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FAKE IT *to* BREAK IT

I FAKED AMNESIA to Break Off My Engagement
and Now He's All LOVEY-DOVEY?!



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Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Me and My Fiancé](#)

[The Beginning of the Lie](#)

[And Now, It's Time to Break Off The Engagement](#)

[What's True and What's False](#)

[An Unexpected Past](#)

[I Really Don't Know](#)

[A Kind Gaze](#)

[A Lying Ally](#)

[Completely Unexpected](#)

[No Matter What Happens](#)

[Things Set In Motion](#)

[Vague and Unconfident](#)

[Treasure](#)

[Everything Is So Confusing](#)

[It Was Just As If...](#)

[Suspicions and the Truth](#)

[For The First Time, You...](#)

[An Inciting Event and Love](#)

[A Hidden Future](#)

[Just One](#)

[Changes](#)

[The Real and Honest Truth](#)

[As If The World Itself Changed](#)

[However](#)

[The Heartbeat Hidden in the Rain](#)

[The Only Thing I Know](#)

[Noticed](#)

[Birthday 1](#)

[Birthday 2](#)

[Birthday 3](#)

[The End is Always Sudden](#)

[Misunderstandings and True Feelings](#)

[Until Now and Forever More](#)

[From a Lie to a Truth](#)

[Step by Step, Slow and Steady](#)

[From When? Always.](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Bonus High Resolution Color Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)

Me and My Fiancé

“It’s a nice day today.”

“It sure is.”

I had been struggling to find a topic of conversation and ended up with nothing more than a trivial observation. He gave me the usual blunt response before we both fell silent again. I sighed quietly and turned my gaze from the sight outside the window to the handsome man sitting before me.

He was Phillip Lawrenson, son of Duke Lawrenson, as well as my fiancé. His hair was as dark as the night sky, and his amber eyes gleamed like shimmering stars. His face was so beautiful that he grabbed the attention of everyone who beheld him. Due to his reserved personality and impassive expression, he was called the Icy Noble, and his attractive looks made him popular in high society. He didn’t seem to be bothered by the awkward atmosphere between us as he took an elegant sip from his teacup, his face as calm as it always was.

As the daughter of a viscount, I, Violet Westley, was hardly an equal match for him. If I had to list a positive quality about myself, it would be that I was a little prettier than average. However, even when it came to our looks, he had me beat.

One might wonder why we were even engaged to begin with. It had to do with our families’ history. In the past, House Lawrenson had fallen on such hard times that the dukedom had been in danger of ending. A fortune teller, and then daughter of House Westley, had been the one to save them. Thanks to her instructions and advice, House Lawrenson had been able to survive.

Duke Lawrenson wanted to thank her, and in response, she’d said, “One day, when our families produce two children of the opposite gender within the same year, please have them marry each other.” That was her only request. After a hundred years had passed, Lord Phillip and I were the first ones who’d finally met those requirements.

It seemed that House Lawrenson felt gratitude toward House Westley. I was born a month after Lord Phillip, and a few days after that, they'd asked for my hand in marriage. There was no reason for my family to reject it. Thus, my engagement to Lord Phillip was arranged in the blink of an eye.

"Um, Lord Phillip," I said.

"What is it?" he replied.

"Could you ask Duke Lawrenson to reduce these meetings back to once a month?"

Ever since we were children, without fail, the adults would set up a monthly meeting for the two of us to spend time together. These days, all we did was sit across from each other, drink tea, and exchange very few words. I was the one who did most of the speaking, while his replies were limited to "Yes" or "I agree." It made these meetings a painful affair.

He never was the talkative type, but whenever he was around me, he became even quieter. He'd always been this way. Every time I met with him, I prayed for the clock to tick faster. However, a few months ago, we suddenly started having these meetings twice a month. I didn't know what Duke Lawrenson was thinking, but there was no bigger waste of our time than this. In particular, Lord Phillip was a very busy man. The other day, I'd asked Lord Lawrenson myself if we could go back to having monthly meetings, but he'd rejected my suggestion with a smile.

"Why?" Lord Phillip asked.

I'd assumed that Lord Phillip wanted the same thing I did. So I was baffled when he replied with that query.

"Wh-Why?" I echoed, dumbfounded. "I'm sure you're busy with other things, Lord Phillip."

"I don't have a lot of spare time, but our meetings only last for a few hours. It's not an issue."

If that was his reasoning, then the only thing I could say was, "I understand."

After another moment of silence, Lord Phillip opened his mouth.

"I've been invited to an acquaintance's soiree next week. Would you be willing to accompany me?"

"Yes, I would."

There weren't many opportunities for me to appear at social gatherings as his fiancée. He only invited me in situations where my presence was absolutely necessary. Every time I went, though, he would only give the bare minimum of greetings and then try to leave. This happened every single time I accompanied him. The other nobles had told me that Lord Phillip didn't do this when he went alone. Was he that embarrassed to be seen with me in public?

Personally, I was worried about passive-aggressive comments from the noblewomen in love with Lord Phillip, so I hardly ever went to social gatherings alone. I was on the verge of becoming a shut-in. I'd received strict education from an early age to assist Lord Phillip in all his endeavors, but the title of Lady Lawrenson would be much too heavy a burden to bear.

I finished drinking the umpteenth cup of tea for the day and set it back down on the saucer. Knowing that what awaited me was yet another stifling silence, I started to count the growth rings on the wooden table.

"Thank you very much for today. I shall see you next week at the soiree," I said.

"Yes," Phillip replied.

It seemed that Lord Phillip had something he needed to attend to later, so our meeting ended a mere thirty minutes after his invitation. No matter how busy he was, he always found the time to escort me back to my carriage. I entered the carriage, and after I could no longer see him from the window, let out a deep sigh.

Now that I was eighteen years old, there was about a year left before our wedding. At this rate, even if we got married, I doubted that either of us would be happy. Surely there was someone out there who was much more suited to be Lord Phillip's wife. As for my family, even though my father was a viscount, we had plenty of money. We could survive even if the engagement fell through.

“I hate you, Lord Phillip!”

“I...hate you too.”

A conversation from our past suddenly entered my mind. If I wasn't mistaken, that was when I was fourteen. Back then, Phillip's silence in our conversations hadn't felt nearly this awkward.

As the carriage continued the bumpy ride home, I absently wondered if there was any way to break off this engagement. Suddenly, the entire carriage shook, along with a mighty sound. The next second, the world flipped upside down, and I felt a hard impact against my head. That was the final thing I was aware of before I lost consciousness.

The Beginning of the Lie

“Ugh...”

When I slowly opened my eyes, I was greeted by a painful brightness and I hurriedly closed them again. After blinking a few times, my eyes became acclimated to the light. Eventually, my vision cleared up, and I recognized the ceiling above me. I was lying on top of my bed in my room.

It felt like I had been asleep for a very long time. I chanced a look to the side and saw the teary face of one of my maids, Selma. In a quivering voice, she said, “I-I’ll call Lord and Lady Westley,” and then hurried out of the room. Right after, she came back with my parents in tow.

“Viola?! You’re finally awake!” my mother cried.

“Ahh, I’m so relieved. I couldn’t sleep a wink all week,” my father exclaimed.

They grabbed my hands, tears streaming down their faces. What was wrong? My brain wasn’t working very well, but as I pondered that question, my memories gradually returned.

Yes... I remembered now. I had been on my way home from House Lawrenson’s mansion, thinking of a way to end my engagement with Lord Phillip, when the carriage had simply tipped over. If I had died right then and there, then my engagement would have been broken off in a rather crude way. I smiled sardonically at the thought and then turned my attention to my body. It felt heavy, but there was no pain.

Now that I thought about it, I was surprised that I had been asleep for a whole week. No wonder I was so hungry. In any case, my body was fine, so I should let my parents know. But right when I opened my mouth to say something, my mother leaned forward.

“Viola, are you all right? Do you remember who I am?” she asked.

She looked worried about the fact that I hadn’t said a word the entire time since I woke up. That was when a stroke of genius came to me: if I pretended to

have amnesia, then wouldn't I be able to break off my engagement with Lord Phillip?

I could say something like, "*I don't remember anything, so I don't know what the heck is going on, hee hee!*" and pretend to be an idiot. They'd surely deem me incapable of performing my duties as a lady of House Lawrenson. That way, we would be able to end things without arguments on either side.

I would feel bad for causing my parents such worry, but I would tell them the truth later and apologize until they forgave me. This was the only opportunity I had to get out of spending a lifetime worrying about the situation with Lord Phillip.

"To fool your enemy, you must first fool your friend" was a proverb for a reason. I decided to go through with my plan without telling anyone first. I took a deep breath, mentally encouraged myself that I was the greatest actress alive, and then opened my mouth.

"Milady, Lord Westley wishes to see you in the parlor."

"All right. Thank you for letting me know."

It had been three days since I woke up. Thanks to some desperate acting, I'd managed to convince everyone that I had lost my memories. As for the carriage, a part of a collapsing cliff had destroyed half of it. It was a miracle that I had come out of it with nothing more than superficial injuries. The coachman had broken all of his limbs, but he was thankfully in no danger of dying. That was a relief to hear.

When I'd told the doctor that I had amnesia, he'd concluded that though I didn't have any visible injuries, the shock of the impact must've damaged my brain. In truth, I was perfectly fine. The doctor had told my parents that there were precedents where the afflicted party never recovered their memories, and they'd looked incredibly shaken. Though it pained my heart to see them in that state, there was no going back. I was afraid the doctor would see through my lies, but to my relief, I'd managed to pull the wool over his eyes.

"I have to get it together," I murmured to myself. I gently slapped my hands

against my cheeks, psyching myself up.

It was surprisingly difficult to pretend that I didn't have my memories. Even when performing tasks I'd known how to do all my life, I had to feign ignorance. Because of that, I was on guard at all hours of the day.

When I walked into the parlor, my father was already sitting on the sofa. He gestured at me to approach him with a gentle smile on his face. Even when I was a child, my father was soft on me. He'd really spoiled me. It felt like he'd gotten even worse after my accident. I sat down across from him, and the maids immediately placed my favorite snacks and tea before me.

My father chatted about this and that for a little while before he paused and then said with a serious expression, "To tell you the truth..."

Here it comes! I knew what he wanted to say.

"Viola, I want you to meet Lord Phillip," my father continued.

"Lord Phillip?"

"Yes. He's been your fiancé since birth. Ever since he heard about your accident, he's been terribly worried about you. He's even been personally delivering flowers to our doorstep."

"Huh?" I couldn't suppress the shocked noise, and I hurriedly covered my mouth with my hand.

My father apparently thought my surprise was from the revelation that I had a fiancé, because he gave me a lopsided smile and said, "Anyone would be surprised to suddenly hear about their betrothed."

Phew, that was a close one.

It seemed that the beautiful flowers brought to my room every day to be put on display were gifts that Lord Phillip brought himself. My surprise came from the fact that someone like him would do such a thing.

"He said that he'd be willing to wait until you're feeling better to see you. So, I thought it was about time that you met him and told him about your amnesia."

"I see. This Lord Phillip seems like a very kind gentleman. I would very much love to meet him."

"All right. Then we'll get right to scheduling that," my father said happily before he started issuing orders to the butlers.

I took a sip from my tea and steeled my resolve once more. It was finally time for the real show to start.

The next day, Lord Phillip came by. Considering he visited every day, it wasn't difficult to arrange a meeting. After the maids informed me of his arrival, I stood in front of the mirror and looked over myself one last time. In order to reinforce the fantasy that I'd lost my memories, I'd been wearing dresses that had never been my style. I'd always tied my hair up as well, but I started wearing it down. With these two changes, I thought I looked quite different from before.

I finally made my way to the parlor and saw my fiancé sitting there. As per usual, his face was so beautiful that it was almost eerie. The moment he noticed me, his usual stoic expression melted away. It was difficult to decipher his emotions; he looked relieved, yet also looked as if he was about to burst into tears at any second. Seeing him like that almost made me lose my composure at the surprise, but I managed to keep myself in check.

Incidentally, my father had told Lord Phillip about my amnesia before I arrived.

"Um, hello...?" I made sure to keep my tone nervous, as well as slightly embarrassed. In addition, I gave Lord Phillip a big smile. This was to keep with the running theme that my amnesiac self was a little bit of a ditz.

As soon as I greeted him, his sharp eyes widened in shock. "So you...really don't remember anything."

When I saw him murmur that to himself, with an expression slack in disbelief, I knew that my plan would succeed.

And Now, It's Time to Break Off the Engagement

My mother, who had entered the parlor at the same time I had, sat down next to my father. Naturally, that meant that I had to sit next to Lord Phillip. After I did so, I took a small breath and then poked his shoulder. He immediately turned to face me, holding me in his bright amber gaze.

"Um, thank you so much for the lovely flowers. I never imagined you'd be so handsome, Lord Phillip... My heart won't stop racing." I shifted in my seat shyly and smiled at him.

He didn't say anything in response and simply looked away. Upon seeing that reaction, I internally raised a fist in victory. He never liked it when women praised his looks. To tell the truth, acting in this way was so embarrassing that I wanted to die. But, knowing that everyone thought I was a completely different person because of the amnesia, I barely managed to keep my sanity in check.

This was the perfect plan. I would act like an idiot and make him have a terrible impression of me, which would then lead to him breaking off the engagement. I only needed to do one more thing to seal the deal.

I reached out for his large hand, which he'd been resting upon his knee, and gently placed my own hand over it. Surely he would think I was shameless for touching a man that I'd basically just met. This was definitely the type of woman he hated. Since this all happened underneath the table, my parents couldn't see what was going on.

More importantly, Lord Phillip *despised* being touched by women. No matter how beautiful a noblewoman was, if she so much as brushed up against him, he would seriously lose his temper. Even when he had escorted me, he never touched me more than necessary. Like I'd expected, he quickly removed his hand from underneath mine. However, that was about the only thing I'd predicted right.

Huh?!

But for some reason, the hand I thought he'd moved away turned and held mine in a tight grip. I jerked my head up to stare at Lord Phillip, but he was staring straight ahead with his usual cool expression. I had no idea what was going on in his head.

Just what was he thinking? No matter how much I racked my brain, I couldn't come up with an answer. As my hand continued to stay enveloped in his warm and slightly calloused one, my heart started beating faster and faster.

I'd accidentally lost my composure, but in any case, we had to continue with our discussions. With my eyes, I signaled at my father, who was sitting across from me, and he cleared his throat. It looked like he figured out what I was trying to communicate. My father turned to Lord Phillip with a serious expression and opened his mouth.

"Lord Phillip, as you can see, my daughter doesn't have any of her memories. She truly has no idea about anything. The doctor said that there's the possibility she'll never remember who she was, and she'll likely have a hard time appearing before members of high society like this. We plan on discussing this more with Duke Lawrenson as well, but we believe that it's necessary to reconsider your upcoming marriage."

My father was completely on my side. I'd sobbed at him, "I don't know what's going on at *all*, so I'm *terrified* of going outside! I don't understand any complicated matters either. I wish to stay at home forever, father!" Upon hearing that, he'd suggested breaking off the engagement of his own accord.

As a result though, that made it more difficult to come clean to my family about the fact that I was merely faking my amnesia. So I would have to pretend that I recovered my memories later. I was truly learning that you had to weave a web of lies in order to prevent a previous falsehood from unraveling.

I swore to myself that I would never come up with a lie as severe as this again and mentally apologized a thousand times to my parents. *I'm so sorry for being such a terrible daughter.* But in any case, I absolutely must pull off this plan.

If Lord Phillip said, "I understand" here and now, then it'd all be over. That was what I was thinking. And yet...

"Viola, may I speak with you in private?"

Upon hearing him make that request, I felt a bead of cold sweat gather on my brow. Why wouldn't he immediately agree to our suggestion? In the end, I couldn't say no to him, so we decided to move the conversation to my room.

As I stood up, I tried to remove my hand from his grip, but for some reason, he held on tight, with no indication of letting me go. I hesitated, confused, but Lord Phillip didn't pay me any mind as he pushed himself to his feet and led me out of the parlor. Uh, why was this happening?

I had no idea that my parents and the maids warmly watched over us as we left the room together, hand in hand.

Lord Phillip walked in silence as he continued to pull me along by my hand. When we eventually got to my room, he went straight for the love seat instead of where we usually sat with a table in between us. He sat down and looked at me, his eyes silently ordering me to sit as well. I *truly* had no idea what he was thinking about.

In any case, I obediently sat down next to him, our hands still entwined. It wasn't a very big sofa, so our shoulders naturally pressed against each other.

And then, we spent the next twenty minutes sitting together in silence. At this point, we could consider this our specialty. It'd seemed like he had something he wanted to talk about, but in the end, we spent time like we always did. I'd kept my foolish look affixed upon my face the entire time, but even I was on the brink of losing my patience. Right when I was about to say something, though, Lord Phillip opened his mouth.

"Do you really not remember a single thing about me?" he asked, as if trying to confirm the truth with me.

"Yes. I honestly can't remember anything... I'm sorry."

"I see."

He slowly squeezed my hand in his and then looked me straight in the eyes. Our faces were so close that our noses practically touched. In his clear gaze, I could see myself and my own idiotic expression. Even at point-blank distance, his visage was so beautiful and flawless that, for some reason, it made me want

to cry.

“I have no intention of breaking off our engagement.”

The shock of those unexpected words was akin to being punched in the face. What in the world could he mean? Lord Phillip himself had said that we weren’t a good match for each other and that he hated me.

“Why?” I asked in a trembling voice.

In response, he gave me a smile so beautiful that it took my breath away. Then he said, “It’s because we were in love with each other.”

A few seconds passed as my brain parsed his incomprehensible claim. The idea that I was pretending to be an amnesiac completely slipped my mind as the word “Wha—?” came out of my mouth.



What's True and What's False

“Viola?”

The sound of Phillip saying my name and the sight of him staring into my face at close range pulled me back into the situation. I’d been spacing out from the shock. With my free hand, I pinched my thigh over my dress, but it hurt as expected. If this wasn’t a dream, then what he’d said just now surely was me hearing things.

“Um, what did you just say?”

“I said that we were in love with each other?”

“Who’s ‘we’?”

“You and I.”

“Huh?”

So I really wasn’t hearing things. I was unable to hide my surprise at the sudden lie. It was impossible to tell why he would make up such a crazy story. Perhaps he’d discovered that I was faking my amnesia, and this was his way of getting back at me?

“I-I’m sorry, but my parents didn’t mention anything about that. So it came as a surprise...”

“Yes, I figured that Viscount and Viscountess Westley weren’t aware of it. You weren’t the type to express your affection in front of others.”

Wait. Seriously, wait a second. Just who was he talking about? It sounded like he was implying that I expressed my affection so long as it was in private. His face had reverted to its normal blank expression, but no matter how much I stared, I couldn’t read what was going on in his head. After thinking about it for a little while, I decided that the best course of action for now was to press him for more details.

“Uh... So, Lord Phillip, back when I had my memories—”

“It’s Phil.”

“Excuse me?”

“When we were alone, you would refer to me as ‘Phil.’”

I gave him the chance to speak, and he decided to shamelessly make up a ridiculous lie. I wanted to yell, “Hey, don’t you think you’re going too far?!” but I managed to keep myself in check. Then I opened my mouth once again.

“Um, so Lord Phillip, back—”

“Phil.”

“*Phil*, back when I had my memories, what kind of person was I?”

I’d lost the battle of wills and ended up calling him “Phil.” The word didn’t feel right in my mouth at all. For some reason, his face twisted in pained sadness at my question.

“Before you lost your memories...you were absolutely in love with me. You always said that just seeing my face made you happy, and would always get jealous when you saw me speaking with other women.”

“I-In love?”

“Yes. You were infatuated.”

“Infatuated...”

I was starting to get a migraine from the irrepressible barrage of lies. Not only were his falsehoods oddly realistic but he also presented them in such a casual manner that I even started to doubt my own memories. If he continued to hold the reins in this conversation, something terrible would happen. That premonition calmed me down, and I suddenly noticed something off about everything.

Didn’t “we were in love with each other” mean that *he* also liked *me*? The timing of the lie implied that he still liked me even now. That couldn’t possibly be true though. But when I nervously asked, “Phil, correct me if I’m wrong, but are you in love with...?” he widened his eyes as if taken aback and then gave me a small smile.

My hand was still in his, and he raised it to his mouth. Then he gently pressed his lips against the back of my hand. The action was done so naturally and with such beautiful elegance that it took my breath away. He looked every inch like a prince out of a fairy tale.

“Ever since I can remember, you were the only one for me. If you told me to die, then I would gladly do so this very second. That’s how deep my love is for you.”

The love he expressed for me was the most that one could ask for. My breath caught in my throat as he continued to look at me with his soft, honey-colored eyes. I could feel my face slowly growing hot, and my heart started to beat a fast rhythm in my chest.

He’d been lying the entire time. So what he said just now was likely untrue as well. Even though I knew that, his words flustered me so much that it was frustrating. It must be because his face was so handsome, and that he was so good at acting. Also, I didn’t want him to die, but I still wanted him to break off the engagement.

“I-I see...” I was so shaken that I could only give him that reply. But he continued to speak as if he didn’t hear me.

“So, I don’t want to break off our engagement. I’m sure you’d be upset to discover we had done so once you recovered your memories.”

“Actually, even if I did recover my memories, I’d still be delighted to hear it” was something that I absolutely could not say in response.

Instead, I racked my brain on what I should do after hearing such an absurd story and pseudo love confession. For starters, someone as smart and collected as Lord Phillip would never come up with a lie like this without a good reason. There was likely some circumstance that made breaking off our engagement problematic for him.

But what reason could there be for him to remain my fiancé to the point that he would willingly say such cheesy lines? In any case, I never thought he was the kind of person who would take advantage of someone’s accident and injuries to trick them. He was an absolute trash bag of a human being.

That judgment swung right back at me as soon as I thought of it. As I swallowed in guilt, I heard him call my name. I slowly looked up at him and met Lord Phillip's serious eyes.

"If you don't want to, you don't have to appear before high society. You don't have to do anything at all. I'll take care of everything for you."

"Huh...?"

"So don't try to leave my side again."

As he made that plea, his expression and voice were so mournful that, even though I knew this was part of his plan to prevent me from breaking off our engagement, I found myself nodding nonetheless.

An Unexpected Past

“I’d like to speak with your parents before I leave.”

“All right.”

With that, Lord Phillip and I stood up from the love seat, our hands still intertwined. Appearing before my parents like this was a little too embarrassing, even for me. My father, who’d been the one to suggest breaking off the engagement for me, would likely be confused at the sight as well.

“Um, Phil, don’t you think it’s about time we stop holding hands?”

“You don’t like it?”

“It’s not that. My hands have been getting a little sweaty, so...”

“I understand.”

With that, he finally released my right hand. But before I could fully relax, I felt him scoop up my left hand in his. That wasn’t what I’d meant...

Now that I thought about it, though, I was the one who had first made physical contact. My plan had completely backfired on me. I reflected on that as I tried to come up with another reason for why he should let go of my hand, but I couldn’t think of anything. So I followed him to the parlor where my parents were without any further fuss.

When they saw our connected hands, they both looked at each other and said, “I knew it.” They appeared so delighted. An alarm bell started to ring in my head.

“Please allow me to remain as her fiancé,” Lord Phillip said immediately.

I’d thought he wanted to say his farewells, so I started to cough at the unexpected words.

“But she doesn’t have her memories right now. She won’t be able to support you. In fact, we fear that she’ll simply cause trouble for you, Lord Phillip,” my father said.

"I simply require Viola to remain by my side. I'll do my best to make sure that she can live comfortably, even in her current condition. I'll treasure her dearly, and I am prepared to do everything I can for her. I vow to protect her for the rest of our lives," Lord Phillip said solemnly. It was like he was proposing. Then, at the very end, he added clearly and unambiguously, "I love her."

It seemed that my parents were deeply touched by his proclamations, and my mother was even dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. Of course, I knew that everything he'd said was a lie. The only thing that impressed me was the fact that he could say so many words in one go.

"I understand your feelings, Lord Phillip. Viola, what do you think?" my father asked.

"Hmm? Uh, I..."

"Earlier, she agreed to stay by my side as well."

"Oh, is that so? Well, I'm glad to hear that."

Was he talking about how I'd nodded when he said, "So don't try to leave my side again"? There were a lot of things I wanted to say about all this, but the sight of my parents' relieved expressions made me hold my tongue.

Finally, while still standing before my parents, Lord Phillip made plans for us to meet next week and then left the house.

A week later, as I sat in a carriage headed toward Duke Lawrenson's mansion, I struggled to come up with a solution to my problems. Under the current circumstances, it was impossible to immediately break off the engagement with Lord Phillip. After giving it some thought, I decided that the best thing to do for now was to find out why he came up with such a lie.

Eventually, we reached the mansion. Normally I'd be guided to the parlor, but for some reason today I was taken to Lord Phillip's room. It must have been several years since I'd last stepped foot inside of it. There were two high-quality sofas facing each other, and I sat down on one of them. Strangely, instead of sitting opposite of me, he sat down next to me.

"We used to converse with each other like this all the time," he said.

The lies flowed out of him today as easily as they had the previous week. As the maid prepared our tea, my eyes drifted around the room and I noticed a portrait displayed on the wall. It was a painting of Lord Phillip, Duke and Duchess Lawrenson, and Lord Cedric, who was Lord Phillip's little brother. In the portrait, Lord Phillip's long, navy blue hair was tied up, and it felt nostalgic to see.

"That was when I was thirteen," Lord Phillip told me when he noticed me staring at the picture.

That reminds me. Why did he cut that beautiful, long hair of his? One day, he'd suddenly sliced off his hair, shortening it until the tips barely grazed his shoulders, about the same length it was now. In his case, he looked good no matter what kind of hairstyle he had.

"I cut my hair."

"Yes, it looks wonderful."

"I see..."

If I recalled correctly, that conversation was right after he cut it. It was such an obvious change that I'd even felt confused as to why he'd gone out of his way to tell me about it. Since his only response had been "I see" before he stood up and left, I wasn't able to ask him for the reason at the time. But wasn't this the perfect chance to do so, especially since I was pretending I'd lost my memories? With that thought in mind, I opened my mouth.

"So you used to have long hair when you were younger. You're still very handsome now, but why did you cut it short?"

"Because you said that you like shorter hair."

"I see. So it was because I... Wait, I said that?"

"That's right." Lord Phillip nodded in affirmation when I unconsciously asked him the question again.

I could say for a fact that I had absolutely no memory of ever stating something like that to him. He was once again taking advantage of my fake

amnesia to make up some random lie.

As I chalked it up to that, he continued, “To be more precise, I overheard you saying that to a friend.”

“To...a friend?”

“Yes, when Lady Preston asked you if you preferred long or short hair, you told her that you liked short hair.”

Lady Preston, or Jamie Preston, was the daughter of Marquess Preston, as well as my best friend. I rifled through my memories, wondering if what Lord Phillip was describing really *did* happen. As I did so, I bit back a sound of surprise.

What he said was true. A few years ago, Jamie did indeed ask me something like that while we were at a soiree. Jamie was the assertive type when it came to pursuing a partner, and she’d said something about deciding on what men she’d talk to depending on my answer. Since a male acquaintance that Jamie had called “cute” in the past had been attending that particular soiree, I’d answered “short hair” since that was what he had. While I did like short hair more, I was of the opinion that the hairstyle itself didn’t matter, so long as it suited the person.

Hadn’t Lord Phillip excused himself around then? I never thought he’d heard our conversation. And now that I thought about it, he’d cut his hair around that time. So that meant...

“Th-That’s the only reason you cut it short?”

“For me, there is no greater reason.”

Just because of a random opinion I’d thoughtlessly expressed, he cut off all of that beautiful hair he’d spent so long growing out?

“Why...?”

“I wanted you to like me more, even if only a little.” After he said that, he gave me a gentle smile, and my heart skipped a beat at the sight.

Why would he say such a thing? For some reason, I couldn’t chalk this up to one of Lord Phillip’s nonsensical lies like I could before. Even so, there was no

way his words were true.

Because if they are true, then doesn't that sound like Lord Phillip really and truly is in love with me?

I Really Don't Know

As my mind reeled from the nonstop train of unexpected revelations, a knock at the door sounded through the quiet room.

"Lord Phillip, Duke Lawrenson is calling for you."

"All right..."

Even that short exchange was enough to make me feel relieved.

"I apologize, but could you wait here a little? All you need to do is remain in my room. You can do whatever else you wish."

"I understand."

After I said that, Lord Phillip's eyes softened. Though he looked reluctant to do so, he left the room. I was the only one remaining in the spacious room, so I decided to look around. Lord Phillip didn't have a lot of things, and the interior design was quite simple. It was a room that accurately reflected the kind of person he was. As I walked around and stared at the high-quality, fashionable furniture and decorations, I eventually reached a large bookcase.

Thick books that I could never hope to understand lined the shelves. Even reading their titles made my head hurt. I scanned the bookshelf in search of something that I could read and then saw something strange in the corner of the bottom shelf.

