hear and continued hurrying on. He practically ran to catch her up. ‘Victoria!’

She turned at this and he was met with a face of puce rage, her eyes red from tears. She pointed back along the corridor.

‘You see? You see what he has done? Set his lackeys on me! To watch and spy and report back!’ She paced from side to side, livid, enraged. He had never seen her like this. It did nothing to dim his own brewing ardour. Fortunately, the corridor was deserted. ‘And he has done nothing but talk to me of marriage for the last four days! It sickens me! It repels me! Am I not the Queen? Can I not choose such things myself? Can I not dismiss their foolish notions?’

‘Victoria, not here.’

‘Why not? Why not here?’

‘Sh!’ he hissed, grabbing her by the wrist and pulling her into the hidden corner of a dark alcove. It was barely private but he could wait no longer to have his hands on her. ‘You must be still,’ he tried, and it came out more as a dominant command than a gentle bid.

Her eyes flashed immediately. ‘You were away so long – I missed you. I missed you so.’

He stared down but resisted kissing her; the anticipation was too perfect.

Melbourne said quite seriously, ‘They know. They all know. We must stop pretending. They will try to keep us apart.’

She frowned but shook off her dismay. ‘But they will not succeed.’

He said nothing for a time, enjoying this new side to her.

‘They will not succeed,’ she repeated. ‘Say it.’ She tried to tug at his coat but he caught her wrists in his hand and drew her arms above her head. She bit her lip and pushed her hips against him.

‘Victoria …’ His desire was so great that reason was lost, but in the muddied recesses of his mind he knew all too well of the powerful machinations at work which went beyond even her authority.

‘Say it,’ she insisted, grinding against his livid erection. ‘Say it,’ she proclaimed, letting her heart beat into him through pliant breasts. ‘Say it,’ she convinced, writhing with bewitching enticement in his grasp.

‘They will not succeed,’ he agreed and bent to kiss her in avowal.

He drew back only when his head swam. Victoria kissed over his face and he let her. She moved her mouth to his ear and whispered into it, ‘I can still taste you. I love the taste of you. I want to taste you again. I want you in my mouth again.’

She squirmed in his grasp and tried to drag her hands out of his hold, but he held her fast.

‘My Lord,’ she said, low, needy, and he was lost. He dipped his head and plunged his mouth onto hers again, still pinning her to the wall.

For a time he cared only for her kiss but when she bared her neck for him he took it, kissing and
sucking along it, biting, inhaling it. ‘I want you to tie me again,’ she said, her tone increasingly desperate. ‘I want to feel your hand on me again. It has been too long. Nothing else is enough. Nothing else will ever be enough.’

‘No, it will not.’

‘Come to my chambers now. Please, please, my darling.’

‘I was due to return to the House.’

She frowned in remorse. ‘Here then. Let me do it again right here.’ She struggled in his grip, trying to sink to her knees there and then. He held her fast.

‘Victoria … this is madness, we’re in the corridor.’

She smiled with wicked intent. ‘No one can see.’

‘But they can hear.’

‘Well … I am not intending to speak.’ She grinned malevolently and tried once more to tear herself free of his grasp.

The thought of being encased once more in the warm succulence of her mouth was almost too hard to resist, but he held her tight and frowned down at her. ‘I thought you wanted me to –’

‘Thrash me?’ Her eyes lit up. ‘I do. I want you to make me burn. It will blot out the agony of my uncle’s droning insistence of the last few days.’

‘Well then … you shall wait.’

She tutted petulantly.

‘But only until tonight,’ he teased. ‘May I dine here?’

‘You need not ask.’

‘And then … the Baron’s Room was a most comfortable place to spend the night. I should very much like to spend another night there.’

‘I shall arrange it immediately.’

‘Immediately?’ He was still holding her and, with his own grin of wickedness, he lowered his head and kissed her again, slowly this time, agonisingly, tormentingly slowly, teasing her with all the deep deliciousness she could anticipate.
'William,’ she sighed against his lips, ‘I love you, I love you.’

‘I know that … and I love you, do not ever doubt it.’

‘I want you always. I never don’t want you. Is that wrong? Is it madness? Perhaps it is.’

He drew back and seared her eyes, seeking and finding their truth. ‘No, it is not. Because I have seen true madness, I have lived with it … and you, Victoria, are the truest, most perfect woman I have ever known.’

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter'll be a good 'un. ;-) x

Let me know your thoughts. Loved writing the conversation with Leopold and loved writing the alcove scene even more. Alcoves ... so useful.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria asks several questions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Leopold, thankfully, was otherwise occupied on a visit to Richmond with her mother that afternoon. Victoria was not sure she could bear to look on his face or listen to his oleaginous discourse for a moment longer.

Melbourne had gone to the House but she was reassured by the knowledge that he would return later. The heady days of their time in Windsor, when they had spent all hours of night and day together, seemed like a distant dream now, but the more time passed, the more she was aware that she would soon be able to take him properly again. The awareness of it made her skittish. It had been too long, and yet the activities they had otherwise engaged in made her pulse quicken and caused her to giggle aloud at the most inopportune moments. She was so at one with him, as if she were incomplete without him, that everything they did simply felt right. How could it ever be thus with another?

There was a knock at her door and Emma Portman entered. She glanced surreptitiously at the Queen then lowered her head. Victoria eyed her unwaveringly. As much as she desired to trust her Lady-in-Waiting, she would have to ask.

Victoria’s resolve settled and she straightened her back. ‘Lady Portman, I have been wishing to speak with you.’

‘Your Majesty?’ replied Emma, approaching to stand beside her but unable to meet her eyes. It was clear to both why she had been sitting in on Lord Melbourne’s visit that morning.

‘Emma,’ Victoria pursed her lips in accusatory dismay, ‘I thought I could trust you.’

Lady Portman’s stare darted hard and wide to the Queen and she sucked in. ‘Your Majesty? You can trust me!’

Victoria clasped her hands together. ‘My uncle knows, and it is clear that he has sent you to spy on us.’

Emma looked close to tears. ‘Your Majesty, please, you know I would never do anything to betray you … or Lord Melbourne. I care for you, both of you, so very much.’

The Queen was desperate for some rational explanation. She searched her Lady’s face for truth. ‘In that case, explain yourself, for I am much bewildered and dismayed.’

Emma did not flinch from giving the Queen the full openness of her disclosure. ‘Your Majesty, I swear to you that I have not breathed a word to King Leopold or to anyone about Your Majesty’s … activities.’
Victoria frowned in confusion. ‘Then why do you appear so guilty?’

Emma turned away at last, her eyes red with threatening tears. Victoria hated to see her friend so distressed. ‘Oh … do sit down and talk to me.’

Emma sat reluctantly and hung her head as she tried to contain her upset. ‘Ma’am … not once have I betrayed your secrets, but it is true that His Majesty, King Leopold, has been trying to elicit information from me. He knows that I am close to you both and he knows that I will be privy to things that pass between you. But, I assure you with all that I am … I have never breathed a word to him.’

Victoria took a deep sigh and reached for her friend’s hands. ‘I believe you, and I am sorry to hear of the pressure he has put you under. But … he has surely asked you to be present when Lord Melbourne and I are together?’

She gave a regretful nod. ‘He has. And your mother too, although she is a more willing participant in this connivance than I. I am truly sorry, Your Majesty, for any distress my actions have caused, but I assure you, I have not betrayed your trust.’

‘I know,’ she sighed and instinctively reached in to hug Emma who returned it through her sobs. Victoria drew back and sat tall, thinking it through. ‘In a way, it may be better for him to think he has you as his ‘eyes’. You can lead him off the scent.’

‘I would rather simply say nothing, Ma’am.’

She sighed softly, the whole situation frustrating her. ‘I understand. I shall not ask you to do anything with which you are uncomfortable.’ Victoria frowned in bewilderment, still unable to make sense of it. ‘But … if it wasn’t you, then … who has told him? For according to William – Lord Melbourne, I mean – my uncle knows it all.’

‘I am not certain, Ma’am, but there are many staff at the palace and at Windsor and I suspect Leopold is most adept at extracting information from them.’

A sudden horror occurred to her and she turned to Lady Portman in dismay. ‘You don’t think Skerrett has spoken to him?’

Emma squeezed her hand and gave a tender smile. ‘No, Ma’am, I am certain of it. She is truly loyal to you.’

Victoria pursed her lips. ‘I am pleased to hear it, for it would be most grievous to me to suffer her betrayal.’

‘You have no need to, Ma’am. I have spoken to her myself and she is most upset that you are under suspicion.’

‘I fear it has gone beyond being under suspicion, Emma. But if not you nor Skerrett, then who?’

‘It is most likely footmen and the like, Ma’am, maids who deal with the laundry … those who struggle to make ends meet, even through employment here. There are any number of servants whom you probably do not know exist. Leopold will ensure he does, however. The King will have greased their palms and made things that much easier for them. You cannot blame them really.’

‘Do we not pay our staff enough that they cannot live life without falling prey to such wickedness? Then I must put that right – they must be paid enough to live life without the need to betray their integrity! But … but how do they know? I had thought us so careful.’
'There is only so much you can hide in a royal palace, Ma’am. Secrecy relies more on discretion than inconspicuousness.'

She creased her brows in despair, thinking back. How silly she had been! Did the servants not have eyes and ears like any other? She remembered the noises she made in broad daylight, the way she gazed on him in Council, the way she passed footmen and valets on the way to his chambers.

Victoria closed her eyes against it but then let air fill her lungs. That was the way it was and that was the way it would be. ‘Well, it is in some way a relief. I am the Queen; I can behave as I wish. If I wish to take my Prime Minister as an intimate companion I see no reason why I should not!’

But Emma’s voice dropped and she leaned in warily to Her Majesty. ‘Ma’am … that is not … the way it can be.’

Victoria turned to her, indignant. ‘Why not? If I say it is, then it is. I never use my royal privilege, but in this matter I feel perhaps I should. The sooner Leopold leaves and we stop all this talk of marriage to my cousin, the better.’

‘Ma’am … you are expected to marry.’

‘Indeed. And I know exactly whom I wish to marry.’

‘Ma’am.’

She had never voiced it before and was suddenly taken with a new found resolve to say it aloud, despite the heavy caution in Emma Portman’s tone.

‘Ma’am, please.’ The urgency in Emma’s voice was unnerving but she forged through it.

‘Why not, Emma? Why not? There is only one man I love, only one I will ever love, and why should I not spend my life with him? I wish to marry William!’

Lady Portman dropped her head with a sigh and said barely audibly, ‘Ma’am … I don’t know what to say.’

Victoria sat tall. ‘I suspect you know all too well what to say and you are choosing not to.’

Emma lifted her head and looked her directly in the eyes. ‘Your Majesty … you cannot.’

It was as if she had been stabbed. She held back a sob. ‘Why not?’

‘He is your Prime Minister, Ma’am, and … he is considerably older than you. He is not of royal line. There are so many reasons.’

‘None of them good enough.’

‘He is so much older than you, Ma’am. What if he becomes ill? You may not have long together. Your happiness is vital to me.’

‘I will not deny myself nor Lord M happiness based on pessimistic supposition! He is a fine man and carries himself with the verve of someone much younger than his years. Age is irrelevant and I shall not have it mentioned again!’

Emma continued. ‘There are laws, Ma’am.’

‘Then we shall overrule them! I am the Queen and he the Prime Minister – if anyone can change the
constitution it is we, is it not?’

‘Not entirely, Ma’am, we live in a democracy, after all.’

‘And the people will want to see their Queen happy! I will not be happy married to a stuffed German owl! I will be happy married to Lord Melbourne! That is all there is on the matter!’ She stood, enraged and determined.

‘Ma’am, I –!’ Emma tried. But it was too late. Her Majesty had already departed, trailing rashness, confusion and grievance in her wake.

--xoOox--

Leopold and her mother did not return for dinner. They were to stay the night in Richmond. It gave Victoria much needed respite.

Melbourne also was delayed and not able to attend dinner but he sent word that he would arrive shortly afterwards, hopefully in time to take port. On sensing the Queen’s impulsive mood, nobody queried why the Prime Minister was bothering to attend at the Palace at such a late hour.

Melbourne arrived at ten o’clock. He swept past Emma and Harriet and knelt to kiss the hand of his monarch immediately. He was dressed in the black frock coat she so admired. She held his eyes as he stood and already her desire was stirred. It felt like days since she had seen him, not hours, but with what was promised for later, that was understandable.

She considered dismissing the others, she considered simply retiring early, but she was enjoying the little glances and smiles she and Lord M were giving each other. At one point she got up and retreated to the end of the room, taking a book from the shelf and pretending to read. It was not long before she sensed him pacing slowly over towards her. She did not care that all other eyes in the room studied them both. She turned her back and allowed him to come up beside her, his back also turned to the room.

‘Are we boring you, Ma’am? Would you prefer to read?’

‘Not at all, Lord M. I simply wished to stretch my legs.’

She glanced back at the others. They were staring over but soon lowered their heads when they caught her looking.

‘It was not Emma. She did not divulge our secret,’ she whispered to him.

‘It would never have been. She is a good friend, I told you.’

‘Neither was it Skerrett. Emma suspects other servants, those easily swayed by money.’

‘Leopold will have well-practised methods for extracting information.’

She sighed, staring up at him in hope. ‘Is it too early to retire? I have been most patient today, Lord Melbourne.’

‘Have you?’ He quirked an eyebrow, his meaning clear.

She let her mouth rise at the corner. ‘Well … not entirely … My Lord.’

‘I thought as much.’
‘Will you deal with that effectively, My Lord?’

‘I fully intend to.’

‘That pleases me.’

‘It shall. As it shall please me.’ He leant in closer to her. ‘When you come to me tonight … you will wear your corset.’

She turned, wide-eyed. ‘How do you mean?’

‘You usually come to me in your nightgown. Wear your stockings and your corset underneath it.’

‘With my chemise under that?’

‘No, just your corset.’

‘Next to my bare skin?’

‘Yes, exactly.’

‘But …’

‘Are you questioning me?’

She found her breath quickening at his sudden dominance and shook her head rapidly. ‘No, My Lord, not at all.’

‘Good.’ He stood tall and looked down at her, his height seemingly greater than ever. ‘Now … I shall retire. Until later.’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

And with that he inclined his head and took her hand, brushing his lips almost idly over them before quickly departing. He may as well have touched her there and then; her desire was so intense it threatened to upend her.

Victoria turned blearily to the rest of the room and walked as steadily as she could back to her companions.

‘Has Lord Melbourne retired?’ queried Emma.

‘Yes,’ she stuttered, still struggling to draw breath.

‘Are you feeling unwell, Your Majesty?’ asked Harriet.

‘No, not at all.’

‘Come and join us for a final hand of whist.’

She was aware of Melbourne’s demands, but she would maintain a dignified departure. She sat again and let them deal her a hand, although her mind was as far from a game of cards as it could be. She lost badly.

At half past eleven she glanced at the clock. ‘It has grown late. I should retire.’

She stood quickly and the ladies stood with her.
'Good evening, ladies.'

They curtsied and she turned to leave. With great restraint, the Queen managed not to run until she was in the corridor.

--xoOox--

The Queen hurried back to her chambers and sat while her Lady’s Maid entered. As much as she took assurance from Emma’s assertion, she would have to have the same conversation again.

‘Skerrett?’

‘Yes, Your Majesty?’

She took a deep breath. ‘I fear the whole court knows about Lord Melbourne and me.’

‘Oh, I am sure not, Ma’am.’

‘My uncle Leopold knows.’

Skerrett paused in brushing her hair and Victoria felt a quiver take her. ‘Oh, Ma’am, I …’

She turned to her, wanting to get it over with quickly. ‘Skerrett, I have never doubted you. You have been a true friend to me, but …’

Her dresser’s eyes were wide with horror. ‘Ma’am … please, Ma’am …’

‘I wish to hear it from you. I would understand if he pressured you into saying something, but … have you ever divulged anything of my liaison with Lord Melbourne to my uncle Leopold?’

Skerrett fell swiftly to the floor and began to sob, her distress uncontainable. ‘Ma’am, no! Not once! I have only ever been your true and honest servant. Please, please don’t doubt me. I love this position more than life itself. I would never do anything to put it in danger. And I love you, Ma’am. You have trusted me and you can, you can. Not once have I ever said anything. Oh, but he … he …’

‘What? What Skerrett?’ She reached down and tried to pick her up from the floor but Skerrett remained in her position slumped and weeping.

‘His Majesty did try to get information from me. He was most insistent in his attempts to make me speak.’

‘He is like that, I fear, and for that I am sorry.’ Skerrett was beside herself. A terrible thought suddenly occurred to the Queen. ‘Did he hurt you?’

‘No, Ma’am, not like that, but he tried to get me to …’

‘Do things?’

She glanced up at last, her face red with tears and shame. ‘Yes, Ma’am. To win my trust, I suppose, to catch me off guard, to pretend that I were his favourite so that I would tell him things. He flattered me and promised me trinkets and the like, and he tried to …’ Skerrett closed her eyes against the memory.

‘Did he try to seduce you?’

Her maid hesitated.
'You must tell me, Skerrett. I only wish to help you.'

She looked up at last and said, 'Yes, Ma’am.'

Fury raged through the Queen. How dare this man damage the lives of so many dear to her! 'The devil take him! I am most distressed to hear this, Skerrett! Oh, you should have told me of this earlier.'

'I didn’t want to make your situation worse, Ma’am.'

Gently, Victoria guided her at last to her feet and pulled over a stool for her to sit on. She stroked her maid’s hair from her face where it had come untucked.

'But he did not succeed? He did not manage to seduce you?'

'Oh no, Ma’am. I quickly put him right.'

'And he did not … force himself? Do not tell me he did that?’ Anger still pounded through her veins.

At this, Skerrett at last managed a slight smile. ‘No, Ma’am. He may be an oily fish, but he ain’t no shark. Ain’t got the speed nor strength for that. I can spot ‘em a mile off.’

Victoria smiled and squeezed her maid’s hand. ‘I am sorry I questioned you. I did not ever really doubt, but I needed to ask. In a way it has only made me more determined to keep my love for Lord Melbourne stronger than ever.’

Skerrett stood up with a sigh and started to brush her hair again. ‘You’ve got a good ‘un there, Ma’am, and no mistake. You keep hold of him as long as you can. You pay no heed to that Leopold bloke.’

Victoria sniffed out a laugh but glanced over at her clothes which Skerrett had laid aside.

‘Lord Melbourne is staying the night in the Baron’s Room.’

‘Yes, Ma’am,’ Skerrett smiled back at her. ‘Shall I get the usual coat and bonnet, Ma’am?’

‘And … my corset and stockings.’

‘Ma’am?’

‘I shall wear my corset tonight.’

Skerrett blushed a little but that was all. ‘Very well, Ma’am.’ She moved to retrieve Victoria’s chemise and corset which were laying on the divan.

‘No, just the corset.’

‘No chemise, Ma’am?’

She shook her head.

‘Oh, but it’ll rub, Ma’am.’

Victoria shrugged. ‘That’s what I thought, but … he was insistent.’

Skerrett frowned a little. ‘Is he a most insistent gentleman, Lord Melbourne?’
‘He can be.’ She hesitated and gave the slightest smirk. ‘When I want him to be.’ Their eyes met in the mirror and they shared a smile.

Victoria stood up and, with barely a thought, removed her nightgown. Skerrett placed her corset around her and began to lace it up. ‘I won’t lace it as tight as usual, Ma’am.’

‘Very well.’

Carefully, Skerrett laced the Queen back into the corset. Victoria looked at herself, the way the device pushed her breasts up, the way her waist was pulled in. She had always resented wearing the infernal thing, but on this occasion she admired the curves and undulations which resulted. She placed her hands around her belly and enjoyed the tautness she felt there. She imagined his hands around her.

‘Do you think he will like what he sees?’

‘Of course he will, Ma’am. He wouldn’t have asked for it otherwise.’

‘And my stockings. He asked for those too.’

Skerrett let out a little giggle.

‘What?’ Victoria asked with a smile.

‘He’s an interesting one and no mistake.’

‘Interesting?’

‘Got some wicked ideas, that Lord M of yours.’

‘Oh, he does, but then … so do I.’

Skerrett leaned down and whispered in her ear. ‘Then you just enjoy it, Ma’am. I’ve never seen you so happy. You’re the Queen after all. If you can’t take your pleasure where you want, then who can?’

Victoria put the nightgown on over her corset and wrapped herself in the bonnet and coat again, although she wondered for a moment why she need bother. If their secret was out, why not simply live their lives as they wished? Still, she did so nonetheless and made her way as quietly as usual to the Baron’s Room.

She knocked three times. At first there was no response, and her pulse quickened in annoyance and anxiety. Perhaps he had gone to sleep? Perhaps he would not let her in.

She knocked again. At last, she heard footsteps, in no rush it seemed. The door opened a little and Melbourne appeared behind it.

‘Ma’am,’ he said, that was all.

She waited for him to open the door completely. He didn’t. It compelled her to ask, ‘May I come in, Lord Melbourne?’

He gave a little half smile, infuriating in itself, but then eventually opened the door.

She stepped inside and the door was shut behind her.
(I love your comments, btw. Just sayin'.)

I shall be posting the next chapter tomorrow so you don't have long to wait. It is written, edited and ready to go.

Gird thy loins, people, it's intense.

GIRD THY LOINS.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

In which Victoria is ecstatic.

Chapter Notes

This is an intense chapter. For some it may be too much, for others not enough. But I loved writing it and I hope it works for you. No matter what, it is a chapter of complete and utter love and devotion between these two.

(You may want to make sure you're alone and not in public.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She came in quickly and set about removing her coat and bonnet. Melbourne let her but when she started to pull up her nightgown he stepped in.

‘Wait.’

His voice held a bite of assertiveness which stopped her. She stared at him, wide-eyed.

Melbourne approached, not meeting her eyes but casting a gaze over her as she stood there. He moved behind and rested his hands on her shoulders momentarily before sliding them agonisingly slowly down her arms. Leaning in, he murmured with a low rasp against her ear so that she had to close her eyes to steady herself.

‘Do you recall what you asked of me earlier?’

‘I do, My Lord.’

‘Tell me. Tell me what you wished for.’

‘I ... wanted you, My Lord. I always want you.’

‘Specifically. What did you request specifically of me?’

‘I asked you to … to tie me, My Lord.’

‘And?’

‘To make me burn, My Lord.’

‘How?’

‘By thrashing me, Lord Melbourne.’

He was so close the heat of his body made her skin prickle. She wanted to let her head fall back
against his chest but he carefully evaded her touch.

‘Do you still wish that, Victoria?’

She bit her lip, her body hot already, her flesh crying out for him. ‘Yes.’ She nodded, desperate. ‘Yes, I do.’

And after a moment where the tension in the room seemed alight, he reached down and gathered her nightgown in his fingers, pulling it up and tugging it off.

He cast it aside. She stood, not daring to move, not wanting to move. To be in the hands of this man – it was the most freedom she could ever wish for.

‘Let me look on you. Turn around.’

She did so, slowly, and noticed his eyes casting over her body encased in the corset.

‘You look well in it.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ she said instinctively.

‘You are happy to wear it without the chemise?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

He approached and cupped a hand around her narrow waist. ‘Too tight?’

She could feel the warmth of his hand even through the material and pressed herself against it. ‘Not unduly, My Lord. Skerrett did not bind it too tightly this time.’

He cocked an eyebrow. ‘Is that so?’

Melbourne moved behind her, letting his hand trail over her waist as he did so, and took hold of the laces. He proceeded to untie them. ‘Not tight enough then?’

‘Per … perhaps not, My Lord,’ she stuttered.

‘Take hold of the bedpost,’ he said and she moved across to grip it. She curled her fingers around the smooth wood and waited. With sudden and startling assertion he pulled back on the laces. She gasped.

‘Too much?’ he asked.

‘No, My Lord.’ For once, she was enjoying the constriction, and adored knowing it was done at his hands.

He tugged again, then again, giving the slightest grunt as he pulled at the laces. Victoria felt her waist tightening, not so that she was horribly uncomfortable, but he was achieving more than Skerrett was capable of. She gripped onto the post and let him, knowing the pleasure he was deriving from it himself.

Melbourne tied off the laces at last. ‘There,’ he said, a satisfied croon to his voice. ‘That is good.’

She daren’t let go of the post, but he took hold of her hands and guided her round to look at her. Her breath came fast, not only through the tightness of the corset but the delirious excitement he evoked in her.
She held his gaze with fierce determination. ‘If anyone is to constrict me, if anyone is to bind me and mould me and shape me, let it be you and only you,’ she declared.

He stared hard into her and cupped her face, grazing his thumb over her cheek. ‘No. You are not to be moulded by anyone but yourself, Victoria. I am only here to reveal all that can be and should be. I am here to free you, not restrain you. Don’t ever let anyone do that.’

‘But for now, for tonight … Let it be you.’

‘Do you want that?’

‘You know I do, sir.’

He leaned closer again. ‘Do you permit me to do what I wish with you tonight, and trust me to know that it is what you wish also?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘And if it is too much, you remember our word?’

She glanced over at the orchids adorning the dressing table. ‘Yes, My Lord, I remember. I have never yet had cause to use it.’

‘Indeed.’

With that he crossed to a drawer. She strained to see what else was inside. Melbourne turned and approached with a rope, not rough, but rope nonetheless, narrow and pale.

‘Turn around,’ he said, his voice leaving no room for equivocation. She did so.

He took first one wrist and then the other and brought her arms behind her back. Surely and deliberately she felt the rope being coiled around her wrists. She squirmed instinctively to ascertain how tight he was binding her and got only constriction and tugging in return. Soon she could not move them at all. His breath was coming hard through his nose but he said nothing. Melbourne worked with nimble fingers and she grew aware that he had done this before. For once it evoked trust rather than envy.

The position of having her hands bound behind her made her breasts just out. The corset barely covered the nipples and her flesh sat round and full on top. She dragged in breaths, making her chest rise and fall almost obscenely. He took hold of her wrists where they were tied and guided her over to his bureau.

‘Down over it,’ he said again, more demanding than ever. It only made her belly crawl with longing; it made her legs quiver, her inner thighs dampen. She laid herself down over the bureau, enjoying the coolness of the wood against her face.

Melbourne stood a little way off to the side and she could just see him as he took off his coat then rolled up each sleeve in turn. She found the process of this divinely arousing. The sight of his fingers working on the material and the revealing of his forearms made her desire so acute she nearly sobbed.

Soon enough he was behind her.

‘I am not in the mood to go easy tonight, do you understand?’
Why did his forcefulness only make her glory in him rather than fear him? She agreed eagerly. ‘Yes, sir.’

‘Can you take it?’

‘I believe so, sir.’

‘I will not heed your pleas, nor your sobs, but I will stop immediately if I hear the word orchid. Is that clear?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘Count.’

And he brought his hand down hard on the bare flesh of her backside. It gleamed red and hot immediately and she sucked in sharply and instinctively raised herself up. He placed his hand on her back to press her back down.

‘O … one,’ she stuttered.

He bestowed another on the other side. This time she stifled her cry and said clearly, ‘Two.’

Oh, she had missed this. She had longed for it. Never did she feel so alive, never did she feel so real. His hand came down again and she counted loud and clear. Then again and again and she took them and adored the brimming, burning wonder of it. Her flesh was seared with his force. Not her uncle’s, not her Council’s nor her subjects’ nor anyone’s: she was his and he hers, and that was all she would ever want or need in life.

He spanked her hard and she knew she would soon be red and raw. The heat spread, brilliant and blistering, and as the numbers rose she wondered for a moment if she could take it. His hand continued to fall relentlessly and with each number there now also came a gasp or a suppressed sob. He carried on regardless. At one point she called out, ‘My Lord!’ at another, ‘Please!’ She was not sure herself for what she was pleading. Her eyes fell on the orchids by the window and she felt the word forming on her tongue.

But then the searing whiteness changed, shifting to a glow that seemed to enclose and enfold, an encroaching numbness which comforted. It settled into her core, warm and pulsing, reminding her of her very existence. She took the rest without hesitation.

‘Thirty-seven!’ she exclaimed, impressed that she was still clear and confident.

At that, he stepped back at last and she wondered at how his hand must be stinging. He was panting hard and she felt a strange pride that she had taxed him so and taken it all. But then, through his gasping breaths he said, ‘You are a wonder. You are my joy.’ And she did not doubt it.

She ached for him, longed for his touch, and she writhed, desperate for some relief from the heavy, wet throb between her legs. He seemed to sense this and came up behind her, running the tip of one finger lightly along her dripping sex.

She moaned aloud and turned her face into the wood to try to stifle it.

‘You like that very much, don’t you?’ A sole finger continued to stroke along her, but so gently she wondered if it was actually real.

‘Yes, My Lord,’ she said and the sobs at last came. Pain didn’t bring her tears, but his ability to turn
it so swiftly to pleasure did. He stroked so very lightly though that she would not come. She tried to push back for more touch, to urge his fingers to slip inside and fill her. She longed for all of him filling her but knew to be the most patient she had ever been; it was not yet time.

But soon enough his fingers were gone and she heard instead the rustle of clothing being removed. Gentle yet firm hands guided her up and she turned to see him now wearing only his shirt. Cupping her face gently again, he stared into her. She dampened her lips, but although he promised it he did not bend to kiss her, instead merely studied her intently, as if afraid she would vanish from him if he let go.

And then he reached in at last as if he would kiss her and she mewled in anticipation, but just as his lips hovered near hers, they curled up and he whispered instead, ‘No. Not yet. You said you missed the taste of me.’

‘Oh, I did. I do, My Lord.’

‘And therefore … kneel.’

And so, with her hands still tied behind her back, dressed in corset and stockings, Victoria gave at the knees and knelt before him. Her heels dug into the flaming heat of her rump, reminding her potently of what had just occurred.

As her hair fell loose around her Melbourne leant down and smoothed it back before twining it in his fist to hold it from her face, not tight, but enough for him to gain purchase.

She stared up at him, her mouth wet with expectation. His shirt hung too low for her to see him, but she felt a sudden hunger like no other, kneeling as she was, helpless before him yet still so able to give and take the most profound pleasure. He at last lifted his shirt to reveal himself thick and hard.

He held her hair, angling her head up a little. With the slightest enticing smile, she opened her mouth. She noted his ragged breathing, the look of utter devotion on his face, and Victoria felt empowered as never before.

Then, slowly and carefully, he pushed into her mouth and she closed her lips around him. She had forgotten the sensation, the pliancy of the flesh despite its hardness, the eagerness of it as it sat on her tongue, the musky aroma. She kept her eyes turned up to him. He looked down, his head tilted a little to study her. She sucked in and he gasped. She pressed the pad of her tongue onto him and he shuddered.

How could life ever be more visceral and vivid? She knelt, apparently subservient before him, but he was entirely hers. And she would not find this with another, surely?

She felt the slightest tugging on her hair, the merest insistence, and let herself be guided by him, drawing back a little and dragging her lips along him as she went.

He released the longest sigh and she could not help but grin.

He said nothing now but worked her along him, as little as she needed it, so intuitive was their connection. She momentarily missed not being able to take hold of him and struggled against her bonds, but this merely caused her lust to make her go at him more fervently. He fed himself in and out of her mouth, letting her tongue roll on him, letting her cheeks tug him, her lips caress him, and he was lost in her, she knew it.

Melbourne began to move faster, pushing himself through her lips, sinking deep into her before emerging again, glistening wet. He was breathing hard and every so often could not prevent a moan
rising unbidden from his throat. He brought his other hand to her head and, although his fingers did not impose, there was a dominance which settled against her own, a harmony of erotic power which thrilled her.

And then, after denying himself for long enough, he pushed in hard, letting the head sit on her tongue, and stillled. She pulled her cheeks in around him and caught his release, heard his shuddering gasp and took it. He didn’t move for a time and she held his seed in her mouth – a waste, she allowed herself to think momentarily. She glanced up. His head was down and he was staring at her. Stroking her face again, he pulled slowly out and she released him with a gentle pop. Then, maintaining the look between them, she swallowed, aware he’d note the lurch of her neck. He let his head hang back and his mouth slant into a lazy smile of happiness.

She was glad. He deserved his happiness. He deserved it all.

When he recovered awareness he reached down and raised her to her feet, guiding her over to the bed. Victoria grew suddenly aware of the constriction on her arms. She tried to move them but was unable and a shadow of discomfort must have passed across her face for he asked, ‘Does it hurt you?’

‘A little, yes.’

‘Use it a while longer. Use it, my darling.’ And he directed her to sit on the edge of the bed with her legs bent up, revealing her to him. Without hesitation, he knelt before her, opened her with searching fingers, and brought his mouth to her sex.

Victoria threw her head back and nearly screamed; never had there been such intense joy. His tongue laved long and hard, ending with a trill over the tight bud so in need of him.

She leant back and braced herself on her clasped fists, and – as he had said – she used the pain, she used it to guide her pleasure. His hands occasionally grazed the red hot skin of her backside, but this pain also, combined with her bound arms, only morphed into pure sensation.

He pressed two, perhaps three fingers deep up inside her and she ground onto them, clamping them into her so hard he smiled in wonder before reapplying himself to sucking and licking and dragging wet, ready ecstasy from her.

As much as she wanted to hold back, as much as she wanted this to last and last, it could not, for she was so primed, so needy, that it was coiled and ready to crash.

With his fingers stroking and plying, with his tongue and lips sucking it out of her, her pleasure wall broke and she came hard. She came so hard her back buckled and her toes curled. Victoria forgot who may be listening, forgot she was Queen. Her head fell back, her hair poured down in thick brown waves and she cried it out, shrill and high and rapturous.

He did not rest until he was certain she was exhausted from pleasure and her cries turned to whimpers, her gasps to shallow pants.

Then, saying nothing, his mouth damp from his attentions, he pushed himself up and untied her wrists quickly. He drew her arms round tenderly, rubbing life back into them, soothing and caressing her. She grimaced as pins and needles darted to her fingers, but soon feeling returned to normal and she managed a bleary smile. Still not speaking, he undid her corset and removed it and rolled off her stockings.

Then, guiding her back and under the covers, William pulled them over her, curled his limbs around
hers, and held her as she fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

And it's not over yet.

Please don't be shy. I'm desperate to know what you thought, good or bad.

I love these two so very much. x
Victoria was awoken reluctantly early the next morning. But the nature of the awakening was not something she disputed. A warm hand rested on her hip, a soft murmur drifted into her ear.

‘Victoria … Victoria …’

She resisted.

‘Ma’am … you need to wake up.’

She pressed herself against the length of man behind her. ‘”Ma’am”? Is it back to that, Lord M?’

‘You weren’t responding to the other,’ he chided, almost a growl, and proceeded to kiss and nibble along her ear.

She laughed and reached up a hand to hold him to her. As much as he was trying to rouse her, his body told another story. She pushed back against his erection and caused a low rumble within him which made her own desire leap. Taking hold of his hand, she guided it between her legs. He obliged. She came in sweet silence before the clock chimed seven.

‘You really must return to your chambers, Ma’am.’ But still he lay against her, still he was as hard as anything.

‘I miss you inside me,’ she protested. ‘I miss it so much. I am empty without you.’

‘There is not much longer to wait,’ he reassured, and she turned over for a kiss.

‘Ow!’ Victoria’s eyes widened in shock as the sheets rubbed cruelly on her tormented backside. *It stung still!*

He merely grinned down at her; she frowned and rewarded him with a smack on his arm. ‘You are not to laugh at my discomfort, Lord Melbourne!’

‘I thought you liked the reminder of me?’ he teased.

How could she not? With a grin, she pulled him down for another kiss which he gave her deep and hard. His cock rubbed against her, seeking her out. How easy it would be to take him, to let him slide into her. *How she longed for it!* It ached, it physically pained her not to have him.

Victoria wriggled into place under him and spread her legs wide. Drawing her hands seductively down to rest on his backside she lifted her leg to move him directly up against her.

‘Come inside me,’ she whispered. ‘Come into me,’ she implored. ‘I want it, I want you, I want your cock inside me, please, *please*, come inside me.’

He was back to kissing her, his own moans of arousal uncontained. His strength and lust overwhelmed her and she rejoiced in it. The head of his cock nudged at her and she welcomed him. *Oh, nearly, nearly.* He pressed in, just a little, barely, and she tried to push down to draw more of him in deeper.
Melbourne moaned as he was pulled into her body, unable to stop, it seemed, which caused her a heady rush of intoxicating sexual energy.

‘Yes, yes, yes, my darling, I love that, more, more, oh please fuck me, my darling, my love.’

Her words focused his sexual potency and his muscles hardened as he prepared to thrust fully. *Oh God, how she would take him!* But instead, he tensed suddenly to the point of agony. He pulled out and rolled onto his back with a thwarted growl of desolation.

‘We must stop this madness! I will not risk getting a child on you! Even being inside you without releasing is danger enough!’

Victoria was bereft. She turned to rest on him and ran her fingers over his chest. ‘But … can you imagine it? What if … what if you were to get a child on me? *Our* child? Can you not picture it? Our own little girl or boy? It would be such a glorious little thing and we would love it with all we are.’

He turned away from her and did not answer.

‘William?’

Still no response. ‘William?’ She tried again, anxious.

Victoria leaned over and saw: he was crying. ‘Oh, my darling, I have upset you. Forgive me.’

William turned back to her and his face contained such immeasurable sadness it made tears come to her eyes too.

‘You asked me if I could imagine it,’ he said. ‘Yes, I can imagine it all too well. I long for it, I yearn for it, but … it can never be. Do you understand that? It is impossible, and thinking about it is too much pain. I have told you, Victoria … I cannot stand anymore pain.’

She reached up to cup his face, trying to stroke away his sorrow. ‘And I wish to take away your pain, my love, you know that. Oh, let us do it, let us marry and have babies, as many as you wish. I will give you more babies than you will know what to do with!’

He tried to smile but she could tell it was too much.

‘That cannot be.’

Victoria pushed herself upright and almost thumped him in frustration and fury. ‘Why not? Oh, why not?’

‘A queen does not marry a man decades older than her, one who is not of royal blood, one who has a disreputable past and a considerably questionable present.’

‘A questionable present? You are the Prime Minister!’

‘Well, exactly, there is that too. You would hardly be showing political impartiality if you married me!’

‘You could resign from the party. You would hardly be expected to remain as Prime Minister if you became my consort.’

He propped himself up on his elbows and said with painful sincerity, ‘Victoria … it is an impossible notion. And … it must be said … you are practically married already to this cousin of yours. Leopold has all but marched you down the aisle.’ The bitterness in his voice was palpable.
‘I refuse to be marched! The only man I wish to have waiting for me at the altar of the Chapel Royal is you!’

He managed a sad smile at last and took hold of her hand, bringing it to his lips and kissing the palm. ‘Come, my dear, we manage as we are, most ably, let us not spoil things. Here you are in my bed and we shall continue.’

‘For always?’

He hesitated, stroking a hair from her face. ‘For now.’

‘No, my darling, for always,’ She reached up to kiss him and curled her fingers around his still hard cock. ‘For always.’

Melbourne groaned and his eyes fluttered closed.

Victoria worked on him, using the wetness leaking from him in his lust. She held herself poised over his lips, kissing lightly, whispering her adoration, and working pleasure from him as only she could.

‘My darling, I love you, I love you … for always, for always.’ He tried to take more of her kisses but she eluded him, teasing him, plying his cock in her fist perfectly so that he could do nothing but allow it. ‘Say it … for always … have me for always … always …’

And just before he came she took the promise whispered against her lips: ‘For always.’

And he released helplessly into her hand, his seed bursting plenteously onto her fingers as he moaned it out.

Melbourne lay back, eyes closed. ‘What you do to me …’

She at last pushed herself up and winced as she sat on the side of the bed. ‘What you do to me, Lord M! I do not know how I shall even sit to breakfast!’

He reached over with a handkerchief which she took before standing. As she did he bestowed a resounding smack across her tender buttocks.

‘Ow!’ she turned with a shocked yelp of admonition. ‘That smarts!’

He merely chuckled. ‘Good. You are most headstrong and wilful. You will remember what happens when you exhibit such obduracy.’

‘Oh,’ she crawled up on the bed again and teased him with her dewy mouth. ‘I do remember, sir. I will be good.’

‘You are good. You demonstrated that just now.’ His smile of admiration turned to one of expectation. ‘I find I like it when you assume control … on occasion.’

She was surprised but, equally, intrigued. ‘Do you?’

He held her gaze. ‘Yes.’

Victoria smirked seductively and murmured, ‘I shall remember that too, My Lord.’

His lips twitched with glee and he had to work to suppress his grin. ‘I am pleased to hear it.’

She let her finger trail a path around his chest. ‘Five days until you can take me again,’ she mused.
'Or you can take me,' he crooned, his eyebrow quirked.

'Can I wait, I wonder?'

'You shall have to. Now …’ Suddenly, he took hold of her and moved her from the bed before getting up himself and throwing his robe upon him. ‘Off with you to breakfast or your uncle will ask too many questions.’

'Let him ask! I find my uncle’s influence to be much diminished. I shall not heed a word he says and shall please myself!’

'Remember what I said about obduracy,’ he warned before winking at her and disappearing into his dressing room.

Victoria brought a hand to her mouth and bit at her nails distractedly as her mouth curled into a smile of undiluted happiness. If she couldn’t take him inside her, a wink would suffice quite well.

--xoOox--

The Queen swept into breakfast late, having kept everyone waiting. They stood as one. The glare from their eyes was accompanied by the growl of their stomachs.

'Good morning, everyone, I trust you slept well,’ she beamed, ignoring their displeasure.

'You are late, Drina,’ said her mother tersely.

'I apologise, but you should not wait for me to begin, you know.’

'You know full well that court protocol dictates that we do. You were expected earlier.’

'A quiet night, Your Majesty?’ inquired her uncle, his eyes fixed on her.

'Quiet enough … when I needed it to be,’ she replied, deliberately not looking at him.

She sat, forgetting herself. She sucked in sharply as she did so, the sudden pang to her backside a forceful reminder of the previous night’s activities.

Her uncle’s gaze was immediately upon her. ‘Something troubling you, Victoria?’

She shifted gently and spread her napkin. ‘No, not at all, just a little adjustment, that is all.’

‘And where is Lord Melbourne this morning?’ Leopold inquired.

'Oh, not here?’ she glanced around, making a show of looking for him before feigning surprise and disinterest. 'I do not know. Perhaps he has chosen to eat in his chambers.’

They ate their grapefruit in a silence interrupted only by the occasional interjection of ‘a little tart’ or ‘too sour for me.’

A few moments into the next course the Prime Minister was announced. Victoria could not help but smile to herself at the relaxed ease with which he strode in, his effortless handsomeness radiating from him.

'Ah, Lord Melbourne, we were just discussing you,’ contributed her uncle.

'Were you indeed, Your Majesty? Should I be alarmed?’
Leopold laughed dryly. ‘I suppose that depends on what makes you late.’

‘I was engaged in other matters.’ He took a sip of coffee before placing the cup carefully back on the saucer. ‘Something came up.’

Victoria took a large gulp of tea to stifle her laughter and succeeded only in coughing helplessly when it went down the wrong way.

‘Drina! Control yourself!’ scolded her mother.

‘I … am … trying!’ she spluttered out.

She tried not to notice the stares of cold indignation around the table and applied herself to finishing her kedgeree. Melbourne kept his head down and managed to converse most normally with Harriet and even Leopold. *He was far too relaxed and making it all seem altogether too easy!* She felt some retribution was in order and enjoyed the new notion tingling in her mind and body.

When breakfast was ended, Victoria stood quickly and asked, ‘Lord Melbourne, has the box arrived yet?’

‘I believe so, Ma’am,’ he replied, standing with her along with the rest of those at the table.

‘In that case, let us see to the dispatches.’

She left immediately for her chambers with her Prime Minister close behind. As she reached the door she turned, about to bestow him with a broad smile and perhaps more, but saw immediately that Harriet and Emma were close behind.

‘What are you two doing here?’ she asked curtly.

‘We have received instruction that you might need some company, Ma’am.’

She paced furiously up to them. ‘Well, I do not. I am sure you have much with which to occupy yourselves. Do not let me keep you.’

‘Ma’am … your uncle …’ Emma tried, her voice pointed with meaning.

‘Emma,’ the Queen insisted, taking her aside and whispering, ‘I know fell well what he wishes, but I, as your sovereign, instruct you to desist and leave us. Lord Melbourne and I have important work to do. And, as I insisted upon from the first minute of my reign … I will meet with my ministers alone.’

Emma looked from her Queen to the Prime Minister. ‘I simply do not wish to cause more trouble for you two.’

Victoria took hold of her lady’s hands and squeezed them. ‘Dearest Emma, I shall not be dictated to by my uncle. William and I are quite aware of the situation but are managing quite well.’

‘The court has been most tolerant of you and will continue to be, but Leopold is forcing their eyes to turn and look and take note. If he cannot influence you, Your Majesty, then …’ Emma looked up at Melbourne. ‘… He will make life very difficult for you, William, if not impossible.’

