



FROM THIS
MOMENT

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
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Romulus White stood motionless in the crowded ballroom, staring at a woman he'd once longed for more than his next breath of air.

It was not a pleasant experience, especially since Laura stood alongside her doting husband. Even from a distance, her copper-red hair gleamed in the candlelight and made her stand out from the crowd.

It had been several years since Romulus had last seen her. He braced himself for the blinding wall of anguish that was sure to clobber him, but surprisingly, it didn't come. He waited, holding his breath, but the only emotion Laura's presence summoned was a cloudy swirl of bittersweet memories, an almost-pleasing sort of ache. Wasn't that strange? But perhaps that was the nature of a first great love. If such a profound experience didn't leave the trace of a scar, it would be disappointing.

"Are you going to say hello to her?" His cousin Evelyn drew up alongside him, pressing a glass of mulled cider into his hand.

He took a sip before responding. “Who?” he asked casually, but Evelyn sent him a shrewd look. Evelyn was three years younger than his thirty-two years, but she’d already perfected a disapproving stare that could terrify lesser mortals. They’d grown up together, and she knew all about his epic fit of despair when Laura broke their engagement ten years ago. It was not his proudest moment. He’d rather think of anything—a plague of locusts, perhaps enduring a public execution—anything other than those ignominious few weeks following Laura’s rejection.

“You know who I’m talking about,” Evelyn said pointedly. “It might be nice to exchange a few words to let her know there are no hard feelings.”

“I’m here on business, not to make pleasant chitchat with Laura Rittenhouse.”

Tonight’s gala was in celebration of the next round of funding that had just come through for the greatest engineering project in Boston’s history. Hosted in the lavish country club overlooking one hundred acres of rolling woodland, this was an unprecedented gathering of the city’s leading politicians, engineers, bankers, and businessmen, all of whom had joined forces to create the nation’s first subway, which would soon be running beneath the streets of Boston.

Romulus intended to shake as many hands as possible tonight. His career as the editor and publisher of *Scientific World* depended on his ability to capitalize on friendships with the engineers and scientists who were forging the new era of invention. He’d spent more than a decade cultivating these alliances, and he was good at it.

“You haven’t stopped staring at her since she entered the ballroom,” Evelyn observed.

“Laura no longer means anything to me,” he said, relieved there was no stirring of those turbulent emotions that had once

knocked him flat. In hindsight, Laura had been right to cut him loose. He would have been a terrible husband, and she was surely better off with Dr. Rittenhouse.

Besides, it was quite possible that no man in Boston enjoyed bachelorhood more than Romulus M. White. He adored women and had cut a wide swath through their ranks over the past decade. Someday he would marry, but not anytime soon. The woman he married would be a good mother and suitable companion. His future wife would make him smile, but never roar with laughter. She would be capable of holding an intelligent conversation, but she would not hold him spellbound and entranced. Nor would she have the ability to make him weep in despair or plunge him into melancholy merely because she withdrew her favor. He had already dipped his toe into that particular pond and had no desire to sample it again. Ever.

He didn't want to think about Laura tonight. A far more fascinating woman had just arrived in Boston and captured his professional interest. He had never even met Stella West, but his letter to her was burning a hole in his pocket.

He leaned down to whisper in Evelyn's ear. "After the speeches are concluded, I need a few minutes of your time to discuss business."

Evelyn was not only his cousin, she was his business partner and the managing editor of *Scientific World*. They shared ownership of the magazine on a fifty-fifty basis, so he was legally obligated to gain her consent before major decisions. Although they usually worked smashingly well together, there had been tensions over the years, and the envelope in his pocket was *not* going to make Evelyn happy.

"Dare I hope you are about to tell me you've approved the list of technical articles for the April issue?"

"Completed just before I left and already on your desk. You

can get everything on the production schedule first thing Monday morning. There is something else we need to discuss.”

And it was going to have to be handled delicately. Evelyn ran a tight ship at the magazine, and she was likely to fight him tooth and nail over his suggestion. *Scientific World* would have crashed into insolvency years ago if Evelyn had not been there to reel him in from his more extravagant indulgences, but on this issue he intended to remain firm.

