

**Forgotten No More, A Lady Forsaken Book Two**  
**Excerpt**

**Prologue**

7 April 1783

*Not a fiber of my being knows why I seek to put this terrible moment to paper, to commit the wrongs against me to a tangible surface. Part of me believes—no, hopes—if I do not acknowledge these foul sins I have made against my family, then all can be forgotten. Alas, I can no more hide from my misdeeds than one can hide from the plague. It consumes me, inhabits my every waking thought, devours me in my dreams...*

*Verily, I did not wish to bring this dishonor down upon my husband. I did not go in pursuit of falling—falling so surely that I can no longer be whom I have always been. So drastically I have changed...or perhaps not I, but my perception of my world and my place in it.*

*I was the Honorable Miss Pearl, daughter of an English Baron.*

*I was, and have been, Mrs. Pearl St. Augustin for over ten years.*

*But what I have always sought to be is a mother.*

*Mayhaps I set my sights too high for what the good Lord planned for my husband and me.*

*Or possibly, He has forgotten me altogether.*

*I know naught. I ceased caring what the Lord had planned for me the night I met the man who ripped my heart in two, tore my very soul from within and dashed every dream, every desire for life I had within me. He did this all whilst placing the beating heart of a precious child in its place.*

*He was to be my salvation and instead he has damned me to an eternity of hiding. Hiding my sins, my love, and his child.*

*Possibly I write this to remind myself of the evils of seeking what is not meant to be yours—to warn others, including my unborn child, of the malevolence of mankind.*

## Chapter One

London, England

January 1816

Miss Ruby St. Augustin glanced over her shoulder as she ran down the endless dark hall toward the safety of an empty room. Skidding to a halt, she eased the door open and slipped soundlessly inside. She leaned back against the solid door, breathing heavily as the latch clicked into place. She hoped she hadn't been followed, though she couldn't be certain.

She'd only been in town a few days, but was finding it harder and harder to escape the notice of her mother. The woman attended every social engagement from afternoon teas to grand balls.

It quickly grated on Ruby's nerves. She wasn't ready to face the woman. There was still information to gather, emotions to sort out, and a certain man to locate—even though by doing so, she was working in direct opposition to her mother's wishes.

Ruby looked around as her eyes adjusted to the dim glow of the room. The smell of after-dinner cigars engulfed her. It was standard London style: massive desk that no gentleman of the *ton* actually used, two straight-back chairs facing said monstrosity of a work area, and an enormous hearth large enough to burn the abundant misuse of wood in the room. Two chairs were cozied up nicely for maximum heat, an assortment of collectables and books scattered about. The only thing that changed from house to house was the color scheme. Lord Trenton, or possibly his esteemed wife, had selected a mix of blood red and gold. Gaudy, yet the height of fashion this season.

Ruby had quickly learned that stealth and efficiency would benefit her greatly if she hoped to find the object she sought without being caught by another guest or—heaven forbid—the lord of the house. A servant she could handle, blaming her presence on being lost looking for the ladies' retiring room, but anyone else's suspicions would be difficult to allay. Moving into action, she went straight for the desk and opened one drawer after another, pushing papers to the side or gently lifting objects, careful to put everything back in its place. Her mother had detailed the thing so specifically, Ruby felt she could sketch it in her sleep.

A handcrafted letter opener, polished metal with inlaid rubies, and the inscription, *The course of true love never did run smooth*. She knew the quote well, even without her mother's reasoning for selecting the line. Penned by William Shakespeare, and performed at the local playhouse the night her real father had laid eyes upon her mother. As her mother had written it, it was true love at first sight, the line coinciding with the moment their eyes had met across the crowd—Pearl ensconced in her dear friend, Lady Darlingivers', box, her father meanwhile consorting with the commoners in the general seating area.

Her mother wrote countless pages of how she'd sold her most prized possessions to have the opener crafted for 'her love,' as she'd called him early on in her journal. Her mother had gushed with pride when she wrote of presenting the gift to her lover: How he'd accepted it with reverence and declared his own love. The words and feelings within the journal were as foreign to Ruby as the people it described. She did not know her mother as a woman who could care about another so much that she'd give up her own funds to make him happy.