Lady Portman’s eyes were reddening with anxiety. Victoria swallowed hard.

‘Please, Emma, let us handle things.’
‘But there are some things even you cannot prevent, Ma’am. Your behaviour at breakfast, both of you, was … forgive me, Ma’am … rash. I would advise a less blatant approach.’

‘I sat awkwardly, that is all.’

Emma pursed her lips to indicate she believed not a word. Melbourne cleared his throat and turned to study a vase.

Lady Portman stepped away from her Majesty and instead approached her old friend. ‘William … I have told you before … be careful. You must not forget yourself.’

Melbourne looked her square in the eyes. ‘Forget myself? Do you know, Emma, I do believe I know myself properly now for the first time in my entire life. Now, if you’ll excuse me, like Her Majesty says … we have work to do.’

And with that he held his hand out to Victoria with that same expression he used when helping her from carriages. It made the heat inside spread gloriously through her. She smiled at him, a dark smile of complicity and purpose, and placed her small hand in his long fingers before letting him walk her into her study. They shut the door promptly behind them.

Once inside she immediately curled her arms about him and searched his face. ‘Do you?’ she asked.

‘What?’

‘Know yourself properly for the first time in your life?’

‘Yes … I have told you as much before.’

‘William … I will stay strong but … what Emma says is true. I do not want to cause you more difficulty. But you have withstood scandal before. What can Leopold do to you?’

He smirked and dropped his head. ‘All manner of things.’

‘Politically?’

‘Yes.’

‘But … that must not be.’

‘My dear, I know my days as a statesman are finite. I’ve had a good run of it. And … politics no longer has the lure it used to. Perhaps it is time for a younger man to take the reins. Running the country can be … tedious, you know.’

She smirked a little but could not reflect his humour. ‘You would do that? Resign? But then what reason could we contrive for spending so much time together?’

He averted his eyes and could not answer. Her heart juddered. ‘Oh, William! I do not see how you cannot continue as Prime Minister!’

‘Victoria … my government is in a tenuous enough position as it is. I fear it will not endure long, with or without Leopold’s additional intervention.’

‘Then it goes back to what we said before … marry me! Oh, my darling, marry me!’

He took hold of her by the arms and held her back. ‘Victoria, stop this, I will not go through all this again.’ He stepped back from her and picked up the red box which he placed upon the bureau.
Now, for the time being at least, I remain your Prime Minister … and we have work to attend to.’

The sternness of his voice pulled her back. She drew in a deep breath. ‘Yes, you are right. One must never neglect duty. You have taught me that … amongst other things.’ She glanced at him. He quirked an eyebrow but resisted her lure of further flirtation. Victoria cleared her throat, sat down to the dispatches and settled to work.

--xoOox--

She worked as efficiently and seriously as always. Her mind could always focus on duty when required. At those times, it was as if Melbourne and she knew each other solely as monarch and head of government, not as two lovers who were each other’s very oxygen.

After completing the state duties, Melbourne concentrated on packing away the box. ‘I’m afraid I must return to Westminster, Ma’am.’

Victoria was disappointed but had predicted it. His recent absence from the House would have been noted and she had anticipated his need to be there. ‘When can you return?’

‘Not today, nor tomorrow, I fear, nor possibly the next day.’

She opened her mouth to complain but thought better of it. ‘Very well, I understand. In any case, then we will be … all the more closer to a proper reuniting.’

He could not hide the curl at the corner of his mouth as he inclined his head to her. ‘Indeed. I know you will be most patient.’

‘I will,’ she said, her head high, keeping the bureau between the two of them to prove her determination.

‘Good … Now … I must bid you farewell, Ma’am.’

She stood and resisted rushing to him. She would be strong and dignified. ‘Yes, Lord M. I shall see you when your business allows it.’

‘Yes, Ma’am. I hope you pass the time productively and happily.’

‘I will try.’

‘Good day, Ma’am.’ He bowed to take his leave and began to walk away.

‘Good bye, Lord M,’ she said after him.

He nearly reached the door.

But then, just as he was about to grasp the handle, Melbourne stopped himself and looked back over his shoulder at her. She studied him in bewilderment for the brief moment he stood there.

Then he was almost running to her.

His long strides carried him back to her in only a second or two. He took her in his arms, one hand clasping her head to him, the other pulling her by the waist up against him, and plunged his mouth to hers.

He kissed her so hard she was robbed of breath and thought. If he wasn’t holding her so tight she would have fallen to her knees.
He held her still as he kissed over her face, desperate, hot kisses, as if trying to absorb her into him.

She gasped out with the sudden, violent wonder of it. ‘Oh, my darling, my love!’

He was back to her mouth, opening it so hard it would later hurt. She gave him her tongue and her wet, heated self.

Again he broke away only to kiss down her neck. Victoria let her head fall back and bared it for him. ‘Say you won’t stop, ever, tell me you won’t stop.’

‘I won’t. I can’t,’ he slurred, his lips and teeth grazing her skin. ‘I can’t, I can’t.’

‘Tell me we’ll find a way to carry on, to carry on forever.’

‘We’ll find a way, we will, we’ll carry on.’

And with a final kiss on her bruised mouth and a searing look into her eyes, Melbourne at last turned and left her.

--xoOox--

The sudden onslaught of passion robbed her of sense for a time, and Victoria stood quite still while minutes ticked away.

She rubbed a finger distractedly over her lips – they were swollen from his kiss. As much as she would miss him horrendously in the next few days, she was comforted by the fact that the next time she saw him, she may well be able to have him inside her properly again. She drew her hands down her waist, remembering how he had held her to him, then ran them over her belly, pressing down, letting the fingertips rub onto that ever ready nub he enthralled so easily. Her head fell back and she groaned out her need.

There would never be another. There could not be!

She needed air. Without his presence, her thwarted desire threatened to stifle her. It was a fine enough day; she would ride out.

Quickly pacing to the door, she threw it open and proceeded down the corridor in search of her ladies.

She turned a corner and met Uncle Leopold coming the other way.

‘Ah, Victoria!’ He beamed, arms outstretched. ‘I was just coming to see you! I have wonderful news!’

She stopped with a barely disguised huff and waited for him to impart it.

He stepped right up to her and ensured she was looking straight at him before announcing with scheming glee:

‘We can set everything in motion for your marriage sooner than even I had hoped. Your cousin Albert arrives in a week’s time!’

Chapter End Notes
Oh.

Dear.

Thoughts, as always, gratefully received. And don't forget to join our Facebook group 'For the love of Vicbourne' if you crave more VLcbourne love and discussion. x
Melbourne returned to the House for a debate. He was briefly concerned that he would not be able to focus on the matter at hand, but the euphoric feelings he had experienced over the last few days had quite the opposite effect. He held the Chamber in the palm of his hand and members on both sides of the House waved their order papers with gleeful commendation.

He departed ebulliently: Parliament was pleased with him; he adored a woman; she adored him back; and into her he could pour his disappointments and failures and she would absorb and absolve them.

He considered skipping from the Chamber, but it might not seem dignified for a man of his authority (especially to Tory eyes) and, in any case, he had to save his knees; Victoria, after all, put them under considerable strain. Still, he walked with his head high and a distinct smoothness to his gait.

‘Melbourne!’

Wellington called after him as they exited. Melbourne turned back and waited. The Duke held out his hand. ‘It is not often I choose to congratulate a Whig, but you dealt with that most commendably. I think on this occasion I shall encourage my party’s support for you in the vote.’

Melbourne smiled back. ‘Then I thank you, sir. It did seem to go well, which is something of a relief given the current political climate.’

They continued down the corridor.

‘Have you been to the Palace today?’ asked Wellington.

‘Indeed, in fact I stayed there last night.’

He didn’t turn to see the rise of Wellington’s eyebrows.

‘And how is Her Majesty?’

‘Very well indeed. Most radiant in fact.’

Wellington glanced wryly at him before saying. ‘As indeed are you, Melbourne. One does speculate on the cause of your radiance. In fact, many speculate … or indeed purport to know.’

He stopped and turned to the Duke, furrowing his brows a little to elicit his meaning. Wellington stepped in closer and lowered his voice. ‘We are men of the world, Melbourne, I am not one to judge your private life, but … you do know that your little dalliance is barely a court secret any longer, don’t you?’

Melbourne shifted uneasily but masked it as dignified ignorance. ‘I don’t know what you mean.’

‘Oh, I think you do. You are the envy of all, Melbourne, I must say. A hardened old political warhorse like you … and a radiantly beautiful young queen. Still, you could always charm the birds off the trees. You certainly charmed those gnarly old crows down from their backbench perches today.’

Melbourne clasped his hands tight behind him; they had grown clammy with sweat. ‘My attentions
to the Queen are strictly in her best interests, Wellington.’

Wellington narrowed his eyes. ‘And what are those attentions exactly? Your tendencies are widely known, Melbourne, you know that. One can only imagine the exact manner of your instruction of her Majesty.’

The muscle in his jaw clenched. ‘Like I said. I wish only the best for the Queen.’

‘I’m not sure the King of the Belgians agrees with that.’

‘His opinion is of no import to me.’

‘It will be when he brings his nephew along to wed her and bed her. And then what? When the Coburg prince finds his virgin bride has already been deflowered by her Prime Minister? The British establishment may be good at containing its scandals … I’m not sure the German court will be quite so restrained, especially if they feel slighted.’

Melbourne had stood quite implacably throughout, but now, with the slightest curl of his lips and narrowing of his eyes he backed away from Wellington. ‘I think I shall bid you good day now, sir.’

‘Be careful, Melbourne, don’t let your premiership end badly,’ called Wellington as he left. ‘You deserve better.’

--xoOox--

Melbourne paced back to his rooms, his joyous air when leaving the Chamber replaced with one altogether more disconsolate. Now Wellington! It seemed indeed their secret was out, not that he had doubted that. He had long known that the British establishment took pride in harbouring intrigue and containing scandal rather than eliminating it, especially with regard to matters of the monarchy. Even so … he was playing with fire, and after the exhaustion of Caro and the recent inconvenience of Caroline Norton, he had thought he would avoid it.

But he had not factored into that the next sovereign of England being the woman to bring meaning back to his life.

The concept of selfishness had long haunted him – he had often been told he had either too much of it or not enough. He told himself that his behaviour towards Victoria was for her entirely, and he maintained that. He saw her growing independence, her strength of character and determination, and hoped that he had played no small part in crafting that.

But it wasn’t all about her, he had to admit. It all felt so terribly good. He had not felt good like it for as long as he could remember. Had he not suffered enough in his life not to merit one little nugget of goodness at last? The trouble was … the little nugget wore a crown and had the eyes of the world upon her.

And, truth be told, he seemed to have lost the ability to think beyond the here and now. Leopold had always been a nuisance, but he was fast becoming a hindrance and could soon be something far worse.

Melbourne sighed and poured himself a brandy before sitting at his bureau. He would have to remain at Westminster for several days: bills, motions, debates … it was becoming so very tiresome, but as long as he was in office, he would do his duty as he instructed Victoria to do hers.

There was knock at the door and a clerk entered. ‘Prime Minister, a letter from the Palace.’
He glanced up. He had only left five hours ago. ‘Already?’

‘Sir.’ The clerk presented the letter and backed out.

Melbourne sighed but as he took it in his hands and noted her sweet, looping writing, his mouth rose unbidden into a smile of reminiscence. He brought the letter to his nose and inhaled, trying to capture any of her he could before opening it.

His eyes glanced over it quickly – the writing was not as neat as usual, as if it had flowed from her hand in an erratic splurge of emotion. He read.

My darling,

Oh, I shall go mad, surely I shall! There is disaster! There is calamity! My uncle informs me that Albert is to arrive next week – next week! How can I survive this? And you not here! I cannot endure this without you. How can I cope without your counsel and advice and touch and love? How?

My darling, if you cannot come to me, then send word and advice. Your words are such a comfort. I do not know what to do with myself and I feel the eyes of everyone scrutinising my every move. I wish I could be invisible, I wish I could shut myself away, or better yet, I wish I could pack myself into a parcel and send it to you!

Oh, my love, I await your reply eagerly.

Yours, and only yours, Victoria.

Melbourne gave the softest sigh and closed his eyes. Perhaps when he opened them again the letter and its announcement would have gone.

He knew her German cousin would be arriving soon, but now he was to be there in only a few days. And then what? A feeling of such heaviness sank deep within him that he pushed the brandy glass away as the smell of it made him suddenly nauseous.

He read the letter again. Despite the news, her despairing frivolity was endearing and he ran his fingers over her signature – ‘only yours’. But he could not leave Parliament now. A letter would have to suffice. He reached for pen and paper.

He wanted to write:

My darling, do not fear. I shall take you away from it all. No more crown, no more Parliament. I shall arrive at midnight tonight in a carriage and together we will elope. We will travel to Southampton and thence to America where we will live an anonymous life as husband and wife and have many babies and I will adore you and you me until the day we die. Yours, and only yours, William.

But instead he wrote:

Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty and is sorry to read of the apparent distress your Majesty finds herself in. The arrival of His Serene Highness is long expected and something to which your Majesty must grow accustomed. Indeed, it may well prove a happy occasion; it is always nice when cousins visit as one can usually laugh about various other cousins.

Lord Melbourne recommends long walks and Mozart. He would advise Rondo Alla Turca to purge the high tempers, followed by Eine Kleine Nachtmusik to calm oneself afterwards.
In addition, Lord Melbourne anticipates completing Parliamentary business in four days’ time at which point he looks forward gladly to returning to the palace and – if your Majesty is so disposed – staying there for one or two nights and providing your Majesty with much meaningful counsel.

Your devoted servant, Melbourne

The reply was awaiting him first thing in the morning.

Four days! I am not sure I can endure this! Then it will be only a few days until he arrives. I feel quite sick at the prospect. And you know for what I long. I know that we are nearly there, my love, but my need and longing is only heightened by this horrible news of my cousin. I miss you inside me. I have waited and waited. I ache. I am empty. I will endure it, but know that every minute I am away from you is beset with agony.

Your love, Victoria

He wrote back.

Lord Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty and is pleased to hear that your Majesty will endure the travails which beset you. He hopes this is due in no small part to his careful instruction in the art of patience and anticipation. He would advise distraction and things which will ensure the time passes swiftly.

Three days now.

Your devoted servant, Melbourne

A letter arrived that afternoon.

Oh how I wish you would stop presenting your humble duty and instead present your body naked in my bed!

I find you most frustrating at times!

But I am doing my best to distract myself and quell my desires and tempers.

I have taken many rides out, usually at a canter if not a gallop. If I cannot yet have you between my legs then my horse will have to suffice.

With most ardent and passionate desire,

Victoria

Even the Second Viscount Melbourne – accustomed as he was to licentious conversation and scandal – raised an eyebrow on reading Her Majesty’s latest missive. But his surprise lasted only a brief second to be replaced quickly by a quirk of the lip and a stiffening of the groin. When his clerk brought him afternoon tea he instructed the door to be locked saying that he must not be disturbed from the tortuous bill he was drafting. He did eventually attend to the lengthy and hard matter of the bill, but only after attending to the lengthy and hard matter in his breeches.

--xoOox--

Business was Melbourne’s distraction. Every minute of his days was occupied and therefore they passed relatively swiftly. He allowed himself a modicum of pride; he was handling matters with efficiency and confidence. His colleagues commended him, even members of the Opposition would
now look at him and nod rather than turn away and mutter.

The letters between monarch and Prime Minister continued, but he noted with relief that her petulance (not something he had associated with her for some time) had been subdued. She knew, like him, that their wait was nearly over.

Governing was going well, he and Victoria adored each other, and he would be able to show her that adoration in a day … he was in many ways the happiest he had ever been.

But the spectre loomed, the spectre that was arriving from Coburg. And as hard as he tried to ignore it, Melbourne hated the man with as much passion as he adored Victoria. Jealousy was a futile emotion, he had long told himself that, and yet it was one which defined his life. He had thought he had conditioned himself against it – he had had enough practice, after all – but, no. He had not even met the man and he despised him already. And as skilled as he was at doing so, it was always such an effort to pretend otherwise. The thought of it alone exhausted him.

But time passed, and so, that Saturday morning, he was at last able to pack his portmanteau and leave the Palace of Westminster. He went briefly to Dover House to collect some necessaries, but was soon on his way to Buckingham House. His horse seemed too slow. If he could have run he would have, but even he thought it unwise to gift the people of London with the spectacle of their Prime Minister, frock coat billowing, sprinting up the Mall.

He arrived at half past ten and inquired after the Queen, expecting to be taken to her immediately.

‘Her Majesty has gone for a ride,’ he was told.

‘Ah.’ He hoped his disappointment was not apparent in his face. He had indeed told her he would hope to be there in the afternoon, but his anticipation was so great that he had not been able to delay.

‘Do you know when she is expected to return?’

‘Two hours or so, I believe, Lord Melbourne,’ Penge added.

‘I see.’

‘Perhaps you would prefer to return to the House, My Lord?’ added the butler.

‘No … I think I will wait.’ He looked across at the man. He was staring at him with an intense gaze of curiosity, there was no doubt, but averted his eyes when scrutinised.

‘Very well. Should you require any refreshment, My Lord? Tea? Or perhaps something more … relaxing?’

‘Tea will be most satisfactory, thank you.’

‘Very well, sir. If you would care to wait here.’ He was shown into a drawing room.

And wait he did. Melbourne knew that clock watching was a waste of time in every sense, but on this occasion he could do nothing else. He tried sitting, but could not get comfortable, and so stood and studied the paintings. He had never noticed the little dog in the corner of the Poussin before. He didn’t notice it now. He could think of only one thing, and that thing was somewhere in St James’ Park riding a horse when she could be riding him.

He paced around. His tea grew cold but remained largely untouched.

And then, at 12 noon, he heard voices outside, one voice in particular that he recognised all too well.
He stood, his heart beating like a humming bird’s wings in his chest, his mind a dizzy whirl of hope and expectation and desire.

The door opened and there she was.

‘Lord M! I was told you were here! If I had known you were arriving so soon I would never have gone out. You told me you would not make it until the afternoon.’

She was beautiful; she was completely and utterly radiantly beautiful. For a time he forgot to do anything, he could only stare. Had it only been five days?

‘Ma’am, I … I was able to finish my work sooner than expected.’

‘But you have had to wait so long for me to return from my ride.’

‘It is no matter, Ma’am.’ He lied. He had hated being so close to her and yet so very far. He had hated not having her when he’d thought he could have.

He glanced behind her. Emma Portman stood, lips pursed as tightly as her hands. He remembered himself and rushed forward a little over-hastily perhaps, bending to one knee and taking Victoria’s small, white hand in his before pressing it hard to his lips. He heard her slight intake of breath as he did so. He wanted to stay there, pull up her skirts and taste her, there and then, but he managed to restrain himself.

He stood and looked into her. She looked back and it was almost as if he had entered her already.

Without breaking eye contact with him, Victoria said to Emma, ‘Leave us.’ She offered no explanation. There was no box today and the excuse of going through the dispatches was lacking.

‘Ma’am,’ cautioned Emma.

‘Leave us!’ barked the Queen.

Emma dipped into a slight curtsey, glanced warily at Melbourne, who barely noticed, and left them, closing the door behind her.

For a time they just stood and stared, as if the moment needed to seep into their souls.

‘Is it time?’ she asked eventually.

‘Yes,’ he replied.

‘You will stay tonight?’

‘If you wish it, Ma’am.’

‘Of course I wish it.’

She glanced down at her clothing and her face twisted in bewilderment which spoke of dismayed realisation. ‘I have not changed from riding. I should do so. And then it will be lunch, and I have an audience with the Bishop of London this afternoon. Then dinner. Your arrival is unexpected, I was not prepared.’

His heart stuttered in disappointment and his groin twisted in agony; his cock had been hard since she stepped into the room.
'Then … after dinner, Ma’am.'

She swallowed back her own dismay. ‘It seems it must be that way.’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’ He clasped his hands behind him, digging the nails into his palms. Patience – how many times had he advised it? ‘We shall wait. It will make things all the more worthwhile, after all.’

‘Indeed. We have waited so long. What is a few more hours?’ She managed a tight, brief smile, then turned, unable to look at him any longer.

Victoria moved towards the door and took three, perhaps four, steps, but before she had reached it he was at her. She turned in his arms or he turned her, he wasn’t sure which, and it seemed that all her limbs, that her very being coiled itself around him. He had her again.

William pulled her tight in upon him and immediately he was feeling for the hooks on her gown and undoing them. In the brief moment of restraint before his lips met hers, he murmured with supreme conviction, ‘I’ve changed my mind. I cannot wait.’

Chapter End Notes

He can't wait, but you'll have to. *ducks and hides*

Loved writing this chapter. Love writing Melbourne.

Love your comments.

x
'Here and now?' It came out as a gasp, seeing as he had robbed the air from her when he pushed her back against the wall, to which she now found herself pinned by his lean length.

'Yes.' His voice had a dark insistence which spoke of danger, but which she craved nonetheless.

His hand coiled around the back of her neck to hold her head to him, the other quested down to her waist. There was such urgency to him that the suddenness of it shocked her.

'I –!' she tried but he kissed it away. Holding her head, he showered kisses over every part of her face.

She was awhirl with conflict. He was usually so controlled and cautious, even when they had done all manner of things in this very room, but his passion now unnerved her and she considered briefly pushing him from her, telling him indeed to wait. He sensed her hesitation and drew back; even through his desire, he remained attuned.

'What? What, my darling? Do you wish me to wait?' But it was said with a growl as his hands now moved to her back and his fingers started to undo the hooks on her gown. Prevarication was crushed. That sound from his throat was so unfeasibly arousing that she could do no more than cling to him. The awareness that he would soon be filling her emptiness made her yearn for him even more.

'No … no … I cannot wait. I will go mad if I wait,' she said, letting her head fall back and granting him her whole self.

He had by now released most of the hooks on her gown and soon it fell to the floor in a pool of green silk.

But he could not stop kissing her and every so often would break away from his attentions to her clothing to hold her face again and brush all parts of it with his lips.

'The door … the door,' she murmured.

With a sharp breath, he moved across to it, bringing her with him, and fumbled at the handle.

'The key? Where is it?' he slurred.

'I don’t know.' She had already succeeded in removing his coat and his cravat was partly untied.

Melbourne grunted in frustration and tore himself from her. Quickly, he paced across to take hold of a chair and came back to wedge it firmly under the handle. She laughed at his boldness and pulled him back to her.

Still holding her tightly, he guided her towards the middle of the room. 'I’ll have you naked.' His hands were behind her, tugging at the ties of her corset, pulling the laces out.

'Even here?' she murmured between kisses, but was in no state to protest.

'Yes, especially here.'
But if she was to be naked, then so should he be. She succeeded in removing his cravat completely
then started work on the buttons on his waistcoat.

‘Hasty,’ he smirked and the pace shifted, as if her frenetic energy had subdued his. He was slowing
himself, and now held her head gently again, kissing her softly, relaxing the pace. ‘Slow, calm.’

She drew back a little to frown at him in query. ‘It is you who are the hasty one. You had me against
the wall!’

He smirked but planted soft kisses over her. ‘And I will have you now, but I have waited too long to
rush it, my perfect creature. I will savour you.’

The way he said that that made her melt for him. Her head fell back and she bared her neck while he
slowly continued removing her clothing. She was so used to his careful, statesmanlike conversation,
to his eloquence and *bon mots*, that, despite all the intimacy between them, this new language was
different: dark and seductive. *I will savour you* … Oh, it made her hungry for him. The ache of
longing rose up suddenly and she gasped out her need.

She tried again, this time reaching for his breeches and fumbling to undo the placket. But he took her
hands and pulled them off. ‘Patience,’ he slurred and pinned her arms behind her while sliding a
hand under her chemise and enclosing it around a breast.

She groaned again. ‘You yourself said you couldn’t wait.’

‘Not until tonight, but I will do this properly. I have been anticipating it for long enough. It is all too
good to rush.’

He was on her and upon her and would soon be in her and she must trust. At last, he drew off her
chemise, then, guiding her to the chaise he directed her to lie back along it while he took hold of first
one leg then the other, rolling her stockings down with an idleness which intoxicated her, letting his
fingers slide down the pale flesh which he exposed, leaning down and kissing, dragging his lips
along the path forged by his fingertips.

Victoria lay on the chaise in her drawing room, quite naked. She was quite sure there had never been
a sight like it in all the time the palace had been built (well, practically sure, in any case), but she felt
no shame. She stretched herself for him, brazenly presenting her body, wanting him on it, urging him
into her.

But Melbourne stood and at last removed his own clothing save for his shirt. As much as she loved
the way the soft white material fell over his torso, it concealed too much from her and she moaned
her frustration out again.

She stretched out a hand to him but he instead remained standing, simply looking down at her.

‘What?’ she implored. ‘Oh, please, please, my darling.’

‘Let me look on you. It has been a while.’

‘I am so empty,’ she whined, practically writhing on the chaise, rolling her hips in an attempt to
relieve the throb of desire afflicting her. Clearly, he enjoyed this, as he stood quite controlled for
some time and simply stared.

‘You are perfect,’ he murmured softly then at last knelt, placing himself between her legs, his head
poised over her sex. ‘I want to see how much you missed me. I want to taste how much you missed
me.’
And parting her lips carefully, he licked, a long sweep of his tongue gathering in her desire and ending on that nub which was so full and ready that she would shatter given only a little more.

But he would taste her. He would taste every drop of her desire for him. Melbourne stayed there, imbibing all she was. If she had wanted to resist, she was helpless to. It did, after all, feel so very, very good. But a fear took hold that she would give up her pleasure before he was inside her, and that was what she wanted beyond sense. But it was sense, was it not? Their conjoining, their togetherness? It was the only sense she knew. And so it was agony and she wailed.

‘Please, please … I have waited too long … please.’

Finally, with a groan of his own he tore himself away and pulled off his shirt with fluid strength. Now he too was beset with urgency; his nostrils were flared, his muscles taut.

Melbourne knelt on the chaise and held her legs open for him before taking hold of his rigid cock and lowering himself to her.

Their eyes were locked. ‘Here and now,’ he murmured. She nodded.

He pushed into her.

*Complete.*

She had almost forgotten, but not, as she had longed for this every night, night upon night, and she had carried the memory with her throughout that time. But his size surprised her again. She was so small and so new in many ways that he stretched her. He tried to keep staring at her but his own pleasure was too great and his eyes closed and his head fell back as he dragged in air.

Victoria was so very full of him. ‘Oh!’ she said, no more, and her eyes were as wide as the round O of surprise on her open mouth.

He stared down and she thought she detected his eyes misting, but then he pulled out a little and she enjoyed it as much as when he’d first entered her. Melbourne pushed in, slow again, watching her every reaction and she couldn’t help but grin broadly for him.

*Joined.*

‘I remember,’ she whispered. ‘I remember you, I remember this. It is wonderful. *You* are wonderful.’

‘My darling,’ he murmured and moved within her, slowly, stroking his length through her with careful awareness, every inch and ridge and part of him his gift to her. Never could she be this together with another, she knew that here and now. Their eyes did not leave the other, their minds and souls as merged as their bodies.

She clung to him as he lay down upon her, his body working in hers, his hips rolling and pushing himself deep and hard within her accepting flesh. She curled her arms about him and tangled her fingers through his hair.

‘I want this always, I want this, I want you, only you, only you,’ she repeated over and over.

He moved faster, his breath hot and urgent, his eyes glazing despite still being locked with hers. At that, the pleasure she had held at bay broke and her climax took her. She dug her hands into his back and tried to swallow back the cry which wanted to break free. But it could not be stifled and was so loud that he instinctively brought up his hand to her mouth. She sucked on his fingers to forestall more cries. She was coming so hard that he felt her pulsing on him and he could not help but let his
own pleasure erupt. Melbourne came, hard and deep, his seed propelled from him by the strength of his lover’s orgasm, his own cry muffled in the muggy home of her neck.

Afterwards, she lay for some time, running an idle finger along his back, focused on his length inside her, the occasional twitch of him, as if in little aftershocks. It made her smile. She couldn’t read his face as he had buried his head in the curve of her shoulder, but she felt his complete happiness in the languid limpness of his previously taut limbs. Could life be more glorious?

After a time – she was not sure how long – he pushed himself up reluctantly and smiled down at her. ‘Are you alright, Ma’am?’

She giggled and smoothed his ruffled hair. ‘Why call me that now?’

He pouted a little in thought. ‘I quite like the paradox of it.’

She gave him a seductive grin in return. ‘Yes, my Lord M … I am very much alright.’

‘As am I,’ he said, leaning down and kissing her again. But soon enough she felt him slipping from her and, before he could completely, he drew back and looked down at where they were still joined. ‘But I find myself in urgent need of a handkerchief. I would not want to despoil the Italian silk of this chaise.’

Victoria laughed aloud, which prompted him to slip completely from her. He rushed to retrieve a handkerchief from his coat which lay in a crumpled heap near the door. After hurrying back, he pressed the material between her legs. ‘The trouble with impulses of this kind … is that they tend to have consequences one doesn’t always think through properly.’

He meant it light-heartedly, he meant it in reference to the usual mess of such an act, but when he met her eyes, the sudden seriousness of the true implications of their behaviour hit home and they both averted their gaze. It pained Victoria and she pushed herself up only to curl her naked body around his.

‘I missed you. I love you. You will stay a while, won’t you? Come to me tonight and all the nights we can be together.’

‘It would be impossible for me not to.’ He stroked her cheek.

‘Even when …’ She let her voice trail off.

‘When what?’

She dropped her gaze. ‘When he is here?’

He brought a finger under her chin. She resisted turning her eyes back to him. ‘Victoria … look at me.’

Reluctantly, she lifted her gaze to him again. ‘You must do this. You will be polite and dignified.’

‘And do what?’

He let a slight sigh escape him through his nose and for a time could not speak. She searched his eyes. ‘Do what, William?’

‘You must do as you wish, Ma’am.’

She pressed herself harder yet against him. ‘This is what I wish.’
‘I know.’ He swallowed. ‘It is now.’

She frowned in sincerity. ‘And for always. For always.’

He gave a smile but she noticed he could not meet her eyes, but when he bent to kiss her she forgave him for it.

‘How long do we have?’ she murmured as his hands ran down her back again, cupping her bottom and pulling her against him.

‘A week before you bleed again.’

She groaned. ‘Oh, the inconveniences of being a woman! Why do men not suffer such indignities?’

He pulled back with a smirk. ‘Because we would not have the fortitude nor the resolve to endure it. We would need to be cast aside at those times, good for nothing. You, on the other hand, continue to rule an entire nation.’

She huffed. ‘Perhaps I shouldn’t. Perhaps this time when my monthly affliction occurs, I shall retire to my chamber and you shall come and minister to me, feeding me marrons glacés and chocolate truffles.’

He reached for her chemise and stockings and handed them to her before pulling on his breeches again. ‘I would be most content to do so, Ma’am, but Parliament may ponder my whereabouts.’

‘Parliament takes you away from me far too much!’

‘Well … I am Prime Minister, Ma’am.’

‘I forget at times. When I am with you I forget myself, even. I forget that I am Queen … or perhaps I wish I were not.’

‘Surely not, Ma’am? There could be no other. You are the finest monarch I have ever known.’

‘Lord M – you have hardly known many, and those you do recall were hardly the finest examples this country has ever produced.’

‘Be careful how you speak of your uncles, Ma’am,’ he warned with a tease.

They were finally fully dressed. She drew herself around him and pulled him down for a kiss again before whispering in his ear, ‘I can still feel you inside me. When I go to meet the Bishop of London, I shall be thinking only of that.’

‘Well, as long as you don’t talk of it, he’ll be none the wiser, Ma’am.’

‘Do you think even he suspects?’

‘Perhaps, but he most certainly will say nothing.’

‘Is it not his job to say more than anyone?’

Melbourne gave a wry smirk. ‘The Church of England is noted for turning a blind eye when an inconvenient truth arises, Ma’am.’

‘Is that what we are to people … inconvenient?’
He hesitated before telling her most seriously, ‘You know we are.’

‘But true?’ She smiled and pulled him down again and he was once again unable to resist.

‘True,’ he concurred, holding her tight and whispering into her, ‘You are my truth.’

They struggled to part, but she grew vaguely aware of time and drew back, straightening down her skirts. ‘Do I look presentable?’

‘Always, Ma’am,’ he smiled, taking a step back and placing his hands behind his back.

‘You will stay tonight?’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘And I can come to you?’

He gave a soft smile. ‘You need not ask that, Ma’am.’

She let a laugh rise from her and he quirked his eyebrows. ‘Ma’am?’

‘I was simply considering that … we have much more at our disposal than before.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘I mean I am now … more experienced.’

He cleared his throat briefly. ‘Yes, I … apologise for that, Ma’am.’

‘Apologise for what? For enlightening me? I shall remind you that it was me who demanded I be enlightened.’

Melbourne drew in a breath. ‘That is somewhat true.’

She smiled alluringly at him. ‘Tonight cannot come soon enough, Lord M, but for now, we each have our respective duties.’

‘Indeed, Ma’am. I shall find a quiet corner and get on with business.’

‘And I shall meet the Bishop of London … and try not to mention our … inconvenient truth.’

‘I hope it won’t prove that difficult, Ma’am.’

‘I assume not.’ She extended her hand and he bent to kiss it.

‘Good bye, Lord M.’

‘Good bye, Ma’am.’ With a faint smile, he left her.

Victoria tucked her stray hairs back in carefully and settled herself. Next week could bring what it would. Tonight, she would be in his bed again, and for now that was her truth.
Well, that was a nice reunion ...

The calm before the storm ...

Drop me a comment if you can. More soon. xx
The fortyeth chapter!

Thank you for coming along with me for the ride. Things are going to start to get tricky for our lovebirds very shortly as this tale edges towards a close. It's not over yet, but ...

The Lord Bishop of London left his audience with the Queen in uncharacteristically good spirits. Her Majesty had been remarkably pleasant and charming. She had even been willing to discuss the introduction of changes to the liturgy during Ascensioitide. He previously hadn’t been convinced she even knew what Ascensiontide was, not through ignorance but through a deliberate wilfulness not to listen. Today, however, he had found her most attentive.

He passed Lord Melbourne on his way out. The Prime Minister looked in good spirits too, he noted. The Bishop preferred not to consider the coincidence of finding both the Queen and Melbourne in such excellent moods.

‘Melbourne,’ he muttered, not wishing to stop; he wasn’t sure he could look the man in the eyes.

But the Prime Minister halted and turned in his direction. ‘My Lord Bishop, it’s unusual to see you here and not at Westminster.’

He would have to stop now. He cleared his throat tersely.

‘Yes, well, Her Majesty was due a meeting so … I have attended upon her.’

‘And you are now returning to the Lords?’

‘Yes, yes, a quick visit before Evensong.’ He hesitated then looked warily at Melbourne. ‘And you, sir? Your plans for the day? I presume your daily business with the Queen is now concluded?’

A glint caught the Prime Minister’s eyes. ‘Ostensibly, yet I shall remain here for dinner and stay tonight.’

‘Oh?’ The bishop’s bottom lip started a juddering dance of indignation.

‘I have been intensively occupied at the House for several days so it is pleasant to come to the Palace for a change of scene.’

‘Is it indeed?’ The Bishop’s good humour left him – the audacity of the man! Did Melbourne not realise he was the subject of scandalous gossip, and here he was positively glorying in it! Had the man not learnt his lessons over the years?

He stepped in and cleared his throat. ‘Melbourne … you are living a Godly life, are you not?’

The Prime Minister’s lips thinned briefly in what was clear amusement.
‘A goodly life, did you say, My Lord Bishop? I most certainly am. Life is very good indeed.’

‘Godly, man, Godly!’ He lowered his voice to convey the seriousness of his sentiment. ‘I hope we have no reason to fear for your soul.’

Melbourne’s eyebrows jiggled up briefly. ‘Fear for my soul? You are sounding most Roman, Bishop. Is that wise?’

‘Do not be frivolous, Melbourne.’

Melbourne smirked and answered him at last. ‘A Godly life, My Lord? As much as God demands it of me.’

‘He demands it greatly, sir!’

‘Yet, it must be said, I rarely hear him speaking directly to me.’

‘Then perhaps you should listen more attentively.’

‘I do find that I have so many people to listen to that sometimes it’s hard to distinguish individual voices.’

‘And yet you distinguish Her Majesty’s voice most easily.’

Melbourne paused only briefly, his eyes narrowing as he considered the Bishop’s words. ‘True. The Queen’s is of a higher timbre. I imagine God’s voice to be in a considerably lower register, would you not agree? Perhaps I am simply not attuned to that.’

The bishop gave a strange sort of harrumph and turned on his heels. ‘Good day, Melbourne! You would be wise to attend Evensong tonight.’

‘I regret I shall be otherwise engaged, My Lord. But do please pray for my soul in my absence.’

The bishop spun on his heels with indignant rage and for a time looked set to pace back to the Prime Minister and do something most unbecoming of those in the higher echelons of the Church of England. ‘I hear his Serene Highness is arriving soon and intends to woo the Queen,’ he said with almost manic glee. ‘The sooner that girl is wed, the better!’

This time he did turn and leave, almost tripping on the carpet in his haste to quit Melbourne.

The Prime Minister looked after him for a moment, then remembered himself and went to find Her Majesty.

--xoOox--

He found the Queen surrounded by her ladies and her mother. At this his heart sank, but then, he mustn’t be greedy.

‘Lord M!’ she beamed. ‘Do come and see what I have been drawing.’

He thought he heard a tut from her mother. Melbourne walked over and stood just behind the Queen, looking over her shoulder. She had sketched in pencil a naïve yet easily identifiable portrait of him.

‘Hm. I find myself a little confused as to how to respond, Ma’am. I would like to compliment you on your fine drawing, but I must make it clear that I would be praising your artistic skill and not the beauty of the subject matter.’
She looked up at him and laughed. ‘The subject matter is most beauteous too, so you should not be afraid to praise it at all!’

Her mother tutted yet louder.

He leaned down for a closer look and his arm nudged the back of her head. He didn’t withdraw. ‘Is my hair always such a frightful mess?’

The Queen laughed again. The other ladies in the room had their eyes fixed on drawings and embroideries of their own, but he could feel their attentions so acutely they almost hit him like darts. Yet instead of shirking it, he revelled in. *Let them mark it!* The Bishop, after all, had already damned his soul.

‘Not always.’ Again, she turned her face up to his, that sweet, heart-shaped face he wanted to lean down and cover with kisses. ‘But certainly at times … when you have been involved in strenuous activity, for example.’

‘When we’ve been riding together, for example, Ma’am?’

‘Indeed. After a particularly energetic ride, we often find ourselves aglow with perspiration and with our hair and clothing in a state of some disarray.’

‘We do, Ma’am. And I am usually quite exhilarated by the experience.’

Harriet Sutherland had a sudden coughing fit.

‘Shall we take a turn outside?’ asked Emma Portman, standing abruptly. ‘There is something I wish to discuss with you, Ma’am.’

‘I am quite happy here, Lady Portman,’ Victoria replied curtly.

‘I would very much like it, Ma’am, if I could impose upon you.’

The Queen sighed. ‘Very well.’

‘We need not trouble the others. They can remain here.’

Victoria pursed her lips and glanced at Melbourne who gave her a brief nod. She turned back to Emma with a look of frosty acceptance. ‘Very well.’

The Queen and her Lady were soon pacing through the neatly manicured hedges of the south gardens.

‘Ma’am,’ began Emma, ‘your manner with Lord Melbourne is becoming increasingly … unguarded.’

‘Yes, I suppose it is,’ replied Victoria with little hesitation.

‘Ma’am! I advised caution when all this began and now I feel I must insist upon it. Albert arrives next week –’

Her Majesty immediately tutted and rolled her eyes.

‘Ma’am! Albert arrives next week and if he witnesses the clear level of intimacy between you and Lord Melbourne, he will be most aggrieved.’
Victoria rounded on her. ‘Let him be aggrieved! Perhaps he should be aggrieved and so go scampering back to Coburg with his tail between his legs!’

‘Ma’am … he is …’

‘What? What is he?’

‘A worthy suitor … for you to consider.’

This was what betrayal felt like. The air was robbed from her and she stared at Emma, for a time unable to find words.

‘You tell me that? You of all people who truly knows the extent of my feelings for another man?’

Emma stood her ground. ‘A future with Lord Melbourne is not viable. You have had your time together and we have turned a blind eye, we have indulged it even, but now … you must look to the future.’

‘I do look to the future! And William is firmly in it.’

‘He is too old.’ She spoke unhesitatingly.

Victoria felt her mouth run dry. Never had Emma been so stark before. ‘What?’

‘He is too old. You know it. It may not be noticeable now … but in ten, twenty years’ time, when he is gout ridden and infirm …’

‘Gout ridden and infirm!? How dare you!’

‘It happens, Ma’am, even to those as active and in such good health as William Lamb. Ma’am … I must ask you …’

‘What?’

‘Has William ever … promised you of a future together? I do not mean in moments of … passion, for heaven knows we say all manner of things at those times … but at times of calm discussion.’

She wanted this to stop. She wanted Emma to vanish and be replaced by William who would take her in his arms and kiss away the distress. ‘I …’

Emma stepped in, gentler now. She reached out a hand and clasped Victoria’s in it. ‘I know it is painful, Ma’am, I know it is unbearable, but you must see sense.’

Victoria could only speak the truth. ‘We love each other.’

‘I know you do.’

‘I cannot imagine a life without him.’

‘I understand.’

Victoria turned and stared at her, her gaze so penetrating that Emma, as determined as she was to make her point, could not blink the intimidation away.

‘No,’ continued the Queen. ‘You do not understand. I have decided, Emma. I have decided that I love this man and I want this man and I shall have this man.’
Emma swallowed and tried again. ‘But you must do what is right.’

‘Right for whom?’

‘For everyone, including yourself and William.’

‘Do not presume to tell me what is right for us.’

‘Ma’am, with all due respect, even the Queen of England must take advice.’

The flame in Victoria’s eyes burned ever brighter. ‘You think I assert these things due to the privilege of Sovereignty? Because I am Queen?’

Victoria’s scorching ferocity robbed Emma Portman of further words.

‘Emma, I may be Queen, but I am first and foremost a woman, and through William I have learnt how to love and how to live, and any decision I make is based on that and that alone. As Queen I am expected to behave in a certain way and speak in a certain way and to conform to the demands of others – where is the freedom in that? As a woman, if I am not hurting others, then I will live my life exactly as I choose, and I will love with my heart, my soul and my body.’

And Alexandrina Victoria turned from her lady-in-waiting and strode back into the palace. Emma did not stop her.

--xoOox--

When she returned inside, it was time to change for dinner. Victoria swept through the corridors, Dash barely able to keep pace as she hurried along. She threw open the door to her bedchamber where Skerrett was waiting to dress her.

There was silence for a time, the only sound the concerted breathing of her Majesty as she tried to settle.

‘Hope you don’t mind me asking … but is everything alright, Ma’am?’ asked Skerrett, releasing the hooks on the Queen’s gown, the same hooks released by her Prime Minister earlier.

‘More than alright. Everything is perfectly wonderful, thank you.’

‘It’s just that …’

Victoria sighed. ‘I am sick of being advised, Skerrett, that is all. There is only one person whom I wish to listen to … and tonight I shall be back in his bed taking the full length of his advice.’

Skerrett froze, unsure she had heard aright.

Victoria glanced at her in the mirror, aware she had shocked her maid.

She gave her a broad grin and Skerrett eventually dared meet her eyes and, with a crimson blush, returned it.

‘Has that time come by again, Ma’am?’

‘Oh, it has indeed, Skerrett, and I have already taken advantage of it to the full.’

Skerrett could not suppress a little gasp. ‘You mean? Today already? But … where?’
'In my drawing room. On the chaise, mainly.'

'Ma’am! I …!'

Victoria dropped her head. ‘Oh, Skerrett, I am sorry, I should not embarrass you like this. But I am rather tired of having to be so careful with what I say. Lord Melbourne and I are quite ecstatically happy and I want to shout it from the rooftops.’

‘I’d advise against that, Ma’am.’

‘You sound like him, Skerrett! Do not fear, I shall not be mounting the roof of the Palace and bellowing down the Mall about my intimate activities … but I do find it a comfort to be able to discuss it with somebody.’

‘And I am greatly honoured you confide in me, Ma’am.’

‘Well,’ Victoria bent down and picked up her spaniel to give him a nuzzle. ‘Dash is a very good listener, but I find he doesn’t really appreciate my attempts at humour. Now, we really should attend to getting me ready for dinner.’

‘And after dinner … a visit to Lord Melbourne, Ma’am?’

The two women shared a smile. ‘Indeed, and I shall be paying very careful attention to every part of his counsel.’

---xoOox--

She arrived at dinner early for a change, before even her mother.

When Leopold began to take his place next to her she turned to him with a smile of ill-disguised sharpness. ‘I would like Lord Melbourne to sit here tonight. You shall be placed just along there, uncle.’