There was a strange cloth covering a part of it, and only a part of it. Clearly, Lord Phillip was hiding something. At least, that was what my feminine intuition was telling me. Perhaps there was a book that Lord Phillip didn't want anyone discovering? He was a man, after all, so the chances of that seemed rather high.

Since I couldn't predict what he would do, I needed to find a weakness to use against him, just in case. He'd said I could do whatever I wanted, so without a hint of reservation and with my heart pounding in my chest, I carefully removed the cloth. What I saw took the words from my mind.

Underneath the cloth, several books on love were lined up on the shelf. I could see titles like *Ten Ways to Become Loved; Surefire Strategies for Love: New Edition; Hypnosis for Dummies*; and *Bad at Socializing? Not Anymore!* All of them looked battered and well-read, and there were even tabs sticking out from the sides.

I'd expected to see something I shouldn't look at or talk about, but this was beyond my imagination. I quietly placed the cloth back over the books. None of the books were ones I thought he'd ever read, but wasn't there one in particular that was kind of strange? There was an indescribable feeling in my chest as I sat back down on the sofa. The moment my behind touched the cushion, the door swung open again as Lord Phillip returned.

"Sorry for leaving you alone for so long. It should be fine now."

"R-Right."

He sat down next to me as if it were natural and personally refilled my lukewarm tea with more from the teapot. I stared at his beautifully sculpted face and started to realize that I'd never understood a single thing about him, even though we'd been engaged for eighteen years.

I'd thought of my fiancé as a perfect being, one far out of my reach. But at the thought of him flipping through those books with a studious expression on his face, I couldn't stop my lips from twisting upward. Lord Phillip noticed and, after blinking in confusion, smiled happily for some reason.

"Adorable," he said.

The Lord Phillip, saying that to me? This was the first time he ever said something like that to me, and I couldn't believe my ears. Every birthday, when I would dress up in elegant dresses and receive compliments about how much I looked like a princess, his only response was to stare at me for a little while and remain silent.

Just where did this come from? The word made me feel warm inside, but I couldn't let my guard down.

"Do you have any plans for next weekend?" Lord Phillip asked.

"N-No, I don't..."

“I’m glad to hear that. Would you care to go out with me?”

“Huh?”

“I’ll pick you up from House Westley the day of.”

In the end, I never figured out just why he was lying. In fact, the mystery only deepened. Not only that, but I also ended up agreeing to meet him yet again. I was at a complete and utter loss, and I went home with my head down at the sad state of it all.

It was the weekend. Lord Phillip had come to pick me up from my house, and we sat in a carriage together as it rumbled down the path. I asked him where we were going, and his expression grew serious.

“I read that retracing your actions can help recover your memories.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. So, I thought we could go to a river that we visited together previously to help you retrieve your memories, Viola.”

“A river...?”

Lord Phillip and I had never gone to a river before. In fact, I had never even seen a river up close. As expected, he was starting the day off with his usual bizarre lies. I could never let my guard down around him. But I wondered why Lord Phillip chose to visit a river today. If we had to go look at a body of water, I’d much prefer a lake.

Now that I thought about it, it was rare for us to go on outings together. Before, we would both attend social gatherings at most. The only time we went out privately together was to watch an opera at Duke Lawrenson’s suggestion.

“A-Are we really going to the river?”

“Yes. We’re going to go fishing.”

“F-Fishing.”

Just what was Lord Phillip thinking? Why did he decide to take me fishing? No matter how many times those questions ran through my head, I was unable to

come up with an answer. The only thing I knew for certain was that Lord Phillip had no intention of helping me reclaim my memories.

The carriage mercilessly continued its journey to the nearby river. My maids would surely cry if they knew where we were headed today. When I informed them of my outing with Lord Phillip, they'd said, "Oh my, a date? I'm sure Lord Phillip will take you somewhere fancy and sophisticated," and did their best to dress me up.

And so it was time for the curtains to rise on this ludicrous day, in which we would use an impossible method to awaken memories that had never been lost.

A Kind Gaze

Eventually, the carriage arrived at the river, and we both got out. There was a wooden path that would take us directly to the riverside; someone had even taken the time to place a carpet over it, which was a relief. It looked like my dress and shoes wouldn't get dirty. There were even two comfortable-looking chairs placed by the water. Just how much preparation had gone into this trip? I couldn't help but wonder why Lord Phillip was so persistent on fishing that he would go through all this effort.

"Viola, here."

After we sat down, Lord Phillip handed me a professional-looking fishing rod. I gazed at it in bewilderment, only to notice that he was staring at me in surprise.

After a moment, Lord Phillip murmured, "I suppose you've forgotten how to do all this as well."

It sounded like he was trying to convince himself of something. But "forgotten"? This was my first time fishing. He was adhering so naturally to the script that he'd created in his head that I started to feel some measure of fear.

After he gave me a quick rundown on how to use the fishing rod, I lowered the hook and line into the water. Thanks to the parasol I had, it wasn't too bright, and the gentle breeze felt cool against my cheek. As I listened to the babbling of the river over the stones and the occasional song from the birds, I started to feel relaxed and at peace.

The usual silence between Lord Phillip and me didn't feel uncomfortable at all. When I first heard that we would be fishing at the river, I hadn't been too enthused, but it wasn't so bad once I gave it a try. In fact, I felt like this would become my new hobby.

"The fish aren't biting," I said.

It had been about thirty minutes since we started, but it didn't look like we were going to catch anything. It wasn't as if I really wanted to catch a fish, and I

was satisfied with simply lounging about and enjoying the fresh air. So I truly didn't mean anything by my remark.

But Lord Phillip suddenly turned around and looked behind us. I wondered if something had caught his attention, and stared at him blankly for a few minutes. Suddenly, a school of fish came swimming toward us from upstream.

"Hmm?"

I didn't know much about rivers or fish, but even I knew that the sight before my eyes was bizarre. It didn't feel natural.

"Viola, look at your rod," Lord Phillip said.

"Huh?"

I had been staring dumbfounded at the river, so it wasn't until Lord Phillip called out to me that I noticed my rod bending under the telltale weight of a hooked fish. I'd imagined that the pull of it would be much stronger than this. I still didn't know what was going on, but I hurriedly pulled back the fishing rod toward myself. The line came out of the water and at the end of it, a little fish about the size of my thumb.

"Phil, I caught one!"

Not only did some unseen force come into play but also the sole fish that I caught was tiny. Nonetheless, I felt extremely happy for some reason. I couldn't help but lose myself in my excitement and turned my gaze toward Lord Phillip next to me. As soon as I saw him, I felt my breath catch in my throat.

Lord Phillip's eyes were soft and gentle, and he was looking at me with a terribly kind expression. Despite myself, I stared back at him, taken by his beauty. From out of nowhere, the servants of House Lawrenson came bustling toward us, removed my too-small fish from the fishing rod, and put it inside a bucket. Then all of them applauded and congratulated me. It was truly embarrassing. I wished they would stop.

"Are you having fun?"

I nodded at Lord Phillip's sudden question, my cheeks hot and red. All he said was, "I'm glad," before he returned his gaze to the water.

Though I had my misgivings in the beginning, I ended up having quite a bit of fun. We caught a few more small fish and then moved to a nearby field. House Lawrenson's maids quickly and efficiently laid out a blanket for us, then prepared our lunch. It was hard to believe that we were eating outside with how rich the spread was.

Lord Phillip's movements were refined even while he ate. When I was a child, I had looked up to him and spent some time putting my all into practicing my table manners.

"It was delicious," I said.

"I see," Lord Phillip replied.

The maids even brought dessert for us after our lunch, as well as tea to finish everything off. As I enjoyed my tea, I heard a sweet meow. I looked around and then saw a kitten a short distance away, staring at us with her big round amber eyes.

"Sh-She's so cute! Come here!"

I spread my arms out, and the kitten tottered toward me. Her sheer adorableness made my chest feel full of love. As soon as the kitten made her way toward me, I stroked her on the head and she started to purr as if she enjoyed it. What an angelic creature.

"Phil, do you want to try hugging her too?"

"No, I'm fine with just watching you."

Now that I thought about it, I'd never seen him touch an animal. Even whenever I would pet dogs or cats, he would simply observe me from behind. Perhaps he wasn't really a fan of them? After a few more minutes of petting, the kitten walked away, satisfied by all the attention. I didn't want her to leave just yet, but I murmured, "Good luck out there," and watched her go. I suddenly thought of something.

"That kitten reminded me of you, Phil."

"Did...it?"

“Yes, she was very similar to you.”

The kitten’s fur had been a blue so dark and deep that it was almost black, and her eyes had been a gleaming gold. Her face had also been beautiful, much like his. Granted, the kitten was female, so that was a key difference.

“Come here! Hee hee...just kidding.”

The day had been so much more fun than I’d expected. So I was probably lost in the excitement of it all. After I said an uncharacteristic joke, I looked at Lord Phillip and then promptly found myself at a loss for words.

He looked taken aback, and his cheeks were strangely red. I’d thought that he would say, “No, I’m fine” like earlier and that this would all boil over. So I wasn’t sure how to react in the face of his unexpected response.

The silence made my heart race uncomfortably until it was broken by him slowly standing up and walking toward me. He sat down across from me, his face close to mine, and stared into my eyes with such passion that I was unable to look away.

What's...going on?

He hesitated for a moment, and then gently leaned forward until his forehead rested against my shoulder.

A Lying Ally

How did this happen?

Thanks to the heavy warmth on my shoulder, I couldn't relax at all. I froze, unsure of what to do, unable to move even a finger. Sometimes the wind blew toward us and messed up Lord Phillip's hair, tickling my neck with the soft strands. At the same time, a sweet scent would also waft toward me. I had no idea how long we sat like that for.

Eventually, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a maid approach us. She was holding a teapot in her hands and likely planned on refilling our cups. But as soon as she saw us, her face flushed crimson, and she turned back around.

Considering her reaction, she must've greatly misunderstood the situation. I had little doubt that she would spread misinformation to the other maids. I felt embarrassed at the prospect of meeting their eyes in the future. We couldn't sit like this forever, though, and I racked my brain for something to say to Lord Phillip. Before I could open my mouth, he beat me to it.

"Thank..."

"H-Hmm?"

"Thank you for coming today. It made me happy."

He murmured the words without raising his head from my shoulder. Why was he saying something like that at this moment?

All I could say in my state of confusion was, "I should be the one thanking you."

After a few more minutes, Lord Phillip slowly raised his head from my shoulder and suggested that we should leave. Then we returned to the carriage together, and I was dropped off at my home. Our eyes never met again for the rest of the night.

Three days after our outing, I was reading my favorite book in my room when someone knocked on my door and informed me that I had a guest. I wasn't expecting anyone today, and there were only so many people I knew who would drop by unannounced like this. It was probably Jamie, sore from a recent rejection. With that prediction in mind, I descended the stairs.

The guest was waiting in the reception room rather than the parlor, which made me tilt my head. But I made my way over to the reception room anyway. As soon as I saw who was waiting for me inside, I unconsciously stepped back, for the person I wanted to see the least right now was staring right at me.

"Hey there, my adorable little Vivi. I missed you." He was sitting on the couch with his long legs crossed, and he was waving his hand at me.

Why is he here?

"I'm sorry... Who are you?"

Upon hearing my question, his eyes widened before he smiled irritantly brightly at me.

"Ah, right, you don't have your memories or something, huh? Your father told me all about it just now. Man, you have it rough. I'm your cousin, Rex."

Rex Dowland, my cousin, was five years my senior and the son of an earl. People consider him the kind of genius who was born once every generation or something, and he was working as a civil official within the royal palace. Not only that, but he was sociable and handsome, and with blond hair and green eyes, he was incredibly popular with the ladies.

However, I never liked Rex very much. He had a rotten personality. Despite that, Lord Phillip and Rex had been friends since childhood, and they still apparently met up every once in a while for meals.

"Are you all right? I hear that injuries can suddenly start to hurt after a while, so you should watch out for that. My old wounds, for example, still bother me from time to time."

"Thank you...for your concern..."

Rex was so laid-back that it was like he thought this was *his* house. He looked

at the maid and said, “Ah, you don’t have to pour tea for Viola.”

“Huh?”

“We’re going to go to her room now, so she’ll take it there.”

“Wait, what—?”

Rex stood up from the couch after making his presumptuous order, then walked up to me while I was still frozen at the entrance. He gave me a small smile and then leaned forward to whisper in my ear.

“You’re the one who’ll be the most inconvenienced if we continue to chat here, aren’t you?”

I immediately understood everything when I heard those words. So I quietly followed him back to my room.

This is why I didn’t want to see him.

When we got there, Rex had the maid prepare our tea, then ordered her to leave. I requested that the maid follow his command and then let out a deep sigh.

“Hey, so why are you pretending to be an amnesiac?”

He asked me with a smile the moment we were alone. His eyes shimmered like a child’s when presented with a new toy.

I never thought I’d be able to pull the wool over his eyes, so I gave up and asked, “When did you notice I was faking it?”

“As soon as I saw your face. When you saw me, you grimaced a little. If you didn’t have your memories, then that would’ve been the first time we met, right? No woman would ever make the face you did upon seeing a man as handsome as I.”

Despite how ridiculous the claim was, he was completely serious.

“Well, that was a joke...orrrr maybe it wasn’t. Anyway, I became certain of it after we actually spoke. When I mentioned my old wounds, you looked at my left arm without hesitation, even though I didn’t even bring up where I’d gotten hurt.”

I couldn't refute that, and he continued, "You will never be able to deceive me, especially at the level you operate. I'm actually surprised no one else has seen through you. Miracles *do* exist!"

I had no response, but Rex kept pestering me, asking me why I was doing all this. So I put my big girl boots on and decided to tell him everything. It was far better to do that than risk him getting upset at my silence.

I told him about how I wanted to break off my engagement by feigning amnesia, as well as how Lord Phillip started coming up with bizarre lies. After I finished telling him everything, Rex began to laugh, clutching his stomach. He was even crying at how funny this all was to him.

"Why didn't you tell me this earlier? This is hilarious!" he said, putting the blame on me.

I wished that he would put a hand to his chest and reflect on his own actions before asking me that.

"But still, he sure made a bold move," Rex muttered as he wiped away some of his tears. "It wouldn't be strange if Phillip also saw through your terrible acting, but I guess that's a bit of a tall order. He always seems to lose his brain cells around you."

"Hmm?"

"Oh, I guess that explains why he asked me the other day about date spots you might like."

Rex nodded to himself after he said that, and I looked up at him. When I asked what he said in response to Lord Phillip's question, he laughed and gave me the answer.

"I didn't know where you like to go, and I figured Phillip didn't have the guts to invite you out. So I told him that you try to keep it a secret, but you actually really enjoy fishing at the river. Annnd I may have told him that you're really into hunting for insects in the forest."

"Wait a second."

Seriously, can he stop for once? So it turned out Lord Phillip suddenly inviting

me to go fishing at the river was *Rex*'s fault. I was eternally grateful that Lord Phillip didn't go with the second option. Lord Phillip chose the wrong person to ask to begin with, and he should know better than to never take *Rex*'s idiotic jokes seriously by now. There was something seriously wrong with these two. Granted, fishing *had* been pretty fun.

This meant that when Lord Phillip took me fishing the other day, he had been acting out of a genuine desire for me to have a good time. It made sense, then, why he had looked honestly surprised when he saw my inability to use a fishing rod. I'd thought that he was an amazing actor, but that wasn't the case at all.

A little bit of guilt at how suspicious I was of him started to well up inside of me. But he *had* actually lied to me several times now. There was no longer any way for me to tell what was true and what was false. I told *Rex* that we really *did* go fishing thanks to his lie, and he started to laugh loudly again.

"H-Ha ha, I-I can't breathe! Ahh, man, Phillip's the best."

"Please stop messing with us."

Once he finally calmed down, he took a sip of tea and then looked at me. "So, why do you wanna break off your engagement again?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"It's not like you hate the guy or anything, right?"

I *had* told Lord Phillip that I hated him in the past...but that wasn't how I felt anymore. I wanted to separate from him because I knew he hated me and that I wouldn't be a suitable partner for him. More importantly, every time we were close to each other, the air was so awkward that it was suffocating.

Seeing my silence as I thought about Lord Phillip, *Rex*'s lips curled in a smile. "Well, he'll never do you any harm, so you can rest easy on that. It's not every day you get a chance like this, so instead of reading books like *that*, why don't you approach this as a literal blank slate and try falling in love?"

Rex's eyes turned to the book that I was reading earlier that I had left out on my desk. It was an incredibly fluffy and sweet romance novel titled *A Prince Just for Me* ≡. I wished that he would mind his own business.

“Oh, shut up,” I said. “Stop acting like this doesn’t concern you.”

“Because it *doesn’t* concern me. Even so, I’m on your side, Viola.”

Liar. Instead of saying that out loud, I sighed and then glared at him. “Why’d you even come here today anyway?”

“Oh, right. I almost forgot.” He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out an invitation.

Upon seeing Rex’s big smile and the wax seal on the envelope, I started to get an incredibly bad feeling.

Completely Unexpected

"It's an invitation for Prince Abel's birthday party. It's three weeks from now, and apparently he wants you and Phillip to attend together."

Upon hearing Rex's words, I buried my face into my hands. Prince Abel was the next in line for the throne, so this was obviously not an invitation that I could turn down. For some reason, even Prince Abel enjoyed Rex's company.

What Rex said earlier was right. I didn't have the confidence to mingle in a large crowd when I was so pitiful at pretending to be an amnesiac. Rex had been able to see through it immediately, after all. When I first came up with this plan, faking my amnesia should've ended right after the accident, on the day that I "first" met Lord Phillip.

I couldn't help but murmur, "I...wonder if I should stop pretending that I have amnesia," and Rex let out a deep sigh.

"You haven't accomplished a single thing, yet you're quick to drop everything and run. That's a bad habit of yours. You can always pretend to remember everything, but you'll probably never get a second chance at pretending you lost your memories. Don't you think that's a waste? You even tricked your parents."

"Huh?"

"You haven't broken off your engagement. Not only that, you still don't even know why Phillip's been lying to you, right? Are you sure you want to end things here? I assure you, you can still keep up the charade, Viola. So why don't we work together a little more? All right?"

Why did I have to get lectured and encouraged by this man? No, things were not "all right." But, though I hated to admit it, nothing he said was wrong. If anyone else had been the one to say all that, then I would've had a much easier time accepting it. I lost my nerve in the heat of the moment, but the reminder that I had even fooled my parents brought it back.

“Sorry... I think I misjudged the situation...”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. So anyway, I’m going to be your acting coach from now on.”

“What?”

“Okay, so pretend that I’m a noble you’re acquainted with.”

After that, Rex’s incredibly strict acting lesson began. Halfway through, I started to lose sight of what I wanted to do and what I was aspiring toward. But thanks to his advice, my ability to pretend that I had amnesia greatly improved.

A week had passed since then. At the moment, I was walking through the streets of the capital at Lord Phillip’s side. Apparently, Rex had told Lord Phillip that since we would be attending Prince Abel’s party together, he should use the occasion to buy me a dress.

Truthfully, I didn’t want to accept a gift from Lord Phillip. After all, I was planning on breaking off the engagement, so receiving something from him didn’t sit well with me. But Rex refused to listen and insisted that I go. He pointed out that I shouldn’t even worry about it because it was weird that I had *never* received a proper gift in eighteen years of engagement. Just what did Rex think he was to us?

Ever since Lord Phillip started making up strange lies, it was a little easier to talk to him than before. Plus, thanks to Rex’s training, I was no longer as worried about accidentally outing myself. In the end, I accepted Lord Phillip’s invitation and now, here I was. In the worst-case scenario, I could always return the money to him at a later date.

Lord Phillip took me to Madam Rico’s shop. It was the most popular dress shop in the capital, and it was said that you had to wait half a year before you could think about ordering something from there. The power and influence of House Lawrenson was truly impressive. He bought me a beautiful dress that was said to be the cutting edge of fashion.

“Thank you so much, not only for the dress but also the shoes and jewelry. I’ll take good care of them.”

“Right.”

On our way back to the carriage, we saw a cute little café that had an awful lot of people coming and going. According to the board that was propped up in front of it, it was a café specifically for couples.

This was not a place that I would ever visit. With that thought in mind, I was about to walk past it when I noticed that Lord Phillip had stopped.

“This was your favorite café,” he said. “Let’s go inside.”

He came up with his lies as naturally as breathing, and today was no exception. I had never been to this place before. However, I couldn’t call him out on his fib, so I followed him inside. It was only after I did so that I remembered Jamie mentioning that the pancakes here were absolutely amazing. No matter what kind of café it was, it was still an eating establishment at the end of the day. I decided to not worry too much about anything and simply enjoy a delicious meal before heading home.

The café was spacious, but all of the tables were filled up. It was clearly a popular locale. The table that the waitress took us to had a rather cramped love seat next to it. It was probably part of the owners’ unnecessary show of consideration for couples that wanted to canoodle. All of the tables were really close to each other, likely so that the owners could maximize how many patrons could dine at once.

The pancake combo was the most popular item on the menu, and both Lord Phillip and I ordered it. I didn’t expect it, but it seemed that Lord Phillip enjoyed sweets as well. The pancakes and tea were served at once, and my heart started to beat faster with anticipation when I saw them. The pancake was presented so adorably, with mountains of fruit piled on top.

“Speaking of which, I heard Barbara broke up with her lover.”

“Oh? What happened? They looked like they were getting along.”

As Lord Phillip and I silently ate our pancakes, we overheard a nearby couple’s conversation. Even though I knew I shouldn’t eavesdrop, I couldn’t help but focus my attention on them.

“I heard that her boyfriend was a horrid liar.”

At that moment, Lord Phillip's shoulders jumped. When I saw that, I started to cough, and I hurriedly drank from my teacup.

"Yeah... It's hard to trust someone who lies all the time."

"And it wasn't just one or two lies either."

"I can't blame her for breaking up with him, then."

Oof. It's starting to get uncomfortable for me too. I glanced at Lord Phillip to see how he was doing, and he was completely frozen up, knife and fork in hand.

"I hate liars."

"Me too. People who can lie to their loved ones are scum. I can't believe anyone could do such a thing."

"In the end, all they care about is themselves. That's why they can do something so cruel."

"Yeah. To put it frankly, they're utter trash."

The atmosphere of all the couples around us was sweeter than the whipped cream covering the pancakes. But after we had been unexpectedly put through the wringer known as "common sense," the air at our table, which was occupied by two pieces of human garbage, was as gloomy as a funeral.

"Viola."

"Y-Yes?"

When Lord Phillip eventually called my name, I looked up at him and met his worried, golden eyes.

"Do you...um...dislike men who lie?"

I don't want to say it, but if you know someone who likes the kind of men who lie, then I'd love for you to introduce me to them.

"Well, I...don't particularly like them..."

"I...see..."

But I wasn't the one to talk, so I hesitantly left my answer at that. We managed to finish our pancakes and quickly left the café.

“Big brother? Is something the matter?”

“I...thought I saw Viola and Phillip.”

Upon hearing that, the young girl laughed loudly.

“Oh, come on, you must be seeing things. There’s no way those two would come to a place like this.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“Besides, I heard that Lady Viola got in an accident. I wonder if she’s all right? Hee hee, but I’m glad that I was able to come here with you, big brother! Everyone kept looking at me like they were *so* jealous. I’m so lucky to have such a handsome brother.”

The girl smiled like she was having the time of her life. In contrast, the man sitting across from her—the man she referred to as her brother—continued to zone out for the rest of their time in the café.

No Matter What Happens

There were still five days until Prince Abel's birthday party. Today, I received an invitation to House Lawrenson's mansion. Apparently, Lord Cedric, Lord Phillip's little brother, heard about my amnesia and wished to speak with me. He was two years younger than us and had always been kind to me.

But on the way to House Lawrenson's mansion, there was an awful traffic jam, and I ended up being late by over an hour and a half. I eventually made it there and was hurriedly ushered inside the house. Because Lord Cedric would be having tea with us, we would be in the reception room.

"I apologize for the wait," I said as I walked in.

Lord Phillip was sitting at a small table at the back of the reception room, but he didn't look up even though I announced myself. He was holding a pen in his hand, so he was likely doing some sort of work. Considering that I was tardy, I didn't want to get in his way. I quietly informed the maid that she could come back and prepare our tea after Lord Cedric arrived, then sat down some distance away from Lord Phillip.

The room remained silent. I stared at Lord Phillip as he continued to work at the table, his face deadly serious. He'd tucked his hair, which was a little longer than how most men cut theirs, behind his ear, and it made him look so good that my heart skipped a beat. He looked like he was deep in concentration, but sometimes he would suddenly sigh and look off into the distance. Just as I was thinking that he must be in the midst of some extremely difficult work, I noticed something.

A piece of paper had fallen by my feet. It must be something related to what he was doing, so I picked it up for him. But when I saw what was written on it, I found myself at a loss for words. My name had been written on it countless times, and the handwriting was Lord Phillip's.

Is this...some new curse? And this actually looks like he wrote it on an important document.

I didn't have the courage to hand him back this creepy piece of paper. I had inadvertently and unmistakably looked at something that should've never reached my eyes. For now, I decided to hide it by slipping it under the sofa cushions. As soon as I finished, a bright voice rang out through the room.

"Viola, thank you for coming by!"

"R-Right."

"Huh?"

Lord Cedric's arrival was what finally clued Lord Phillip to my presence. As soon as he saw me sitting on the sofa, he stood up and walked toward me.

"When did you arrive?"

"About ten minutes ago. I did call out to you, but you seemed busy..."

"I'm sorry. I was lost in thought."

I told him that I was late thanks to a traffic jam and apologized. For some reason, his response was to make a terribly relieved expression.

Afterward, Lord Cedric introduced himself to me as if this was our first meeting, and then the three of us sat around the table. We made casual conversation as we drank our tea. Though Lord Cedric and I were the only people talking.

"Oh, speaking of which, my acquaintance went to a soiree last week. Phil, I heard that you were surrounded by the other noble ladies as if they were about to attack you."

Hearing that reminded me for the first time that my accident had happened on the same night as the soiree Lord Phillip invited me to. It seemed that he had been worried about my condition and went by himself without mentioning it to me. I felt abashed that I hadn't noticed his consideration.

"There were lots of rumors about your accident, Viola. People were wondering if you scarred your face, or if you were left unable to walk. It seemed that people were looking forward to Phil breaking off the engagement."

I hadn't known about that at all, and I wasn't able to hide my surprise. The nobles had always been a gossipy lot, and they would often spread rumors that

had absolutely no basis in reality. Even to an outsider, I must have never looked like I was close with Lord Phillip, which must have made the rumors even worse.

Despite the fact that Lord Phillip had me as his fiancée, he had always been intensely popular. Everything about him, from his lineage to his looks to his smarts, was perfect. The only flaw he had was his attitude toward women, but it was undeniable that there were a number of girls who enjoyed that about him as well.

“And then, Phil got so mad.”

“Huh?”

“‘No matter what happens with Viola, it won’t affect my feelings toward her. The only future in my cards is one spent at her side, and if I can’t have that, then I shall spend the rest of my life alone.’ That was what he said! We were all so shocked to hear it.”

Why did he say something like that?

I looked at Lord Phillip, eyes wide, and he simply looked away after berating Lord Cedric about saying unnecessary things.

If only I hadn’t seen that cursed document earlier, then I surely would have felt touched by his words, even if I knew they were nothing more than pretty lies. Just what was up with that piece of paper? I couldn’t stop wondering about it. Plus Lord Phillip saying all that in a public space would only bring more attention to us. I felt more nervous than before about next week’s party.

Lord Cedric moved to sit next to me and then held my hand. Lord Phillip called out to him, but Lord Cedric ignored him.

“Viola, tell me if there’s anything that bothers you, all right?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Speaking of which, you feel different from before. You seem more mature now.”

My plan to change up my hairstyle and fashion was still in motion. Even Rex praised me on it, though that was the only thing he thought was good. It seemed that physical appearance was *extremely* important when it came to

how others perceived you.

“You think?”

“Yeah. You’re prettier now.”

Just when I was about to thank him for that compliment, Lord Phillip suddenly spoke up.

“She’s always been pretty.”

Lord Cedric looked more surprised than I was to hear Lord Phillip say that.

“Ph-Phil, did you hit your head as well...?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“The Phil I know isn’t the kind of person who would casually say such a thing in front of the person he’s talking about.”

Yeah, the Lord Phillip I know isn’t that kind of person either.

“Hmm? What’s this...? Huh?! Yikes!”

What Lord Cedric had found and was holding in his hand was the cursed paper from earlier. When Lord Phillip saw that, he jumped to his feet and snatched it away from Lord Cedric.

“Viola...didn’t see anything, did she?”

“I don’t think so.”

Of course, I couldn’t say that I saw it as clear as day. It really hadn’t been something for my eyes.

“Hey, what *is* that? I’m seriously judging you.”

“While I was waiting...I kept thinking about her and wondering if something happened, or if she didn’t want to come anymore. I must’ve been unconsciously writing her name.”

“You’re too overbearing.”

Their whispered conversation didn’t reach my ears.

“In any case, I’ve also been invited to the prince’s birthday party, so if something happens, just come find me,” Lord Cedric said.

