

# Phantom of the Opera 2

By Eriks\_Girl

Submitted: November 26, 2006

Updated: December 18, 2007

*After 3 years, the Opera House has been rebuilt, and a woman named Anna Hart has joined the cast. The Opera Ghost returns, with growing interest of this woman. Will Erik triumph in gaining her love, or will her overprotective brother cause his end?*

Provided by Fanart Central.

[http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Eriks\\_Girl/41204/Phantom-of-Opera-2](http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Eriks_Girl/41204/Phantom-of-Opera-2)

<b>Chapter 1 - Chapter 1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Chapter 2</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Chapter 3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Chapter 4</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - Chapter 5</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter 6 - Chapter 6</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 7 - Chapter 7</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 8 - Chapter 8</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter 9 - Chapter 9</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter 10 - Chapter 10</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Chapter 11 - Chapter 11</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Chapter 12 - Chapter 12</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Chapter 13 - Chapter 13</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Chapter 14 - Chapter 14</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Chapter 15 - Chapter 15</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Chapter 16 - Chapter 16</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Chapter 17 - Chapter 17</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Chapter 18 - Chapter 18</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Chapter 19 - Chapter 19</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Chapter 20 - Chapter 20</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Chapter 21 - Chapter 21</b>	<b>89</b>

# 1 - Chapter 1

“Now, Miss Hart,” said Madame Giry. “Why is it that you would like to be a performer here at The Opera Populaire?”

Anna Hart ran her long, thin fingers over the creases of her black dress. “Because Madame, I’ve always wanted to perform here. I love to dance and sing. I’ve been planning to come here for many years, but then when I heard of the great fire, I thought I had lost my chance.” She smiled. “I was so overjoyed when I got news that The Opera Populaire had been rebuilt to its former glory, I packed my things and rushed down here as fast as I could.”

Madame Giry smiled and nodded at the young woman. “Well, I am very glad that you are here. I’ve heard of you before. You’ve performed in the London Opera House for many years. You have exceptional talent, but why would you give that all up just to come here?”

Anna shrugged. “I’m just drawn to this place. It’s so beautiful and mysterious. I feel like I belong here.”

Madame Giry nodded and handed the resume papers back to Anna. “Your resume is very good Miss Hart. I look forward to hearing you perform. Hopefully, now the performers can all live in peace. We’ve rid the Opera House of some bad memories.”

Anna sighed. “Ah yes. The famous tales of the mysterious Phantom of the Opera. Was that a true story, Madame?”

“Unfortunately it was, my dear.” Madame Giry frowned. “But, I don’t ever want to speak of it again. It was a hard time for us all. Especially for Christine Daae, who’s now the wife of the Vicomte Raoul de Chagny. Now, how about I show you to your new dressing room?”

Anna nodded. “That would be nice, thank you.”

Madame Giry and Anna exited the back office of the theatre and walked silently through the busy halls. As they made their way backstage, they unfortunately ran into a very angry looking diva in a feathered hat and frilled red dress, carrying a small white poodle.

“Madame, where have you been?” The diva fumed in her Italian accented voice. “I need my lines for rehearsal. I know nothing of this new production.”

“Now, Carlotta,” Madame Giry said calmly. “There will be plenty of time for that later. Right now, I need to take Miss Hart to her dressing room.”

“Who?” Carlotta asked, flipping back her curly red hair.

Madame Giry motioned to the young woman beside her. “Carlotta, this is Annabelle Hart. She will be a part of our cast.” She looked at Anna. “Miss Hart, this is La Carlotta.”

Anna nodded in greeting. “Pleased to meet-“

Carlotta cut her off. “I don’t care. Just don’t get in my way while I am performing.” She looked back at Madame Giry. “I’d better get my lines soon, Madame. You don’t want to see me angry.”

Carlotta was about to turn and leave when Anna spoke up.

“Wow, Carlotta.” Anna said sarcastically. “You really know how to make a first impression on others. I must say, I’ve never in my life been greeted in such a rude way. A word of advice for next time though, how about you try and be a little more sincere towards others? It would probably make people like you better.”

Carlotta’s mouth dropped. “That’s ‘La’ Carlotta to you, missy. And whom do you think you are to talk to me like that? I am the greatest performer this theatre has ever known. As a matter of fact I’m the-“

Anna turned and walked away. "I don't care."

Madame Giry ignored Carlotta's dramatic presentation of insult, and quickly followed Anna up the spiraling stairs to where the dressing rooms were held.

When she caught up to her, Madame Giry said, "Miss Hart, I appreciate you sticking up for me, but please try not to upset Carlotta too much. When she gets upset, she storms out of the theatre and leaves our production without a star. So, try and keep your comments to yourself next time."

Anna huffed, tightening her fingers around the handle of her suitcase. "My apologies, Madame. I just can't stand Prima Donnas like her. They drive me up the bloody wall!"

Madame Giry smiled. "My advice is try and tune her out. It always works for me."

Anna covered her mouth and gave a small cough, before turning back to Madame Giry, smiling. "Thanks, I'll keep that in mind."

After walking for a short while through the dimly lit halls, passing actors, maids, and stagehands, Madame Giry stopped at a dressing room door and unlocked it with her set of jangling keys. She opened the door and smiled.

"Here we are, Miss Hart."

Anna stepped into the large room and looked around. There was a good-sized bed beside a beautiful three-mirror dresser with vases of beautiful flowers on top of it to one side of the room, and a dressing area, a piano, and a small fireplace on the other side. And up against the back wall was a beautiful, full-length mirror. It was

the most beautiful mirror she had ever seen. She looked back at the older woman in the doorway.

"Madame, it's beautiful." She smiled. "Thank you."

Madame Giry nodded. "You're welcome, my dear. This room was once Christine Daae's when she performed here."

Anna's eyes widened. "Really? But, why are you giving it to me? I'm not as important as her."

Madame Giry touched her shoulder. "Nonsense. You're just as important as her, and everyone else in this theatre. We are all like a family, here." She sighed. "Well, I'd best be back to work. You stay here and make yourself comfortable. I'll be backstage if you need me for anything."

Anna nodded. "Thank you, Madame."

Madame Giry smiled once more before exiting the room, shutting the door behind her.

Alone at last, Anna removed her coat and hung it over the flowered dressing screen. Then, she lit a few candles and set them on the table and piano, giving the room a warm, comfortable feeling. She put her suitcase on the bed, opened it, and began to unpack her clothes. Then, she sat herself on the chair in front of the three-mirrored dresser and unclipped her loose bun. Her wavy, auburn coloured hair fell gracefully around her face. She took her brush and began to gently run it through the waves of her hair, as she softly hummed to herself.

Putting her brush down, Anna looked back at the piano in the corner of the room beside the beautiful mirror. Getting up from her seat, she pulled out a pile of blank music sheets from her bag, along with a pen, and made her way to the piano. Sitting down on the wooden bench, Anna straightened her long black dress and scattered the sheets on top of the piano in front of her. Softly and gently, her fingers began to dance along the keys as she began to play her song, unknowing that someone in the darkness was watching her.

\*\*\*\*\*

It had been almost three years since Erik had watched Christine Daae, the only woman he'd ever loved, sail away with the Vicomte Raoul de Chagne. An angry mob had then gone after Erik, hoping to bring

him to justice and had forced him to leave his home. Not knowing where else to go, he sought asylum at a monastery. He didn't particularly care to find comfort in God (after all, how could a deity care for such a monster as himself?), but men of God would not turn in a man who needed a place to stay. After one year there, renovation to the Opera Populaire had been completed and Erik decided that it would be safe to return to his home in the cellars. He wasn't sure why, but he was drawn to that prison. Perhaps it was because everything he owned was there. He had always relished having power, and his belongings were the only things he controlled. Perhaps it was because the Opera House was the only place where he had known any kindness, any happiness. Or it might have been because the shadows of the dark and gloomy cellars were the only places he truly belonged.

Erik was rather surprised to find that little was missing. He supposed that he had Madame Giry, the ballet mistress, to thank for that.