“Are you wearing a *pink* vest?” The voice belonged to Michael Townsend, the attorney general of Massachusetts and Romulus’s weekly sparring partner in the boxing ring. With patrician features and prematurely gray hair, Michael was a handsome man despite his bland taste in fashion.

“It’s coral,” Romulus corrected. “I’m wearing it in honor of the marine life exhibit currently at the Smithsonian. We are featuring it in next month’s issue.”

Michael looked skeptically at the vest, but his tone carried a glint of humor. “It looks pink to me.”

Like most men in the ballroom, Michael wore a black swallowtail coat and vest, but Romulus had had an appreciation for style from the day he was old enough to understand the concept of complementary color schemes. Standing over six feet tall, with black hair and a face that turned heads, he never shied away from a dash of color or a sparkly gemstone to liven up his wardrobe.

“Brace yourself, the speeches are coming,” Michael said, and a balding man with a walrus mustache stepped up to the podium in front of the orchestra.

The music came to an end, and the clinking of forks on champagne glasses caused a hush to settle over the crowd. Henry Whitney was the improbable hero of the evening. A businessman with a lifelong interest in railroads, Henry was intrigued by the

possibility of creating a railway that ran beneath the streets. Two years ago, he had finally cobbled together the necessary financing, technical plans, and political clout to begin building America's first subway.

Traffic congestion had always been bad in Boston, with its narrow, twisting streets first laid out in the seventeenth century. More than half a million people now lived in a city whose streets were choked by lumbering streetcars, wagons, and pedestrians darting among the potholes and horse-drawn carriages. It had been even worse for the past year as streets had been torn up for the digging of the subway tunnels, but the first leg of the subway was due to open soon.

As the applause settled down, Henry began speaking. "My friends, it is surely no coincidence that the first attempt at a project as technically challenging and politically risky as a subway should happen in Boston. Our city has been blazing trails into the unknown since the first settlers arrived in America. We carved a great society out of the raw wilderness, and now our factories, publishing houses, and universities are the envy of the world. Our colleges support the research that is fueling the innovation that will lead us into the twentieth century. Our ships sail to ports all over the world, and our buildings are rising high into the sky. Soon we shall expand into an entirely new realm, deep beneath the city itself, to launch the first underground subway in America."

A hearty round of applause greeted the words.

"London may have been the first city in the world to build a subway," Henry continued, "but the London subway runs on steam, and ours shall be powered by the miracle of electricity. It shall be a clean, well-lit, and well-ventilated subway, a model for all future projects."

Mr. Whitney proceeded to introduce the mayor, the chief

engineers, and the bankers who had pulled off the latest round of funding that would permit breaking ground on the Tremont link. If all went well, digging on the Tremont leg would happen within the month, and the subway would be ready for business by the end of the year. Henry continued introducing key players in the Boston subway while Romulus fought the temptation to let his gaze wander back to Laura Rittenhouse on the far side of the ballroom. Then Henry's voice interrupted the struggle.

"And I would be remiss if I did not recognize Mr. Romulus White, whose magazine, *Scientific World*, has done so much to educate the public about the subway project."

Romulus felt pole-axed. This kind of recognition was unexpected and stunning, but not to be taken lightly.

"Romulus? Where are you?" Mr. Whitney asked from the podium.

"Here, sir!" he called out in a hearty voice. The crowd around him parted enough for the renowned financier to spot him.

"Egad," Mr. Whiney burst out. "A pink vest!"

Romulus raised his glass. "Only the best for a night like tonight!"

Applause mingled with laughter as every face in the room swiveled in his direction.

When the laughter settled, Mr. Whitney continued in a sober voice. "We could not have commenced this project without the support of the public. *Scientific World* has done more to ease fears about safety and stoke excitement for the coming subway than an army of politicians could have done. We are grateful, sir."

This time the applause was mingled with foot-stamping and some good-natured cheers. Michael clapped him on the back, and Evelyn beamed.

He swallowed hard. Oh, this felt good. Was Laura still in

the ballroom to hear? Ah yes, there she was, standing by the ice sculpture and politely clapping.

He bowed his head in acceptance, when what he really wanted to do was shout from a mountaintop. For a man who had barely graduated college, floundered with finding a career, and whose glittering wardrobe disguised a lifelong sense of insecurity, this was nice. For a few seconds, he had the esteem of every person in this room.

