

Chapter 9

“Easy (on the Eyes)”



Dinner was a fancifully delicate feast, British style.

The Professor had trouble with his eyes throughout dinner though. They refused to move away from the knockout across from him. She knew she was being seduced at the table, but seemed to enjoy playing the part. The water was cool but still the Professor paddled towards his prize, like an

unsatisfied sailor who couldn't stop even if he wanted to. He couldn't stop himself.

He was incorrigible. The momentum from thought to thought continued. Time lost all meaning.

Whenever she smiled at him, her eyes ignited every color of the rainbow and hurled them all at once in his direction. Just like the lotus that pushes through the darkness to bloom, he longed to become a better person so he could be with her. Was it too late for him? Was it too late for him to deserve her kind of happiness? He didn't want to keep pretending he was interested in anything else going on at the table, except her.

“Professor? Are you alright? Did you hear a word I said about where we should start in our search for the artifact?”

His head turned awkwardly, as if trying to release the many thoughts that consumed him. He stared back politely at Charlie. As usual, she had bad timing.

“Charlie, my dear, I was paying attention to you as best as I could, but this exquisite meal unfortunately repeatedly overtook my thoughts. Every bite is better than the next. I haven't eaten like this in... well, possibly never!”

The Duke smiled. “So glad to hear that, old chap. We love our food around here.”

A gentleman dressed in a dark suit and trench coat entered the room in a hurry, looking like he just ran the marathon.

The Duke peered in his direction and his face changed from joyful to concerned. “Frank, what are you doing here?”

Frank bowed and said, “I must speak to you in private, sir.”

“Can’t it wait?”

“No, I am on a tight schedule, sir.”

Eloise had followed Frank into the room and motioned to the Duke. “I’ll take him to the study, sir.”



“Thanks, Eloise, and please fetch him some warm tea and a plate of fresh food.”

Frank acknowledged and followed Eloise out of the room.

The Duke looked over to his guests. “I’m sorry, but I will need to meet with Frank Appleton immediately to learn what he has uncovered. He was the agent searching for the rose.” He stood. “When I return, I hope it will be with good news.”

The kid smiled and was seemingly oblivious to anything except his stomach. “Well, that’s the cake. I must try more of the toad in a hole. Quite the taste with the sausage and custard.”

“I wonder what’s going on?” Charlie was always the curious one.

Interesting how Sarantos honestly didn’t care anymore, because now his attention went straight back to Lady Helen. He speculated on how old she was. Was she too young for him? Maybe, maybe not? What’s age but a number, though? It’s a very dangerous thing when one thinks for himself.

Lady Helen flashed him another smirk while also tilting her head mischievously.

Because it was important to get deep into the weeds and evaluate what was really going on here, Sarantos knew he had to take a shot. Strangely, though, he couldn’t stop his mouth from blurting out a strange sentence that left it hanging open in utter shock and disbelief. “Lady Helen, that DNA looks good on you. How old are you?”

The kid loudly dropped his fork. Charlie choked on her flavored wine, but the Lady kept her composure, politely wiping her mouth with the large white linen napkin.

The silence swallowed the entire room. It felt deafening, like he was in an ancient tomb and the lid was mercifully being closed on his coffin. He sat there and did not make a sound.

He obviously lost his mind or was getting to where he desperately wanted to get married. So, this was what it was like when you walked over the edge and fell into the abyss.

His eyes rolled towards the ceiling because he didn't know what else to do. He prayed for a miracle that wasn't coming.

As the Professor tried to ignore the elephant in the room, Charlie, of course, spoke up first after cleaning up her spit out of her drink. "What is wrong with you, Professor? Where are your manners?"

She looked across at her friend. "Lady Helen, I must apologize for my nutty Professor Sarantos, as he must have drunk himself into unconsciousness, but somehow his eyes are still open and he still stands upright." Her red eyes glared at him until her finely manicured brows decided they'd had enough.



Lady Helen laughed. “No worries, I am 35, single, and find you quite attractive, Professor.”

His head spun. There was nothing he could do right now. Was she teasing him? Had she picked him to be her man? How should he respond?

The Professor decided the best way to embrace disaster is to admit it's happening.

He somehow found his voice. "The feeling is very mutual. Would you like to go out with me for dinner sometime, you know, somewhere far away from Charlie??" He smirked and hoped his humor and sarcasm would settle the situation.

The kid answered instead. "Doc, is there nothing you won't say or lower yourself to say? She's a real Lady, you're a regular Professor. She has to marry a Duketon or something like that. You're way out of your class."

Charlie, now distracted by the kid, said. "What's wrong with you both? I can't believe I hang out with you two donuts. Have you no shame?"

Relief came when Lady Helen interrupted. "I would love to have dinner with you, Professor."