But now, Erik was behind the two-way mirror connecting his domain with Christine's old dressing room, with the intent to sit in her room, to remember her, and to mourn her; she was dead to him.

No one had been assigned to the "haunted" dressing room since Christine left, for fear of the Phantom of the Opera. That much Erik knew from his extremely infrequent excursions into the aboveground portion of the opera house. So, it is understandable that he was rather surprised as he stood behind the two-way mirror to find the room occupied by a young woman, sitting in front of a piano. She had several pages of sheet music spread out in front of her. Erik stood there watching her for some time, too stunned to move.

This strange woman had long, wavy auburn hair that framed her attractive face. Her skin was fair porcelain, her fingers were long and thin, and her hands were so small and graceful that they seemed to be made for the piano. She had full lips, and her eyes were as blue as the ocean itself.

The woman made several notes on the music. Then she began to play and sing a song the ghost behind the mirror had never heard before.

Her soprano voice was strong, but gentle as she sang:

"Please, please forgive me,

But I won't be home again.

Maybe someday, you'll look up,

And barely conscious, you'll say to no one,

Isn't something missing?"

Erik felt thrills go up his spine. The woman had such clarity of tone, such perfect pitch! This was beauty, indeed. Something in her voice seemed to cry out to him. She sounded immeasurably lonely.

Erik felt his chest tighten, as if in a vise, a sensation he had only experienced when hearing Christine. A soft moan of miserable ecstasy escaped him, as the woman hit a C, four notes above the staff.

The singer stopped suddenly and made a few more notes on her music. When she began again, Erik noticed a subtle change in the rhythm of the bass clef. The invisible vise tightened a bit more as he realized why he had never heard this song before: she was in the process of composing it.

With a few months of my instruction, she could become a great artist, Erik thought, but immediately dismissed the idea. He didn't want another Christine Daae on his hands. The Angel of Music's first, and last, journey into the realm of teaching beautiful young opera singers had been a disaster. Erik had trained Christine, had fallen in love with her and had wooed her in vain. He had learned his lesson the

hard way; history would not repeat itself.

Erik turned to go, but before he had taken four steps toward his underground lair, several loud, dissonant notes from the piano jarred his ears. He looked back through the mirror and saw the woman's slight frame shaking with tears, her head in her hands.

She cried out in despair all too familiar to him, "Why am I so alone?" Her rich, feminine voice contrasting sharply with her clear soprano singing voice. Erik noted the rather appealing, mature huskiness in it.

After making this lamentation, the woman raised her head, her expression blank, and all traces of tears gone. Unbidden, the word "mask-like" entered Erik's mind. He silently cursed himself for being so preoccupied with his deformity and the mask that concealed it.

The woman put her sheet music in order, and then stood up to retrieve a new set of sheet music from the top of the piano. Erik noticed that she was around five feet, seven or eight inches. She had seemed rather petite when she was sitting down, so he supposed that her legs must have been rather long. She spread her music out in front of her and began to softly play a piece Erik was more familiar with. It was a lullaby. He had heard it many years before he'd met Christine, when he was a child.

She was doing a very good job. What really struck him about this performance was the way the woman reacted to the music. All of the tension in her shoulders and neck relaxed as her fingers danced on the keys. Her eyes closed, but she played just as well, if not better, than she had when they were open. The gentle lullaby seemed to calm her in a way that her own composition had failed. He couldn't help but feel sorry for her.

Erik wanted so much to sing to this woman, to comfort her, for he knew quite well what it was like to be lonely. But, he couldn't make himself known to anyone. If word got out that the Phantom of the Opera had returned, he would be hunted down and arrested in no time.

Besides, he didn't want to frighten the woman, and he most surely didn't want her to believe that The Angel of Music had come to help her. He didn't want to go down that path again.

Erik watched intently as the woman stopped playing and turned her head away from him as she started to cough. She covered her mouth with one hand as she wheezed and coughed for a moment. Clearing her throat, the woman sat up straight with one hand on her chest, her face twisted in pain. Erik tilted his head a bit. Was she sick? She looked as if she was suffering physically, as well as emotionally.

Taking a deep breath, the woman rose from her seat and walked over to the bed, where she lay herself down on the pillow. She turned over to her side, her back to Erik, and was soon asleep. Taking one last glance at her, Erik turned and walked back down to his underground lair, the sound of that woman's beautiful, yet lonely voice, still ringing in his mind.

## 2 - Chapter 2

“Places! Places, everyone!” Madame Giry called.

Anna sat back in the front seat of the empty audience as she watched all of the actors rush around the stage, getting into their positions for rehearsal. She had never heard of this Opera before, so she simply asked Madame Giry if she could just simply observe the performance and learn from it for next time. She was lucky that Madame Giry was so understanding.

Madame Giry stood with her fists on her hips at the side of the stage, along with Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre, the owners of the opera house. A small crowd of people in full costume stood around the stage, and Carlotta, wearing the most unattractive purple dress with a feathered headpiece Anna had ever laid eyes upon, stood at the front of the crowd. Anna sat back and crossed her long legs from under her dress comfortably.

“Okay, Carlotta.” Mr. Reyer, the orchestra’s conductor said. “From the top, if you please.”

Once the music from the orchestra began to play softly in the background, Carlotta cleared her throat and began to sing.

Anna flinched and shut her eyes. Good Lord, Anna thought, she’s awful. By looking at the faces of everyone around her, Anna knew that the entire cast thought the same thing. When Carlotta hit a high C, Anna was surprised the glass windows of the opera house didn’t shatter.

“Okay Carlotta,” Mr. Andre cut in. “That was very nice. But, how about you tone it down at the high notes? Remember, this song is supposed to be soft and gentle. Your character is supposed to be singing to the man she loves.”

Carlotta glared at the older man with her venomous green eyes. “What, is my singing not good enough for you, Monsieur? Would you rather have your precious little Christine Daae to come down here sing it instead?”

“No, no. Of course not, my lady.” Mr. Firmin stuttered. “You are our star, and will always be. Andre was just... over exaggerating. You were lovely.”

Carlotta smiled. “Thank you, Mr. Firmin. I was, wasn’t I?”

Anna couldn’t believe what lengths these people were going through just to please Carlotta. It was obvious that they were lying, but Carlotta’s arrogance and ignorance seemed to be getting in the way of her realizing it also.

Anna watched the rest of the rehearsal in silence, trying her best not to plug her ears when Carlotta sang. The ballet dancers were very graceful, though, and Madame Giry smiled with pride when they danced their routine flawlessly.

After rehearsals, Madame Giry came down off the stage. She walked over to Anna, along with Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre. Once they reached her side, Anna rose from her seat.

“Mr. Firmin, Mr. Andre,” Madame Giry smiled. “This is Annabelle Hart. She is a new member of our cast.”

The two older men smiled politely, each taking her hand and kissing the top of it. Anna blushed, since she had never been treated so respectfully before.

“A pleasure, Mademoiselle Hart.” Mr. Andre smiled. “If I may say so, you are a lovely young lady. I look forward to hearing you perform. Madame tells me that you have exceptional talent.”

“Thank you, Monsieur.” Anna smiled. “I look forward to finally singing for you as well.”

“What an idea!” Mr. Firmin exclaimed. He turned to Anna. “Miss Hart, how about giving us a demonstration of your talent?”

“Well, I uh...” Anna stuttered. “I could sing you a song that I’ve been composing for quite some time now. I have the finished sheet music right here in my bag for the orchestra. If that’s alright with Mr. Reyer?”

Mr. Reyer smiled and nodded. “Of course, my dear.”

“A composer as well!” Andre smiled, placing his hand on her shoulder. “My, aren’t you the talented one?”

Anna reached into her bag on one of the chairs. She pulled out the sheet music that she had been working on the night before. She walked up to Mr. Reyer and handed him the music.

He smiled. “Merci, Mademoiselle. Go onto the stage, and we shall begin.”

Anna nodded and, lifting the hem of her dress up, she walked up the stairs and stood at the front of the stage. She waited patiently as Mr. Reyer handed each of the musicians a music sheet. Her eyes wandered around the empty theatre, imagining every seat occupied by a person, waiting to hear her perform.

