

Chapter 1: An Unexpected Encounter

Anne was walking home from the Arken ball that she had attended earlier in the evening. James, her escort and the man that she was hoping to be courted by, had sorely disappointed her by getting blindly drunk and falling asleep next to the stables. She decided that it would be best just to walk home by herself since she didn't live too far.

"Oh, what a fool James is!" she silently exclaimed to herself. Her disappointment and the embarrassment made her cheeks flush even more.

She stared down at the cobblestone road as she proceeded on her way home. She felt a change in the air and looked up to see a man standing in front of her. He was tall, well dressed in garb that was akin to an officer's uniform but she found it rather strange that he was wearing all black, he wore a cocked hat that had three points – almost like a pirate's but far more expensive - and long, untied but well groomed grey hair – or was it silver? – which flowed from under the hat. He also had a strange but very expensive looking pendant hanging on a silver chain. She was slightly startled but was not afraid. The man spoke first,

"Good evening, Miss. I have to admit that it is most unusual for a lady to walk unaccompanied at this time of the evening. May I ask your name?"

Anne felt slightly uncomfortable; she did not know if it was because of the man or if it was because she'd been so lost in thought that she didn't notice him approach. She hesitantly said,

"Yes, it is rather unusual but so my night has been. My name is Anne Hathborne and may I enquire as to yours?"

"But of course, dear Lady. My name is Lucius Cane and if I may, I would like to accompany you to your destination? I do not believe that such a beautiful young woman should walk home alone at such an hour."

"Why, how kind of you, Mister Cane, and I might add that you have quite the silver tongue." Anne said while smiling.

She extended her hand, he promptly took it in his own and she noticed that his skin was cool to the touch, bent down and softly kissed it. He could see her veins filled with delicious blood, he could taste it exuding from her skin but he kept himself composed. He placed her arm in the crook of his and they started walking.

"Naïve girl" spoke a disconnected raspy voice.

Anne looked up at him from the side and noticed that he was particularly handsome with fine features, albeit a little pale, and was almost beautiful. He couldn't have been more than thirty five years old even though, at first glance, his silver hair appeared grey. He looked down at her and his cool green eye met her eyes. She blushed and looked away.

Lucius' keen eyes caught a shadow up on the roof across the road; he felt them being watched and grew excited. He needed to feed.

"So, Miss Hathborne, what brings you to walk alone at this hour?" Lucius broke the silence.

"I was attending the Arken ball earlier this evening and my escort failed to be a gentleman. Don't mind me asking, Mister Cane, but I have noticed that you have a slight accent to your English. Do you come from London?"

"Very observant of you," Lucius was impressed. He tried to conceal his accent best he could and few people noticed it, "No, I do not originally come from England but have spent many years here and a myriad of other distant countries. Have you ever traveled, Miss Hathborne?"

"I did once, many years ago, with my father. We went to India since he has ties with the Dutch East India Company. It was a rather exotic experience."

"Ah, yes, I once traveled with a Dutch East India Company ship. It was quite thrilling." Lucius replied.

He could feel the hour grow and the night fold around them; he enjoyed this feeling, it was his playground, the dark. He knew that the moment was drawing closer and noticed he was salivating. Their observers were still out there; clutching to the darkness and flitting from vantage point to vantage point.

Lucius craved for her horribly; he could see with every heartbeat how her jugular would swell and he could see the delicious blood pulsing through as red, glowing streaks but he kept himself and his hunger contained. He had become quite adept at this single task of self-discipline and he knew that his time would come. They walked for two more minutes but in silence, Anne was very curious as to whom Lucius was but did not mention more since the quiet felt more fitting. She felt, even though he gave no indication, that he was searching for something out there in the darkness where the gas lamps' illumination ended.

"This is my father's house." Anne motioned.

It was a large manor with a very well kept garden that had a variety of purple, yellow, pink and red flowers that punctuated the air with sensual fragrances. A carriageway that led to the front of the manor was lined with statues of Greek origin and lit lamps that burned with toiling

black smoke indicative of oil and tallow. The manor was quite lavish with three stories and a well-lit porch.

“Very well then, Miss. I shall accompany you to the door and then my role as your escort shall be fulfilled.”

“Thank you, Mister Cane, for being so gracious and please call me Anne.”

“You have to be quick about it, Lucius.” Spoke a dusty voice but Anne did not hear it.

“You are most welcome, Anne.” Lucius replied.

He led her up the carriageway and knew that it was almost time.

