

His Grace Forsaken

By Tammy Kirby

Shimla, India, 1838

Viscount Greyson Brennen, heir to the Briarcastle dukedom, walked along the busy streets of Shimla with his batman, Jeremy Timms. A year ago, on his eighteenth birthday, he received a small inheritance from his grandmother. With it, he purchased a commission in Her Majesty's Army. It was unusual for a duke's only son to find a place in the queen's army, but Greyson had convinced his father. The monies from his grandmother supplemented his paltry income from Her Majesty's army, though not in the fashion he would appreciate from his father, were he still in England.

"Truly a remarkable place, do you not think, Timms?"

"It is not at all what I expected of a heathen land, my lord."

Greyson chuckled. "British officers have been stationed here since '32. No doubt they played a large part in civilizing the city."

Timms' gaze followed a group of well-dressed ladies strolling along the opposite side of the street. "I am utterly amazed at the number of English misses present."

Greyson slapped his batman on the back. “Ah, but Mr Timms, surely you know where there is a surplus of marriageable young men, one will inevitably find a horde of beautiful young ladies searching out marriage alliances.”

“I suppose...” Timms stopped speaking and turned his gaze on Greyson when he emitted a loud grunt. His arms surrounded the young woman that nearly bowled him over. Ebony hair flowed over his regimental jacket in a silky fall. An earthy scent of patchouli and white jasmine surrounded him as he stared into surprised, ebony eyes.

“Your pardon, my lord. I am afraid I did not see you. I was...how do you say...in too much hurry?”

Greyson swallowed hard. This was no pale English flower in his arms. Exotic honey-coloured skin glowed with health, sleek and smooth. Long, dusky lashes rimmed wide, mysterious eyes. Soft curves filled his hands. Her heady scent filled his lungs and trapped his tongue. Timms cleared his throat and Greyson released her, stepping back.

“Sorry, miss. Are you hurt?”

She gave him a sweet smile. “I am well, my lord. You save me from nasty fall.”

Greyson bowed from the waist. “Leftenant Greyson Brennen at your service, miss. May I assist you with your bags?”

The young woman dipped in a neat curtsy. “I am Miss Mara Parsi. Your help would be...much...thankful?”

Greyson chuckled. “Appreciated.”

Her laughter tinkled. “Yes. Is right. Your help would be much appreciated. I am learning your English from the missionary.”

Greyson took her arm and threaded it through his. “You are doing remarkably well, Miss Mara Parsi.” He handed her bags to Timms and escorted her along the narrow walkway. She directed him to the bungalow, where she lived with her aunt. By the time they arrived at the modest abode, Greyson was well and truly enthralled.

When he took his leave of her, he grasped her hand and brought it to his lips, his eyes trained on hers. The rosy blush that tinted her honey-coloured cheeks enhanced her beauty. “I must see you again. Please say you will receive my addresses?”

Mara’s lips parted on a sigh. “You wish to visit me? A fine English gentleman like yourself?”

Greyson gripped her fingers tighter. “I believe I shall perish of anguish do you deny me, Miss Parsi.”

Mara’s shy glance turned heated. “I have no wish to deny you, Lieutenant Brennen. I am pleased to have your addresses.”

“Tomorrow, then. I shall take you to the art exhibition that is opening in the village proper.”

“I shall be waiting every moment, excited.”

Greyson bowed. “As will I.”

Greyson’s mind overflowed with thoughts of Miss Parsi. His heart had never pounded so fiercely when in the presence of a young lady.

Timms adjusted the cuff of his immaculate summer jacket. “Sir, do you feel it wise to entangle yourself with one of the locals? Your father...” Greyson frowned at Timms. “My father

is miles across the ocean. You know there is a war on the winds, man. Miss Parsi is like a ray of sunshine in this bleak existence I find myself. Do not ruin this for me.”

“Yes, sir.” Timms frowned but said no more.