But they didn't really know him. Not like Laura did.

He pushed away the thought. These misgivings rarely plagued him anymore, for he had launched a magazine with scientific influence that reached all four corners of the globe. By the time he managed to draw a breath, Mr. Whitney had moved on to congratulate the team of geologists whose work charting the terrain beneath the Charles River was a vital step for the next leg of the subway.

He turned to Evelyn and kissed her on the cheek. Evelyn was an attractive woman, with glossy black hair and a willowy figure that belied the backbone of pure steel that had propelled her into a field normally closed to women.

"None of this would have happened without you," he murmured, and Evelyn sent him a grateful smile. It wasn't fair that he received all the acclaim for their magazine's success, but he'd always been the public face of *Scientific World*, while Evelyn quietly labored behind the scenes to keep the operations humming like clockwork. The two of them had been inseparable since childhood, and what a miracle that they'd found a way to turn their unique talents into a profitable career for both of them. He only hoped the letter in his pocket would not throw a bomb into their sometimes contentious relationship.

"Enough with the boring speeches," Mr. Whitney intoned with a nod to the orchestra. "Let the dancing begin!"



Romulus had no interest in dancing. He needed to win Evelyn's consent regarding the letter in his pocket. It took some maneuvering, but he managed to lead her out to the enclosed patio overlooking the wide expanse of lawn. The March evening was chilly, and there were fewer people out here, but some had gathered amid the potted palms and flickering lanterns that cast circles of warm light into the evening. Soft laughter mingled with a violin sonata, and the air was perfumed by night-blooming jasmine. He guided Evelyn into a secluded corner, for he didn't particularly care to be overheard.

"Stella West is in Boston," he said. "She is the final missing piece we need to make *Scientific World* soar."

It was hard to mask the excitement leaking into his voice, for Stella was an artist of extraordinary skill. He'd been trying to hire her for years. They had never met, but he could tell merely by looking at her illustrations that they were kindred spirits.

Scientific World was the most prestigious science magazine in the country, but they'd never been able to produce full-color illustrations on the amazing topics they covered. Developments in lithography now made high-speed reproductions of color artwork possible, but it required an artist of both technical and artistic mastery. Stella could do it. Her illustrations could capture the translucent quality of a butterfly wing or the breathtaking colors of the Grand Canyon. No grainy photograph could capture the wonders they covered, and Stella's artwork hinted at an exuberant love of the natural world that had captivated Romulus from the moment he'd seen her fantastic lithographs.

"I thought she lived in England," Evelyn said. "And that she told us it would take a barbarian horde armed with pitchforks and a battering ram to pry her out of London."

He held up a letter. “This was my latest offer begging her to work for us. I sent it to her London apartment, but her landlord wrote a forwarding address to Stella here in Boston.”

Evelyn’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “So how did *you* get it?”

Romulus grinned. “The post office made a mistake and returned it to me rather than Stella’s forwarding address. So now I know where she lives. I’ll need you to set aside eight thousand dollars to make her a tempting salary offer.”

Evelyn nearly choked. “No, no, no,” she sputtered. “*Noooo.*” Her voice was a swirling mass of disapproval, but Romulus had anticipated resistance and kept his face a pleasant mask.

“I’ve always admired how you can pack an entire kaleidoscope of disapproval into a single word. Now that we’ve got that out of the way, let’s proceed with a salary offer for Miss West.”

“No. Absolutely not. We’ve got a perfectly adequate illustration team.”

“We need better than *adequate*; we need the best.”

Two spots of color appeared on her ivory skin. Ever since they’d been children, Evelyn’s porcelain complexion had betrayed her when she was upset, and there they were, the visible signs of agitation sneaking out from beneath Evelyn’s iron control.

“We can’t afford her, and she’s already rejected every offer you’ve ever made to her. Quite colorfully and persistently.”

It was true, but he wasn’t ready to give up yet. After he’d seen Stella’s work on display at a gallery, he’d instantly known she must be recruited to work at his magazine. He sought out everything he could learn about her. She was an American, the daughter of a New York physician, and she had studied at Cornell University. She left before completing her degree when the London art world beckoned, and her reputation had been on the rise ever since.

He and Stella West had enjoyed a lively correspondence over the years. She was blunt and funny and wisecracking, but one thing was always the same—she refused to leave London.