"I'll be with you as well, so don't worry," Lord Phillip added.

"Thank you for your consideration, both of you."

Then, before we knew it, it was time for the big day.

Things Set in Motion

On the day of the birthday party, I wore the dress, shoes, and jewelry that Lord Phillip gifted me. He came right on time to pick me up, and I went out to greet him.

“You’re beautiful,” he said when he saw me. Oddly enough, he also added, “Thank you.”

He’d often come to pick me up for parties in the past, but this was the first time that he said something like this. I wasn’t sure how to act in the face of such uncharacteristic behavior, and I felt oddly embarrassed by it all too. I thanked him as well and took the hand he offered me before I hopped into the carriage with him.

We reached the palace and entered the ballroom where the party was held. I immediately felt the piercing gazes of the guests, and the weight of their curiosity was heavy on my shoulders. Even worse, quite a number of people looked up and down my entire body, clearly trying to observe something from it. It was probably as Lord Cedric said, and they were searching for the injuries that I was rumored to have suffered.

“Viola, are you all right?”

I felt terribly uncomfortable at all the attention, and then Lord Phillip had called out to me in a kind voice. Strangely enough, hearing him ask about me made my heart feel lighter.

“Yes, I’m fine. Thank you.”

Upon hearing my reply, his face softened into a gentle smile. Together, we congratulated the prince on his birthday and did the bare minimum of greetings to the other nobles. Then we met up with Rex, who was surrounded by a large number of women. He said something ridiculous about how if there were two of him, then we could achieve world peace, so I ignored him.

As we conversed, I heard someone say from behind me, “Oh? If it isn’t Lady

Viola. Long time no see.”

I didn’t even have to turn around. I knew exactly who it was from the voice.

“I heard that you got in an accident, but you look plenty healthy,” the woman behind me continued with a soft huff of laughter.

She was Lady Natalia, daughter of Marquess Hackman. Ever since we were children, she had been in love with Lord Phillip, which was why she was particularly harsh toward me. As well, she’d told me in the past how there was nothing about me that was a fitting match for Lord Phillip.

I stood silently, feigning confusion. This was an act that Rex himself had taught me. Then, after a few moments, Lady Natalia started to look a little worried, and she said, “Why aren’t you saying anything? Does it hurt somewhere?”

That was right. Lady Natalia wasn’t a bad person at heart.

“I’m sorry. As a result of my accident, I’ve lost my memories...”

“Huh? You *must* be joking.”

“It’s true. I don’t remember a single thing.” I said, in the saddest tone I could muster.

She blinked several times, her long lashes fluttering, then she glared at me. “I see... I know what you’re trying to do.”

“What?”

“You’re just doing this so you can monopolize Lord Phillip’s attention, aren’t you?” She announced her hypothesis in a loud and confident tone. Thanks to the volume of her voice, all of the other guests turned to look at us. I really wished she would stop.

“Is that...true?” Lord Phillip asked.

“It is not,” I replied immediately.

I also wished that Lord Phillip wouldn’t get swept away by Lady Natalia’s enthusiasm. I could hear Rex desperately trying to hold back his laughter, but his snorts were still audible behind my back.

“You’re truly a sly woman...” Lady Natalia growled. “I can’t let my guard down around you at all.”

“Um, this is a misunderstanding.”

“I will *never* believe that you have amnesia!”

“Natalia, enough.”

As soon as Lord Phillip said that, Lady Natalia fell silent with her shoulders hunched. But she immediately recovered and announced, “I’m going to rip that mask off her face!” before she stalked away, her frilly dress billowing around her with every step.

Why did she even come talk to us? The reasoning she gave for why I was pretending to have amnesia was completely off the mark. But it was a little scary how she’d completely convinced herself that it was all an act. Granted, it *was*. I had to tighten up my guard around her in the future and watch for anything she might try to pull.

“She’s as eccentric as ever. I like it when she’s around, though, because she’s hilarious,” Rex said.

All I could think about was how much I wanted to leave.

I heaved a heavy sigh as I looked around the hall. After the tempestuous Lady Natalia left, the most popular bachelor in high society showed up, and all of the noble ladies rushed toward him with the enthusiasm of rampaging boars. They swept me away in their excitement, and as a result, I became separated from Lord Phillip.

It would likely be difficult for us to find each other again. The spacious hall was filled from corner to corner with people. In times like this, it was better to stay in one spot than run around trying to find the other person. With that in mind, I quietly made my way over to the wall.

Without Lord Phillip by my side, I could feel everyone’s curious looks—so intense, as if they were boring holes into my body. It was so irritating that I couldn’t hold back my sigh. That was when I heard a soft voice call out to me.

“Good evening.”

I looked up, and when I saw who was standing before me, I was so shocked that I almost forgot to keep up my act.

“I heard that you lost your memories, so I presume that you don’t know who I am?”

“Yes. My apologies...”

After I said that, he smiled awkwardly, eyes crinkling at the corners. “My name is Cyril Crane. We were classmates; no, we were friends back in school.”

“Oh, I...see.”

Lord Cyril wasn’t lying.



It was true that during our school years, we had plenty of chances to hang out with each other. I, too, had been under the impression that the two of us were close. However, the last time we spoke to each other wouldn't leave my mind.

"I can no longer think of you as a friend, Viola."

That was the last thing he ever said to me, and it was precisely because of our last conversation that I was surprised he could speak to me so casually. Lord Cyril, son of Marquess Crane, and his younger sister were a pair of siblings famous for their beauty even amid the rest of high society. They had eye-catching silver hair that glowed under the lights and eyes that shined like emeralds. These traits only accentuated their naturally good looks.

"I want to help you get your memories back, and I'd love it if we could converse like this in the future. Would that be all right with you?"

"Huh? Well, it's not...*not* all right..."

"I'm glad to hear that," he said with a relieved smile. His entire face lit up with the expression and from the corner of my eye, I could see unfamiliar noble ladies blushing when they saw Lord Cyril's face.

I had all of my memories, of course, but I had no idea what was going through his head. It was taking all I had to hide my confusion.

"I'm sorry... I've fallen in love with you."

Just one year ago, during my last conversation with Lord Cyril, he had confessed that to me.

Vague and Unconfident

“Oh, right. Have you heard? There’s gonna be a class reunion next month.”

“This is the first time I’m hearing about this.”

“I plan on going, so why don’t you come with, Viola? Otherwise, there’s no telling the next time we see each other.” Lord Cyril smiled wryly after he said that.

Even today’s party was exhausting, so the last thing I wanted to do was go to a party full of people who knew me. How should I reject him? As I started to ponder that, a cute but irritated voice rang out through the hall.

“Big brother! Jeez, I was searching for you *everywhere*! Why did you go running off? If you’re not by my side, then the plebs will talk to me, and they’re so annoy— Oh! Lady Viola! It’s a pleasure to see you.”

Lady Laura, Lord Cyril’s younger sister, smiled at me with the face of an angel after she said that. We weren’t close, though we were friendly enough that we would exchange greetings whenever we met at one of these parties. So hearing her adorable voice say words like “plebs” and “annoying” was quite shocking, even if I didn’t let it show on my face.

“I’m Laura, Cyril’s younger sister. I heard that you’ve lost your memories as a result of an accident, Lady Viola. If there’s anything we can do to help, please feel free to let us know.”

“Thank you for your consideration.”

Laura’s kindness was touching, and her appearance was distracting enough that I could sneak away from here without saying anything definite about the class reunion. But right before I started to leave, I heard someone call my voice. It was Lord Phillip, approaching us from behind.

“Phil.”

“Huh?”

I unconsciously said his name, and Lord Cyril reacted with surprise. Now that I thought about it, this was the first time that I called Lord Phillip by that nickname while we were in front of others. He wouldn't reply to me unless I called him that, so even though it was terribly embarrassing, it had started to become a habit.

"Hey, Viola—"

"Let's go back."

"Huh?"

Lord Phillip grabbed my hand after interrupting what Lord Cyril was about to say. I couldn't hide my surprise at his sudden desire to leave, and right after we found each other again. There might be an emergency that he needed to attend to, though.

"Hey, Phillip. You're not even going to greet me?"

"We saw each other just the other day, didn't we?"

"Let's chat for a bit. I want to talk with Viola too."

"No."

With that, Lord Phillip started walking toward the exit. What was wrong with him? Even as he tugged me along, I kept glancing behind me. The entire time, Lord Cyril continued to wave his hand at us, a gentle smile on his face.

"We'll see each other soon," he mouthed.

The atmosphere between Lord Phillip and I was slightly tense as we sat in the carriage home. We sat next to each other, our fingers still laced together for some reason. The feeling of his hand in mine made it hard to relax. Not only that, but Lord Phillip hadn't spoken a single word since we left the party.

"In regard to Cyril..." We were halfway home when Lord Phillip finally opened his mouth, and I nodded at him to continue. "I thought you hated him."

"Huh?"

That was the first lie he'd come up with all day. However, it was strange that he said it in such a vague and unconfident tone. I didn't hate Lord Cyril, though I

felt a little awkward around him. So I had no idea why Lord Phillip would come up with such a falsehood.

“So...you shouldn’t talk to him that much.” After he said that, Lord Phillip closed his mouth again and remained silent for the rest of the trip home.

Every year, our country held an event known as the Flower Festival. The towns would be decorated with flowers of all shapes and colors, and the streets would be teeming with people and stalls. Part of the festivities involved men presenting women with bouquets, and women gifting men with handkerchiefs embroidered with flowers.

Among the nobility, it was normal for engaged couples to present each other with gifts, even if they didn’t necessarily feel like lovers. However, Lord Phillip and I never participated in this custom. This was the one day that you could give an engaged person a gift without it counting as a faux pas. It was also common for people to pass around flowers to those who took care of them on a daily basis.

So every year, Lord Phillip received a countless number of handkerchiefs. Since it was rude to refuse a gift, he likely had a lifetime supply of handkerchiefs in storage somewhere.

More importantly, I was disastrously bad when it came to embroidery. During my school days, my teacher would constantly scold me and say that my skills were so shameful I’d never be able to get married. I practiced in secret, but I never saw much improvement. That was why, unlike other noblewomen, I was never busy in the days leading up to the Flower Festival.

“You’ve always liked plumerias, but do you still like them even without your memories?”

This year, Lord Phillip seemed determined to give me a bouquet. What could’ve inspired that decision? I didn’t recall telling him what kind of flowers I liked, but he was right. How did he find out? Incidentally, Lord Phillip had just finished giving me a nice, long explanation on what the Flower Festival was.

“The other day, our maids messed up the laundry and ruined all of my

handkerchiefs. Now I'm at a loss for what to do..."

"I see."

"Yes. If only I had a handkerchief with some sort of design on it..."

Lord Phillip kept indirectly hinting that he wanted an embroidered handkerchief, but the way he went about it was ridiculously obvious. I managed to bite back my instinctive reply of "Then why don't you buy one?" and simply replied, "I see."

I'm not sure why he suddenly wanted one, but it would be far better for the both of us if he were honest about his desires. In the end, I never promised him that I would give him one. He simply told me to keep my schedule free on the day of the Flower Festival and then went home, his shoulders slumped. Just what was that all about?

I pondered on Lord Phillip in silence. At the end of the day, we were still engaged. If he gave me a bouquet, then it would be rude of me if I didn't give him a handkerchief in return. So that same night, after hemming and hawing on the matter, I quietly pulled out the sewing kit that I had kept in the back of my drawer.

Treasure

It was the day of the Flower Festival, and my face was buried in my hands.

“There’s...simply no way I can give him something like this.”

That was how terrible the handkerchief I had embroidered looked. Even gazing upon it straight on was difficult. It had been a week since Lord Phillip invited me to the Flower Festival. During that time, I practiced as often as I could and started over countless times. It wasn’t because I wanted to give Lord Phillip something. I simply didn’t want to embarrass myself.

As a result, my hands were covered in so many wounds that they didn’t look like those of a noble lady’s at all. But what made me more upset was my own clumsiness. I was never able to create a handkerchief worthy of gifting to Lord Phillip.

“Lady Viola, is it about time to get ready?”

“Yes, please.”

I...worked so hard on it too...

No one would be happy upon receiving such a gift. For a moment, after I picked up the handkerchief, I wondered if I should simply toss it into the garbage bin. However, upon seeing the little flowers and animals on it, even if I was the only one who could recognize them as such, I couldn’t go through with it. I folded it up just in case and placed it into my bag.

“Um...what is this?”

“It’s a bouquet. I would also like you to take this.”

Lord Phillip came to pick me up right on time today, as usual, and handed me cute little earrings in the shape of a flower. The jewels embedded in them sparkled so brightly that I dearly wished to ask him how much they had cost. And though he described what he was giving me as a “bouquet,” there were so

many flowers in front of my house that it looked more like he planned on opening up a flower shop. In no world would one consider this a “bouquet”; it would be more commonly referred to as a “field of flowers.”

“Is it...not to your liking?”

“No, that’s not true! I’m...very happy.”

Upon seeing how I froze up, Lord Phillip gave me a very nervous look. I quickly told him I was happy with a smile, and he smiled back at me as if he was terribly relieved. In truth, I *was* happy to see his gifts. But there was no way I could hand him that ugly piece of fabric in exchange for all these flowers and an expensive piece of jewelry. Even so, it would be even more rude if I didn’t give him anything at all.

There was nothing I could do about it now though. I let the butlers and maids handle carrying all the flowers into the house, and I got in the carriage with Lord Phillip. After that, we walked around the town like we always did. The streets were livelier and more beautiful than usual, and it made my heart soar to be in the midst of all the excitement. We enjoyed some street food, watched some acrobatics, and shopped at a few of the stalls.

Lord Phillip was as quiet as ever today. Even so, our first Flower Festival together was a lot more fun than I’d imagined. Every time I turned my gaze toward something I was a little curious about, he immediately suggested that we go take a closer look. It seemed that he genuinely wanted me to have a good time.

That was why my guilt at being unable to give him anything in return kept eating away at me, weighing on my mind with every step.

All too soon, the sun started to set, and we returned to the carriage, sitting beside each other as it took us back home.

“I’m glad that we could go to the Flower Festival together. Thank you.” After he said that, Lord Phillip stopped talking and silence fell over the carriage.

Why wouldn’t he say anything about the handkerchief? Just the other day, he hadn’t been able to stop bringing it up, hinting at the fact he wanted one. If this was how he was going to handle things, then I would’ve preferred that he

directly requested one from me. In the end, the guilt was too much for me and I found myself opening my mouth.

“For you...”

“Hmm?”

“I! Embroidered...a handkerchief...for you...”

“Huh?” Lord Phillip’s mouth fell open for a moment, and then he murmured, “For me?”

Who else could I be talking to?

“But I messed up... I’m sorry. So, the next time we meet, could I thank you for today in another way?”

“Where’s the handkerchief that you worked on?”

“W-Well, I have it here with me...”

“I want it.” He said it without a hint of hesitation in his voice. Even when I warned him that I wasn’t joking when I said I messed up, he was adamant about wanting to take it off my hands.

In the face of his determination, I could no longer think of anything to say. So with one final warning of “I really did mess up,” I carefully took the hideous handkerchief out from my bag.

After I placed it into Lord Phillip’s hands, he opened it up and looked at it, seemingly deep in thought. Eventually he opened his mouth and said, “I think...the worm is quite adorable.”

“That’s supposed to be a bird.”



I learned my lesson: I really shouldn't do things that I'm not used to.

After grimacing in an awkward manner, Lord Phillip said, "It must be because of your amnesia. I hope you don't feel too down about it."

Not only did he hurt my feelings, but he even took the time to rub salt into the wound. I had my memories, so this was just my natural clumsiness. I hoped that he wouldn't say anything more on the matter.

I held my hand out and said, "Sorry, but could I have that back, please?"

In response, Lord Phillip stared at my ugly little handkerchief. "This is something that you made for me, isn't it?"

"Yes...it is..."

After I said that, Lord Phillip folded the handkerchief up as if it was a precious piece of art and carefully placed it in his pocket. Then he held my rough and bandaged hands in his. "Thank you, truly, from the bottom of my heart. This is the nicest gift I've ever received. I'll take good care of it for as long as I live," he said solemnly.

"Th-That's... You must be joking."

"I'm serious."

"It can't be true."

"It is. I'm delighted."

Lord Phillip was as big a liar as I was. I couldn't believe anything he said, no matter how much he tried to pass it off as the truth. Even so, hearing him say that made me want to cry.

"I'll carry it on my person every day. It'll be my treasure."

"I'm really embarrassed by it, so please keep it somewhere no one can see it. Don't carry it around."

There must be something wrong with him if he wanted to keep something like that in his pocket. There must be something *seriously* wrong with him if he considered such an ugly thing a treasure.

Yes... I knew all of that in my head. So there must have been something

wrong with me as well, as even for a second, I wished that everything he just said was the truth.

Everything Is So Confusing

A week had passed since the Flower Festival, and I had once again visited House Lawrenson's mansion to have tea with Lord Phillip. The reason that I was meeting him more frequently was due to yet another one of his blatant lies. He'd said that this was our usual frequency and that we'd even met more often than this. My parents said nothing to refute this. They'd simply smiled upon seeing how I was leaving the house more than I'd used to.

At my maid's suggestion, I wore the earrings that Lord Phillip gave me the other day. He was incredibly happy to see that and said that he would give me even more presents the next time. When he asked me if ten pairs of earrings would be enough, I politely but firmly turned him down. I only had two ears, after all.

Of course, the silences that plagued our meetings still continued. But oddly, they no longer felt as suffocating as they had in the past.

"Speaking of which, will you be participating in next month's class reunion, Lord Phillip?"

I didn't think anything of my question, but Lord Phillip made a troubled face. He looked deep in thought for a moment before he opened his mouth.

"I...won't go."

"Oh, I see."

"How about you?"

"Of course, I have no intention of going."

After I said that, he said, "Right, of course." But for some reason, he said it with a terribly relieved expression.

"Viola... I'm really sorry..." she sniffled.

"I-It's fine, really..."

"Fweh... I can't believe that I... While you were going through something so terrible..."

Three days later, Jamie visited my house. She was bawling her eyes out and looked thinner than I remembered. Apparently, she had fought with her lover and he broke up with her. The shock of it all had caused her to shut herself in her room for an entire month. She was usually a tough cookie, but when it came to matters of the opposite sex, she was terribly insecure. She was sobbing about how she'd failed as my best friend, since she hadn't known about my accident and couldn't do anything to help me.

Truthfully, even though I was the one who had been in an accident, Jamie looked much closer to death. She was pale and gaunt, and she looked moments away from fainting. I was doing perfectly fine, thank you very much, so I hoped that she wouldn't worry too much about me.

"I'm really all right, Ms. Preston," I said.

"Really...? Also, just call me by my first name."

"R-Right..."

After that, she spent two hours telling me all about how close we were. It was honestly a little embarrassing, but I was happy to hear her talk about our friendship. Since Rex already knew my secret, I wondered if I should tell Jamie the truth as well. However, she lost control at times, so I decided against it. More than a few times in the past, Jamie had done things that I could never even think of. I told her that Lord Phillip and I were occasionally meeting and how he was very kind to me during those times, and even that was surprising enough for her.

"Speaking of which, have you received an invitation for the class reunion?" Jamie asked.

"Yes, I've gotten one in the mail."

"I...bet that Hugo will be there."

The conversation shifted to the topic of the upcoming class reunion after we discussed my amnesia. Lord Hugo was Jamie's former sweetheart as well as our former classmate. I remembered him as a pretty normal and nice person.

Though I would never say this to Jamie directly, I had a suspicion that she'd said something unnecessary, as she usually did, which had caused their breakup.

"Viola...do you wanna go together?"

"Huh?"

Jamie's big eyes sparkled with tears, and she looked up at me pleadingly. She always did that when there was something she wanted.

"I don't think...I'll be going..."

"Right... You have amnesia, so you probably have more important things to worry about... I'm sorry..."

Jamie offered me a painful smile, and I couldn't say anything in return. It hurt to look at her like this. She'd helped me out so many times in the past. I also knew that her feelings toward Hugo were far more genuine and intense than anything she'd felt for her past boyfriends. Even so, from the bottom of my heart, I didn't want to go. I sat in silence for a bit, weighing my options in my head.

"Maybe..." I paused, "I should just show my face? There's the chance that I'll remember something if I meet with people I used to know, so I'll go with you, Jamie."

"R-Really?"

"Yeah."

"Violaaa... I love you!"

Jamie launched herself at me and pulled me into a tight hug. As I stroked her back, Lord Cyril's face flashed before my eyes. But I decided that as soon as I let Jamie meet Lord Hugo, I would take my leave.

On the day of the class reunion, Jamie—who was already looking much better—and I headed to the location together.

"Do I look good? Does this dress make me look fat?"

"It makes you look adorable. Don't worry."

"Thank you so much, Viola."

I couldn't help but pray that things would work out between Jamie and Lord Hugo. Which reminded me that I'd told Lord Phillip I wouldn't be attending. Well, it wasn't as if we had ever been the type of couple to report what social gatherings we'd be going to, so it likely wouldn't be a big deal.

We eventually made it to the site of the class reunion, and as expected, I became the target of attention. Jamie hugged my arm close to her and said, "Tell me if someone says anything nasty to you. I'll ask my daddy to get rid of them."

Despite her cute face, Jamie had a terrifying side to her.

"Viola! I'm so glad you decided to come!"

The first person to come up and talk to me was Lord Cyril. Next to me, Jamie looked back and forth at the two of us, her eyes practically popping out of their sockets. At the time, she'd been the only person I told about Lord Cyril's confession to me. I suddenly remembered that I hadn't told her about meeting him the other day.

"Hello, Lord Cyril."

"Mm, hello. It's great to see you."

"I'm here too, you know!"

"Yes, I know. Long time no see."

Jamie had never liked Lord Cyril very much. Her reasoning had been "He kind of gives me a bad feeling." She looked like she was seconds away from scratching out Lord Cyril's eyes, and I smiled awkwardly as I looked around the hall. I immediately saw who I was looking for.

"Jamie... Lord Hugo's right over there." I whispered in her ear.

"Huh?!" Her expression slackened in surprise for a moment before it twisted like she was about to cry. "But, I don't know what to say to him..."

It was true that it would be difficult to talk to him in front of so many people right after an argument. Though I was acquainted with him, I wasn't particularly close with him, and things were even worse now due to my fake amnesia. As we

stood there at a loss of what to do, Lord Cyril tilted his head to the side.

“Do you want to talk to Hugo?”

“Yeah...”

“Do you want me to call him over for you? I won’t mention your name.”

“Eh?”

Neither Jamie nor I could hide our surprise at Lord Cyril’s sudden suggestion. Apparently the two of them were close enough that he could approach him without an issue. Jamie hesitated for a moment, but in the end, she agreed that was the best method and decided to ask for Lord Cyril’s help. Ten minutes later, thanks to Lord Cyril, we were able to get Lord Hugo and Jamie to meet again without it being too obvious.

“Um, thank you very much.”

“Don’t worry about it. I just wanted to talk to you one-on-one.”

“Huh? Really?”

My heart couldn’t calm down upon hearing him say that to me with a bright smile. Just what was Lord Cyril thinking? I could feel the surrounding nobles’ glares piercing into me. After that, he told me about our shared past, as well as caught me up on what he had been doing recently. He looked like he was having so much fun.

Since the other nobles couldn’t stop looking in my direction, I wanted to leave. But since Lord Cyril had helped Jamie and me out, it was hard to immediately tell him that I was going to go home. We conversed for some time, and then the hall started to get noisy. I wondered what was going on and looked around. Then I heard some of the girls nearby whispering excitedly.

“Lord Phillip has arrived!”

I couldn’t suppress the shocked noise that escaped from my mouth. Why was he here? I had no room to talk since I was also attending, but he’d told me just the other day that he wouldn’t come.

Was that a lie as well?

Just as I thought that, I saw him through the crowd. It would be awkward if the two of us met here, and I started to wonder if I should take advantage of the ruckus to sneak out. But even though Lord Phillip was still some distance away, he looked up and our eyes met through the crowd.

It Was Just as If...

For a few seconds after our eyes met, Lord Phillip's narrow eyes widened as if in surprise. At that moment, my legs started to move.

"Viola? What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry, Lord Cyril. I just remembered that I have something I need to take care of."

I had an incredibly bad feeling about all of this. My plan was to leave immediately and have Lord Phillip conclude that he had just been seeing things. I hurried toward the door opposite of the one Lord Phillip came in from.

"I'll walk you home," Lord Cyril said, following me.

"Um, you really don't have to..."

"I want to spend as much time as I can with you."

What was he talking about? But I felt that nothing I said would get through to him right now. Without wasting time on that, I continued to walk out and hurried down the hall. But I didn't get very far before a hand grabbed me by my elbow and pulled me back.

"Viola."

I stopped upon hearing that familiar voice.

"Ph-Phil..."

I slowly and fearfully turned around to stare at Lord Phillip. His beautiful face was scrunched up in a way that I had never seen before, it was clear that he was in a foul mood.

"What are you doing?"

"I-I'm not sure how to answer that question... I was just attending the class reunion..."

"Didn't you say that you wouldn't come?"

"Yes, but Jamie invited me afterward. Besides, Phil, you said the same thing."

After I made my argument, Lord Phillip made a slightly perplexed expression. Though it felt like I was in the wrong, in my opinion, Lord Phillip was in the exact same boat as me.

"I...was suddenly called—"

"‘Suddenly’? Phillip, if I recall correctly, you were always supposed to come and greet people, right?"

Lord Cyril had butted into the conversation, his usual bright smile still affixed to his face. It seemed that whatever Lord Phillip was going to say wasn't the truth. He was still as big a liar as ever.

"This has nothing to do with you."

"Really? At the very least, I would never lie to her."

The air was starting to become tense between the two of them. I couldn't say anything and simply stood there frozen. Eventually, Lord Phillip let out a heavy sigh and started to walk toward the opposite door I had been heading for, my arm still in his grip.

Just what was he thinking? I turned around and saw Lord Cyril giving me a wry smile as he waved his hand at me. He'd helped Jamie and me, so I dipped my head to acknowledge him before I continued to walk behind Lord Phillip.

We eventually reached a resting room. As soon as the door closed behind us, I found myself caged between the wall and Lord Phillip's body. Because he'd placed his arms on either side of my head, his beautiful face was so close to mine that I could feel his breath against my lips. I couldn't look away from those lovely golden eyes.

"Did you have fun?" Those were the words that he eventually said.

"Huh?"

"Did you have fun, all alone with Cyril? You always seemed to enjoy his company."



Just what was happening? I truly had no idea what he was trying to do. Why was I in this position, and why was Lord Phillip saying these things to me? Why did he look so sad? It was as if he was *jealous* of Lord Cyril.

"Um, I... I'm sorry." I had no idea what to do, so I tried to apologize. But when he heard me say that, he looked even more hurt.

"I'm such a fool... It's as if I'm the only one who..." Lord Phillip said, looking as if he was seconds away from crying. He took a few steps back and then turned away.

My heart was beating unbelievably fast. I couldn't get the face I just saw him make out of my head.

"I'll go and finish my greetings. I would like you to wait here for me until I return."

With that, he left the room. Left alone inside, I slowly slid to the ground, feeling weak after the tension left my body.

"Viola!"

About ten minutes later, as I sat on the couch and waited for Lord Phillip as he had told me to, a knock suddenly sounded on the door. Then Jamie walked in.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"Lord Phillip told me where to find you." After she said that, she sat down next to me and held my hand. "Viola, thank you so much! Thanks to you, I was able to make amends with Hugo."

"Really? I'm glad to hear that. But, I didn't do anything..."

"That's not true. I mean, you came all the way here with me. I'm truly grateful for that." She looked me in the eye and smiled gently. "If...and this is a big 'if'... If there's anything that you're troubled with or if there's anything I can do to help you, just let me know any time. I'll do anything I can. I will always be on your side."

I wasn't sure why she would suddenly say all that to me. Jamie's expression

was deadly serious, and I found myself nodding at her words.

“Lord Phillip is going to be back soon, I think,” Jamie said.

“I see...”

If we saw each other again, would the atmosphere be as awkward as it was earlier? I truly didn’t understand Lord Phillip. I still didn’t understand why he started making up all these lies. The only thing I knew for sure was that he had truly been angry earlier when he spoke with me about Lord Cyril.

“Hey, Viola...”

“Hmm?”

“You’re a lot lovelier than you think you are.” Jamie smiled, her entire expression softening.

It was such a sudden thing to say that it befuddled me as much as it made me happy. Then a knock sounded at the door once again.

“I’m coming in.”

Lord Phillip’s voice was deeper than usual, and upon hearing that, my heart skipped a beat once again.

Suspicions and the Truth

Lord Phillip entered the room, and though he still stood some distance away from me, he said, "I apologize for the wait. I'll take you home now."

I bid farewell to Jamie and walked over to his side. However, Lord Phillip didn't wait for me to reach him. He simply left the room without a second glance at me. I assumed that we would be heading back in the same carriage, considering he came all the way back here to find me again, but the distance between us kept growing. Now, even though we were walking down the same hallway, he was so far away that he was the size of a pea. Despite that, I could still see him peeking back at me every so often. I had no idea what he wanted to do or say.