Sarantos smiled at her like a kid on Christmas, then immediately felt fire on his face and loins. She did not feel like a mistake. He had crossed the oceans of time to be with her. Always full of doubt, but now the sparkle of hope and finding love at the end of her rainbow almost overtook him to the point of jumping up and down at this dinner table and screaming eureka. It's so tempting to follow your mind's distractions, but he had to focus.

Visions of swimming in her gold were interrupted when the Duke came back into the room. He sat down and said, “Sorry to keep you waiting.”

Eloise brought him a new plate of food that was warm, and he nodded his approval.

Sarantos studied his face. It looked sad and forlorn. He desperately wanted to respond to the lady, but didn't feel the timing was appropriate now.



As the Duke ate, they all sat quietly until Eloise brought in the dessert and more wine. Eloise offered the Duke a sherry, which he gladly accepted. He seemed to enjoy it.

They all continued waiting while the man finished his meal, wondering what the news could've been. They would have to wait until he was ready to tell them. Following the lead of

his daughter, who sat quietly chatting with Charlie, all of them continued waiting.

Because the Professor could never sit still, his eyes drifted towards the window. The weather was unusually nice at this time of year. They were missing the usual downpours of the English rains that made the flower gardens bloom so fully here. No one here dared to travel without an umbrella at this time of year.

The Professor thought of the upcoming trip to Alaska. It would probably be a thrilling adventure for him and the kids, and if he found what they were looking for, he might actually retire and move to his new home on the Greek Island, at least maybe for part of the year. Though he loved Boston, he doubted Mary would mind looking after things in his absence.

The Duke finally sat back in his chair, signaling to the staff that he was done. "Let's retire to the sitting room."

He stood up without another word and moved towards the door. "Eloise, please show our guest to the sitting room."

The ever-present Eloise curtsied.

She stood in the doorway with the grace of a Queen. "Excuse me, but would you all please follow me to the master's sitting room?"

It was just the four of them, but the attendants kept up the display of royalty for anyone who might be watching. Sarantos wondered if it became second nature, cementing a habit that became a reflex without thought necessary.



He and the kid followed the women. As Lady Helen walked with the sway of a princess, the thought crossed his mind,

was she toying with him? Girls that looked like her could do what they wanted to, could have any guy they picked. But her eyes caught his attention yet again two seconds after the thought ran across his mind. It was all about her eyes... she was so easy on the eyes. It wouldn't matter to him if she wanted to use him as a toy for a couple of days. He'd been in worse situations. Besides, if your dreams don't scare you, they aren't big enough!

They stepped into the sitting room. The Duke hadn't arrived yet. Sarantos imagined royalty liked to make a spectacle with their grand entrance. It was a vast room with an entire wall that was nothing but a fireplace. Heavy, perfectly polished wood on the floors and fine-grained wood on the ceiling. The furniture was a deep red mahogany. The large cushioned chairs invited guests to sleep in. It was warm. The fireplace sang the most wonderful lullaby.

Lady Helen's eyes caught his again, pulling him from the drowning sea of noise that was his cluttered mind. He had no choice; her eyes would always bring him back to her humane soul and nuzzle him towards her beautiful heart. He sighed. She was an island of peace. He wanted to spend the rest of his days there on her white sand, nestled in the warm, deep blue waters of her mysterious yet comfortable arms.

Eloise poured him another drink and another servant that had freckles over most of her face with bright red hair brought them some interesting looking mini sandwiches. He took one, loving the taste of refreshing cucumber.

It freshened his palate after the heavy dinner.

The kid took three, making Sarantos laugh, which drew the kid's attention.



The kid moved to his side. “So, what’s got your undies in a toss?”

“You.”

“Oh, that’s nice, Doc.”

The Professor looked back at Lady Helen. Of course, he couldn’t think of anything or anyone else, despite her being younger.

The kid followed his gaze. “Oh, Doc, you’re out of your league. Her family has too much cabbage, and I think you might need a bull session to get your mind back on track.”

He calmly turned his head to the kid. “I don’t think I need a chat so people can inform me I’ve lost my mind. I’m not a butter and egg man, but I’ve got a lot to offer. And I think it’s time I settled down, anyway. I need a constant in my life. I want her, kid. I really do.”

“Doc, I hate to say this, but you’re a chump if you think that dame will dance with you for a share of the dib.”

The Professor’s face lit up and his temper soared. “What the hell are you talking about, kid? I’m not stupid, and I’m not after her money. Look at her. I can’t stop. She lights a fire in every cell in my body. Why do you always make me feel like I need to be fixed? I’m not 12, I’m not going backwards. She is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my entire life.”

“Oh, Doc, this isn’t the first time this has happened. And by the way, I’m pretty sure the Duke would never let you two happen.”

He stared at the kid. “How do you know?”

The kid popped in another sandwich. “Because I know things.”

The Duke entered the room and so the urge to punch the kid in the kisser went away, at least temporarily.

