

Meryl arrived at police headquarters the next morning while Alec watched over Andrei.

'Good morning Ms Moorecroft, bright and early I see, eager to begin?'

She was beginning to get accustomed to the inspector's cynical tone and caustic comments. What she wondered was whether it was his professional or personal persona that came across. She had never had any reason in her forty years to be involved with the police, least of all in Florence, so far away from home.

'Would you like coffee before we commence or tea that you English prefer?'

'I'm not English, Inspector Aldo, coffee would be lovely, thank you.'

She knew she had to maintain her composure as Inspector Aldo had cast suspicion in her direction.

'Well, Dr Hart, your uncle, is quite the English gentleman, except when he is angered, so I assumed, as his niece, you might be too.'

'Ben is not English by birth, he has lived in England since he was eighteen, so that is as English as he is. He is a dignified man, standing tall among those who cannot hold a candle to him.' Her dagger was uttered with pointed intention.

'Yes, yes, I get it Ms. Moorecroft. I must be mindful not to say anything that might be construed as uncomplimentary to Dr Hart, right?' That sardonic grin irked her.

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'May we proceed with what it is you wish to ask me Inspector Aldo?'

'Let's begin. How long have you known Professor Malakov and how did you meet? This is official, I am recording your responses, Ms Moorecroft so please be direct.'

'Three or four months, I was on tour in Bath and he approached me to borrow a chair from my table at the local tea shop as there were many members in his group.'

'Three or four? Which one is it, four is four weeks more than three months and a lot can happen in four weeks, be specific Ms Moorecroft, how long have you known the professor?'

'It's four months, well four months on Monday.'