Only a few pages later, her mother wrote of her desire to stab her lover with said letter opener when their affair went awry. The words, so wisely inscribed, had proven prophetic for the pair—assuming the man had ever loved her mother at all. She lamented on and on about the injustices of the world, the fickle hearts of men, and the burden of living with one's decisions.

Despite the inadequacy of her methods thus far, Ruby saw no other way to gain what she sought without

approaching the only woman with the knowledge to set her mind at ease. Still, a part of her hoped that someone would tell her what she'd found in the attic of their country estate was a ruse, the writings of an imaginative mind, the journaling of a lonely and bored woman of the *ton*.

Unfortunately, Ruby would not—could not—trust the mother who had ignored her existence for all her adult life, treated her like an inconvenience, and then as soon as she was able, shipped her to the country estate of a friend to become a young lady's paid companion. The irony of the situation was not lost on her: For years her mother sought to avoid her, and now Ruby did everything in *her* power to evade the woman.

Ruby slammed another drawer closed after finding nothing of use. "Where are you?" she muttered. Pulling another open, she moved papers, extra ink, and a sealing kit aside in her search.

She did not, for one minute, regret her years in the country spent with her nearest and dearest friend, Lady Viola. But Vi was now married and starting a life of her own with Lord Haversham, so she had no need for a paid companion.

How Ruby wished she could go back to that time when she'd been unaware of her mother's deceit. A time when she'd thought her mother, Mrs. Pearl St. Augustin, only a detached woman with limited motherly instincts unhampered by attachments. Was it truly only six months ago? And only a few short weeks since she'd found her mother's journal, detailing her extramarital exploits?

Closing yet another drawer, she turned her attention to the last and the largest of them all. She eyed the keyhole suspiciously, as if it would click locked if she grasped the handle too quickly.

Ruby took a deep breath before trying the final drawer that could hold all the answers to her past, her true heritage. Her lungs expanded; she held the air inside. She didn't exhale until it burned. With trembling fingers, she reached for the last drawer and pulled.

Her nicely trimmed nails nearly snapped when her grasp on the handle slipped from the force of her tug. The drawer hadn't budged.

Locked!

"Oh, poppy cocks!" she hissed. Moving her hands to the folds of her evening gown, Ruby procured a small pouch tucked neatly into a hidden pocket. Setting it on the desk, she pulled out her array of lock-picking devices, really only hairpins and small wires she'd collected since her first night—and her first failed attempt at breaking into a desk—to help her disengage the drawer.

She had to know what secrets *this* lord held. Would she find an envelope inside labelled 'Abandoned Daughter,' or a report from the Bow Street Runners with details about herself—her hair color, the particular green shade of her eyes, places she'd been, perhaps the details of her activities over the course of her life?

Nothing worth finding was that simply ascertained.

No man, married or not, would leave record of their nefarious past. It was more likely her father had not spared her, or her mother, a second thought after throwing his pregnant mistress from his townhouse in the middle of the night with no coat and no means to get home.

Ruby was anything but a fool, but she found herself continuing to search regardless. She didn't need a signed confession—she just needed that letter opener.

Picks in hand, she knelt before the locked drawer and eyed the keyhole, blowing a wayward strand of hair that had fallen across her face. She'd been unsuccessful more often than not when attempting to open locked drawers. But luck may have been on her side this evening. She'd entered the ball with little fuss, shortly after the host and hostess had quit the receiving line. It was surprising how similar the layout of most London townhouses were. Ruby had navigated the halls of the second floor and found the room she sought fairly quickly, encountering not a soul.

The pins slipped into the lock and her tongue darted out of her mouth to lick her lips as she concentrated on moving them exactly right to click the lock over. She fought to keep her hands steady when sweat broke out

across her forehead. She was running out of time.

Ruby applied a bit too much pressure and the pin snapped, falling uselessly into the locked drawer. “Damn you to hell, Mother!” she cursed and sat back, wiping her slick brow.