Leopold had no response. His eyes widened as he tried to process what he had just been told. Place settings were allocated based on hierarchy and set in stone. The King of the Belgians outranked a British viscount. But not today.

‘Victoria?’ he managed at last. ‘What is the reason for this?’

‘I wish it.’

‘Is that reason enough?’

‘It is.’

Leopold stood stock still, the harshness of his stare intended to beat her down, but it did not. She looked straight back at him defiantly. At that moment, Melbourne arrived and headed for his usual place across the table from the Queen.

‘Lord Melbourne,’ she called. He halted and turned to her. ‘You are to sit here, beside me.’

He looked almost as dumbstruck as Leopold. ‘This is a change, Ma’am.’

‘Well observed, Lord M.’

‘I would not wish to put out others.’ He glanced at Leopold who was still staring icily at the Queen,
his chest rising and falling as he struggled to retain composure.

‘That is of no matter. Come, sit here.’ With that, the Queen pulled out the chair for him while the assembled group stood, stock still, mouths open, watching the unfolding scene with frozen amazement.

Melbourne hesitated, but the Queen gave him a look of such fierce determination that he felt himself compelled towards the chair. He took his place behind it and Leopold stalked furiously to the opposite side of the table.

‘There we are. This is most satisfactory.’ Victoria sat, and so did everyone else.

She turned to Melbourne and gave him a little smile. ‘This is better. Where you belong.’

‘Where exactly do I belong, Ma’am?’

‘By my side.’

‘That does not always have to be taken literally, Ma’am.’

‘I want you to sit here. I want to be able to …’ She reached a hand under the table and placed it on his knee. ‘Do that.’

Melbourne drew himself tall and reached for a drink. ‘Perhaps you shouldn’t, Ma’am.’

‘Why not?’ she continued, running her hand with potent seductive force up his inner thigh. ‘Don’t you like it?’

‘You know the answer to that. But there are certain conventions at the dinner table which it would be wise to uphold.’

‘What would they be?’

‘Well, the usual practice of not engaging in acts of an intimate nature in front of your mother and uncle, for example.’

She spluttered out a laugh and reached for a drink herself, at last withdrawing her hand. Melbourne exhaled in quiet relief and concentrated on subduing his burgeoning erection.

‘Have I embarrassed you?’ she asked. ‘I am sorry.’

‘After the various events of my life, I find that I am now somewhat immune to embarrassment, Ma’am.’

Dinner continued. There were other people at the table, but Victoria and William did not notice.

--xoOox--

Victoria excused herself early after dinner, complaining of a headache, not that she had one in the slightest.

After help from Skerrett she was soon set to go to Melbourne’s room. She considered briefly whether she should even bother donning the maid’s coat and bonnet she usually used, but with a nod to habit, she did. She had to wait until Lehzen was asleep, but fortunately she fell asleep very rapidly, and Victoria easily crept out past her room without disturbing her.
The staff she did pass glanced her way but little more. She thought the bonnet masked her sufficiently but found she did not care if she was noticed. Theirs was no longer a secret, that much was clear, and she found it oddly liberating.

She arrived at his door and knocked. He opened the door, his glorious half-smile already etched on his face. His jacket was off and his waistcoat unbuttoned. It took all her resolve not to throw herself on him there and then.

‘Good evening, Lord M.’

‘Ma’am.’

He held the door open for her then closed and locked it behind them.

‘I was just having a brandy. Would you care for some?’ he asked, pacing over to a bureau.

‘I think I would, thank you.’

She shrugged off the coat and took off the bonnet. ‘I almost didn’t wear these.’

‘It’s wise that you still put up a semblance of propriety, Ma’am.’ He returned with the glass and handed it to her. She took a sip and, although the fiery liquid nearly caught her throat, she swallowed it back and took another larger amount quickly. She didn’t notice his raised eyebrow and the amused curl of his lip.

‘What was Emma discussing with you in the gardens?’

‘The usual tedium.’

‘It seems that is the only topic of conversation on anyone’s lips at the moment. At least we are relieving the dreariness of their own lives.’

She smirked and, with his help, set about removing her garments until she was left in only her corset and chemise.

Victoria looked up, her free hand coming to his chest and seeking under the waistcoat. ‘Are we terribly reckless?’

‘We are brazen, I will admit. We have become so.’

‘You do not mind?’

He swallowed. ‘I would appear not to. I admit, it is not something I quite understand.’

‘Nor I … I suppose boldness comes with certainty.’

Slowly, he leant down to kiss her. ‘Certainty,’ he murmured.

But just then, she brought up a hand and placed a finger between their lips. He was held there, confused. Victoria gave him a smirk of such delicious enticement that he struggled not to grab her and throw her on the bed.

‘What is it?’ he asked.

She took another drink of brandy then took his own glass from him and placed it with hers on a table beside them.
'Lord Melbourne, do you recall a conversation of ours a few days ago?' Her voice was low and resonant with seduction.

'Remind me which.' He wanted her so much it made his limbs throb.

'You said that it might be interesting to try something a little different sometimes.'

'Different?'

'Hmm …' By now both her hands were on his shirt, pushing his waistcoat from his shoulders.

She pressed in against him and he reached down again for a kiss but again she evaded his lips. Instead, he found himself being walked backwards until he came against the bed. At that, she gave a sharp push and he fell back upon it.

With a sinful grin, Victoria climbed up and straddled him. Instinctively, he reached out to hold her, but suddenly found his wrists encircled in her hands and pinned to the bed. For someone so little she had remarkable strength.

He looked up at her, his eyes wide with wonder and dawning expectation.

Victoria shifted herself and settled down just below where he was already hard and desperate for release.

Leaning over him she whispered into his ear. 'My turn.'

Chapter End Notes

Just the right place to end the chapter, honest. *ducks*

Still love hearing from you. I love writing Victoria's sass and I love writing Melbourne's snark. Snarky gorgeous man.

x
Chapter Notes

So many apologies for the wait. I won't bore you with why this has been, but it's got nothing to do with not wanting to continue this. I have missed them soo much! But I hope this chapter makes up for the wait. And, yes, there will be lots more to come. x

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

‘Majesty …?’

She looked down. The title had slipped from his tongue unbidden and naturally and it was a rare occasion when she enjoyed the glow of royal superiority.

‘Lord Melbourne,’ she returned and bent slowly to kiss him. He reached up into it but her surprisingly determined fingers curled tighter around his wrists and prompted him to sink back again. A rush of such delight dashed through her that she grew almost dizzy but poured it into kissing him instead, all the while straddling him, holding him there, tightening her legs to allow him no escape, although she sensed no inclination on his part to even try for it.

She drew back and saw a bright wonder in his eyes as he stared up at her. ‘What is this?’ he muttered.

Victoria sat up and drew her hands along his torso. She could already feel him hard and prominent against her backside.

‘Whatever you wish it to be … Lord Melbourne.’

He had not moved his hands from their position above him.

‘You Hecate.’

She smirked. ‘Why should I not be?’ She leaned down again so that her rump nudged his rigid cock, causing him to groan.

‘Why indeed?’ he murmured back, desperately seeking more from her. Instinctively, his hands rose to hold her. She quickly took hold of them, allowing him no more touch.

‘No, not this time.’ She drew his arms back, placing them on either side of his head. He frowned in bewilderment but let her. Victoria had tied ribbons in her hair and now undid them slowly so that she soon had four long, silken bands gathered in her palm.

As she looked down at him she smiled, her lips curled with seductive wickedness. His breath was increasingly ragged and his tongue instinctively dampened his lips.

She held a ribbon up for inspection; it was nearly two feet long, deceptively smooth and pliant in its strength. ‘I always insist on long ribbons … one never knows when they will come in handy.’

And with a smirk, vixen-like in its intent, she leaned over and curled one about his wrists, around and around, binding them together. He glanced up and gave a slight grunt of confusion.
‘Ma’am …?’

‘Come now, Lord M … you are quite accustomed to this sort of thing … although, admittedly … from the other side.’

‘But …’

‘Oh, do not tell me you do not like it.’ She paused briefly and grinned.

‘No, I … I cannot tell you that.’

‘I didn’t think so.’ And so she continued. She bent down over him and teasingly brought her mouth to his to kiss him deep and full before drawing back a little to smile against his mouth and whisper, ‘This is curious, I will admit.’

‘Do what you must do,’ he muttered, barely able to speak.

So with another ribbon, the longest she had, Victoria proceeded to tie his arms to the bedhead through a hole in the carving. He glanced up, tugging on them briefly.

‘What the devil?’

A laugh rippled out of her. ‘Perhaps I am indeed the devil! Now lie still or I shall do the same on your feet.’

He gazed up at her, eyes wide, but lay quite still for her all the same.

Victoria began kissing over him, soft, light little pecks mostly, alighting over every part of his body, which she revealed little by little, as if unwrapping a parcel. She worked her way slowly down his torso, teasing his nipples like he teased hers, catching them with her tongue, nipping them between her teeth and causing him to hiss.

‘Victoria …’

She smiled in satisfaction but barely lifted her head from his abdomen, which she now ghosted over, trailing a path of kisses and touches as her fingertips followed the path. He sucked in a breath to hold his pleasure at bay. When she finally reached his manhood (she could barely miss it, after all), she continued her kisses along it. He groaned, unable to form words.

‘What was that, Lord Melbourne?’ she asked, stopping for a moment.

‘Go back … go back.’

At this she pulled up immediately and knelt beside him on the bed, her hands contained tightly in her lap. ‘Oh no, Viscount. You shall not tell me what to do. Not on this occasion. I expect a full apology, or I shall simply sit here and do nothing.’

He swallowed and she adored the sight of his Adam’s apple lurching in frustration along the line of his neck.

‘Forgive me, Your Majesty … I should not have spoken.’

‘No … you should not have, but … as you beg forgiveness so beautifully …’ She curled her fingers around the shaft again and drew them up around the head. He was leaking anticipation already, and let a moan escape him when the tips of her fingers rubbed over the slit. She studied it intently.
‘What an extraordinary thing it is. I am quite enthralled to it, you know.’

‘You have given me reason to suspect this, Ma’am.’

‘I am so very drawn to it at times like this … well, at most times come to think of it. But there is something quite animalistic which overcomes me. Is that normal?’

He swallowed again. ‘For some, yes.’

‘Well, for me certainly. I find it quite beautiful and I simply want and want it for me.’ And she lowered her head and closed her lips around it. He flung his head back and bucked up into her mouth, but far from being deterred, she took it and sank yet further down on him.

She went at him ardently, curling her tongue around the shaft, pulling her lips in tight as she worked on him, up and down, as deep as she could, rising nearly off before sinking down again. Her right hand instinctively took hold of the heavy sac beneath and caused him to groan loudly. ‘Do you like that?’ she asked, curious at this new discovery.

‘Yes,’ he managed. ‘I like it greatly.’ And so she tightened her grip and felt his body grow taut under her.

Melbourne writhed, but she ignored it and focused on the length of hard flesh in her mouth. How she thrilled to it!

‘What have I done to you?’ he murmured, all the while pushing up into her mouth. ‘What have I done?’

She pulled off slowly again, indulgently this time – why not? ‘What have you done to me?’ She came up, kissing him fully once more. ‘I shall tell you, William. You have made me. You have formed and moulded and shaped me. I am who I am due to you and for that I am eternally yours.’

‘Never could I imagine anyone so diplomatic and sensible in business matters and so … wanton and salacious and …’

‘Wicked?’

‘So very wicked … in my bed.’

‘Not only in your bed, My Lord. I half thought of having you on the floor this time.’

‘You are my angel and my demon in one.’

‘Do you know? I think I like that, but …’ She leaned over him again and whispered in his ear, ‘You talk too much. It will not do at all. Be silent, I command it. Now … where were we?’

Victoria raised her leg over him and, resting her hands on his chest, slowly but surely sank down onto him. He could not speak nor guide her with his arms; he was entirely in her hands … and he adored her only more for it.

She began an unhurried rhythm, rising almost fully off him before dropping her body slowly to take him again. She closed her eyes after a while and focused on feeling him, all of him, absorbing and embedding him deep inside her. She fell almost into a trance and Melbourne could only watch as this woman who had brought meaning to his life used him, but equally gave and gave, for theirs was a relationship of such perfect respect that she could do what she would – and so could he – and they would both know it and accept it.
She leaned back at one point, but still moved, her instinct for their joining so profound it took only a slight adjustment in either of them for pleasure to bloom. But there was no rush, and they both knew it.

‘Do you feel that?’ she asked, eyes still closed. ‘I feel you … I feel all of you … you are part of me.’

She waited for his answer but realised none would be forthcoming. Opening her eyes, she glanced down blearily with a smile. ‘I had forgotten … you are not to speak … you are most compliant, Lord M … but I take the look in your eyes as corroboration.’

At that she clenched on him, causing a surge of pleasure to bolt through him. He bucked his hips up into her and groaned.

Victoria leaned down and whispered in his ear. ‘Do you want to come, my darling? Are you ready?’

He met her eyes and nodded.

‘Very well,’ she whispered again. ‘Come then … come inside me.’

She pushed herself upright and began moving faster, harder, rolling her hips on him as she worked him deep inside. With little gasps and moans of her own, she brought him to the most blinding climax he could remember.

His enforced silence could no longer be held, and he cried it out with a groaning roar. At this, her own pleasure spiked; it had been primed and ready for some time. Victoria came hard, stopping her movement to let the orgasm rip through her so profoundly she could only open her mouth in silent wonder until it ended and then gasp it out with a groan of amazement.

She fell damp and sated onto him afterwards and wondered momentarily why he didn’t curl an arm around her as he usually did. But she remembered – he couldn’t. Glancing up, she smiled blearily.

‘I give you permission to speak again, Lord M … in fact, I give you permission to do whatever you wish with me again, but … that was most enjoyable for a change.’

At that he released a laugh, still infused with amazement.

‘You are the most extraordinary thing.’

She pushed herself carefully up. ‘I suppose I should untie you now.’

‘If you wish.’

She cocked an eyebrow as if she was considering it. ‘You have been most compliant … I imagine you may need the use of your arms again for … Parliamentary matters and tedious things such as that. I shall let you go.’ Victoria reached up and undid the knots binding him. Immediately, he took hold of her, spun her over and, still managing to remain cock-deep inside her, kissed her with nearly violent passion.

‘You bewitch me. You entrance me and enthral me.’

She smiled, shocked at his sudden switch but revelling in it nonetheless. ‘Good. I am pleased to hear it.’

At last he rolled to the side and they lay, nearly silent in their contemplation, staring above them.

‘I missed you so much,’ she said.
'We have barely been apart.'

'I missed the feel of you inside me. I can feel you still, your warmth, your remnant.'

'Yes, well … it must remain only that … a remnant … not enduring.'

'I wish it could,' she sighed. 'How I would love to have your babies.'

'Babies can be very hard work, Ma’am … even for a Queen.'

'Well, this is true … I would not wish to have anyone else’s babies … only yours. Yours are bound to be as sweet-tempered and amusing as you are.'

'Sweet-tempered?’ He stifled a scoffing laugh. ‘I’m glad you think so. I’m not sure the Bishop of London agrees.’

'Oh? Did you see him earlier?’

'I did, but have no fear … he is praying for my soul, so all is in order.’

'Does he suspect?’

'More than that, I fear. Victoria … ours is no longer a secret, you know that.’

'I do and … it is something of a relief, it must be said. Why, coming here tonight, I practically thought not to disguise myself at all.’

'The attempt at deceit should probably be maintained nonetheless.’

She grew silent and pulled herself in tighter to his chest. ‘If everyone knows then … he will know too.’

'Who?’

'Him … my cousin, the German prince.’

'He has a name, Ma’am.’

'Not one I wish to voice aloud.’

'Well … ‘ He turned his head away. ‘You will have to soon.’

A sudden tension took hold; they both knew it. Victoria felt that dull weight settle in her stomach that she tried so hard to ignore.

She pushed herself up and looked down at him. ‘William … Emma said something earlier.’

'Oh?’

'She said that … when one makes declarations during moments of passion … they should not be heeded.’

'Declarations? That could mean any number of things.’ He was not meeting her eyes, she noticed.

'Indeed it could. You have … we have declared a great deal to each other, but … I was thinking that …'
He turned his head to her at last and stroked her hair from her face, interrupting her. ‘You think far too much. You have enough to consider as monarch, do not overthink these matters also.’

‘William …’ She hesitated, then asked outright, thinking she sounded hideously young. ‘You do love me, don’t you?’

‘What?’ His face creased in something approaching disbelief.

Victoria felt her eyes growing hot. ‘I do believe you only ever tell me in moments of abandon. I would like to hear it when you are quite calm and reflective.’

At first he did not answer and she feared for one dreadful moment that he could not do it. But he was looking at her with such deep sincerity that her fears were allayed. He said, soft and intense, ‘Victoria … of that you must never doubt.’

‘Say it then.’

And he said, quite immediately and plainly, ‘I love you.’

Tears sprang to her eyes and she turned from him, embarrassed. ‘Thank you.’

He leaned over her and moved her head gently so that she was looking at him. ‘If there is one truth in this life, then it is that, my darling. I, William Lamb, love you, Alexandrina Victoria, with all that I am and will ever be.’

She managed a smile.

He bent down and kissed her gently, saying, ‘I think it is time to sleep. You must rest and we have so little time.’

‘Whatever do you mean?’ There was that heart-stopping anxiety again.

‘Well … before the time you could conceive comes round again. We must make the most of it.’

She grinned, her fears allayed.

‘After all …’ he continued, ‘you must be well-rested as … I think some reparation is in order, don’t you?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, you were a little minx just now. There will be consequences.’

She sat up, already wanting. ‘Can there be consequences immediately? Oh, please!’

He was considering, she could tell. A quixotic smile danced on his lips. ‘… No.’

‘Oh, you tease me.’

‘I tease you?’

He moved over her again and his hand reached between her legs. She pushed up into it, seeking his touch, longing for his fingers to find and enthral her again.

‘How easy it would be,’ he murmured. ‘How wonderful …’ They were merely thoughts spoken aloud.
But then he fell back. ‘No. Sleep. Tomorrow, my love.’

She nestled into him, trying to be content with closeness. ‘Tomorrow cannot come fast enough.’

But their togetherness was too blissful to neglect, and so, limbs curled around each other, they fell asleep in each other’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

The calm before the storm?

Let me know you’re still out there. xx
They woke together but were in no hurry to get up. Victoria ran her fingers idly over his chest.

‘Two more days …’

‘We have longer, Ma’am, before your bleeding comes.’

‘I mean until … he comes, but … he will cause me as much pain as my monthly time, I have no doubt.’

William said nothing. Usually he had all manner of droplets of wisdom to ease her mind. Victoria turned her head to prompt a response.

‘William?’

‘Ma’am?’

‘You say very little.’

‘It is not always necessary to fill silence, Ma’am.’

She tutted softly. ‘William … I do feel that after the events of last night you may call me Victoria.’

He smiled gently and stroked her hair. ‘Indeed … Victoria.’

Kissing him tenderly, she then laid back again with a sigh.

‘You do know that when Albert arrives, I shall simply send him straight back again before he has barely alighted from the carriage.’

‘He may require a cup of tea first … or something stronger, especially if the Channel crossing has been difficult.’

‘Oh, do stop being so hideously … decent!’ She chided him with pointed annoyance.

‘I thought you liked my decency?’ There was a smirk in his voice.

Victoria circled her fingers upon his chest. ‘I frequently prefer your wickedness.’

‘And yet it was you being wicked last night.’

Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

My updates are a bit like London buses ... ;-) Onwards ...

x

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
‘And you were not complaining, Lord M.’

‘I certainly was not … Ma’am.’ She gasped in mock indignation at him reverting to the appellation, making him quirk an eyebrow. ‘You called me Lord M again … I am quite entitled to revert to Ma’am … Ma’am.’

She tapped his nose playfully. ‘The sooner the man comes and goes again, the better.’

He didn’t respond for a beat or two but then said openly, ‘But they will expect a decision.’

‘They can have it before they arrive. My decision is no.’

Melbourne drew himself up, not exactly moving her aside, but Victoria had no choice but to retreat from her comfortable position resting on him. He sighed but spoke clearly.

‘I know you hate discussing it, Victoria, but, in all seriousness, Leopold has virtually set his kingdom on this match. The Coburgs will not give up.’

She sat upright, her eyes alight with fury. ‘It is not their decision! I shall not be forced into marriage with someone I cannot abide!’

He picked at a thread on the eiderdown. ‘What if … it turns out that you can abide him?’

‘William! How can I possibly? And how can you ask that?’

He said nothing and still focused on the thread. She placed her hands on either side of his face and guided him round to look at her.

‘William! I do not see other men in that way. I have you! You are all I want. I cannot even entertain the notion of another man interesting me.’

He smiled ruefully. ‘These things do happen, Ma’am.’

The breath was practically robbed from her in horror. ‘No! They do not! Not to me and you! Do you … do you truly fear that?’

William gave a deep sigh and averted his eyes again. ‘I should not have raised the issue … let us not speak about it.’

She tried to search him to make sense of him, but he would not look at her. ‘You do! You think I shall fall for him! William, you are so very wrong! You are so completely and utterly wrong, my darling.’

He moved the covers back and went to sit on the edge of the bed. ‘Victoria … I am old.’

Tears immediately sprang to her eyes and she moved over to clasp him to her. ‘No! No, you are not! You have decades and decades of life and vitality left in you. And I mean it – I will have your children and they will thrive and be yours, and then their children and theirs after them. Age is irrelevant, love is everything!’

‘I wish that were true.’

‘William! Stop this! You are scaring me! Emma was right, you did only mean those things in moments of passion!’

At this he did turn to her. ‘No, my darling, I mean every word I have said to you with utter sincerity.
I feel those things from the moment I awake until the moment I sleep. That is how I feel and how I will always feel … but … I would not presume to speak for you. I would not presume to constrain you.’

‘Constrain me?’

‘When the time comes … you must do what is right for you.’

‘You are right for me.’

‘Perhaps I am now, but … time can change things.’

Tears poured from her eyes. ‘You think me so fickle?’ she sobbed.

He smiled softly. ‘No … but I think you are young. I have done my growing and my changing … you have much of that yet to come. You know yourself now, and you may say even I know you now … but no one can know how things will be in five or ten years’ time, perhaps even in only one or two. I would not seek to deny you your change.’

‘But … we are so happy.’

‘Yes. But happiness is not exclusive to one person or set of circumstances.’

She stood up, her body alight, and declared loudly before him, ‘I believe it is! I do not believe I will ever be as happy as I am now and I will ensure I keep it.’

He stood too and took her by the shoulders, stroking her arms and soothing her. ‘And that is one of the many things I love about you, …’

He hesitated, drawing breath, about to speak again before she cut him off suddenly.

‘Do not say but … not now, please do not say but.’

She pleaded so purely that he could not continue. Instead, with her open, heart-shaped, upturned face before him, he bent his head and kissed her.

Victoria melted against him and coiled her naked body around his with deliberate seduction. It had been too painful; she wanted to forget; she wanted him back as he was. William held her head gently, but his thumb stroked against that tender place beneath her ear and made her bare her neck for him. He took it, kissing down along her, and she felt his passion stirring. It vanquished the pain and the doubt.

‘My darling …’ she sighed.

‘Do not think on it. Let me make love to you,’ he murmured against the soft skin at her collar bone.

‘Yes … yes …’

So they fell back onto the bed together and he entered her, swiftly at first, but when he was in her to the full, he stopped and watched her, how her eyes widened, how her lips parted a little.

He pushed just enough to reinforce his presence. She felt him, all of him, took him and loved him.

‘There. There,’ she whispered. ‘I missed this. I want this all the time.’

William kissed her as he began to move, long, slow strokes that she could feel every pull and push
He bent over her so that she had to arch her back to accommodate him and it drew a gasp. He whispered into her ear, his voice rasping as he moved through her, ‘So do I. I want all of you, all of the time and forever more. Do not doubt that.’

She gripped his back and he took hold of her leg, bending it so that he could move freely into her with increasing determination.

‘Harder,’ she murmured, although he was being so tender this morning she was not sure he’d respond.

Indeed, he gave the slightest frown, as if questioning her request.

‘Oh, please, harder, let me feel you. I want to feel it so that it hurts.’

His frown did not leave him; he was questioning her, questioning himself, but they knew each other too well. She clenched on him and she saw the flash of pleasure pass across him. With that, his face darkened and he took hold of her and pulled her into a sitting position, moving so that he remained embedded within her. Cupping his hands under her backside, he then stood with a grunt, carrying her with him, ensuring he was still deep inside her. Her own weight sank down onto his cock and she was so full and stretched she gasped with the shock of it. Melbourne moved so that she could lean back on the bed post, but she kept her legs curled about him so that he was the one holding her up.

‘You feel that?’ he asked, ragged with his own desire.

‘Yes, yes, I feel that.’

‘Too much?’ Even through his upending lust he cared.

‘No, no. Move in me like this, let me feel more.’

‘Take hold of the post,’ he asked, although his tone was demanding. She reached above her and grabbed onto it.

Immediately, he withdrew – not enough to slip fully from her, but enough to prepare – and then he thrust hard, so that she was pushed up the post again and the breath was forced from her.

‘Too much?’ he asked again, but harsher this time, almost daring her.

‘No!’ she cried, although it had panged – exquisitely, but it had panged.

He did it again, and again she took it. And again, again, again: deep, hard drives into her which made her gasp and quiver with the sheen of pleasure-pain which took hold.

And there, through the cock-deep onslaught of fullness and the haze of confused sensation, she felt that deep, addictive pleasure that only he could deliver, that brewing, blistering ecstasy as he hit her perfectly time and again.

‘Oh there … it’s there!’ she cried and clung to him. So he only went at her faster, grunting with the effort, digging his fingers hard into her rump to hold her.

Her orgasm took her with such force she could only ride it out and was glad of the post behind her and the impaling security of his cock. She was not aware enough to hear the sound she made, a
harsh, throbbing cry of perfect rapture. He continued to move as he could himself hold back no longer.

William was pressed as high into her as he could when he came. His seed burst from him so plenteously and violently that he threw back his head, lost for a moment. ‘Fuck!’

Victoria was carried through her own rapture but heard the word and could only respond with a laugh of sheer delight.

He clung to her but when he’d emptied the final bursts of his rapture into her, he moved them with the last ounce of his energy so that they fell back onto the bed. Having come apart at last, they lay side by side, staring up at the canopy.

‘Good God,’ he breathed out, struggling to regain awareness. ‘Good God above.’

She lay panting, her eyes wide with wonder. ‘That wasn’t the phrase you employed a moment ago.’

‘I apologise. I was somewhat overcome.’

‘Do not apologise; I like it when you’re overcome. And when you come all over.’

He laughed aloud at her crude humour. ‘You are quite the wit.’

‘I have had excellent tuition.’ She wriggled over to curl herself around him. ‘Thank you, my darling. It was quite exceptional.’

‘I cannot dispute that.’ He ran a lazy finger over her arm as they both readjusted to normality. ‘But how my knees held up, I will never know.’

Victoria spluttered a laugh against his side but was aware that again he referred to his age. She would not chide him for it this time.

The bells of London were chiming.

‘Is that eight o’clock?’ she queried.

‘I believe so.’

‘Everyone will be awaiting me at breakfast.’

‘I have a sense that you do not care.’

‘You are correct, Lord M.’

‘Even so …’ He stretched. ‘We should perhaps rouse ourselves. They will be looking for you.’

‘Do you believe they know where I am?’

‘I imagine they do.’

As if cued by their conversation, there immediately came a knock at the door.

Victoria looked up at him, wide-eyed but trying to stifle her laughter. ‘I think it would be wise if you answered the door, Lord M.’

Melbourne got up and threw his dressing gown around him, barely managing to tie it together. He
went over to the door, which fortunately opened away from the direction of the bed, and opened it.

‘Emma, good morning. I hope you are well.’

Victoria strained to hear the conversation.

‘William … it’s after eight o’clock.’

‘I was aware.’

There was a slight pause. He said nothing more.

‘Are you alone?’ continued Emma.

‘Well, hardly … you’re here.’

Lady Portman tutted loudly. ‘You know exactly what I mean.’

‘And you know I’m not going to answer that question.’

‘William …’ Emma’s voice was low and urgent. ‘Everybody is waiting for the Queen at breakfast. The mood down there is quite intolerable. And Baroness Lehzen went into a fit of panic when Her Majesty wasn’t in her room this morning. Her expressions of horrified indignation were quite alarming in themselves.’

‘That must have been entertaining. I’m sorry I missed it.’

‘Stop toying with me!’

‘Oh, but it’s fun.’

‘William! Please ensure that you and, more importantly … anybody else who may be listening … get yourself to breakfast as soon as is humanly possible. And … do put some clothes on!’

Melbourne shut the door and turned back. Victoria sat up in bed with a grin that would not have been out of place on the face of the naughtiest boy in a schoolroom.

‘We have been summoned,’ he said.

‘We?’

‘Oh yes. I do not imagine anyone is any doubt as to where you spent the night … even the outraged Lehzen.’

She gave the deepest sigh. ‘I suppose I should go. Uncle Leopold is difficult enough to deal with at the best of times – I dread to think what mood he would be in if I denied him his kedgeree.’

It was William’s turn to laugh. ‘Heaven forbid! Come along then …’ He paced over and yanked the covers quite suddenly off her. She yelped in surprise but before she could argue he’d picked her up and carried her over his shoulder to the dressing room. She squealed in mock protest but in fact thoroughly enjoyed it.

William put her down and pointed to the bowl and jug. ‘Basin and water. I daresay you may wish to avail yourself of it after our … undertakings.’

She grinned again. ‘Will you carry me into breakfast like that?’
‘My dear, my knees were strained enough earlier … don’t ask me to test them further.’

‘I’m only a little thing.’

He smiled. ‘It is tempting, but perhaps a modicum of decorum would be wise.’

She reached for the jug and poured some water in a bowl. ‘And, as usual, Lord M … I defer to your infinite wisdom.’

And giving her a playful smack on the backside, he left her to wash.

Chapter End Notes

If you love Vicbourne (which presumably you do as you're reading this) and you haven't already, do pop over and join our very friendly Vicbourne discussion/appreciation group, 'For the Love of Vicbourne - Victoria and Lord M' on Facebook. We're still keeping the Vicbourne love going! x

NB - I'VE JUST POSTED A CHAPTER GUIDE TO REVELATION. YOU’LL FIND THE LINK BELOW.

Oh, and comments are still soooo lovely and loved. xx
Melbourne arrived at breakfast first. The atmosphere was not unlike that he recalled when walking into the Chamber after forcing through an education bill. However, now he perversely enjoyed the froideur which greeted him in icy stares and tersely cleared throats.

‘Good morning, Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies,’ he announced.

Not one person greeted him in return. He barely expected them to, but the silence which engulfed him was enough to prevent any further comment on his part. He took a seat in his usual place opposite the Queen’s. The seat beside hers was once again occupied by Leopold.

They sat upright, awaiting Her Majesty in silence.

He could attempt conversation; it would at least amuse him. But at the same time, he took pleasure in sensing their discomfort and antagonism. She had been in his bed last night; all else was as nothing.

It took several more minutes for the Queen to arrive. When she did, they stood as one as she bustled in.

‘Here we are then,’ she declared, crossing to her seat. She took one look at Leopold beside her. ‘Oh! Uncle, you appear to have moved places again.’

‘Indeed, niece,’ said Leopold.

‘But I wish Lord M to sit there as he did previously.’

Melbourne decided there had been enough tension for one morning. And even he was hungry after the previous night’s enterprise. ‘It is no matter, Your Majesty. I am quite content here.’

She looked across at him and the spark in her eyes told him she would protest, but he sent her a look of such clear warning that she soon shut her mouth.

‘Very well. I don’t suppose it matters this once.’

The grapefruit was served; it was far from ripe and his cheeks shrank against its acidity. There was no talk for some time, save for the occasional chink of spoon upon porcelain. Leopold was the first to speak.

‘Victoria, I received a letter from your cousin Albert this morning. He is on his way to see us.’

‘As you keep reminding me, Uncle.’ Her sharpness was as potent as the grapefruit.

‘He is greatly looking forward to seeing you.’

‘How lovely for him.’

‘And, you, I presume, are looking forward to seeing him?’ Leopold turned to her with a thin smile of veiled spite.

Victoria took some grapefruit and wrinkled her nose. ‘This fruit is most sharp, is it not?’
Her uncle continued. ‘We must spend some time at Windsor when he is here. He writes that he is
greatly looking forward to seeing the numerous dragonflies. Their mating behaviour is fascinating, he
says.’

‘Is it? I wouldn’t know.’

Leopold put down his spoon and said pointedly. ‘Would you not?’

‘No, Uncle. I am not terribly acquainted with dragonflies.’

The King of the Belgians raised his head slowly and fixed instead on Melbourne. ‘Perhaps you can
enlighten us on the mating behaviour of the dragonfly, Lord Melbourne? Perhaps you could even
share your knowledge with Albert when he arrives.’

His mouth twitched at the corners; he wasn’t sure if it was in irritation or amusement. ‘I am sure the
Prince is more than capable of discovering these things for himself, Your Majesty.’

‘Oh, but you! A man of the world and with considerable experience; your expertise could be
invaluable. You have so much to impart … as you do so often to my niece.’

Emma Portman made a strange squawk. ‘Your Majesty, do you recall us suggesting a boat ride today
if the weather holds?’ She spluttered it out hurriedly.

‘That sounds splendid. Lord M, what are your plans for the day?’ asked Victoria, brightening.

‘You don’t yet know?’ muttered Leopold under his breath.

‘I must return to Westminster, Ma’am.’ He had hoped to remain by her side for as long as he could,
especially with the arrival of Albert so imminent, but Leopold’s scorn prompted sense to return.

‘Oh, bother,’ huffed the Queen. ‘It would have been so nice to have been rowed by you across the
water.’

‘Another time, Ma’am.’

‘I’m sure Albert will gladly take you rowing, Victoria,’ Leopold added.

‘Perhaps … but he knows nothing about the surroundings and what I like. I’m not sure he’ll have the
strength nor the sense of direction to take me where I wish to go.’

Leopold ignored her. ‘Return to Westminster at last, Lord Melbourne? You do spend so much time
away from it. It is fortunate that the country seems able to run itself, is it not? But I do wonder if the
electorate will see it that way.’

For once he could not think of a pithy retort, and so he merely pressed his lips briefly into the
thinnest of smiles and turned his attention to his poached egg.

Breakfast continued in a frosty silence broken only by the occasional comment by Harriet on the
toughness of the bacon.

--xoOox--

Victoria and he managed to spend an hour together afterwards, and also managed to see to business.
But Melbourne had said he was returning to Westminster and so he must. He reluctantly admitted
that there were significant amounts of work to be attending to.
Victoria signed the last document with a sigh and glanced up at him. ‘I suppose it is farewell then.’

‘Only for a short while, Ma’am.’

‘Can you return tonight?’

‘I will endeavour to.’

‘But how will I know? That time you arrived in my room was quite daring. Even I do not think we should risk that again, especially as everyone is now so alert to our every move.’

‘If I come, I shall arrive after dinner … I cannot bear to sit through another meal with those ghouls staring at me.’

‘Ghouls? Lord M! Are you talking of my uncle and mother?’

‘I apologise, Ma’am. Not them alone … but you felt it too. The scrutiny was oppressive, even for me.’

‘Even for you?’ She stood and curled her arms about his waist, looking up at him with a smile.

‘I’ve learnt to bear most things over the years, but Leopold has a way of aggravating me which I find hard to ignore.’

‘He takes pleasure in it. You should not rise to it.’

‘Should I not?’ He enjoyed the feel of her body pressing against him, pulling him in tighter against her.

‘No … you should only rise for me.’

A lazy smirk played on his mouth and he lowered his head to kiss her. ‘You vixen,’ he murmured against her lips.

‘Am I supposed to be an expert on the mating habits of foxes now too?’ she teased.

‘Well … we can hone your skills later … Ma’am.’ He kissed along her neck, breathing in the ever-intoxicating scent of her, finding the little pulse point under her ear – a favourite – and nuzzling it gently.

She sighed and he felt that gloriously affirming sensation as she melted against him. He was as hard as anything and her effervescent sensuality wove its spell yet again, making him press into her without barely realising. His soft kisses became firmer, his nuzzles became harsher. If he opened his mouth he could graze her with his teeth, mark her … claim her. She would want that, would she not? She would like that.

He held her tight into him and opened his mouth, breathing hot and muggy onto her. He was met only with a sigh of encouraging bliss in return. So he closed in, the merest amount, just enough for the edges of his teeth to provide a frisson of excitement. He felt her shudder beneath him, but the hands around his waist only splayed harder across his back. Her head fell back to grant him easier access.

He sank them in further and this time he heard the little gasp, but still she pushed herself wantonly against him. So again, harder.

This time she cried out, a sharp, short little cry of pain. But she did not pull back.
He did.

Melbourne lifted his head and tried to blink his lust away. She opened her eyes blearily; her only expression that of disappointment. ‘Why did you stop, My Lord?’

He glanced at her neck. There were clear red indents where he had bitten down.

‘I apologise, Ma’am. I am forgetting myself.’

She let out a laugh and held him tighter still. ‘You think I do not like that?’

‘I do not wish to hurt you.’

‘Hurt me?’ she scoffed. ‘Lord Melbourne! I willingly let you spank me until I am throbbing and sore. Do not trouble yourself with that.’

‘I wasn’t sure if you were ready. I can only say sorry.’

She was still holding him tight. ‘I am always ready. If I am good … will you do that again?’

He smirked. ‘I think I can agree to that, but … if you are bad then I will …’ He leaned down and whispered into her ear such filthy things that even he could not bear for them to escape into the air around them.

She threw her head back with a laugh. ‘Then I think I may have to be very bad indeed, Lord Melbourne.’

‘Promise?’ he asked.

Victoria at last drew her arms away from him and, right there before him, sank into the deepest curtsey. Her skirts pooled in an azure lake around her, matching the colour of her eyes, wide and lustrous in her upturned face. ‘I promise … My Lord.’

The moment was too good not to savour. The delicious gleam of mastery as this perfect woman knelt before him, ripe, ready for him. He could take her now. His erection practically demanded it. But, instead, with supreme restraint, he took the cue, and, with a final smirk of satisfaction and promise, turned and left the Queen of England kneeling on the carpet.

Anticipation … she was not the only one who benefited.

--xoOox--

Westminster was hardly engaging. He attended questions and sat through a debate on the corn laws, then retreated to the Members’ dining room for tea.

‘Melbourne, may I join you?’

The familiarly assured tones of the Duke of Wellington greeted him. Melbourne stood and shook his hand. ‘Wellington. How are you?’

‘As well as can be expected given the stifling atmosphere I find round here these days. No wonder you avoid it.’

Melbourne threw back his tails as he sat again and remarked pithily, ‘Well … I’m here now.’

‘But for how much longer one wonders?’ Wellington pulled out the chair opposite and lowered
himself into it.

‘As long as I am called upon to do my duty.’

‘And where do you consider that duty truly lies, eh, Melbourne? To the House? The people? Or to a little woman sitting in a very large house at the end of the Mall?’

He gave it a moment’s pause. Was Wellington so astute? ‘If the people want me, then I will serve them. I do not shirk from my responsibilities.’

‘But you could consider relinquishing them to another. If the time has come to move on, Melbourne, don’t be too proud to step aside.’

‘I think you know me better than that. Pride ceased to be a factor for me when my wife had a very public affair with the world’s greatest poet.’ He reached for his tea. ‘I use that term lightly.’

If he had looked at Wellington, he would have noted the expression of admiring pity that defined it.

‘I’ve resigned before,’ he continued, ‘why should I not do so again if the necessity arises?’

‘Well … being Prime Minister affords you … access, that you would otherwise not have.’

He narrowed his eyes. ‘Is this the only topic of conversation around these days?’

Wellington sat back with tight resignation. ‘It is certainly discussed frequently.’

‘And people see this as a reason for me to resign?’

‘Amongst other things.’

‘Oh?’

‘Come now, Melbourne, your bills have barely scraped through recently. It is hardly a healthy majority. If you are to remain, ensure you are doing it for the right reasons, that is all I suggest.’

‘You know I will not cling on if things are untenable, but the Whigs are in such disarray that they do – whether you believe it or not – need something familiar at the helm.’

‘As long as the person at the helm isn’t distracted by …’

‘By what?’

‘The siren’s call?’

He had no response, and – as two gentlemen who’d known each other through mutual human vagaries – thought he would respond to Wellington with a smirk of understanding. But at that moment someone walked into the dining room and other words ran from Melbourne’s mouth.

‘Buggery and damnation! Can I not escape the man?’

Wellington turned. The King of the Belgians had just walked in.

‘Ah! Melbourne, at last I find you.’ Leopold paced across to the table, forcing them both to stand. ‘And Wellington. It is good to see you, my friend.’

‘Your Majesty.’ The Duke bowed his head and shook the King’s hand. ‘What brings you to
Westminster?’

‘Please … sit.’ They did so as he continued. ‘I wanted to see British democracy in full flow, and to perhaps watch our estimable Lord Melbourne in his natural habitat.’

Melbourne could not help but scoff slightly.

‘What, Melbourne?’ inquired Leopold. ‘Not your natural habitat? No … perhaps not, considering where you spend most of your time these days. But then … even here, I had hoped to find you in debate in the Chamber or holding counsel, you must have a great deal of work to catch up on after all, but instead I find you engaged in that most British pastime … drinking tea.’

‘I find it lubricates the mind as well as the throat, Your Majesty.’ Melbourne found his hands coiled into tight fists and forced himself to uncurl them and reach for his tea. Raising the cup to Leopold, he took a sip.

He did not invite him to join them; it was left to Wellington to speak.

‘Do sit down, Your Majesty. I will arrange for more tea to be brought.’

Melbourne swallowed back what was nearly an audible sigh. ‘However did you manage to get in, sir? This is a private room for Members only.’

‘Well … being a King does afford one a few privileges. And I said that the Prime Minister himself would be only too happy to host me.’

‘But of course,’ he responded tightly.

‘But I am sorry to interrupt your discussion, gentlemen,’ said Leopold. ‘Pray tell me what you were discussing?’

Wellington obliged. ‘The state of Government, as you can imagine.’

‘Ah. I hear the Whigs cling on tenuously. Perhaps time for your own party to return, eh, Wellington?’

The Duke chuckled. ‘I am too old to wish to be involved at the cutting edge of politics any longer. I prefer simply to see stable governance.’

‘But, surely, with a fragile majority and with your heart not in it, it is time to consider moving on, would you not agree, Lord Melbourne?’ He fixed him with a stare of penetrating intimidation. It didn’t work.

‘When the time is right.’ He looked straight back.

‘I took time to talk to your colleagues on arriving here. Many of them think the time is now.’

Leopold spoke louder than he needed. His voice was carrying through the dining room and other Members were turning and listening in.

‘They always do.’ Melbourne shrugged.

‘They have concerns about your commitment and about your propensity for distraction … distraction which could bring the Government into scandal. I am wont to agree with them and told them as much. The Belgians, for one – and I am sure they are not alone in Europe or the wider world – would be disturbed at the thought of trade with such a fragile nation. I shall have to report this when
I return.’

Melbourne felt every eye in the room on them. He gripped the arms of the chair and leaned forward, his temper at last uncontrolled. He said under heated breath, ‘What idiocy to say that! Great Britain is the leading industrial nation in the world and will remain so! It is not fragile! And it is certainly not fragile due to my relationship with Vi-!’

He cut himself off and clamped his lips shut, his breath coming hard and fast with rage.

‘Melbourne,’ warned Wellington.

Leopold sat quite calmly with a satisfied grin on his face. ‘Since when has it been acceptable for the Prime Minister to refer to his Sovereign by her first name? You forget yourself, Lord Melbourne. And if you forget yourself, then think of the rest of the damage you could do. I’m sure the Duke of Wellington agrees with me on this.’

Wellington chose not to respond, but when Melbourne looked to him for support, he kept his gaze lowered.

Leopold stood and looked down imperiously. ‘It is time for you to resign, Lord Melbourne, and I shall ensure everyone knows it. As for the Queen, Albert arrives tomorrow. I expect a marriage agreement within two weeks. Good day.’

He left.

Melbourne sat, his mind churning with fury and frustration.

‘Melbourne …’ began Wellington, ‘the man is a snake in the grass, but he makes valid points. This liaison … you have enjoyed. It must end. You know that. She is young, she must marry another. I believe Prince Albert would be a good match. Surely you want what is right for her?’

He dropped his head. ‘Of course I do.’

‘You don’t fool yourself into thinking it can endure, do you?’

‘I … I try not to think about it at all.’

‘Well, then you’re a damn fool. You must resolve this, for her as much as anything. She may be young and have her heart easily swayed … but you are not and you shouldn’t.’