Could he still be angry with me? I suspected that the entire time we walked to the carriage. No matter how he felt, he still had appearances to keep up, so he escorted me into the carriage and we rode off together.

However, no conversation passed between us. The silence was to be expected. I didn't quite understand why, but if he was so angry that he didn't even want to speak with me, there wasn't much sense in going home together. As I was lost in such thoughts, I suddenly heard Lord Phillip say something.

"I..."

"I?"

I parroted back at him without thinking. Lord Phillip raised his head and looked at me, his beautiful eyes clouded with anxiety.

"I hope you haven't grown weary."

He asked while looking so distressed, as if he was staring at the end of the world. I didn't expect him to ask something like that, and my mouth hung open in shock.

"Weary of what?"

“Of me.”

“Me, grow tired of you, Phil?”

“Yes.”

Why are you asking that question while making that face?

“I’m truly sorry... I never intended to do or say such things. I was mistaken.”

He wasn’t wrong. It was true that earlier, Lord Phillip seemed to have made some mistakes in whatever plan he was acting upon. The things he’d said were truly bizarre. The past that he’d invented between us had also fallen apart.

“Um, I’m not tired of you or anything.”

“Really...?”

“Yes. But why did you lie to me and say that you wouldn’t attend?”

After I asked that, Lord Phillip let out a deep sigh of relief. He seemed to hesitate a little before he opened his mouth and said, “It’s because I didn’t want you to go to the class reunion.”

“Huh?”

“I didn’t want you to meet other men, especially Cyril.”

What? I don’t understand what he’s trying to say.

“Why is that?”

“Because I love you.”

Here we go again. He lied yet again without a single change to his expression.

And yet, he looked so serious that I could feel my heart skip a beat, much to my frustration.

“When I saw that you’d attended without telling me, and that you were alone with Cyril, I felt the blood rush to my head. That was why I ended up doing that to you.”

“U-Um...”

“I truly felt like I was going to lose my mind from the jealousy. I’m begging you. Please don’t meet with him again.”

“Phil...?”

He gazed at me pleadingly and continued, “I’ll do anything for you. I’ll treasure you more than anything else. So, please, please fall in love with me again.”

I couldn’t believe what he said. I stared into his honey-colored eyes, which were so passionate that they resembled melted gold, and found myself at a loss for words.

Just now, he said ‘again.’ That was a lie. Lord Phillip really is a liar. Or at least, that’s what he’s supposed to be...

Even so, suspicion started to rear its head. He was so bad at lying before, but his expression now looked like he was seriously begging me to like him. I started to wonder if this really was just an act that he was putting on.

“Viola?”

“I-I’ll do my best.”

“Good.”

In a panic, I didn’t think too hard about what I replied and said something random. In response, he thanked me and smiled, looking terribly happy. For the rest of the evening, I couldn’t look Lord Phillip in the eye.

“Huh? Phillip really said that?”

Rex had come over today—though, as usual, he didn’t say a word in advance—and was lounging in my room. He was lying down on the sofa, reading one of my favorite books, with a mocking look on his face. As he did that, I told him what had happened recently.

“He’s doing his best. I’m pretty impressed.”

“I wonder why he lied, though.”

“A lie, hmm?” He sat up properly on the sofa and stared at me intently. “Do you seriously still think that?”

As always, he didn’t hesitate to poke at topics I didn’t want poked.

“I mean... Lord Phillip’s always lying...”

“You lie a lot too, but it’s not as if everything out of your mouth is false.”

“Uh... Then, are you saying he’s telling the truth?”

“I dunno? How would I know?” Rex sounded like he was joking, and then he smiled at me. “In any case, I just think that you should keep an open mind. If you don’t, then you’re never going to see what’s right in front of you. Your eyes and ears are both working, aren’t they? So go and confirm for yourself what the truth is.”

Rex walked up to me and said, “You’re still just a kid,” then roughly ran his hand through my hair.

For the First Time, You...

“I can’t believe this...”

After finishing up my errands, I was on a walk with my maid, Selma, when a piece of paper made me pause in the middle of the street, my entire body shivering with excitement.

“A stage play based on *A Prince Just for Me* ≡?!”

The paper in my hand was a poster advertising the stage play adaptation of my favorite book. Not only that, but the lead actor was famous for his good looks. He was the perfect fit for my favorite character, Mitchel.

I absolutely had to go. I hurried home and begged my father, saying, “I found the source material in my room and read it the other day, and I thought it was really interesting, so I absolutely must go see it every day that it’s performing.” I did my best and managed to get tickets for all three days of the stage play.

To my surprise, all of the tickets came in pairs of two. When Jamie and I had our afternoon tea together, I invited her; she said that she could go with me on the first and second days. However, she already had plans on the last day, so she couldn’t go. I didn’t mind. She wasn’t a fan of the book, and she was willing to go watch the play two days in a row for me. There weren’t enough words to thank her for her kindness.

In saying that, though, I couldn’t bear the notion of there being an empty seat in the theater just because I didn’t have many friends. I was stuck on what to do, and Jamie suggested, “Why don’t you just go with Lord Phillip?” She asked it as if it was the most obvious decision in the world.

“I-I don’t think he’s the right person to bring...”

“Oh, really? I’m sure he’d be delighted, though. Why don’t you at least try asking him?”

I didn’t respond, lost in thought. Would Lord Phillip really be happy to be invited to a play so obviously marketed toward women? Wouldn’t I be adding

to his troubles? In the end, I had no one else to invite. So after thinking on it for a while, I decided that I would ask him, just in case.

“Um, Phil?”

“What is it?”

“Are you free in the afternoon next weekend?”

“So far, I don’t have any plans. Why?”

A few days after I got the tickets, I was invited to House Lawrenson’s mansion. Lord Phillip and I had enjoyed some tea under the bright sky in his much-too-impressive garden. That was when I decided to invite him to the play.

“You don’t have to say yes to this, but...”

“Go on.”

“Um, would you like to go see a play with me?”

I kind of felt embarrassed and asked the question without looking up at him. However, even after a minute of waiting, he didn’t give me an answer. I nervously peeked up at him, and what I saw made my eyes widen. The teacup in Lord Phillip’s right hand was held at a crazy angle, and the tea inside was spilling like a waterfall all over his clothes.

For some reason, he was frozen like a statue. I hurriedly called out to him and handed him a handkerchief. That was when he finally came back to himself.

“I apologize. Wouldn’t this dirty your handkerchief?”

“It’s fine. Please feel free to toss it after you use it. I don’t need it.”

The handkerchief that I handed him was the one that I’d failed at embroidering during the Flower Festival. The handkerchief itself was of the highest quality, since I’d planned on handing it to Lord Phillip. It’d felt like a waste to throw away, so I had kept it in my purse for emergencies like this.

Lord Phillip didn’t say anything, too busy looking at the handkerchief in his hands. This handkerchief was even worse than the one he’d thought was decorated with a worm. His eyes widened in surprise for a moment, and then

he took out a handkerchief from his own chest pocket. Even from a glance, it was obviously of expensive make. Oddly enough, he placed the failed handkerchief into his pocket and then used the beautiful one to clean up the tea.

What in the world is he doing?

“Um, Phil? You’ve mixed up the handkerchiefs.”

“No, I’m using the right one.”

“The one I gave you really was just a scrap of garbage.”

“It wasn’t garbage.”

He said it in such a stern voice that it felt useless to try to argue with him. I could only pray that his maids would mess up while doing laundry and destroy the thing. Lord Phillip stared at me for a moment before he hesitantly opened his mouth.

“You really wish to go to the play with me?”

“Yes.”

As soon as I said that, he covered his face with his right hand. I could still see a bit of it through his fingers, and for some reason, his cheeks and ears were bright red.

“That makes me happy.”

“Huh?”

“This is the first time you’ve ever invited me somewhere. So I’m happy.”



He truly looked happy. Seeing him like that made my heart beat faster.

It really doesn't look like he's acting.

"The thing is, I don't know if it'll be something you'd enjoy."

"Viola, so long as you're by my side, I'd enjoy anything."

"I-I see."

In any case, it seemed like he would go with me, which was a relief. Rex had laughed while reading the book, so I was unsure if I wanted to take him with me. I just hoped that Lord Phillip would find it enjoyable.

"What kind of play is it?"

"It's a play based on a novel called *A Prince Just for Me* ≡."

"Do you like that book?"

"Oh yes. I have the entire series in my room, and I was hooked when I read it."

"The past version of you must've liked it too, then."

Lord Phillip murmured, "A prince just for me" several times under his breath. Hearing the title spoken repeatedly in such a calm voice was a little embarrassing, I wished he would stop.

It took us so long to decide on a time he'd come get me that the two of us somehow ended up dining together as well. It felt kind of like a date.

"Viola."

"Yes?"

"Thank you for inviting me. I'm looking forward to it."

His eyes curved gently, and he smiled at me with such a pretty face that I couldn't look away for a few seconds. My heart continued to beat faster than usual as I gazed upon him.

An Inciting Event and Love

Time flew by in the blink of an eye, and it was time for the final day of the *A Prince Just for Me* stage play. On the first two days, I almost died several times. It was all too much for me to see Mitchel talking, moving, and *breathing* right before my eyes. Whenever I thought about Mitchel, my chest tightened to the point that it was painful. I even thought that this must be what love was.

Since it was certain that I wouldn't be spending much time outside, the maids put in a lot of effort into dressing me. But I didn't feel bad watching them do that. In fact, I agreed that it was necessary that I looked my absolute best. What if, by some stroke of fate, I somehow entered Mitchel's field of vision?

Lord Phillip came to pick me up via carriage as usual, and as soon as I entered it, he politely thanked me again for inviting him to the play. I thanked him back for coming with me and taking me there, but the interaction threw me off-balance.

"Today is your third time seeing it, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's really a wonderful play, so I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself, Phil."

"I see. What scene did you like?"

"Um, I'd say it's the scene of Mitchel professing his love while on his knees... Wait, Phil, that was a spoiler."

"Oh, you're talking about the scene from the second volume, right? The one that starts from the third line of page 152?"

"Huh?"

I wasn't sure how to respond to his casual statement. He was correct that the scene took place around there in the second volume. I had completely blanked, but he continued to speak.

"I agree that Mitchel was quite impressive during that scene. I can also understand Carolyn crying after she remembered her past. I heard that scene

was greatly influenced by the author's own real-life experiences, which explains how they were able to portray the emotions so realistically."

"Wh-Why do you know about that?"

"I did a bit of studying," Lord Phillip said, sounding as if it was a given.

"A bit of studying" was a horrible understatement. Unbelievably enough, in only a matter of days, Lord Phillip had read all thirty-one of the current volumes. Even I hadn't known that the author had written about their own experiences.

In the face of Lord Phillip's mysterious passion and knowledge, I started to feel a hint of rivalry. I'd been a fan of *A Prince Just for Me* for almost a decade now. I couldn't lose to some bandwagoner who'd only become a fan a week ago.

Despite my feelings toward him, I was impressed at how good his memory was. As I stared at him, I realized anew that Lord Phillip was even more handsome than the attractive stage actor. It was otherworldly how beautiful his face was. There was a brief period of time when I felt unworthy to even stand next to him and disliked being by his side. Lately, I'd gotten used to it, so I no longer felt this way.

"Phil, you really do have a nice face."

I'd looked upon him since we were born, but I never got used to his beauty. There wasn't a single flaw to be found. Upon hearing the words that unconsciously came out of my mouth, Lord Phillip looked taken aback for a second before he stared into my face.

"You like the way I look?"

"I think you could search through the entire land and you wouldn't find a single woman who dislikes your face."

"I don't care about what others think. I want to know what *you* think," he said with a serious expression.

"Huh? Well, I *do* like it..."

Though it always triggered my inferiority complex, I really liked Lord Phillip's

looks. Granted, I'd never breathed a word of this to anyone. However, this was something that any woman attracted to men would think, so I was able to say it without feeling shy. It was only when I saw Lord Phillip make an embarrassed expression that I regretted my words.

"I... I quite like your face as well." Even worse, he started to say similar things. "And not just your face. I like your voice and your personality too."

"U-Um..."

"I like everything about you, Viola."

I couldn't stand his straightforward gaze or words anymore. I hurriedly averted my gaze from Lord Phillip and looked down at my clenched fists. I could feel heat gathering in my cheeks, and I was sure that they were bright red.

"Th-Thank you very much..."

"Of course."

In the silence that followed, I managed to calm myself and decided to ask something that had been bothering me for some time.

"Before, you said that ever since you could remember, you liked me. But, um, was there a particular incident that made you start?"

Lord Phillip nodded. "Ever since I was a child, my parents taught me that I had to treat you as the most important treasure in my life. That you are the woman I'm destined to marry. So every time I was around you, those thoughts ran through my head."

This was the first time that I'd heard about what went on behind the walls of House Lawrenson, and my heart started to beat faster. I'd heard that House Lawrenson felt gratitude toward my family, but I never thought that Lord Phillip grew up being told such things.

"However, what made me realize that I liked you for reasons beyond the prophecy was when I saw you crying for the first time."

"When I was crying?"

"Yes."

When was that? I didn't cry that often. I didn't like to cry, nor did I like the idea of people seeing me in that state. As I pondered this, the carriage suddenly stopped.

"Lord Phillip, we've arrived," a servant said from outside.

"Let's go," Lord Phillip said, holding a hand out to me.

Though the earlier conversation still bothered me, it would be even worse if the play started and we were still outside. I hurriedly took his hand. Even on the short walk through the theater, Lord Phillip monopolized everyone's attention. Everyone stared at him, and the majority of people he passed turned around for a second look.

However, he didn't look concerned or annoyed by everyone's curiosity. He only cared about me, and his eyes were solely focused on me. We sat down next to each other in the audience, and our seats this time were much closer to the stage than the previous two nights. But even though I was much closer to my beloved Mitchel, my heart didn't beat as fast as it did when I came the previous two nights.

A Hidden Future

“It was a very interesting play. I had a great time. Thank you.”

“Really? I’m glad to hear it.”

After we watched the show, we ate a late lunch in the restaurant that Lord Phillip had reserved for us. It looked like he really did have fun watching the play, so that was a relief.

The restaurant we were eating at was one of the most popular ones in the capital, and it was famous for its seafood, which was my favorite. I couldn’t help but wonder if he specifically chose and reserved this restaurant for me. I continuously praised the food before me, and every time I did so, he curved his beautiful lips and said that he was glad I was enjoying the dinner.

“Speaking of which, wasn’t it a lot of work reading thirty-one volumes in such a short period of time?”

“Oh, yes. I kept on working too, so I didn’t sleep for about three days.”

“Th-Three days?!”

Why would you go that far? I must’ve mouthed the question because he huffed out a small laugh.

“Because I wanted to share the enthusiasm you had for the play to the best of my abilities.” After he said that, he looked away slightly as if embarrassed.

Upon seeing his reaction, I found that I was completely unable to understand the man in front of me. At the same time that thought crossed my mind, for some reason, I wanted to cry a little. If I could, I’d go back in time and punch myself for thinking of him as a potential rival.

If all of this really is a lie, would he go this far?

My suspicions about Lord Phillip continued to grow inside of me. But I still couldn’t be certain of anything, so I had to keep my guard up.

“The second stage play will be next year?” Lord Phillip said.

"Yes. I can't wait. I hope we can go together again."

Though I'd wanted to stay on guard against Lord Phillip, the invitation flowed out of my mouth without me consciously wanting to say it. When I looked up, our eyes met. Lord Phillip was making an indescribable expression; it could've been a trick of the light, but I could've sworn that he looked on the verge of tears.

"I wonder if you'll still say that a year from now?" he murmured in a voice so soft it was practically inaudible.

"Huh?" I didn't know what he meant by that.

Upon seeing my confusion, Lord Phillip's eyes widened, and he quickly said, "I apologize. Please don't worry about what I said. If you're all right with it, I'd love to watch the play with you next year." With that, he smiled, though it looked like he wasn't sure what other face he should be making.

After we ate, Lord Phillip asked if I wanted to walk around a bit, and I nodded my head. He held my hand as if it was natural for us. At this point, I was so used to it that it was.

We walked around a nearby park for a little while and saw a boy standing alone. He looked to be around ten years old, and it was obvious from his clothes that he was of noble birth. There'd been some kidnappings for ransom lately, and so it was dangerous for a boy like that to be alone in a place like this. Lord Phillip agreed with me, and I decided to call out to the boy.

"Hello there. Are you lost?"

In response to my question, the boy lightly glared at me and replied, "No. My servants are the ones who are."

He seemed like a handful to deal with, but it wasn't as if I could just say "I see" and leave him here.

"Would you like to wait with us until the people you're with find you?"

"Fine... Whatever..."

Considering how quickly he acquiesced to my suggestion, it seemed that he

actually was a little nervous. It wasn't wise for us to walk around and miss when his servants returned, so the three of us sat down on a nearby bench. During our conversation, I learned that he really was the son of a nobleman. It would be awkward if there was some bad history between his family and ours, so we didn't ask him for his name, nor did we introduce ourselves. We continued our casual talk as we waited for someone to come find him.

However, the people around us were acting strange. Even though it was the middle of the day, there were lots of couples acting lovey-dovey, or kissing each other. Neither Lord Phillip nor the boy seemed bothered, and their faces remained as calm as ever. I was the only one who felt awkward, so I volunteered myself to go buy us drinks from a nearby stall. As soon as I returned with three drinks in my arms, I heard the boy ask a ridiculous question.

"Do you two kiss too?"

I froze and stared at them.



Kids these days are so grown-up, I smiled to myself. I figured that Lord Phillip wouldn't answer it seriously and avoid the subject. But when I looked at him, he looked slightly troubled before he opened his mouth.

“Of course we do.”

Why in the world would he lie about that? And to a child we'd never met before, at that. At this point, I could only feel impressed at the bizarre sense of professionalism when it came to keeping up the facade.

“When do you two kiss?”

“When we're happy or when something good happens.”

Also, I wished he wouldn't talk about kisses as if they were something as casual as a high five. He was so disastrously oblivious about romance that I almost dropped the drinks in my arms.

Even if you have to pull an all-nighter again, reread all thirty-one volumes and really let those lessons sink into your brain.

“So, are you two gonna get married?”

“I would like to.”

“Why are you saying ‘I’ and not ‘we’?”

“Things are complicated.”

I wasn't sure what to make of their conversation, but I had to hurry up and give them their drinks before they became warm. So I walked up to them and pretended that I had only just arrived.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting.”

“Hey, you, don't you like him?”

As soon as I handed the boy his drink, he asked me a ridiculous question. Thanks to Lord Phillip's earlier lie, the two of us were supposedly close enough to exchange kisses. Telling him the truth and saying that I didn't would hardly set a proper example for a growing boy.

“Of course I like him.”

That was why I said that. But in an instant, Lord Phillip covered his face with his hand and looked down at the ground. Then he heaved a heavy sigh. The skin that I could see through his fingers was bright red.

He suddenly stood up and, with the drink I gave him in his hand, said, "I'm thirsty so I'm going to go buy a drink." Before either of us could say anything, he went stumbling off toward the stall.

Just One

“Even though it’s a commoner’s drink, it was quite good. You have my thanks.”

The juice that the boy held in one hand had lots of diced-up fruit in it, and he smiled after he complimented it. Though he was a bit snooty, he must not be all bad if he was able to thank others so easily. He was pretty adorable. His oddly self-important attitude and the decorations on his outfit made him seem like someone from a really high-ranking family, but I pretended that I didn’t notice it.

As we continued to converse, we heard someone call out, “Lord Nigel!”

The boy looked up when he heard that. It seemed that someone had found him. His face was scrunched up, but he couldn’t fully conceal his relief. I was also glad to see that he was reunited with the people he came with. Someone who looked to be the boy’s servant bowed and thanked me several times, and asked for my name so that they could give me something for my trouble. But I refused, stating that it was fine over and over again.

“Well, thanks to you two, I wasn’t bored while waiting. So thanks.”

“You’re very welcome.”

“Oh, right. Let’s give them that.”

He whispered something to his servant, and the servant handed me two tickets. Upon closer inspection, I realized they were tickets to the most expensive hotel in the capital. It was so popular that the earliest reservations were several months away.

“You’ll be able to stay in the suite rooms with those.”

“Huh?”

“Just tell them my name—Nigel. You’ll be able to get reservations in no time. The food there is pretty good, by the way.”

And then, with a parting “See ya,” the boy walked off. He moved so quickly that I didn’t have time to thank him for the tickets. Just who was he?

Right as the boy disappeared, Lord Phillip returned. He wasn’t holding any drinks in his hands, so he must’ve chugged them all on the way back. He sat down some distance away from me, looked at my face, heaved a sigh, and then looked down at his knees.

“Someone came to pick up that boy so he’s safe with his guardian now.”

“Good.”

“Um, are you all right?”

“Good.”

Judging from what I could see, he didn’t look “good” at all. What was wrong with him? I sat there, worried, and after a few moments of silence, Lord Phillip raised his head and stared at me with his golden eyes.

“I knew you were lying, but it made me so happy to hear that you like me that I couldn’t settle down.”

“Huh?”

“I’ll do my best for you to say those words and mean them.” After he said that, Lord Phillip gazed at me with heated eyes.

On my end, I barely managed to reply, “I-I see.” In an attempt to do something about the weirdly sweet atmosphere between us, I tried to think of another topic to bring up. But in the end, I thrust the tickets in my hand toward him.

“I-If it’s not too much trouble, would you like to come with me?!”

Lord Phillip didn’t reply. He was too busy reading what was written on the tickets and froze up like a statue. His undisguisable confusion was obvious on his beautiful face. Upon seeing his reaction, I realized for the first time that I’d forgotten to say, “The boy from earlier gave them to me. I hear the food is good, so let’s at least go and eat dinner there,” even though that was the most important part.

Without those words, it looked like I was suddenly inviting Lord Phillip to stay

somewhere with me.

“I-It’s not what you think! The boy from earlier gave them to me. I’m not inviting you to stay there with me! I heard the food is delicious, so I thought we could at least go grab a meal there!”

Even to my ears, my words were starting to get a little confusing, but I’d managed to get the message across. Lord Phillip eventually nodded, though his face was still red. We would decide on a time and date in the future, so we returned home in the carriage.

At this time, I never imagined that on the day of our dinner, we would really end up staying there together.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“No, no, it was all—”

A few days after my outing with Lord Phillip, I had some spare time and was practicing my embroidery. But I ran out of several colors, I figured I would go outside and get some fresh air and made the trip to the market with Selma. I purchased some thread at a trendy general store and was about to head home when I accidentally bumped into someone. I apologized but as soon as I saw who the other person was, I unconsciously exclaimed, “Ah!”

“Hello, Viola. I never thought I’d meet you in a place like this. What a pleasant surprise.”

“H-Hello, Lord Cyril.”

Lord Cyril was standing before me, his smile as bright and cheery as usual. Next to him was Lady Laura, who was just as bright and beautiful.

“Oh my. Lady Viola, are you also here for some shopping?” Lady Laura asked.

“Yes, something like that.”

“Embroidery thread! And Lord Phillip’s colors too.”

“Th-That wasn’t why I bought these ones...”

“You don’t have to hide anything. I think it’s lovely. If it’s all right with you,

“why don’t we grab some tea together?”

I tried to back out of it by saying that I had some errands to run, but Lady Laura shut down my protests by saying that it would only take a little while. Before I knew it, she’d linked her arms with mine. We left the store and walked into the nearby café.

It was when we ordered our drinks that a butler from the Crane family rushed toward us and whispered something into Lady Laura’s ear. Her eyes widened and she jumped to her feet.

“I apologize. I need to take care of something.”

“Huh?”

“I’ll be right back!” With that, she hurried out of the store.

How did this happen? I wondered, mentally clutching at my head. I ended up alone with Lord Cyril, who was seated at the other side of the table. Though I was feeling awkward, Lord Cyril still had his usual calm smile affixed to his face. Eventually, he looked toward the bag full of thread that I had just purchased, and then looked at me with an unreadable expression on his face.

“People really change if they don’t have their memories.”

“Huh?”

“In the past, you disliked both Phillip and embroidery.”

I was truly grateful, from the bottom of my heart, that Lord Phillip wasn’t here. Considering his personality, he would’ve lost control at that.

“I hope you remember everything soon,” Lord Cyril continued. “I wonder what you have to do to get your memories back? Maybe I’ll ask a doctor acquaintance of mine for advice.” Lord Cyril looked like he was seriously thinking of me.

So I had to ask, “Why would you go so far for me?”

His expression softened and he smiled gently. “Because I liked you.”

His words sent my heart fluttering, and I couldn’t help but feel relieved that he spoke in the past tense.

“When I heard that you’d lost your memories, I thought that I disappeared from inside you as well. It was a terribly lonely feeling.”

“Lord Cyril...”

“The time I spent with you was really important to me, Viola. I don’t know if it was the same for you, though.” His expression when he said that looked like he was fighting back pain. “I always knew that your engagement with Phillip was something that couldn’t be broken. It wasn’t as if I wanted to be more than friends with you. But even so, I found myself wishing that a little piece of me, at least, could be in your thoughts.”

He continued to smile like he was a little troubled. I had no idea how to respond. I never imagined that Lord Cyril thought about me in such a way. His feelings of love and affection for me really came through in his words. At the same time, my chest clenched with pain at the idea that I had to lie to him as well.

“I’m terribly sorry for the wait! What did I miss?”

I heaved a quiet sigh of relief when Lady Laura returned. As if my earlier conversation with Lord Cyril never happened, we discussed things of little consequence until about an hour had passed. It was about time to leave, so we paid our bill and left the café.

That was when I noticed a piece of string clinging to Lord Cyril’s shoulder. He was so busy talking to Lady Laura that he didn’t notice. I figured that I shouldn’t interrupt them, so I silently reached out to try to take it. But Lord Cyril suddenly turned around, and my hand ended up pressing against his cheek.

At that moment, Lord Cyril’s face turned red, and he let out a soft breath.

“This won’t work,” he said, smiling sadly. “I’m sorry. I said I wouldn’t lie to you, but I ended up hiding the truth from you earlier.”

He whispered those words into my ear. I stood still, wondering what he meant, but I didn’t get the chance to ask him. He waved goodbye at me, and then both he and his sister disappeared into the crowd.

Changes

“Viola.”

It was almost time for classes to start up again after lunch break. I had just finished chatting with Lord Cyril in the hallway about the committee and was about to return to the classroom. But before I could enter, I heard someone call my name and I turned around.

“Are you...on good terms with Cyril?”

“Huh? I don’t think we’re on *bad* terms...”

Lord Phillip was standing before me. There was no way I could mistake him for anyone else. It was rare enough for him to be with the normal students when he was an AP student, and he had to follow that up with such a sudden and bizarre question. I couldn’t hide my surprise at all. I answered his question, but he continued to stand there in silence.

“Lord Phillip?”

He had refused to open his mouth, so the two of us were left standing in the middle of the hallway. Why was he here where the normal students were anyway? The other female students in the hallway noticed Lord Phillip’s presence and started to squeal with excitement. I could relate though. He was as beautiful as usual today.

I remained lost in thought as I stared at his excessively perfect face, but he immediately turned to look away from me. He’d seen my face so many times by now that he was probably sick of it.

“I...would like you to keep your next weekend free.” That was all Lord Phillip said before he turned and walked away. He didn’t even wait for my reply.

I watched him go and then let out a deep sigh. I didn’t think I could ever hope to understand Lord Phillip.

“What a weird dream.”

I had had a rather nostalgic dream. It felt like it had been a long time since I dreamed about something from my school days. Thinking about my time as a student made the recent events in my life feel even more unreal. If the me from high school saw me holding hands with Lord Phillip while walking around together, she’d undoubtedly collapse. The very thought of that made me smile.

“Good morning, Lady Viola.”

“Good morning, Selma.”

“You’ll be going to House Lawrenson later, so I suggest eating an early breakfast so that you’ll have plenty of time to prepare.”

Selma was right. I had been invited to House Lawrenson’s mansion yet again. Lord Phillip had sent a letter stating that there was something that he wished to ask me directly. Though I didn’t know what he wanted to discuss, we were supposed to meet in the morning, so I had to hurry up and prepare for my outing.

I finished my breakfast and sat in front of the dresser. For some reason, Selma looked very happy as she tied up my hair.

“You’ve always been a beautiful girl but lately, I feel like you look even more radiant than before.”

“Is that so?”

“Oh yes.”

Selma confirmed so enthusiastically that my eyes drifted to my reflection in the mirror. Did I look *that* different? I got both my long, glossy violet hair and big purple eyes from my mother. In this country, these were very rare traits that everyone complimented me on, stating that they were like amethysts. I was quite fond of them myself.

But in the past, I felt like having a unique eye or hair color meant very little when standing next to the sheer beauty that is Lord Phillip. In retrospect, I was terribly self-deprecating and even a little mentally ill during that time of my life.

“It must be thanks to Lord Phillip,” Selma said.

“Huh?”

“Women become more beautiful when they’re loved and complimented. It looks like you’ve been meeting him more often lately too.”