The Duke plopped down by the fire and took a brandy from Eloise. It must be nice to have someone by your side, always knowing exactly what you need and when you need it.

“Thank you all for waiting, but we have a slight blip. According to my good friend Frank Appleton, someone has taken apart the rose and sold in pieces.”



Lady Helen drew in a frightened breath and then released it slowly. “How do you know? Can we be sure of this?”

The Duke held out his hand. A piece of melted rose gold lay across his palm, glittering in the firelight.

“This is how we know.”

“No, that’s not possible. Oh, father we waited too long to call in Professor Sarantos.”

Her father looked into her big eyes. “Yes Helen, I’m afraid we waited too long to call in the Professor, and now I’m gutted.”

Sarantos approached the Duke. “May I look at that, sir?”

The Duke nodded and carefully placed it into his hands.

The Professor studied it for a few minutes before suggesting they take it to someone who would know the exact karat and mixture of rose gold to find out whether it was indeed a relic of the rose of his great-great-grandmother.

“Great idea. I can deliver it tomorrow to the family that has made items for royalty here for generations, and it was their ancestor that made the rose for Lady Bonnie.”

“I hope they find it’s a fake put out to deceive others into giving up their search.”



“Thank you, Professor. Please stay the night. I’m sorry all of this transpired the way it did. We have accommodations for all of you. I want you to sleep well. Eloise, please see they are comfortable.”

She nodded and left the room.

The Duke stood up. “Goodnight.”

The shock and silence of what had just happened seemed to follow him out into the somber hallway and left some displeasure behind in the sitting room.

“What the hell? That’s crazy, Doc. I find it hard to believe.”

“Yes, so do I kid, but it has been five years since it’s gone missing.”

Charlie said, “I’m so sorry, Lady Helen. I know how much that rose meant to you.”

“Thank you, Charlie, but I’m not surprised. I’m a little angry at my father for waiting too long to do something more about it. The men he had on the case were good, but I knew about your little group and thought you’d have much more success because you are more inconspicuous and far more knowledgeable about artifacts and history. And that works better for things of this nature.”

“I’m disappointed that our journey may end here,” Sarantos said.

He meant the words because he might not get a chance to take the Lady to dinner after all.



Several sharply dressed servants came in and offered to escort them to their rooms. They all followed.

Sarantos felt exhausted. As he entered his room, the size was the first thing he immediately noticed. It was quite large and fit for a king, at least in his eyes.

He wanted to rip off his clothes and just pass out on this monstrosity of a bed. Instead, he just sat on the edge of the bed. In his life it was the same old story. He stopped whenever he got smacked down, uttered a little cry of

disgust, and then always got up and tried again, and again, and again. This time, however, he didn't want to.

Just as he was about to shed a tear of self-pity, someone tapped politely on his door. When he opened it, he was more than a little surprised to see Lady Helen standing there.

“I hope you don't find me too forward or this too aggressive, but would you like to go with me on my nightly moonlight ride? I ride my horse, Madeline, and I have a wonderful breed for you too, if you're up for it.”

His heart skipped two beats. “Yes, I think I am. I'd be honored. Thank you so much for inviting me.”

“I hope I'm not too presumptuous, but I also brought you riding boots. I hope they fit.”

“I'll make them fit,” he said as he smiled.

Thankfully, they actually fit nicely. It was as if she somehow knew everything about him.

She put her arm in his and they strolled down the stairway towards the back entrance. They made light conversation as they continued out onto the relaxing porch and then straight into the yard, heading towards the stables.

The moon was bright white, and his heart was beating like a racing horse.

She took him on a ride like no other. Their stress melted away. The natural stimulant of horseback riding sprinkled with infatuated conversation enhanced his mood. They both felt a sense of happiness and well-being. Neither one of them wanted the ride to end.

Sarantos never stopped to think before about the power and courage and graceful beauty most horses symbolize. They inspired him tonight, as he felt more confident and heroic. He just had to kiss her.

A few moments later, they stopped on a hill and as they got off the horses; she moved towards him and kissed him deeply, taking him by surprise. Her scent, the night air, and her mouth were a perfect combination.

Sarantos couldn't sit still around her anymore. He couldn't think clearly as the rush of dopamine and adrenaline surged across his body, but the words just came out of his mouth without thought, this time not embarrassing him. It was so effortless and easy because she made him feel so comfortable.

“Would you want to join us on our next adventure to Alaska?” Wait, maybe he was actually being an idiot again? What was he thinking? Maybe he shouldn't of asked her and just killed the moment?

She smiled and winked at him. “I would love to. I’ve always wanted to share in your adventures. Charlie tells me a lot about them. The truth is, Professor, you do something to me. From the moment I first saw you, trying not to look at you was like fighting a hurricane.”

“Yeah, ditto.”