Which made him exceedingly curious about what had lured her back to the United States. It didn't matter, for the thrill of the hunt had seized him. Stella West had wandered into his city, and he'd go after her with the speed of a comet hurtling through space.

"All I need to do is figure out what she wants, then offer it to her," he said. "Pearls from the bottom of the ocean, rubies from the Far East, whatever it takes. I want her onboard at the magazine."

"How long have you been trying to lure her to *Scientific World*?" Evelyn asked.

"Three years. That means we have published thirty-six issues without the best illustrator gracing our pages. Don't ask me to tolerate a thirty-seventh." He snatched the envelope back from Evelyn.

"Stella West is a luxury we can't afford." She was about to launch into a classic Evelyn tirade but stopped when a group of ladies wandered onto the patio to admire the jasmine. Evelyn nodded politely to the ladies, then turned her attention back to him and spoke in a calmer voice. "We can't afford it," she said. "I'd rather finish paying for the office renovation first. We overspent shamelessly on the main office."

Evelyn was still prickly over the parquet floors he'd installed in the editorial wing of the building. He'd designed the oak parquet floor himself, modeled on the geometric pattern found in quartz crystal structures. Hardly anyone noticed the similarity, but their magazine was founded on the principles of scientific wonder, and if he wanted to spend a fortune on a parquet floor that mimicked the six-sided prism of a quartz

crystal, he would do so. The same went for the artwork in the magazine.

“Art can move people in a way no written words can do,” he said. “I want to inform and inspire anyone who has ever dreamed outside the limits of their own daily life. Don’t you see it, Evelyn? Our magazine is reaching people in sod houses in Kansas, in frozen villages along the Yukon River. We just got our first subscriber in Mongolia. Those people will never see the Grand Canyon or the inside of a museum, but they see our magazine and it opens the entire world to them.”

He couldn’t afford to pay for a new artist unless Evelyn loosened the purse string, so he chose his words carefully. “Stella West is one of us,” he said, barely able to control the undercurrent of passion in his voice. “I can tell merely by looking at her artwork. She captures the radiance and the immensity of God’s creation. She can immortalize it in brilliant color. If we can get her on our team, our subscription rates will soar.”

Evelyn still looked skeptical. She rarely made a decision without triple-checking every conceivable angle, but on this move he knew he was right.

“I’ll see what I can do,” she said grudgingly, and he breathed a sigh of relief. The magazine was the most important thing in the world to him. On his deathbed he suspected he would still be strategizing ways to polish its content, recruit better writers, improve their circulation rates—

“Hello, Romulus,” a soft voice murmured.

He stiffened. Laura must be standing directly behind him, for he’d recognize that honeyed voice anywhere. In front of him, Evelyn winced in understanding and sent him a sympathetic smile. This wasn’t going to be too horrible, was it? In any event, it seemed there was no escaping it. He plastered an agreeable expression on his face and turned to greet Laura.

“Mrs. Rittenhouse,” he said with a slight bow. “You look as lovely as ever.”

She made a polite reply and introduced her husband. He’d met Dr. Rittenhouse many times before, of course. Romulus made it his business to attend the conferences of scientific organizations throughout New England to keep abreast of developments in the field. Dr. Rittenhouse owned a pharmaceutical company that produced a drug for immunity against tetanus. It was real work. Not like what Romulus did . . .

Laura proceeded to chat with Evelyn about her new house in Beacon Hill. Apparently people paid handsomely for the doctor’s tetanus drug, for no house in Beacon Hill could be purchased cheaply. She probably wouldn’t think much of the hotel room where he lived, but why did he need a house when all he did at home was sleep? The hotel suited him perfectly fine.

Evelyn elbowed him, and he realized Laura had asked him a direct question. “My apologies. Could you repeat that, please?”

“There is a gaggle of young ladies near the punch bowl who wondered where you disappeared to,” Laura said. “I gather they were hoping for a dance. Greta Fitch was particularly interested in securing a waltz with you.”

Was Laura trying to play matchmaker? It was totally unnecessary, as he tended to enjoy women’s company far too much as it was. And Greta Fitch was becoming a problem. They’d enjoyed a brief flirtation last summer, but she was reading far too much in to it, and he’d been trying to avoid her. She was a nice lady, probably too good for him, but her pursuit was becoming a little awkward.