Then, something caught her eye up in Box 5. She could’ve sworn she saw something move up there. A shadow, of some sort. But now, it was gone. Shrugging it off, Anna looked back at Mr. Reyer, who lifted up his conducting stick.

“Are you ready, Miss Hart?” he asked.

“Yes.” She said softly.

At once, the gentle sound of her song began to echo through the theatre. The violins, flutes and percussion played the tune gently, but strongly. Madame Giry, Mr. Andre, and Mr. Firmin all took a seat in the front row of the audience. Taking a deep breath, and shutting her eyes, Anna’s gentle, yet strong soprano voice filled the theatre as she sang:

“Please, please forgive me,

But I wont be home again.

Maybe someday you’ll look up,

And barely conscious, you’ll say to no one,

Isn’t something missing?

You wont cry for my absence, I know.

You forgot me long ago.

Am I that unimportant?

Am I so insignificant?

Isn’t something missing?

Isn’t someone missing me?

Even though I would sacrifice,

You won't try for me, not now.

Though I'd die to know you love me,

I'm all alone.

Isn't someone missing me?"

The orchestra's music slowly died down and the song finally ended. Anna opened her eyes and saw Madame Giry, Mr. Andre and Mr. Firmin all standing and applauding. Even Mr. Reyer was clapping, along with a few stagehands and performers who had heard her singing from backstage. Anna smiled and took a small bow, her wavy hair falling around her face.

"Bravo! Bravo!" Mr. Andre grinned. "That was beautifully done, Miss Hart."

"Thank you, Monsieur." Anna said, straightening.

Soon, everyone was running up to her, talking to her all at once, praising her on her great performance. Anna smiled at them all in thanks, but deep inside her heart, she was frowning. Didn't anyone even listen to the words of her song? Here she was, singing out her immeasurable loneliness to the world, and no one seemed to have noticed.

Suddenly, Carlotta stepped through the crowd, glaring at Anna hatefully. She turned to the two older men. "So, Monsieur's, are we having a little rehearsal for who will be replacing me?"

"No, Madame. We were just..." Mr. Firmin tried to explain.

Carlotta stepped towards Anna. "Don't you start thinking in that pretty little head of yours, that you're going to take the spotlight from me. Christine Daae may have done it once, but look at where it led her."

Madame Giry cut in. "Carlotta please..."

Carlotta ignored her. "Miss Daae became a prisoner to that blood thirsty murderer, the Phantom of the Opera. It was lucky that she managed to escape that hideous man's clutches before he killed her, along with everyone else in the theatre. It's a good thing he's dead now, or you'd be next."

To everyone's surprise, Anna didn't show anger to Carlotta's insult, but simply smiled at her.

"Didn't you like my singing, Carlotta?" Anna asked.

"As a matter of fact I didn't." Carlotta smirked.

Anna shook her head, the smile never leaving her lips. "Well, perhaps I should learn to sing more like you."

Carlotta grinned at the thought. "Yes. Yes, I think you should."

Anna raised an eyebrow. "Sarcasm is a foreign language to you, isn't it?"

"Excuse me?" Carlotta asked, confused.

"I was being sarcastic, Carlotta." Anna smirked. "I wouldn't dare ever try and make my singing voice sound like yours. The sound of nails on a chalkboard doesn't quite suit my voice."

Carlotta's jaw dropped. "How dare you!"

Before a fight broke out, Mr. Firmin stepped between the two women. "Ladies, please. Let's have none of this. We're all supposed to be family, remember?"

"But she-" Carlotta protested.

"Carlotta, enough." Mr. Firmin said, strictly. "I'm sure Miss Hart didn't mean what she said. And I'm sure she is sorry." He looked at Anna. "Aren't you sorry, Miss Hart?"

"No." Anna said, but when she caught the glint in the man's eye, she played along. "I mean, yes I am. Very sorry. I didn't mean it at all. I guess it was just...the stage fright talking."

Carlotta snorted. "Sure it was."



Mr. Firmin looked at the diva. "And, I'm sure you are sorry too, Carlotta."

"Me?" Carlotta asked. "Why should I be sorry?"

"Because you clearly insulted Miss Hart's singing talents." Madame Giry cut in. "I think that deserves some kind of apology."

Carlotta huffed, throwing her hands in the air. "Fine! I'm sorry."

Anna shrugged. "Fine with me."

"There!" Mr. Andre smiled. "All settled then."

With one last hateful glare at Anna, Carlotta strutted off the stage and out of sight. Mr. Firmin sighed with relief, looking at Anna.

"Thank God you can act, Miss Hart. It takes a lot to convince Carlotta to apologize to someone. Especially someone she doesn't care for."

"Believe me," Anna muttered. "It took a lot to convince me as well."

Anna then stepped off the stage and grabbed her bag from the chair. She turned to the others. "If you would please excuse me? I would like to go to my room. I'm suddenly not feeling well."

Madame Giry nodded with a frown. "Of course, Miss Hart."

With one last glance up at Box 5, Anna turned on her heels and made her way back up to her dressing room.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik sighed as he threw his long black cape over the back of his chair that sat in front of his organ. He placed his hands over his face as he sat at the edge of the chair, his elbows hitting the keys of the instrument. The loud, dissonant notes echoed through his candle-lit underground lair.

How could he be so stupid as to try and watch the rehearsals from Box 5? That woman, the woman he watched through the mirror, she might have spotted him. What if she did? The very thought made his stomach turn.

But that voice. That beautiful voice, calling out to him. Those sad words of loneliness echoing in his mind. This woman had pure talent. Her singing made him feel emotions he only felt when hearing Christine. He wanted so much to speak with her, to sing with her. But he couldn't, not ever. The Phantom of the Opera didn't exist anymore, and he wanted to keep it that way. And he most surely didn't want to fall in love with her. His heart wouldn't be able to take the rejection again. No woman could ever love a monster such as him.

Erik didn't blame Christine for leaving him for another man, and he certainly didn't hate her for it. He understood perfectly why she didn't accept him. Erik looked at his reflection in the mirror. What stared back at him wasn't a man, but a creature of darkness. A creature not meant for this world. Maybe it would have been better if the angry mob had just caught him, brought him to justice, and hung him. The world would've been a better place for it.

He deserved to die.

### 3 - Chapter 3

Anna shut the door to her dressing room and leaned her back against the wall. She shut her eyes and slid down the wall until she sat on the floor. Running her fingers back through her wavy hair, she looked up and wiped away her tears. Why was she so alone? Why wasn't there anyone out there who understood her?

Sniffing back her tears, Anna slowly stood up and walked over to beautiful full-length mirror at the end of her room. She stared at her reflection, at her hair, her eyes, and her long black dress, which shrugged off her shoulders. She didn't see anything wrong with her. So why was she so alone? She was never like this when she was a child. She was always spunky and full of life. That was until her mother died of lung problems when Anna was only five years old. Her mother was her closest companion, and when she died, Anna just simply fell apart. And everyday since then, for twenty years, Anna always wore black, to mourn the loss of the only person who ever truly understood her.

Anna gently touched the beautiful heart shaped pendant on a short gold chain, which hung around her slender neck. It was the only thing she had left of her mother. She had no one else in her life except for her father and her older brother Victor, who were both still back at their home in England. She was alone here in Paris, with no one to help her.

Anna pressed her forehead against the glass of the mirror as she softly cried to herself. But then, something odd caught her attention. Anna stepped back and looked at the left side of the mirror's gold frame. It seemed to be... out of place, like the glass was separated from the frame. But, how could that be? She leaned in close to the mirror, trying to inspect in more closely.

Slowly, Anna lifted her hand and placed it in the space between the mirror and frame, the space that shouldn't be there. She slid the mirror away from the frame like it was a sliding glass door. She gasped. Behind the mirror was a long, dark and narrow passageway leading down under the theatre. Anna stood, too stunned to move.

"Oh my God." She whispered.