“Th-That’s not...”

I hurriedly tried to deny Selma’s hypothesis, but she told me that I didn’t have to get all embarrassed. But I couldn’t say she was completely off the mark. The words “when they’re loved” made me stop and think.

In truth, I could no longer write off all of Lord Phillip’s words and actions as lies or an act. When he said that he loved me, everything about him—from his words to his expressions—was completely serious. I could tell that my feelings toward him were starting to change because of that as well.

In the past, I used to find it hard to be around him. But that was starting to fade. The truth was that more often than not, I enjoyed my time with him. Even so, there was no guarantee that what he was saying was the truth. There was still a chance that he was lying to me for whatever reason, so I was scared of believing him and letting myself get charmed. I’d never even considered that Lord Phillip might like me. I actually thought that he’d always hated me.

“Ever since I can remember, you were the only one for me. If you told me to die, then I would gladly do so this very second. That’s how deep my love is for you.”

I suddenly remembered his words and felt my face grow hot. I hurriedly shook my head from side to side to try to dispel the memories, only for Selma to get mad at me since she was still in the middle of doing my hair.

“Welcome, Lady Viola.”

After I arrived at House Lawrenson, I was taken to the garden. Since the weather was nice, we were to have tea outside. However, Lord Phillip was dealing with a sudden guest, and so I had his servants tell him not to worry about me. I decided to take a walk around the garden while I waited. The Lawrensons’ garden was several times bigger than ours, and it was filled with a variety of colorful flowers. I was in the middle of strolling about and enjoying

the sights when I suddenly heard some people yelling.

“Little Vio ran away!”

“She flew that way!”

I jumped. If my ears weren’t deceiving me, I heard them say that “Vio” ran away and that “Vio” flew in some direction. What was going on? I couldn’t contain my curiosity and went to where the voices were coming from. There were servants rushing about and searching for something, which made it difficult to ask them what was wrong. So I decided to ask the nearby young man, who seemed to be a new gardener I’d never seen before.

“Hello. Um, by Vio, who are they referring to?”

“Oh, don’t you know, miss? Vio’s Lord Phillip’s parrot. He’s had her since he was a kid. I’ve never seen her though.”

“A parrot.”

I’d been frequenting House Lawrenson’s mansion since I was young, but this was the first I was hearing about Vio the parrot.

“What kind of parrot is she?”

“I hear she’s got lilac plumage and is really talkative.”

It was apparently purple too. I was intensely curious about this parrot that I felt a sense of kinship toward. If they found Vio without incident, I wanted Lord Phillip to let me meet her. With that, I continued my walk.

“Ah.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a cute little bird with purple feathers perched on a tree branch. I wasn’t too familiar with birds, but it looked like a parrot.

“Are you Vio?”

“LITTLE VIO!!!”

“Ah, my apologies. A-Are you Little Vio?”

The parrot was so angry at my nervous question that I unwittingly replied politely to a bird. However, when I called for her to come, she obediently flew

toward me and landed on my arm. Up close, it was even more obvious how beautiful her colors were, and her face was small and cute.

In any case, I was glad I found her. The servants were still running around for her, so I'd take her to them on my way back to wait for Lord Phillip. That was when the bird suddenly opened her beak and started to speak.

“Viola was cute today too.”

“Hmm?”

“Viola, I love you.”

The Real and Honest Truth

“Viola smiled at me. So cute. She said my name. So happy.”

My mind was completely blank as I stood there with the chattering Little Vio on my arm. If memory served me right, parrots were birds that could mimic human speech. Which meant someone had spoken these exact words in front of her. It was a fairly surreal image. In this mansion, there was only one person who would say these kinds of things.

“Viola gave me a handkerchief. Gonna cry.”

My chest grew tighter and tighter with every word that Little Vio spoke. Why did he even mention that to a parrot? It was obviously a weird thing to do. Though I wasn’t sad, I felt like I wanted to cry. Little Vio continued to speak.

“I really love her.”

At that moment, my heart started to beat faster than it ever had in my life. Something that had only existed in my imagination suddenly became fact. If even Little Vio was a prop, then that’d actually make it easier to accept my loss. Anyone would believe in Lord Phillip if they heard this.

I truly couldn’t understand him. It was absolutely bizarre that the words of a *parrot* held more weight than Lord Phillip’s when they were *his* words, and that they were the final piece of evidence that I needed. I finally realized that it was all true.

Lord Phillip really did like me.

With the information I had at the moment, I couldn’t understand why. But he liked me enough to buy a parrot the same color as my hair color and name it after me. Not only that, but he obviously spoke to it quite often about his feelings. That his affection for me was a lie or an act was unlikely at this point.

If all of the confessions he’d said to me were true, then “like” was an understatement. He probably liked me a lot more than I realized. I mean, he said that he’d be willing to die if I told him to.

“Lord Phillip likes me...”

As soon as the words came out of my mouth, I could no longer remain calm; nor was I able to come up with a good course of action. My legs felt weak, and with Little Vio still on my arm, I crouched down on the ground. What kind of face was I supposed to make in front of Lord Phillip later? Previously, I’d never actually viewed him as a suitor, and I couldn’t even remember how I used to speak with him.

In any case, I felt like it would be bad if I was discovered here with Little Vio in my arms. Just as I realized that, someone called out to me.

“Viola?” To my shock, the person I wanted to see the least—Lord Phillip himself—had walked right up to me, obvious concern on his face. “What’s wrong? Are you feeling...unwell?”

He trailed off and hurried toward me. As soon as his eyes saw what was on my right arm, he froze. The worry on his face changed into despair. He looked as if he was watching the world end right before his eyes.



I'd never seen Lord Phillip so panicked before, but I could relate. If I were him, I'd die from the sheer embarrassment of it all. That was probably why he never told me about Little Vio. Actually, I'd love to know how the servants of House Lawrenson felt taking care of a parrot that couldn't stop repeating Lord Phillip's declarations of love. Even just imagining it, my face started to heat up.

That wasn't important right now though. I racked my brain to find a way out of this situation that wouldn't hurt Lord Phillip. In the end, I decided that I would pretend that I found Little Vio without hearing or learning anything from the bird. Right when I decided on that course of action, Lord Phillip opened his mouth.

"Th-There's a sparrow on your arm. It could be dangerous so hold still. I'll catch it for you," he said so quietly that I could hardly hear him.

A sparrow? Even I knew that there was no such thing as a purple sparrow. And what kind of sparrow was dangerous? His lie was completely unrealistic, but I decided to play along. This was too painful.

"Th-Thank you so much. I...really don't like sparrows so I'm grateful for your assistance. It just suddenly landed on my arm and I was too scared to stand up," I said. I tried to make my expression as blank as possible, as if to communicate, "This sparrow hasn't spoken a single word."

Lord Phillip's expression softened in obvious relief. Seeing it made me let out a quiet breath as well.

I'm sorry, Little Vio. I was the one who told you to come here, and yet I'm pinning the blame on you.

As soon as I thought that, Little Vio opened her beak and said, "Viola said she loved me. It was a lie. I was happy. I love her so much." It was the longest string of words she'd spoken all day.

I was no longer able to look up at Lord Phillip's face. When it came to reading the room, Little Vio was the worst.

A heavy silence—one unlike any other that I'd ever experienced in my time

with Lord Phillip—fell across the lovely table that was between us. After Little Vio's confession, Lord Phillip gently lifted her off of my arm and placed her on his palm. He didn't speak a word the entire time. After that, he gave her to a servant, and without any conversation between us, we walked all the way to the set table.

The maid that poured us our tea must've noticed the awkward atmosphere, because she looked terribly nervous the entire time. I really felt bad for causing her that much distress. At this point, sitting with Lord Phillip in silence was a nostalgic feeling. After about thirty minutes or so of it, Lord Phillip opened his mouth.

"I have two things I'd like to say. The first is something so embarrassing I'd rather disappear than say it, and the second is something so painful that my chest burns at the very thought of it. Which would you like to hear first?"

What came out of it was an absolutely insane choice. I'd never heard him say something like this, and I buried my face into my palms—mentally, of course.

Sorry, Lord Phillip. Neither of those sound like something I wanna hear. But judging by the atmosphere, I likely had to hear him say both of them.

"Th-Then, let's start from the embarrassing one."

It had to be about Little Vio's words. So I decided to start hearing him out from there.

As If the World Itself Changed

After I told him that I wanted to hear the embarrassing thing first, Lord Phillip nodded with a serious expression.

He hesitated for a little bit before he said, “Actually, the bird earlier...”

“Yes?”

“That wasn’t a sparrow... That was a parrot.”

“Huh?”

I didn’t think that he would start by explaining that, and I unwittingly made a noise of surprise. Upon hearing that, Lord Phillip made a face like he was thinking, “As I figured, she didn’t know what kind of bird that was.” That made me a little annoyed. I knew what a parrot was, thank you very much.

“Normally, I keep her in my room and talk to her every day. So, uh, I believe that’s why she’s started to speak like that.”

“I...I see.”

“Every day...” he hesitated briefly. “I talk to her about you.”

It made sense why Little Vio only spoke about me, then. Just listening to Lord Phillip was embarrassing for me, I couldn’t even imagine how he felt.

“I’m sure you must...think I’m a creep.”

As he said that, his face was bright red, and his expression was clearly nervous. Upon seeing that, the fact that he liked me felt much more real.

Someone as beautiful as him likes me?

I’d always thought that Lord Phillip was absolutely perfect and that nothing about me was a match for him. He was someone completely out of my reach. As it turned out, he read weird books and had long chats with his parrot. The more I learned about him, the more I saw how normal (and weird) he was. Before I realized it, I was no longer able to think of him the way I used to. We’d

been engaged for eighteen years, and yet I didn't know the first thing about him. No, perhaps, I'd simply never made an effort to.

"Um, I don't think you're a creep."

"Really...? When I was a child, Rex told me that women hate needy men. So I hid Vi—I mean, the parrot from you, even when you had your memories."

I wished that Rex would stop giving weird advice without cleaning up his messes. It also looked like Lord Phillip was still desperate to hide the parrot's name. If this was something that Rex had told Lord Phillip when they were children, then that meant that Rex knew about Lord Phillip's feelings for me from that long ago. And yet he still told me to confirm them for myself.

It was frustrating to admit it but he was right. If I hadn't come to the conclusion on my own, I would've never believed it to be true.

"D-Do you really like me that much?"

"Yes, I do."

"Ah..."

"I'm always thinking of you, whether I'm awake or I'm dreaming."

He was able to say such a thing without even the slightest hint of hesitation. Just the other day, I'd been able to write off his whispers of affection as total lies. But now every single word he spoke burrowed into my heart. Truthfully, I couldn't understand him at all. Until very recently, he was always so quiet and never showed any of his emotions toward me.

But now my heart was beating unbearably fast. My body felt hot. I couldn't stand the way he was staring straight at me, and I hurriedly looked down at my lap. I started to feel embarrassed as well, to the point I worried tears would well up in my eyes.

"So, even if you like another man, I don't think I can give up on you so easily."

"Huh?"

Lord Phillip said the words with a wounded expression, but I didn't understand what he meant, so I tilted my head to the side. Upon seeing my confusion, he elaborated.

“May I say the other thing I wanted?”

“Yes.”

Truthfully, I had no idea what he could want to talk about, so I was quite curious about it. It was so painful that his chest hurt to think about it, apparently. With that in mind, I tensed and waited to hear what he wanted to say.

“Have you...?”

“Yes?”

“Have you fallen in love with Cyril?”

He hesitated a beat before he asked his question, but it was so unexpected that I accidentally replied, “Huh?” But it seemed that he wasn’t joking. Lord Phillip’s expression was incredibly serious and a little pained.

“Um, what do you mean by that?”

“I heard from an acquaintance that the two of you spent time together.”

“Oh...”

He must have been talking about when the two of us were left alone in the café for about ten minutes. Someone saw us? Lord Phillip’s acquaintance saw us at the worst moment, but it was my fault for creating such a situation in the first place.

“I’m sorry. But it’s a misunderstanding. It’s true that I ended up alone with Lord Cyril for a little bit, but Lady Laura was with us.”

“But my acquaintance told me that Lord Cyril said he liked you, and that you seemed relieved upon hearing his words.”

“Whaaat?”

Not only did Lord Phillip’s acquaintance have terrible timing, but they only heard part of what Lord Cyril said. They also had a wild interpretation of my reaction. In any case, I explained everything to him, from the fact that it was a misunderstanding to how I happened to run into the two of them while buying thread for embroidery.

"I don't like Lord Cyril in that way," I said clearly, staring straight into Lord Phillip's eyes.

In response, he made a terribly relieved expression and eventually let out a heavy sigh. "I'm glad to hear that..."

"Hmm?"

"Every time I thought that you had started to like Cyril, I became so anxious that I couldn't focus on any of my tasks. I couldn't even sleep properly."

Those words made my heart beat faster again. For the first time, I noticed the bags under his beautiful eyes. Now that I thought about it, he'd always been especially concerned with Lord Cyril.

"Did you have fun, all alone with Cyril? You always seemed to enjoy his company."

I finally realized that his words and attitude could've all stemmed from his anxiety and jealousy toward Lord Cyril. As soon as I realized that not everything was a lie and that he liked me, I felt like the fog in my mind had been lifted. Every interpretation I had of his actions and words changed.

"My affection for you is no lie." As he said that, Lord Phillip smiled nervously, and at the same time, I felt like a hand tightened around my heart.

"Phil, I truly apologize for doing something that caused you such a misunderstanding. I'll be more careful."

"No, I shouldn't have believed rumors from others. I'm sorry." He looked down and murmured, "When it comes to you, I don't have any confidence at all."

I couldn't say anything to that and for a while, a rather awkward silence settled between us. But unlike before, it didn't feel suffocating in the least. Instead, it was just a little nerve-racking, and I couldn't stop fidgeting.

"You're still doing embroidery?"

"Yes. I've been practicing it a little when I have the time."

After hearing that, I suddenly remembered the bookmark that was in my bag. Lately, I'd been making bookmarks that had embroidery in the borders and

decorations. Before I left the house, I kept wondering if I should give him one. Now that I had the confidence he'd like it, my feelings shifted toward wanting to gift one to him.

I took the bookmark out from my bag and slowly placed it onto the table.

However

“It’s sort of an apology for the Flower Festival, but I tried making some more items with embroidery. I’m still not very good at it, but would you like to have one?”

“Are you giving this to me?”

“Yes. I made this for you, Lord Phillip.”

Compared to something made by Jamie—who was very good at handicrafts—my embroidery looked like a child had done it. In my opinion, though, it was leaps and bounds better than what I made last time.

Lord Phillip stared at the bookmark on the table with a perplexed expression for a while before he quietly said, “I love you” with a serious expression on his face.

“What?”

“I love you so much that I could die right here and now.”

With that, he carefully picked up the bookmark and stared at it. He smiled happily, looking like a young child as he did so. On my end, my heart was beating so fast from the consecutive “love” attacks and the sudden smile.

“This is a very lovely fish.”

“Thank you very much. That’s a cat.”

I’d used the cat I saw on our fishing trip—the one that resembled Lord Phillip—as inspiration and, even though he still didn’t recognize my art, I must’ve improved since he was no longer under the impression that it was a worm.

“Viola, I’m truly grateful. I don’t know how I can even begin to thank you for this. What sort of gift would make you happy?”

“This bookmark is kind of like an apology and a thanks for the other day, so I don’t need anything.”

“I don’t believe that makes us even.”

“Um, that should be my line.”

There was absolutely no contest between this little bookmark and the countless flowers and accessories that Lord Phillip gifted me in the past. He was probably the only person in the entire world who would be this happy about such a meager gift.

In any case, I was glad that he liked it. The relief made me smile, and as soon as he saw that, Lord Phillip said that I was “cute” and that he “liked” me. I could only blush furiously and nod in response.

We enjoyed tea for about an hour, and then I asked if I could see his parrot for a little bit before I left. Lord Phillip looked a little troubled, but when I told him that I only wanted a peek, he agreed. Little Vio was already back in Lord Phillip’s room, so I had him wait outside the door before I hurried over to her. I wanted to thank her, since it was only due to her words that I was able to make such an important revelation.

“Little Vio, I’m sorry about earlier.”

“Viola, I love you!”

Hearing that immediately out of Little Vio’s beak made me smile. “Hee hee, thank you. It’s all thanks to you, Little Vio.”

Though I knew that the words weren’t Little Vio’s own, I couldn’t help but reply as if they were. She was adorable. I patted her gently on her little head and turned away to leave the room. I didn’t get far before Little Vio opened her beak again.

“But she hates me.”

“Huh?”

The voice that I heard from behind me sounded so sad that I stopped walking. But before I could say anything or go back to Little Vio, Lord Phillip called my name from the other side of the door. I barely managed to promise Little Vio that I’d bring her snacks next time I came over before I hurriedly left the room.

"Wait, really? You finally realized that Phillip likes you? How'd you manage that?"

Rex's eyes sparkled like a young lad's as he asked the question. I was sitting across from him as I ate a slice of cake. Rex and I were having a meal together, which was not a very common occurrence at all.

My father had reserved a table at this trendy and popular restaurant a while ago, but due to sudden work, he couldn't make it. So he told me to go with Rex, who happened to be at my house at the time. If I was meeting with *Rex*, then not even Lord Phillip could have a problem with that.

I told him all about Little Vio, and he couldn't contain himself. He was laughing so loud that the other patrons around us gave him weird looks.

"Ahh, Phillip is so cute that I could explode. If only I were a woman! I would've made him so happy." After saying such a ridiculous thing, he wiped away the tears that had gathered in the corners of his sharp eyes and let out a breath. He took a sip of his tea, then looked up at me again. "So what about you?"

"Me?"

"Yep. How do you feel about Phillip?"

"I..."

What do I feel about Phillip? You tell me. I didn't dislike him and my negative feelings toward him were starting to fade. But my confusion was so great that I wasn't entirely sure.

"Is it something like 'He said that he liked me so much that I started to like him too'?"

"I...wonder what it means to like someone?"

"Like you wanna touch them, or you wanna be touched by them, or you wanna kiss them..."

"Oh, then I don't think I do."

As soon as I stated that, Rex started to laugh loudly again. Honestly, it wasn't as if hearing Lord Phillip say that he likes me made me *unhappy*. My heart would even beat faster. But if it was the kind of "like" that Rex described, then I

hadn't reached that point just yet.

"Don't say that in front of Phillip, all right? You'll kill the guy."

"O-Okay."

"So do you still wanna break off your engagement with him?"

"I don't...want to go that far anymore."

"Hmm? Oh my." Rex continued to hum delightedly at my response. "Keep on pretending you have amnesia. You still don't know why he's been acting so weird, right? Besides, if you tell him right now that your memories returned, Phillip will have a heart attack. In the best-case scenario, he'll become a shut-in."

"Huh?"

"I don't want my adorable little Phillip to turn out like that."

"A-A shut-in is the best-case scenario..."

"Yep. So just trust me. Keep on remaining the Viola you are right now and observe Phillip as he is right now."

Rex's suggestion was probably the right thing to do. I eventually told him "All right," and he gave me a satisfied smile in response.

The Heartbeat Hidden in the Rain

Rex and I continued our casual conversation, and we enjoyed our dessert together. Then a sharp and familiar voice sounded out through the restaurant.

“Oh my!”

I knew what I would see even before I raised my head. As expected, when I looked up, I found myself staring into a pair of red eyes.

“You’re going out with a man yet again? How scandalous!”

“Um, no, this is—”

“I can’t believe you. And you call yourself Lord Phillip’s fiancée...” The woman who exclaimed that as she pointed her finger at us was Lady Natalia, who I hadn’t seen since Prince Abel’s birthday party. It seemed that she had also decided to eat her meal at this restaurant.

As usual, she was wearing a rather elaborate dress and her face was caked with makeup. Her eyes, framed by thick and luscious lashes, were sharp and narrow as she stared down at me.

“Just the other day, I saw you having a rendezvous with Lord Cyril!”

“A r-rendezvous?”

“Viola, how could you? Aren’t I enough to satisfy you?”

“Rex, be quiet.”

Apparently, Lady Natalia was the witness who had reported Lord Cyril and me to Lord Phillip after making a wild assumption about our relationship. Ever since childhood, she was honest to a fault and never lied, and Lord Phillip knew this as well. That was probably why he had believed everything Lady Natalia said. However, she was occasionally prone to pretty crazy misunderstandings.

“What happened between Lord Cyril and me isn’t what you think. Rex is also my cousin.”

“It’s not as if you can’t marry your cousin!”

“Ah, that’s true! Hey, I think I’m a pretty good catch. What do you think?”

“Seriously, please be quiet.”

Rex was obviously poking fun at Lady Natalia’s reactions, so I kicked him under the table. What do you *mean*, “What do you think?”

“I’ve always thought the two of you were suspicious,” Lady Natalia continued.

“Really...?”

“Ah ha ha ha! Viola and I? Wow, can’t say I’ve ever heard that before.”

Rex was at his limit and he burst out laughing. Lady Natalia didn’t pay him any attention. She was too busy glaring at me as I gaped at her in shock.

“I’m going to find proof of your relationship one day and shove it in your face!” With that declaration, Lady Natalia dramatically swished her dress and flounced away.

She could look for proof all she wanted, but she wouldn’t be able to find it because it didn’t exist. Every time I talked to her, I felt like I was dealing with a hurricane—she was unstoppable. In any case, I was relieved in a way now that I knew who the acquaintance Lord Phillip mentioned the other day was.

“She’s so funny,” Rex said.

“It’s just going to cause trouble down the line so please don’t say anything unnecessary,” I replied. After I glared at Rex, I finished the rest of my tea, and it was about time for us to leave as well.

Right when we were about to part, Rex said, “Oh, by the way, Phillip isn’t the only one I think is adorable. You’re just as cute as he is. Do your best!”

Hearing that made my head spin.

“It’s shocking how bad the weather is today.”

“Yeah. It doesn’t look like it’ll let up anytime soon either.”

When I turned my gaze to the window, there was torrential rain pouring

down from the sky. It was so gloomy outside that I even felt a bit down. Today I was going to use the ticket the boy in the park gave us to eat dinner with Lord Phillip at the trendy hotel. Normally, trying to make a reservation there would put you on a waitlist that was several months long. But as soon as I brought up the ticket, I was able to get a table with ease. Just who was that boy?

Since the weather was so treacherous, it would probably be best to come home as soon as we finished eating.

“Oh, it looks like he’s here. I’m going to go, then.”

“Be careful.”

I waved goodbye to Selma and got into the carriage that House Lawrenson sent. Then we headed to the hotel.

Once we got there, we were taken to an unbelievably fancy room that was separate from the main dining area. We sat across from each other at an excessively large table and enjoyed our meal.

“It’s delicious,” I said.

“Yes,” Lord Phillip replied.

I didn’t expect anything less from such a popular restaurant. Everything was so delicious, I felt like I needed three tongues to taste it all.

“Phil...it doesn’t look like you’re eating much. Is it not to your taste?”

“No, that’s not it.” He smiled a little bashfully after I asked about him and then continued, “You just look so happy as you eat. Seeing how cute you are is satisfying enough.”

“Huh?”

My hands stopped upon hearing that. I’d been enjoying the food, but I suddenly couldn’t register the flavor in my mouth after that.

Even so, we managed to finish everything and even had dessert and tea after. We finished our meal and left the restaurant. As we headed to the hotel lobby, I noticed that it was terribly noisy and crowded.

I was curious as to what was going on, so I asked a nearby employee, and he

said that the downpour outside had changed into a storm. The winds were so strong that carriages couldn't even traverse down the roads. Apparently, a storm this bad only ever happened once every few decades.

While I was in the restaurant, the live band was so loud that I wasn't able to hear anything. But now that I was paying attention, I could definitely hear the horrendous rain and winds.

"It doesn't look like it'll die down anytime soon. Everyone here has accommodations for the night, but what about you, miss?"

"A-Accommodations...?"

"Yes. Since you're an acquaintance of Lord Nigel, we can book you the suite room immediately. We don't have any vacancies so we only have one room though."

"Huh?"

The sudden chain of events had me staring at the employee in shock. Accommodations meant staying the night. Not only that, but it would be staying the night *with* Lord Phillip. So that meant Lord Phillip and I—just the two of us! —would be staying the night. The phrase "staying the night" was starting to lose meaning in my head.

I was in a state of panic and shock, and my head was barely working. I tried to think of another way but considering the way everyone around me looked, it was true that no one could get home. As soon as that thought passed through my head, a loud noise like lightning cracking down somewhere rang through the room. My body twitched in surprise. Yeah, it would be impossible to get anywhere like this.

I nervously glanced at Lord Phillip. His expression was the same as it always was and he seemed fairly calm.

"For now...let's have them book us a room and wait here until the weather calms down. After we can leave, I'll send you home immediately."

"All right."

What a relief that Lord Phillip could keep a cool head. The staff immediately

took us to a room. We would only be using the suite to wait for the carriages to start running again. I felt embarrassed at how quickly my mind jumped to all the wrong conclusions.

As I thought that, I glanced at Lord Phillip, who was walking a little ahead of me. His expression was as calm and collected as it always was. However, as he walked, I noticed that he swung forward his right arm at the same time he took a step with his right leg.

The Only Thing I Know

The hotel worker led us to a fairly spacious room, but apparently it was considered quite small in comparison to some of the other suites. There was a single bed placed in the middle of the room, and the very sight of it made the atmosphere more awkward.

The worker told us to call the front desk if we needed something, then left. The room fell silent the moment he left. It was hard to describe what kind of silence it was. Since there was nothing else to do, the two of us, still without saying a single word, sat down on the large L-shaped sofa.

I had managed to calm myself down earlier, but Lord Phillip made it hard to sit still again. Just by the sight of him and how strange he was acting, it was obvious he was way more nervous about the current situation. I could still hear the rain and wind practically hammering against the window from outside, and the occasional rumble of thunder was a little scary.

“Would you like a drink?”

“Ah, yes, please.”

After I said that, Lord Phillip poured some of the iced fruit tea the workers had prepared for us into a glass and handed it to me.

“Ah!”

Right as he did that, a large clap of thunder roared out through the air. Lightning must have struck just outside. I was so shocked that the glass slipped out of my hand and the fruit tea spilled all over me. The coldness of the liquid gave me goose bumps, and the wet stickiness clinging on to my dress was disgusting. My luck today was truly awful.

“I’m sorry. Are you all right?”

“No, that was my fault. I’m sorry. Since I spilled tea all over myself, would it be all right if I take a bath first?”

“G-Go ahead.”

I used the bath first and returned after I changed into the loungewear that the hotel had provided. I felt more relaxed after soaking in the warm water. Lord Phillip was seated at the edge of the couch and reading a book he had picked from the shelf. His serious gaze moved from left to right as he took in the information on the pages. He had seemed so nervous earlier, but it looked like he also had returned to normal.

“I apologize for bathing first.”

“Mm.”

“You were reading a book while waiting, I see.”

“Mm.”

He replied twice, but still refused to look up at me. Was the book so interesting that he literally couldn’t tear his eyes away? Curious about the title, I leaned down so that I could look at the cover and to my shock, I realized that he was holding it upside down. He hadn’t calmed down at all. In fact, he was in an even worse state than before.

“Um, your book is upside-down.”

It was only then that Lord Phillip realized his mistake. He made a small noise like his breath had hitched in his throat and his face flushed red. He muttered something about going to take a bath and hurried into the bathroom.

While I couldn’t help but smile upon seeing him in such a state, the thought of him sitting in the same bath water I had just been in made my heart start to beat faster. I passed the time reading some of the magazines in the room.

“Phil, you’re done with your...”

When I heard Lord Phillip return, I raised my head and the sight of him was so captivating that the rest of what I wanted to say faded away. I’d heard that truly handsome men look good no matter the situation, and it was true for Lord Phillip as well. His damp, dark-blue hair and the faint blush on his porcelain cheeks made him look even more beautiful than usual. It was unbelievable how sexy he looked. My heart was beating so fast from just staring at him I was

worried he might be able to hear it.

“Viola?”

“N-Nothing!” I hurriedly looked away before I lowered my face. *Calm down, calm down, calm down.* I repeated the mantra in my head.

Afterward, we spent time in the room reading our own books with the odd murmured conversation every now and then. Soon, it was about time when I would normally go to sleep. Judging by the weather outside the window, it didn’t look like the storm was letting up anytime soon.

Lord Phillip must’ve also noticed that it would be impossible to return home today. But I had no idea how to bring this up. Even if I suggested that we get some sleep, there was only one bed. Considering Lord Phillip’s personality, he’d likely suggest that he take the couch. As I sat there, wondering what to do, Lord Phillip took the initiative and opened his mouth.

“I’ll sleep on the couch so you can take the bed.”

“Oh no, I can’t do that. Phil, you can sleep on the bed.”

“I don’t want to be the type of man who could sleep alone on a bed while the woman he loves sleeps on the couch.”

The words I wanted to say in response died on my tongue. I couldn’t possibly refuse his offer now. In the end, I took him up on his offer and headed to the bedroom alone.