His mouth rose up with rueful awareness. ‘But you see … one does not become any less human the older one gets. I … I care about her very much. Very much indeed.’

The Duke gave a sigh. ‘Have you not learnt to guard your heart after all you have put it through over the years, William?’

‘Apparently not.’

Wellington leaned forward. ‘Come now, old chap.’ He clapped him on the hands. ‘There is more to life than a warm bed and someone waiting for you in it, you know that. Heavens … I have hardly been a shining example of marital propriety, but … perhaps it has taught me not to give love too readily, and certainly not to expect it in return. It is not something that I have found rewarding … I had imagined your experiences would have taught you the same.’

‘I am not you, Arthur. Love can be beautiful and glorious; I have always thought that, hoped it, at
least. And now, finally …’

‘What? Don’t tell me you’ve found it in little Victoria? Damn it, man, see sense! You’ve had a good run of her between the sheets, heaven knows you’ve been the envy of all and have been most fortunate that we have turned a blind eye! Now do the decent thing and leave her to a man who can be her consort and guide.’

‘She doesn’t need a consort and guide. She is quite capable of thinking for herself.’

Wellington stood up. ‘William … You know what must be done. Step away.’ And with a raised eyebrow of advising finality, the Duke left him.

William sat a while longer, his fingers steepled, staring ahead of him. People came and went, and he barely responded to their enquiries and approaches.

He knew he should. Step away … from Parliament, from her. It was time.

But what else did he have? He had come to a time in his life when he was left with nothing save for a decent library and a glasshouse of orchids. Marriage had been a disaster, his children were dead. He had seen the same happen to so many … would he wish the same on anyone … on her?

And now here he was … the happiest he had ever been. He loved her. He lived for her. How could he give that up? And she for her part … she loved him, there was no doubt. She could, couldn’t she, forever more? Would it not endure? How could something so perfect and radiant not endure?

He remembered Caro, her eyes shining with adoration on their wedding night, her lips moving with fervent promises of her eternal devotion …

He closed his eyes tightly, blotting out the progression of thoughts which would inevitably and torturously follow.

‘More tea, Prime Minister?’ asked the footman.

He opened his eyes suddenly and took a sharp inhalation of breath. ‘No, no, thank you.’

‘Anything else, sir? It is, after all, five o’clock.’

‘No … I have work to do, need a clear head and all.’

‘Very well, sir.’

The footman turned.

‘On second thoughts … a brandy … yes … thank you.’

‘Very well. Your usual amount, sir?’

‘No … make it large.’

‘Very good, sir.’

The brandy arrived and was consumed before the Division Bell sounded at quarter past. He really should be bothered to vote, he supposed.

And after that … some more paperwork. He would not be finished until at least ten o’clock. Bed at Dover House was a little over five minutes away. His housekeeper always prepared a fine
vichyssoise in case he returned. It would suffice.

Suffice.

He had spent his whole life sufficing.

Buckingham Palace was fifteen minutes away. She would be waiting, whatever the time.

He sighed, draining the last drops of brandy, and then stood to go and vote.

After more work, Melbourne left Parliament as the bells of Westminster chimed a quarter past ten. But instead of turning his horse right down Whitehall towards Dover House, he headed along Great George Street and up Birdcage Walk.

He arrived at the Palace barely ten minutes later.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, William, you darling, tormented, confused, loyal, gorgeous, gorgeous man. x

God, I love him.

Don't forget to join our Vicbourne Facebook group if you haven't - For the Love of Vicbourne. Also, I've uploaded a chapter guide to this story called (originally) Revelation Chapter Guide. It's listed as an individual story on my profile. I'll keep it updated as I post chapters.

Anyway ... thoughts, my lovelies? xx
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

Be warned. This is a heavy chapter of some serious historically inaccurate sexy stuff between two people who are in so deep and are so uncertain about the future that they're a little confused as to how to express it. Definitely NSFW. Intense and intimate and private, but you are very welcome to be a fly on the wall.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When he arrived at the Palace, Melbourne inquired after Her Majesty and was informed that she was finishing dinner. He could not bear to see Leopold yet again and so declared that he was not hungry and would retire to his bed chamber.

‘Very well, sir,’ said the footman.

‘One moment.’ Melbourne retreated to a study where he found pen and paper. He returned a short while later with an enveloped letter. ‘Would you please ensure this is delivered to Her Majesty?’

‘Of course, sir.’ The footman took it without a look at Melbourne or hint of curiosity in his voice. But when the Prime Minister turned from him and left along the corridor, the man marked him go and glanced at the letter in his hand.

--xoOox--

Victoria and her party were moving to the card room when the footman approached her.

He bowed. ‘From Lord Melbourne, Your Majesty.’

‘Oh? Did this arrive by post?’

‘No, Ma’am. He delivered it personally.’

‘Thank you.’ She took the letter hurriedly and moved away from the others. ‘I will join you presently. Do get the cards ready.’

She went a little way down the corridor and pulled the note out, casting her eyes over it quickly.

My darling,

I am here. I cannot stand another round with your uncle, so please accept my apologies for not joining you. I fear he won the last two and I would sooner devote my remaining energy to you. Do not hurry, I will wait. You know I will.

With my heart and my patient anticipation,

William.

She smiled as she read and afterwards pressed the paper to her lips. Victoria sighed and glanced towards the card room. She would have to join them for one or two hands, she supposed.
‘All well, Drina?’ asked her mother when she returned.

‘And the letter? From Lord Melbourne? What doe-’ began her uncle.

‘Shall we play?’ She picked up the cards and started dealing them before he could say another word.

After two hands, Victoria pretended to stifle a yawn. ‘Well, I think I shall retire. I give you permission to continue without me.’

‘Do you wish me to accompany you, Majesty?’ queried Lehzen.

‘No, not at all, Lehzen. You stay and enjoy the game. I bid you all good night.’

And without waiting for responses she left. She managed not to run until she was halfway up the stairs.

It took Skerrett only a few minutes to prepare her.

‘Will you tie those ribbons again, Skerrett. I found them useful last night.’

Skerrett gave a little smirk. ‘I prefer not to ask how, Ma’am.’

‘That is probably wise. I do not wish to traumatise my Lady’s Maid.’ With a giggle, the two women set about what was needed, before Victoria was soon hurrying along to the Baron’s Room.

He kissed her long and hard when she arrived, and Victoria sensed in him a need for comfort and company. She drew back and searched his eyes. ‘What is the matter?’

‘Nothing. You are here now. Nothing is the matter.’

‘But before?’

He sighed and gave that resigned raise of the arms he sometimes did. ‘There are many who seek to remind me of my mortality.’

She nearly laughed. ‘What a strange way of putting it!’

‘I …’ he sighed. ‘I don’t want to talk about it. Not now. Not tonight. For tomorrow …’

She quickly put a finger up to his lips to silence him. ‘Do not speak of tomorrow.’

He smiled softly. ‘No … you are right.’

‘Now,’ she grinned, turning the full seduction of her gaze to him, ‘I recall you mentioning what you would do if I were naughty.’

‘Hm.’

She cocked an eyebrow. ‘Unless you are too tired, My Lord.’

‘For you?’ he said, his voice low. ‘Never.’ And with that he took her and spun her around, pulling her back against him and holding her tight. She gasped with the shock of it.

His arms enfolded her against him as he bent to whisper, ‘Tell me … what exactly have you done that is so naughty?’ It was practically growled into her ear.

‘Well, I …’ She must think of something! ‘I … let Dash jump onto the ottoman with dirty paws.’
'Is that all?'

'I … called my uncle a bitter old prune.'

'To his face?'

'Not quite. But I certainly thought it.' His hands were exploring her, ridding her of clothing. She could barely think let alone speak. 'But mostly I … I have been so in need of … attention that I have had to … find ways to amuse myself.'

'What sort of attention?'

'Your attention, My Lord.'

Her nightgown was off and she was naked. He pulled her back in against him, 'And how have you been amusing yourself?'

'Well, I … I complained of a headache and retired to bed after lunch.'

'And what did you do in bed after lunch? Sleep?'

'No.'

'What then?'

'I … touched myself.'

'Did you indeed?'

'Yes, Lord Melbourne.' His right arm pinned her to him, his left trailed idly up and down her side, half tickling, half enticing.

'And did you come?'

'I did, sir.'

The left hand stopped briefly. 'Have I given you permission for this?'

'No, sir. I did not realise I should seek your permission.'

'Only if you wish to be considered … not naughty.'

'But …'

'You do wish to be naughty.' He started stroking her again.

'Yes … I do. Sometimes I wish to be desperately naughty. Wicked, in fact.'

'And you know what happens to wicked girls?'

'I hope so.'

'Hmm … You’re wearing the ribbons again, I see.'

'Yes, sir. I thought perhaps … you could make use of them tonight.'

'I will decide on that.'
‘Of course, My Lord.’

But he had already taken hold of one ribbon and was tugging it off, letting its silken band uncoil slowly from around her hair.

When he had one, he drew his hands down slowly over her arms and, on reaching her wrists, took hold of them and pulled them suddenly behind her back. She inhaled sharply but said and did nothing. He bound the ribbon around her arms, so tightly she could barely wriggle her hands. He usually asked if was too tight. This time he didn’t.

Melbourne moved round to stand before her and, with an expression of serious concentration, brought his hands up to cup her breasts. ‘So very beautiful. I do not attend to these enough.’

With the backs of his hands, he rubbed across the nipples, causing her to suck in sharply. The fire crackled nearby and the air was not cold, but already they stood out like little sentinels, craving more from him. He continued grazing over them, lightly, tenderly, but it was enough to make her swoon with need.

‘Oh, that’s … please …’ she sighed.

‘Please what?’

‘I need more.’

‘You will be patient.’ He glanced up suddenly, as if an idea had only just occurred to him, and in the next moment, had withdrawn a large handkerchief from his pocket and coiled it into something approaching a rope. ‘And silent.’

With determined fluidity, Melbourne then placed the coiled handkerchief around her mouth. She had no time to cry out or protest but the wideness of her eyes spoke of her surprise. He merely smirked. ‘You talk too much. You told me to be quiet yesterday … I now demand it of you.’ He reached around and tied the ends of the handkerchief tightly behind her head. Victoria breathed in through her nose, indignation rising in her for the first time. It made her toss her shoulders from side to side in an attempt to pull her arms around.

With that, he brought a hand to her left breast again and caught the nipple. ‘Shh. Settle.’ His left hand found the other and, with his thumbs, he pressed the hard nuts of flesh in and then circled them, rolling them around and around. Immediately she was soothed, immediately beautiful pulses of pleasure flowed from her enthralled nipples, down through her willing body to throb at her very core. She pressed her legs together to relieve it and focused on her breathing – in and out through her nose.

‘Don’t be alarmed. Since you cannot speak and your hands are bound, if you wish me to stop, instead of orchid, you will stamp or kick your right foot five times. Do you understand?’

She looked at him and nodded.

He turned his attention back to her breasts and squeezed them gently while his thumbs continued flicking and teasing the nipples.

‘My God, you have beautiful breasts. I feel I have been most negligent.’

And with that he bent down and dragged the left nipple onto his tongue. Victoria nearly cried with the beauty of it. Not only was the sensation the most perfect thing – warm but damp, focused but broad, gentle but sharp – but the sight of him suckling on her, licking and completely adoring of her,
sent such happiness through her that she felt her eyes prickling.

He remained like that for a time, moving from one to the other, focused on them, studying them, holding them in his hands. She tried to reach round to hold onto him, forgetting she was tied; she tried to sigh out his name, forgetting she was silenced. All she could do was let him; all she could do was take every moment of sensual perfection he gave her.

When her nipples were hard and pert and lividly erect, he at last pulled back, sated it seemed.

‘There,’ he stated.

And then, with a glance at her, he moved across to the bureau and poured himself a brandy.

She moaned into the gag and stamped her foot. He glanced back at her, noting the stamp of the foot (only the one).

‘What?’

Melbourne paced across to her and looked down before taking another drink.

‘Is something the matter?’

She whined again, pleading with him with her eyes. There was such a tugging throb between her legs that she wondered how she would survive it. She pressed them together and bent herself to try to provide some friction or touch or anything.

His mouth curled into the slightest grin.

‘Stand tall.’

She did so.

‘Feet apart.’

She didn’t hesitate.

He drew his hand down slowly, running it along the curves of her breasts and waist, before tantalisingly hovering just short of where she so needed him. His other still held the glass of brandy from which he now took another drink.

‘You want me to touch you, don’t you?’

She wanted to scream her affirmation out but could only nod.

‘What do you think I’ll find?’

A sob caught in her throat, stifled by the length of silk binding her mouth.

‘You said you liked being wicked. I like you being wicked. I like it very much. Shall we see how wicked you truly are, Victoria?’

She nodded again and he gave the slightest smirk.

Then, not breaking eye contact from her, he brought his hand between her legs.

Never had touch been so craved. She nearly came immediately. Her body jerked forward and she
grunted into her gag.

He sniffed out in satisfaction. ‘Yes … so very wicked … and so very, very wet.’

His middle finger slid down through her sex. Despite all the intimacy between them, she felt a wave of embarrassment at her body’s reaction. She was dripping for him, dripping onto him.

He took hold of a breast and teased the nipple again, squeezing and rolling it with sinful idleness. At the same time, he massaged her clit with an insouciance which drove her mad, and as he did this, he lowered himself to whisper in her ear.

‘Wicked girl … are you? Hm? Are you my wicked girl?’

She opened her eyes wide and met his. He was looking at her with the same expression he might adopt when she had frustrated one of her detractors in support of him. She nodded.

‘Yes … you are … my wicked, deliciously naughty girl.’

He rubbed harder now in determined circles to build her pleasure undeniably.

‘Do you want to come?’ he asked low, almost a hum.

She nodded again, the gag frustrating her.

‘Do you think I should let you come?’

She whined this time. Would he not let her? She would die surely if she couldn’t release the twisting, prickling heat of pleasure consuming her.

She nodded again, desperately, her brows furrowed in bewildered delirium.

‘Oh, you need it, don’t you?’ He slowed his rubs, and his mouth curled into a sly grin which bordered on malevolence. ‘But … not … yet.’

And at that he removed his hand and paced around to stand behind her.

She sobbed. It was muffled in the material silencing her, but a tear of frustration fell to roll down her cheek. Melbourne pushed down on her back. ‘Bend.’

She did, although she was poised awkwardly, bent over in mid-air. He inhaled deeply and – THWACK!

The spank resounded around the room and she nearly tumbled forward in surprise. Taking hold of her arms, Melbourne drew her over to the bureau and pushed her down over it, not aggressively, but brusquely nonetheless. Now that she was flat and braced against something, he quickly delivered another hard smack, making her bottom quiver and her pride with it.

‘Oof!’ she moaned into the gag, feeling she should offer a token protest.

‘Not this tonight? Remember, you have been so very wicked after all. But if you wish me to stop, stamp your foot five times as instructed.’

She considered it, briefly. He gave her time to do so, but her feet barely twitched out of their position planted on the floor.

‘Very well. I shall do as I see fit.’
THWACK!

It had been some time, and with his attentions to her breasts and with her hands constricted and her mouth silenced, the sheen of pain was heightened. But at the same time it was more stunning than ever. She proffered herself to him willingly and wantonly, opening her legs in the hope his searing hand may connect with more than the absorbing flesh of her backside. It did not deter or bewilder him.

THWACK!

The hardest yet. Her body shivered under the onslaught. He did not let up. He spanked her concertedly now, full, hard pelts raining down on her time after time.

Melbourne bent over and whispered in her ear again, his breathing ragged with the effort of what he was doing. ‘Remember this … remember what I do to you. Remember what you need, what you need from me.’

And he set to it again. Hard, blistering thrashes which sent her into that place where she seemed to float between this world and another; a red-white world of sheening, glowing beyondness.

And then, when she thought she could take no more, when the pain began to encroach with sharpness rather than a glow, when the word orchid formed in her mind and her foot twitched to stamp for it to cease … she felt something else instead.

Seeking, pushing, stretching and filling.

He had entered her. Long, thick and hard, him, into her, in and in, deep then deeper. But he was determined and he was driven. Tonight, he fucked her. Melbourne thrust into her with a grunt each time: regular, full drives so that her body was rammed against the bureau.

But still she took it, still she pushed back for the full length of his cock each time. His long fingers closed around the bindings on her wrists and he tugged on them so that she was lifted from the table slightly. It hurt but she didn’t recognise it as pain. He was inside her so perfectly, hitting that place that sent rolls of brewing ecstasy rising and rising in her. She moaned into the gag as her anticipated bliss was held poised.

Melbourne leaned down, still moving, still filling her each time, cramming every hard inch of himself into her. His voice rasped against her awareness, rough with his own certainty: ‘You need it, you always will. This. You need all of me. My hand on you, my mouth on you, my fucking you. Will you come for me, Victoria? Of course you will, as I will for you. Come now.’

And so she did. The pleasure which she had held back needed only the briefest word from him to break. She came so hard that he would feel the clenching of it on his cock. She came shuddering, her eyes wide and unseeing, her illimitable cry of rapture caught in the material binding her mouth, but she came completely on him and with him, because he could not stop himself from emptying into her in burst after burst of his own pure ecstasy.

She fell back onto the bureau afterwards and he stood behind her, still embedded. It was as if the world had stopped momentarily, and Victoria cried, not because she was hurting – although her arms were starting to protest at their constriction – but because she knew the world hadn’t actually stopped and she wanted it to so very much. She wanted to keep him inside her for always, to remain thus, him and her, isolated and secure.

As if sensing her regret, he said, his own voice melancholic, ‘I’m going to fall from you. I’m sorry.’
And he stepped back and slipped from her and she was left only with his remnant which she felt warm and soft as it ran a little from her. She kept her legs together to keep him inside, to hold onto any part of him she could.

Then, gently and tenderly, he guided her up and immediately released her arms. She gasped as blood rushed through them and closed her eyes with discomfort. He took her hands and rubbed gently, raising them to his mouth and kissing her wrists, scored with dark red marks where the ribbons had bound her. His lips soothed away the pain. Then he untied her mouth and immediately took her head in his hands and kissed her. After the drying constriction of the gag, his kisses were the softest, most enthralling thing, and she sighed into him.

He paused in his kisses only to ask, ‘Are you alright?’

‘Yes.’ She nodded through her tears.

‘I have made you cry. Was it too much?’

She managed a smile. ‘No, not you, not what you did.’

‘Why then?’ He continued to kiss over her face gently, absorbing her tears.

‘Because I want it to go on … I want this to go on forever, and …’

‘Shh.’ He covered her mouth with his own and her doubts and fears melted under his healing kisses.

‘Don’t talk,’ he continued, moving down her body to her breasts and sucking on one. ‘Come for me again,’ he slurred before tugging the nipple deep back into his mouth. His fingers were between her legs and, as tender as she was, she could take more from him, already more.

He would feel his seed but he didn’t care and, attaching his mouth to her left breast and rolling the nipple of the right in his fingers, he rubbed and stroked her sex so perfectly with his other hand that pleasure rose rapidly and unstoppably yet again.

This time she could release it loudly, and as she cried out the sudden spike of orgasm, his teeth found her nipple, sending a shard of glorious brilliance to heighten the pleasure.

Her legs betrayed her afterwards and she nearly buckled under him but he caught her quickly and lifted her in his arms, carrying her over and placing her on the bed. But he gave her no respite and after ridding himself of the rest of her clothes, placed himself between her legs and licked. She thrashed her head in bewilderment.

‘Oh, I can’t! Not again!’

‘You can,’ he said, and she took his faith and used it. ‘Make it so, Victoria.’ His insistent edge was undeniable.

Her clitoris was swollen and tender and she instinctively tried to wriggle from him, but as his tongue fell on it soft and wet and cooling, she relaxed into it again and found her body readying itself for more.

He was unfailingly gentle, but constant, always there, regular, rhythmical, and soon enough pleasure cascaded through her once more. Her thighs instinctively clamped around his head, holding him there and causing him to suck suddenly on her clit and jolt her ecstasy into a delirious peak. She let it out with a wailing sigh this time which turned into a half laugh of disbelief.
Only after ever judder and twitch had left her did he move himself up to lie beside her. Victoria could not bring herself to lift even a hand to caress him, but he seemed content to simply lie, his face graced with a soft smile of satisfaction.

‘You did that. You do that, only you,’ she breathed out. ‘How can I live without that?’

She met his eyes, but he did not linger in her gaze and kissed her instead.

When he drew back she said with a grin, ‘I trust I was wicked enough then?’

‘Most deliciously wicked.’ He lifted himself a little to lean over her.

‘I would add that you were quite dreadfully naughty yourself, My Lord.’

‘Occasionally it can be beneficial to fight fire with fire.’

At last she found the strength to curl her arms around him. ‘And you, sir, rendered me quite aflame.’

He grew momentarily serious. ‘Do I shock you?’

She considered it. ‘Perhaps a little … but only to my benefit.’

‘That is the only purpose.’

‘Oh, but you do enjoy it too?’

‘You know I do.’

‘When we first spoke of this … all that time ago, you said that the restriction to the lady was liberating. I understand that so very much now … and you are right. When you tie me, when you spank me and silence me … I am more within myself, more at ease than I ever am within the constraints and protocol of the court. I am myself, only with you, only ever with you.’

‘My darling.’

He kissed her slow and tender and moved between her legs. She instinctively reached down to feel for him. ‘Are you hard again, My Lord?’

Melbourne smirked. ‘It just so happens that I am.’

He started to nudge her legs apart but she stopped him. ‘Come up to me here. I want to taste you. I want you to feed it to me.’

He let out a laugh which bordered on shock.

‘What, My Lord?’

‘You … the things you say. You arouse me so desperately, my wicked girl. Have I created this wild creature?’

Victoria giggled. ‘If you have, then you should be most proud of your achievements.’

He smirked. ‘You want to taste me?’

‘Indeed I do.’

‘Very well. It seems I can only humour you.’
And with that he knelt up and she, newly energised, turned herself to kneel level to him as he jutted out, as erect as before. She looked up at him with coquettish pride.

‘You do have a way of making me rise to the occasion,’ he grinned. ‘Now … open.’

Not breaking eye contact, she opened her mouth for him and, with a deliberation as he studied the process, he fed himself slowly between her parted lips.

Victoria closed her eyes and sucked slowly, concentrating on the hard flesh sitting on her tongue, rolling it, toying with it, relishing the feel of it. For he was hers and she adored it.

He moaned; it was his turn to be lost. But when his hands found her head and his fingers threaded their way through her hair, it was clear he was not going to relinquish all control. She was in no rush, but he slowed her again, guiding her along him so that he could work himself in her mouth at his pace.

‘I love the way you suck me,’ he murmured and so she sucked more. ‘Slowly,’ he warned, and she was content to be led by him, as she had been all night. ‘One must never rush perfection.’

At one point he brought a finger under her chin and pushed her head up, tilting it back. Then he pushed himself in so that he sank deeper into her and nudged her throat. She expected to pull back, for her throat to close up against him, but her hunger for him overrode it and she found herself able to take nearly his full length.

‘Oh, Christ alive!’ he cursed, but there was such amazement and adoration in his voice that she could only close her cheeks in harder around him.

Eventually he built up his pace and handed control to her. She tongued and licked and sucked him ever more fervently until he burst into her mouth with explosive force.

It was a gift, she thought, when he came in her mouth, a giving of self, without shame or embarrassment. For two people to be so open with each other … surely it was a rare and precious thing? She had taken his raw self fully into her and kept it.

It was Melbourne’s turn to slump onto the bed. ‘How you do this to me,’ he murmured, his amazement evident.

She pushed herself up to look at him and spoke clearly. ‘It is quite simple … I love you.’

‘I love you,’ he replied.

‘I love you.’

‘I love you.’

They repeated it back and forth for some time, no other words, simply that.

And then they slept and did not think about what tomorrow would bring.

Chapter End Notes

That's what it all boils down to - love. They are so very desperate, my two darlings.
Let me know your thoughts no matter how flushed or blushing this made you (in various ways). I can take it.

And do come and join our Facebook group For the Love of Vicbourne - Victoria and Lord M. There's all sorts of goodness to be had.

More soon. And what will tomorrow bring? Oh dear ...
Alright. It's time to move this along. Fasten your seatbelts.

Victoria didn’t speak as she prepared to leave the next morning.

‘Are you sore?’ asked Melbourne, knowing what was occupying her mind but himself also unable to mention it.

‘A little. Nothing I cannot bear.’

He approached her carefully as she put the coat on and placed his hands on her shoulders. ‘Victoria …’

She could barely bring herself to look at him and spoke rapidly. ‘We shall deal with the dispatches as usual this morning. Are you due in Westminster?’

‘Yes. I’ll go after our business is concluded.’

At this she did turn her eyes to him, and they were shining with threatening tears. ‘Must you?’

He ran his hands down her arms and held her tighter to reinforce his presence. ‘You know I must.’

The first tear fell and it broke him. She dropped her head and he saw another drop fall straight from her eye onto the floor.

‘I do not think I can do this,’ she whispered, almost unable to voice it.

‘But you can.’

He placed his hand under her chin and guided her head up to look at him. ‘Victoria … do you remember what I told you once? When you first came to the throne? I told you to go out there and smile and –’

‘Smile and wave and never let them know how hard it is to bear.’ She smiled softly in remembrance. ‘I think of those words so often.’ She sniffed in and wiped the tears from her eyes, composing herself. ‘I shall try, Lord M.’

He bent and kissed her softly.

‘And you?’ she asked.

‘What about me?’

‘Will you smile and bear it, William?’

At this a profound sadness caught him and he almost had to turn away. His lips juddered and he hoped she hadn’t noticed. William clasped his hands to regain composure.
'Of course, Ma’am.’ It was her turn to reach up a hand to cup his face. Her thumb stroked over it and when she invited his kiss, he bent to her, but took rather than gave, for at that moment, he needed it desperately.

She drew back but let her hand trail down to take his fingers in hers. ‘I must go back.’

‘Yes.’

‘Will I see you at breakfast?’

He hated the idea of being there, but one look at her open, pleading face told him he must. ‘Of course.’

‘Thank you. Good bye, Lord M.’

‘Good bye, Ma’am.’

She tried to smile but couldn’t quite manage it, and then she turned and left his room.

---xoOox---

Breakfast was a largely silent affair. Leopold was speaking, he remembered afterwards, but he was not aware of what it was about. He supposed it was to do with the arrival of his nephew, who was due at two o’clock.

Melbourne and Victoria dealt with the dispatches in their usual efficient way, but conversation sat awkwardly today. When he bade her farewell to return to Westminster, she maintained composure, and he, for his part, supposed he did too. Although as he rode off along Birdcage Walk, he had never felt so desperately alone.

---xoOox---

Victoria did not wear the dress suggested by her mother. She chose an old one which was rather dull in both hue and sheen. Her mother was displeased to the point of rage, but Victoria was having none of it.

At two o’clock she declared that she would go to the Throne Room.

‘The Throne Room, Victoria?’ the Duchess queried tersely. ‘That is not necessary for Albert. He is family and this is not a diplomatic visit.’

‘Nevertheless, that is where I shall receive him.’ And she turned and headed there before she could be stopped.

Victoria sat on her throne and waited. Her mother and Leopold, her ladies, half the court it seemed, stood to the sides. Nobody spoke; she certainly did not. She stared straight ahead and focused on the heat of her backside after its thrashing the night before at the hands of her lover.

The clock chimed two. Instructions had been given to show Albert in as soon as he arrived. She could tell Leopold was fretting to go and see where he had got to, but she had forbidden him from doing so. The Prince should be perfectly capable of making his own way, if he must.

The minutes passed. He was late. She already disliked him more than she had before. She did not like to be kept waiting, unless it was for discipline at Lord Melbourne’s hands. For that she could wait an eternity.
At eight minutes past two, the door opened.

‘His Serene Highness Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.’

In walked a tall young man. He walked well, she conceded, and he had a good figure. But he had far too many whiskers and a high forehead. She didn’t like that. And he had an awful lot of gold braid pouring from his shoulders. How terribly vulgar.

She did not move from the throne.

She saw the flare in his eyes as he approached her and knew that he would be wondering why she was seated on the throne and not greeting him informally. He stopped just before the dais, ensured she was looking at him, and bowed, rather stiffly, she thought. He could be considered handsome if it were not for the expression of intense concentration he bore, as if he were contemplating a difficult chess move while contending with indigestion.

‘Your Majesty … Victoria. It is a great pleasure to see you again at last.’

‘Albert. Welcome to the palace. I trust you had a pleasant voyage.’

‘As pleasant as these things always are. It was tiring.’

‘Oh.’ He was complaining already. ‘Well, you’re here now so there it is.’

Silence. Neither of them knew what to say, and as she was in no mood for banal small talk, she said nothing. He looked at her with a scrutiny and a hint of amusement she objected to.

‘Do you sit here all day, Victoria?’ he said at length quite openly.

‘Whatever do you mean?’

‘Here, on the throne? I would find it most uncomfortable and uninspiring.’

She bristled. ‘Well, fortunately, you’re not Queen of England, and I am.’

She wanted him to be insulted, but instead he let the corner of his mouth rise into something approaching a smirk. That infuriated her more. She clutched her hands together while also clutching for things to say.

‘Well … how are things in Coburg? I suppose you must miss it terribly?’

‘Not yet. I have only just arrived here, after all.’

‘And your brother? Did he not accompany you?’

‘Not on this occasion.’

She shot Leopold a glare. Ernst she remembered as being much more fun than Albert. He would have been amusing, at least.

At this point her uncle stepped forward. ‘May I suggest we convene to a drawing room for tea, Victoria?’

She almost tutted audibly. ‘You may suggest it. Whether we will do it is another matter.’

Albert’s brows creased. ‘Are you unwell today, Victoria?’
‘No, not at all. Why?’

‘You seem a little out of humour.’

*His impertinence!* ‘Well, there it is!’

She huffed and, unable to abide it, stood up. ‘Very well. We shall go into the Blue Room.’

And without waiting, she swept out past everyone.

They followed. Victoria moved immediately to stand and stare out of the windows.

‘A game, perhaps, Your Majesty?’ suggested Emma.

‘No, thank you.’

Albert had approached the pianoforte and was running a hand along it.

‘Shall I play, Victoria?’ His voice was remarkably bland, she thought, despite his heavy accent.

He could do as he pleased. ‘Do as you wish, cousin.’

He sat down and began to play. Schubert. How predictable. Lord M didn’t like Schubert. She wondered how the debate in the Chamber was going.

She remained staring from the window. He played well, admittedly. Better than her.

When he stopped she did not applaud like the others. She felt footsteps approaching but did not look round.

‘Would you play for me, Victoria?’ he asked, closer to her than she wanted.

‘I would not be as skilled. You are an accomplished player, cousin.’

‘Nevertheless, I would like to hear you.’

She gave a little sigh and went and sat at the piano.

She began. Mozart *Rondo alla Turca*, her party piece. Lord M’s favourite. He always complimented her most effusively on her ability to play it.

She finished by practically hammering the last chords out and looked up with smug satisfaction at Albert. He had that concentrated expression on his face again, almost displeased. *How dare he!*

‘That was very fast. Perhaps too fast,’ he observed. ‘It is tempting to show off when you are playing that piece, but there is no need.’

‘I was not showing off!’

‘Sometimes the intricacy of the turns can be more carefully conveyed with less haste and more care.’

‘Lord M is always most impressed with how I handle that piece!’

‘Ah … Lord M … you mean Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister?’

‘Indeed.’
'He is not here?'

'No, he is busy being Prime Minister.'

'For a change.' It was half muttered, but perfectly audible.

'I beg your pardon?'

'I hear he spends considerable time in your company and not in Westminster.'

'He is a trusted advisor.'

'I was expecting him to be here. I hear he rarely leaves your side.'

'He will be present for dinner.'

'Then I look forward to meeting him later.'

Victoria could not say the same for Lord M.

The day continued. Albert was most interested in everything she did, she noticed, and although it was flattering in some ways, she found it bothersome after a while and wished he would take himself off and leave her in peace. And Leopold and her mother skulked, casting their eyes their way, observing their interaction. It infuriated her.

She began clock watching, willing Lord M to return.

At half past six the footman entered and announced, 'Lord Melbourne, Your Majesty.'

She stood immediately and practically ran to him at the door.

He came in and she crossed to him and could not help but whisper, out of earshot, 'You’re here, thank goodness you are here. It has been a horrendous day.'

'Shh,' he hushed, 'do not show your dismay. All will be well.'

'Will it?'

He smiled softly and then moved his eyes beyond her to the others. She turned. Albert was making his way over.

'Lord Melbourne. It is good at last to meet you.' The Prince approached and stopped a few feet from the Prime Minister, who glanced at him briefly before lowering his eyes.

'Your Serene Highness.' Melbourne bowed moderately.

'I have heard so much about you.'

'Ahh. That expression never fills me with much confidence, sir.'

'You spend a great deal of time advising Victoria, I am told.'

'Only when she needs or seeks advice.' His hands were clasped before him. It was such a familiar stance with him and Victoria adored him for it at that moment more than ever.

'I am sure she values it highly.'
‘I do indeed,’ she interjected. ‘Lord M is a wonderful and trusted advisor. The only one I need.’

Albert’s eyes moved from Victoria quickly back to Melbourne. ‘You see? You are most valued.’ There was something in the way he said that that Victoria found most distasteful.

Leopold approached. ‘How was Westminster today, Melbourne? Any easier? Seeing how things stand, I imagine not.’

‘Westminster was as it always is, Your Majesty.’

Leopold looked to his nephew and declared, ‘Lord Melbourne is reaching the end of his tenure as Prime Minister, Albert.’

‘Oh?’ queried the Prince.

‘That is not actually the case, but it is a tedious matter to discuss now … so let’s not,’ said Melbourne. ‘I trust your journey here was without incident, Your Serene Highness?’

‘It was, but it is not something I wish to repeat often. I will be staying here for several weeks.’

At this Victoria spoke, ‘Oh. But surely you will need to get back to attend to matters at home?’

‘My father and brother are dealing with such things, Victoria, have no fear. You cannot get to know somebody adequately in only a few days.’

Silence fell. She tried to meet William’s eyes, but he was staring at a spot on the ground. She noticed a reddening of his cheekbones and wanted to kiss it away.

‘Albert,’ said Leopold. ‘Victoria wishes to show you the paintings, I believe.’

‘Do I?’ she asked in surprise.

‘You do, niece.’

Victoria considered refusing, but Lord M offered her a small smile of encouragement and, with a sigh, she turned away with Albert following beside.

--xoOox--

Melbourne was desperately in need of a sherry. He cast his eye around for a footman to fetch him one, but just as he was about to achieve this, Leopold intervened. ‘Lord Melbourne, a moment of your time.’

He was ushered rather abruptly to the other side of the room.

‘Melbourne … I am surprised to see you here tonight.’

His jaw tightened in annoyance. ‘Her Majesty invited me. I do not refuse the Queen.’

‘As we are all very much aware.’

Melbourne’s eyes narrowed and he glanced across at where Albert stood talking to Victoria. Talking at her, rather, he noted with some satisfaction.

Leopold followed his gaze. ‘You are wondering if Albert knows of the exact nature of your relationship with my niece, aren’t you? The answer is no. I do not believe that would be beneficial to
him or to Victoria … but he does know that you exert a strong influence on her and that it is time that changed.’

‘That is up to the Queen to decide.’

Leopold smirked and glanced over again. ‘He is a fine looking young man, don’t you think?’

‘I have no opinion on the matter.’

‘He will not fawn over her. He will not indulge her. She will like that. It will not take long for her to warm to him … and more.’

‘And you imply that I do … fawn over her?’

‘Not so much … but you indulge her, certainly, and it is not in her best interests … she will learn that. Albert will help her realise it.’

The muscle in his jaw worked fast but he managed not to speak.

‘Come now, Melbourne … look and think, man. She needs a future. She needs a man who will be her equal in every way and can be by her side and support her for a long, long time to come. You cannot provide that, not in the way Albert can.’

Melbourne darted his eyes to Leopold and knew his passionate indignation would be obvious.

The King of the Belgians stepped in and imparted with a cutting intensity: ‘If you truly loved her, you would step aside and let her be loved by another who can give her all she needs for many, many years to come. If … you truly loved her.’

And after holding his gaze for a while longer for his words to penetrate completely, Leopold turned and walked back to Victoria and Albert, leaving William Lamb alone at the edge of the room.

Chapter End Notes

Hold tight. We'll do this together. I'm here for you.

And if you want to ease the Vicbourne angst, head over and join our Facebook group - For the Love of Vicbourne-Victoria and Lord M for lots of easing.

I really, really value your comments and would love to hear your thoughts on developments here.

x
Victoria thought it a step too far even for her to interfere with the seating plan at dinner. And so she was seated next to Albert. William was opposite her.

Albert was unfailingly polite, she noticed, and, she would have to admit, respectful. She rather wished he had been rude and coarse, but he seemed to be able to judge her moods rather well.

‘I sense you are distracted tonight, Victoria,’ the Prince stated.

‘How so?’

‘You are not entirely focused on conversation. It is no matter. As Queen you have many demands on your time. I understand if you do not wish to engage fully in discussion.’

She turned to him, confused by his assertion. Was he insulting her or not? ‘I … I am a little tired, that is all. I apologise if you do not feel I am giving you my full attention.’

She was not sure where the apology had come from. He had neither earned it nor demanded it.

She glanced across at William. He had his head down, intent on his soup, but she got the impression he had only just removed his gaze from them. A flush caught her cheeks.

‘Thank you for showing me the paintings earlier. I am particularly impressed by the Gainsborough portraits. They capture something quite intensely personal, don’t you think?’ asked Albert.

‘Well, yes, of course. Gainsborough was one of our finest.’

‘I hear you yourself paint, and are quite accomplished.’

‘Oh, what silliness! I sketch a little, and dabble in watercolours.’

‘And what subjects do you like to paint?’

She smirked, enjoying his flattery. ‘Dash features often, of course.’

‘Of course. He is an engaging little fellow.’

She glanced at the man opposite her. He was talking to Emma Portman and his green eyes shone as they always did. ‘And Lord M. I enjoy sketching him.’

‘Oh?’

She smiled to herself, and gazed across at the beautiful man across from her. ‘Yes, he has a fascinating face, I think.’
‘And he is often on hand to sit for portraits.’

‘Yes.’ She realised what she had said and turned to Albert a little flustered. ‘Well … only when he is not engaged in parliamentary matters, of course. He always prioritises things most admirably.’

‘But you are his main priority, I am told.’

She straightened her back, indignation brewing. ‘The relationship between a Queen and her Prime Minister is vital for the good order of the country.’

‘It is, but there is no need for so many hours spent in each other’s company, surely.’

She put her spoon down abruptly and the sound clanged loudly through the room, causing people to turn and mark them.

‘We spend exactly the amount of time required.’

Any other man would have known to shut up there and then, but Albert merely smiled mildly in amusement. ‘This is clearly a subject which touches a nerve.’

She glared at him. ‘Then I suggest you do not broach it again, cousin.’

‘I should like to explore the parks of Windsor tomorrow. Will you ride with me?’

‘I may be busy.’ Her mouth was open to say, ‘Lord Melbourne and I go through the dispatches and other matters,’ but shut it, thinking better of it.

‘I am sure you can find time. It is good to get outside into nature, I find.’

‘How lovely for you.’ The bite in her tone was undeniable. Silence fell for a moment.

‘I have said something to displease you,’ commented Albert eventually.

‘No, not at all.’

‘Yet you are displeased.’

‘I have already told you … I am tired, that is all.’

‘Then you should have an early night.’

‘Cousin Albert, I do not take advice from people I barely know. I shall do exactly as I wish when I wish.’

‘Again, I annoy you. This is curious.’

‘Why is it curious?’

‘I thought Queens did not allow petty matters to affect their mood.’

‘Well … perhaps I am not like other Queens.’ She looked straight across at Melbourne. He met her eyes briefly and she saw only grave dismay on his face. She offered him a warm smile of encouragement and was relieved when his lips curled up the merest amount before he resumed his conversation with the Lady Portman.

Victoria was relieved when she could turn to the person on the other side of her. She found Albert’s
conversation unsettling. She had done her utmost not to encourage the man, to discourage him even, but he seemed determined to remain implacable and almost amused no matter what. She wasn’t entirely sure what to make of him.

There was cards after, whist. She sat at a table with Lord M, Albert and her mother. She and Lord M played as a team with Albert and her mother against them.

She won the first trick, Lord M the next and the next. They exchanged fleeting conspiratorial smiles which made her stomach flip.

‘I am not sure I grasp this game of yours,’ said Albert, scrutinizing his hand as if he would find the secrets of the universe in it.

Victoria bit back a retort, but her Prime Minister, uncharacteristically, was not so restrained.

‘Surely not, Your Highness?’ he remarked. ‘Your intelligence was certainly evident earlier when looking at the paintings. Does it not extend to cards?’

For the first time Victoria sensed annoyance in Albert’s voice. ‘I tend not to expend much intellectual energy on trivial things such as games. I am surprised that a man in your elevated position would either, Lord Melbourne.’

‘Well, perhaps you have not been to the House of Commons, sir. It is not dissimilar to a raucous child’s nursery and therefore it is essential that one is good at games.’

‘Indeed, Lord Melbourne. I would much like to visit your Parliament. It sounds a most intriguing place … however Britain manages to retain its position as an Empire, I do not know.’

‘Well … there it is.’ And with that Lord M played the ace of spades and claimed the next trick.

Albert was clearly aggrieved not to win, but by the fifth hand he was becoming more adept and Victoria felt that the next time they played the outcome may be different.

--xoOox--

It gave Melbourne more satisfaction than was respectable to win at cards over Albert. When the Prince finally conceded defeat (in fact, it was a trouncing) he did so with an exaggerated sigh which gave the Prime Minister a ripple of undiluted supremacy.

William commended the Queen on the game and declared that their win was a reflection on them being a thoroughly good team who worked skilfully in partnership. He said this unnecessarily loudly, aware that Albert was standing only a short distance off.

Victoria gave him a smile of such happiness that he thought for a moment she would reach up and kiss him, and he considered that if she did he would not stop her, but someone approached to interrupt them.

‘Victoria,’ said a voice. He turned to see Albert. ‘I have brought you something from Coburg. I wished to save it for an appropriate time to give it to you.’

‘Oh?’ she said, her face barely masking her displeasure at the interruption. Melbourne swallowed back his annoyance.

‘Excuse me, Lord Melbourne,’ said Albert pointedly, staring fixedly into him until the Prime Minister had no choice but to bow and back away. Albert moved so that his back masked Melbourne’s view
of the Queen.

Emma approached and smiled up. ‘Come now. Talk to me, William.’

‘I fear my conversation may be lacking tonight, Emma.’ He stared over at where Albert was handing something over to Victoria. He was desperate to see what it was and took a few steps around to grant him a better view. The Queen opened it and smiled, a genuine smile he thought, open and broad. Her eyes shone too. He felt nausea brewing and hoped he could staunch it.

‘William,’ warned Emma. ‘Do not let it bother you.’

He let out a rueful sigh. ‘Do I disappoint you, Emma? I am sorry.’

‘You could never disappoint me, but I fear for your happiness. The man is here to woo her and you know it. Perhaps you should take yourself away for a few days.’

She may as well have struck him in the stomach.

He dropped his head. ‘Yes … yes perhaps you are right.’ She was right. Melbourne clasped his hands into fists but glanced around to focus himself. ‘In which case … please make my excuses to Her Majesty and bid her good night from me. I shall return to Dover House tonight.’

He turned and left as Emma called his name futilely after him.

Melbourne paced through the corridors. He would have to return to his chamber to get some things before leaving. He was confused and went the wrong way before heading back on himself. ‘Damn it,’ he spat under his breath. ‘Damn it all!’

Hurrying footsteps sounded behind him, Emma no doubt coming to rebuke him for his hasty departure.

‘William!’

He stopped. It was not Emma.

Slight fingers closed around his hand and tried to pull him round to her. ‘What are you doing? Where are you going?’

Melbourne allowed himself to be turned around and lifted his eyes to meet Victoria’s. ‘You should return to your guest,’ he said.

She frowned. ‘I didn’t know where you’d gone. You didn’t even say goodbye.’

‘Ah well,’ he sighed, unable to think of more. Something bright and shining caught his eye. A brooch in the shape of a cuckoo, encrusted with diamonds and sapphires, now adorned her breast. His stomach turned. ‘Is that what he gave you?’

She glanced down and her cheeks were caught in a flush. Victoria pursed her lips and could not look at him. ‘Yes. It is generous and sweet, I acknowledge.’

‘Generous and sweet,’ he muttered.

She looked up at him, smiling openly and trying to change the subject. ‘We beat them at cards – that was most splendid!’

He was still staring at the brooch.
'I have known you for over a year and have never once given you jewellery. He arrives and gifts you with diamonds within a few hours.'

Victoria tutted. ‘Oh, don’t be foolish! This is a trinket, I attach no significance to it. Your gifts to me are so much more glorious, so much more wonderful. Oh, darling, stop this petulance!’