Where did this passageway lead? Who built it? And why was it behind her mirror? All these questions swarmed through Anna's mind, but she didn't seem to have an answer to any of them. Should I see where this leads? Anna thought. She paced up and down her room for a few moments, trying to balance out the pros and cons of the situation, before finally deciding to investigate.

Taking a deep breath, Anna stepped through the mirror and began her descent through the dark passageway. Her boots echoed off the stone floor, and she had to brush a few cobwebs, which hung from the ceiling, off her face and hair. Her breathing was heavy as the passageway lead to a staircase going further down below the opera house. She climbed down the stone stairs, which curved around a corner and lead into another passageway.

Anna froze in her tracks when she saw, at the end of the passageway, a big black stallion, his reins tied to a nail in the stone wall. How the hell did a horse get down here? Anna thought, walking swiftly to the horse's side. The horse looked at her with its big black eyes, whinnying softly. Anna stroked its long black mane before continuing her walk through the passage.

She walked in silence for a while, until she saw some light at the end of the tunnel. Wanting to see where this light came from, Anna quickened her pace to a steady run. When she realized what it was, she skidded to a stop, her jaw falling open. The passageway ended there, but the side wall opened up to a huge, torch-lit chamber. An underground lake, with mist hovering over the water, filled the chamber. She made her way down the stone steps and to the lake's edge. There was a steak in the ground with a

rope tied to it near the waters edge. Anna guessed it was used for a boat of some sort. Suddenly, Anna clutched her chest, a shock of pain running through her body. She covered her mouth as she began to cough violently. Her hoarse coughs echoed through the room, and her vision swam. Everything was suddenly spinning around her. Anna's weak knees hit the water and she began to lose consciousness. She fought hard to try and stay awake, but the pain was too overpowering. Not able to fight it anymore, Anna gave in and collapsed into the water.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik jerked his head around when he heard the sound of hoarse coughing echoing through the underground catacombs. Where had it come from? He grabbed his black cape from the back of his chair and wrapped it around himself, before quickly climbing into his gondola at the edge of the lake. He made sure his sword was at his hip, before pushing off shore and floating across the misty lake. Whoever trespassed into his underground domain would pay with their life. The Phantom of the Opera did not appreciate people visiting his lair uninvited.

Using a pole to steer the boat, Erik's eyes searched the darkness for any sign of a threat. When the end of the lake was in clear view, Erik saw a shape in the water. He clutched the hilt of his sword, preparing to defend himself. But then, when he got close enough, Erik finally realized what that dark shape was. He gasped.

It was the woman again. She was passed out at the water's edge. Erik quickly jumped out of the boat and waded through the water until he got to the woman's side. He lifted her head out of the water to keep her from drowning. She coughed a bit, but remained passed out. Erik was just thankful that she was alive. But, what was she doing down here? Had she found the passage behind the two-way mirror? Erik wrapped one arm around the woman's back and placed the other under her legs. He then lifted her out of the water and carried her carefully into his boat. He removed his cape and wrapped it around the woman's wet, shivering body, before laying her down gently into the boat. Erik climbed into the boat with her and, using the pole, steered it back towards his lair.

\*\*\*\*\*

Anna groaned softly, her eyes fluttering open.

She rubbed her eyes with her hand, trying to make her vision clear again. She lifted her head and looked around, only then realizing that she was lying down on a large bed with silk red sheets. Candles surrounded the bed and filled the huge, underground chamber. A beautiful organ stood on the other side of the chamber, along with a sitting area, dressing area, and of course, the misty lake.

Where was she? All she could remember was passing out in the water, and everything going black.

Anna looked at her shoulders and froze when she saw a long, black cape wrapped around them. Did this cape belong to the same person who brought her here? And if it did, who was this person? Who could possibly live in a chamber underneath the opera house?

"Well, look whose finally awake." Came a man's voice. "It's quite a relief that you're not dead. Well, not yet anyways."

Anna spun around and only then noticed a man leaning on the stone wall beside the bed, his arms crossed.

Giving him the once over, Anna saw he was tall. Not much taller than she was, but he still looked like he could snap her neck and think nothing of it. He looked to be the same age as well. He had dark brown hair that he had slicked back, deep green eyes that could make the pope swear, and he would be very handsome if he decided to smile, not glare like she was the plague. He wore a white, open collared shirt

with tight black pants and black boots, which came up to his knee. Completing his face was a white mask covering his right side.

The man stepped towards her. "Now, you've got five seconds to explain to me what the hell you're doing sneaking into the lair of The Phantom of the Opera."

Anna's jaw dropped. "You're The Phantom of the Opera?"

The man raised an eyebrow. "Did you figure that out when you saw the mask on my face? Of course I'm The Phantom of the Opera."

Unable to keep it in, Anna suddenly burst into a fit of laughter.

The Phantom spread his arms. "What is so funny?"

Anna shook her head, trying as hard as she could to stop giggling uncontrollably. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she looked back at the Phantom. "I'm sorry, it's just that, you're really not what I expected."

"Not what you expected?" The Phantom asked. "What do you mean by that?"

Anna smirked. "I expected you to be a hideous, disfigured, bloodthirsty creature of darkness. But, now I see that I was wrong. Very wrong indeed."

"I don't think you were wrong." The Phantom said.

Anna raised an eyebrow. "You're kidding, right? You sir, are nothing like The Phantom of the Opera I've heard of. You're a very charming, tall, dark, and handsome man."

The Phantom smirked a bit. "You think I'm handsome?"

"Of course I do." Anna smiled.

Shaking his head, the Phantom said, "I think you've been knocked out a bit too long. Now, answer my question. What are you doing down here?"

Anna swung her legs off the edge of the bed and stood up. "Well, I found your little secret passageway behind the mirror in my dressing room. I was curious, so I followed it down to the lake."

The Phantom didn't look too convinced. "Okay, but why did I find you passed out in the water? You could've drowned."

Anna frowned and looked away from his penetrating gaze. "No reason. I just felt a little...lightheaded. That's it." She took the black cape from her shoulders and handed it back to the Phantom. "Thanks for letting me use your cape."

He grunted, taking the cape. "Not a problem." He pointed to her dress. "I trust you would like to get out of those wet clothes?"

Anna looked down and only then noticed how wet her dress was. The silky black material clung to her body, and she started to feel very cold. She looked at the Phantom. "Yes, I would. Do you have a spare dress?"

"Um...no." The Phantom said.

He walked down some stone steps and into the dressing area of the lair.

Disappearing behind a curtain for a moment, he finally emerged carrying a white shirt and a black pair of pants similar to what he was wearing. He stepped back into the bedroom and handed the clothes to Anna.

"You can go change behind the curtain." He said. "Just don't touch anything."

Anna smiled. "I won't. Thank you."

She left the bedroom and went behind the curtain in the dressing area. Quickly removing her wet dress. She put on the black pants, tucking them under her boots, and slipped on the shirt, buttoning it at the front. When she finished, Anna surveyed herself in the mirror. The clothes were a bit big on her, but she didn't care. At least they were dry.

Gathering up her wet dress, Anna stepped out from behind the curtain. The Phantom stood beside his organ, his back to her. Anna cleared her throat, and he turned to face her.

She turned on the spot. "How do I look?"

The Phantom rolled his green eyes, but didn't answer. Instead he asked, "May I ask your name?"

"Annabelle Hart." She said. "But you can call me Anna. That's what my friends call me."

The Phantom blinked. "You consider me a friend?"

Anna smiled. "Well, you saved me from drowning, let me sleep in your bed, and gave me your clothes to wear. I think that pretty much qualifies you to be called one of my friends."

For the first time since they'd met, the Phantom smiled.

Anna tilted her head a bit. "Why do you wear that mask?"

The Phantom frowned, turning away. "Because I am a monster. This mask is the only thing that makes me look like I'm normal. Like I'm a man."

"Can you take it off?" Anna asked.

He shook his head.

"Alright. I'm not going to force you to take it off." She said, stepping towards him. She placed her hand on his shoulder. "But if the only reason you won't show me your face is that you're afraid I'll judge you, you're wrong. I'm not that type of person."