A shout hailed him, and he glanced up to find Lieutenant Chase Montclair riding toward him with his own mount trailing behind.

“Have you taken to thieving, Montclair?”

Chase grinned. “By bringing Alexander, I have saved you a trip to the barracks, my friend. Colonel Yancy wishes us to oversee the transfer of party fripperies from a Sood merchant behind the bazaar to his house on the hill. Apparently, our illustrious leader has a few diplomats and their wives and daughters to entertain.”

“Yancy does love a party. Why would anyone think joining the military would be all about war and training to fight infidels?”

Chase laughed. “A little taste of home keeps the young men mollified. I, for one, am delighted to share my estimable company with the bored young ladies that will be present.”

Greyson snorted. “Just because we’re not in London does not mean you can go about kissing every woman you meet in a dark corner without getting caught in a jam, Montclair. All you need is to compromise the wrong English flower, and it’s off to St. George’s for you. Forever leg shackled to a woman you end up wondering whatever you saw in those loose lips.”

Chase hooted. “Brennen, you know I have more finesse than to be caught by an incensed father.”

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“It seems I remember a time not too long ago.” He put a finger to his lips and tapped it. “Miss Dalrymple, I believe. Did you not have your regimental jacket repaired due to ripping it on the trellis outside her father’s study? Two stories high?”

Chase winked at him. “But he did not catch me, did he?” Chase fingered the barely discernable stitches along one sleeve. “The local seamstress is quite adept at her work. If I had not told you of that little caper, you would never have known.”

Greyson shook his head and reined his mount around a crush of locals. “You are hopeless, Montclair.”

“What were you doing in the lower section?”

Greyson’s heart lightened. “I was acting the gentleman and seeing a lady in distress to her home.”

“Oh ho! I have not seen you show interest in a female since Eton. Enlighten me.”

Greyson patted Alexander’s neck. “She is beautiful, Chase. Her name is Miss Mara Parsi. She stumbled into me in the market and dropped her packages. I...I have never met anyone so intriguing.”

Chase’s brows rose to his hairline. “Careful, ole boy. You are frightening me.”

Greyson smiled and remembered sooty lashes surrounding dark, liquid eyes, offering...he did not know what. But he craved it with every part of his being. “I am taking her to the art exhibition.”

Greyson brushed the sleeves and lapels of his jacket. Timms had, as always, dressed him immaculately. He finished reading the letter from his father and checked his funds. For months, he’d been saving and had no need for the loans the duke offered with every missive. When he had bought his commission with the money his grandmother had left him, the duke had said little, but the gleam of pride in his eyes had been enough.

To prove to his father he was worthy of the title and all it entailed when the time came, he vowed to survive on his own merit. Greyson was not a wastrel, and he was not afraid to get his hands dirty. The duke appreciated that about him. He thought about his mother. Would she have been proud? *Ha! She would not.* She never had been, and now she never would be. Her death had made little impact on him because she had been forever absent in his life. There was always another party or picnic to plan or attend. A little boy wishing for his mother's love was the least of her worries.

Greyson shook the gloom away and stepped out of the barracks to find Timms had a carriage waiting. He clambered aboard and grinned. "Don't wait up for me. I am hoping for a long day."

"It is beautiful. Yes? I wish so bad to go there." Mara stood by his side, admiring a painting of London in the evening with lights ablaze, detailing the finer aspects of the city.

"Yes, it is." Greyson had eyes only for his companion. The bright sari she wore emphasized her tanned skin, making her appearance glow. She smiled, white teeth flashing. The tiny mole at the corner of her mouth begged to be kissed.

"Thank you for escorting me, my lord."

He gathered her hand and placed it on his arm. "It is my pleasure. Would you like to visit the bazaar?"

Mara nodded. "I would be pleased."

They strolled into the street and examined the wares for sale. There were lengths of fabric and lace at one stall. The air was heavy with the scents of spices and perfumes among everything

else one could imagine. They stopped at a goldsmith's, and Mara's breath escaped on a sigh as she fingered a jewelled brooch.