He sniffed out a laugh. ‘Petulance … it is not usually I who am petulant.’

‘Exactly!’ She took a step closer and tried in vain to meet his eyes. ‘My love, look at me. Where were you going? Why did you leave so suddenly?’

He swallowed and said quite evenly, ‘I think it wise, Ma’am, if I return to Dover House tonight.’

Her face clouded. ‘What? No! We have little time left before my bleeding. If you leave, I … please don’t.’

‘Ma’am …’ He took a single step away from her. ‘Ma’am … you have a guest and you must do the right thing with him.’

She searched his eyes in bewilderment. ‘Do the right thing with him? Whatever do you mean?’

*Did he even know?* He rubbed a hand over his forehead. ‘You must … be polite, be present … speak to him … and accept his gifts.’

‘I will do those things! I am! But it is still *you* I want.’

He took another step away. ‘It confuses matters if I am around at these times.’

‘I am not confused!’

Melbourne grasped his hands behind him. If he did not, he may take hold of her and never let go. ‘Then … perhaps I am.’

Victoria stared in bewilderment. ‘My love, please … you must not fear.’

*But he did.*

Melbourne did not reply, only bowed a little, intending it as a farewell. ‘I shall attend upon you tomorrow morning to deal with business, Ma’am.’ With that he bowed to her, turned and paced away along the corridor.

‘No! I forbid you from leaving, Lord Melbourne!’ She was running again and this time she rushed fully into his path and threw herself upon him, coiling her body upon his, arms, breasts, the very pulse of her on him.

*Oh, conviction was as nothing!*

Without a thought, William took hold of her and brought his mouth to hers. Right there in a candlelit corridor of Buckingham Palace he kissed her so desperately he feared she could break under him. Together they moved towards the wall and he pressed her against it and kissed and kissed her, open mouthed, devouring, drawing her out of herself and pouring himself into her.

‘Yes, yes,’ she moaned as he moved down her neck, his fingers gripping it, his lips hungry for it. ‘Yes, my love.’

‘Your love,’ he muttered and instinctively his right hand began drawing up her skirts. He wanted to
feel her need for him, he needed to know her desire and love. ‘I am, I am!’

‘Oh God, oh dear God, don’t stop, don’t ever stop,’ she sobbed and her sob became a gasp as he quickly pushed two fingers deep inside her. She was wet and hot and pushed down to take them. He grunted with as much satisfaction as if he had penetrated her properly.

‘There,’ he said. ‘That.’

‘Always.’

He had forgotten they were fully exposed in the corridor. Forgotten that at any moment a member of the household could turn the corner and discover the Prime Minister fingering his monarch against the wall.

Or perhaps he didn’t care. For if they were discovered then Albert would find out. Perhaps it would be Albert himself who discovered them. If he did then he would return to Coburg immediately and give up his attempt to wed her. There would be scandal – scandal no longer troubled William Lamb – and Victoria would retreat from public life for some time. And in that time they could be together, always, everywhere, together.

He worked his fingers harder, staring into her, making her writhe and moan and sob under him. He stroked her, he circled and rubbed and pumped and she sang for him. Her eyelids fluttered shut, one hand rose up to press against the wall as if she would forget all sense otherwise, and she let him play her like some fine instrument.

‘Will you come?’ he muttered, and held her chin in his other hand, angling it towards him before kissing her brutally again.

Her response came only in a whine and a gasping breath as ecstasy approached. He was not gentle. He rubbed faster, desperately, so hard his wrist started to ache.

‘I will, I will,’ she breathed when she could. ‘I’ll come for you, only you.’

‘Only me, only me.’

And when she did, for that moment, all his doubts and fears evaporated and life was once again clear and brilliant. He felt her rapture gripping his fingers, he felt it in the shudder of her body as it pressed against his, he felt it in her cry which was caught on his own lips.

*He loved her, dear Christ, he loved her.*

But then she came down. Her body stopped quivering and expectation dissipated from him too. And they were in a corridor in Buckingham Palace.

He rested his head on hers and dragged in breaths to focus. A diamond in her brooch caught the light and flashed into his eyes. He at last withdrew his fingers and let her skirts fall down.

There were voices around the corner. Victoria quickly stepped away from the wall. ‘Stay tonight,’ she whispered to him before rushing away.

For a time Melbourne could not move. Silence and loneliness engulfed him, but his own thoughts screamed and his own arousal pained. He closed his eyes and wanted her, wanted her mouth on him. At that moment he wanted to feed himself between her lips and have her suck and suck on him until he spilled copiously into her mouth. And instead she was using those lips to laugh and talk and entrance another.
Melbourne practically cried out. What evil had beset him? What wicked, sinful hatred that he thought these things, that he had grown to expect them? That he wished the lewdest and basest of acts from his Queen? Had he done this? To her? To himself? Torment upended him and he stumbled forward to brace himself on the wall. Self-loathing rose in him so forcefully he almost retched but forced it back and coughed instead, painful and harsh.

‘My Lord?’

He glanced over. A footman stood nearby.

‘Are you quite well, sir?’

Melbourne pushed himself heavily up. ‘I … a little under the weather, that is all.’

‘May I fetch you anything, sir?’

‘No, no, that’s quite alright, thank you.’

The footman bowed and turned to go.

‘On second thoughts … a brandy … large … to my chamber … thank you.’

‘Very good, sir.’

And with a sigh, Lord Melbourne retreated to the Baron’s Room.

In a room below, the Queen was singing and Albert was listening.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, William. My heart. x

Are you still out there, you gorgeous patient lot? xx
This chapter makes reference to a Schumann song which is incredibly powerful and
redolent of the emotions these two are going through - Widmung. I've included the
lyrics in the original German and in English at the start as they're quoted in German in
the chapter. It's the teensiest bit anachronistic as it wasn't written until 1840 and we're
still in 1839, but who actually cares. (Incidentally, in the show, Ernst sings this in Ep 8
of Series 1.) It's worth Googling or popping onto YouTube to hear it.

OK ... we are beginning to work towards a conclusion. Hold tight.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Widmung (Dedication) – lyrics Friedrich Rückert, music Robert Schumann

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,  You my soul, you my heart,
Du meine Wonn’, o du mein Schmerz,  You my rapture, O you my pain,
Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe,  You my world in which I live,
Mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe,  My heaven you, to which I aspire,
O du mein Grab, in das hinab  O you my grave, into which
Ich ewig meinen Kummer gab!  My grief forever I’ve consigned!
Du bist die Ruh, du bist der Frieden,  You are repose, you are peace,
Du bist vom Himmel mir beschieden.  You are bestowed on me from heaven.
Dass du mich liebst, macht mich mir wert,  Your love for me gives me my worth,
Dein Blick hat mich vor mir verklaert,  Your eyes transfigure me in mine,
Du hebst mich liebend über mich,  You raise me lovingly above myself,
Mein guter Geist, mein bess’reres Ich!  My guardian angel, my better self

It was some time before she came to his room. Melbourne waited and tried to read, the brandy
decanter to hand, but he realised his eyes had cast over the same paragraph several times without
having taken a thing in. He thought he had become immune to jealousy: clearly not. Now it ate at
him. It gnawed away until no amount of brandy could quash it. The mere thought of her being in the
man’s presence tormented him. It was the Prince’s intent to court her, after all, even if Victoria dismissed him out of hand. But … she had called his gift ‘sweet’. And Melbourne had watched her closely at dinner. She may not have laughed with the man, but she had listened intently to him and had been interested, there was no doubt.

Interested.

Melbourne scoffed and took another drink. How could a man of his age and experience allow such petty, adolescent thoughts to beset him? In any case … what did the future hold? What should it hold? He knew what he wanted, but there was a difference – as he was all too aware – between what you want, and what you can have.

It wasn’t until after midnight that there was a knock at the door. He leapt up from his chair but thought it better to assume a dignified pace before opening it. He couldn’t help but scrutinise Victoria’s expression when he saw her. Was she manufacturing her smile to appease him? Were her eyes shining brightly for him or because she had just been enchanted by a conversation downstairs?

‘Lord M?’ she tried, her smile deepening. ‘Aren’t you going to let me in?’

He came to his senses and pushed the door wider for her. She slipped inside and shook off her coat with a sigh. ‘Thank goodness that is over! I have never had to endure such intense interrogation!’

‘Oh?’

‘Oh, the man asks all manner of soul-searching questions, as if he wished to know me inside out already.’

Already? Before what?

‘And he insisted I sing! I tried Widmung and he criticised my accent! The audacity of it. But he did like my interpretation, admittedly.’

Had she grown wistful?

Widmung, that new song, one of Schumann’s most passionate. ‘Isn’t Schumann a bit of a stretch for so late at night, Ma’am?’

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz …

She looked at him and for a moment a flare of annoyance flickered across her face. ‘Are you telling me I am not accomplished enough to sing Widmung, Lord M?’

‘No, no, not at all … I merely … It is no matter.’

Du meine Wonn’, o du mein Schmerz …

In truth, he wanted her to sing it to him, sing it for him, and for her to know he meant it all for her.

Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe … Mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe …

‘No, it is no matter.’ The terseness in her voice had melted by the time she finished the sentence and she approached him and drew her arms about his neck. ‘I am here now.’

Mein guter Geist, mein bess’res Ich!

Melbourne kissed her and all his worries and concerns evaporated. Picking her up in his arms he
carried her to the bed and laid her down upon it. He made love to her slowly that night, silently even, and she matched it, never looking away from him, never breaking the perfect stillness they had created.

They slept peacefully all night and Melbourne was grateful for the rest. He needed a clear head. He was due back in Westminster for some tedious lobbying business and needed to focus.

‘What are your intentions today?’ he asked as he pushed himself reluctantly from the bed in the morning.

Victoria sighed. ‘Albert insists on riding out. I’d much rather it was with you.’

Immediately, he wished he hadn’t asked. The night had almost allowed him to forget about the man.

‘I must return to Parliament.’

She looked up and frowned but did not protest as vociferously as she often did. ‘I’m sorry. But you will be back later?’ Victoria also rose and padded over to the water basin.

‘Yes … if you wish it.’

She paused from washing and looked around at him. ‘Of course I wish it, whatever do you mean?’

‘Well …’ He shrugged somewhat. ‘Perhaps you will be otherwise engaged … with other people.’

Victoria’s brows furrowed in bewilderment. ‘William, you are expressing doubts which are foolish … You know the extent of my feelings for you.’

‘But that does not mean …’ He stopped himself.

‘What does it not mean?’

Something compelled him. ‘Having feelings for one person does not preclude feelings for another.’

Victoria was silenced momentarily, but then she took a step into him and declared forcefully, ‘Stop this nonsense! I grow tired of it!’

He merely shrugged. ‘Now you are aware how I felt when you railed against me regarding those Prussian ladies.’

‘I did not rail! That is a gross exaggeration! In any case …!’ It was her turn to stop herself. She looked nearly panicked when she realised what she was about to say. But Victoria then stated quite plainly, ‘It is not your place tell me what to feel.’

He opened his mouth but all that emerged was a hush of breath at the shock of it. She was right, of course, and he castigated himself not that is what she thought, but for the fact that she had voiced it aloud … He turned from her, partly because he couldn’t bear to see the judgment in her eyes but also to hide his own despair.

‘I shall have to be back in Westminster quickly,’ he muttered. ‘I won’t be at breakfast.’

‘Very well.’ Her tone was brusque.

‘I hope you have a pleasant ride.’ His turmoil prompted more. ‘I feel somehow you will.’

She blinked twice quickly and bit into her bottom lip before raising herself tall and saying,
‘Sometimes, William, I forget that you are the elder and I the younger.’

And, with no more spoken between them, she quickly put on her clothes and left his room.

William Lamb stood, alone and isolated. He had not felt desolation like it since he had first heard the rumours about Byron.

--xoOox--

Albert stood when Victoria entered the room for breakfast. He bowed and then held her eyes and offered a smile. He looked much more approachable when he smiled. She returned it. ‘Good morning, Albert. I trust you slept well.’

‘Mostly, although the guards outside were most vocal and loud this morning. Is that necessary?’

She gave a little sigh. ‘Yes. It is.’

Albert sat just along from her and she sensed him turning to look at her often. She did not look back. A seat was vacant opposite her and its emptiness turned her off her grapefruit.

‘And where is our estimable Lord Melbourne this morning?’ queried Leopold.

‘He has returned to Westminster,’ she replied, rather too suddenly. Victoria felt the collective pause after her immediate response. ‘I believe that is the case … He told me last night after dinner he would leave early this morning.’

Albert was one of the few who appeared not to have noticed, or perhaps he chose not to. ‘Victoria, I am so greatly looking forward to our ride today. I have heard the gardens contain many specimens brought back from the Empire.’

‘That is right.’

‘I look forward to you telling me all about them.’

She suddenly felt very inadequate. ‘It may be wiser to ride out with an estate manager in that case. I am afraid I am rather ignorant of horticultural matters.’

‘Not at all, but I have quite an awareness of plants and trees, perhaps I can help point some out.’

His voice had softened and it prompted her to turn to him. He smiled. He rarely smiled; it was nice when he smiled, she admitted. She smiled back. ‘Very well. That will be nice.’

Her stomach turned over. That will be nice. Would it?

--xoOox--

The Queen and Albert rode out together after lunch. It was deemed unnecessary for there to be a chaperone, and for once while riding out with a man (the only other man she rode out with being Lord Melbourne), Victoria rather wished there were. They could easily have walked through the gardens, but Albert seemed to want to ride and she decided that having the horses would distract them from having to make too much conversation.

‘I would like to visit Windsor soon. Can that be arranged?’ the Prince asked as their horses padded slowly across the lawns.

‘I have only just returned,’ she replied. ‘It is unfair on the household to expect them to keep moving
back and forth.’

‘Well, there is no rush. I am here for several weeks.’

‘Oh, are you?’ She knew she sounded tetchy.

He turned to her. ‘Yes. Have you not been informed? It is a long journey from Coburg, Victoria. There would be little point in staying only a few days. In any case …’

‘What?’

‘It takes time to become certain of things.’

‘Indeed it does.’ She bristled. He had not yet mentioned the business of marriage and she had rather foolishly hoped he may not.

‘Getting to know someone is not something that can be rushed.’

‘If achieved at all,’ she added.

He dropped his head with a soft laugh. ‘You can be quite acerbic, Victoria.’

She refused to be insulted. In any case, he said it almost as if it were a compliment. ‘When I need to be.’

When they reached the wooded part of the gardens, he dismounted. She resolutely remained on her horse.

Albert approached. ‘Shall we walk a while?’

He held both his arms up to her to help her down. She sighed. She seemed not to have a choice. Victoria slipped down from her horse, trying to avoid his hands, but she could not. He took hold of her waist and helped her. When she was on the ground, he did not remove his hands from her.

She did not immediately pull away. It felt strange – another man’s hands on her – similar but so utterly different. Albert’s hands were strangers to her. He held her as if she were a specimen in a museum, not a woman. She almost felt like pushing into him as she would with Lord M and testing him, seeing how he would respond. She allowed herself to look up at him. He was handsome, she conceded, and now, in the dappled light through the trees, his expression was more tender than she had thought.

‘Victoria,’ he said in that strange murmuring tone he had. ‘You know why I am here.’

She did not reply. At last, he let his hands fall from her waist, but he barely stepped back.

‘I wish you to know that I have no plan, no outcome that I aim to achieve,’ he continued. ‘If things turn out to be right, then so be it, if not … then that I shall accept also.’

She swallowed hard and her nostrils flared. She could not bring herself to say anything.

‘But … Victoria … I find you most fascinating and curious. And I do wish to get to know you, however long it takes. I only ask that you extend that curiosity towards me. And at the moment, I sense your resistance.’

She turned away and played with the horse’s saddle. ‘Albert, I … it is something I feel has been imposed on me, and therefore you are right. I do not like being dictated to. I fully intend to make my
own mind up on the matter.’

‘Of course. I would have it no other way.’

She glanced back at him, surprised at his equanimity.

‘I do not wish to mislead you, Albert.’

‘I do not believe you are.’

‘Then you should know that my heart is not free to be given.’

He frowned a little. ‘You are in love with someone else?’

She didn’t answer.

‘With Lord Melbourne?’ he followed up with immediately.

His frankness stole her voice and her breath away.

‘It is no secret,’ he continued, ‘neither in the gossip of court, nor in what I myself have observed. But … I wish to observe for longer.’

She raised herself tall and stated, ‘If you have seen it, then I do not see what other conclusions you can come to.’

‘Not currently, but … times change, people change.’

‘My feelings do not.’

He paused briefly then said, ‘And his?’

Her pulse hammered in her temples. ‘What?’

‘As time moves on, can you be certain of his love?’

Her stomach turned over but as she stared into Albert’s face, trying to make sense of it, his blue eyes turned green and his mouth curled up into that teasing smile she was so used to and it was William before her, no one else. And he smiled down and all was well.

‘Yes,’ she declared with utter conviction. ‘Yes, I can.’ And Victoria took a few paces away before glancing back. ‘Come then. I thought you wished to examine the flora.’

Albert stared after her and raised his eyebrows before eventually following on.

--xoOox--

They did not speak more about matters of marriage and love. Albert inquired about the plants and Victoria found she knew more about them than she realised. She was able to discuss things with the illusion of expertise and was pleased.

They must have visited all parts of the garden and were gone several hours. Albert’s knowledge was broad and he spoke at length and with great sophistication. He told her about the varieties which grew best in Germany and she was not bored, for his passion was admirable, she accepted. Apart from Lord M, she knew very few people who displayed passion about anything, and she was happy to listen to him. His candour of earlier was also pleasing. She realised, as they walked the horses
back to the palace, that she did not mind his company. She would not go so far as to say she would seek it out, but she did not mind it.

As they approached the steps to the terrace, he recounted a story about how he had become entangled in knot weed while trying to catch newts as a child. The way he told it, a story of such humour, in that serious, intense way he had, made it all the funnier, and she instinctively reached out a hand and placed it on his arm to steady herself from the laughter.

Victoria looked up to draw breath. Standing on the top step, observing them, was Melbourne.

Chapter End Notes

Hang in there. x
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

('House cricket match' refers to a sports competition Melbourne would have likely had at school. 'House' as in the school boarding house he belonged to, similar to Gryffindor, Slytherin etc.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victoria let go of the man’s arm when she saw Melbourne. But she still smiled. In fact, as she looked up at Lord M, she smiled more broadly. It didn’t help. He felt as he had in the house cricket match when Beaulieu had struck him across the gut with his bat after he’d bowled him out.

The two of them mounted the steps. Melbourne wanted to go, to turn and not speak, but his feet seemed fixed to the ground.

‘Lord M!’ she beamed. ‘I was not expecting you until later. How wonderful that you were able to escape Parliament so soon.’

It was quite normal, her manner, quite as expected, but normal was not enough. He wanted effusion, he wanted connection, and the more he sought it the more it seemed to evade him.

He inclined his head a little. ‘Your Majesty. Business concluded earlier than I expected.’ He glanced at Albert. ‘How was your ride, Your Highness?’

‘Most splendid, Lord Melbourne, thank you. I have learnt a lot. Victoria is very knowledgeable about the gardens.’

He hated him calling her that. Hated it.

‘Oh, don’t be silly,’ she laughed. ‘I feel quite the opposite. Your knowledge and enthusiasm are infectious, Albert, and I thank you for your time.’

‘It was my pleasure, entirely.’

Melbourne could no longer look at them. He turned his head to the ground and swallowed back the rising bile of acrimony.

‘Albert! Victoria!’

Leopold emerged onto the terrace and approached to kiss his niece on both cheeks and pat his nephew on the arm. ‘You look most invigorated after your time together. I hope it was most pleasurable.’

Melbourne wished he had Beaulieu’s cricket bat to hand now.

‘It was, Uncle,’ said Albert. Victoria smiled but said nothing.

‘Lord Melbourne,’ said Leopold. ‘Take some time for yourself until dinner. It was not necessary to hurry from Westminster, surely. You are not required now. Good afternoon.’
With that Leopold started to usher his two relatives inside, but Victoria did not go along with it.

‘Lord M and I have not yet attended to our daily business, Uncle. Now is a good time to do so. Albert, I will see you at dinner. Thank you for your company today.’

She had become most authoritative again and Melbourne’s breathing settled somewhat. He turned his head to glance over. Leopold looked as if he had bitten into a lemon, Albert stood, his mouth fixed straight but his brows furrowed slightly. Victoria had stepped away from them both.

Albert inclined his head. ‘As you wish, Victoria. Until dinner.’ And with that he paced rather forcefully inside.

Melbourne did not like ascribing infantile sentiments to grown men, but if he had he would have described Leopold’s departing expression as a sneer.

Victoria stepped into him when they were alone. ‘I have missed you, my darling.’

He could so easily have asked ‘Have you?’ to prompt her repetition, to make her yet more aware of his torment, but he did not. He would mind the advice he gave her so freely. He would do what was right.

So he simply smiled briefly.

‘Come inside,’ she continued. ‘There are too many eyes upon us here.’

‘The dispatches could wait until tomorrow, you know, Ma’am.’

‘But it gives me reason to be with you … and anyway …’ She took another step in and curled her lips into a smile of such heady seduction it made his head swim. His jealous dismay was melting.

‘When we are alone … when the doors are locked … we don’t have to deal only with the dispatches.’

‘Victoria …’ he murmured.

‘I love it when you call me that. When you call me that, my darling, only you.’

He wanted her now. He could push her to the wall and brace himself and take her – damn anyone watching!

But instead he stepped back.

‘Ma’am … as I said … the dispatches truly can wait, as your time is precious.’

‘No, Lord M,’ she insisted, not allowing him regret, ‘they can’t. Duty, remember … you always taught me that. Come … let us go inside.’

She started to walk in and, after a moment to try to sort the myriad of conflicts coursing through him, Melbourne followed.

They did attend to business but got through it quickly. Victoria placed down her pen and looked up. ‘William,’ she said, reaching for his hand. He allowed her to take it. She stood and her body was so close he could feel the warmth radiating from it. Then, not speaking, she pushed herself up onto tiptoes and kissed him. She kissed him slowly, softly at first, but with a deepening intensity that bound him to her. When she nudged his lips apart he let her, when she slipped her tongue in to find his, he let her, and when she moaned into his mouth, he adored her.
Soon he was kissing her back, soon she was his and he was hers all over again.

She drew back, breathless, and their foreheads rested against the other while they panted out their desire. ‘You see?’ she whispered. ‘Do not doubt, do not fear.’

He kissed her again because he couldn’t not. But his mind forced the conflict to resurface. Here he was, Prime Minister, a peer of the realm, and yet he may as well have been once again a schoolboy wrestling with a permanent erection, such was his control of his emotions. What good would that do him?

What good would it do her? She, who was his everything.

*Hell take it, he must try, he must try at least!*

With supreme effort, Melbourne pulled away and turned from her, slowing his breathing, closing his eyes against it all.

‘I hear the Duke of Wellington is dining tonight,’ he said in an attempt to regain order.

Victoria frowned and approached him again. ‘Don’t speak of that now, my love, we have time before then. Is the door locked?’ And then her hand was stroking over him and he could not help but respond. He sucked in as she rubbed through his breeches until his cock strained for release.

‘Christ, Victoria!’ he hissed and it sounded like the reprimand it was. She did not heed it and undid the buttons on the placket before drawing him out.

‘Just this. Let me,’ she murmured, not stopping, stroking and squeezing until he had no choice but to banish the prickles of decency he’d tried to recapture.

When she sank to her knees and took him deep in her mouth he threw his head back and cried out again: ‘Christ, I said!’

He should pull away, turn and do up his buttons and take the dispatches and go. He should tell her that he would do what was truly right for her, for her, only for her. Only ever for her.

But he made the mistake of looking down, and she was on him and licking him and sucking him and it felt so very good and so very right. And as he looked down and saw her hungry love for him, the sight became blurred for he was crying.

‘Victoria, please,’ he murmured, half despair, half need, ‘please, please …’

She turned her face up and dragged soft wet lips over him and one of his tears fell onto her face. She opened her mouth a little to take in air but then was back on him, holding him with her right hand, working him with the tongue and lips of an angel.

And through his tears, he found himself threading his fingers through her hair and holding her there, wanting her there. She mewled as she sucked, little soft sounds of complete devotion. And he had doubted?

He came suddenly – it almost surprised him. He burst into her mouth and she took it as if starved, and his pleasure mingled with awe.

When he had settled, she let him slip from her mouth gently and pushed herself to her feet. Without thinking, he held her head and pulled her to him, kissing her with a passion which nearly made her stumble. She had barely time to swallow and he could taste himself, but he didn’t care for she was
him and he her.

Victoria smiled softly. ‘There.’

And she tidied her bureau and quietly left the room.

--xoOox--

He was seated beside Wellington at dinner. As much as he admired the man, their conversation had of late been horrifically depressing.

Albert was next to Victoria. The memory of what she had done to Melbourne earlier helped him cope with the seating arrangements, but as the meal wore on, his malaise returned.

‘William,’ began Wellington when the people either side of them were heavily engaged in other discussions. Their conversation was as good as private. ‘I hear you’re coming on well with St Chrysostom. You must be keen to complete it.’

He knew where this was going. He stared down at his plate and cut through the asparagus. ‘I haven’t touched the pages for months, Arthur.’

‘Ah, well, in that case it demands your attention.’

He put down his knife and fork. ‘If this is an attempt to impose retirement on me yet again, do not think I have not been considering all future possibilities.’

Wellington looked over at the Queen and Albert. ‘They seem to be getting on well.’

Yes, but it wasn’t Albert’s cock she’d been sucking two hours previously.

‘Well enough.’ He took a drink of Chablis.

‘Enough for marriage?’

The wine was sharp. ‘I am not the right person to ask on that matter.’

‘Are you and she still …?’

Melbourne looked at the Duke but said nothing before turning back to his sole.

He heard the faintest tut from Wellington. ‘Come now, man.’

Oh, he did, frequently.

‘You know it will happen, don’t you? She has a new diversion, a new distraction, and if she knows what’s good for her, she will grasp it with both hands. What you’ve enjoyed together has been good while it’s lasted, I’m sure, by all means be glad of it, but you know it cannot endure. Look at her, she is ready for the next stage of her life.’

Melbourne gripped his knife hard but restrained himself from stabbing it into Wellington’s leg. He drew in deep breaths and dragged his gaze to the two people opposite. Albert leaned into Victoria and was talking to her, no, whispering, so that she had to lean in also to hear him. She was smiling. She was not looking at Melbourne. He waited, his eyes trained on her, willing her to glance over at him and offer him the same smile. He waited. She did not.

She took a drink and his eyes focused on her lips, those same lips which only hours before had been
wrapped around him so ardently. Now she was seemingly unaware of his presence.

Wellington was right. Of course he was. Melbourne reached for his glass and noted the lined skin on his hand. He brushed back a stray lock and knew his fingers moved through greying hair.

She had been curious. He had opened a new world to her and she had taken to it, but time would move her to another world, one with no place for a man old enough to leave her widowed and alone within only a decade or so, perhaps less.

‘Melbourne?’ came the voice next to him. ‘Are you alright?’

He turned blankly to Wellington. ‘No … I am not sure that I am.’

Wellington reached over and placed a hand on his shoulder before saying sincerely, ‘If it were done when ’tis done, then ’twere well. It were done quickly. Don’t drag it out for her sake, or most importantly for yours. Then finish this session in Parliament – your majority is untenable for much longer, but if this gets out the scandal will be the end of it sooner than the country can manage. Your focused leadership is required for a while longer to sort matters, and then, when things are tied up, announce your retirement, dear chap. It is time, you know it.’

He gave a rueful sigh and twisted the glass on the table.

‘It is curious, Arthur, do you not think? … I have a Parliament which needs me but does not want me, and a Queen who wants me but does not need me.’

Melbourne lifted his eyes to the woman across from him. She was still talking to Albert. That was the way it was and that was the way it was going to be.

But just then she turned her head and looked straight into him and her mouth curled up into the most perfect smile and in it William Lamb read only love.

God help him, whether He existed or not, for nothing else would.

--xoOox--

Victoria played the piano after dinner. Albert listened. Melbourne drank brandy.

She was enjoying playing, he could tell, and she was enjoying Albert’s attention. Melbourne had never really known what to say about music – he either liked it or he didn’t. Albert commented on phrasing and tempo and harmony, and Melbourne stared into his glass and felt hideously stupid.

He tried to admire the man; he knew he would in any other circumstance; he was a perfectly pleasant, polite, erudite individual. But he could not. Not now. Not like this.

As Albert sat down at the piano beside Victoria to play a duet, Melbourne hated him. He hated him so much that he wondered if he would hurl himself at him and strike him to the floor. Hatred was a futile emotion, he had long told himself that and had successfully conditioned himself out of it over the years. But now, like some lurid item of clothing one finds at the back of a wardrobe that has not been worn since gauche days of youthful experimentation, hatred glared at him and he had no choice but to grab onto it.

They finished the duet with a laugh and to rapturous applause, especially from Leopold, who was also on the receiving end of the Prime Minister’s newly resurrected animosity. Melbourne didn’t manage to applaud.
Victoria looked over at him, still smiling. ‘Do you not enjoy Schubert, Lord M?’

‘It was most accomplished, Ma’am.’

‘That is not what I asked.’

‘Yet that is what I replied.’

The smile fell from her face. There was a thunderous silence and all eyes flitted between the two of them.

‘Lord Melbourne, that is a rather ill-mannered remark to make to Her Majesty,’ said Leopold drily.

‘Is it? Then I apologise.’ He took another drink. Victoria chest rose and fell as she contained her confused annoyance.

‘It is no matter,’ she said. ‘Perhaps you are tired, Lord M.’

He looked up at her. ‘Not unduly, but perhaps it is time for me to retire.’ He stood. ‘Good evening, everyone, I bid you a good night.’ He should have waited for her permission to retire, but he turned and paced out fast.

Once again footsteps followed him quickly out of the room.

‘Oh, stop this running away!’ came her voice behind him.

He continued on, turning down corridors.

‘Lord M!’ she called after him. He could hear her running. ‘William!’

With the deepest sigh, he stopped and looked back at her.

‘Please!’ she said, no more.

He held his hands out to the sides. ‘I … cannot …’

‘You cannot what?’

‘I do not wish to sit there and see it.’

‘See what?’

‘Him … and you.’

She shook her head in frustration. ‘There is no him and me.’

‘That is not how I witness it. And, forgive me, but I would rather simply not observe it, so please allow me to retire, Ma’am.’ He started to walk off again.

‘But you yourself told me that I should engage with the man.’

Stopping, he threw his head up and again looked over his shoulder at her.

‘Indeed, and you should … but I ask that you allow me not to be present when you do.’

She came around in front of him. ‘But this has no bearing on us.’
He had no response.

‘William! My darling!’ She flung herself at him and curled her arms around his neck.

Melbourne took hold of her wrists and disengaged them from around him, moving her arms away. ‘Perhaps it should.’

She frowned in despair. ‘What?’

He could not look at her but said quite plainly, ‘You like him. He likes you. You are compatible … in all ways. Perhaps …’

Her eyes flared in horror. ‘No! I refuse to allow you to say these things or even think them! It is you I want, you I love and you I will have!’

He must try. He must. ‘You say that now.’

Her eyes filled with tears of disbelieving rage. ‘I will say it for always! After all we have been through, all we have declared, how can you say these things now?’

He wanted to wail. He wanted to cry out in frustration and despair but instead he held himself tall and said clearly, ‘I do not say them lightly … Ma’am.’

‘Enough with Ma’am!’ She pounded her fists against him. ‘I am Victoria! I am your Victoria!’

His heart swelled to hear her say it. As much as he tried to resist, he could only respond. ‘Are you?’

She leaned in, pressing the length of her against him as if by that alone she could keep him. ‘Yes! My darling, my love, let me show you. Let me prove all I am to you. Show me all you are to me!’

He frowned against it, but her body was so needy against him that he was stirring already. He swallowed hard, his last vestiges of dignity crumbling.

‘My love, I hate to see your pain,’ she implored, her eyes bright with tears. ‘I am yours, only yours. Prove that. Show me. Claim me as your own.’

Claim her as his … Oh, he could, oh, he wanted it.

‘You wish that? You want me to do that?’

‘Yes, yes, I do, only you, only you, my darling, my love, My Lord.’

And the last of his resolve was washed away on a tide of desire and adoration. A new determination now took hold, one that had become so familiar in recent months. One that set him on the edge between rapture and madness.

Melbourne held himself tall and looked down at her. ‘Go and prepare, then come quickly to my room. If it is truly your wish to be claimed by me … then that is what I shall do.’

Chapter End Notes

OK ...
Deep breath.
Chapter Notes

This is a very intense chapter. Read it when you have time and haven't got people looking over your shoulder. It's a crucial chapter. It's a long chapter. Remember, this is not a manual on how to have a relationship. This relationship, as it stands at the moment, is deeply flawed and wrong in many ways, I'm not pretending otherwise. This is a story of two humans who are not perfect, but who love each other very much and need each other and want to show that and try to make sense of it in their own heads while battling convention and hopeless lust. Some aspects may be difficult, but do read it.

OK. Deep breath.

She did not speak to Skerrett as she prepared.

Neither did her Lady's Maid ask. There seemed to be a state of such poised anticipation that nothing could break it.

Victoria put her corset on again. And her stockings and the silk slippers. Just those things. She let her hair fall long behind her. And after studying herself in the mirror, she was ready, painfully so.

She put on the cloak Skerrett handed her and pulled the hood up. And then she slipped unnoticed through dark corridors to his chamber.

Victoria took steadying breaths as she stood outside his door. It was she who had raised the notion of being claimed, and she knew that he would do so in a way which was entirely for her. No one had a hold over her, no one would control her, but he could claim her tonight, body and soul, and she would adore him for it.

She lifted her hand and knocked three times.

He made her wait. At first she heard nothing, but eventually the key turned in the lock and the door was pulled open slowly. Melbourne stood there, waistcoat undone, cravat discarded and top shirt buttons out of their eyes.

She met his gaze and for a time considered asking to come in, but then he pulled the door open and stepped aside for her.

Victoria entered and stood quite still in the middle of the room. He did not speak, neither did she. Melbourne crossed to stand in front of her and, reaching up, undid the ties on the cloak. He dragged it slowly from her shoulders then tossed it aside onto a chair. He let his gaze return to her as she stood in stockings and corset before him. She could scarcely breathe, not through the tightness of the corset, but with the expectation of what was to occur.

But what was to occur? Did she fear? Perhaps she did a little, but need – desperate and consuming – quashed doubt.

In their haste, she and Skerrett had not tied her corset overly tightly. Without her chemise her breasts
struggled to be contained within. Victoria grew acutely aware of their plump desperation as they bubbled from the rim.

He was looking at them and stepped in. Cupping her waist, with his other hand he ran it up her side to her breast. He squeezed through the material and even that made her gasp. He repeated this on the other side until his hands cupped both her breasts. Then, in a move which made her whine in confusion, he slipped his fingers down around her breasts and lifted them out the merest amount so that the nipples were exposed.

Melbourne tilted his head slightly, inspecting his handiwork, and let his thumbs glance over the tight pink buds now perched fully exposed above her corset. Then, doing no more, he took hold of her hand and led her across to the bed post.

‘Take hold of it firmly,’ he said, the first thing spoken between them, but his tone only inspired compliance.

Victoria reached up and gripped hold of the post. She felt fingers on the laces of her corset, and, as he had done that last time, he tugged and tugged so that she was so tightly contained that she felt herself gloriously snug to the point of pain, but not quite.

Melbourne stood behind her, and, taking hold of her shoulders, pulled her back against him, then pushed her hair forward over one shoulder and ran his hands down to grip around her slender, constricted waist. He lowered himself to her bare neck and he planted soft kisses there at first, and then harder and harder, grazing her skin with his teeth, sucking hard so that they would leave marks which would be noticed. As he did this his hands slid up her corset, over her breasts, until his fingers found the pert tight nipples sitting atop.

His thumbs and forefingers closed upon them.

She moaned.

He tightened his grip.

She mewed.

He rolled them.

She gasped.

He pinched.

She cried out.

But he didn’t stop.

Rolling and pinching and squeezing, he continued to exact a delicious pulse on her nipples until she was whining continually.

He kept this up for minutes, minutes which drifted and danced until her thighs were damp and that rippling inside was now a constant churning so agonisingly real that it hurt.

Her nipples were hard as rock and extended by his fingers, but he still carried on and whereas at any other time it would have hurt and prompted her to pull away, now she was simply floating on a plane of such intense sensation that she clenched and unclenched her thighs in an attempt to gain relief.
‘Please … please touch me, My Lord,’ she said, and it was a plea, nothing else. She had never sounded so desperate.

‘Shh,’ he murmured in her ear. ‘Don’t speak. Remember what you came for … here, you are mine. You are in my hands and I will do with you as I wish. You don’t need to reason or think or worry or consider. Leave all to me.’

‘But –’ she said without thinking. He pinched her nipples in response and made her suck in in surprise.

‘Sh, I said.’

Melbourne moved before her and looked down with an expression of such complete devotion that tears pricked at her eyes. He bent and took hold of her head gently and kissed the tears away. Then he kissed her cheeks, then along her jaw, then he found her mouth and kissed that. He kissed her softly, he kissed her hard, he nudged at her lips and she opened and sighed against him and he kissed her more.

Her nipples still tingled from his attentions earlier and as soft and sweet as his kisses were, she wanted more. He didn’t stop kissing and his hands rubbed down her arms until they reached her wrists. He encircled them and suddenly tugged her arms behind her.

She let him. She liked it.

She liked the way it pulled her arms back, she liked the way it pushed her breasts out. She rubbed them against the brocade of his waistcoat and enjoyed the way the drag of it felt.

One large hand held her slender wrists while he reached for something concealed in the bed covers. Rope.

Still he kissed her but now, with agile hands and determined fingers, he wrapped and coiled the rope around her wrists behind her. Melbourne broke off briefly to inspect his work, ensuring there was no escape but checking that it did not rub or hurt. She tried to pull out of them but could not.

He came round again and looked down at her with an expression of satisfaction. She was breathing so hard she feared her breasts would break clean out of the corset, but never had she felt so gorgeously contained.

With the slightest smirk, he lowered his head and licked across the nipple on her left breast. And then again, slow and soft, licking and dragging along it. Then the other while coolness enfolded the first.

He broke off only to press his head against her breast as if to cushion him. He suckled on her again, sucking strongly, tugging the nipple hard into his mouth. ‘Oh God, the taste of you!’ He dragged her hard on his tongue, pulling her into his mouth until it was tight and distended.

Victoria could only throw her head back and cry out. She wanted to beg, she wanted to plead for more. Her desire was so acute that she could actually feel it running down her legs and she squirmed against her bonds and against his denial of touch.

He remained at her breasts, one hand on one, his mouth on the other, and he suckled and rolled and pinched and stroked until she was sobbing. With no recourse to hold him, she could only stand and stare at the top of his head, hoping beyond hope that he would do all and be all.

And then, when she thought he would deny her forever, his right hand slipped down, running hard over the curve of her waist, until it found her hips. At this his touch grew featherlight, Only his very
fingertips ghosted over her thighs and around to her inner legs so that they tickled. She squirmed, trying to seek them out yet evade them at the same time.

‘Ow!’ Victoria squawked. He had given her a nip with his teeth.

She glanced down. He was looking up at her with what could only be interpreted as a reprimand. She stilled but his fingers still glanced over her and she struggled not to react.

But then they were at her sex. She was almost embarrassed; she was so wet it made her face burn. But when he parted her lips, so coated in her juices, he only moaned against her breast and the vibration sent more good things through her. A single finger was pushed up inside her and she welcomed it as if it would sustain her life. At length he pressed another in next to it and she pushed down onto them, her hungry quim drawing them in as if starved. He tapped at her, pushing hard onto that place which gave her such glorious feelings. And his thumb found her nub. Easing apart her lips to expose it, he circled it, lightly at first for she was so in need that it was acutely tender, but as she accustomed herself, he grew harder.

It didn’t take long, her first come, it couldn’t, for she was so very ready. With two fingers deep inside her, with his thumb on her bud and his mouth on her breast, she climaxed within a few seconds – a fast, harsh come which made her buck so hard her breast was tugged from his mouth.

He held her, still pressing onto her nub so that pleasure had no choice but to pulse and pulse until she nearly begged for it to stop.

Then he drew himself up to rasp in her ear, ‘I am going to make you come so often that you will forget anyone but me.’

‘Yes, yes, my darling, my love … my Lord.’

He withdrew his fingers from her and held them up between them. They glistened with her juices, and she opened her mouth, an innate curiosity taking hold. He glanced at her and offered the fingers towards her. ‘Open.’ It was almost a query, more a command.

She didn’t hesitate and he fed his pleasure covered fingers into her mouth. Without hesitation, she closed her lips around them and sucked off her own taste, rolling her tongue around his fingers.

He was frowning, not in annoyance but in wonder. ‘Victoria …’ he murmured, his voice low with amazement.

‘My Lord,’ she responded and with that he fell to his knees and pushed her legs apart.

She gasped with the suddenness of it. Her orgasm had gripped her only a minute before and she would be tender to the point of pain, but he licked and stroked his tongue along her so carefully that, despite his enthusiasm, her body adjusted quickly.

‘Again,’ he growled against her, sending a reverberation of pleasure up through her.

‘Yes,’ she cried and tried to reach round to hold him there. She had forgotten she was bound, and she writhed against her bonds. It was starting to pain.

He slurred up to her, ‘Use it. Use the discomfort.’

So she did. There was pure joy at her sex, and aching in her arms, but it was all feeling, it was all from him and it was all her.
He licked so well, so very well, knowing exactly how much she could take. His tongue was cooling after the heat of his fingers and he let her recover from her orgasm while building towards her next.

She took a step back at one point when rapture began to make her dizzy, but he held her in strong hands and gave her no escape.

Still he licked slowly, long, as if he needed it for his own sustenance, but then ecstasy grew again. She considered holding back, and wondered if he would too, but he was giving and she would take.

‘Oh, coming,’ she sighed, wanting to tell him.

Victoria let it billow this time, rolling over her in time with the rhythm of his tongue. She gave at the knees and pushed against his face and he didn’t draw away. He groaned and the vibrations heightened her orgasm, making her sob with the beauty of it.

She had come twice within a few minutes and it drained her. Her legs seemed jelly-like and Victoria sank to her knees, limp and sated.

He knelt too and supported her, resting her against him and stroking. She turned her head up to offer a bleary smile of gratitude and he took it in his hands and kissed her, slow, deep, his tongue soothing her in languid circles.

It was only then that she became aware that she could barely feel her hands. ‘Ow,’ she murmured and immediately he was undoing the knots. As they were released, she sucked in with the pain of returning blood and moved them carefully round. He took hold of her arms in turn and rubbed and soothed them.

She glanced up. ‘You have not yet …’

‘Shh,’ he said and kissed her into silence again.

Slowly, they rose and he laid her on the bed then lay beside her. She rested for a while, sleeping perhaps, but she was aware of his constant presence. His hands moved over her body, occasionally grazing up to her breasts and nipples. Even now, even after the intense pleasure he’d already given, she wanted more. He had been hard for some time, even through his breeches, and now she reached down and slowly stroked over him through the material.

‘My Lord …’ she said, infusing her voice with heady eroticism. ‘I want you in my mouth.’ She would speak plainly.

He smiled and kissed her again. ‘Are my kisses not enough?’ he asked but groaned as she closed her fingers around the thick shaft near the head.

‘No,’ she answered.

‘We thought they may be at one time.’

‘No longer. I want it all. I want to give you all.’

‘You do.’

‘My Lord, please … I want to suck on you. I want you to come in my mouth and I want to swallow you into me.’

‘Christ, my girl!’ he said, almost a laugh at her candour.
But he moved. Kneeling, then throwing a leg across her so that he straddled her, he moved up so that he was over her chest. He undid the placket and released himself quickly. Then, cupping her head, he lifted her a little, and fed himself into her open mouth.

At the first taste of him, the first feel of that warm, firm flesh in her mouth, she hummed with contentment and he groaned as the vibrations tingled along him. He pushed deeper and she took. So, deeper still. They stayed like that for some time and she licked and sucked and tasted, for he was leaking pleasure already. But in this position she could not take him deep enough, however hard she tried, and, reading her frustration, he moved swiftly off the bed and guided her out with him.

‘Kneel,’ he said and she was on her knees before him instantly, staring up, mouth wide to welcome him completely.

‘My Lord … I want all of you.’

‘I know,’ he said, stroking her hair back from her face, and pushed into her again. He tilted her chin up a little and it opened her throat, so he pushed more and sank in deeper than ever before. ‘Damnation be mine!’ he said as his cock edged further and further between her plump lips. She could feel him pressing and she relaxed so that he could go yet deeper. More. More.

When he could go no further, when the head of his cock sat tight in her throat, he drew back and she glanced up to see a look of complete devotion on his face.