He looked at her, but before he could say anything, Anna was walking down the stone steps towards the lake. She looked back at him.

"Well I'd best be leaving now. Madame Giry is probably worried sick about me. Thank you for everything, Phantom. It was a pleasure to meet you."

The Phantom nodded. "It was a pleasure to meet you as well, Anna. You can take the boat back to the other side. Just follow the passage and you'll be back in your dressing room."

Anna smiled, as she climbed into the boat. Just as she began to float down the lake, the Phantom called out to her.

"You must tell no one that you've been here! No one must know that I am alive. Not Madame Giry, not anyone! Promise me!"

Anna nodded. "I promise."

"Oh, and Anna!" The Phantom called again.

She looked back. "Yes?"

He smiled. "You have a beautiful voice. I heard you sing at the rehearsals this afternoon. You were amazing."

Anna raised an eyebrow. "You were watching me from Box 5, weren't you?"

"Yes." The Phantom nodded.

She grinned. "I knew I saw something. At least I now know I'm not going crazy. I'm glad you enjoyed my performance."

He smiled. "I most certainly did."

She gave the Phantom one last smile before disappearing around the corner. She could already see the end of the lake where the passageway began. Anna smiled to herself. Maybe she wasn't so alone after all.

## 4 - Chapter 4

Taking a deep breath, Anna lifted her fist and knocked hard on the wooden door to Madame Girya's dressing room. She heard a faint shuffling of feet coming closer to the door, then the sound of the metal bolt being unlocked. Finally, the door opened, and Madame Girya appeared. Her long, dark brown braided hair was done up neatly and she was wearing an elegant dark green dress.

"Good evening, Madame." Anna smiled politely. "Am I interrupting?"

"Oh, of course not, Miss Hart." Madame Girya smiled. "What is it you want?"

Anna shuffled her feet. "I need to speak to you about something, Madame. Is that all right with you? If not, I can just come back later."

Madame Girya opened the door wider and stepped aside. "Oh, no. It's all right. Please, come inside."

Anna smiled gratefully and stepped into Madame Girya's large dressing room. The sweet smell of flowers filled the air, and the candles on the tables and dresser gave the room a comforting feeling.

Madame Girya closed the door and turned towards Anna. Her eyes went wide.

"Miss Hart!" She gasped. "What on earth are you wearing?"

Anna looked down at the clothes she wore. It was just the white shirt and black pants that the Phantom had given her. She didn't see anything wrong with them. But clearly, Madame Girya did.

"It's just a pair of pants and a shirt, Madame." Anna shrugged. "It's not a problem, is it? I was just tired of wearing my dress."

Madame Girya pointed to her outfit. "Where did you get those clothes?"

"A friend lent them to me." Anna shrugged.

"A friend?" Madame Girya asked. "And may I ask who your friend is?"

Anna frowned, remembering the promise she had made to the Phantom. "I'm sorry, Madame. I can't tell you. I made a promise."

Madame Girya placed a hand over her heart. "Oh, mon dieu. He's back. He has returned. Oh, how could this happen?"

"Who, Madame?" Anna asked, concerned for the woman.

Madame Girya gave her a stern look, which made Anna take a step back. "You know very well who I'm talking about, Miss Hart. Those clothes belong to none other than The Phantom of the Opera!"

Anna froze. "Madame, I don't understand."

"Miss Hart, don't play me for stupid." Madame Girya said. "I've known the Phantom since he was a mere child. I've seen him wear that outfit on more than one occasion. I'd never forget it." She stepped towards Anna, her fists on her hips. "When did you get this outfit?"

Anna sighed, knowing she'd never outsmart this woman. "I got it about half an hour ago, Madame."

"Where?" She asked.

"The Phantom gave it to me when I was in his lair." Anna said.

"You were in his lair!" Madame Girya gasped. "Miss Hart, how could you have possibly gone down there? Unless...you went through the mirror, didn't you?"

Anna nodded.

"Miss Hart, why would the Phantom give you his clothes?" Madame Girya asked. "He isn't the type of man that would do that for no reason."

"He saved my life, Madame!" Anna protested. "I passed out in the water and he saved me from drowning. Then he gave me his clothes so I wouldn't catch a cold. My dress was soaked."

Madame Girya sighed. "Did you speak with him?"

Anna nodded.

“About what?” Madame Giry asked, finally taking a seat on a chair.

Anna shrugged. “Nothing important. He asked me what I was doing down in his lair, and I explained it to him. Then he gave me his clothes to change into. He asked me what my name was, and I asked him about his mask.”

Madame Giry went slightly pale. “And, what did he tell you?”

Anna frowned sadly, remembering the despair in the Phantom’s eyes. “He told me he was a monster, and the mask was the only thing that made him look normal. Made him look like a man.”

Madame Giry sighed. “That poor man’s been through some tough times in his life. What else did you two talk about?”

Anna shrugged. “Nothing much. He told me I had a beautiful voice, and that he watched the rehearsals from Box 5. After that, I left on his boat and came back here.” Anna stepped forward. “That’s what I wanted to talk to you about, Madame. I have many questions about the Phantom. I guess you are the only one who can truly answer them.”

Madame Giry shifted in her chair. “Very well. I will answer your questions. What is it you would like to know?”

Anna sat down comfortably on the edge of Madame Giry’s bed. “Well, what is the Phantom’s real name?”

“Erik.” Madame Giry said. “His name is Erik. I don’t know his surname.”

Anna nodded. “Erik. Okay, what is his story? How did he ever come to be the Phantom of the Opera?”

“When I was a little girl, in ballet school, my class was invited to see a Gypsy Circus which came to town.” Madame Giry began. “Erik was a member of the freak show. They called him the ‘Devil’s Child’, due to the deformity of the right side of his face. I remember how young he was, about ten or eleven years old. There was a man who used to beat him in front of the spectators. They laughed at him, but I felt sorry for him. He looked so sad. So alone.”

She took a breath before continuing. “After everyone had left, I decided to stay near where Erik was caged. The man who beat Erik was counting up the money he had earned, when suddenly, Erik came up from behind him and strangled him with a rope. Not knowing what else to think, I helped Erik escape the cage. I was young, I thought the man deserved to die for the way he was treating that poor boy. A mob chased us down the street, until we came back to the Opera Populaire. I let Erik sneak into the basement of the opera house through a secret opening in the side wall. He has lived there since then. The underground of the opera house was his playground, and his artistic domain. It was both his home, and his prison.” She smiled. “He’s a genius, Miss Hart. He’s an architect, a designer, a composer, a musician, and a magician. A genius.”

Anna sat in stunned silence, after Madame Giry finished the story. “That poor man. I...I can’t believe how much he has gone through.”

“It’s not the worst of it.” Madame Giry frowned. “Three years ago, Erik fell in love for the very first time in his life. The woman he loved was none other than Christine Daae. He used to sing to her in her sleep, and give her singing lessons. She called him her ‘Angel of Music’. He was obsessed with that woman. So much, that it became frightening. Christine made her decision and left the Opera Populaire for good. She married Vicomte Raoul de Chagne, and Erik, heartbroken, disappeared for a long time. I thought he was dead. But now, thanks to you, I realize that he has returned back to the only home he ever had.”

Anna frowned. “I cannot possibly imagine how much heartbreak that man has been through. No wonder he was so surprised when I called him my friend. He must have never had one before.”

Madame Giry nodded sadly. “I’m afraid, you’re right.”

Anna stood up, pacing up and down the room for a while, before stopping and turning to the older woman.

“Madame, you cannot tell anyone that Erik has returned. Not a soul! I made a promise to him. And I value my promises.”

Madame Giry sighed. “I promise I won't breathe a word, Miss Hart. But, you must never see this man again. He's dangerous. Stay as far from him as possible.”

“But...” Anna breathed. “He's my friend.”

Madame Giry stood up and grasped Anna's shoulders. “Miss Hart, you have no idea what this man can do. I don't want you getting hurt. Please, try and stay away from him.”