“Do you like it?”

She smiled at him. “It is lovely, but too much money for me.”

Greyson spoke to the man in his own language. After a bit of haggling, the man wrapped the brooch in paper and exchanged it for the coins Greyson handed him. He pocketed the jewellery and pulled her after him to a deserted fountain beyond the bazaar. They sat in the shade on a wooden bench in a secluded arbour, and Greyson turned to face her.

“Miss Parsi, I would like to know if you have enjoyed my company today as much as I have enjoyed yours?”

She glanced down at her hands and then furtively beyond their leaf-covered bower.

“Leftenant Brennen, may I show you how much?”

Greyson nodded, puzzled until she placed her hands on his shoulders and tilted her head upwards. His heart exploded in his chest. Her luscious lips begged to meet his, and he did. This Indian girl lit a fire in him that fanned flames throughout his entire body. When he was able to pull himself away, she sighed as if he had denied her life-giving sustenance.

She licked her lips and cast him a sultry glance. “Did I do that well?”

Greyson choked on a laugh. “Quite.”

He reached in his pocket and removed the brooch, pinning it to her sari with trembling fingers. “To show my appreciation for your beauty.”

Mara stroked the jewels and preened. “You are many good to me, Leftenant.”

He stroked her satiny cheek. “Very. You are very good to me.”

She leaned forward and kissed him again and leaned back. “You are very good to me, Lieutenant.”

“Call me Greyson.”

“Greyson.”

Her throaty whisper near undone him.

After a whirlwind two weeks, Greyson was in a turmoil. He craved Mara’s touch as a drunkard craved the next drink. Her exotic Indian beauty tantalized him in ways he had never experienced. The desire to let his fingers play over her deep golden skin and wrap himself in her inky silk tresses drove him mad.

There was no way he could make it through another day without possessing her fully. His father had raised him to be an honourable man. He would not touch her without wedding vows to sanctify his commitment to her.

Chase broke into his raging thoughts. “Where did you go, chap?”

Greyson met his questioning gaze. “I am marrying Mara.”

“Whoa! What is this? You’ve known the gel two weeks, man. Have a bit of fun with her and get her out of your system. I’ve seen her with you. She’s ripe for the plucking. Don’t ruin your life over a bit of muslin. Bed her and move on.”

Greyson’s fist connected with his best friend’s chin and Chase spit out an epithet.

“Do not speak of her in that manner. She will be my duchess one day. Montclair, I am not like you. I have no wish to bed everything in skirts. Mara is all I want. There is no other woman for me. She loves me.”

Chase moved his chin back and forth with his right hand. “I am willing to let that punch slide, Brennen, because I know you are distressed, but you should think about rushing into something you cannot get out of. Marriage is forever.”

Greyson strode toward the door. “That is my point exactly. I do not wish to spend my life between silken sheets and a different woman every night. I want a home and family. Someone who loves me and wants me by her side. A woman who will stand beside me and never walk away.”

“She will never be your mother, Brennen.”

Chase’s hard words followed him through the wooden door. He didn’t need a mother. He needed a wife. He needed Mara.

The following months were the happiest of Greyson’s life. Marriage to Mara was everything he dreamed it would be. As an officer’s wife, she was amazing. Her English had improved quickly, which saddened him because he had enjoyed the endearing way she mixed up her words. Training was almost over for the day and he could not wait to get back to their bungalow and see her.

“Hey, Brennen!”

Greyson stowed his gear and saddled Alexander, the blooded bay stallion he had raised from a colt. At Sergeant Bellows shout, he turned. “Bellows. What may I do for you?”

The other man cast a hungry look at the horse. “Sell me that wonderful beast. I can make it worth your while.”

Greyson patted Alexander's shoulder. "Like I told you the last five times you asked, Bellows. Not a chance. You do not have enough funds to pay for this animal. He's more than a mount to me."