‘Again,’ she said, and so he sank back in and began to move, building up a rhythm.

‘You are my all, you are my life,’ he said. And she was.

When he was coming he held her head and gave to her. She did not doubt herself, not now, not ever. For she was as certain of it as when the crown had been placed on her head. And if she could convince him of such, then it was all the better. As she heard his moan of rapture and felt him release into her mouth, a surge of such happiness coursed through her that it made her head swim. She took him all and she swallowed.

Melbourne sat back on the bed and his shoulders hunched over; his breathing was deep, his head hung low. But he looked at her under hooded eyes and she saw his love.

‘You are extraordinary,’ he stated.

It was her turn to come over and kiss him. She stood between his legs and turned his head up to her and stroked her thumb over those extraordinary cheekbones and lowered herself to him and kissed him.

He stared up and muttered, ‘You wish to be claimed. I will do so with pleasure. I will bind you to me with ecstasy.’

She considered for a moment, but her body still tingled, her skin grew warm with need.

‘No,’ she murmured, shaking her head, for she knew. ‘Not just pleasure.’

His brows creased.

She stroked over his cheekbones, staring into his eyes as she imparted her truth. ‘You know, My Lord. You know what we need, how it works. How it makes us forget.’

She bent her head to him and whispered in his ear, ‘Make me burn. I want that too. I need it.’
‘Already?’ he queried.

She kissed him again and flipped the control for the briefest moment, taking his bottom lip between her teeth and tugging on it the merest amount, enough to make him suck in with surprise.

‘Already … My Lord.’

‘Yes,’ he said low, a growl almost, and his hands tightened on her waist. ‘Yes.’

And he took hold of her and before she knew it, had upended her and laid her across his thighs. She squawked in surprise and found herself staring down at the floor, her feet kicking up behind her. Her corset dug in and she wriggled to try to ease it. His hands were on her and shifted her, but not to ease her discomfort, only to settle her upon him.

‘Stay still. Stay still and take it. Count for me. I want to hear each one loud and clear.’

She had rarely heard him so demanding. Again, she wanted. How much could she take? She wished to know; she wanted to find out.

‘How many, My Lord?’ There was the slightest tremble in her voice, she could not deny it.

‘As many as I deem necessary.’

‘Yes, Lord Melbourne. I understand, Sir.’

‘Good.’

And his hand came down. Hard.

‘Ow!’ she yelped in surprise as much as anything. It had stung viciously, that first one.

‘Ow is not a number.’

‘No, My Lord. I’m sorry, My Lord. One, Sir.’

Thwack! Again, same cheek. This time she was ready and her yelp was now a moan. ‘Two,’ she declared clearly.

‘Good,’ he said in satisfaction and delivered another on the other cheek. The heat bloomed from it to balance with the rest.

‘Three.’

Again.

‘Four.’

Another, hard. ‘Five.’

His fingers coiled through her hair and he pulled her head up a little. She stared across at the bureau. She could feel his erection lividly hard again against her belly even though the taste of his recent climax was still strong in her mouth. She wriggled upon it and was rewarded only with a sensational spank which blistered across her right cheek.

She had been counting well and he soon reached ten.
The next blow was lower, on the tender flesh of her upper thighs. She sucked in and forgot to count.

‘What was that?’ he demanded, waiting.

‘Eleven,’ she said and did not wish to tell him that her eyes were starting to burn.

Another on the other side. Oh, that hurt, but she was already in that strange floating space where sensation misted reason, where pain and pleasure met and collided and entwined. She welcomed her tears, she welcomed his hand anywhere he would land it.

‘Twelve,’ she said, her voice crystal clear, and she lifted her backside for more. He duly delivered, raining down several more blows in quick succession until she felt the heat blistering from her.

‘Twenty!’ she said.

‘Oh, you darling girl, you wondrous thing of mine,’ he said and his hand stroked over her inflamed rump. ‘You are so very red and hot, do you feel it?’

‘Yes, my Lord, I feel it. You have done that, My Lord, only you, thank you, Sir, for I need it.’

Slowly and carefully he guided her to her feet and stared up at her tear stained face.

‘I have made you cry.’ And his voice was heavy with sudden melancholy.

‘They are tears of belonging, My Lord.’

His lips ticked and the sadness on his face melted into an acceptance. Melbourne pushed himself to his feet and held her. ‘You are extraordinary.’

‘But I am still empty, Sir. I am so very empty. You said you would claim me. Claim me everywhere, inside and out.’

He frowned a little and ran a thumb over her cheek. ‘How can I not? I will make you mine. I will make you mine forever.’

‘Yes,’ she sighed. ‘Yes.’

‘I don’t want you to forget. But the heat fades.’

‘Don’t let it fade. I want to feel it. Everywhere I go, everything I do, I want to feel you.’

He stared into her, as if trying to find the answer to a myriad of questions. She stared back, never breaking their connection. And so he took hold of her and pulled her to the bureau and pushed her down onto it. With no ceremony he was inside her to the hilt and she gasped in shock.

Melbourne withdrew quickly only to push full and deep into her again. She reached forward instinctively to grab onto the edge of the bureau, bracing herself on it, and so he began moving, harsh, fast thrusts which powered into her. Where she had been empty, she was now full, where she had been hollow, she was now complete.

He drove into her time and again until her thighs bruised and her quim was expectant of fullness.

‘More,’ she moaned through it, for it would never be enough, she knew that now. Until she could fuse to him forever, it would never be enough. ‘More.’

He slowed and pressed himself deep into her. His hands came to her backside again, still aglow from
his earlier thrashing, but then fingers … stroking, a forefinger she thought … teasing … circling … exploring. She tensed. What was that?

‘My Lord?’ she queried, her voice quivering.

‘Relax.’

His finger was there, right there, at that place that was only hers, only ever hers, tight and closed and hers.

He lifted his hand away for a mere moment and she knew he was sucking on it, dampening it, then it was back, circling again.

‘Relax,’ he said again. ‘Breathe out.’

She exhaled slowly and he circled some more and then he pressed. He pressed it in. Only a little, the merest amount, just the tip of his finger.

‘Ohh,’ she exhaled again for it was the most curious feeling. It stung a little, her body resisted, but he eased it in further and this time she relaxed and let it sink deeper. A breaching, a claiming, yes. Only him, only ever him.

It was her who pushed back now and she welcomed his finger as it worked yet deeper into this most intimate of places.

‘Good girl,’ he said and she loved him for it.

‘I like that,’ she said and so he pushed it deeper.

It stung her but only for a time, and then it was there and he moved it the merest amount to reinforce it. She sighed out. ‘Oh, I like that, My Lord,’ she said again and she meant it.

He pulled his cock out a way then began moving through her again, all the while keeping his finger within her. She could still feel that sting and stretch and she wanted it. As he fucked her, she felt it more, but that was why he did it, that was why she loved it.

‘I don’t want it to end,’ she moaned. ‘Never, My Lord, never.’

He moved quickly and she was ready again.

‘I’m going to come again,’ she voiced aloud.

‘Not yet.’

But he moved so well she couldn’t stop it. His finger was so perfectly within her that she wanted to give it to him.

‘Oh, please, my Lord, I can’t stop. You’ll have to stop moving. You’ll have to come out of me.’

‘I won’t do that.’

‘Then I will come.’

‘Wait.’

‘Oh, My Lord, I cannot, truly!’
‘Do you feel it? Do you feel me?’

He slowed and stroked idly, indolently, and worked his finger in and out of her just as he worked his cock.

‘Yes, always, always.’

‘Then come again. Come for me again. I want to feel you on me.’

He stroked along her, twice, three more times, and the pleasure she had held so finely poised crashed through her. Victoria came with a shaking gasp upon him.

She panted it out and lay limp across the bureau. He had not released and still sat thick and hard inside her.

‘I don’t want it to end. I don’t want it to ever end,’ she murmured, her body slack with the aftermath of ecstasy.

‘No. It must not end. It cannot.’

And at that he pulled out quickly again. She sobbed with the loss of him and glanced around.

‘Turn around. Do not look.’

She obeyed instantly.

There was the sound of something opening, of objects being retrieved. He came and stood behind her again. She wanted to look around, to see what he held.

She found out soon enough. There was a swish through the air and then a sharp bite across her right buttock.

His riding crop. Even through the reddened bloom of her backside she knew it.

He gave her five short, sharp taps with it, leaving kissing bites across her already agonised skin.

She sucked in and drew back instinctively.

‘Take it,’ he said, leaving her in no doubt. ‘I bestow it and you know it to be from me.’

She breathed out, let her fingers clench on the bureau, and prepared.

‘Yes, My Lord. Claim me. That is what I want. That is what I ask.’

He began striking her with it, taps at first, but then more concertedly. She had been floating for some time, drifting in that space between awareness and dreams, between pain and sensation.

Now she flew. Her mind clouded, her body took, confused by the sensations afflicting it. She had been removed from herself at last, stripped of any responsibility to self.

With the rhythmic beat of the crop upon her glowing flesh – time and again – she knew it at last. Her eyes rolled back in her head, her breath shuddered, and she gave herself over to him. Victoria was lifted beyond: here, now, she was his entirely. He had done it. He had claimed her.

But Melbourne didn’t stop. He continued, bringing the crop down yet harder and faster until her rump burned with heated sensation.
He was saying something, repeating it time and again.

‘Mine … Mine … Mine.’

Yes, my darling, My Lord. My love, only yours.

Still she wanted, still she adored it.

But deep inside something had shifted. She had never known him so driven, so intent on his purpose. She thrilled to it but something prickled at her, something started to whisper a warning. He seemed possessed almost, consumed by his own need.

‘My darling, you shall know me and remember me – when you sit with him, when you talk with him, you will burn for me, only me, Victoria … only me.’ His voice sounded grave and rough, dispossessed almost. Her senses grew alert.

And then – THWACK!

‘OW!’

She screamed. She couldn’t not. A line of white pain formed fast and searing across her rump.

He had struck her with the switch of the crop, not the flat leather tress on the end, which he had used until now, but the thin rod of the crop itself. She could feel the mark of it, knew it would be red and raised and lividly sore.

‘Mine,’ he said again. ‘He will not exist to us.’

And he did it again. Blistering. Searing. Another line.

It hurt, oh it hurt.

Now her tears flowed and she realised that they were no longer tears of completion but tears of pure pain.

‘Oh, please!’ she said. Panic threatened and she tried to push herself up but his hand was on her back holding her there.

Now real white agony forced her out of that accustomed glow of rapture, forced her to feel reality and forced her back into herself.

‘My love, my Victoria!’ But his words were lost in the pain pulsing from the two angry lines on her rump. She heard him step back in readiness to deliver another.

And she suddenly and completely wanted it to be over.

A word, that word. She’d never used it, had never had to.

He inhaled and she knew she would feel it again. Jealousy consumed him; he had forgotten himself.

Victoria forced her lungs to work, forced her mind and her voice to do what was needed.

‘ORCHID!’

Immediately, it stopped. Immediately, she heard the crop fall from his hand with a clatter.
Melbourne staggered then stumbled. He stared at her, stared at what he had done to the woman he loved.

William Lamb dropped to his knees on the floor and let his head fall into his hands.

And with great gasping sobs, he wept.

Chapter End Notes

If you're there, speak to me. x
He could not rise from his position. She was his butterfly: fragile, evasive, exquisite … And she had alighted in his hands and he had crushed her.

Melbourne sobbed, huge hopeless sobs of self-realisation and failure.

But then, through it, a voice.

‘William … William, stop that.’

He glanced up, his vision blurred through tears.

‘William, stand up. Lend me your hand.’ Victoria was resolute and clear.

He could not bring himself to look at her backside so he focused on her face. Victoria had pushed her trembling body up from the bureau and was braced against it.

She needed him. What a pathetic, shameful fool he was.

He got to his feet and stepped across to her. Victoria winced as she stood upright and reached quickly for his arms. He caught her and held her. She did not look at him.

‘Lay me on the bed … on my side. And help me remove the corset.’

After supporting her as she stepped cautiously over, he tugged quickly at the laces on the corset before slipping the garment off.

She exhaled in relief. ‘That is better already.’

Victoria gripped onto him as he helped her into bed and lay cautiously on her side with a wincing exhalation.

‘Ma’am … I …’

‘Oh, no Ma’am now! If you speak, speak to me.’

He stuttered. ‘You must know that although I put that protocol in place and we agreed on the word, I never intended for it to come to that. I never thought it would. I have failed you. I am sorry … my love, I am sorry.’

She closed her eyes and a shiver caught her. He rushed over and pulled the covers over her to keep her warm.

‘I confess,’ she began, her voice pale, ‘it took me somewhat by surprise. But not the pain … that I can cope with. Only that …’

He fell to his knees before her and took her hands and kissed them and held them against his tear-stained face. ‘What? What, my love?’

Victoria opened her eyes and said, her face shaded with confusion, ‘You were so very jealous. I felt
that jealousy. Why? Why, William?’

_Because I must give you up to him._ He heard the answer in his head, but he could not voice it aloud. If he did, it would destroy him and, at this moment, possibly her.

He lowered his head and repeated time and again, ‘I am sorry, so sorry, my darling, my heart. Can you make sense of it?’

She frowned. ‘I am not sure. I am not aggrieved by having to use the word, or by the pain … but by the reasons that prompted you to be so … to be as you were.’

His breathing pained him.

‘There is no cause for it,’ she continued.

He swallowed. _Did she still not see how her future must lie?_ ‘I do not wish you to show that jealousy again,’ she said. ‘I can …?’

‘What, my darling?’ he prompted.

‘I can trust you in that … can’t I?’

_Trust._

Never before had she had reason to question him on trust. It hurt him so acutely he almost groaned aloud.

But before he could answer, she turned to adjust her position and winced again. ‘Oh, it pains! Please, fetch me some ointment.’

This dragged him to his senses and he scrabbled around in the cabinet for the pot of calamine.

Victoria rolled gingerly over onto her front and he lifted the covers to reveal her backside. Shame consumed him again. Her entire rump was red and inflamed and this stretched down her thighs. And across the soft flesh of her usually pale cheeks ran two lines: dark purply red, raw and raised. He turned away again.

Victoria looked back over her shoulder and said, her tone almost scolding, ‘Do not wait then. Apply it.’

He dipped his fingers into the calamine and rubbed it in as gently as he could. Her skin was so hot it almost hurt to touch. Minutes before, he had responded to that heat, had craved it and used it. And now … he was consumed by such guilt that he struggled to do what was needed.

Victoria sucked in and her buttocks clenched against further touch, but the calamine began to work quickly and she relaxed and let him coat it over her.

‘Oh, that’s better, that eases it.’

Her breathing steadied and he pulled the covers over her warmly again before moving round to kneel beside her.

‘I am sorry,’ he began again, stroking the hair from her face.

‘Yet this is what you intended after all … to make me think only of you when I sit; I do believe you
have achieved that.’

‘Do not say that, my love. Do not remind me. I am so very ashamed.’ He looked hard into her.

‘Do not be ashamed,’ she said. ‘It would happen, you know, for we are so very in need of anything
the other can bestow … but do not give in to jealousy, for that I hate. That is not my darling man, my
Lord M. What have you to be jealous for? You, who are my everything?’

He could only stroke her face. She had stopped shivering but was still huddled in on herself. He
would not take his eyes from her for a moment; he would guard her recovery.

‘I am so tired,’ she murmured. ‘So very tired.’

‘Sleep,’ he said, ‘sleep now.’

‘Do not leave me … William, do not leave me.’

He took hold of her hand and pressed her fingers to his mouth, repeating yet again, ‘I am sorry, I am
sorry. Forgive me, my love, forgive me.’

She opened her mouth as if to speak, but sleep took her before a word could be uttered.

--xoOox--

He did not sleep that night. He did not lie beside her. He sat on the chair, pulled up close to the bed,
and watched her. He watched her every breath and movement, alert to any changes. But she settled
as she slept and she was warm and slept peacefully. She barely moved through the night and at times
through his vigil he was able to retreat into his own thoughts.

William Lamb sat, fingers steepled together, and he knew.

--xoOox--

Victoria forgot what had happened when she awoke and stretched over onto her back.

‘Ow!’ She was awakened abruptly by a sharp pain flashing across her bottom. Memories came back,
and before opening her eyes, she allowed the conflicting thoughts and sensations to resolve. Through
the pain, through the pleasure and heat and bite and words and desire, still now, they left her with a
smile.

Oh, what he did to her, how he made her his!

Had she not wanted that? Had she not demanded it? Why have a word if they were not to use it?
This was what had always been intended, this was how it would be. For now she forgot the deeper
confusion of his intent, the jealousy which had prompted it. His presence was too familiar to
question, and it was much needed comfort. Gingerly, she touched her agonised backside, but this
time the pain was welcome, for it was him.

Still with eyes shut, she felt for him in the bed beside her. It was cool and untouched.

Victoria opened her eyes. She saw him immediately. He was seated in the chair just across from her,
his face grave.

She smiled softly. ‘Good morning. Why did you rise so early? I do so like it when you rise early,
Lord M … but not in this way.’ Her attempt at humour went unheeded. He stared across unmoved.
‘Oh, darling, why aren’t you in bed?’ she implored.

‘Victoria … how do you feel?’

She winced again. ‘I daresay I shall smart today. I shall certainly have to cancel the ride out with Uncle Leopold and Albert.’

‘Victoria …’ he tried again.

‘What is it? Oh, it is still early, come into bed.’

‘I cannot.’

‘Do not tell me I have exhausted you at last?’ she smirked. ‘Come to bed.’

‘I will not.’

Now she too lost her humour. Victoria pushed herself up as best she could, panic stirring rapidly. ‘William? You speak strangely. What do you mean?’

He stood and came over to her, kneeling beside her again.

‘I love you,’ he said. ‘I love you more than I thought it possible ever to love another.’

She stared into him, the panic not assuaged. ‘And I love you, you know that.’

‘Victoria … last night I sought your forgiveness … and you did not give it.’

She furrowed her brows, bewildered. ‘Well, I … Of course I forgive you! If I did not say it then it was only that I was so tired and weary.’

‘No, my love. You should not have given it, that was right … for what I did was unforgivable.’

His inner agony transferred to her and she sought to reassure him. ‘No, no, it wasn’t. It was us, it was simply another step on our discovery of each other and ourselves. I asked for it, I begged, do you not recall? I wanted and needed it, please know that. Yes, it smarts, that is all, but it will fade. And you stopped, my darling, you stopped as soon as I said the word.’

He closed his eyes and shook his head in regret. ‘It should never have reached that stage. I forgot myself. I forgot what I should be to you.’

‘But you are all I want!’ she insisted. ‘You are my perfect being!’

‘You questioned your trust in me last night.’

‘Not my trust with your regard to me, I trust you completely in that respect … simply whether you can subvert this foolish jealousy. I was questioning only your trust … in yourself.’

‘I …’ he began, but stopped.

‘Oh, and you can control and subvert it, my darling, of course you can.’

But he would not meet her eyes. Squeezing her hand, he pressed it to his lips again. ‘I would urge you to feign illness today – a headache perhaps, your monthly troubles, for they are due to start at any time, I warrant. Avoid the questions which will inevitably arise. I would spare you that even if I have not spared you the pain.’
‘But I love that pain! I love all you give me, you know it.’

He shook his head in despair. ‘My darling, don’t say these things. Can you not hear how wrong they are?’ Tears formed in his eyes again. ‘What have we become that we say these things? What have I done to you?’

And he lowered his head and cried softly. Reaching over, Victoria cradled his head and kissed the soft curls on top, but he could not be soothed. Seeing him like this hurt more than the heat still flaming from her backside. They stayed like this for some time, a clasping of confused remorse and love.

But soon enough a clock chimed outside six times. William glanced to the window, alarmed, and pushed himself to his feet. ‘It is time for you to return. You cannot walk yet, you will still be unsteady. I will carry you back.’

She moaned, but was distracted back to what must be done. ‘Oh, already? I fear you are right, though. I would be grateful for your support.’

‘Of course, Ma’am.’

She glanced at him. He stood, hands clasped behind him, and lowered his gaze. He may as well have been offering support at a Privy Council meeting.

‘I thought we’d dispensed with that,’ she said, her grievance not entirely hidden.

He did not reply but moved across to retrieve her nightgown and cloak.

Carefully, Victoria lifted herself from the bed and stood, adjusting to the soreness. ‘You are right. I shall feign illness today and spend the rest of it most emphatically on my side.’

Melbourne helped her with the clothes but said little. He wore an expression of such grave impenetrability that her anxiety was not eased. Before she left, she brought up her hands to cup his face.

‘My love, it was to be. It always was.’

His jaw clenched, but again he said nothing.

‘Kiss me, my darling,’ she asked. ‘I may not see you for the rest of the day.’

‘No …’ he murmured.

She drew him down and he planted the purest kiss on her mouth, a kiss of such devotion and depth that it made her catch her breath.

When he drew back, his eyes were again brimming with tears. ‘I love you, Victoria,’ he said. ‘Always.’

‘And I love you, my darling … my William.’ Her own eyes were hot and damp, but then he bent and swept her up in his arms, carefully avoiding her backside. Carefully and undetected, he carried her back to her rooms.

Skerrett was surprised to see the Prime Minister carrying the Queen into her chamber.

‘Her Majesty is afflicted today,’ he declared. ‘She must not venture out of her chamber and must rest. Here is plenty of calamine and … some items of her clothing.’ He handed over the calamine and
Victoria eased herself into bed and pulled the covers in tight around her. She was so tired still and her eyes closed instantly.

‘I …’ he started, but words seemed to run out.

‘Hmm?’ she hummed, reaching out a heavy hand towards him.

Skerrett was busy at the dressing table.

‘I must … return to the House.’

‘Yes … go and do your duty,’ she smiled blearily.

He took her hand and ran his thumb over it. She liked that, but sleep was claiming her again.

‘Goodbye, Ma’am.’

‘Goodbye, Lord M.’

And he let go of her hand and was gone.

--xoOox--

With the careful application of calamine and rest, by the next morning Victoria was feeling able to go down to breakfast.

Her uncle greeted her euphorically. ‘Niece! We missed you yesterday!’

Albert stood as she entered. She offered him a smile; there was no reason not to. He smiled back. His hair stood up a little at the side; he was clearly completely unaware. It turned her smile to a laugh.

He blushed and reached up to where she was staring. When he felt his hair he tried to smooth it down unsuccessfully. Her smile deepened and as she passed him, she whispered, ‘It matters not, Albert.’

But then she sat down. She had forgotten. She gasped and her face twisted with clear discomfort.

‘Victoria?’ queried Albert, rising from his chair in alarm. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Oh, I … sometimes when I sleep awkwardly my neck twinges. It has happened before. It did so last night. I will be better as the day progresses.’

Leopold stared hard at her. ‘Lord Melbourne did not stay at the Palace last night? Perhaps he has remembered his responsibility to the nation after all.’

Victoria took a sip of coffee. It was bitter.

She spent the day carefully. Walking was preferable to sitting and much time was spent in the gardens examining the flowers and shrubs. Again, she was comfortable enough in Albert’s company, she noticed, although she ensured her skirts brushed across her rump frequently. She preferred the sting of it to her cousin’s rather pallid observations on rhododendrons. She wondered what William was doing. Chairing a debate, answering questions in the Commons perhaps. But not here.

They ended up in the glass house on the east side.
Albert paced over to some specimens. ‘Orchids,’ he observed. ‘A rather meagre selection though.’ Her breath caught and a memory of panic took her briefly. Her reaction surprised her. She turned away.

‘No. Orchids do not grow well here.’

‘Yet you have many around the Palace.’

‘They are gifts from … elsewhere.’

She held her stomach. Oh, why feel this way? She had reconciled it, had she not?

But had he, had he truly forgotten himself?

She turned back to Albert. He was so terribly predictable, it struck her. She couldn’t imagine him ever forgetting himself.

She wasn’t sure if that was reassuring or dismaying.

---xoOox---

When he left the Palace, Melbourne spent the day in Westminster, but words fell without meaning against his hearing, and mouths moved without sense before him. He returned to Dover House and his brandy decanter a little before 5 o’clock. Sleep barely touched him that night, and in the morning he retreated to his study and drew the curtains against the harsh light of day. Parliament could do without him for once. He sat and he thought and he felt.

The hours chimed, time passed.

At ten minutes past seven in the evening, he reached for pen and paper.

---xoOox---

After dinner, as the party left the dining room and walked to the drawing room for cards, a footman approached the Queen.

‘Your Majesty. A letter from Dover House.’

‘Oh?’

Her pulse quickened immediately, as it always did at correspondence from Lord M. She took the letter off the tray, adoring the familiar curl of his writing on the front immediately.

She called to the others. ‘Do carry on. I shall join you momentarily.’

Victoria took herself off quietly and alone to a room. She closed the door, opened the letter, and read.

---xoOox---

‘My beloved Victoria,

As you read this, I wish you to know that I love you with all that I am, ever have been, and ever will be.

I write because there is so very much that would emerge erratically and hopelessly were I to try to
Today, I tender my resignation as your Private Secretary. I shall continue as Prime Minister but intend to call a General Election immediately and announce that I shall be stepping down no matter what the result. I shall thereafter retire to Brocket Hall.

What happened in my chamber the other night revealed to me how hopeless our situation has become, how untenable and wrong it is, wrong for you and for your future. What we had was so brilliant and radiant as to be blinding. We have been blinded, blinded by our devotion and love and lust, and a life lived like that cannot endure. What happened was wrong and I am deeply ashamed of my actions. I am sorry, you know that, and I will remain so forever more. You graciously profess your forgiveness, but I cannot accept it. I forgot myself and I was wrong. That is not the man I am nor wish you to know me as.

What we had was so transcendent that we were no longer able to see reality from dreams, dreams which were consuming us both. I am not proud of what transpired in my chamber, and will forever regret my actions in going as far as I did, but it did serve one purpose in awakening me to what should have been done a long while ago. In my heart, I have known this, and only hope that you have too.

Know that I adore you, know that I love you more than I have ever loved another in all my life, more than I ever thought capable of. Know that you have given me reason to live, reason to be more happy than ever before, reason to get up each day and shout for pure joy.

But how selfish I have been. I have allowed emotions to control me, emotions which should have been tamed and subjugated in youth.

But I am no youth. I am old and shall do what old people do. And, you, beautiful radiant pure Victoria, shall continue. You shall live and love and reign with so much passion and vision and splendour. I hand that back to you. For a time, it was sheer beauty to share in it with you, perhaps even lead you forward in it, but you do not need me any longer, and what happened has confirmed to me what I have suspected for some time now – that I hold you back, that I deceive you into a life that cannot be. And I deceive myself too. That is not right for either of us.

And now I set you free and you must live.

I like Albert. He is a good fellow, despite his predilection for Schubert. You like him too, it is clear. It would not be a bad thing to consider him as a husband, you know. I believe it would ultimately make you happy, and that, in turn, would make me happy, although my happiness should be of no concern of yours.

What we have shared, what you have gifted to me will never be lost, will never be forgotten. I wish you to keep it in your heart and treasure it. I wish you to take it out every so often and examine it, but then I wish you to tuck it away again and go about your life.

I love you, Victoria. I shall always love you, but it is possible to love and live without the other. And that is how it shall be.

There will be pain, but time, I find, does indeed heal or at least covers the wound so one is not constantly exposed to it. And there will be another there for you. And you are, after all, Queen, and that does tend to keep one busy.

Move on, darling girl. I think it wise that I do not see you, not for some time at least. I will send the
Lord Chancellor to assist with the dispatches. He is no doubt more efficient than I ever was. We did tend to allow other matters to interfere, although, not, I am proud to acknowledge, at the neglect of duty.

I thank you, my love. I thank you with all that I am and could ever have been or could be, for you have taught me so much and revealed so much, both to me and in me, and what more can one person do for another, than give of themselves so purely and selflessly? You have done that, and my life became real again due to it.

Farewell, Victoria. Go and live and love. I wish that with all you have made me.

Yours, for always, in my heart, my soul and my very self,

William’

--xoOox--

Victoria read the letter, folded it assiduously, and left the room.

She did not return to the others. She turned along the corridor and went up to her bed chamber. She did not speak, not to Lehzen, nor to Skerrett. She did not feel the lingering throb of pain.

She was undressed silently then lay in bed staring above her.

Her world had stopped turning.

He was gone.

Chapter End Notes

To be continued ...
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Lord Chancellor duly arrived the next day with the boxes. Victoria attended to them efficiently with minimal conversation.

She walked with Albert and discussed the future of transport; she dined with her family and ladies; she hosted the Spanish ambassador. She assumed a mask of calm dignity, and if anyone noticed her withdrawn nature, they did not comment.

Nobody knew the agony which destroyed another part of her with every second that passed.

She did not at first write to him. His letter had expressed things eloquently, but any attempt by her would not, she knew.

She gave him time; she would be patient. He had taught her that so well, after all. Perhaps another letter would arrive. Perhaps he would arrive with the dispatches in a few days. He would return to her.

He did not.

On the fifth day after his letter, a document was placed before her: The appointment of a Private Secretary to serve Her Majesty the Queen following the resignation of the Second Viscount Melbourne.

As she reached for it, her hand trembled.

She heard the Lord Chancellor swallow. ‘This follows the resignation of Lord Melbourne from this position, Your Majesty.’

‘Yes, I understand.’

‘The Prime Minister intends to call a General Election next week, Ma’am. He asked me to inform you.’

‘I realise this. Is he …?’ Her voice trembled suddenly.

The Lord Chancellor was not a man unmoved. He stepped in and softened his voice.

‘Ma’am?’


‘Yes, Ma’am, but he spends much time at Brocket Hall also.’

‘Has he … has he remembered himself to me? Has he asked after me?’

The Lord Chancellor hesitated, she could tell. She looked up into his face and read a sadness there which broke her.

‘No, Your Majesty.’
It was then that she began to write, every day, several times a day. They were not long letters but they were plenteous.

None of them were answered.

--xoOox--

Residing in London was not exactly what Melbourne was doing. He sat in the House, certainly, and gave the appearance of listening and he nodded and smiled when needed. And then he would get himself somehow to Dover House and retreat to his study and drink brandy and, when exhaustion demanded it, attempt to sleep, usually in his armchair. If there was little requiring his urgent attention, he would make the journey to Brocket Hall and do similarly there. He delegated much of his work.

Residing required a degree of engagement with one’s surroundings. Melbourne was not engaged in anything. He was hollow; he was desolate. He did not reside; he did not live. He merely existed.

Her letters remained beside him, the piles growing. How he longed to answer, just once, for he knew the turmoil he put her through, the despair, and he despised himself for it. But he did not.

For if he did, he would give her false hope, and himself with it. It had ended, for her sake, and it was right. And thus it must remain.

--xoOox--

Albert continued his gentle courtship and restrained attempts at engagement. Victoria did not respond to it, but neither did she mind it. She simply did not notice it. If he persisted – which he did – she was unaware. She nodded and smiled and got on perfectly well with him, but she thought only of another man.

Three weeks after William’s letter, after her attempts at patience, after her own increasingly frantic and unanswered correspondence, her self-enforced attempts at normality threatened insanity. The sheets in her bed were so cold that she lay still in one position all night, the covers clutched tightly about her. The glow of his thrashing had long since faded and she was left with nothing but a throbbing emptiness which was worse than any pain his hands could have inflicted. Victoria had to do something. Above all else, she abhorred his silence; she despised his invisibility.

And so, making pale excuses to Albert and the others, she summoned a carriage one morning and directed it to Brocket Hall. She had checked with the Lord Chancellor – William had left Westminster the night before for his country residence, on that everyone was agreed. This time, Emma Portman insisted on accompanying her.

On arrival, Victoria rushed quickly from the carriage and up the steps. She practically hammered on the door. A footman opened it, his eyes widening at the sight of the Queen standing on the doorstep but not as surprised as she would have anticipated.

‘Your Majesty.’ He bowed briefly.

‘I wish to see Lord Melbourne.’ She practically barked the words.

There was the slightest pause and then the man said clearly, ‘The Viscount is not here, Your Majesty.’

‘I have been informed that he is.’

The man kept his gaze on the ground. ‘I apologise, Ma’am … but he is not here.’
‘Where then will I find him?’

‘I cannot tell you that, Ma’am.’

‘Cannot or will not?’ Her anger was rising.

‘Your Majesty,’ cautioned Emma.

Victoria stood, breathing heavily, her limbs tight with passion.

‘I wish to enter. Let me in.’

The man did not budge.

‘I am your Queen. I command you to let me in!’

Reluctantly, the man pulled the door wider open and Victoria rushed immediately and quickly into the hall.

She darted her gaze around. Had she expected him to be standing there? He was not. She rushed into a room off to the left. It was empty. She went to another, then another, frantic in her haste, tears hot in her eyes. All were empty. None showed signs of his presence.

Victoria ran back into the hall and stood at the bottom of the stairs, the vast space almost mocking. Her head fell back and she cried out:

‘William!’

Only silence replied.

‘William! Do not forsake me!’

There came back nothing.

‘William!’

Victoria collapsed in a pool of silk skirts on the floor and wailed. Emma hurried over and knelt with her, enclosing her in her arms and rocking her gently back and forth. And then, only after Her Majesty’s sobs had faded high into the lofty vaults of Brocket Hall, did she gently manage to lift the Queen from the floor and guide her back to the carriage.

Many floors up, in a small room at the end of the corridor, William Lamb heard that voice faintly below, that voice which had called his name so often in ecstasy, calling it now in despair; he heard the bewailing sobs of the woman who was his life.

He closed his eyes and sent his thoughts on the stillness: *Go and live, my darling, my girl, go and live.*

---xoOox--

Victoria returned solemnly to Buckingham Palace. She barely spoke at dinner and ate little.

Wellington had been invited. He knew; Melbourne confided in him.

The Duke approached the Queen quietly after they left the table.
‘Your Majesty, I trust you are well.’

She fiddled with the lace on her handkerchief and avoided his inquiring gaze. ‘I have been better, Duke, I will confess.’

‘May I ask what avails you?’

She glanced up at last. ‘I believe you know that.’

Wellington softened his gaze. ‘Lord Melbourne has not visited you for some time.’

‘No. Neither does he write. It … It …’

‘Ma’am?’

‘It seems so very … cruel.’

Wellington gave a little sigh. ‘That is far from the intention, Ma’am, I am certain. Quite the opposite.’

She frowned; her dignity fast deserting her. ‘To suddenly deny me something which has sustained me, which has nurtured me, for so long?’

‘Perhaps it is the only way.’

‘For me?’

‘And for him.’

She stepped in and looked up at him, worrying her lip anxiously. ‘How is he? Have you seen him? Have you heard from him?’

‘I see him occasionally in Westminster, although he deals with much business from Brocket Hall.’

‘How does he seem to you? Is he well?’

He smiled gently. ‘My dear girl … do not fear for him.’

‘I miss him.’ She gave a sudden sob, unexpected and taking her by surprise. Her head dropped and she repeated, ‘I miss him, I miss him, I miss him.’

Wellington could not stop himself reaching up a paternal hand and placing it on her arm. ‘But, Ma’am … you are here and you are well and you are coping and continuing. He knows that. He wishes you to realise it. Perhaps that is why also that he has done this so abruptly.’

She darted her head up to him, her eyes bright with tears. ‘Am I coping, Duke?’

He smiled softly. ‘Of course you are, my dear. And there are many close to you who wish you only the best, and who will love and support you.’

‘What is best for me?’

‘I imagine William has told you that.’

‘I believed he was best for me.’

Wellington sighed a little.
‘At some points I am sure he was, at some times, yes, but not for always.’ He took her hands gently in his, patting them as she imagined a father would. ‘It is curious, life. See it perhaps as a path through the woods on which you set off – dappled, verdant, illimitable delights surrounding you and many more promised up ahead. But you may come against obstacles – some immovable, some transient. And then you must make a choice, for there are other paths. Do you battle on or do you find another path, a different one? It may be that your intended path is unpassable even if you can see marvels beyond it. Both paths would take you on the most glorious journey, to see and experience the most marvellous things, but … they are different, that is all. When you finally reach the end of the path and look back at where you have come, you will see that the journey was good. Different, perhaps, but still good. And, the path chosen was perhaps a little … easier.’

‘Is that what one aspires to? Easiness?’

‘I believe after the life he lived, William would certainly recommend it.’ He looked up as someone approached over Victoria’s shoulder.

‘Your Highness. How are you enjoying your visit to England?’ Wellington asked of the man.

‘Very well, Duke, very well,’ replied Albert.

Victoria brushed at her eyes and recomposed herself as Albert glanced down at her.

‘Victoria? Are you unwell?’

‘No, simply thoughtful, that is all.’

‘That is not a bad thing. I am sorry if I have interrupted you.’

She looked up at him and was touched by his sensitivity. ‘No, no, do not worry. I am quite recovered.’

‘I find music to be most helpful when I become preoccupied. I acquired some new Bach pieces today. Would you like me to play them for you?’

She smiled up. ‘That is very considerate of you, Albert.’

‘Also, some new duets, if you would prefer to play with me.’

She resisted at first. Duets … her duet with William had been pulled away before the next page could be turned. But she looked up at the German Prince and she could read only care and deference in his face. Perhaps it would indeed take her mind off things. Her grief exhausted her. And for now, she was too exhausted to continue thinking about it.

She smiled softly. ‘Yes, a duet. I believe I would like that.’

And she let Albert take her hand and lead her to the piano.

Chapter End Notes

More soon. x
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains historical inaccuracy with regard to Victoria's wedding preparations, but then, the Queen of England engaged in a Dom/sub relationship with her Prime Minister is hardly historically accurate in the first place. But, I know that Victoria and Albert were actually very loved up and physically affectionate in the build-up to their wedding in contrast to what I put here, Lord Melbourne would've been present to carry the sword of state etc etc etc. Just ignore my historical liberty taking.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The weeks leading up to Victoria’s wedding to Albert were hectic.

She was bustled from dress fittings to table arrangements to music rehearsals to discussions with bishops. She barely saw Albert, and at the end of each day she considered that the unsettled feelings she was experiencing meant that she missed him.

She had grown very fond of him, it must be said, and she was confident that love would develop rapidly after their marriage. That is what she was told, and, in the absence of anything else, that is what she believed.

After all, William too had told her that.

After resigning as Private Secretary, William had called a General Election as he had said he would, and the Whigs had predictably lost. He had resigned as head of the party and as a Member of Parliament and had retired to Brocket Hall. But he was now in the Lords and would visit London frequently, she knew that.

She had seen him twice. Once, at the end of a corridor in Westminster, and another time at a garden party at the Palace. He had deliberately not looked at her, but she had noticed him turning her way when he thought her attention diverted. They had not spoken; distance and circumstance had prevented it.

He looked as handsome as ever, she thought, but thinner, certainly. Those extraordinary cheekbones were more pronounced than ever before, and his clothes sat well on his svelte figure compared to the portly men around him. But he had lost weight and she feared for him.

On those occasions she had not eaten for several days afterwards, and she had struggled to go about her duties. When the pain asserted itself again, she would retreat to bed, and it would take tea and comfort from Skerrett and her Ladies to coax her out.

But time moved on, and it did indeed cover the wound, as he had said it would. He had removed himself from her surroundings, and therefore she lived with him only in her mind, and at times, amongst the incessance of the rest of her life, his intent for her seemed reasonable. Her need for him was undiminished, her memory of him intact, but with nothing to feed it, she had no choice but to live on.
Time forced the pain to dull, but there remained inside her an aching hollowness, and in the absence of anything else, into that emptiness came Albert. He brought it discussion and query and music and science. And she enjoyed those things. Without the other, they did at least take their place in the void.

Everyone told her Albert would be right for her, including William, and so slowly but seemingly inevitably, she told herself he would be as well.

Once she had decided, three months after her visit to Brocket Hall, it happened quite quickly. She thought it best not to delay these things. She asked the question without much ceremony after a ride out one day. Albert accepted – his immediate and clear happiness made her so too – and arrangements were made rapidly for the wedding. Her last letter to William was to write informing him of her decision.

It was the only letter he replied to:

*That is right. Go and be happy.*

W

She stopped writing to him after this. It would not be fair on Albert or him.

In the busyness of preparations, there was no time for doubt and regret. However, Victoria did wish Albert would make her laugh more often, or would make her belly leap in that way the merest glance from Lord M had. He had kissed her once shortly after their engagement – chaste, brief – and she immediately compared it to the kisses she had experienced before. There was no comparison, but she thought perhaps Albert’s kisses would improve. She could teach him. She would have to teach him.

As her wedding approached, Victoria grew excited about it. How could she not? Everybody else was. It seemed rude not to do the same.

William was invited to the wedding, and he had written in reply to Albert, politely declining, declaring that it was orchid season and he would not want the plants to suffer due to his indulgence. He wished them both as much happiness as such a union could give.

Victoria studied Albert carefully over the course of their betrothal and she grew to wish more and more for his physical presence. She sometimes would stand closer to him than was acceptable, would smile at him in the way she used to do with William, would fix him with her eyes which would have always given the clearest signal to her Prime Minister. But Albert would lower his gaze and step back, and the twisting need inside Victoria, which was ever ready to reawaken, would be subdued once again. Patience, again, yet this time she was not sure it would ever be rewarded.

She hoped it would, and in some ways longed for her wedding day to approach quickly, for she did miss physical intimacy so very much, it had been so essential to her, after all. Every night in bed she would assuage her own needs, but when she came, her back arching and her fingers drawing out a lonely pleasure, still, even now, it was not the face of her future husband she pictured. She did try to imagine Albert, and in the build-up she largely succeeded, but at the moment of release, when the truth of desire hurls itself unbidden to the forefront of consciousness, it was always another face eliciting her ultimate pleasure.

Leopold, of course, was ecstatic at the engagement, as was her mother, and even Emma was excited for the wedding. Everyone was convinced it was the right match. No one ever mentioned Lord Melbourne. Victoria inquired of Emma about him every so often – she did so wish to know he was happy – and would receive only a brief ‘He is well’ before the conversation was steered in another
‘Your dress is looking most beautiful, Ma’am,’ observed Lady Portman a week before the day, when it was delivered and hung in her dressing room.

Victoria had put much thought into the design and smiled in satisfaction. ‘I am pleased with it.’

‘I am sure Albert will be too.’

Victoria glanced at her Lady and found she didn’t really care if Albert were pleased or not. Should she be? She was supposed to please her husband, she supposed, but the thought of it sat uneasily with her.

She had always wanted to please William; it had given her great personal pleasure to do so, particularly in the bedroom. (Or wherever else they had found themselves … bed rarely entered into it. She glanced across at the bureau over which he’d thrashed her and licked her and taken her on numerous occasions.) But she had never sensed his need to be pleased by her. It hadn’t worked like that. She had wanted to please him, for that made her feel wonderful, but he never demanded that she please him, either during intimacy or at other times. All he ever wished was to please her, of that she was in no doubt. There’s had been a relationship of equality through and through. His respect for her shone from him.

Would it be thus with Albert? She was not sure it would. He always started every sentence with ‘Victoria’, she noticed, as if forcing her to attend to him, expecting her immediate attention and compliance. She didn’t like that. She would put an end to it.

Leopold would not leave her be during the preparations. He was so very happy, and she could not help but mirror his euphoria a little. He ensured her every need was met, he cooed over her, brought her gifts and foods to keep her strength up. At times she wanted to bat him away as if he were an annoying fly, but she did not.

The wedding day drew closer, and Albert took his leave from court in preparation.

Victoria considered how to approach their wedding night. Should she still play the innocent virgin? The whole court had known about her and Lord M, surely Albert had found out as well? But he had feigned ignorance and she thought it best to do the same. She was curious as to what another man would be like, but that was all. She had been so very happy with the man she had had – no other could match him, there was no doubt – but it would be nice to have touch again … perhaps Albert would learn quickly.

The times she and William had reversed roles had been a novelty both had enjoyed, but her natural inclination was to enjoy the dominance of another – liberation, to relinquish responsibility and give oneself over for that time, that was how William had explained it to her from the start, and he had shown her time and again how right that was for her. She was not sure she would feel the same about instructing Albert. And as for the other … was she never to feel the spank of a hand on her backside again? Would she even want to broach it with Albert? She tried to imagine him bestowing it and found that she had not the slightest inclination to do so. Lord Melbourne had been the one for that, the only one for that.

However, she would not be unresponsive if Albert pushed her to the wall and explored her with his hands and kissed her and opened her … but he did not, despite her attempts to encourage it.

But Albert talked well, and he enlightened her in many things. And he was kind, if a little dull and intransigent. They would adapt to each other over time, she was sure. William thought Albert was a
good match, so there must be something in it.

And William was gone; he had made that abundantly clear. The pain never left her, but she had somehow learnt to live with it, and she accepted that that was how it would be.

And so she prepared for her wedding, and, in her own way, she looked forward to it.

The weeks passed quickly and soon it was only a few days before the ceremony. She was to be married in the Chapel Royal, St James’s Palace; the country was expectant.