About an hour must’ve passed since I got under the covers. No matter how many sheep I counted, I couldn’t fall asleep. I tossed and turned before I decided that a warm drink might help take my mind off things. I headed to the kitchen space and noticed the lights were on in the living room. It looked like Lord Phillip was still awake.

“Um, Phil, would you like some warm tea?”

“You’re still awake? That sounds lovely. Thank you for the offer.”

“It’s no problem.”

Despite asking him if he wanted some, I realized that I had never once prepared tea in my life and was struggling with the process. I had no idea how many leaves I had to use, nor how long I had to wait for.

I managed to prepare two cups of tea and headed back to the living room. Nervously, I slid a cup in front of him and sat down closer to him rather than at the very end of the couch. He eventually took a sip from the tea and smiled.

“It’s good.”

What a relief. I let out a quiet sigh and took a drink as well. However...

“I-I’m sorry! Don’t drink any more and just toss it out.”

It was so bland that it took me by surprise. It was practically leafy water. The thought of placing such a thing in front of Lord Phillip and having him drink it filled me with embarrassment and shame. But Lord Phillip shook his head.

“The mere fact that *you* prepared this tea made me so happy that I didn’t even notice the flavor. Thank you.” He finished that off with a smile.

His gentle expression and words made my chest tighten like I was about to cry.

“Why?”

“Viola?”

“Why do you like me this much?”

The words were out of my mouth before I could even realize it.

“I don’t know.”

“Huh?”

“I don’t know the reason. But at this point, I can’t live without you, Viola.”

He smiled like he wasn’t sure what else he could do. I wasn’t feeling sad, but seeing his expression made me want to cry. At the same time, I felt something that was different from anything else I’d felt in the past. My heart raced, carving out a soft and warm rhythm in my chest.

Noticed

After Lord Phillip finished his cup of hot water, he told me that he would prepare a cup of tea for me and stood up. I had fallen silent, confused at my own feelings, and looked up when he spoke.

“Um, could I watch you? I want to be able to brew some nice tea too.”

“Yes, of course, if you don’t mind me being the one to teach you.”

“Thank you so much.”

He easily granted me permission, so I followed him into the kitchen and stood next to him. Lord Phillip taught me how to prepare tea, his instructions so detailed it was as if he was teaching a child. I stared at his hands as he worked and marveled at how even his fingers were perfect. Eventually we took our teacups and returned to the living room.

It was after I sat down on the sofa that I realized that where I was sitting was quite bizarre. Because of how we had been standing in the kitchen, I unthinkingly sat right next to Lord Phillip. I could feel him staring down at me, his attention practically digging into my skin. I was so embarrassed that I could crawl into a hole. It would be weird to move away from his side at this point, so I remained still and uncomfortable.

“Ah!”

Suddenly, thunder even louder than earlier roared through the room, and the entire building shook as if there was an earthquake. At the same moment, the power in the hotel went out, and the room was plunged into darkness. I was so overwhelmed by fear that I grabbed onto Lord Phillip with all my might.

He immediately placed his arm around my shoulders and repeated “It’s all right” in a gentle voice, occasionally patting me on the back. As if he was casting a spell, I could feel my fear fading away.

“Thank you very much...”

“Don’t worry about it.”

About ten minutes must have passed before I felt well enough to speak. For some reason, even though I had calmed down, I remained in Lord Phillip’s arms. It felt good to be surrounded by his nice and comforting smell, his gentle warmth, and his rapid heartbeat. Thanks to that, I could feel my eyelids growing heavy.

“I’m glad I was the one with you today,” he said.

“Hmm?”

“I understand that these are unavoidable circumstances, but I wouldn’t be able to stand the thought of you sitting like this with another man.”

He muttered that he wouldn’t have even wanted Rex here, which I could totally understand. I wouldn’t want to sit next to Rex either.

“Don’t worry.”

“Hmm?”

“I think that I’m only able to do this because I’m with you, Phil.”

The words came out so easily that I didn’t even consciously mean to say them. But it was the truth. I couldn’t imagine sitting here and hugging like this with another man. After I said that, I was unable to withstand the terrible drowsiness that came upon me, and I slowly closed my eyes. Before I could hear what Lord Phillip had to say, I fell asleep.

“Ngh...”

When I slowly opened my eyes, the blindingly bright morning light coming from the window made me wince. I blinked several times and noticed that I was surrounded by a pleasant-smelling warmth. As I started to wake up more, I hurriedly raised my head. The situation couldn’t be what I was thinking it was, right?

“Good morning.”

I met Lord Phillip’s eyes, which were so close to mine that I was taken aback.

He smiled so bright that it was like he embodied the sun itself, especially when combined with the light coming from the window. At the same time, I noticed that I was grabbing on to his clothes with a tight grip.

“Ah, um, I...”

“You fell asleep like this last night, and though I tried to carry you to the bed, I couldn’t see anything and gave up. Since you wouldn’t let go of my clothes, we stayed like this until now.”

“Huh?”

I glanced at the clock. It was already morning. Did that mean that Lord Phillip had to stay up the entire night because of me? Cold sweat broke out over my face as the immense guilt ate at me.

“I-I’m really sorry! Phil, did you sleep at all?”

“Yes, don’t worry. I had a little shut-eye as well.”

So he said, but was that true? It sounded like he was lying to spare my feelings.

“U-Um, did you see my face while I was asleep?”

“Yes. You were unbelievably adorable.”

He said it with a completely straight face. I hurriedly buried my face in my hands. There was no way a face slack in sleep would be cute.

When I was a child, I accidentally fell asleep on the garden bench. Rex told me that my face looked so stupid that he had actually been surprised. It was very embarrassing.

“As I stared at your sleeping face, I wondered if what I was experiencing was pure happiness.”

I glanced at him through my fingers, and Lord Phillip really was making a blissful and soft expression. I wasn’t able to look at him for a while.

The sky outside the window was so bright that it was hard to imagine that just a few hours ago, it had been dreary and stormy. We ate the breakfast that the employees brought to our room while facing each other. It felt a little strange to

eat breakfast with him. If I did end up marrying him one day, I'd probably be spending all of my mornings like this though.

"Phil, you eat so neatly."

"I do?"

"Yes. I've always thought... Ah..."

That was when I hurriedly closed my mouth. What was I saying? I let down my guard way too much. I quickly glanced at Lord Phillip, and he was staring at me with a shocked expression.

"Have your memories returned?"

"I-I don't really know. My mouth just said that on its own..."

"I see... Have you remembered anything else?"

It was an extremely unbelievable lie, but it looked like Lord Phillip took my word for it. I let out a sigh of relief. Normally, this would have been the perfect opportunity to say that my memories had returned, since it wouldn't negatively affect me. Actually, I'd be able to stop this awful farce, which would make me feel better. But when Rex's words from the other day flashed through my mind, I found myself making up a lie.

If he thought that my memories returned, our relationship wouldn't be able to remain as it was now. Considering the lies he'd told up to this point, I wouldn't be surprised if he ended up hiding in his room, like Rex said. That's what I would do. At the same time, I noticed something.

"I don't remember...anything else."

I realized that the idea of not being able to see Lord Phillip any longer was something that I feared more than anything else.

Birthday 1

“Hey, Viola, why don’t you try giving one to Lord Phillip as well?”

“Huh?”

“Normally, your cooking is so bad that I’d feel bad even feeding it to pigs, but today’s looks pretty good. Try giving him some once in a while.”

I couldn’t tell if Jamie was complimenting or insulting me, but the beautiful bag of cookies in the palms of my hands was the result of her suggestion. I stared at it from every angle. Though the exterior of the present was beautiful, the cookies inside were the same ugly ones I always baked.

We had just baked cookies in home economics, and all the female students around us were excitedly discussing who they wanted to give them to. Since I was bad at making desserts, I had always given them to Jamie, who wanted them for some reason. It was a mystery as to what she was doing with them.

She was right that the cookies I made this time were pretty good considering my previous attempts. But I hadn’t even thought of gifting them to Lord Phillip.

“Lately, people have been saying that you and Lord Phillip aren’t very close, so I think it’s important to make the appeal that you’re lovey-dovey.”

“It’s true that we’re not close though...”

“Well, in any case, just try handing it to him. Okay? Please?”

With that final push and a “See you later,” I was literally shoved out of the classroom. Why did she want me to give these to Lord Phillip so bad?

It was true that gifting desserts to one’s fiancé was a normal and common thing to do, and this time, I was only handing it to Lord Phillip at Jamie’s request. There was no deeper meaning behind it. With that thought running through my mind, I made my way to the advanced placement class. But Lord Phillip wasn’t in the classroom. I was greatly relieved at the fact that I wouldn’t have to hand him the cookies now.

But if I immediately returned to the classroom, then Jamie would probably say something about that. I decided that I would take a detour through the back courtyard and take the long way back. As I walked, humming to myself the entire way, I noticed two familiar silhouettes and stopped.

What are Lord Phillip and Lady Natalia doing here, just the two of them?

“Lady Viola really is a headache... Don’t you agree, Lord Phillip?”

“Yeah. Nothing about us is the right fit for each other.”

As soon as I heard those words, it felt like a shard of ice stabbed through my heart. At the same time, I wasn’t surprised. Everyone around us knew that I wasn’t a suitable fiancée for him.

“So you have absolutely no interest in Lady Viola?”

In response to Lady Natalia’s question, Lord Phillip nodded without hesitation. “No. If our families hadn’t made that promise, I probably would not have even spent time with her.”

He practically spat the words out and upon hearing them, my vision slowly became blurry from the tears welling up in my eyes. Before I even knew it, I had run away.

I was such a fool. Even if I went and handed him these cookies, they’d just end up in the trash. I held them so tightly that I felt them crumble in my fists as I started to cry. Though our engagement was something that had been decided upon before we were even born, we’d been together since we were babies. It wasn’t an insignificant amount of time. For the first time, I realized that I’d been under the impression that even though Lord Phillip never showed any affection, he’d at least grown a little fond of me. That made me cry even harder.

A few days later, I went and told him, “I hate you, Lord Phillip.”

When I had woken up this morning, even though I couldn’t remember much of it, I felt like I had had a horrible dream. As usual, I was now sitting in House Lawrenson’s mansion and sitting across from Lord Phillip as we had our tea.

“Your birthday, Phil?”

“Yes. I’d like you to be at the party as well.”

Upon hearing his words, I felt like massaging my temples to stave off the impending headache. I participated every year, and yet I’d completely forgotten about it this year.

“Of course, if you’re all right with having me there.”

“Thank you... And, one more thing.”

“Yes?”

“May I give you a dress that I’d like you to wear on that date?”

Lord Phillip made his request while looking so embarrassed that my heart skipped a bit.

“But it’s *your* birthday. Is that really all right?”

“Yes, that’s precisely why I’d like you to wear my present.”

“Thank you so much... That makes me very happy.”

After I said that, he smiled ecstatically. The air about him was so soft now that I could hardly remember the expressionless Lord Phillip from the past. At the same time, since I was going to receive a dress soon, I started to worry even more about what present to give him. In the past, we would give each other flowers, which was the bare minimum. But that wouldn’t work this year. I couldn’t think of a single thing he’d be happy to receive though.

“Have you remembered anything else since then?”

“No, nothing yet.”

“I see...” Lord Phillip looked a little sad at my response for some reason, but he followed it up with, “I’m looking forward to the party.”

He offered me a small smile. Upon seeing that, I genuinely, from the bottom of my heart, wanted to give him a present that would make him happy.

“And that’s why you called me?”

“I don’t know anyone else I can go to for this kind of advice.”

Rex and I were conversing as we sat in a carriage. In the few days since my conversation with Lord Phillip, I racked my head for something to give him but came up empty. So I had Rex come with me to pick out Lord Phillip's present. In retrospect, I hadn't been fond of Rex at all, and yet lately, I hadn't been as reluctant to spend time with him as before. Not that I would ever admit that to him.

"A present, hmm? If you're the one picking it out and giving it to him, I think even a rock would make him happy."

"Of course it..."

It would... Even that awful handkerchief had been enough to make Lord Phillip happy. It was entirely plausible that a rock would suffice as a good birthday present based on Lord Phillip's recent attitude, which made it even harder to choose.

"Anyway, I want Lord Phillip to actually enjoy the gift."

"Hmm? HMM? I see, I see."

I looked away from the way Rex was grinning at me and turned my attention to the view outside the window.

We ended up in a jewelry store of the highest quality in the kingdom, but when I saw what Rex was suggesting, I shook my head rapidly.

"No, no, no, no, nope. No way, nuh-uh."

"I seriously think this is the best thing you can get him."

"No way! I could *never* give that to him. I'd die from embarrassment."

The present that Rex was holding up was, to my horror, a set of matching necklaces. Yes, the design was lovely, but it was much too embarrassing to give him something that we had to wear as a pair.

"Without a doubt, this would make him as happy as a clam."

"B-But..."

"Hmm, so I guess your desire to make Phillip happy wasn't all that strong, then. What a shame."

“F-Fine!”

I ended up giving in to peer pressure and purchased the matching necklaces.

“Oh my! I can’t believe my eyes!”

I turned around when I heard a familiar voice behind me and I saw Lady Natalia, much to my surprise. Just how did the stars align in the sky for such a coincidence to occur? Things would undoubtedly get even more complicated with her around, and I surreptitiously sighed at the thought.

“You have Lord Phillip, and yet you’re buying a pair of matching necklaces with Lord Rex...”

“Huh? Oh no, this is...”

“I don’t want to hear your excuses!”

“You’re mistaken. This really is...”

Since I didn’t want her telling Lord Phillip biased misinformation again, I tried to explain what was going on, but Lady Natalia walked off with a furious look. Her servant followed suit, his arms loaded with bags. It felt like she had terribly misunderstood the situation, but it was doubtful that anyone would believe her if Rex was the supposed other man.

“Ah ha ha! She totally thinks that you’re cheating on Phillip with me.”

I heaved out a heavy sigh as Rex continued to laugh next to me. I was far more concerned with what I would say to Lord Phillip when I handed him his gift.

Birthday 2

“Happy birthday, Phillip.”

“Thank you.”

On Lord Phillip’s birthday, I wore the dress that he had given me and stood next to him, a smile on my face the entire time. We’d picked up the dress together the other day. It was custom-made from one of the most popular boutiques in the kingdom and was a perfect fit for me. He must have ordered it a long time ago, but I had no idea when that could’ve been.

The dress was a dark blue, and it was a truly beautiful and elegant gown. I had been so happy right after I put it on that I had spun around in front of the mirror, only for Selma to laugh at me. It was incredibly embarrassing.

All I did at the party was smile at the continuous line of guests that came up to us to congratulate and greet Lord Phillip. He had told me that he would be the one to deal with everybody so I pretty much didn’t have to talk. Knowing that he was more taciturn than anyone else we knew, for him to offer such a thing was so touching. At the same time, my heart started to beat faster at his consideration.

Since this was a party for the future Duke Lawrenson, there was a large number of guests present. Though there wasn’t enough time to go and talk to everyone at length, we were still grateful to everyone who came.

“Lord Phillip, Duke Lawrenson is calling for you.”

At around the midway point of the party, Lord Phillip was called away by his father. He told me to wait for him, and after seeking out Rex amid all the guests, told him, “I want to leave Viola in your care for a little while.”

This must have been his way of making sure I didn’t feel uncomfortable alone. His kindness was really sweet.

“Kay, leave it to me. Speaking of which, ‘leave Viola in your care’? You sound so cool. You’re more like her husband than her fiancé.”

"Phil, thank you so much. I'll wait for you right here."

I elbowed Rex in the side to stop him from joking and sent Lord Phillip off with a smile. His ears were bright red. I somehow managed to keep my face from flushing in response.

"Oh, that reminds me. Have you given him his present yet?"

"Not yet..."

"Huh? Didn't you have time to do that before the party started?"

"Yeah, but I got embarrassed."

After I said that, Rex heaved a heavy sigh. I regretted my decision and have reflected on my choices. *So please don't make me feel worse about it than I already do.*

"I'm sure it'll be too busy at the end of the party to give it to him, so I'll find a way to get you two alone later. You better hand it to him then."

"Sorry... Thank you. I'll give you something as thanks next time I see you."

"I don't need anything. I just want you to continue telling me alllll about you and Phillip and making me laugh until my stomach hurts."

Just who did he take us for? But it was true that Rex had helped us out a lot, so I nodded obediently. Afterward, though the occasional old classmate or one of Rex's acquaintances would talk to us, Rex's perfect support kept me from blowing my secret. Around thirty minutes later, I saw Lord Phillip heading back to us.

But every few steps he took, people around him would call out to him, and it didn't look like he'd reach us anytime soon. I figured it would be faster if I went to him instead, so I started to walk toward Lord Phillip. On the way, I saw a familiar noble lady talking to Lord Phillip. If I recalled, she went to the same school as us and was in advanced placement, just like Lord Phillip was. As I got closer, I heard a snippet of their conversation.

"Lord Phillip, what's the matter?"

"There's a string in your hair."

"Oh no, are you serious? It would be embarrassing if someone saw that, so could you take it out for me?"

You could do that yourself, or have literally anyone else do that for you. But the noble lady whose name I didn't even know was blushing, and it was exponentially clear that she had impure intentions toward Lord Phillip.

But Lord Phillip didn't notice a single thing. On top of that, this was as simple as removing a piece of trash from somebody, so he easily consented. Right when his fingers were about to brush against her hair, I ran forward.

"No!"

I hurried toward the two and grabbed Lord Phillip's arms tightly. The word was out of my mouth before I even realized it. Both Lord Phillip and the noble lady had frozen up as if time itself had stopped.

Just what did I do?

Eventually, the noble lady's eyes widened, and she awkwardly bid us a farewell before she ran away, leaving Lord Phillip and me standing in silence. As soon as I realized the position we were in, I let go of Lord Phillip's arm. But he remained still without saying a single word. I couldn't say anything either.

"I sawww that." The one who broke the seemingly endless silence was Rex, who was staring at us like he was having the time of his life. "Vivi, you got jealous?"

Lord Phillip looked shocked at Rex's words, and I was in the same boat. Jealous? Like envy? I got jealous over watching Lord Phillip interacting with another girl? Even though I wanted to deny it, it was true that earlier, when he was about to touch the other girl, the feeling in my chest was an overwhelming sense of rejection. As soon as I realized that, the sheer amount of shame I felt made me flush a deep crimson, and I buried my face into my palms.

Ahh, without a doubt, I was feeling jealous.

"Really?" I heard Lord Phillip's terribly surprised question from right next to me. It must've been surprising to him that I didn't say anything to counter Rex's words.

"Hey, I can handle the guests here. Why don't you guys leave for a bit and talk things out?"

He wasn't a member of House Lawrenson, but this was *Rex* we're talking about. I trusted that he'd be able to handle everyone. He must have intended for this to be my chance to hand Lord Phillip his present. Admittedly, it was hard to be alone with Lord Phillip *and* give him the necklace after what just happened, but I couldn't waste Rex's thoughtfulness.

Lord Phillip apologized and thanked Rex as well, and then, with his hand around my arm, we left the party hall.

Lord Phillip led me to the sitting room I had been resting in before the party started. As soon as he closed the door behind us, Lord Phillip turned and faced me straight on. His eyes were alight with anticipation, as if he wanted to hold on to me, and in their reflection, I could see my own face, which was blushing like a maiden's.

"Were you really jealous over me?" he asked after taking a small moment to find the words.

Despite all the lies I'd told up to this point, for some reason I couldn't come up with one in the face of his question. I slowly nodded with a slight dip of my head, and Lord Phillip's expression crumbled for a moment like he was about to cry. Instead, he wrapped his arms around me in a tight hug.

"I'm so happy, I don't even know what I should do or say."

"U-Um..."

"I'll never do something like that again. I'm sorry."

"Ah..."

"I swear that I'll never touch a woman other than you for the rest of my life."

Those words made me unbelievably happy. With one final "I love you" murmured directly into my ear, Lord Phillip tightened the embrace. Those feelings of wanting to touch or be touched by the other that Rex mentioned before were still something I knew nothing about. But I could no longer turn

away from the stirrings of love emerging from my heart.

Birthday 3

“U-Um, there’s something I’d like to give you!”

My embarrassment had reached its limit, but I figured this was the perfect time to give him his present. So I slowly untangled myself from his embrace and took out his gift from my bag on the table. I asked if he’d like to sit, and he immediately moved to sit on the nearby sofa. I sat down next to him, took a small breath, and then slowly handed him the paper bag.

“It really isn’t that fancy, but I got you something I hope you’ll like for your birthday. I hope you’ll accept it.”

“This is for me?” Lord Phillip asked after staring down at the gift for a long time.

“Is there anyone else here whose birthday is today?”

I followed up my joking question with a small smile, and he stared at me briefly, mouth agape, before he awkwardly took the gift from me with a “Thank you.” He asked if he could open it. I didn’t think I could stand watching his reaction, so I wanted him to open it in his room, but nonetheless, I nodded.

He slowly opened up the bag, so carefully as if he was handling a priceless treasure, then took out the box containing the necklace. As soon as he slowly opened it up, his eyes widened as if he was terribly shocked. His gaze shifted to me and what I had around my neck. I had actually worn the matching one today.

“This one and yours...”

“Yes, they’re a pair. Um, if you don’t want to match with me, then you don’t have to...” My words trailed off when I saw Lord Phillip’s reaction.

Tears as fat and round as pearls were falling from Lord Phillip’s pale golden eyes. It took some time for my brain to catch up to the fact that he was quietly crying.

“I’m sorry. I was just so happy that...”

I’d hoped he would be happy, but I didn’t once think that it would push him to tears, and I couldn’t hide my shock. Just how much did he like me? I could feel my nose starting to burn at his expression and his words, and I bit my lip to fight back the tears that began to blot my vision.

“I’ll never take this off. Thank you so much, truly.”

Lord Phillip smiled, as happy and unfettered as a child, and the sight made my chest tighten. At the same time, a wave of joy and affection washed over me. The depth of the emotion was so overwhelming that I could lose myself in it. The revelation of my love for him was absolutely painful. Lord Phillip wiped away his tears and gave me a small smile as if he was embarrassed before he peered into the paper bag again.

“Is there still something in here?”

“Y-Yes, though I’m not confident in the next one.”

The little bag that he took out from the gift bag contained homemade cookies. After I went shopping with Rex, I asked Jamie for advice as well, and she suggested that it would be even better if my gift contained something I made myself. I figured that he probably had enough of my embroidery after the handkerchief, so I decided to give him some snacks. I practiced with my family chef so many times and used the cutest molds I could find. This time, I was certain that my cookies both looked and tasted like normal ones.

“You made these yourself, Viola?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you so much.” The corners of his eyes crinkled in a gentle smile. He picked up a flower-shaped cookie and placed it in his mouth. I’d taste-tested the snacks countless times during the baking process, but I was still so nervous that my palms were starting to get sweaty. “This is delicious... What a surprise.”

“Really? I’m glad.”

“You really improved.”

At the same time that relief flooded me from him complimenting the cookie’s

taste, a question suddenly welled up in my mind. I'd never gifted him homemade cookies, nor had I ever brought up the fact that I was bad at making desserts. How did he know that I had improved?

He carefully placed the remaining cookies back inside the paper bag and quickly put on the necklace. He looked so good in it that one would think that it was a custom order made especially for Lord Phillip.

"Thank you so much. This was the best birthday of my life."

"I should be thanking you for everything you've done for me. I'm glad that you like it."

He looked away from me and murmured, "Happiness is a scary thing."

"Huh?"

"Every time I think about how this will all end someday, I'm filled with dread."

What did he mean by that? I opened my mouth to ask, but suddenly there was a knock on the door.

"Lord Phillip, Lord Rex says it's about time for you to head back."

"All right. Shall we go?" Lord Phillip held his hand out to me. Even though my mind was still filled with questions, I walked back to the party hall with him.

"Huh, Phillip, you weren't wearing that necklace earlier, were you? Ha ha, is that the present Viola gave you? Oh wait, Viola, you're wearing the same thing! Matchy-matchy!"

Rex continued to poke fun at us, as did several others who noticed the matching necklaces. I was so embarrassed I could die right on the spot, and eventually I forgot about all of my earlier questions.

"Oh, you managed to give it to him without any issue? That's great!"

A few days later, my father took me to a soiree with our family friends. Truthfully, I didn't want to go, but I managed to drag myself there after I found out Jamie had also been invited. I wanted to meet her and tell her all about what had happened at Lord Phillip's birthday. The soiree was a pretty big affair,

and there were a lot of people. Amid the crowd, Jamie and I hung out together near the walls, chatting the entire time.

“He said the cookies were yummy too.”

“That’s fantastic! I know I was the one who suggested them to you, but you were really bad at baking before so I was super worried. Though I figured that Lord Phillip would eat anything you put in front of him.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Um... If you promise you won’t be mad, can I tell you something?” Jamie asked as she stared up at me from behind her thick lashes. I had a terrible feeling, but I nodded anyway, and she giggled happily before she opened her mouth. “So back during our school days, you used to make these awful... I mean, these little snacks that were like pig food and I would always take them off your hands.”

Did you *have* to reword it like that? I swallowed the question with a mouthful of juice as I waited for Jamie to finish her story.

“And then I would give them all to Lord Phillip.”

I spluttered and coughed as soon as my brain registered her confession. I honestly thought I’d suffocate from how hard I was coughing. Seriously, wait a second. Why would Jamie give those snacks to Lord Phillip? They were practically biohazardous waste.

“I can’t remember when exactly it was but once, I happened to meet Lord Phillip at a soiree, and he asked me what you did with all the failed snacks you made in home economics. He thought you were giving them to someone.”

“Huh?”

“I told him that they weren’t fit for human consumption so you always threw them out. Then he asked if I’d be willing to give them to him. I figured it’d be better than just throwing them out, so I pretended that I wanted them so that I could hand them to him. Sorry for hiding it for so long!” Even though I was so shocked that I stood there in silence, Jamie continued to speak. “Once, when I was giving him the cookies, I asked if he was actually eating them.”

“U-Uh-huh?”

“After I asked him that, he ate all of the charred and blackened cookies right in front of me. That was a surprise! There were tears in his eyes after he finished though. But I kept handing them to him until we graduated. To tell you the truth, you would always say that Lord Phillip hated you so I wanted to tell you everything and clear up the misunderstanding. But Lord Phillip was adamant that I kept it from you... I worried for so long as to whether or not I should meddle in other people’s business that we graduated before I could figure out what to do.”

“Yeah... I get it. Thank you, Jamie.”

Back then, even if Jamie had confessed everything, I probably wouldn’t have believed her. I was happy at her consideration and sentiment, and I had no intention of blaming her for gifting them to Lord Phillip without telling me. But to imagine that Lord Phillip used to do such a thing.

Even though all of my cooking ended in abject failure, he managed to power through them just because I had been the one to make them. That was how much he loved me, apparently. He really made me so happy, though it was a little embarrassing to know that he’d seen that parade of failures back when we were younger.

“Viola?”

I pressed my hands against my cheeks as I felt them warm up and then heard a familiar voice calling my name. When I turned to look in its direction, I saw my old classmates and Lord Cyril standing there.

The End Is Always Sudden

“Good evening, Viola. I didn’t know you came as well.” Lord Cyril’s face gently softened to a smile, and he left his friends to come toward us. Before he could reach me, Jamie shoved herself in between us.

“Good evening, Lord Cyril. What business do you have with Viola?”

“Good evening to you as well, Lady Jamie. I wanted to have a little chat with Viola; am I not allowed to?”

Jamie started to nod, but she paused as if she remembered something. “Oh, but you did help me out a lot the other day...”

She dropped her aggressive attitude, looking a little nervous. At the same time, her father, Marquess Preston, appeared and led her away. I wasn’t sure where he took her to, but I hoped that nothing was wrong.

“She’s the same as always. How’ve you been?” Lord Cyril asked.

“I’ve been doing well, thank you.”

“I see that your memories still haven’t returned?”

“Yes...”

I’d always felt guilty at the fact that I was lying about my amnesia, but lately I’d been feeling even worse.

“Oh, you’re blushing. Is something the matter?”

“Um, well, something happened recently that made me happy.”

After I said that, Lord Cyril asked if the “something” had to do with Phillip. I easily nodded at that, and he looked at me in surprise.

“I’ve never seen you look like that before,” he said.

“I-Is that so?”

“Yeah. Don’t tell me...you’ve fallen for Phillip?”

The question took me off guard, and I felt my heart skip a beat. Lord Cyril was awfully inquisitive today, but why would he ask me something like this? Despite my confusion, I easily met his deep emerald eyes straight on to give him my answer of “Yes.”

“Even if Phillip is lying to you?”

“Yes. To tell the truth, I’m a huge liar myself.”

I smiled after I said that, and Lord Cyril looked surprised before he smiled sadly, his eyebrows curved downward. “I see... I guess it wouldn’t bother you if you loved him.”

I wasn’t sure what he meant, so I didn’t say anything and merely tilted my head to the side in curiosity.

After a moment, Lord Cyril said, “I’ll take you back to Viscount Westley,” and then together, we went back to my father.

“Um, thank you very much.”

“It’s fine. I’ll be off, then.”