She’d always viewed herself as a sensible girl, a dutiful daughter, and an honest friend. She could only imagine the horror on Vi’s face if she saw her now. A common thief. A midnight prowler. A defiler of privacy.

Although, it could not be helped.

She sought answers and at the moment all she had was an endless list of questions.

Gaining her feet once more, she bundled her kit and slipped it back into her pocket. She turned her attention to the long table against the wall behind the desk. Leaning over, she ran her hand along the underside of the ornately carved piece, feeling for hidden compartments or—if her luck returned—a forgotten folder of papers.

“Sherry, Miss Ruby?” an oddly familiar voice asked behind her.

# # #

Harold Jakeston watched as she stood. Her back straightened and her body tensed.

She slowly turned in his direction, her eyes wide and her mouth gaping.

He wanted to laugh, but feared startling her any more than he already had.

Even though she’d matured, Miss Ruby St. Augustin still resembled the dirty ragamuffin who’d tagged along after Brock and him in their youth. Her eyes had always been filled with mischief and adventure, as they were now. The green of her irises fairly glowed in the low-lit room. Her hair no longer hung limply around her shoulders, but was caught up in a fashionable pile atop her head. She’d always been tall; now she towered close to his six-foot height.

His gaze traveled back to hers. “Can I offer you a sherry?” he asked again, holding his glass out to her as he admired the delicate tilt of her slender neck.

“Mr. Jakeston...I...well.”

He relaxed. “It is a simple question.” He paused, bringing the glass to his own lips for a sip. “Either you would enjoy a glass of sherry or you would not.”

When she only stared without a word, Harold continued, “Do you not know what you want?” He was badgering her. She most definitely was not doing the same as he, hiding from the masses for a few minutes of quiet after an arduous evening. Her cursing and rifling through Lord Yorkton’s desk clearly showed she was looking for something—and hadn’t located it. But *what* precisely did she seek?

“Pardon my rudeness, Mr. Jakeston. No, I do not wish for a glass, but thank you ever so much for the offer.” She rubbed her hands down the front of her evening gown. “You startled me. I thought I was alone.” Her glance darted around the room, as if she expected someone else to emerge from the shadows.

Harold chuckled. “I gathered that much. Would you like to join me by the fire?” he asked. Not waiting for her response, he sank into the overstuffed chair he’d vacated moments before. The room was modernly appointed and satisfied Harold’s need for space. He’d expected a few minutes to decompress from the many people he’d met throughout the evening, but found he was not opposed to her interruption.

While highly improper of him, he sought to lure her into sitting—and hopefully an explanation about her presence in Lord Yorkton’s private study.

Her reluctant footsteps could be heard as she crossed the room, tentatively taking the seat next to him. While the chairs faced the fire, they also angled slightly toward each other. He took in her uplifted chin, perfectly coiffed hair, and the emeralds that hung elegantly around her neck and from her ears. He’d wager a pretty penny they matched the shade of her eyes perfectly—eyes that currently stared intently into the fire as she perched on

the edge of her chair.

After several moments of silence, he asked, “Are you enjoying your evening? I was not aware you were in town.”

“Why would you know if I were in town?” She never turned away from the fire.

“I suspect that Lady Vi, I mean Lady Haversham—the name is still so new to me—would be bursting at the seams with your arrival.”

She finally looked at him. “When have you seen Vi?”

“Every morning, the noon-time repast.” He paused to take a large swallow from his glass. “And then on the carriage ride here. I am staying at the Haversham townhouse after all, being a poor vicar-to-be.”

Everything about the woman was suspicious, from her muddled search to her anxious attitude. If the light was exactly right, he could most likely see her skin glow with perspiration.

Her back stiffened. “But I have not...” Her words trailed off. “Mr. Jakeston, I can—”

“Please, it’s not as if we don’t know each other. It’s just Harold.” He chuckled at her obvious discomfort. “Mr. Jakeston, or rather Vicar Jakeston, is my father—or either of my older brothers.”