Anna frowned. “Madame, I appreciate you trying to help me, but I can judge Erik on my own. I believe he's a good person deep inside. He's just misunderstood. Don't worry about me. I can take care of myself.”

Madame Giry shook her head. “If you won't listen to reason, Miss Hart, I'm not going to force you. Just, be careful.”

Anna nodded. “I will. And thank you for your concern.”

Madame Giry smiled and walked over to her dresser. “Well, I must finish getting ready.”

“For what?” Anna asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Have you forgotten already?” Madame Giry gasped. “Tonight is the Gala.

Everyone will be arriving soon to see the premier of the performance we rehearsed this afternoon. You must go and prepare.”

“Oh! I nearly forgot.” Anna said, rushing to the door.

“I will save you a seat in the front row, Miss Hart.” Madame Giry smiled.

Anna stopped and looked back. “That's alright, Madame. I won't need it. I will be watching the performance from Box 5 tonight.”

Madame Giry looked at her curiously. “Box 5, Miss Hart? Why?”

Anna shrugged with a smile. “I don't know. I guess I'll get a better view of the whole stage from higher up.”

Madame Giry smirked a bit. “Very well, Miss Hart. Just one more thing.”

“Yes, Madame?” Anna asked, peeking in through the door.

Madame Giry gave a serious expression. “Remember to keep your hand at the level of your eye.”

Anna raised an eyebrow. “I don't know what that means, Madame.”

“You will.” Madame Giry said. “Now, go.”

Anna nodded and quickly rushed down the hallway towards her dressing room, the thought of Madame Giry's last words never leaving her mind.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik silently snuck through the shadows as he swiftly made his way up the stairs of the opera house. He was a shadow, blending into the darkness, unseen by the eyes of others. He was on his way to his normal seat in Box 5, where he was going to watch the performance. He could already see people gathering in the audience, trying to find their seats. Men were dressed in distinguishing black tuxedos, and the women wore elegant dresses with matching hats or hairpieces. They were all perfectly unaware of his presence, and he was thankful for that.

Finally reaching Box 5, Erik sat himself comfortably in one of the seats there. The view of the stage was clear, as always, and he was particularly happy that this seat had been kept empty. It seems that Mr. Femin and Mr. Andre had learned their lesson, and had made sure that no one sat here during performances. That was one of the advantages to being The Phantom of the Opera. Because everyone feared Erik, he always got his way.

The full theatre fell into hushed silence and the lights dimmed. Erik watched as the curtain opened and,



to his disappointment, Carlotta appeared standing at center stage. He absolutely loathed that woman. Everything from her attitude to her singing made him want to yank her throat out. He had secretly wished that his new friend Anna was going to star in the performance. She had clearly impressed everyone in the theatre at rehearsals, but it seemed that Carlotta still managed to steal the show. Well, Erik was going to make sure that it never happened again.

After a few minutes of watching the performance, Erik suddenly felt a gentle hand on his shoulder, and a voice whispering, "I knew I'd find you here."

Erik nearly jumped out of his skin, thinking that someone had caught him. He looked back and a wash of relief fell over him when he realized that it was only Anna standing beside him, smiling.

He placed his hand over his heart. "Don't ever do that again, Anna. You frightened me half to death."

Anna laughed softly. "Sorry about that. I couldn't resist."

Erik didn't answer, but stared at what Anna was wearing. His breath caught for an instant. It was another black dress, but it was nothing at all like the one she wore on a daily basis. This one was elegant in its simplicity, failing to conceal the curves of her body. The weave of the fabric was fine and smooth, almost glistening in the dim lighting of the theatre. The square cut neck complimented the way the waves of her auburn hair fell gracefully around her face. The heart-shaped gold pendant around her slender neck helped complete the outfit with elegance.

She smiled at him. "May I have a seat?"

Erik snapped out of his daze and motioned to the seat beside him. "Of course."

Anna stepped forward and, arranging the long folds of her dress, had a seat next to Erik. She looked down at the performers on the stage before turning to him.

"So, what have I missed?" she asked.

Erik shrugged. "Not much. Just Carlotta's opening act."

Anna shuddered. "Well, then I haven't missed anything at all. That woman's voice is like nails on a chalkboard."

Erik gave a small laugh. "Took the words right out of my mouth."

Anna smiled. "I want to thank you again, Erik, for saving my life. I don't know how I'm ever going to repay you."

"It's nothing. I don't need repayment for..." His words trailed off as he looked over at Anna, his eyebrow raised suspiciously. "What did you just call me?"

"Erik." She said. "That is your name, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I never told you." Erik whispered. "How did you find out?"

She smiled innocently. "Let's just say, a little birdie told me."

Erik's looked away, muttering to himself, "That Madame Giry's going to be the death of me."

Anna smiled, crossing her legs from under her dress. "Let's not worry about that now, Erik. Just sit back and enjoy the show."

Erik nodded and turned his attention back to the stage. But for some reason, the performance didn't interest him anymore. His eyes kept glancing over at Anna for some reason. He didn't know why, but this woman made him feel normal. Her friendly nature, her intelligence, her charm, and her wit brought a smile to his face, which was quite a difficult thing to do. He'd only experienced feelings like this when he was with Christine. Erik frowned to himself. Am I falling for this woman? He thought.

Erik sighed and continued to watch the performance in silence. He made a silent vow to himself that he would not fall in love with Anna. She was his friend, and that was the end of it. He would not deal with the heartbreak and rejection again.

History would not repeat itself.

## 5 - Chapter 5

The audience applauded as the curtain closed after the performance had ended. Erik applauded as well, but only out of politeness. The performance wasn't really one of his favorites, and Carlotta being the star didn't make it any better for him. Anna seemed to have enjoyed it though, since she was clapping more enthusiastically than he was. The sight of that brought a smile to Erik's lips.

Soon, the people in the audience began to leave their seats and slowly empty the theatre. Anna stood up and looked down at him.

"The show is over, Erik." She smiled. "We can go, now."

Erik shook his head. "I usually wait until the theatre is completely empty before I leave my seat. I don't want to be seen."

"If you say so." She sat back down beside him. "I'll wait here with you."

"You don't necessarily have to stay with me, Anna." Erik said. "You can go back to your dressing room if you like. I don't want to be a bother."

Anna shook her head. "It's fine. I don't mind at all. I rather enjoy spending time with you, Erik. You're fun to be around."

Erik raised an eyebrow. "You consider me fun?" He laughed a bit. "I'm probably the exact opposite of that. But, thank you for the compliment."

Anna rolled her ocean blue eyes. "Anytime, Erik. Anytime at all."

Erik sighed and continued to sit in silence, waiting in agony for the theatre to finally empty. But mostly, he was eager to find Madame Giry and speak with her. He knew it was a big step to make his presence known to others, but he trusted Madame Giry. After all, she was the reason he was here, and not part of some Gypsy Freak Show. He owed her his life.

After some time, the theatre finally emptied and Erik led the way back through the empty halls and down the stairs. It was pure luck that there was no one in the halls at this time. Erik could roam through the theatre and not have to worry about being spotted.

When they reached her dressing room, Anna stopped by the door and gave Erik a smile.

"Thank you for a lovely night, Erik. I had a great time."

Erik shrugged, his black cape billowing. "I don't quite see how sitting next to me in silence for a few hours is considered having a great time, but you're welcome. I had a great time too."

Anna laughed a bit, and with one last smile, disappeared behind her dressing room door. Erik sighed, and with one final glance at her dressing room door, walked down the dark halls towards Madame Giry's quarters. He had much to talk about.

\*\*\*\*\*

Madame Giry sighed with exhaustion as she walked down the dark halls towards her dressing room. Tonight's Gala had been a success, and she was more than relieved that it was over and done with. Now, all she could do was relax.

Finally reaching her dressing room, Madame Giry opened the wooden door and stepped inside. Her room was dark, so she had to be very careful as she slowly crossed the room towards her dresser. Lighting a few candles, the room finally came into clear view. She didn't seem to notice the dark shadow sitting on one of her chairs.

"Good evening, Madame Giry. How nice to see you again." Came a man's voice she was all too

familiar with.