“I’ll see you soon.”

“Right... See you, Viola.”

As he waved to me farewell, I noticed that strangely, the expression on his face was the same one he wore the day he confessed to me.

Since it was now the social season, there were more and more events that I couldn’t avoid. Lord Phillip and I were riding in a carriage together on our way to a ball held by the royal family. I’d never been one for social events and wasn’t looking forward to spending the night surrounded by my acquaintances. However, since Lord Phillip and Rex would be present, I wasn’t too worried.

After we arrived, I greeted the bare minimum of people and danced once. Right when I was saying that I wanted to get a drink and take a break, I saw a woman approach us.

“Oh, long time no see, Phillip.”

I quickly looked up when her sweet voice broke through the chatter. There were few women in the kingdom who could refer to Lord Phillip without honorifics or titles.

“Princess Mirabel...” After Lord Phillip greeted her by name, he whispered into my ear, “That’s Her Highness Mirabel, the sixth princess of the kingdom. Don’t say anything.”

Princess Mirabel, who was the sixth princess in the line of succession, was one of our classmates from school. I heard that she had already gotten married to a member of foreign royalty, so I was quite surprised to see her here. Back when we were in school, everyone knew her to be a selfish person who caused quite a bit of trouble for those around her. Considering how difficult it was for someone to change their nature, Lord Phillip likely thought that she was still someone to watch out for.

Lord Phillip and Princess Mirabel chatted casually for a little bit before she turned her attention to me. “Speaking of which, the two of you made up? That’s a surprise.”

“We...made up?” I unconsciously asked, too taken aback by her sudden comment. At the same time, Lord Phillip’s shoulders twitched.

“Back when we were in school, I happened to hear Phillip and Natalia talking about you behind your back.”

“That’s—” Lord Phillip hurriedly opened his mouth to try to interrupt Princess Mirabel, but she continued as if she didn’t hear.

“I also saw how you heard them and then ran off in tears.”

“Huh?”

I didn’t know that Princess Mirabel was there and that she even saw me. Now that Lord Phillip knew that I’d heard his conversation and fled from the scene crying, I slowly and nervously looked up at him. His face was expressionless.

“I’m truly glad that the two of you made up. I wish you a happy life.”

Princess Mirabel didn’t seem to notice Lord Phillip’s reaction. She simply turned around and walked away. Lord Phillip’s face was pale, and he remained

silent even after Princess Mirabel took her leave. Unsure of what to do, I could only stand there nervously.

Eventually, with his face buried in the palm of his hand, he said, “She’s got the wrong idea.” His voice was so quiet that I could hardly hear him. “I didn’t know that you overheard me, let alone that I made you cry.”

“Phil?”

“What happened that day really wasn’t what it sounded like. Not that telling you about it now makes a difference...”

Lord Phillip looked like he was about to burst into tears any moment. I had never seen him look so flustered, and I could only stand there, unable to do or say anything. After a moment, he suddenly grabbed my arm and started to walk off until we found Rex.

“I apologize... I’d like some time alone to cool my head.”

“A-All right,” I replied.

“Rex, I leave her in your care.”

“Have I become her permanent caretaker? Well, whatever. Sure.”

Lord Phillip stumbled off. It made me worried and anxious to see him so off-kilter.

“Did something happen?” Rex asked.

“Actually...” I told him exactly what had happened.

After I finished explaining, Rex murmured, “Oh wow...” with an awkward look on his face. “In any case, this isn’t the place to discuss this. Let’s get outta here for a bit.”

“Huh?”

“It’s an emergency. I feel so bad for Phillip, it isn’t even funny.”

Just what did Rex know? I obediently followed him to one of the resting rooms in the back, making sure to avoid any curious onlookers. Normally, it wouldn’t do for the two of us to take a break from the party. But this was supposedly an emergency, so it couldn’t be helped. We sat down with the table

between us, and then Rex leaned back in his chair with a deep sigh.

“So the biggest reason you thought Phillip hated you was that conversation Princess Mirabel mentioned?”

“Yes,” I replied without missing a beat.

“Yikes, yeah, I feel pretty bad for that one.” There was a dark look on his face, which was a fairly rare expression for him.

“To tell you the truth...that entire conversation between Phillip and Natalia you overheard was a lie. Actually, it was more like an act.”

“Huh?”

“You remember how at the time, Princess Mirabel was selfish, the kind of selfish where she wanted to have what others had, and wouldn’t give up until she got it?”

It was true that I had heard rumors about Princess Mirabel’s bad habits. However, I was too distracted by how my heart picked up speed at Rex’s unbelievable words. Everything I overheard that day was a lie?

“Back then, she was only into guys who were engaged or had a girlfriend. One day, she set her eyes on Phillip.”

“What?”

“Phillip is the heir to the prestigious House Lawrenson, he had enough power and influence that he could even reject the advances of a princess. But Princess Mirabel wasn’t the type to give up so easily. Plus, she was the kind of person who wouldn’t think twice about bullying someone or using violence against them, even if that someone was the daughter of a noble family.”

I couldn’t form a response, and Rex continued without waiting for one.

“Back then, Phillip asked me what he should do. If he rejected Princess Mirabel, there was a chance that she would do something to you. So I figured that to smooth things over, he could put on an act and make Princess Mirabel lose interest in him. Then we could fix the issue without any hurt feelings, right? That was what I told him.”

With all of this background information, I could easily put together what

followed. The memories from back then flashed through my mind and my chest tightened painfully.

“Princess Mirabel used to pass by the same place at the same time every day. The plan was to have Phillip stand near there and talk at length about how much he wasn’t interested in you and that he wanted to break off the engagement. We chose to have Natalia there as the person he was complaining to in order to make it more realistic. The plan worked out tidily and Princess Mirabel easily lost interest in him... But I didn’t know it had caused such a problem elsewhere... I’m sorry.”

Rex apologized to me in a soft murmur. Now that I had heard the entire truth from his mouth, I felt like I was about to break down in tears.

Everything I heard that day had been a misunderstanding. I realized now that Phillip’s past behavior toward me was due to him trying to hide his embarrassment and feelings. But back then, there was no way for me to tell. So I had easily fallen for Lord Phillip’s act. The thing was...

“After that, I told Lord Phillip I hated him.”

“Oof.”

“And ever since then, it’s been really awkward.”

Thinking back, after I told him I hated him, he replied, “So do I.” That was why my misunderstanding became worse. What did he mean by that though?

“In any case, it’s not your fault so don’t worry too much about it. Phillip and I were the ones who didn’t want to cause you unnecessary anxiety so we kept you in the dark, after all.”

“But...”

“Are you feeling better now that you know what happened?”

“Yeah... I’m fine.”

“Great. Then for now, we should go and take care of Phillip. He’s probably on the brink of death about now.”

Rex was absolutely correct. Lord Phillip was undoubtedly suffering through guilt and self-hatred at this very moment.

"Hey, don't you think it's about time to pretend that you got your memories back?" Rex asked.

"Huh?"

"I mean, you already like Phillip, right?"

"Yeah... I do." I nodded without any hint of hesitation, and he gave me a satisfied smile.

"If you pretend that you got your memories back and then confess your feelings, Phillip'll spring right back."

So Rex said, but I started to worry if I really could pretend that my memories had returned. I knew so many of his lies now. It would be unfair if I was the only one who could keep all of my secrets hidden. I felt like this deception would haunt me for the rest of my life if I didn't do something about it.

"Hey, Rex... If Lord Phillip knew that my amnesia was a complete lie that I came up with to break off our engagement..."

Do you think he'll hate me?

The words were almost out of my mouth when suddenly, the door flew open with a bang.

"I heard your words loud and clear just now!"

I hurriedly turned around to see Lady Natalia and Lord Phillip. There was a smug grin on Lady Natalia's face. Their arrival was so unexpected that I forgot to breathe for a moment and froze up like a statue. Even Rex looked shocked, his mouth hanging open.

Did Lord Phillip hear what I said? I'd wanted to come clean about my amnesia, but I never wanted to under these circumstances. But fate was cruel. My bad feeling was on the mark. I was in so much panic I felt like I was about to pass out. After what felt like an eternity, Lord Phillip opened his mouth.

"Was everything a lie?"

Misunderstandings and True Feelings

I had been taken by surprise, but now that it had come to this, my only choice was to tell him the truth. On top of that, I had to give him an honest apology and confess my love to him. With that decision in mind, I slowly nodded and as soon as I did so, Lord Phillip's eyes widened in shock.

"So, ever since the beginning..."

"I'm sorry for lying to you in such a cruel way."

Lord Phillip's breath hitched. There was a pained expression on his face, as if he was watching the world crumble around him. My chest tightened at the sight. In the beginning, I had only wanted to break off an engagement that neither of us had been interested in. That had been my only goal.

I didn't know that Lord Phillip had always been in love with me, nor could I have guessed that I would also end up falling for him. Lord Phillip stumbled backward a few steps and then walked toward the table near the entrance.

"Phil?"

Then, for some reason, Lord Phillip picked up the empty ice bucket from the table and placed it over his head.

None of us said a word. We all froze at the sight of Lord Phillip's sudden strange behavior. Lord Phillip's bizarre acts had surprised me multiple times in the past, but this time, he was truly incomprehensible. No matter how I racked my brain, I couldn't think of a reason as to why he'd want to wear an ice bucket in this situation. Things had become so ludicrous that I felt myself slowly calm down from my panic earlier.

"Er, Phillip? Why'd you put that on your head?"

For a few minutes more, an indescribably awkward atmosphere filled the room but, as expected, Rex was the one to break the silence.

"I can't look Viola in the eye..." Lord Phillip replied in a voice so quiet that I

had to strain my ears to hear him. I would have never guessed that was the reason for the ice bucket.

Rex snorted loudly. “Hee, h-hold on a second... H-How’d you end up with a bucket on your head though? Man, Phillip, I love you.” Rex couldn’t contain his laughter. If he truly loved Phillip, then I wished he would stop him from embarrassing himself.

Yet, considering all of the lies Lord Phillip had told so far, I could understand why he couldn’t remain calm. If I were in his shoes, I’d also feel so embarrassed I’d want to die. But even so...

“Lord Phillip, I’m truly sorry. I’m begging you to listen to what I have to say.”

He jumped at the sound of my voice, and it looked like he hit his head against the bucket. A low banging noise rang out through the room.

“It’s fine... I’m truly sorry,” Phillip said.

“No, it’s not, I...”

“Though this dream didn’t last for very long, I was able to experience an entire lifetime’s worth of happiness.”

“S-Sorry, Phillip, but Vivi isn’t standing there.”

It looked like Lord Phillip had gotten turned around due to the bucket on his head because he was talking while facing a direction no one was standing in.

“I-I wanna help him instead of laughing at him, b-but I can’t breathe,” Rex wheezed, looking like he was in even more pain than before.

“You must’ve forced yourself to play along with my foolish and disgusting lies. You’ve always been such a kind person. I’m sorry.”

“Phil, please listen to me! I—”

But my words fell on deaf ears. Lord Phillip merely apologized again, then removed the bucket from his head. With it still in his arms, he left the room. I hurriedly chased after him but by the time I exited the room, he was already gone.

What should I do? Standing alone in the long hallway, I buried my face into

my hands.

A week later, I sat in a carriage headed toward House Lawrenson's mansion. Ever since the truth came out, I hadn't been in contact with Lord Phillip at all. I tried to write to him, but he never replied. As a result, I asked his little brother Cedric for help and was told to come visit the manor.

"Not even Phillip can remain calm after all that embarrassment but he'll calm down in a few days. It'll be fine! Besides, him never saying anything to you is part of the problem."

That had been what Rex said to comfort me in the aftermath. I agreed that Lord Phillip could stand to talk more. If he had mentioned his issues with Princess Mirabel beforehand, then the misunderstanding wouldn't have happened. But it was also true that I hadn't put in any effort into getting to know him for the longest time. He wasn't the only one at fault.

Incidentally, after Lord Phillip left the room, Lady Natalia looked completely lost, so Rex fed her a random story and she left with a confused look on her face. Considering what she had witnessed, I couldn't blame her for such a reaction.

"Hello, Viola. Long time no see."

"Lord Cedric, it's been too long. I'm sorry for coming here out of the blue."

"It's fine. More importantly, I apologize for my brother's behavior."

When I eventually reached House Lawrenson's mansion, I was quickly taken to the parlor, where I sat down across from Lord Cedric. Apparently after Lord Phillip had returned home, ice bucket in hand, he'd spent an entire week holed up in his room. I also heard that he hadn't been eating well, which was quite worrisome.

"It's all my fault..."

"I don't know what happened, but in my opinion, my brother's at fault too for avoiding you when you just want to talk to him." After Lord Cedric said that, he

let out a heavy sigh.

“Lord Cedric, Little Vio is done with her walk,” a maid said as she entered the room, Little Vio perched in the palm of her hand.

Hearing someone say “Little Vio” was rather bizarre, and I shifted uncomfortably in my seat.

“Thank you,” Lord Cedric said.

“Where should I take her now?”

“Hmm. I can take her for now.” Upon hearing that, the maid gently placed Little Vio near Lord Cedric’s arm, and she energetically hopped over to her new perch.

“Hello, Little Vio,” I said.

“It’s over...”

“Huh?”

“Over...”

Little Vio wouldn’t stop muttering those words. It was definitely a trick of my mind, but she even looked a little upset.

“Even Little Vio’s been off her game, thanks to my brother. I heard she hadn’t been eating well either, so I’ve been taking care of her in my brother’s stead.”

My heart hurt upon hearing that even Little Vio was suffering due to my lies. I gently stroked her bright and small body, and then she said, “Want to disappear...” I felt like I was going to cry at the thought of Little Vio repeating Lord Phillip’s words and sentiments.

“In any case, I’m going to tell Phillip again of your arrival and ask him to come. Please wait right here.”

“All right... Thank you so much.”

With that, Lord Cedric placed Little Vio in the palm of my hand and then left the room. Alone with Little Vio, I gently pet her beautiful feathers and whispered another apology. I took out some bird feed from my bag and gave it to her. To my relief, she ate a little bit.

“To tell you the truth, I’m a little scared...”

I hadn’t been able to speak about these feelings, but since I felt a sort of innate connection with Little Vio, I didn’t mind exposing them to her. I was terrified of the idea that Lord Phillip hated me now. I thought about it carefully and realized that there was a chance he no longer wanted anything to do with me. Granted, at the time, it didn’t feel like that was the case.

But anyone would be hurt if they found out that their fiancée wanted to end an engagement so badly that she took advantage of an accident to pretend she had amnesia. I couldn’t blame him if he completely lost interest in me. The more I thought about it, the worse my thoughts began to spiral. This was always a bad habit of mine.

“If I was forcing myself to be with him, then I wouldn’t get jealous or buy matching necklaces...”

Tears started to roll down my cheeks, creating dark splotches on my dress. Lord Phillip didn’t understand anything at all. At the same time, I was made painfully aware of the fact that I had somehow fallen completely head over heels for him. Little Vio stared up at me with her big round eyes as I continued to cry.

“I’m truly hopeless...” she said in a quiet voice. Her words were as pessimistic as before, and hearing them made me feel terribly guilty. “It’s no use. I did my best countless times before.”

“Little Vio?”

What did she mean by “did my best”? I tilted my head to the side and she continued to speak.

“Viola truly is the one thing I can’t give up on.”

My vision clouded over at those words. Relief and affection welled up at the same time, and even more tears poured down my face. I was the one who didn’t understand anything at all. Again and again, I wiped away my tears and took a deep breath, then I pushed myself to my feet.

Until Now and Forever More

After I left the parlor, I asked the closest maid to take me to Lord Phillip's room. When I got there, I saw Lord Cedric in front of the door. Upon seeing me, he made an apologetic face.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting. It looks like he still won't come out." He let out another sigh and shrugged.

"Um... Lord Cedric, my apologies, but may I be left alone here for a little bit?"

"Yes, of course."

"Thank you so much."

"I leave my brother in your hands," he said with a gentle smile. He took Little Vio from me and then walked off.

I made a mental note to thank Lord Cedric again later and turned to face the door. "Lord Phillip, it's Viola. I'm sorry for my sudden visit. But there's something I absolutely must discuss with you. May I speak with you for a little bit?"

However, as I expected, there was no response. If it hadn't been for Little Vio's earlier words, then I undoubtedly would've given up here and left. But that was no longer the case. He still liked me. That truth kept my feet rooted to the ground.

"Very well, then," I said. "Then please listen to what I have to say." I trusted that he was paying attention as I slowly pressed the palm of my hand against the wood and continued, "Ever since I was a child, I thought you were someone far out of my reach... That I wasn't suited to be the bride of someone as perfect as you."

Everything from status to appearance to grades... Nothing about me was on his level. He could do everything perfectly, and meanwhile, I was too clumsy and awkward to do anything right. Everyone around us thought the same. I'd known Lord Phillip since we were babies. So I kept unconsciously comparing

myself to him. Time and time again, I hated myself and my lack of a spine.

“Lord Phillip, you were never a very friendly person. On top of that, I heard you say those things about me from your own mouth. So for the longest time, I thought you hated me.”

There was no way either of us would be happy if we had married each other under past circumstances. There was definitely someone out there who made a far better match for Lord Phillip, and if I wasn’t engaged with him, I no longer needed to hate myself even more than I already did. At least, that was what I used to believe.

“As a result, I wanted to end our engagement, even if it meant lying about having amnesia. And yet, you started to lie to me as well, saying we were in love with each other. I was really surprised. I even thought you had come up with a new way to torment me.”

He loved me enough to come up with such a sudden and unexpected lie. But back then, I believed it to be a complete falsehood.

“But you were such a different person from the Lord Phillip I knew... I’m not one to talk, but you kept coming up with outrageous lies and doing bizarre things I never imagined you doing. I truly had no idea what was going on...”

My vision was becoming more and more cloudy. *Don’t cry yet*, I told myself, biting back tears as best as I could.

“Lord Phillip, your true self wasn’t perfect at all.”

He took me to the river for a date and I saw the strange books that he read. He was so happy because of my terrible embroidery to the point that I felt embarrassed at his praise, and he talked about it all to a parrot that reminded him of me. He even randomly decided to put an ice bucket over his head. All of my memories with Lord Phillip were so silly and the opposite of my previous impression of him. And yet...

“And yet, I love you the way you are.”

Before I even knew it, I had fallen in love with him. I wanted to stay at his side for the rest of our lives.

“I love you, Lord Phillip. I love how kind you are, how you always try your best, and how you’re always honest with people even if you don’t always know how to talk to them.”

Tears welled up in my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. My voice was trembling, and I could feel my words catching in my throat. But even so, I clenched my fist and continued to speak.

“I want to call you ‘Phil’ as who I am now. I want to remain your fiancée. I want to be with you for as long as we...”

Before I could finish my sentence, the door suddenly burst open. I had been resting my weight against it, and I stumbled forward at the sudden lack of support. But I didn’t fall onto the ground. Instead, I realized that Lord Phillip was tightly embracing me against his chest.

“I’m sorry...” His voice was trembling as he gently spoke. The tears got worse as I realized I was surrounded by the warmth, scent, and voice that I loved. “I’m truly sorry for making you cry and hurting you.”

“Lord Phillip...”

“I can’t apologize enough.” I remained in his arms for a few minutes more, eventually he slowly released me and then looked at me with an insecure look in his eye. “I’m sorry I’ve been avoiding you this whole time.”

“No, I’m the one who should apologize for lying to you.” Even after I said that, he insisted that he was in the wrong. At this point, I felt like we were both at fault. “As you say, I’m not perfect. I’m a liar who has no social skills. I’m not cool at all.”

“Yes, I know.”

Upon hearing my answer, Lord Phillip smiled helplessly and gently brushed his right hand against my cheek.

“But even so, I’m confident that I love you more than anyone in this world.” His passionate eyes met mine. I’d been at his side ever since I could remember, but this felt like the first time I was actually seeing him. “I promise that I will never lie to you again... Despite all of my faults, would you still be willing to let me stay by your side?”

“I’ll never lie again either... Please, stay with me forever.”

He looked confused and after a strange five-minute-long silence, Lord Phillip hesitantly opened his mouth. “Um, do you...like me?”

“Yes.”

He didn’t say anything for a little while again. “Really?”

“Yes. I love you,” I answered immediately.

Lord Phillip slowly fell to his knees and covered his mouth with both hands before he let out a long sigh. His face and ears were so red that I felt a little worried for him. I crouched down as well so that I could meet his eyes. Love was truly a fearsome emotion, because he looked adorable like this. I had never seen someone so endearing.

“I can’t think of anything to say...” he said.

“Considering the situation, I wish you would try to at least say one thing.”

“I could die happy right now.”

“Don’t.”

His expression slowly became pinched, as if he was barely controlling himself from bawling. This time, I was the one who brushed my hand against his cheek, and as I did so, a single tear spilled from his golden eyes.

“I’ve always been in love with you... That is the truth.”

After he murmured that, he pressed his face against my shoulder, and I wrapped my arms around him. As I soaked up his warmth, I felt as if all of my past struggles had not been in vain.

From a Lie to the Truth

“You really need to talk more, Phil.”

“I’m sorry...”

When we both calmed down after a while, we sat down on the sofa and talked things out. Now I realized just how many misunderstandings there were between us. Apparently, when he had said, “So do I,” after I said I hated him, it was because he meant, “I hate myself as well.” Unless I had psychic powers, there was no way I would’ve ever figured that out by myself.

“Ever since I was a child, my mind would go blank around you and I couldn’t think of anything to say.”

“Be that as it may, I can’t understand you unless you use your words.”

“Yes, I’m truly sorry... That’s why I thought it was a given you’d hate someone like me. Despite being prepared for that, I was sick in bed for two weeks after you told me you hated me.”

I didn’t know what he’d gone through, but that made me feel terrible. I still wished he would’ve said something to me beforehand though.

“I’ll spend the rest of my life making it up to you for everything. Please forgive me,” he continued.

“Er, you don’t have to take it so seriously... Oh, that reminds me, what did you mean by ‘just seeing your face made me happy’ back when I first pretended to have amnesia?”

“Um... Those were my own feelings...”

Apparently, he had been introducing himself in an explanation to me about myself.

“Were you jealous seeing me talk to other men?”

“Yes. I was under the impression you loved Cyril.”

“Is that why you lied and told me that I hated him?”

For a very long while, Lord Phillip didn’t open his mouth until finally, in a voice so quiet I could hardly hear him, he said, “I’m sorry.”

He buried his face into his hands. If I continued to bring up his past lies, there was a chance that he’d put an ice bucket over his head again. The mental image of that made me laugh a little, and he stared at me in confusion.

“Phil, I love you.”

“I do as well... I love you so much that I don’t even know what to do with myself.”

Like always, he finished off his confession like he was about to start crying. The sight of him filled my chest with love, and I wished that I could stay by his side forever more.

“What nice weather we have today,” I said.

“I agree. Should we go out into the garden later?” Phil replied.

“Oh, that sounds good. We should invite Little Vio too.”

I smiled and then turned my gaze from House Lawrenson’s manor’s window to my beloved sitting across from me. About a week had passed since I confessed my feelings to Phil. After our talk, I told my parents, Jamie, and Lord Cedric about my fake amnesia and apologized. No one got mad; instead, they were glad that I had cleared up all of my misunderstandings with Phil. All of the most precious people around me were so kind and gentle that I swore to never lie to them ever again.

As for my other acquaintances, they only knew that my memories had returned. Lady Natalia knew about my deception, but after I told her everything, she had said, “Hmm, I see. I don’t hate you when you’re not all mopey, so I’ll keep your secret!”

“If you’re free next week, would you like to go eat with me? There’s a restaurant I’d like to go to,” I said.

“Of course, if you’re all right with me accompanying you,” Phil replied.

“You’re the only one I’d want with me... Um, what are you doing?”

For some reason, he was pinching his own cheek with a perplexed look on his face.

“I’m so happy that I can hardly believe this is all real.”

“Oh you. You’re going to ruin your pretty face.” I reached my hand out and gently took hold of his hand. When I linked her fingers together, his face flushed a deep crimson. “All of this is real. Don’t worry.”

“Sometimes I can’t even believe that you like me back...”

“Oh you,” I said again. I’d confessed to him multiple times, and yet he couldn’t stop saying such things. I couldn’t help but laugh. “It looks like I haven’t gotten through to you just how much I love you.”

“How much is that?”

“Do you want to know?”

“Yes.”

It seemed he was serious about that, and he stared at me with a solemn expression on his face. Neither of us were the talkative type, so we’d been completely oblivious to each other’s feelings for the longest time. So I decided that I would communicate to him my honest feelings as many times as he needed. I gave my beloved a bright and toothy smile.

“I’m infatuated.”

Step-by-Step, Slow and Steady

“So, how far have you gone with Phillip?”

“We haven’t seen each other in so long and that’s seriously the first thing you ask?”

Rex suddenly dropped by House Westley’s manor in the afternoon without any prior warning. He sat down on the sofa in my room, looking completely at home. As soon as he made himself comfortable, he asked me that question. He was as insensitive as ever.

“Well, considering it’s you two we’re talking about, I know that nothing happened.”

“You need to find better hobbies.”

“I get that a lot.”

“I figured.”

He offered a uselessly cheery smile and then picked up the teacup from the table. It was impossible to tell that the man before me was the most popular among the ladies of high society.

About two months had passed since Phil and I confessed to each other. We started to meet each other more, but of course, we hadn’t experienced the kind of change that Rex brought up. Our relationship was still very chaste. We mostly went out on dates around town or attended parties held by our mutual acquaintances. Fishing had been a surprisingly fun activity, so we went again as well.

At times, Phil still did or said some weird things. But I loved that part of him. Our days passed by in peaceful bliss.

“I ran into Phillip the other day and we were chatting over a meal.”

“Oh, I think he mentioned that to me.”

I remembered the letter he’d sent me the other day brought up the fact he’d

be going to eat with Rex soon. All of the letters he sent me were five times the length of mine, so I always had trouble deciding what to write in response. Despite how long they were, I reread them almost every day. This was a secret I'd take to my grave.

"Phillip looked as happy as always. He couldn't stop going on about how cute you are that it practically became a catchphrase."

"I see..."

"He really loves you, Vivi."

"That makes me really happy to hear."

"Mm-hm."

Even when talking directly to me, Phil never hesitated to call me "cute." I loved hearing him say that. I started putting in more time and effort into my appearance so that he would never stop complimenting me.

Rex smiled as if he was satisfied and continued, "Oh yeah, that reminds me. I asked him how far you two've gone, and do you know how he answered me?"

"You asked Phil that too? Stop that."

"It's fine. There's nothing to get mad about." After he said that, Rex started to laugh as if he could no longer contain his mirth. I had a bad feeling about it and stared coldly at him.

"When I asked how far he's gone with you, he said that he took you to the neighboring town. Ha ha ha ha ha! O-Oh no, just remembering what he said is making my stomach hurt... I really love that guy. Y-You two should try taking a trip a bit farther away, ah ha ha ha!"

I ignored Rex as he continued to laugh at his own story and took a bite of the cake he'd brought as a gift. This was my favorite dessert in the world. Considering Rex had been talking to *Phil*, I already figured that he would give the incorrect response.

It was almost unnatural how little he knew about love. Didn't he read through the entire *A Prince Just for Me* series? How could he still be so clueless? It sometimes made me a little mad. Even after we confessed our feelings to each

other, the air between us remained the same as always. We'd hugged countless times, but we hadn't progressed beyond that. I felt like he had been more assertive back when I was pretending to have amnesia.

"Lord Phillip must've never thought the day would come when you'd reciprocate his feelings, so he's probably feeling completely out of sorts. How adorable of him," my friend Jamie had said the other day. His feelings had been one-sided for so long that he must be unsure of what to do now that they were mutual.

I loved Phil, so I too wanted to know more about him than I do now. But not only was it much too embarrassing a sentiment to convey, it was also something that would only cause him more stress. So I was doing my best to keep it out of not just my words, but my attitude as well. We had all the time we needed. I didn't mind proceeding at his pace, no matter how slow he wanted to take it.

As those thoughts swirled in my mind, Rex's shapely lips suddenly formed a beautiful crescent. No matter how many times I saw him smile, it only filled me with dread.

"Don't worry. I gave Phillip a few things to think about."

"What did you say?" I asked after a pause, too worried about what I'd hear.

"I gave him some advice. I'm sure he'll show you his more reliable side the next time you're together."

"Here you go again with your unnecessary help..."

"That's not very nice. And here I was being so considerate of you two..."

I knew that Rex's intentions when it came to helping Phil and me with our relationship were pure. But I also knew that he viewed us as entertainment. In this particular situation, the latter was probably his main motive.

"So, make sure you tell me *everything*. That's a promise."

Rex's words were so exasperating that I responded with yet another heavy sigh.

"H-Hey, Viola."

"Hello...?"

A few days after, I visited House Lawrenson's manor and was immediately greeted by Phil, who wasn't exactly acting like himself. As far as I could remember, this was the first time that he had ever greeted me in such a way.

"I made some of the snacks you said you like, Phil. I practiced many times with the head chef and had him taste test for me, so they should be all right."