"Come along, mate. Think of all the baubles you can buy your pretty new bride. I need that horse."

Greyson shook his head. "Alexander is not for sale. You'll have to look elsewhere, Bellows."

He left the sergeant and made his way from the military base to their small bungalow at the edge of town. After stabling the stallion and taking care of his needs, he hurried to the house. Mara met him at the door, wearing a lovely creation of silk and lace. She threw her arms around his neck and gave him a sultry smile.

"My handsome husband has finally come home. I missed you dreadfully." She pouted her full red lips at him, and Greyson's heart thundered against his ribs.

"I am sorry, love. Duty calls me, you know that. If I had my way, I would never leave your side." He moved to kiss her, and she turned her head away and slipped out of his arms.

Huge tears filled her accusing eyes. "You could be with me all the time if you would sell your commission and ask your father for funds to keep us in the lifestyle we deserve."

Greyson stiffened. "We have been over this, Mara. I will not go to my father for money. My pay as an officer is adequate, along with my inheritance, to meet our needs if we are careful. When the time comes for me to succeed my father, you will be a duchess, love. I wish for him to know I am worthy of the title and not likely to squander the riches he entrusts to me."

"But you are away so much of the time. I miss you."

He placed a hand on her cheek, rubbing the lone tear away with his thumb. "I am home now."

Her face brightened. "May we go to the new restaurant that has opened?"

He caressed her cheek with the back of his hand. "I have a short while before I must move out on patrol. I thought we could stay in. Have Timms bring us food and..." His eyes moved to their bedchamber door.

She stepped back and posed. "Look at me, Greyson. I have spent hours getting pretty for you to take me out in public. Don't you like my new gown?"

He frowned. "It is quite lovely. But I thought you were going to wait for my next pay. Darling, I know how much you love pretty gowns, but we agreed on one per month."

"Do not worry, husband. This gown I made myself from fabric and lace I had before we wed. It did not cost you a farthing."

"I had no idea you were so talented." He held her at arm's length to run his gaze up and down the dress. "You are quite the seamstress, darling. And I am so proud of you for being frugal. You will make a perfect duchess. And this gown is just the thing to enhance your exotic beauty that I love so well."

She allowed him a kiss. "Then would it not be a shame for the villagers not to see it?"

Greyson cast a lingering glance at the bedroom door and sighed. "Anything for you, love. Give me a moment to freshen myself and I shall be ready to escort you wherever you wish."

Mara was an attentive dinner partner. Greyson was proud of the quick way she learned to hold herself in society. When they first married, she had watched the other ladies and mimicked their movements so that now, three days away from their six-month anniversary, her manners were as impeccable as any English-born debutante.

He laid his napkin on the table. "Shall we walk back to the bungalow? We can stroll along the bazaar and see if anything catches your eye?"

Mara beamed at him. "I am agreeable to that, husband. Can you believe we shall soon be married six months?"

He stood and pulled out her chair. "It has been the happiest time of my life. I wish I could take you in my arms right now and show you how well you are loved."

She cast him a coquettish look at his whispered words. "I shall look forward to you expressing that once we are out of the public eye, husband."

He led her through the bazaar and stopped at the jeweller's stall she loved to frequent. Greyson gained much happiness by watching her face as she fingered the handcrafted jewels. She lifted an ostentatious diamond bracelet crafted in heavy gold.

"This is the one. I must have it."

Greyson spoke to the jeweller for several moments, then clasped her hand. "I am sorry, love. You will have to choose something else. This one is much too deep for my pockets." He gestured to a smaller bracelet set on a much finer chain. "What about this one? It will look lovely on you."

Mara stamped her foot. "No! It is ugly. I will not wear such a cheap piece. I am to be a duchess. You must get me the other one. Ask your father to send you the money that will be ours one day."

Greyson frowned and took her elbow to escort her outside the bazaar. Heat burned his cheeks as he hailed a hansom to take them home. The extra coins he spent on the conveyance he would worry about later.