She jumped back with a gasp when Erik came into full view. He was lounging back on one of her chairs, one leg crossed over the other. His black cape was spread out over the back of the chair, which strangely reminded Madame Giry of black angel wings. He gave her a small smirk, his sharp green eyes gleaming.

"I see you did not expect to see me." Erik said.

"No, I did not," she admitted, having finally recovered from the shock of finding him in her room. "I thought you'd never return."

"I was only gone a year. How is Meg?" he asked abruptly. "I never got around to congratulating you on her good fortune. She married a baron, didn't she?"

"That is correct. She's just recently become the mother of a little girl." She sighed. "Erik, why are you here? I know as well as you do that chatting about my family isn't your only reason for this quaint, little meeting."

Erik stated without preamble. "I need you to answer a few questions for me."

"What kind of questions?" Madame Giry asked uneasily. This didn't sound good. Not good at all.

"Questions about Annabelle Hart." He said. "You seem to like her very much."

Madame Giry gave a weary sigh, sitting down on the chair in front of him. She had been expecting this conversation to pop up sooner or later. "Alright, Erik. What do you want to know?"

Erik leaned in towards her. "Why is she so lonely? I've heard her in her room at night, crying to herself. How can a woman like her be so sad?"

Madame Giry frowned. "Miss Hart has never shown any signs of sadness around me."

"Not true." Erik stated. "She has not only shown it to you, but to the entire theater. Her song, the one she sang this afternoon, it was an expression of her loneliness. Didn't you listen to the words?"

Madame Giry shrugged. "Not really. I was too captivated by her voice. She has an incredibly beautiful singing voice, Erik."

"I know." Erik said, lost in his thoughts. He looked back at her. "Why does she seem like no one cares about her?"

"I guess she is still upset about her mother's death." She answered sadly. "It was a tragic loss."

Erik nodded, apparently thinking hard about something.

Madame Giry smiled a bit. "You have feelings for this woman, don't you?"

"No." Erik said, clearly lying.

"I don't believe you for a minute." She whispered.

"Neither do I." Erik admitted. "Madame, do you think that there is any chance at all that she could care for me?"

"I'm not sure, Erik. If you behave, you might just have a chance," she told him with a small smile.

"She could save me, Madame. I know I would be a fool to try and win another woman over, but I have to believe that there is hope for a wretched, repulsive monster like me. I need a friend. But what right do I have to so much as speak to her? She's beautiful, talented, intelligent, and kind. I don't deserve to be near something as pure as Anna," he said, sounding more guilty and miserable than Madame Giry had ever heard him, and though he believed that he was fooling her with his charade that he didn't want Anna's love, Madame Giry knew Erik's heart.

"Erik, if there is any woman on this earth who can love you, Anna is she." Madame Giry said. "She can look past your face and see the man, the genius, who looks through those eyes. Anna knows that there is more to a man than how handsome or ugly he is. I know that, at heart, you are really a good man. She is the woman I think most likely to appreciate that."

Erik nodded, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "I know that, Madame. Anna treats me like I'm no different than any other man. Her first impression of me was that she said I was handsome. I've

never once been called handsome in my whole life. And just a while ago, she told me I was fun. Fun! Madame, Anna is special. She makes me feel normal. No other person on this earth could ever do that.” Madame Giry nodded in understanding.

Erik’s smile quickly turned to a deep frown. “But can she accept my past? Can she accept the fact that I’m a murderer? That I kidnapped a woman? That I tried to force that woman to marry me? She’ll have to learn the truth, eventually. I don’t want to lie to her, Madame, or keep secrets from her. If she decides to give me a chance, I want her to know what she’s getting herself into.”

“You really care for her that much,” she breathed, astonished that he could be so selfless.

“Since I’ve met her, Anna has become very dear to me,” he answered evasively.

Madame Giry couldn’t help but smile. “Earlier this evening, Anna came here and asked me a few questions about your past.”

“And?” Erik demanded, holding his breath.

Madame Giry smiled. “I answered them all truthfully. I told her what your real name was.”

Erik grunted. “I’ve figured that.”

She smiled. “And she also asked me about how you came to be The Phantom of the Opera. So, I went and told her the story of how we met, and how I saved you from the Gypsy Circus.”

Erik sat for a moment before asking. “And, what did she say?”

“She felt very sorry for you, Erik.” She explained. “She can’t believe how much you’ve been through in your life. But even after hearing all that, she still vowed to stay your friend.”

“Did you tell her about Christine?” Erik asked.

Madame Giry nodded. “She didn’t seem affected by it. It just made her feel sorry for you even more. She really does like you very much.”

Erik sighed, running his leather gloved hands back through his hair. “What am I going to do, Madame?”

“Well, have you told Anna you’re feelings?” She asked.

“Obviously not.” Erik answered.

“Well, there’s an idea!” Madame Giry smiled. “Tell Anna about how much she means to you.”

“What if she rejects me, Madame?” Erik said miserably. “What if she refuses my love, just like Christine did? I can’t take the heartbreak again. I just can’t. I’ll die if she doesn’t accept me.”

Madame Giry leaned forward and placed a gentle hand on Erik’s shoulder. “Don’t you worry, Erik. I told you, Anna is different. If she really does love you, she’ll see past your face and accept you for who you really are.”

Erik sighed. “It’s not as easy as you think, Madame. It’s going to take some time before I gather up the courage to tell her. But I promise you; I will tell her my feelings. Just, not now.”

Madame Giry nodded. “Everything will be fine, Erik. All you need to do is hope. It’ll all work out for the best, you’ll see.”

Erik nodded. “I guess you’re right. Well, I’d best be leaving you now. I’m sure you want to get some sleep after this long day.”

He rose from the chair and headed for the door.

“Will I be seeing you at rehearsals tomorrow, Erik?” Madame Giry called.

He looked over his shoulder. “Rehearsals?”

“Yes. Tomorrow we will be beginning the rehearsals for our new Opera. And I am planning to give Miss Hart the leading role in the production.”

“And what production would that be?” Erik asked.

She smiled. “Il Muto. I’m sure Anna will do very well as the Countess, don’t you think?”

Erik smiled warmly, clearly pleased by Madame Giry’s decision. “Yes, I’m sure she’ll be breathtaking. Il Muto is one of my favorites. And it will be quite entertaining to see Carlotta’s reaction when she hears the news.”

“So, will you watch the rehearsals from your normal seat in Box 5?” She asked with a slight smile.

“What time?” Erik asked.

“Noon sharp.” She said.

Erik smirked. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Very good.” Madame Giry smiled. “Goodnight Erik. See you tomorrow.”

Erik bowed. “Goodnight, Madame.”

And with that, Erik opened the door and disappeared into the darkness of the corridor, his cape billowing out behind him.

## 6 - Chapter 6

“What do you mean I’m not the lead role!”

Carlotta angrily threw her feathered hat onto the floor after hearing the news from Madame Giry. Everyone in the theatre took a cautious step back from the fuming diva, while Mr. Andre stepped forward.

“Carlotta, you gave a brilliant performance at the Gala last night. All we want is a slight change of cast.” He said. “You’ll still play a big part in our production.”

“But I am the star!” Carlotta protested. “I am supposed to be Juliet!”

“Miss Hart will be playing the role of Juliet, Carlotta.” Madame Giry said. “It will be her first performance here at the Opera Populaire. You’ve been here with us for ten years. Give Miss Hart a chance.”

Carlotta growled, crossing her arms. “You’ve all taken quite a shine to that little know it all, haven’t you? Is she supposed to be your new Christine Daae? Is she going to take the lead role in all of our productions whilst I stand in the background, unnoticed? Do you really hate me that much?”

Madame Giry rolled her eyes. “For the love of God, Carlotta. Stop with all the dramatics. Just because Miss Hart will be playing the lead in one production does not mean we hate you.”

Carlotta shook her head. “That woman is a menace! She’s had you all wrapped around her little finger since she got here. I bet she jumped for joy when you broke the news to her.”

“Actually,” Mr. Firmin said. “We haven’t told Miss Hart yet.”