Victoria stood in the window of Buckingham Palace looking down the Mall two nights before her wedding. The bunting and flags were already up and tomorrow the crowds would start to gather for the processions. There was an anticipation to the nation which fed into her; butterflies, some called it. She glanced over to where her wedding dress hung, white and pure – she could at least pretend – ready for her. Her final fitting was the next day.

She looked back out. The lamplighters were already mounting their ladders and the amber glow from the lamps started to illuminate the long road with a reassuring golden sheen. She wanted to cling onto that, that warm, soft stillness before everything changed.

All of a sudden, a bird flew close and alighted on the ledge of the balcony outside. Black, a crow she thought at first, but she noted the light grey of the beak and realised it was a rook. It cocked its head at her, its piercing obsidian eyes fixed unhesitatingly into hers. She was unnerved, but then, while the bird continued to look intently at her, an understanding passed between them. She considered opening her window and offering it the remains of her tea biscuit, but then, as suddenly as it had landed, the rook shook its feathers and flew off and out of sight. She allowed herself a tinge of disappointment and stared for some time at the spot it had alighted.

Victoria looked over at her dress again, taking in every detail of the lace and trim she had so carefully selected, then she turned to face back down the Mall, and she settled and calmed. The bunting waved gently in the breeze, the guards paced up and down, just as always. The lamplighters continued gifting the night with their glowing reassurances. Victoria inhaled, held her breath for a time, then released it softly.

Her decision was made. She was ready.

Chapter End Notes

More soon. x
William Lamb had always enjoyed brandy.

Now, he no longer enjoyed it, but he still consumed it in large quantities.

After a short time, his butler knew that eliciting any meaningful response from the Viscount after 3 o’clock in the afternoon when he resided at Brocket Hall was a futile venture.

Melbourne did, however, manage to return to Westminster frequently and do his duty. After resigning as the Queen’s Private Secretary, he called an election promptly and promptly lost it. The relief of that, at least, was something. He never realised how little he would miss politics until he was out of it.

He had written her the letter quickly in the end. He had signed it, sealed it and given it to the messenger before he could change his mind.

And, for her, it was right.

When he handed it over, he did at that moment consider going to the top window of the Dover House attic and climbing out – the cobbles below were sufficiently distant and hard – but that would be most self-indulgent. And William Lamb, if nothing else, was not self-indulgent. After all, it was his intention to make her happy, not cause her more suffering.

And so he retreated to his study and drank. He was not sure when he stopped drinking. Whitsun, possibly.

He knew there were those who looked out for him. His staff were angels, and he considered leaving his estate to them. They would benefit more from it than his brother or his sister, who was, after all, quite well-catered for materially by Palmerston.

Emma Portman visited, although she made him think only of her, and so he feared he gave her short shrift. And she did fuss so. It drained him. But she had the courtesy to realise this and so her visits were brief.

When he made it to London, which he did with relative frequency – duty and all – Wellington was, as ever, a support.

The Duke would tell him about her. Nothing to set him into sudden despondency – Wellington was too canny for that – but he imparted seemingly inconsequential things such as her meeting with a trade delegation from China, or her arrangements for the Livery Companies Banquet. Each morsel of information Melbourne tucked deep inside his soul and treasured. She carried on. She lived. And that made him carry on, although not as decorously as perhaps he should.

On one occasion, after a debate in the Lords, Wellington had treated him to an admittedly fine meal in Rules, tucking them both away in a dark corner far from the prying gazes of others. Afterwards, as they were departing, the Duke had leaned in and murmured with a warming smile, ‘You may wish to reacquaint yourself with a razor at some point, old chap.’

The Duke was right. One must not let standards slip. She would not want that. He had subsequently visited his tailor and ordered a new coat (his others sat a little loosely on him now) and treated himself to a leisurely shave and haircut afterwards. The barber complimented him on his fine hair. Apparently, there were few gentlemen who could sport such a head of it at his age. And furthermore,
according to the barber, that German fellow, Albert, had a forehead which was becoming increasingly exposed with each day that passed.

Melbourne left the barber in high spirits, a rare thing these days.

He was not entirely sure what he would do with the rest of his life, and so he fell back on the things he had intended to do before she had become part of it (and then ceased being part of it): orchids, St Chrysostom. (Well, the intention was there, at least. He did open the manuscript every other week and clear his throat concertedly while looking at it.) He did not consume brandy in quite the same way he had in those first few weeks, but his brandy merchant was very grateful for his continued custom, nonetheless.

But from the moment he awoke each day he thought of her: What was she having for breakfast? How had she styled her hair today? What was she wearing? What amused her? What displeased her?

Without being able to discover it for himself, he found himself inventing her daily routine. On those occasions he would shake off his gathering madness by a brisk walk around the grounds.

She began writing to him after a few weeks. He took each letter, he pressed it to his face, he inhaled every part of her which lingered on them – her scent, her touch, her purpose. He kissed them all and placed them beside him – a reminder of his resolution. Many he read, but he did not reply. If he did, it would lead them both down a wretched road. He had found himself able to tread his well-worn path of misery relatively successfully, but he would not wish it on her.

One day, a few weeks after he had quit her, there was a commotion outside. He was in his dressing gown still but was at least out of bed. He heard a carriage pull up and glanced outside. On seeing her, he had to lean against the wall to steady himself. He had suspected she may visit, and so had given clear instructions to the staff to inform her he was not at home.

She could not be here. He could not see her. And so he had retreated far into the house, up into a tiny attic room where he would never be discovered. He had heard her. He had heard her cry out for him from far below in his hallway.

After that, he had not left the room for three days. His butler found him, fortunately, in the early evening, and gave him food and drink, but it had taken three days for him to summon the wherewithal to emerge.

But, once again, he had. Time in London helped in some ways – the enforced need to converse and think was a good thing, but the enforced memories of her on driving past the Palace or noticing a statue was not. The trouble with being hopelessly in love with the Queen was that there did tend to be rather a lot of images of her everywhere one went.

But it would be a deceit to imagine he would ever not be in love with her. That much was a certainty. He would love her with every fibre of his being until his dying day.

He did reply to one of her letters, the one writing to tell him of her engagement.

What an extraordinary emotion it had evoked in him: searing agony and glorious relief all in one. Part of him wished to ride up to London immediately and put a bullet in the German’s brain, the other wished to hug the man for letting her live and making her happy, for he so hoped she would be.

He had written back, brief, but all that was needed.

*That is right. Go and be happy.*
She did not write again after that. It was right that way, but his brandy merchant benefited yet again. He even contemplated a visit to that most secret establishment in Whitechapel to eradicate his thoughts with the opium he had partaken of in his youth. But it was most unseemly for a man of his age to consider such things, and sense had, fortunately, prevailed.

He had seen her twice. Once, at twenty-five minutes past eleven o’clock on October 23rd, as she mounted the steps out of Westminster Hall before inspecting the refurbishments to the lobby. She had been wearing purple and it was a cold day and her cheeks were tinged with pink just as they used to be when he fingered her and stood so close he could stare into her and keep her his. He had noticed even from a distance. She had bestowed smiles to everyone around and he hated them all and jealousy made him clutch his papers so hard they ripped. She did not notice him for a while but then she had, but as soon as her head turned he looked away. He looked away for he was not sure he could have remained upright otherwise. And then she was gone again and he had made his excuses and left.

And there had been that wretched garden party. The Lord Chancellor had insisted he put in a token appearance, and so he had but remained as far from the royal party as possible, hovering on the other side of the north lake for most of the damned event.

She was in cream, the same cream colour as her corset, the one she wore that time she had knelt and taken him in her mouth and when he had known that nobody ever anywhere in this world could love another as much as he loved her.

He had thought he remained hidden among the sea of smiling dignitaries and do-gooders surrounding him, but even then, from yards and yards away, she had found him out. She had seen him and he her and his world was made and crushed again in that instant. The bottom of the lake seemed the best place to be at that moment. But, again, dignity and all that. It would not do anyone any good on this occasion, least of all her, to have to fish out the lifeless body of an ex-Prime Minister from the bottom of a pond at Buckingham Palace. In any case, she was surrounded by those who ushered her onto other things.

He heard occasionally about preparations for the wedding – he could hardly avoid them. And everyone seemed so terribly pleased about it – What a fine man Albert was, how he would enhance the monarchy, what a handsome couple they were, what a relief it would be for her to have such a man by her side!

At this William Lamb did baulk. Victoria required no man by her side. She was quite capable of reigning entirely independently.

‘What do you mean?’ he had asked the Duke of Rutland pointedly when the fool had said it to Melbourne one day at Brooks’.

‘Well,’ scoffed the man, ‘she’s only a little thing, after all.’

Melbourne’s rage immediately burned through his limbs. ‘Victoria requires no man to help her rule. She is the most determined and clear-minded person I know.’

‘And … you would indeed know, Melbourne.’ The Duke glanced at the Earl of Monmouth, his pig-like eyes narrowing, his skin red and pockmarked. Together, Monmouth and he smirked into their claret.

Melbourne chose to ignore the bait and continued, ‘If ever there was a person who could run this
country with vision and strength and insight, it is her. She does not need to be guided in any way by
anybody.’

Rutland’s smirk deepened. ‘Oh, come now, Melbourne, that’s not entirely true, is it? We all know
what sort of guidance you gave her, you lucky bugger. If Albert’s got any sense, he’ll pick up where
you left off and roger her into blissful numbness so that he can get on with running the country.’

Melbourne had grabbed the man and dragged him to his feet before anyone could react.

The other members of the club turned to regard the spectacle with curiosity and some sort of respect.
Nobody moved to stop it. After all, in a gentleman’s club, gentlemen could do what they would.

‘What did you say?’ hissed Melbourne, grasping the man’s lapels ferociously, holding him only
inches from his face. ‘Retract that, you wretch!’

Rutland did not back down, despite being considerably uncomfortable in Melbourne’s grip. ‘Come
now, Melbourne. You had your fair share, and you’re lucky we’ve kept it under wraps for you.
Rumour has it you had her so often, in so many places and in so many ways that it’s a miracle there
isn’t a surplus of half-royal Lamb cutlets stored away in the palace larders.’

‘You piece of filth,’ he said into his face, rage pouring through him.

Rutland merely chuckled but thought it best to back down. ‘Lamb, this isn’t like you. I’m sure little
Queenie will handle herself most admirably whatever her German squire wishes to do with her.’

He was right; it wasn’t like him. Melbourne closed his eyes to it, relinquished his grip, and started to
back away.

But then, no.

In an instant, he turned back and threw a perfectly placed right hook which landed straight across the
Duke’s jaw. The man staggered with a grunt and fell back into his chair.

Melbourne then turned, took a moment to adjust his cuffs, and paced from the club.

There were two mild tuts before the members returned to their newspapers. The Duke of Rutland,
after all, was an odious idiot.

--xoOox--

As the date of her wedding approached, he remained largely at Brocket Hall. It had not become
easier. Had he even tried to cover the wound as he had advised her? Possibly, but blood poured so
relentlessly from it that there was little point.

He was told preparations for the wedding were going smoothly and that she was happy. Even Emma
told him that. So he had achieved what was needed, and he supposed he should be glad of it. He
tried to be. In some ways he was. He desired her happiness above all else, of that there was no doubt.
If she was not, he was not sure he could carry on.

But he retreated, for he could do no more. His mind threw images at him: Her smiling at another man
– not him. Her laughing with another man – not him. Her lying with another man on her wedding
night.

Brandy, again, was most helpful at these times.
He had declined the invitation to the wedding. That would have been a step too far for all.

In the days before the wedding he stopped opening his mail. Piles of it arrived, but it would all be the same: *The Queen looks most radiant as she attends rehearsals at St James’s Palace. The Queen met happily with her ministers as they wished her well for her forthcoming nuptials.*

He shut himself in his study and sent his butler away.

He spent the day of the wedding, the 10th February, locked away, only letting anyone in when hunger and thirst demanded it. He batted away any attempts to impose correspondence on him.

‘Leave me!’ he barked. ‘Today of all days, in hell’s name!’

His butler, a look of agonised despair on his face, backed away quietly.

He had drunk himself into a stupor by midday. Victoria would be walking down the aisle at one o’clock.

He didn’t wake until late evening. He pushed himself to his feet and shuffled to the kitchens, once again dismissing the staff who approached him. ‘For once, let me fucking do it myself!’

They were left in no doubt.

Melbourne got himself some bread and cheese and returned to the study where he stayed for the rest of the night. Claret now provided the oblivion, which took him again at about three o’clock in the morning. If his mind forced him to imagine what she was doing during these hours, he managed to blot it out with the wine.

He slept slumped in the chair again. Daylight returned, but he did not notice. Eventually, at around two in the afternoon, consciousness somehow drifted back to him. He rang for water – he had that much sense at least. At half past two he was alert and present enough to realise he should probably not spend another night in the damnable chair.

He sat, fingers steepled together, and brooded. It was raining, but he preferred it that way. It provided a rhythm if nothing else.

At twenty minutes past four he heard footsteps outside the door and tutted in annoyance. The existence of other human beings at this time was a bloody frustration.

The door opened. He had left explicit instructions for no one to enter the room unless he rang for something. The insistent care of his staff was enraging! He gripped the arms of the chair in fury and shouted without turning around, *‘How many times have I told you not to enter unless I ring? In the name of all things unholy, what must be done to get peace in a man’s own home?’*

The door closed quietly again and he sighed out. They had gone, he presumed. And yet … there was a shift in the air … a quiver. He frowned against it but his senses were suddenly alert. The room had warmed even though the door had opened, he could sense the tiniest change, and on it … a scent. *It could not be. It would not be.* His body was at once electrified.

‘William.’

William Lamb turned, slowly, not daring almost, for it was a dream surely. He pushed himself from the chair and faced the source of the voice.

There, standing softly and quietly in his study, her eyes as blue and bright as they had been that first
morning he’d kissed her hand when she ascended to the throne, was Victoria.
He stared.

William Lamb blinked – a familiar gesture of his, usually used to diffuse tension or to buy time in discussion, but on this occasion he did so as he could not believe what he saw.

Victoria. Here, in his study.

She stood quite still, simply looking at him.

‘I …’ he began, but nothing further.

His hands rose to the sides as if trying to grasp the air to feel its reality, for surely reality was not this. He thought his inebriation had dissipated. His head seemed clear enough, although tiredness still muddied his senses.

‘What? I … Ma’am …?’

‘Yes, William.’

He ran a hand through his hair and glanced about. Empty bottles and glasses lay everywhere. Crusts, crumbs, the detritus of his despair. He should care but he was beyond that.

‘Why are you here?’ he managed at last.

‘Because I wish to be here.’ Her voice. The same voice. It seemed real enough.

But he was confused. He had given an order before, had he not? Why then, now? It made no sense. ‘I had told them not to admit you.’

‘On this occasion I convinced them otherwise.’

His hands tore through his hair. His fingers dragged down his face. ‘Ma’am … I …’

She gazed at him, her head tilted a little to the side, her face graced by a gentle, almost amused smile. Did she find him funny?

He remembered. Yesterday. It had been yesterday, hadn’t it? How insolent he was. How it hurt to think of it, but he must not allow circumstance to vanquish decency.

‘I forget myself …’ He tried to draw himself up and forced out: ‘May I … may I congratulate you – Ma’am – on your marriage?’ He could not look at her. He got the words out and stood, hands on hips, staring at a discarded glass near her feet.

She said nothing at first but then: ‘No, you may not.’

At this, surprise did make him glance up.

‘You may not, for you see … I am not married.’
He swallowed, that was all. Usual emotion was inadequate and so he became numb. He stared at her. She smiled again, tender, slight, and her eyes misted.

‘William …’ A whisper, but crystal clear. ‘I did not marry him.’

He opened his mouth to speak but nothing emerged.

‘For how could I marry one man when I live only for another?’ she added.

He intended to say Ma’am or even Victoria but instead when he spoke he said, more a breath, ‘My darling.’

For the first time, she grew flustered. ‘I apologise for arriving unannounced. You see, I did not wish to stay at Buckingham House for it was most oppressive. And I had to be with you. I had to be where you were and so –’ And he took her and pulled her into him and crashed his mouth upon hers.

He held her to him so hard the breath was forced from her. Victoria leant back in his arms and kissed him as he kissed her, desperate and affirming and here and now.

‘My darling,’ she mirrored, ‘My darling, my love, my only one, my only one.’

‘Yes, yes,’ he slurred, covering every part of her he could in kisses for she was indeed real and in his arms again.

‘I’ve come back. I’ve come back to you,’ she sobbed, her face damp with tears and his kisses.

When they finally were able to break away, he held her face gently, stroking over it with his thumbs, his eyes fixed only on her. For a while they stood like that in silence, holding and staring and being.

But eventually, his bewilderment returned, and he asked, ‘But … how? How? It makes no sense, the suddenness of it. I hated to hear of it and have read no correspondence recently but I knew it was proceeding.’

She swallowed hard and glanced away, recalling the pain of the last few days.

‘I decided that I would not do it two days before the wedding. I told Albert the following day, just before our final rehearsal. I simply told him that I could not go through with it, that I would not marry him. He was remarkably accepting, the dear boy. It was not a nice thing, but it was the right thing. I could not put me nor him through that. It was so very wrong of me to fool us both into thinking I could for so long. But then … everyone did try so very hard to convince me.’

‘I …’

‘He returned to Germany this morning.’

‘But … all the … all the arrangements.’ He was mumbling, images of paperwork and place settings and guard operations running through his statesman’s mind.

‘Well … at least it has kept everyone busy for the last few months.’

He tried to laugh but was still too full of incredulity to manage it.

‘I believe the wedding breakfast was had by the staff, which is a good thing,’ she continued. ‘The flowers in the chapel have been given to the workhouses, the bunting to schools in the East End, I made sure of that.’
‘But, what of Leopold … and your mother …’

She sighed a little and he felt her distress.

‘They will recover. It may take some time, I acknowledge, but … they will recover. In their hearts, they wish me to be happy too, I know that.’

She pressed herself close again and whispered against his mouth, ‘And now … I am here. I am here where I should always have been and where I wish always to be.’

They kissed, slow and soft this time, breathing through each other and learning each other again, not that they had ever forgotten one part of their togetherness.

‘My love,’ she repeated through kisses, ‘My darling, my love, I am here. And I shall stay.’

At this, he drew back a little and frowned, for the reality of her being here meant the reality of its impossibility.

But she did not sense his hesitancy and continued, ‘In all the preparation for the marriage, I realised the sanctity of it, how it should be with the only person you need and love and are connected to.’

She kissed him softly, covering his face with the sweetness of her. But an ache had taken hold inside of him again and he stood quite still.

‘My darling, my William, it can only be you. It is only you. My darling, I know, I know.’

And she whispered against his love-bruised lips, ‘Marry me.’

His eyes shut hard against the adoration and pain of her request.

‘Victoria … what you ask …’

‘William … why else am I here?’

He spun away from her, wracked with torment. ‘This is madness!’ Turning back, he threw his arms out to the sides. ‘You are Queen, I was your Prime Minister … I am … a second-rate Viscount with more scandals to my name than nights you have slept under waning moons!’

‘Don’t you dare call yourself second-rate!’

She rushed over and curled her arms about him with forceful determination. ‘William, look at me. I have come to you, only you. I walked out on my engagement, on a man who I promised myself to, and who believed until the day before that he would marry me. I abandoned him and all that meant because I love you. Because I am certain beyond belief that it is you I want and you I must spend my days with. Marry me.’

‘Victoria …’ he frowned, desolate. ‘How is that even possible?’

‘I will make it possible.’

‘My darling, even you do not have the power to do that. The Constitution forbids any of the royal family to marry someone not of royal blood.’

Her eyes widened and she declared herself passionately. ‘I am Queen of England! I am the Constitution!’
‘No, my love, there are things even you cannot interfere with, and rightly so, it could be said. The Constitution is the country. The Constitution is the people, and you are the people’s servant.’

‘Oh, my great-great grandfather only put in place that ludicrous act to mete out revenge on his siblings who married for love whereas he never found it! It is a ridiculous thing! Monarchs rule best when they are happy, and marrying the person you desire above all else makes you happy. The people know that. They will support me in it, I am sure of it.’

‘But it is not for them to have the final say.’

‘Are their representatives in Parliament not obliged to act according to the will of their constituents?’

Melbourne quirked a rueful eyebrow. ‘As you know, Ma’am, that may be the intention … but it is not always the practice.’

‘Then I shall convince the Members of Parliament also. You know how forceful I can be when I am decided on something.’

*Oh, he could not dispute that. ‘Indeed, Ma’am.’*

She grinned. ‘You *Ma’am* me again, Lord M.’

He could only return her grin. ‘And you *Lord M* me.’

They kissed again. His doubts were melting, he knew.

‘If it takes me changing the Constitution to have the man I adore, then so be it. And if I cannot, I will marry you anyway in the morganatic way. That is possible, is it not?’

He drew back. ‘It has never come to that in this nation, not since the act was put in place.’

‘Well … as we have shown so often in our relationship, My Lord … there is always a first time.’

He smiled and met her kiss again. ‘I had forgotten how sinfully delicious you are.’

‘Surely not, My Lord?’

His hands grazed down her waist and clung to her before he pulled back and said seriously, ‘But if we were to marry morganatically, you know what it would mean for … your children.’

Her eyes danced. ‘*Our* children.’

His heart soared with such incandescent joy to hear her say that it was nearly painful. ‘Our children,’ he dared repeat. ‘But … it would mean they would not be permitted to inherit the throne.’

She pursed her lips. ‘There it is then. I am not sure I would wish the crown on my children anyway.’

‘Ma’am … you may say that now …’

‘I will say it forever. Unless *you* would wish it for them?’

He scoffed. ‘Not at all! I would be happy to have any child as long as I can hold them and love them and … they are healthy …’ An old agony clutched at him, but then she was wrapped around him again.

‘And you, my darling? Would you mind for yourself? You would not be Prince Consort or indeed, I
doubt you could have any title higher than what you already have. Would you mind dreadfully?’

He cocked his eyebrow. ‘Oh … dreadfully.’

He could tell that for a moment she thought him serious. A look of panic darted across her face. He dispersed it by curling his mouth up and squeezing his fingers around her waist in a tickle. She squirmed in his grasp with a yelp. ‘You tease me again. But we must be serious. If I could choose for my children not to rule, I think I would. Do you really think if I had had a choice I would have chosen to become Queen? My darling, you are the only thing that has enabled me to carry on through it.’

‘No, that is not true. I have merely revealed to you what you are capable of. You are magnificent in every way and more capable than any man I know.’

She drew back a little and took hold of his hands, searing his eyes with the bright determination of hers. ‘If that is how you truly feel, William … if you know my strength and my determination … then you know that, no matter what the obstacles … I will marry you. If …’

He looked at her, an eyebrow raised. ‘What?’

She swallowed, nervous suddenly, ‘If you want me.’

He wanted her so much he thought perhaps she would be absorbed into him right here and now, but, ever the rationalist, he said instead, ‘I am so old.’

He felt the fury flowing through her, resulting in a sharp squeeze of his hands. ‘Oh, stop that! How can you say that when the years are as nothing in your company? When we laugh and talk and sin together like two friends in the corner of a schoolroom? When you are able to bring such pleasure to me time after time?’

‘Perhaps I have strength in me now, but soon … I will be old and infirm when you are but …’

She cut him off. ‘I do not care! You know I do not! Whether I have 40 years or 20 years or 5 years with you, they will be the most precious and glorious years imaginable. I will have you for however long or short I can, and I will love you and adore you. If you will have me.’

William could not help his mouth ticking at the corner. ‘If I will have you …’ he murmured.

‘Then … do it properly. A Queen is supposed to do the asking, but I want you to be as certain of this as I am. I want to hear it from you.’

His brows knitted together.

‘Ask me,’ she whispered. ‘Ask me yourself.’

And so William Lamb took both her hands in his, letting the warmth of them bleed into him, stroking over the fragile strength contained in them. He would not kneel down. He did that to her every day in duty. But this was love, not duty. She wanted him clear and determined, so she would have it.

‘I love you,’ he said, and held her eyes in his. ‘I will never nor have ever loved another as I love you. I will give all to you for as long as I am on this Earth … Victoria … will you marry me?’

She opened her lips and released a breath, then said, for him alone, ‘Yes, William Lamb, I will marry you.’
And he held her there and once again kissed her and all his disappointments and his regrets and his frustrations (of which he had many) were in that moment vanquished. He loved her and he had her.

When they at last drew back, she whispered, ‘You came to me, you know.’

He frowned in confusion.

‘Three days ago. You came to my balcony.’

He shook his head in bewilderment. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘Black and feathered and glossy. My own rook. I was looking out down the Mall and you came and settled on the balcony and looked straight into me.’

His frown turned to a smile.

‘Did I speak?’

‘No, you did not need to. Neither did you linger, for you conveyed to me all that was needed in a single brief moment.’

He smiled in acceptance. ‘Perhaps I did. For I was not in the here and now these last few days. I have certainly been … elsewhere.’

They were kissing again, but at length, he drew back and tutted in self-reproach. ‘My God. You have just finished a long and tiresome journey and I have not even had the decency to offer you a glass of water.’

She giggled. ‘Indeed, and, come to think of it … I am a little peckish.’ Victoria brought a hand around her empty stomach.

He laughed and glanced about, aware of the chaos and mess surrounding him. William dragged a hand through his hair and glanced down. He had stains on his breeches, his shirt was untucked and his dressing gown thrown indolently over it all. ‘Umm … yes, I … I do apologise … you have found me in a state of some …’

‘Disarray?’

He remembered her first visit to Dover House, and sniffed out a rueful laugh. ‘Indeed.’

‘Well, it would seem I am not overly troubled by this.’

‘Still …’

He took her hand and guided her from the room. ‘Come into the dining room and I will instruct the kitchen to provide us with some food. Allow me a moment to refresh myself.’

‘I have no complaints. There is no need.’

He blushed. ‘But, Ma’am, I …’

Her eyes rose briefly to the ceiling. ‘William … you have just asked me to marry you, I think perhaps you can dispense with calling me Ma’am.’

He smiled softly instead. ‘Victoria … wait here while I sort things.’
‘That’s better,’ she hummed. ‘I like it when you tell me to wait. But I like it more when the wait is over.’

He could not resist pulling her hard against him again for another kiss before at last turning and hurrying away to sort things.

Victoria sat and looked about the room. A painting of a woman she recognised as Elizabeth Lamb, William’s mother, stared down at her. What a beautiful woman she was, yet with the kindest look in her eyes. Victoria thought she would have liked her immensely. Scandals had followed her just as they followed her son, and it was generally accepted that William was not fathered by the first Viscount.

The influence of that and of his marriage impressed itself on Victoria. William had been surrounded by women who most certainly lived their lives as they wanted. And his acceptance and admiration of that shone through. She looked up at his mother’s portrait and met her forthright yet warm gaze. She had brought up a son who adored strong women, who craved them, clearly. Victoria was determined to be the strongest of them all.

The staff brought food – chicken and bread and cheese and fruit. A footman blushed as he placed it before the Queen and Victoria smiled warmly at him.

‘Thank you, this looks most wonderful,’ she said.

The man bowed before leaving her alone, his blush spreading at the compliment received from the unexpected royal visitor.

She began to eat, and it was quite some time later that William reappeared. He had clearly bathed and shaved and dressed in fresh, pressed clothes. He looked so utterly handsome she almost forgot herself.

She stared. It was his turn to blush.

‘William …’ she began.

He cleared his throat and tried to distract himself from the embarrassment of her scrutiny by focusing on the table. ‘Ah, food, excellent. I hope it’s, umm, all … here and … to your liking.’

‘William … you are so very handsome.’

His blush deepened. ‘You flatter me.’

Still, she could do no more than stare at him. ‘I have missed you. How I have missed you.’

He sat beside her and took her hands and pressed them to his lips, tears forming fast in his eyes. ‘My love, you know I have been in agony. I have been desolate. The pain of your absence … I have never known despair like it.’

She pulled him in and kissed him. ‘My darling, my love. Do not leave me. Do not leave me again.’

‘No, no, I will not, never, I will never leave you.’

And they clung to each other again.

‘I need you, I want you …’

Her hands were on him and over him and it was the most he could do not to sink to his knees and
taste her before anything else.

‘Do you know?’ she said, drawing back with a wondrous smile. ‘This is the first time I have spent
time with you in a home away from the court. No family, no Ladies. Aside from your staff, we are
quite alone.’

‘And my staff, I assure you, are the height of discretion.’

She chose not to dwell on their reasons for needing to be so prior to this moment. Victoria leaned
forward and teased him with light pecks of kisses.

‘I feel quite …’ she murmured.

‘Liberated?’

‘Well, yes, but … also … rather …’ She reached inside his frock coat and let her hand slide down to
his breeches. ‘Wicked.’

He could only groan and she soon coaxed his cock to hard prominence so that it strained against the
placket.

Just then, his stomach rumbled loudly.

She pulled back in surprise and they both spluttered out sudden laughs.

‘The feelings are mutual, you know that,’ he declared, ‘but one does need to recover one’s strength,
and as brandy has been the only thing sustaining me for the last few days, I feel I should at least try
to eat something.’

‘But of course.’ And with that, she picked up a strawberry and proffered it to him.

With a smirk, he took it in his teeth and bit it in half. She couldn’t resist leaning in and kissing him,
letting the juice from the strawberry seep back to her through the kiss.

‘Would you like me to let you eat in peace?’ she murmured against his mouth.

He held the other half of the strawberry up to her. ‘That might be …’ She opened her lips and leant
forward for it, but he snatched it away at the last moment. ‘… sensible.’ William placed it in his own
mouth instead.

She bit her lip in frustration. ‘Hurry then, you tormenter.’

He concentrated on assuaging the gnawing hunger which he hadn’t realised was there. Victoria was
silent, as was he, and sat back in her chair, but as he ate, he felt something dragging up his leg and
pushing his knees apart. He pretended to ignore it, but she was most determined. She slid down her
chair and pushed her foot slowly between his thighs so that her toes came to rest on his groin.

William deliberately did not look up at her, instead concentrating on buttering his bread.

‘Is that good, My Lord?’ she asked.

He didn’t humour her with a response. Her foot rubbed with sensuous skill over his already straining
erection and he took a moment to consider how the woman before him had transformed from naïvely
curious virgin to this goddess of lascivious delight in the short time he had known her. Was it all his
doing?
If he felt a pang of guilt, one glance at her lying back in his chair, her limpid eyes fixed on him, her teeth biting tantalisingly into her bottom lip, her foot idly coaxing illimitable pleasure from him, it was soon banished.

Melbourne finished the plate of food before him, put down his knife and fork, wiped his mouth assiduously on his napkin, pushed his chair back and stood.

‘Is your hunger assuaged, My Lord?’ Victoria pushed herself slowly up.

‘Not entirely.’

‘Then allow me to assuage it further.’ With that she leaned in and rested her full length along him, placing her head on his chest and exhaling, not only in sexual expectation, but the deepest relief. ‘How I have missed you.’

He brought a finger under her chin and tilted her head up to lock his gaze into hers. ‘No more talk,’ he stated.

And he took her hand and led her from the room.

Chapter End Notes

You see. Trust. xx

And a mention to the luminously talented Abz J Harding for her inspiration with her incredible concept art 'A Parliament of Rooks' which you will find on her Tumblr, Instagram and Twitter. Rooky Lord M's visit to the Queen's balcony is my nod to and thank you for that wonder. x

(I must tell you that this story has about two chapters to go. Three possibly.)
Chapter Notes

I've decided that there will be several chapters of boffing. This is one of them. It's quite full on, but you'll cope. x

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The intention was to take her to his bedchamber.

Her fingers were entwined in his. He'd forgotten how slight they were, slight yet strong. They gripped him hard. She was here. She was his and he hers. Again. And they would marry.

William Lamb reached the door of the dining room but then stopped. She was here.

He turned to her, took her head in his hands and stared, embedding the unmarried reality of her into his consciousness. And he had to kiss her, and she him. Victoria pressed herself full against him and let him plunder her mouth with his, for that was what it was – a plundering, a need to reclaim. There was near brutal desperation in him. He bruised her mouth and opened her and took as she did; his teeth cut her lip and he tasted the copper of her blood. But she merely moaned and gave more.

His hands moved to her neck, that tiny neck, and he tilted it back and tasted it again, the perfume of lily-of-the-valley, the slight saltiness of her desire, the soft indent at her collar bone. He sucked on that – a favourite – he inhaled and tasted. All the while she sighed and moaned, a whine at times, and he was so erect it hurt. But he would take her to bed.

So, with a groan, he pulled off her despite her eyes bright with tears of ferocious lust, and clasped her hand again. He led her down the corridor towards the hall. They must have managed twenty paces; he thought he would make it up the stairs.

He was pulling her fast and her little legs had to scurry to keep pace with him. She let out a gasp at his haste and he at last turned and noticed it. They had reached the bottom of the staircase, its grand balustrades leading his eye to what would be attained upstairs.

But when he looked at her she was so very beautiful; her lust brimmed from her, and he had to pull her into him again. She gave back and he was so painfully hard that he moaned in delirious agony.

Without thought, he pushed her back against the bottom of the balustrade and she stumbled up onto the bottom step. Without thought, he reached under her skirts, groaning with the annoyance of their layers. Without thought, his right hand found her wet and ready, just as before. Without thought, he released himself.

She coiled her arms about his neck. One hand cupped her backside, the other he brought to her head to hold it close to him.

He stared hard into her. Together they moved so that it could happen, and he thrust.

She groaned – a sudden, sharp groan of penetration. He did too.

She curled her legs tight around his waist and with a bite of her bottom lip invited him to move. He did. Slowly withdrawing (she was perfectly placed for him to move within her), they held each other’s gazes as he pulled out. His brows furrowed and his mouth fell open.

*Sensation.*

‘Remember?’ she mouthed.

‘Every minute.’

‘I’m here.’

‘Here.’

‘Back into me.’

He pushed hard back and caused her to gasp and grip him tighter.

Her eyes were brimful of tears and as she squeezed them closed one fell to catch on her cheek. ‘I missed you, I missed you, I missed you.’

He moved in her in response, dragging his cock as slowly as he dared out of the wet cosseting warmth of her quim to drive it hard back up and make her suck in in wonder. ‘Oh! That!’

He reached down quickly with both hands and took hold under her backside, lifting her up with sudden strength and causing another cry of delighted surprise.

‘Move. Oh, move, please.’

William drove into her determinedly now, ploughing through her flesh, which gave and took, released and absorbed. Her tears still fell, her mouth hung slack. They did not speak now but focused only on the slide of cock through quim, the taking of him into her, the penetration and the enclosing.

Their eyes were locked, and all their time apart, all the regret and the denial and the loss were gone. He made love to her there in the hallway of his home. They would never have made it to the bedroom; it had had to happen.

She would afterwards find bruises where the bannister dug into her, his knees would ache later, but now they were joined again. Perhaps servants emerged from distant doorways, but if they saw or heard, they simply turned away and ignored.

Love had returned to Brocket Hall.

He felt her tighten on him, read her build to orgasm as well as he always had. She milked him of pleasure, rode his cock, held upon it and braced against the balustrade as perfectly as if they had last been together hours before, not months.

He would come soon and hard, and she would not deny him a fast release after all this time.

But he wanted to feel her first. ‘Come for me, come for me again, Victoria.’

She need not wait. Victoria opened her mouth as if to gasp a final time but her rapture was silent. Her eyes rolled back in her head and her jaw tightened. He felt the pulse of her coming on his cock and in the shudder of her limbs.

‘Oh, thank you, my darling, my love, thank you,’ He was not sure why he said those words exactly,
but they erupted from him just before his seed erupted from him. He powered through his climax, wanting to extend it, to fill her with him, burst upon burst of his come plugging her and given to her.

When they both stopped, she let her left leg drop to support herself on the bottom step. Her head fell onto his shoulder, and they drifted.

‘I have been most remiss,’ she mused after what could have been hours, but was most likely only a few minutes.

‘How is that?’

She lifted her head slightly and glanced up and around. ‘I have not yet complimented you on your beautiful home.’

He chuckled. As he did so his left thigh twinged in protestation and she grimaced as the wood behind dug into her back. The awkwardness of their position was becoming apparent and, reluctantly, guiding her carefully, he slipped from her.

But still they could not move and she entwined her limbs about him and rested upon him. Time passed, silently and unaware.

‘You have not changed,’ he murmured eventually, stroking her face.

‘Should I have?’

‘I … was not sure.’ He knew a tinge of uncertainty would be clear on his face.

In response, she kissed him softly then pulled back and whispered, ‘I did not sleep with him. Do you fear that?’

Melbourne looked away. ‘No.’ But perhaps he had.

‘There is only one man who could be inside me, and that is what I realised before it was too late.’

He shuddered in a breath and tried to bring some awareness back to them both. ‘Ma’am, I …’

She cocked a disparaging eyebrow.

‘Victoria,’ he corrected, ‘I intended to take you to bed. And bed is still a fair way off.’ He glanced up the stairs.

‘I wish you to make love to me anywhere and everywhere. I will explore every corner of your home.’

‘Hmm,’ he mused, her deliciousness reinforced, ‘I will explore every corner of you.’

‘Do not say you’ve forgotten your way around me?’ she teased.

‘No … but it is always wise to keep fully abreast of things.’

‘Fully abreast?’

‘Hmm.’ With that his hands rose to cup the objects in question. Even through the material of her gown, he could feel the nipples hard and needy underneath.

Her eyes fluttered shut and she sighed out. ‘I want you again,’ she said. ‘I want you constantly. I
never stopped wanting you, not for one minute of a single day.’

‘No.’ He was trying to reach inside her gown but it was too tightly bound. He groaned in frustration. ‘Hell take it, but you wear too many infernal clothes!’

She laughed and turned in his arms. ‘Then do what is needed.’

He quickly set about undoing the hooks and soon enough her gown tumbled to the floor. As her flesh was exposed he bent to it, planting kisses over every part of her that was revealed. ‘I missed this. And this. And this.’ His tongue and lips enticed a longing she had kept buried for so long that she could not prevent sobs heaving from her as she held him to her.

William’s lust was too demanding and he tore her chemise to expose her breasts more. When the plump domes were revealed at last, he dropped his head, nestling into them, adoring their reassurance and their familiarity. He tugged down on her corset so that a nipple was exposed, and ran his tongue lightly over it to ensure it rose to stringent attention for him.

‘And, God, I missed these,’ he said, quickly drawing the other out too. One he held between thumb and forefinger, the other he sucked on, tugging it out in a manner which could barely be described as tender.

‘Ohh! I missed that too. I missed that so much,’ she mewed.

He pinched and she moaned as pleasure-pain pulsed through her.

‘Oh, yes, that, that, that.’

He twisted and she growled. How he adored that sound. He moved to the one he’d just twisted and sucked it gently back to relief while his fingers tormented its twin instead.

Another growl from her, which made his balls ache again already; she gave him the libidinous energies of a youth.

He dragged his mouth from the comfort of her breast to murmur in her ear, ‘I could make you come from that alone, I tell you. One day I will.’

She turned to him with bleary eyes. ‘Yes, yes, you will. I love it, I love it all.’

He returned to her nipples, always a hand on one, his lips around the other. Like this, they somehow mounted the stairs, making it to the first landing, but then she closed her hand around his hardening cock and he found himself stopped in his tracks, moaning, at last detached from her breasts.

He stood, halfway up the grand staircase of Brocket Hall on the first landing, and let her ply him. Soon he was hard again.

‘Do you remember when this was all I could do for you?’ she asked. ‘Do you remember that first time I took you in hand?’

He managed a wry look down. ‘As opposed to all the times I took you in hand?’

She licked her lips as she smiled and he could only groan again.

‘Yes, I remember,’ he continued. ‘I remember being in awe of your natural intuition.’

‘Quite right. I fully approve of you being in awe of me.’
She carried on plying him now, gripping, stroking, tugging. She was not gentle, nor should she be, and went at him with such conviction and skill that it was as if she could feel what he felt.

‘We’ve only made it to the first landing,’ he said between moans.

‘Ah well,’ she replied and sank to her knees.

He was in her mouth the next instant, all of him, and she was so relaxed that he sank back further than ever. He felt the head of his cock nestled snug in her throat and looked down in wonder.

‘Christ!’ She only stared up, her mouth stretched around his firm shaft, her eyes dewy with the constriction of it. But he didn’t pull back. She would when she was ready.

‘Christ above!’ he exclaimed again.

She drew back at last, but only slowly, utterly absorbed on the adoration of his cock, keeping her lips tight along him, relishing each moment of the slide off.

She let him pop from her and her mouth slanted into a lazy smile of satisfaction. ‘And I missed that most emphatically.’

And she took him again, right back, once more. His hand instinctively clamped on her head and this time he held her there. Her tongue worked him even now, her cheeks were pulled in on him. In all his days had he known any woman, duchess, servant or whore, who had been so perfectly obliging and wondrous? But as much as he gained from it, he knew all too well from her little mewls and the ardour with which she went about it, that she loved this yet more. And so, with no compunction, he proceeded to fuck her mouth.

William Lamb adored the sight of his cock disappearing then re-emerging from Victoria’s lips. He could stare at it forever, but the trouble was, she did it with such infinite skill that his end would come in no time, and so every so often he pulled out completely. She would give a little whine of frustration and extend her tongue hungrily towards him but, for his own sanity, he would pace himself. They had, after all, not yet made it to the second flight of stairs, let alone the upper landing.

But he could tease. He stroked her cheeks and held her head tenderly in his hands while denying her the leaking head of his erection. Her indignant little face was quite delicious; he bent to kiss her briefly and murmured, ‘Greedy girl.’

She stared up, her plump breasts heaving desperately. ‘But you make my mouth water so dreadfully,’ she declared.

‘Let me see.’

So she opened her mouth and he saw. He gave her a smirk, enjoying the moment of dominance.

‘Tongue me.’

She did not hesitate. Extending her tongue, she rolled it around the tip then licked indolently before curling it over the shaft.

‘Christ!’ he exclaimed. But the moment was rather indulgent; he would take it.

‘Suck.’

He ensured he was watching as she took the head in her mouth – just the head – and sucked on it as
if it were strawberry ice.

And with that he could only give himself over to her again. After she’d taken a moment to draw breath, he fed himself back through her open lips and let her see to him as she wished.

William sank down into her throat time and again. The stricture of it, combined with the heated wetness of her mouth, was the most perfect thing he thought life could ever give. If a woman gave him this, he would give her the world.

He had no doubt she would swallow him clean. It did, however, occur to him that his housekeeper would be most put out by stains of that nature on the Persian stair rug. His inherent decency compelled him to ask:

‘God, I’m going to come. You are too wonderful. Can I spill in your mouth?’

She pulled off briefly (he was bereft) only to state, ‘Yes,’ then was back on him again, working him so well with tongue and lips and cheeks that it took only a brief second more.

His fingers clamped on her scalp so that she tightened on him yet more and he burst full and long, his come protracted, white hot and explosive. If the staff were as yet unaware what was happening, they would no longer be; his groaning exclamation resonated throughout the hall.

He need not have feared for the rug. When he had recovered enough composure to focus on her again, he noted that she had been most assiduous. He did not even have to reach for his handkerchief.

Victoria rose slowly to her feet. He opened his mouth to speak but found words did not emerge.

She reached in and kissed him, and he changed his mind – if he could have her kiss alone, he would give her the world.

The Queen of England stood on his first landing, gownless, her chemise ripped, her breasts bubbling from her corset, her lips swollen from fellatio. It was somewhat remarkable, he conceded, yet why then did it feel so utterly right?

‘Perhaps we should make a concerted effort to reach the bed chamber,’ he suggested.

She giggled and dropped her head. ‘Indeed. I believe that was the original intention.’

‘It was, although, I seem to be inclined to distraction for some reason.’

‘Some reason?’ she purred and curled herself around him again. She need never uncurl herself. But he must be resolute.

‘Enough!’ he declared, and with that, he picked her clean off the ground, cradling her in his arms, and carried her as swiftly as his energies allowed up the remaining stairs, along a corridor and into his bed chamber. The door was soon shut, enclosing them both within.

As soon as the sound of the lock turning was heard, two parlour maids emerged below in the hallway and crossed to the silk gown draped at the bottom of the staircase. It was of such fine quality that there was no doubting its owner. Silently, but with the briefest glances at each other and the warmest smiles, the two maids picked up the gown and took it away to be returned to its owner when the time was right.
Chapter End Notes

*grins wickedly*

x
Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

Because I can.

Indulgence for indulgence’ sake.

Lock the doors, don't let anyone see your screens, even the cat.

NSFW. Got that?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They did at last make it to the bedroom.

And, there, slowly, he removed what remained of her clothing.

Very slowly.

He began with her corset – although she did consider that she may like that to remain, but the leisure and indolent skill he took over untugging the laces and unhooking the hooks evoked such heady eroticism that she dared not protest. Over each part of skin, as it was exposed, he lowered his head and kissed, ghosting over the flesh, breathing on it, as if relearning it.