Mara refused to look at him. Once they were home, she fled to their bedroom. The sound of the bolt clicking into place shouted her rejection.

He beat on the door. “Mara, please let me in. The day will come when you will be smothered in jewels of all shapes and sizes. You know how much it means to me to make my own way. Please let me in.”

Something hard landed against the door on the opposite side, and Greyson stepped back, placing a hand on his chest. His heart hurt, literally and figuratively. Head hanging, he left the cold, silent bungalow. Patrol started in an hour.

Greyson patted the pocket of his white cotton uniform. It was still there. The gift had been more costly than he was prepared for, but he couldn't wait for Mara to open it. Three days of her silent treatment had driven him barmy. He hungered for her approval and she withheld it along with her beautiful body.

Though adequate, his income was not as plentiful as his monthly allowance from his father when he was at Eton. He had managed well enough until he married. His finances did not extend to the beautiful gowns and ostentatious jewellery his wife coveted. Who knew obtaining a wife would prove so costly?

Guilt rode him hard. He needed to tell his father about his nuptials, but each time he sat at his desk to write him of the news, something held him back. Perhaps he wished to tell him in person, or maybe he was...*afraid*. Greyson rotated his neck, stretching muscles that felt as if they were being strangled by an unseen hand. And now he was without a mount.

He mourned the loss of Alexander, but he wanted to show Mara how much she meant to him. Bellows was ecstatic to own such a fine piece of horseflesh and Greyson knew the sergeant

to have a gentle hand with his mounts, which made the transaction a bit more palatable. Still, he couldn't help but feel he had failed Alexander.

The monies he had gained by selling part of his past had been used to buy his lovely bride the gold and diamond bracelet she coveted. He hoped it would be worth it. He swept through the door, calling her name. Moving to their tiny bedroom, he braced his hands on the door frame. His eyes took in the chaotic tumble of gowns and shoes strewn across the floor.

Jeremy Timms, his man, usually kept their quarters in order. At the moment, he was taking a much-needed break to see the sights in India. Mara had hired a local girl to be her lady's maid, but one screaming fit from her mistress and she had vanished. Greyson moved across the room, picking up the discarded silks and satins to keep from stepping on them. His brows gathered in a frown. He had never seen some of these gowns. Heart weighted, he flipped through the elegant fabrics.

Mara knew he did not have the monies to pay for expensive gowns. There were too many for her to have been able to sew them all. Had she been running accounts up all over town? Would there be no other alternative but to contact his father for a loan? His fists clenched. Throwing the gowns on a lacquered chair, he strode from the room, the door slamming in his wake.

At the seamstress shop, where most of the English ladies of his acquaintance frequented, he took a deep, steadying breath and stepped inside. The owner met him at the door with a courteous smile.

"May I help you, my lord?"

"Lord Brennen, Madame. Could you supply me with the amount my wife has charged to my account?"

The seamstress smiled at him. “But of course.” She lifted a ledger from beneath the polished wooden counter and thumbed through it. With a shake of her head, she met his gaze. “I am pleased to tell you I have no outstanding debts in your name, my lord.”

Greyson stood with his hands on his hips, battling frustration and confusion. His eyes narrowed as his thoughts raced. *There has to be a mistake.*

“Are you sure, Madame? My wife, Mara, is about this tall.” He levelled his hand to the middle of his chest. “She has silky black hair and a cream and honey complexion with a small beauty mark at the corner of her lip on the left side.”

Madame clasped her hands together. “But of course, Lady Mara, my best customer. Colonel Yancy always escorts her and pays for her items with gold. He’s a marquess, you know.”

White-hot fury splintered through Greyson’s breast. The frustration and confusion roiled within, taking his breath for a moment. *How could she? James Yancy, Marquess of Marlborough, is my colonel, the man I am fated to follow into battle.* Little things began to push into his memory. Mara had been taken with titles. And Colonel Yancy had shown her much attention at the first officer’s ball to which he had escorted her after they wed. Greyson had been so proud his commander had singled his wife out to make her feel accepted into the upper echelons of English society in India.