Lately, I'd been working hard on both my embroidery and dessert-making skills so that I could see him happy. Granted, he seemed to enjoy whatever I gave him, no matter how badly I failed.

"Thank you, I'm truly delighted. This shall be an heirloom to be passed through my family for generations to come."

"Make sure you finish eating that within the day."

As we conversed, we made our way to his room as usual. I sat down on the sofa after he invited me in, and his maids immediately began to prepare tea. The misshapen dessert I'd made was carefully placed upon a lovely plate and set upon the table. Though it was just as ugly as all the previous desserts I'd made, it definitely tasted normal. In fact, I'd even go as far as to say it was pretty good. I even wanted to give some to Jamie, who had a tendency to treat my cooking like it was pig food.

Just as the maids finished setting the table for tea, Phil was called away for an emergency.

"I'm sorry, but please wait here a little. You can make yourself at home."

"All right."

After I saw him off, I immediately stood up and made my way toward Little Vio, who I had brought snacks for as well. But when I peeked inside her spacious and elaborate cage, she'd twisted her body into a bizarre position with her eyes closed. It looked like she was taking a nap. I'd been looking forward to chatting with her, but there was nothing I could do about it if she was sleeping.

I'd just have to speak with her after she woke up. For a little while, I stared at her cute little body. As I was about to return to the sofa, something caught my eye and I stopped.

"Huh?"

To my surprise, the shelf at the very bottom of the bookcase—the one that had previously been covered by a piece of cloth because it contained books that were never meant for my eyes—was laid bare. It seemed like Phil forgot to put the cloth back on.

I knew I shouldn't look, but I couldn't tear my eyes away. I noticed a new book that I didn't recognize had been placed on the shelf.

"The Dater's... Almanac...?"

What a simple yet suspicious title. Like the others, there were page markers sticking out of the book, and it looked like it was read many times. I carefully pulled it out of the shelf and started flipping through it. The book was a lot more normal than I'd imagined.

It focused mainly on teaching one what to say to girls to make them happy, and there were also suggestions for date spots. Some of the contents were so corny that I wanted to have a word with the author, but this was the first time I'd ever read a book like this. It was so interesting that I lost myself in the pages.

Eventually, I flipped to a page with a strange timeline. There was a space for the reader to fill in themselves, and familiar handwriting on the page. Phil was as weirdly serious as ever. I started to read through his notes.

"Wow..."

To my surprise, the timeline showed how long it took the average couple to meet certain romantic milestones. He must've been taken aback by how slow we were taking it, because he stopped writing where the chart said couples on average spent a month together before their first kiss. The page was weirdly rumpled. It was clear that reading this must've been a shock to him.

Yeah, I really shouldn't have seen this, I thought as I carefully placed the book back on the shelf.

He must've been acting strange earlier thanks to both this book and Rex's words. But it made me happy that he was thinking about me and worrying about us in his own way.

"I apologize for the wait."

"Don't worry, it wasn't long."

That was when Phil returned and sat down next to me. He must've rushed whatever he had been called away for. I probably wasn't imagining the fact he was closer than usual to me on the sofa.

"This is my first time seeing Little Vio's face all relaxed in sleep, but she's so cute."

"Yes."

He was still acting a little strange, but we had a nice conversation all the same. Then, curious as to what Rex said to him, I steered the conversation toward him as casually as possible.

"Oh, that reminds me, Rex told me that the two of you had a meal together. Where did you go?"

"We went to a restaurant owned by one of Rex's acquaintances. The view at night was nice, and the food was delicious."

"That sounds like a lovely restaurant."

"We should go together next time."

"Yes, please. I'm looking forward to it."

"I'm glad. And Rex told me that such stores are..."

Midway through his sentence, Phil suddenly stopped talking and covered his mouth. For some reason, his face was so red that even his ears were flushed.

"Phil...?"

I wondered what happened and peered into his face, but he hurriedly tried to put some distance between us. He lost his balance as a result, and to my shock, he ended up falling on top of me, pinning me down on the couch.

Neither of us could say anything from the shock. Phil's too-beautiful face was

so close to mine that the tips of our noses were brushing against each other. Though part of me thought that this was a cliché moment, my heart was beating loud and fast in my chest.

At this rate...maybe...just maybe...

As soon as the thought came into my mind, Phil jumped backward and off of me.

“Th-The atmosphere...”

“What?”

“I heard that the atmosphere for the first time is really important.”

I tilted my head to the side. What was he talking about? After a few seconds, I realized that all this stuff about the atmosphere was probably something that Rex told him. It was very like Phil to come clean to me about all this.

The air between us was indescribably awkward, and I could feel my face grow hotter and hotter at the embarrassment. Even my heart was starting to pick up speed again at the reminder of our new relationship status. It had been so long since there was such a long silence between us that it felt nostalgic until, eventually, Phil opened his mouth.

“Would it be possible...” he began, trailing off briefly, “for us to meet next weekend?”

“Y-Yes.”

“I’d like to try this again then.”

As far as I knew, even if it *was* a first kiss, it wasn’t something one planned in advance. But he said it with such a serious expression that I unconsciously nodded in response.

On the day that Phil wanted to “try again,” the plan was to meet up at a café and then watch an opera together. This was the first time we would watch something together since the stage adaptation of *A Prince Just for Me* ≡. Last night, there were so many thoughts swirling in my mind that I couldn’t fall asleep due to the nerves. Hopefully, I wasn’t the only one suffering from

insomnia.

It was obvious just from looking at my face that I hadn't gotten any sleep, but thankfully, my maids were able to skillfully hide everything behind a layer of makeup. Finally, with their help, I stood in front of the mirror, looking far more put-together than usual.

After a while, I got in a carriage and arrived at the café we'd be meeting at. Through the glass, I could see Phil sitting at a table near the window. Between the rain and his melancholic expression as he stared out at the distance while resting his face on his hand, he looked like a piece of art. The women in the café and even the pedestrians passing by couldn't stop staring at him. I couldn't blame them; so long as Phil didn't say anything, he looked very much like a prince out of a fairy tale. He just had to keep his mouth shut.

"Hello! Did I keep you waiting?"

After I took a deep breath, I entered the store and walked right to him. Phil practically jumped out of his seat, then he looked at me with an awkward smile.

"No, I just got here. Um, what nice weather we have today."

"It's pouring. Do you like the rain?"

"Er...perhaps..."

I didn't know what to say to that. Was he really in the right condition to spend an entire day with me? Despite my worries for him, I sat down across from him.

"Do you come here often?" I asked.

It was my first time in this café, but it was a lovely store with a stylish interior and a great ambience. There were a lot of items on the menu, with lots of delicious-sounding cakes and teas.

"This is my second time," Phil replied. "The other day, I happened to meet your friend at a soiree and she recommended it to me. I came here by myself once just to check things out since she said you like this kind of place."

"Oh, I see."

By "friend," he must've meant Jamie. It made me happy to hear that he listened to her advice and even went out of his way to make sure the

recommendation was a good one. I loved this part of his personality.

"Thank you very much. That makes me very happy, and this place is quickly becoming one of my favorite stores," I said.

"I'm glad," Phil said after a short pause.

The corners of his mouth were slightly quirked as if he was relieved, and I felt my chest grow tighter. Phil was always doing his best for me, and he was both gentle and sweet. He sometimes focused his efforts in the wrong direction and they ended up for naught, but I liked that part of him as well.

"She told me that this was very good, and I thought this sounded delicious."

"Hee hee, then I'll order whatever drink and cake you recommend, Phil."

After I said that, his expression softened in both joy and embarrassment.

"What a wonderful seat!" I exclaimed.

It was almost time for the opera, so we had made our way to the theater. The attendants took us to some of the best seats in the house, and I didn't even dare try to guess at the cost. I'd read the source material that the show was based on, and it was one of my favorites. It made me wonder if Phil took me here knowing that.

We sat down next to each other on the comfortable chairs, and my view of the stage was so good that I was a little surprised. Not only that, but our seats were in something like a private room so we couldn't see the other patrons, nor could they see us. What a wondrous experience it would be to watch an opera from this spot! Just imagining it made my chest flutter.

"Thank you so much, truly. I'm so excited," I said.

"I'm glad to hear that."

The sight of Phil's eyes crinkled in a kind smile made my heart beat faster. I'd noticed that the lady who led us to our seats hadn't been able to stop sneaking glances at him either, though Phil didn't seem to notice. Ever since I realized my feelings for Phil, I started feeling anxious from time to time. I knew that he liked me very much, but I couldn't help but worry when I thought about the endless

stream of girls who would fall for him the more they knew about him.

When I discussed this with Jamie in the past, she smiled happily at me and said that I was in love as well. I didn't know that liking someone would also lead to such negative feelings.

"I like you..."

As those thoughts swirled in my mind, I suddenly felt the urge to communicate my feelings. After the words left my mouth, Phil's eyes widened with surprise next to me. His face grew so red that I could see the flush even in the darkening theater.

"I'm sure that I like you more."

With that, he held my hand in a tight grip. I couldn't suppress my small giggle at his words. I was truly fortunate. At the same time, the theater grew dark, and I knew that the opera was about to start. I squeezed his hand as well and turned my attention to the stage, my heartbeat ringing in my ears the entire time.

"It was a wonderful show," I said.

Phil didn't say anything for a long time before he finally said, "Yes, it was."

After the opera ended, we left the theater, got in a carriage, and started the journey home. It was fine. Even though I was on edge the entire day, wondering when he'd kiss me, and even looking forward to it, it was fine that it never actually happened. That was what I told myself anyway, but I couldn't help but feel a little miffed.

He even said he would try again.

If he cared that much about the atmosphere, then he missed his chance. The perfect moment would've been before the lights turned on in the theater, right after an opera all about the wonderful theme of love. There was no way this horse-drawn carriage would have the atmosphere he was talking about.

Neither of us said anything. Perhaps Phil, who was sitting across from me with a rather gloomy expression on his face, was thinking the same thing I was. He looked so upset that I wouldn't be surprised if his side of the carriage darkened

from the shadows on his face. It was clear from the way he looked that he'd messed something up.

There were still twenty more minutes before we would arrive at House Westley's manor. Right when I was wondering if we'd end our outing in silence, Phil opened his mouth.

"I'm sorry."

"Huh?"

"I'm sorry that I'm such an uncool man." After his sudden apology, he looked down at his hands in his lap, his long eyelashes casting shadows over his cheeks. "As Rex recommended, I was thinking of, um, doing it after the opera ended."

It looked like my prediction had been correct. I had heard that quite a few couples took advantage of the darkness from a stage play or an opera. Though I hadn't realized that Phil was operating based on Rex's advice there as well.

"But your side profile was so beautiful that I couldn't look away. By the time I realized it, the lights turned back on," he continued.

"Pfft... What's with that?"

Not only did he say such a silly thing with an intensely serious expression, but his face was so beautiful that he looked like he'd just stepped out of a painting. It was all so funny that I couldn't help but laugh. We'd promised each other that we wouldn't lie anymore, so what he said was likely the truth. With this one apology, he'd completely erased the peevish feeling I had.

"I never said that I cared about the atmosphere... I'd be happy, um, to do it no matter the place or occasion."

It was a little embarrassing to say that out loud, but Phil was trying his best for me. And like Jamie said, he was probably at his limit. I should meet him halfway.

"May I...go over to your side of the carriage?"

"Yes, of course." I immediately nodded, and he moved to sit next to me with a soft exhale.

"Viola."

He said my name in a terribly soft voice. I stared into his amber eyes, which held such fire that they practically glowed. The man before me was so beautiful, with such a happy expression, it was hard to tell that mere seconds ago he'd been looking like the world had just ended.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you as well," I said after a moment to collect myself.

Our lips gently brushed, and even that slight stimulation filled my body with such joy that I felt as if I was about to cry.



"I heard that the two of you ended up kissing in the carriage."

"I'm sorry. And you went out of your way to give me advice..."

Rex was sitting in my room; it appeared that Viola had already reported to him everything that happened the other day. Vio was perched on his shoulder as he grinned at me. The parrot liked him a lot and looked happy at his presence.

Rex had listened to my troubles and helped me again, even going so far as to get us those seats in the opera. Yet I went and tossed all his consideration and effort into the dirt. I felt terrible. Even so, he told me not to worry about it and that he was happy for me. He was a reliable and kind friend.

"But you did your best, Phillip. Viola really enjoyed it."

"Really?"

"Yup, that's what she said."

"I'm glad to hear that..."

After we kissed, Viola had smiled at me, her face flushed crimson, and said that she was happy. She was so adorable that I pressed our lips together again, and then she laughed at me, saying that I should've been this assertive from the start.

If I went back in time to just a few months ago and told the past version of me that this would happen in the future, he wouldn't believe me at all. He definitely would've thought that I had lost myself so much in my feelings for Viola that I was no longer able to tell the difference between my delusions and reality. *That* was how much of a miracle it was that she liked me now. I was so happy that I didn't know what to do with myself.

"Despite how she acts and what she says, you're number one in Viola's heart too. Man, it makes me jealous."

"You've always been fond of her."

"So fond that I can't help but tease her." Rex's smile took on a mischievous

air, and he turned to look at Vio with an “Isn’t that right?” as if he wanted her agreement. “Anyway, make sure you continue to take good care of my sweet little cousin.”

“Of course.”

From now and forever more, she will be the most important thing in my life. Ever since I was a child, she’d been my entire world and nothing had changed.

“So then, Phillip,” Rex said.

“What is it?”

“Do you know what’ll happen next?”

I shook my head.

From When? Always.

One afternoon, I was passing time as usual in Phil's room at House Lawrenson's manor when the door suddenly swung open with a loud bang. I turned in its direction, curious as to what was going on, and saw a familiar pair standing there.

"Ray... Amelia..."

They were Phil's cousins, a pair of twins with bright red hair. At fifteen, they were just three years younger than us. Since they lived in a distant territory, the last time I saw them was about half a year ago. In particular, Ray, who was the eldest, looked much taller than I remembered him. We'd spent time together often as children, but those meetings grew less and less frequent after we started school.

"Viola, I wanted to see you!"

Ray rushed toward me and gave me a tight hug. He'd always been attached to me.

"Long time no see. I'm glad to see you're doing well."

"You too, Viola. You're as pretty as I remember you."

"Oh my. Just where did you learn to talk like that?"

As we talked, I felt a piercing gaze from across the room. When I looked in that direction, I saw Phil staring at us with a pout on his face.

"Get away from Viola."

"Huh? What are you acting like her fiancé for?" Ray asked.

"I *am* her fiancé," Phil shot back.

He was so blunt that it took the twins by surprise. They only knew about the past versions of us, so I couldn't blame them for such a reaction. The two apparently had errands they needed to run nearby, so they decided to pay House Lawrenson a visit.

“Speaking of which, it’s rare to see the two of you reading together. What’s up with this weird book anyway? Oh, could you prepare tea for us?” Amelia asked, turning to look at one of the maids. Then she sat down next to Phil, acting as if she was right at home.

The “weird book” she mentioned was *A Princess Just for You* ≡, which was a new spin-off of *A Prince Just for Me* ≡. Before we had our tea, I made sure to correct her on that.

The four of us—the twins, a grumpy Phil, and I—sat around the table and had some tea. I could feel the twins staring at us every time Phil and I had a normal conversation like they couldn’t believe their eyes.

“The two of you used to never talk with each other. What in the world happened?” Amelia asked.

I remembered that back when the hellish silence that stretched on between Phillip and me became too painful for me, their presence was a relief that kept things from getting too awkward. It would be Ray, Amelia, and me talking with each other while Phil stared at us in silence. In retrospect, it must’ve made for a bizarre sight.

“It was more like Phil didn’t talk rather than the both of them. He only ever said ‘Yeah’ or ‘Uh-huh.’ I always felt bad for you, Viola,” Ray said.

“Right? I wouldn’t have been able to endure that. It was so bad that I even thought that I’d ask my father to break off the engagement if I were you, Viola,” Amelia said.

“Right?”

I could see Phil’s face getting paler at their merciless words. It was true that at the time it had been painful to deal with, but I didn’t mind it anymore. Besides, it wasn’t as if Phillip was the only one to blame.

“Um...we just had a little fight...I guess. It was more of a misunderstanding. That’s all. We cleared things up and now we’re really close,” I said.

“I see. That’s good. It was painful to see how you always forced yourself to

smile because you were trying to be considerate of Phillip,” Ray said.

“Yeah. You always looked so relieved whenever we came over. I felt so bad for you,” Amelia agreed.

Though I tried to give Phil a helping hand, his face turned even whiter at the nonstop thorns the twins were hurling his way. Sometimes, words like “I’m truly sorry” and “I’m the worst” came out of his beautiful mouth.

“Um, I’m really all right so please don’t worry about it,” I said to him.

“I’m sorry...”

After that, though we didn’t say anything about the fake amnesia, we told them that Phillip and I loved each other. The two of them looked like they couldn’t believe the fact that I had feelings for him.

“I never thought you’d end up liking him, Viola,” Ray said.

“Yeah. You always looked like you didn’t want to spend time with him,” Amelia added.

Phil couldn’t say anything. He was completely down in the dumps. The twins looked at him and then each other with matching grins. The two of them had always enjoyed teasing Phillip.

“But, wow! Useless Phillip being able to confess his feelings? That’s impressive.”

“Huh?” Upon hearing Ray’s praise, I tilted my head to the side. “Did you know about Phil’s feelings?”

“Oh please, *anyone* could tell just by looking at him,” Amelia said. “No matter where he was or who he was with, he only had eyes for you, Viola.”

“Really?” After hearing Amelia’s words, I turned to look at Phil, only to see a rather embarrassed look on his face.

“The biggest hint was the parrot. That was crazy.”

“I couldn’t stop laughing for an entire week.”

To my surprise, the two of them even knew of Little Vio. Apparently, there was a time in the past when they’d been wandering around the manor without

permission and happened to come across her.

“There’s a lot more stories that you’re the only one unaware of, Viola,” Ray said.

“Yeah. Since you two love each other now, you don’t mind if we tell her some, right?” Amelia asked.

“Please, wait a second,” Phil said immediately, but the twins ignored him.

Though I felt sorry for Phil, my curiosity got the better of me.

“My favorite story is the birthday one,” Ray said. “Ever since we were kids, Phillip would spend days wondering what to get for your birthday present and he’d actually go buy it. But he never once managed to give it to you?”

“Huh?”

This was the first time I heard about this. I’d thought the first real presents I’d received from him were the dress and accessories from the other day.

“Oh, judging by that reaction, I guess he still hasn’t given you any of those gifts?”

“I’m begging you...please stop talking...”

“They should be piled up in one of the rooms here, so go take a look later,” Ray continued, ignoring Phil.

Ray and Amelia had always loved exploring, so the two of them were far more familiar with House Lawrenson’s manor than I was. I was really interested in the mountain of presents that supposedly existed. I would love to see what he picked out for me every year.

“I would like to see them,” I said.

“But, those are really...”

“Phil, please.”

Phillip didn’t say anything for a while before he finally said, “All right.”

Ray watched the two of us talk and then nodded with a satisfied smile. Then Amelia put down her teacup and opened her mouth.

“My favorite story is the one about the flower bed. I can’t remember when exactly, but when we were kids, you were reading a picture book and said, ‘This flower is so pretty. I’d love to see it.’ And then Phillip here got the seeds the very next day and planted them with the gardener’s help.”

“Huh?”

“I told him that he could leave that task to the gardener, but he wouldn’t listen to me because he wanted to do it himself. In the end, since the flower was a difficult one to grow, it took him about three years to actually produce anything.”

“Um... Could it be that you’re talking about a dark-blue flower?”

“Yes, yes, something like that.”

In that case, I did remember the flower. One day, I’d noticed an unfamiliar flower blooming in House Lawrenson’s garden, right where it would most easily catch one’s eye. Upon seeing it, I stopped walking and said, “That flower is so beautiful.” Lord Phillip’s face had always been expressionless, but the way he’d smiled so happily upon hearing me say that had left an impact, so I remembered it. I never would have thought that Phil had grown the flower himself.

“Seriously, please don’t say anything more,” Phillip said.

“I’m sorry, but I want to hear more,” I said.

“Yeah, sure. We have so many more stories to share,” Ray said.

Phillip didn’t say anything in response. After that, the two of them continued to tell me all about him, never seeming to run out of anecdotes. By the time they finished, Phil was covering his face with both of his hands. His ears, peeking out from his hair, were bright red.

On the other hand, I learned just how much he’d always loved me, and I could feel warmth spreading from my heart through my entire body.

“Now then, it’s about time for us to take our leave,” Ray said. “We had a great time bullying Phillip.”

“Yeah, it was delightful,” Amelia said.

“Never come back again,” Phil said.

The two of them left with satisfied smiles on their faces, but Phil looked exhausted.

“I’m glad that the two of you look so happy though,” Ray said.

“Right? I’m looking forward to your wedding,” Amelia giggled.

“Thank you,” I said.

“Phillip’s lame, but he’s a nice man. He loves you more than anyone, Viola, so I hope you take good care of him.”

“Hee hee, leave it to me.”

Though they often teased him, I could tell that the twins treasured Phillip dearly.

“Phillip, you should treat Viola even better than you do now to make up for your past. Give her lots of presents. And give *me* some while you’re at it! Use your authority as the next Duke Lawrenson to get me Madam Rico’s new dress,” Amelia said.

It took a long time before Phil said, “I’ll think about it.”

The two of them, who had the combined destructive potential of a hurricane, quickly left after that.

Phil and I were left alone once again, but the atmosphere was slightly less awkward now. He still refused to look in my direction. Considering how many of his secrets had been brought to light, he was surely much too embarrassed to meet my eyes.

“Phil, I’m sorry that I asked them so many stories about you. But they made me really happy.”

“You didn’t...find them off-putting?”

“No. Actually, they made me like you even more.”

After I said that, he finally raised his head. I couldn’t suppress a smile at the faint blush still dusting his cheeks.

"It made me happy to learn how much you were thinking of me in the past. I'm sorry that I never noticed." Of course, it was the truth that his attitude was part of the problem. But because of my own feelings of inadequacy, I never once tried to see who he was beyond the surface and simply averted my eyes. "Um, would it be all right to see the birthday presents that Ray mentioned earlier?"

After I asked that, Phil looked a little uncomfortable but eventually, he nodded.

The room he took me into was packed full of neatly wrapped boxes. Some years, he'd apparently bought more than just one or two. I felt a chill at the thought that if things hadn't gone the way they did, these boxes would've never again seen the light of day.

"Um...there's a lot more than I was expecting," I said.

"If, by some chance, and hypothetically speaking, there's something that you wish to take from me, I'd like you to have it," he said.

"All of these presents are for me, aren't they? Then I'd like them all." After I said that, I reached out to the small box closest to me. "What's this?"

"It's a present I bought for you last year."

"May I open it?"

"Of course."

I carefully untied the ribbon and opened the box. Inside there was a breathtakingly beautiful brooch. The large amethyst sparkling in the middle of it matched my eyes and hair.

"Last year, you said you wanted a brooch to match your dress," Phil explained.

"I do recall saying something like that to Rex."

Phil had heard me say that and then did his best to pick something out for me. Affection welled up inside me at the thought. Next, I reached for a box farther in the back. It was a little bigger than the first one.

"What's this?"

"It's from when we were fourteen. At the time, you liked dresses from this store."

"Oh, how nostalgic. But it's so small that I don't think I can wear it."

When I opened the box, I saw a cute dress. But I didn't think I could wear something from four years ago. It made me sad since it was a dress I would've loved to have worn back then.

"Um...what is this bizarre wooden doll?"

"That's from when we were fifteen. You said you couldn't sleep and it was giving you some trouble. I heard that if you place it on your pillow, it can help to ward off insomnia, so I bought it."

"I-I see..."

The doll's face looked like that of a monkey on the verge of death. Instead of helping me sleep, it looked more like it would give me nightmares. A child would've cried upon seeing this as a present.

Incidentally, upon asking for the price of the doll, I wanted to cry. No doubt, Phil had fallen for some scam. After that, I continued to open up my presents with Phil, asking him when he bought this and why he chose that.

"Ah..."

"Viola?"

But as we did so, I noticed fat tears rolling down my cheeks. Upon seeing that, Phil called my name, sounding panicked.

"J-Just how much do you love me?" I asked in a thick voice.

Every single box was filled not only with a present but also with his immense affection for me. I was so happy that I couldn't stop crying.

"I loved you more than you could possibly imagine."

The words made the tears come faster. He was truly such an awkward man. Before I could even register what was happening, I found myself wrapped up in Phil's arms, with him murmuring "Thank you" in my ear. I should be the one thanking him. Once I eventually calmed down, I picked up a teddy bear that was

one of my presents.

“May I take this teddy bear home? Just this one?”

“Of course. But isn’t that for children?”

“It’s fine. From tonight, this will be my sleeping companion.”

It was such a cute teddy bear that I felt bad for the fact it had been all alone in a box for years and years. After I said that, Phillip thanked me with a happy smile. I also decided to wear the beautiful brooch home.

“I’ll leave the other presents here, then. I’d love to bring them home, but since I’ll be living here in the future, it would be too much work to move all of this back.”

I said the words casually enough, but for some reason, Phil’s face flushed bright crimson again. It looked like he was embarrassed at the part about me living in this manor.

“I look forward to it,” he managed to say after a pause.

“Good,” I replied.

When I happened to pass by Duke and Duchess Lawrenson in the hallway, they also said that they were excited for the day I would come to live in the manor. They’d always been kind to me. They’d also noticed the atmosphere around Phil and I changed, and were pleased by it.

“I’m truly grateful for all of these presents.”

“Yes, and I’m glad that I was able to hand them to you. Thank you.”

Apparently, if Ray hadn’t told me about them, Phil would’ve never mentioned them to me. He’d thought that, considering how many presents there were, I would’ve found it off-putting. But they felt like little memories from our time together, so he couldn’t bring himself to throw any of them away.

Truthfully, there were plenty of things in our past that were even more off-putting than these presents. But I loved him, off-putting parts and all.

“Please make sure to directly hand me my present this year,” I said.

“Of course,” Phil replied.

“And let me give you something in return, though it would be impossible to immediately present you a gift in return for everything here.”

“You’re giving me something even more important than any material good, so I don’t need any presents.”

“That goes the same for me.”

At the same time, though I felt pure happiness in my life now, I sometimes missed the past when Phil and I couldn’t see eye to eye. Even so, I wanted to treasure my time with the man who loved me more than anything in his own awkward way. With that thought, my heart raced as I envisioned the future Phil and I would spend together.

Afterword

Hello and it's nice to meet you. My name is Kotoko. Thank you for picking up *Fake It to Break It! I Faked Amnesia to Break Off My Engagement and Now He's All Lovey-Dovey?!* The title is so long that it's a little scary.

To start with, I started writing this story last September when, on my birthday, I thought to myself, "I want to write one of those trendy stories with the scarily long title, and I want to write something cheery and fun!" I never thought that the story would turn into a book the following September. It's the best birthday present I received this year. Thank you so much!

I only came up with the title and basic plot, then started writing it. So I never imagined that Phillip would be such a lame and cute protagonist... He's my favorite protagonist now.

In saying that, though, I've only ever written love stories where the protagonists are madly in love with each other, so this was the first time I ever wrote something comedic. To tell the truth, it was really difficult. I suddenly had so many readers for the web version, and it raised my standards for the story, so I rewrote parts many times until I was happy with them. I remember writing until the early hours of the morning every day, with the energy drink Kyokyo Daha in hand.

The popular true heroine of the story, Little Vio the parrot, was also something I thought of while writing in the middle of the night. I want to praise last year for giving birth to Little Vio.

I'd like to give a big thank you to Esora, who gave me wonderful illustrations of all of my too-quirky characters. Phillip's handsomeness, Viola's slightly cold beauty, and Rex's playboy hotness were all so much better than what I had imagined. I was so touched! Even Little Vio was so cute, from her little head to her little toes... She's adorable.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank my editor, who asked if I wanted to turn *Fake It to Break It!* into a book and always sends me wonderful

comments on it. I'm the type of person who gets better with praise, so I was really able to work hard on this. It turned into a fantastic book thanks to their meticulous care. Thank you to everyone who helped with the publishing and distribution of this book.

Right now, the comic version of this book is in production. I myself am very excited to see everything—from the fishing scene to the ice bucket scene—illustrated. However I'm just worried that the artist will have a hard time drawing things like the handkerchief Viola embroidered. Just what does a cute worm even look like...?

This is the last thing I'd like to say, but thank you for reading all the way here. *Fake It to Break It!* is a work very dear to my heart, and I love it and all of the memories I made as I wrote it. I'm really, really happy that I got to see it published as a physical book. Thank you so much.

I hope you will all continue to watch over Phillip and Viola. Also it really encourages me when I receive fan mail! Hopefully, we'll see each other again in volume 2.



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and Now He's All LOVEY-DOVEY?!



“I've been in love with
you this whole time...

That's the truth.”





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Fake It to Break It! I Faked Amnesia to Break Off My Engagement and Now He's All Lovey-Dovey?! Volume 1

by Kotoko

Translated by Stephanie Liu

Edited by Ruuri

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