‘I missed this …’ He pondered with a kiss on the back of her neck.

‘And this.’ Her shoulder.

‘This.’ Between her shoulder blades.

‘This.’ The small of her back.

‘And this.’ Her left hip.

‘And, of course … this.’

‘Ohh!’ Victoria gasped ecstatically.

Tongue. There again. His mouth where her desire sobbed for him. Lips sucking, licking, tasting.

‘Ohh, my darling, my life!’ she wailed, clasping him to her. Victoria stumbled back to land on the edge of the bed where she sat, her legs spread wide in a way that would have been most unusual were she seated on the throne.

She gazed down on the top of his head, his natural curls unruly after the recent neglect, and stroked him as he continued to drink from her sex. For that was what it was; he drank from her, he imbibed her, as if she alone would sustain him.

She came again quickly, head hanging back and mouth open to sigh it out. When he pushed himself to his feet, Melbourne stood looking down at her with a smile of satisfaction.
‘And good God, I missed that,’ he affirmed.

Victoria stared up at him. He stood tall above her, and the indomitable beauty of him made her catch her breath. His stance reminded her suddenly and palpably of the depth and complexity of what they shared, of what had set her on this path.

Melbourne started removing his clothing, and she watched with pleasure, but when he was left only in his shirt Victoria stood and looked at him with deliberate coyness.

‘I missed you too. I missed your kisses and your embrace and the line and shape of your body. But I missed more than that.’ She took a step forward and stared intently at him under hooded lids. ‘I missed everything … My Lord.’

He hesitated, his breath ragged with his own need. Melbourne’s brows furrowed.

‘What?’

‘Everything. I missed all you can bestow. You know I did, My Lord.’

He lowered his gaze, his face darkening with the memory of shame. ‘But … I never thought again … after what happened before.’

‘What did happen before?’ she pressed.

He drew in a shuddering breath, as if thinking on it pained him. ‘I went too far.’

‘For whom? For me? Or for you? You were the one who stopped. You were the one who panicked.’

‘Victoria …’ he warned.

She was undeterred. ‘I merely did what had been agreed from the start – I used the word. Was that not the right thing to do?’

He turned from her, shutting his eyes against it.

Victoria approached again, her present lust desperate. Her quim ached for him, her skin was heated and ready, her nipples hard even without his touch. It had been so long. How she had missed that burn, the abandon and oblivion. After all that had passed, she needed it now like nothing else.

‘Lord Melbourne,’ she tried. ‘I need it. I have missed it so very much. It sustains me. Have you not missed it too?’

He kept his gaze to the floor. ‘Of course I have.’

‘And you need it too? You need it as I do?’

‘Yes.’ His chest rose and fell hard as he struggled with himself.

‘Then here I am.’

And she held out her arms before her, wrists together, proffering herself up to be bound.

Slowly, he turned his head to look at her, still not moving, his breath coming increasingly fast. The paradoxical mixture of conflict and unfettered desire she read in his gaze made her belly leap with expectation.
'How far?'

She wasn’t sure what he had said at first. He held her gaze and repeated it.

‘How far?’ he asked again, his voice rasping.

It made her insides writhe. She swallowed and held her chin up to declare, ‘All of it.’

His jaw clenched. ‘And if I take you too far again?’

‘Then I use the word and you will stop. But this time …’

‘Yes?’

‘Do not be ashamed of that, do not run from me again. Will you promise me that, William?’

He inhaled suddenly and searched her eyes the same way he had the first time they had agreed to it.

‘Yes. I promise.’

‘Then, My Lord … I am yours.’

After a heartbeat’s more consideration, he stepped into her, not touching, but taking in the sight and prospect of her. And then, without warning, he reached up to dislodge the cord holding the curtain to the bed post. Taking hold of her wrists, he began to tie the cord hard around, binding them together.

‘No, Victoria,’ he declared as he worked determinedly, ‘I am yours.’

And she was moved round to stand with her back to the bed post. He pulled her arms up and tied them to the post high above her head. She tried to tug on them – just to test – but there was no give; he had bound her fast.

Melbourne looked over her and a faint smile of approval caught him. She bit into her bottom lip and whined; the hollowness of not having him inside her hurt profoundly and suddenly.

But instead of coming closer, he retreated to a chest of drawers and brought something out – a long strip of black material, silk.

‘I find …’ he began, ‘that other senses are heightened if one of them is eliminated … I’m sure you would agree.’

And he tied the cloth around her eyes, depriving her of sight.

Victoria turned her head, trying to sense him, for he had gone silent. She mewled in frustration, but then lips captured hers and fingers held her chin and he kissed her again. She let herself be kissed this time. She opened her mouth and let him do what he would. His tongue cajoled sweetness from her, his teeth caught her lips with sharpness, and she took it all.

Hands worked over her body down to her hips then up again along the curve of her waist to end at her breasts. Her breath was held. He cupped them, lifting them to relieve the weight, squeezing a little.

‘Perfect,’ he murmured, for himself, not her, and she felt him dip down. He took a nipple so hard on his tongue that she sucked in with surprise. But he gave her no respite and she had no choice but to adjust to it. The shards of sensation shifted from tenderness to pleasure and she breathed out any hesitation. She wanted to hold him, to curl her fingers through that thick hair, but when she tried she
could not; she had momentarily forgotten she was bound. She tried to look down but could not see.
And so she had no recourse but to feel.

He moved from one breast to the other, a hand on one, his mouth on its counterpart, licking and
sucking and rolling until pleasure dashed and pulsed from her tightened buds to swirl and throb at her
quim.

He dragged himself away and his hand dropped between her legs, causing her to whine and press
against him for more.

‘Do you know how much I missed that?’ he groaned. ‘Your wet need? What I do to you? What you
do to me?’

‘More,’ she breathed. ‘Everything.’

‘Everything?’ he queried, almost a tease but meaning it too.

She nodded. ‘Yes, yes, My Lord.’

‘Very well.’

Again, he was away from her, again at a drawer. She turned her head to the noise instinctively but
could see nothing.

She heard the paces back but there followed an absence, an absence of sound and touch. She sobbed
and squirmed. Still nothing.

It was the waiting game again, the one he had honed in her so well. And so she calmed.

And then –

‘Ow!’

He had struck her with something. Not hard, not biting, but surprising nonetheless. And it had struck

He did it again. This time she was prepared and absorbed it.

She knew what he was using: his riding gloves. She remembered the soft buttery leather. She braced
for more. He brought them down a few more times, criss-crossing her belly, catching her hips and
backside as he could. She took it all. She warmed to it.

He began to aim higher. He was not harsh, and when they first fell across her breasts it wrought not
pain but a glow. But as he did it repeatedly, the heat started to build.

And then he caught a nipple. The fingers of one glove flicked over it. She shied away with a gasp.

‘Shh,’ he soothed, stroking over it. ‘Too much?’

‘No … I like it.’

‘Address me properly.’

‘I like it … My Lord.’

‘Good.’
So he did it again on the other and then again. And again. Never so much as to panic her, but enough. Always enough, until her nipples were so hard and hot they practically screamed for more.

She gasped with each strike and she considered whether she should be closer to tears, for she was not. But she was so very alive.

Alive again.

At last.

She had forgotten. Not the love, not the lust, but the sensation of living.

Her right leg was suddenly lifted and he stepped into her, his fingers once again on her, slipping through her soaked sex.

‘By Christ, Victoria, what that does to you.’

She was sodden. She was almost embarrassed at the freedom with which her body gave away its arousal. Almost. She should be, she assumed, but not with him.

He stroked her, long, slow, edging back. And as he stroked, he bent his head and licked over her abused nipples, soothing yet igniting them yet more.

Oh, if he did that she would come again. She tried to hold it in, to pace her rapture, and he sensed it and slowed. Her gasps from before shifted to deep slow breaths. He stroked down, back, until he came to that most private place, the tight little flower she guarded so well. His fingers were there now. And still no shame came.

She remembered. That day, their last time … he had …

Oh!

He did it now. One finger, that was all.

Just a little, not presuming, but seeking. She tensed instinctively and he stopped, withdrawing it. But she was too curious.

‘Yes,’ she whispered.

‘What was that?’ It was a croon. He had heard her well enough.

‘Yes. Please, My Lord.’

‘So my girl has not lost her wickedness?’ His finger was so close but not quite there. She tried to squirm for it but he evaded her.

‘I have not, My Lord. Let me show you,’ she pleaded.

So he edged it back and squeezed it inside her tightest place, slowly, but she was so very needy she took it with ease.

‘Oh … ohh!’

‘Good?’ he asked.

She nodded. ‘So very good, My Lord.’
He began working it in and out and she took the sting and used it.

‘I did this before,’ he murmured, his voice low as he enjoyed her reaction.

‘I remember, My Lord. I liked it then, Sir.’

‘And you like it now.’

Oh, she did. She nodded and sighed for more.

‘For you are so very …’ He pressed it in deeper. ‘… wicked.’

Every nerve ending gave to him. She loved the newness of it, a fresh discovery which added more to her box of sensation and desire.

But then he withdrew it and she almost sobbed with the loss.

Melbourne took hold of her and turned her around abruptly so that her back now faced out towards the room. Loosening the cords binding her to the bed, he pushed them down so that her hands dropped low and she had to bend right over. But he didn’t untie her. He gripped her hips and positioned her, feet slightly apart, arms tied to the bed at head height as she was bent over at a right angle.

‘Now I will attend to this.’

And without hesitation he brought his hand down on her backside with a blistering thwack. It was hard. It hurt, far more than anything his riding gloves had achieved.

But she swallowed back her exclamation.

‘Count.’

He demanded, but her body betrayed its need by quivering in delight.

‘One … Sir.’

He spanked her again in the same place, still stinging from his first hit. She groaned at the impact but counted clearly in reply. ‘Two.’

Four more in quick succession. Already she was glowing, already she existed on that strange plane of bewilderment, between rejection and acceptance, between denial and longing.

‘How many, My Lord?’ she dared ask, wondering if she would be rebuffed.

He spanked her loudly for it but answered nonetheless.

‘I have much to make up for. It has been too long. You will take what I give you and what you need.’

‘Yes, My Lord, I will, thank you.’

Victoria focused on her breathing, keeping it regular. She extended her fingers as best she could, curling them around the post and giving herself up to his discipline.

He kept it up as his hand grew red with the pain of it.
'Eighteen. Nineteen.'

Over and over he spanked her, each thwacking connection resounding loudly through the room, pinging off the walls as her skin seemed to ping from her body.

She was on fire, surely? Still he continued, still she took it. Still she needed it. Would she ever stop needing it?

‘Thirty-seven. Thirty-eight.’

He was grunting with each one. It tired him. She hung her head and the numbers grew quieter.

‘Forty f… five.’

Thwack!

‘Fort …’

‘You know the word. Say it or count.’

She gasped in a breath. Her body ached from being made to bend over, her rump was aflame.

‘Forty-six.’

Another, the harshest yet.

She hesitated then said, ‘Forty-seven!’

And with that he stopped.

He did nothing at first. There was only a throbbing hot silence. Red then white then nothing. She dripped. A drop of her lust fell from her quim to land with a dull wet thud onto the carpet below.

And then Melbourne leaned over her, laying his body along hers. He kissed her face, which was nearly as red as her backside. ‘You are an angel. You are not real, I do not think, and yet you feel real.’

‘Your angel, My Lord. Only yours.’

‘Yes, my darling, my love. And I will make you fly.’

And then came a whisper in her ear, ‘You know what I will do now?’

She nodded. She could feel the urgency of his arousal pressing against her thighs.

‘But ask me.’

‘Please fuck me, My Lord.’

He sniffed out with pleasure and the slightest surprise at her immediate response. ‘I will, my love, I will fuck you, for you deserve it all.’

She lifted her head as if expecting him to remove the blindfold. She felt his fingers on the knot but then he withdrew them.

‘No … I will fuck you blind.’
He leaned over her again, his mouth against her ear, his hands sliding warm from her hips to her breasts.

‘I want you to feel me inside you.’

‘Yes, My Lord.’ She lifted her head and whined when he glanced over a nipple again. But it wasn’t enough, and so she said: ‘And silent. Fuck me silent.’

He hesitated but his hands still did marvellous things to her and she pushed against them.

‘What?’ he asked.

‘Silence me, Sir. Please. I wish only to feel you, that is all.’

And with that he was away from her to the drawer again. When he returned a length of coiled material was placed across her mouth and wound around so that no sound could emerge, let alone words. He tied the gag off tightly at the back of her head.

Victoria felt the bindings at her hands being loosened, but after he’d untied her from the post, he did not release them entirely. Instead, with strong insistence, he drew her hands behind her back and tied them together again.

Then a whisper in her ear: ‘If you wish me to stop, you will stamp your foot three times, do you understand? Not two or four or five, but three. Nod if you understand.’

She nodded urgently. How she must look to him! Her hands tied behind her, her eyes masked, her mouth bound fast.

His finger slanced through her sex, pushing up into her quim.

It made him sigh out in revelation; his fingers were soaked in her. ‘You are the most responsive thing there is. If you take all I can give you and respond thus …. you can rule the world. You know that, don’t you?’

She nodded.

Melbourne placed his left hand on her hip and gripped the binding on her wrists with the right.

‘Then take all I give you.’

And he drove into her.

She would have grunted with the shock of it had she been able, but the sound was muffled in the binding covering her mouth.

He grunted instead, low and almost disembodied.

He pulled out only to thrust forward again, into the hilt in one.

He could make love to her sweetly, and with utter deference. He could stroke and whisper and soothe. He could worship her with his mouth and his fingers.

But now he would fill her, now he would complete her.

Gripping hard onto her bound wrists, he moved powerfully, and she was so poised on the brink of ecstasy, her body so primed and ready to fall, that it took all her will not to come apart immediately.
She wanted to know him again, to rejoice in the feel of his length through her and in her.

And when his hand moved from her hip and she felt a teasing, a circling with his thumb above where he worked inside her, she moaned in approval. He edged it into the flowerlike entrance and she took it easily.

Melbourne pounded her now, his own breath fast and hard, his hips snapping forward, gripping her wrists as he would reins.

Victoria knew only completeness. Enclosed, enfolded, her senses attuned only to him inside her.

Alive.

And so she fell from the edge, tumbling and rolling and shuddering.

She could make no sound and her body contained it all, concentrating it, heightening it, deepening and lengthening it. Her ecstasy seemed to endure, to feed off itself and grow.

If she hadn’t been held on his cock and by his hands, she would have fallen to the floor as her body gave up afterwards, limp and heavy.

But he continued, ploughing through her, stretching and filling, until at last he allowed himself his own release.

She would remember the sound of him coming every day for the rest of her life. In it was the very essence of being.

His seed poured into her, white hot, copious, plugging her with him.

And they stopped.

Time passed.

It was an intriguing picture: the former Prime Minister standing embedded in the scandalous Queen as she bent forward for him, bound, silenced and blindfolded. But it was a picture of perfect pleasure.

And now, as they slowly disengaged from each other and from bed posts and bindings and moved to the bed to sleep, the perfection of it was reinforced by the awareness that it could continue as long as they both wished.

Chapter End Notes

Still there?

I'm going to have to wrap this up pretty soon now, but I hope you liked that one. x
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

Here we are. For all you romantics out there, of which I know there are a few.

And this chapter contains a not very subtle at all reference to my favourite novel - the novel which has informed all of my fanfic writing. You get bonus points for spotting which. It's not hard.

And ... this is the penultimate post. There is an epilogue to follow and that will be all. Over two years. Thanks for the journey. x

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The wedding of Alexandrina Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom, and William Lamb, Second Viscount Melbourne, took place on June 16th 1840 in the Royal Chapel of All Saints in Windsor Great Park.

Besides the Dean of Windsor, who presided, the only other people present were the Duke of Wellington, who gave the Queen away, Victoria’s mother, William’s sister, Emily, and Emma Portman.

The headline in The Times the next day read simply, ‘Her Majesty Weds the Viscount Melbourne’. There was no bunting, no parades, and no public celebrations. There existed a slight bewilderment amongst the British population, but no more. The bond between the Queen and her former Prime Minister had long been apparent, and most people felt a sense of relief that their Queen had managed to do what was right for her. (And her marrying an Englishman was not without its merits in the eyes of the populace, it must be said.)

It had taken some constitutional negotiations to allow it to happen. She had insisted. She had persisted. She had stood her ground amongst the most cantankerous of Tories and Whigs. Wellington had proved a somewhat surprising prop, as indeed had Peel.

And so the Constitution was tweaked and the Queen of England was allowed to marry her former Prime Minister. It was not morganatic in the end, and this ensured that their children could inherit. Neither would have minded if they had or not, but it would at least ensure smoothness of succession this way, and, as Victoria knew, that was never a bad thing.

With the two of them as parents, they were sure they could instruct a future king or queen most ably.

William was made Duke of York in the days following the wedding. He had not asked for it, nor wished for it, but Victoria had insisted, and he knew better than to argue with her when she had the bit between her teeth.

Leopold had been angry, she had heard. He had returned to Belgium after she had broken off her marriage to Albert, and she hoped not to see him for a very long time. When her engagement to William was announced, she still did not see him, but she could practically hear his outrage from across the Channel.
Her mother had not been easy either. When Victoria arrived back at Buckingham Palace three days after disappearing to Brocket Hall and four days after her non-marriage, the air was so frosty that her breath almost formed on it. Victoria had sneaked in late at night when returning but would not delay in informing the necessary people. The next morning she summoned her mother to her study.

‘Drina,’ her mother said through pursed lips, ‘where have you been?’

‘Away, Mama.’ Victoria remained sitting and barely glanced at her mother.

Her mother bristled. ‘You are still adamant in your decision?’

‘Which decision?’

‘The decision not to marry Albert, of course.’ Her mother clasped her hands so tightly together the knuckles were shiny white.

‘Oh indeed,’ said Victoria instantly. ‘He has returned to Coburg, I hear, so it would be so very tedious to re-organise everything at this stage. I would not wish to impose such difficulties on everyone.’

‘Drina!’ the Duchess sobbed, coming and sitting beside her but unable to contain her emotion. ‘This is … this is horrific.’

Victoria straightened her back. ‘No, Mama. What would have been horrific is two people entering into a union when neither truly wanted it.’

‘You would have grown to want it.’

‘Not in that case.’

The Duchess’s head fell. ‘Albert was heartbroken.’

‘You are wrong in that. He knew.’

‘Knew what?’

‘That it was not right. That I …’

‘What?’

Victoria declared it. ‘That I love another.’

Her mother tensed yet more and spat out her question: ‘Where have you been for the last three days?’

‘You know where.’

‘With … him? Melbourne?’

‘Yes, I’ve been with William at Brocket Hall.’

Her mother threw her head back in despair. ‘It is scandalous!’

‘Perhaps, but it will soon no longer be so.’

The Duchess’s eyes widened. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Mama … I have asked William to marry me, and he has accepted.’
Her mother looked as if she would pass out. Her face blanched and her eyes closed as if an affliction had come over her.

‘Mama …’ Victoria’s voice dropped with tender sincerity. ‘You know … you know it is the only way.’

Tears formed in her mother’s eyes. The shock of it all hurt her and that pained Victoria, but it had to be done.

‘Why him? Why?’

Victoria spoke genuinely and openly. ‘He is my everything. And I am his.’

Her mother shuddered in a gasp of confusion. ‘He is … so much older than you.’

‘That is of no matter.’

‘It will be!’

‘No, Mama, it will not. I will take him as he is, in sickness and in health. And he has many years of vitality in him. His happiness will ensure that.’

Her mother locked eyes with her daughter. ‘And your happiness, Drina? That is all I ask for.’

She took hold of her mother’s hands. ‘Mama … you know how truly happy I am with him. I cannot be happy with anyone else.’

For a moment her mother’s lips remained pursed and her eyes flinty, but then she drew in a slow breath and lowered her gaze. She squeezed her daughter’s hands. It was enough.

--xoOox--

There was little to prepare for the wedding and so, once the Constitutional changes were put in place, the ceremony itself was arranged in no time.

Victoria did not wear white this time as she had intended for her marriage to Albert, instead she wore an iridescent silk gown of the deepest cobalt blue, adorned with embroidered feathers and orchids. William wore the Windsor uniform. The marriage was to take place in the grounds of Windsor, after all. He was not at all keen, but she held her ground when he huffed in objection – it was so damnably heavy and hot, he protested – but on this she would insist.

Never had he looked more handsome. The June sunlight poured in through the stained glass and made the brocade on his jacket shine as if he were some gilded god. She was not entirely sure how she got through her vows for her mind was on matters far more earthly than divine.

As the ceremony progressed, the Dean spoke with more portent than ever before:

‘Therefore if any man can shew any just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.’

She stuttered for a moment. What if somebody burst in and said something? What if Caroline Lamb were not dead but still living, consumed by her madness somewhere? What if she, young, wide-eyed and yearning, was not free to marry the older man she adored, and someone appeared at the last minute to reveal all and prevent it? Her heart juddered, but all remained quiet. She considered later that it would make rather a dramatic moment in a novel were such a thing to happen. Perhaps one
day someone would write such a novel.

The Dean then addressed them both:

‘I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secrets
of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be
lawfully joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as
are coupled together otherwise than God’s Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither
is their Matrimony lawful.’

Parliament itself had decreed that their union was entirely lawful, so she knew she had nothing to
fear, and William stared down at her, his bright eyes as keen and lucid as ever, and her heart settled.
She said nothing and neither did he. The Dean addressed her former Prime Minister.

‘William, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God’s ordinance in the
holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in
health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?’

Without a moment’s pause, William answered, his eyes locked with hers, with resolution and clarity:
‘I will.’

The Dean then turned to her.

‘Alexandrina Victoria, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God’s
ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and
keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye
both shall live?’

Victoria could not prevent a little smirk at the query about obeying him. She certainly knew when
she would happily do so, but the rest of the time … William noted her smirk and returned it. Yet still
she answered with conviction:

‘I will.’

The service proceeded, and soon enough Victoria found a ring being slipped onto her finger. It was
then that she felt the tears pricking but swallowed them back and gave him the full force of her smile
instead. William said loudly:

‘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.’

With my body I thee worship. Oh, he did, as she did him. And at that moment she wished for nothing
more than to put those words into effect.

The Dean continued:

‘Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder. Forasmuch as William and
Victoria have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this
company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same
by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be man and wife
together, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.’

It was done.

They stared into each other and their eyes shone with love and emotion. The bells of the chapel
pealed and the married couple stepped out into the June sunshine, where Emma Portman and Emily showered them in rose petals.

--xoOox--

After the ceremony there was a small luncheon for those gathered, but then, as arranged, William and Victoria departed for Brocket Hall, which was to become a residence the Queen frequented often.

There was a silent agreement between them not to do anything in the coach but to wait until they were at his home. They sat on opposite sides and, apart from occasional glances at each other, looked steadfastly out of the windows.

When they at last arrived at Brocket Hall, he took her hand and led her into the house. Only there did he at last look down at her, remove her bonnet, cup her face and kiss her.

‘My wife.’ He kissed her again.

‘They always did call me Mrs Melbourne, you know.’

‘I shall call you my darling, and my beloved, my heart, and my all.’ He kissed and kissed her.

She pulled back and held his gaze. ‘Make love to me … husband.’

He smiled. ‘It gives me such great pleasure to hear you call me that.’

‘And it will give you greater pleasure to do what I request, I hope.’

He bent to kiss her again and led her up the stairs. They did not stop this time until they had made it to the bedroom.

Victoria stood in the room where they had already made love innumerable times, but this time felt so different. No more secrecy, no more deceit, for the first time they could be open and honest and true. And that in itself made her nervous. She lowered her gaze and felt a blush take her cheeks.

He approached and placed his hands on her shoulders. ‘What is it?’

‘I find this strange. For so long we have had to hide ourselves and take measures to evade detection … now it feels new and bewildering.’

‘Is that a bad thing?’

She shook her head. ‘No. I like it. I feel almost …’

‘What?’

‘Well … how I assume a woman should feel on her wedding night. I feel almost … virginal.’

At this Melbourne did have to quirk an eyebrow. When he thought back to all he and Victoria had engaged in, that word was not one he would use to describe her.

With a soft smile, he pulled her close again.

‘Do you remember our first time?’ she murmured as he planted kisses along her neck.

‘Which one? There have been so many first times. The first time I spanked you? The first time you came on my fingers? The first time you brought me off in your hand? The first time I sucked pleasure
She could listen to the litany of their ecstasy forever, but instead she said, ‘The first time you entered me. The time you took my virginity.’

He drew back with a slight frown. ‘I do not like to think of it like that. I do not like to think that I took anything from you.’

‘Oh, but I gave it most freely. I remember it so very well.’

‘As do I. You came even then, a rare occurrence the first time.’

‘I want this to be like that. I want it to be as though it is our first time again. I feel almost as if it is; things are so different.’

‘Our first time … I can make it so … Mrs William Lamb …’ he mused, his voice a warm caress, and started silently undoing her clothing. She let him, not speaking, and she detected something only he could bring out in her: nerves, but wonderful, tingling, expectant nerves. Still, after all this time.

Her gown fell from her shoulders and she stepped carefully out of it. He continued, moving around to her corset and taking hold of the laces. He pulled them out and she could feel the slide as they released.

‘Mrs … Lamb,’ he murmured. ‘My wife … Victoria Lamb … wife of William … mine …’

‘Yours,’ she returned as she felt the laces loosening further.

‘Hmm,’ he hummed, removing the corset completely and swiftly tugging up her chemise so that her top half was naked at last.

‘All mine,’ he said again, and she knew that theirs was a marriage of equality, she allowed him his ownership, not of her, but of her love, a love which could now be claimed openly and freely.

He bent to kiss her and his hands were on her breasts. He kissed and kissed, a languid, lazy kiss of tongue-dizzying, lip-grazing idleness, all the while holding and rubbing and squeezing her breasts so perfectly she pressed against him. His thumbs caught the nipples, his fingers occasionally doing more to make her gasp, but she let him do it all as it was perfect.

‘I could do this all night, you know,’ he whispered.

‘Yes,’ she agreed, and would have let him, but that ache inside protested and her sigh turned into a whine. ‘But …’

‘What?’

‘I want …’ He was rolling her left nipple between his finger and thumb and distracting her. She gasped and arched her back for more.

‘I didn’t catch that,’ he said, rolling it some more.

‘I like that, I like that so much, but … I want you inside me.’

He smirked. ‘You had me but two days ago, which, I should remind you, was highly improper for a woman preparing for marriage.’

‘Please …’
'You do not have to plead tonight, my darling.'

'But perhaps I want to.'

He sniffed out a slight laugh. 'Very well.'

'Please ... let me see you.'

With that, he set about removing his own clothes until he was in nothing but his shirt, loosened down to his belly button.

It was her turn. She coiled her arms around his neck and kissed him the way he had kissed her, made him groan the way he had done to her.

But his hands were still working, untying her drawers and pushing them off so that she was soon naked save only for her stockings, their little blue bows tied around the top of the silk to hold them halfway up her thighs. She pressed herself against him and drew an even louder groan from him as she rubbed against his already erect cock.

'Victoria.' The word caught in his throat. And he held her head and kissed her while guiding her to the bed. She fell back and stretched herself out upon it, willing him to her (although there was little willing necessary), indulging her own senses by spreading her hair and limbs out before him on the burgundy silk quilt.

An urgency had taken hold of him and he moved swiftly to lie above her, bending her leg to the side and sliding his hand under her waist to draw her up a little and angle her for him.

He held himself ready in his other hand and stroked the head of his cock along her. She had been so wet for so long that there was no need for further preparation.

'My love,' he said.

'My love,' she repeated. 'My William ... husband ... be inside me.'

He pushed in and she encompassed him. She felt every inch of him and it was the perfection she had longed for. How many times had she taken him, but in the here and now she had never felt him like it. He was so very present and real and there inside her.

She bit her lip in wonder and a little mewling gasp caught in her.

'Like that, oh, like that,' she said, a near sob. 'Oh, you are there.'

He swallowed and pressed hard and full into her, so deep he could go no further.

'Yes, I am here.'

She clenched on him and he swallowed, his eyes glazing as pleasure spiked.

Then, reaching under her, he drew her up and she curled her legs around his hips and he sat with her astride him. He could be no deeper within her.

'Feel that,' he murmured, and guided her up a little. She smiled and raised herself more before sinking down onto him again. And again, slight movements but enough to feel him as profoundly as possible. He held her close and she him and they kissed again, slow and deep, as slow and deep as he moved within her. Like a first time. Their first time. Husband and wife. Binding.
'You married me,' she mused against his lips.

'You married me,' he replied, a little amazed at the realisation. She laughed and bucked on him more steadily, rolling her hips, milking his cock fervently in her quim.

'Oh God, Victoria!' he said, squeezing his eyes shut at the pleasure of it. But then he moved again, uncurling her legs from around him, withdrawing briefly only to lie over her. He hooked her leg over his arm and quickly surged back up into her.

'Like this,' he said, his voice rasping with intent.

She was under him and as much as she enjoyed it when she led and knew he did too, not this time, not now. He moved in her and she met his every stroke.

She let him drive through her, not harshly, but with a determination she had not seen in him for some time. He was invigorated, she knew it, and his unbridled happiness fed her own.

'Oh, like that, like that,' she moaned, urging him on, arching up to meet him, gripping his back and drawing her legs around him to keep him deep.

'Always,' he said, so low and gruff she barely heard it. 'Always.'

'Oh, I love you, I love you, I love you,' she repeated over and over, and it rose to a whine then a wail as her orgasm ripped through her.

He let himself go, pushing brutally up into her two, three more times before himself coming so completely he struggled not to collapse. He came so hard he dug his fingers into her to steady himself, which caused her pleasure to spike markedly and she threw her head up in gaping, stunned amazement at the power of her climax.

Slowly, steadily, they came down again. When they had at last reconnected with their surroundings they stared at each other, the smiles limp but full on their faces.

At length, he lay beside her and they entwined themselves around the other.

'And … I should assure you …' he said, 'I love you too … Mrs Lamb.'

Chapter End Notes

There it is. Happiness. I'm only going to ask you to leave comments once more after this, so go on, make it a good 'un. I can't believe this is nearly over. Thanks for your companionship. xx
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

The last chapter - an epilogue really, a door closing gently.

It’s been quite a ride over two and half years. Thank you for holding my hand through it. I really mean that. This story is very, very close to my heart and it’s brought with it new discoveries and friendships. I am so, so grateful for your immense love and support.

Enjoy this last one, and, yes, I would love you to leave a last comment if you have a moment.

Lots and lots of love from Laurielove

xx

May 1843

William Lamb cupped the bloom with infinite care between his fingers and turned the orchid up to study its petals. *Paphiopedilum*, a favourite. They were thriving this year, but hadn’t for some time. He wasn’t entirely sure why they bloomed so well now. He hadn’t been able to spend as much time in his glasshouses as he used to, but he supposed that when he was here, he was so very content and focused that the quality of the time he spent nurturing and cultivating was what mattered. He wanted to present this bloom to her, but would wait a while longer. She always chided him for cutting the flowers off, although one or two did no harm, and he loved seeing them adorn her hair or her breast.

There were voices outside. He smiled to himself. He would be unable to attend to his plants any longer for now, but it was no matter. The door to the greenhouse opened and he heard a ‘Shh’ as skirts rustled in.

The hushed warning was to no avail as the quick pitter patter of feet scurried up the path towards him and tiny arms encircled his leg.

‘Papa! Found oo!’

He gently put down his tools and laughed, looking down to find a rag tag of dark blond curls adorning a little head which rose no higher than two feet or so from the ground.

William bent to his daughter and clasped her to him. ‘Why, Alice, so you have, and I am so very glad of it. Look at what I have been doing.’

He took her hand and led her over to some pots. ‘I have been planting seeds and watering and nurturing. And after time and love and attention … this is what they grow into …’ He picked her up, her warm little body giving life back to himself, and pointed out the most beautiful of his specimens. ‘Look at these orchids. Are they not beautiful?’

‘Pretty fower,’ said Alice, pointing a podgy little toddler finger at the petals.

‘Very pretty. Beautiful … But not …’ He kissed her soft rosy cheek. ‘… as beautiful as you.’
There was the sound of a throat being cleared behind them. He pulled a face of mock shame. ‘Or your mother, of course.’ And he glanced over as his wife approached.

Victoria came over and stroked her daughter’s head, leaning in to kiss her cheek before planting a soft kiss on William’s lips. ‘I am glad you put that right, husband.’

‘I am surely allowed more than one beautiful thing in my life, my darling.’

Victoria smiled and looked around. ‘It is looking so splendid in here. I wish I had your skill with horticulture.’

‘It has taken a lot of time and patience for me to become so.’

‘Are you saying I lack the patience?’

He smirked. ‘Only in certain matters, perhaps.’

She tapped Alice on the nose. ‘Your Papa teases me, Alice, but I shall say no more on that. Anyway, I am come to tell you that luncheon is served on the terrace.’

‘Come and eat, Papa! Is corrylower soup.’

William’s nose scrunched his face up and whispered to his daughter, ‘I don’t entirely like cauliflower soup.’

Alice giggled and pressed her hands to his face. ‘That’s wrong, Papa. I do!’

‘Well, I am pleased to hear it. You may have extra in that case.’ He put her down but Alice looked up pleadingly.

‘I help parnt fowers wivoo.’

‘Very well. Tomorrow you can help me plant these.’ He held out some seeds to her. ‘Do you see how tiny they are? You were like that once … and now look at you …’ And he leaned down and caught her and spun her around, prompting a peal of bell-like laughter which nourished him.

Victoria laughed and took hold of one of Alice’s hands while William held the other as they walked from the glass house.

‘How are you feeling today, my darling?’ he asked.

‘Oh, quite well. My headache has passed.’

‘You must not overdo things. The country can run itself for a few days.’

She smiled. ‘You didn’t used to say that. I recall all too well when you used to insist on me fulfilling my duty.’

‘Well … perhaps my priorities have changed somewhat.’

‘Perhaps you simply wish us all to remain here at Brocket Hall … which, I must say, I do also.’

He paused while Alice ran around the garden chasing butterflies.

‘It is understandable.’
‘But we have such happy times at Windsor and Buckingham too,’ declared Victoria.

‘Indeed … but Alice is happiest here.’

‘She is … as here she is indulged so utterly by her father.’

He turned and smiled to her. ‘Can you blame me?’

‘No.’ Victoria leaned up and kissed him and he could only gather her in his arms and kiss her back with increasing passion again. Not once, even now, three years after their marriage, had a day gone by when he hadn’t desired and wanted her with all his being.

The birth of Alice had been the happiest moment of his life. Victoria had been so very brave, and he had insisted on being in the room for the birth, despite the pernicious glares of the doctors and midwives. William was the first to hold his tiny, mewling child and pass her to her mother. Alice was healthy and thrived from the moment she was born.

It was a catharsis as well as a joy. He saw in the tiny bundle a little of both the son and daughter he had lost, and that made her all the more precious to him. Precious was inadequate a word. He lived for her. He worshipped her, although he tried not to show it to Victoria too often, who would chide him for his over-indulgence, although neither did she deny it him.

But the weeks following the birth were not easy for Victoria. She sank into a melancholy which was familiar to him – he had seen the same in Caro – and he accepted it. He eased it by giving her time and space and as much love as possible. He treated her, bringing her her favourite foods, gently suggesting walks if he detected a lightening of her mood. And it enabled him to spend more time with Alice. The bond between father and daughter was formed with unassailable strength in those weeks following the birth.

Fortunately, Victoria’s despondency lifted after a few months, and William watched with deep joy as she built a relationship with her daughter full of laughter and hugs.

The three of them moved frequently between Brocket Hall, Windsor and Buckingham, but he grew used to it. It was rare that they were separated. As much as he would have longed to take Victoria and Alice to their own private place at Brocket Hall, he went with the Queen wherever she was needed, and he was content to do so.

His happiness was complete, and never had he felt more alive and vital. He took frequent exercise – never a habit he had cultivated much before – and found himself with more strength than for many years. His girls had reinvigorated him, of that there was no doubt.

He remained largely in the background when it came to affairs of state, although his gentle counsel was still sought by Victoria frequently. But he did not impose or insist; she was quite capable of managing herself, he knew that. In any case, he had a daughter to bring up and a wife to love. He took on certain advisory roles from time to time, and enjoyed revisiting the halls of Westminster without the burden of Government, but his main role now was as father and husband, and for that he was blessed. He even offered up a prayer of thanks one day in the Abbey; he didn’t consider anyone was listening, but the inclination was there, which it never previously had been.

He saw Victoria go from strength to strength as monarch, and his love and devotion only grew stronger, if that was possible.

But every night she would return to him and curl around him and need him. And he would give as he had always done. For he needed her too. His desire was never diminished and neither was hers,
although they were careful to avoid getting a child on her after Alice’s birth. They would wait a few years before another, despite queries from everyone as to when the son was coming along. He knew how an endless cycle of pregnancy and nursing affected a woman, and he did not wish that on his wife. And if the country were to have another Queen after Victoria, then so be it. Alice would be as glorious a monarch as her mother, of that he was certain.

Fortunately, they had so many tools in their box of bedroom tricks, that there was plenty to keep them occupied and more than satisfied when that option was denied them.

He sat now on his terrace in dappled sunlight and stared at the beige liquid which filled his soup bowl. William glanced at Alice and grimaced. She giggled loudly.

‘Papa not like it!’

Victoria tutted. ‘No, he doesn’t, but he will do very well to eat it.’

William leaned over to his daughter and muttered, ‘Your mama is most insistent, Alice, and I should best do what she wishes.’

Reluctantly, he ate the soup. It wasn’t as bad as he made out, but he made a show of it for Alice, whose laughter he could live on alone.

‘Shall we ride out after this, William?’ suggested Victoria, a glint in her eye. ‘Just you and I, when Alice goes for her nap?’

He looked at his wife. ‘Yes, that sounds very pleasant.’

‘It’s a beautiful day after all.’

‘Indeed. In the park?’

‘The woods, I thought.’

He glanced at her and his mouth ticked at the corners. ‘Did you indeed? The woods tend to be very isolated. If you wished to be sociable and greet people, you will not find any there.’

‘Exactly, Lord M.’

He quirked an eyebrow. She still called him that occasionally, and he knew exactly what the intent behind it was. ‘As you wish … Ma’am.’

She smiled and took a sip of wine. He still called her that occasionally also. She liked it.

Alice tittered. ‘She’s not Mam! Silly Papa.’

‘Yes, your Papa can be very silly … he is a tease, in fact. Although, I must say … I rather like it.’

--xoOox--

Alice soon settled down for her nap, and William and Victoria left her in the capable hands of her nursemaid and were soon cantering across the fields of Brocket Hall’s estate.

Victoria looked back at him with a laugh. ‘Catch me if you can, Lord M!’

He let her go for a while, enjoying the peals of laughter which fell back to him as she galloped ahead of him.
But then, digging his heels in, he set off in pursuit and reached her just as they entered the woods.

‘Do you need to be caught?’ he laughed as they walked the horses deeper in amongst the trees.

‘If I do, it is only you I will allow to do so.’

They continued. It was a hot day, but in the deepest part of the wood, where the canopy shaded the floor from the heat of the sun, the dappled light gave a heady cooling quality which was intoxicating. Swathes of bluebells carpeted the floor and the intoxicating scent of wild garlic drifted up. Victoria drew up her horse and dismounted. William followed suit, tying both horses to a tree before following her as she paced deeper in amongst the birches. She inhaled deeply. ‘Do you feel that? Do you sense that? That is earth and growth and life itself.’

He did, but he smelt her perfume and womanhood more, and so, without more talk, he pulled her into him suddenly and plunged his mouth to hers. She was so surprised her riding hat fell from her, but she pressed back and gasped with her desire, which rose up unstoppably.

‘I do … but I feel you more.’

And they were removing each other’s clothes with unseemly haste, although seeing as they were alone in the middle of a wood, they could be as unseemly as they wished.

‘I want you, I want you,’ she gasped as his hands found her breasts before slipping down to find her wet and ready. She reached down and cupped him, already hard and prominent. ‘Always want you.’

‘Even now?’ he murmured, although he said it with a smirk.

‘Especially now. Here and now.’

‘It is a hot day … You don’t need these …’ he pondered, removing the rest of her clothes quickly.

Goose pimples formed on her skin as the air hit it.

‘Are you cold?’

She shook her head. ‘No … simply expectant.’

He stood before her in his shirt sleeves only and proceeded to roll one sleeve up to the elbow after another. ‘Should you be?’

‘I hope so … My Lord.’

He held her gaze and let the moment steep before declaring: ‘Turn around.’

She bit her lip and looked up at him, imbuing things with further anticipation.

‘Turn around, Victoria.’

She did so and he took hold of her elbow and guided her towards the nearest tree – a silver birch with a slender trunk.

‘Reach up and hold it.’

Soon enough he was encircling her wrists in rope and binding her tightly to the tree. He then stood behind her, his hardened cock pressing against the small of her back and making her groan. His hands came to her breasts and squeezed; his fingers found her nipples and squeezed, not so gently.
She moaned again. William brought his mouth to her ear and murmured hot and low into it.

‘Again, we find ourselves in a rather extraordinary position. You still want it, don’t you?’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

‘You still love it?’

‘Yes.’

He held her close to him, his breath rasping in her ear. ‘From that very first moment you asked me, I knew. I knew you were perfection for me, and that I would give you all you craved and needed … I would try to be what you were to me.’

‘From that first moment?’ she sighed, letting her head fall back onto him. ‘But you made me wait and wait.’

‘Patience, Victoria, as I always said … you know you reap the rewards eventually.’

One hand remained on her breast, the other slipped between her legs and coaxed and rubbed until she nearly came. He brought her right to the edge but then pulled back so that she sobbed.

But he remained there, whispering his truth into her. ‘Never has there been a woman like you in my life. Through you I live; you have brought me such life as I never knew possible, my darling, my love. I love you more than is imaginable. Thank you for all you have given me, thank you for all you have revealed to me.’

‘To you? It is you who has revealed it all to me, my love, my world.’

‘Then we are complete at last. Now …’ He stepped back and she whined again for more. ‘… ask for what you want.’

She strained against her bonds. ‘I want to feel it, you know I do.’

‘Feel what?’

‘The sting … for it makes me so very alive.’

He smoothed his hands over her backside. ‘You understand what I could not explain with words. You know that, don’t you? You had to experience it.’

‘Yes.’

His hands stilled. A slight tension caught him and his voice grew heavy, almost with remorse. ‘Have I been good, Victoria? If ever I failed you, if ever I pained you, I could not live with myself.’

Tears pricked at her eyes. ‘No, no my darling, you know how I understand it, how I need it. From the start you have been perfect. You have been everything.’

‘And still you want it, even now.’

‘I want it and I need it … from you, only from you.’

Her lust overrode all else and she whined, pushing back for his touch.

‘And now?’ he continued, asserting himself again. ‘Here and now. What do you want? My hand?’
‘No,’ she said, her resolution clear. ‘I want the bite of it. I want the sting.’

‘This?’ He held the riding crop up before her.

‘Yes, oh that, please.’

‘Then I shall give it to you, and you shall count.’

‘Yes, My Lord.’

He brought the crop up and she waited with baited expectation, her body so needy it shuddered before him. With an intake of breath, he brought it down, and the blissful sting drew a sigh of rapture from her.

‘One.’

‘Good girl.’

Again. *Swish sting.*

‘Two.’

And another.

‘Three, My Lord!’

He continued, the crop rained down until her backside was covered in little red bites. William stopped at last and let the crop fall from his hand. He panted from the exertion but his cock demanded fulfilment. Taking hold of her hips he stroked, before pulling her back against him.

‘Now …’ he said, ‘I shall be inside you. I will complete and fulfil you as you do me.’

And so he did.

He stroked along her powerfully and determinedly and her hands strained against the trunk of the birch as he moved. It did not take long. They came so hard their pleasure seemed to rebound from the trees themselves.

‘Oh dear God, I love you, I love you,’ she panted as he withdrew slowly, untying her as reason returned.

‘And I you, my love. Forever.’

Victoria turned and fell against him, wrapping herself about him, sated and heavy. Eventually they managed to dress and return to the horses. As she untied hers, she looked across at him.

‘William, husband … you are still my Lord M, you know. You always will be.’

‘I know,’ he said with a soft smile then raised his eyebrows in realisation. ‘Now … our little Alice will be waking and wondering where we are.’

‘And I promised her we’d continue acting out the tale of the squirrel and the rabbit for her later. We must return immediately. That’s quite enough goings on in the woods, Lord M … for now.’

With that Victoria mounted her mare with a grin (and a slight wince as she adjusted to her newly acquired tenderness) and trott ed off ahead of him.
William Lamb smiled and stared after his wife. Then, tucking his riding crop safely under his arm for the time being, he threw his leg over his horse and turned it after her.

‘Anything you say … Ma’am.’

The End

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