“I’d prefer to remain out here and enjoy the night air,” he said.

“Why?” Evelyn asked. “Greta is remarkably intelligent and has a genuine interest in natural science. I think the two of you might make a go of it.”

“And you consider yourself an expert on matrimonial bliss?”

Evelyn raised her chin and shot him an icy glare. “Don’t be small,” she warned.

But on this particular issue he *was* small. And annoyed and disappointed in Evelyn.

Evelyn was his best friend in the world. They were only first cousins but had always been as close as any brother and sister. They’d been through difficult times together, they’d built a world-class magazine together, and their friendship was the bedrock that grounded his entire world.

With one notable exception. Ten years ago, Evelyn had married Clyde Brixton, the best friend Romulus had ever had, but the marriage had collapsed after only a few years. Evelyn had even reverted to using her maiden name on the masthead of the magazine, which Romulus thought was both petty and inaccurate, but he could hardly dictate to Evelyn on this point. Evelyn and Clyde had been separated for the past six years, and he doubted they’d ever mend the chasm between them.

Which was a problem, since rumor had it that Clyde was back in Boston. Whatever happened, Romulus intended to stay out of the line of fire should Clyde be preparing for another go at winning Evelyn back. There had been a time when Romulus had tried to be a coolheaded mediator between the two of them, but he had finally given up in despair. The collapse of Clyde and Evelyn’s marriage only confirmed every one of Romulus’s misgivings about romantic love. He wanted nothing to do with it.

“I enjoy women’s company far too much to settle down with just one,” he said. “Greta is perfectly charming and intelligent, but if I married her, she’d soon be a millstone around my neck. I’m simply not cut out for marriage—”

“Thank you, Romulus. You certainly have a way with words.”

Greta Fitch stood at the far end of the patio, hands on hips, fire in her eyes.

He froze, horrified at what she'd just overheard. "My apologies, Greta. I truly didn't mean—"

"You certainly *did* mean it!" Greta called out, her voice full of artillery fire. She advanced toward them with measured steps. Laura and her husband both politely stepped a few feet away, but everyone on the patio had noticed. Everyone was listening. More than a dozen pairs of eyes watched as Greta marched toward him, and she did not bother to lower her voice as she flung the barbs at him. "I think you are so terrified of genuine emotion that you flee any woman who gets too close," she said. "You'd rather set yourself up as king of your precious magazine because it lets you hide behind your subscription lists and sycophants begging to be profiled. That magazine is nothing but a stack of papers! And you sacrifice your entire life to it."

He tried again. "Greta, I said I was—"

"Sorry? Yes, you are! Don't worry, Romulus, I won't impinge on your time or the sanctity of your precious magazine. I know how much those pages stoke your over-inflated vanity. I hope that someday a woman trounces your heart so hard you'll have a little taste of what you've been dishing out all these years. I hope she rips away every artifice and illusion you hide behind, because underneath it all, I don't think she'll find very much."

Greta whirled away before he could speak another word. The door to the ballroom slammed so hard it made everyone on the patio startle. Excruciating silence hung in the night air. Well, he supposed he deserved that kick in the teeth. He'd been honest with Greta from the outset, but she'd simply ignored all his warnings.

After a few moments, the clusters of people who'd stopped

to stare in drop-jawed amazement turned back to resume stilted conversations, but he sensed their surreptitious attention.

He looked at Evelyn, who did not have much sympathy in her eyes. Which was ironic. She'd survived a miserable marriage, so why should she nudge him toward the same matrimonial inferno?

Romulus asked, "So when can I expect you to come up with an appropriate salary offer for Stella West?"

"Romulus! Aren't we going to discuss what just happened?"

"I think Greta was quite thorough in her assessment." Not too far off base, either. He moved closer and lowered his voice so no one could overhear. "I'm not going to rush to the altar just because Greta Fitch has a nesting urge. The only woman I'm interested in courting right now is Stella West. Frankly, I hope she has the face of a barnyard door and the personality of a python, because I don't need any more trouble with overly emotional females."

It really didn't matter what Stella looked like. He'd been dazzled by her from the instant he'd seen her artwork, and he would move mountains to get her onboard at *Scientific World*.