Steps heavy, he left the shop, arriving at their tiny bungalow without realizing it. The cosy home shared for months with the woman he mistakenly believed, thought he hung the moon. *Hah! She is a master deceiver, my wife.*

Stupidly, he believed she loved him. He looked around the room. Dresden figurines occupied a corner shelf. A silver music box decorated a table. It hadn’t been there a week ago.

He jerked it up and threw it across the room. The strident sounds of the love song played off-key, then stopped. A Dresden figurine shattered into a million pieces against the door. Every bit of frippery he hadn't paid for, he destroyed.

Standing amidst torn lace and shreds of expensive fabrics, he impaled his cheating wife with an angry glare when she entered. Mara took in the devastation, crying out at the destroyed gowns and knick-knacks. "What has gotten into you, Greyson? You have destroyed all my pretty things."

He moved toward her, his fists clenched in white-knuckled rage. "Harlot! How can you stand there as if you have not made me a laughingstock in front of my peers? I gave you everything I could afford, and yet it was not enough. You could not wait for me to prove myself. You had to..."

A vicious scream erupted from her throat. Her beautiful face twisted into a hideous mask. In that instant of truth, he wondered how the lovely girl he'd given his heart to had turned into the wretched venom-spewing hag before him. Her tirade fell around his ears in a blue haze.

"Yes, *I had to*. I grow weary of waiting for your father to die so I can become a duchess. You expect me to wear the same gown more than once to protect your meagre finances. The colonel is most generous. He sees that my beauty should be adorned with the best, and he has no problem supplying me with lovely things."

"He's fifty years old, Mara. Old enough to be your father."

"He is a marquess with plenty of coin to spend on me. You are nothing but a poor leftenant wanting to be a *good boy* to gain your father's approval. You sicken me."

Greyson flinched. “Why in all that is holy did you marry me?” His words were near a whisper as he searched her face for a sign of remorse, an inkling that she did not mean her harsh invectives. He found none.

Wicked laughter bubbled from her throat. “Because I wanted to be an English duchess. I had no idea you would maintain this martyrdom to support yourself. Greyson, your father is worth hundreds of pounds. You are his only living heir. How did you think I would react?”

Straightening to his full height, he spoke in a level tone. “I expected you to love and honour me as you vowed.”

Her snicker undid him. He started toward her, intent on strangling the life from her amoral throat. Mara, apparently recognizing the danger, fled. Greyson slammed a fist into the wall and he grabbed a bottle of liquor from the cabinet. Gulp after gulp, it poured down his throat with scorching heat, all the while he begged for release from the pain tearing him inside out.

He awakened to Jeremy Timms’ shocked expression. Greyson pushed his valet’s hands away as he tried to help him rise. He kept slipping on the pile of torn gowns upon which he lay. Giving up, he sat amidst silks and satins of every hue imaginable and rubbed a hand over his face. Two days’ growth of beard scratched his palm. His nose wrinkled as the smell of spirits bombarded his senses. He glanced down to find his usually impeccable uniform stained and wrinkled. Empty liquor bottles carpeted the floor. He winced as Timms spoke in a loud voice.

“Sir. Lord Brennen. What the devil happened here?”

Greyson opened bleary eyes, trying to focus. Seeing the concern in Timms’ eyes, what little constraint he had vanished. Huge tears rolled down his face. “She’s gone, Timms. She made a cuckold of me and then she left.”

Timms began to set the room to rights. In his efficient way, he brewed coffee and heated water for a bath. Greyson stumbled to his feet, shamed for having Timms see him so humiliated. Until two days ago, he had drunk spirits only rarely. He put a hand to his throbbing head and remembered why.