She nodded but remained silent, her fingers clasped tightly in her lap as she wrung the folds of her gown.

“May I ask you a question, Ruby? It is agreeable that I also drop formalities?”

“Of course.”

He eyed her suspiciously. He remembered her as a boisterous child, precocious to the extreme. Their short acquaintance the year before had also shown Ruby to be articulate, jovial, and open. “What were you doing rummaging through Lord Yorkton’s desk?”

Her expression remained devoid of all emotion, betraying nothing.

“Do you prefer I guess? I’ve always prided myself on my reasoning abilities.” He tapped his fingers against the glass in his hand. “Let me think... What could a lady of the *ton* possibly be doing ransacking—”

“I most certainly was not ransacking Lord Yorkton’s study,” she exclaimed.

“Well, well, well, the lady can speak after all,” he chuckled. “Allow me to rephrase my comment. What could a lady of the *ton* possibly be doing gently searching—is that better?—through the personal desk of a lord, while acting as a guest in his home?” He smiled and raised a brow in her direction, hoping she’d offer some bit of insight.

True to form, she held her tongue.

“Oh, I have it!” He pointed his finger skyward. “You are strapped for funds and are looking to *borrow* a bit from our kind host. Maybe a bauble or such that not a soul would miss.”

“I would never—”

“No? Let me try again. You recently ended a tryst with our generous host and forgot a trinket in his study.” Perhaps his outlandish insinuations could pry some truth from her.

“Now, that is just ludicrous!”

“But not as farfetched as most would assume,” he said. “But again, I must be wrong. Possibly does it have something to do with your mother?”

Ruby fully turned his way and reached for his hand, a concerned expression upon her face. “Please tell me you aren’t acquainted with my mother. She mustn’t know what you saw this evening.” Clearly believing she’d said too much, she fell back against the brocade chair in silence.

Harold refilled his glass from the bottle on the table next to him. “Are you sure you do not want any?” he asked without looking at her.

Silence greeted his question.

He was curious, yet feared spooking her before he ascertained her true motive for rifling through Lord Yorkton’s things. He shuddered at the consequences if she’d been found by anyone other than himself—not

only the potential harm she'd have faced, but also the tarnish that would transfer to Lady Haversham due to their friendship.

"Miss Ruby, exactly how are you acquainted with Lord Yorkton?"

Her response was low, barely audible—like the whispering of lovers in the night. "I saw him two evenings ago, and again tonight when I arrived."

"And do you know anything about the man?" he prodded.

"Not overly much."

"He is not a kind, nor a forgiving man."

"I did not plan to further our acquaintance this night."

"This night?" Her answers only piqued his interest and unease. The evening was turning more intriguing by the second, a nice reprieve from the pressures of his own dilemmas.

"I really must be going."

He wanted nothing less than for her to go. But he also knew the dangers of someone stumbling upon them alone together. "That would be wise. May I escort you to the ballroom?"

Ruby stood, smoothing the creases she'd wrung into her dress. "No, thank you. That will raise suspicion, as well." She stared at him as if taking stock. "Can I trust you will not speak a word of this to anyone?"

He was unsure exactly who he was to speak a word to, but at that precise moment, he'd promise her anything...and everything, if only she'd stay. "Not a word shall cross my lips."

"Thank you," she said. "...Harold."

Harold adored the sound of his name on her lips.

She stood to leave, her dress rustling as she moved toward the door.

Making her escape.

Her captivating spell over him broke, freeing them both.

"Ruby," he called from his seat.

"Yes?" From her muffled tone he knew she still faced away from him, just as he faced away from her.

"You look absolutely stunning this evening." He'd intended to say so many things: encourage her to think of Lady Haversham when putting herself in less-than-savory positions, or to curb her cursing while about town. Instead, he'd blurted the exact thing he'd been thinking since she entered the room. "Please be careful in your future endeavors."

He heard the door open on well-oiled hinges and the click of it closing.

"Until we meet again, my sweet," he mumbled to the empty room, and downed the rest of his drink.