“You knew, didn’t you, Timms? You knew all along she didn’t love me. I was a fool not to have seen it for myself. Montclair tried to tell me, and I refused to listen.” Timms didn’t answer. He laid a fresh uniform on the bed. The shredded gowns had disappeared, along with the broken china and empty bottles that had littered the room. Greyson took a deep breath. “I am glad Father sent you to India with me.”

Greyson allowed himself to be manhandled into a tub of hot water. He drank the coffee and tried to eat, but could only manage a slice of bread. Timms had him shaved and dressed in short order. He was sitting on the small patio adjacent to the house when he heard Timms answer a knock on the door. Though he tried, he could not find the strength to care.

His dearest friend, Lieutenant Chase Montclair, strode to his side, and he looked up at him. “What brings you here, Montclair?”

It took a moment for Chase’s solemn look to sink in. “What is it?”

“There’s been an accident, Greyson. Mara and Colonel Yancy were on their way back from a military ball held by the General’s wife. Their carriage lost a wheel, and they crashed into the river below. There were no survivors.”

Greyson’s lips tightened. He reached for his cup and sipped his coffee. “Would you care for coffee, Chase? Timms just made it.”

Chase frowned at him. “Brennen, did you hear me?”

Greyson set his cup down and brushed at an imaginary piece of lint on the lapel of his white cotton uniform. "I heard you, Montclair. A suitable end to a faithless harlot, if you ask me. Did you know Mara is the name of the Hindu goddess of death? It also means bitter. Fitting, don't you think?"

Chase looked at Timms standing behind Greyson's left shoulder, a question in his eyes.

"Greyson, there is more. Mara was with child."

His bottom lip jerked. He reached for his cup again, "Pity. I wonder who fathered the babe."

Chase gripped his shoulder before sitting across from him. "Would you like for me to make the arrangements for her funeral?"

Greyson shook his head. "It is my mess. I will deal with it. There is one thing I would wish from both of you." He glanced from Chase to Timms. "I have not informed my father of my ill-favoured marriage. I would have you remain silent on the knowledge, as I have no intention of mentioning my failure once I leave this god-forsaken place. After she is planted in Indian soil, I intend to sell my commission and return to England post haste."

Chase gave him a nod. "You have my word."

Timms bowed. "Mine as well, my lord. I shall begin packing immediately." He halted. "What shall I do with Lady Mara's things?"

"Burn them."

He rose and walked across the patio to the manmade pond that held colourful fish. The crystal-clear water threw his reflection back at him with flawless precision. A cold shadow had invaded Greyson's heart and grown stronger since his confrontation with Mara. He studied his

austere image. The naïve young man who had given his heart to a faithless harlot was no more. In his place, a gaunt-eyed, hard-hearted stranger remained.

Hatred blackened his soul and warped his emotions as he reflected on his recent past. If he had never come to India. Never met Mara Parsi. He would not be in this painful place. Movement caught his gaze, and he watched a black leopard slip through the tangle of vines and trees that led to the wilderness beyond his house.

Cunning and beautiful with sinuous grace, the animal prowled, looking for its next meal. Just like his dead wife. She had slinked into his life with her captivating smile. The heated kisses she offered, luring him into her exciting darkness. What a fool he had been. She had used her luscious body to tempt him into her lair. Disgust at his willing surrender raked him like hot coals.

He flinched as the leopard pounced upon an unwary chicken and ended its surprised squawks with a lethal blow before rising and carrying its blood-dripping prey into the darkness beyond. He would leave India and his folly behind. And he would never be taken in by a pretty face again.

The still small voice that urged him to forgive—the voice his father had always taught him to heed—he boxed into a corner of his heart and locked away with a key of bitterness.

Thank you for reading **His Grace Forsaken**.

If you want to see how Greyson's story ends,

check out **His Grace Forgiven**,

the first book in my **Haven House** series.

[Find it on Amazon here.](#)

Acts 8:23

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Ephesians 3:31

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away
from you, with all malice...*