“Oh, well then it’s not too late!” Carlotta beamed. “Just give me the lead role and she’ll never know.”

“No, Carlotta.” Madame Giry said sternly. “Miss Hart is playing the role of Juliet. That is final.”

“Then who am I supposed to be?” Carlotta whined.

“You will be playing the nurse.” Mr. Andre said.

“The nurse!” Carlotta shouted. “A fabulous star like me is to play a nurse? No! I will not stand for it! If I do not get the role of Juliet, then I am leaving!”

“I’m sorry Carlotta.” Madame Giry said. “But we’re not changing our minds. Miss Hart is playing Juliet. End of story.”

Carlotta huffed and turned away. “You will all regret this!” As she stormed out of the theatre, she shouted to her servants, “Get my doggie! Bring my doggie! Bye Bye! I’m really leaving!”

Everyone watched as Carlotta exited the theater with her servants, slamming the door behind her. Madame Giry sighed.

“That woman is going to send me to an early grave.”

Just at that moment, the door from the dressing rooms opened and Anna stepped into the theater, a smile on her face.

“Good afternoon everyone.” She said.

“Good afternoon, Miss Hart.” Mr. Firmin smiled. “My, don’t you look lovely.”

Anna blushed a bit as she lifted the hem of her black dress to walk up the stairs to the stage. “Thank you, Monsieur.”

Madame Giry smiled once Anna reached her side. “Miss Hart, I have some good news for you.”

“News?” Anna asked.

“Yes. Today, we will be starting rehearsals for our new production of Romeo and Juliet.” Madame Giry told her.

“Oh, I love that production.” Anna beamed. “But how is that good news for me, Madame?”

“We are planning to cast you in the lead as Juliet.” Mr. Andre said.

Anna gasped. "Me? As Juliet? Are you serious?"

"Of course, Miss Hart." Mr. Firmin nodded. "You are a lovely, charming young woman with the voice of an angel. A perfect choice for our Juliet."

Madame Giry could see Anna's eyes begin to brim with tears of joy. She walked forward and embraced the young woman in a hug.

"You will do very well, my dear." She told Anna. "I know you will."

"Oh, thank you Madame." Anna smiled, wiping a tear away. "This means so much to me. I...I don't know what to say."

Madame Giry touched her cheek in a motherly way. "You're tears are words enough, Miss Hart."

Mr. Firmin stepped forward and placed his hand on Anna's shoulder. "Well, now that we're all present, lets get started on Act One." He handed Anna a thick booklet crammed with papers. "Here are your lines, Miss Hart. Memorize each and every one of them. I'm expecting great things from you, so don't disappoint me."

Anna eagerly took the booklet. "Oh, I wont let you down, Monsieur. I promise you. I've seen this production so many times, I basically have the entire thing memorized already."

"Good girl." Mr. Andre beamed. "I think we made the right decision to cast you instead of Carlotta."

"Speaking of Carlotta," Anna said, looking around. "Where is she?"

"Oh, we wont be seeing her for a long time." Madame Giry said. "When I told her that you will be playing Juliet, she threw a fit and stormed out of the theatre. She'll be back once she's cooled down."

Anna nodded. "To tell you the truth, I'm kind of relieved that she's gone. I don't think I'd be able to put up with her attitude a moment longer."

Madame Giry smiled and looked around at everyone in the theatre. "Alright everyone, to your places."

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik watched the rehearsals from Box 5 silently, his eyes locked on Anna. She stood at the side of the stage, her eyes skimming through her booklet of lines, as everyone else acted out the first scene.

He couldn't take his eyes off her for a second. She was so beautiful; it made his heart race inside his chest. But how could a woman like her ever love a hideous monster such as himself? How could Anna ever accept him, when she deserved so much better?

Erik sighed softly, recalling the conversation he and Madame Giry had the night before. She had explained to him that Anna could see past his face and love him for who he really was, but Erik still had doubts. He once thought that Christine would have loved him for who he was on the inside, and not on the outside, but he was wrong. So, how could Anna be any different?

Erik shook his head. Anna was different. She made him feel like a normal man, something that Christine never did. She spoke to him without fear, and enjoyed spending time with him. Anna was like no woman he had ever met before. And a woman like her did not deserve to have secrets kept away from her. He had to tell her his feelings. He had to tell her he loved her, and thought about her everyday, and dreamt about her every night.

Yes, tonight he would tell her.

Erik's train of thought was cut off when he heard the large wooden doors of the theatre open, sending a wash of sunlight into the room. He, including everyone else in the theatre watched as a young man walked in through those doors.

He was a tall man, handsome, and looked to be in his late twenties. His hair was short, wavy and blonde, and his eyes were an ice blue. He wore black pants with a dark blue overcoat and black boots. He shut the doors behind him and strode into the room, stopping in front of the stage. All was silent when he spoke, his voice echoing through the theatre.

"I'm sorry to interrupt rehearsals," He said. "But I'm looking for Annabelle Hart. She's supposed to be working here."

Erik froze as Anna stepped onto center stage, staring at the man. His knuckles were white as he clutched the arms of his chair, waiting for Anna's reaction.

The man smiled. "Hello, Anna."

Anna's lips spread into a grin. "Victor!"

Erik felt his heart sink as he watched Anna jump off the stage and run into Victor's arms, embracing him tightly. Victor hugged her back, both of them laughing. He turned his head away, unable to watch a second more of it.

Erik knew it was too good to be true. A woman like Anna, who happened to be the only person in the world who made him feel normal, was in love with another man. A man who was handsome, unlike himself. Erik shut his eyes tightly, trying to hold back the stream of tears that flowed down his cheek. Through his blurry vision, Erik looked back down at Anna and Victor, and to his surprise, he no longer felt sad. Instead, he felt a strong sense of anger. How could Anna not tell him about Victor? How could she toy with his heart when she knew all about what happened between him and Christine?

Erik quickly rose from his seat, and with one last glance at Anna, turned on his heel and stormed towards Anna's dressing room, his black cape billowing.

He was going to have his questions answered, one way or another.

\*\*\*\*\*

"How have you been, Anna?" Victor asked.

Anna leaned her shoulder against outer stone wall of the Opera Populaire, the cool summer breeze playing through her hair. "Victor, I've only been gone less than a week, and already your worrying about me? I'm not five years old anymore."

Victor spread his arms. "I'm sorry. Is it a crime for me to be a little concerned about the well-being of my little sister?"

"Concerned is one thing, Vick." Anna said. "You're overly protective. And you have been ever since mum died."

"I'm sorry, Anna." Victor said. "But this is the first time you've been away from home for a very long time. I was just a little worried about you."

"It's alright." Anna said, smiling. "So, what are you doing here? I've a feeling you didn't come all the way to Paris just for a visit."

Victor sighed deeply, as he looked out to the busy streets of Paris. After a moment, he turned back to his sister. "It's dad."

Anna froze. "What about dad?"

She could read the sadness in her brother's eyes so clearly; she feared the next words which came out of his mouth.

"He died last night." He whispered.

Anna gasped, covering her mouth with her hands. Tears were already trickling down her cheek. Victor stepped closer and wrapped his trembling sister in a comforting hug. She began to weep uncontrollably on his shoulder as he held her for a while. Finally, Anna pulled back from him.

"Vick, how could this happen?" She asked, sniffing.

"He was sick, Anna." Victor explained. "He's been sick ever since mum died. It just got worse and worse over the years. He died peacefully in his bed, like he was ready to go." He placed both hands on her shoulders. "Before he died, dad told me to take care of you. He told me to protect you, and I promised him that I would."



Anna nodded. "Will dad have a funeral?"

Victor shook his head. "No, he didn't want one. He asked us to be cremated and have his ashes spread out over mums grave. They did that this morning."

Anna frowned. "I can't believe he's gone. I...I just can't."

"You have to come back to London with me." Victor said.

"What?" Anna gasped. "Why?"

"Because we need you to come home." Victor said. "You can't stay here in Paris anymore. You're needed back home."

"This is my home now, Vick." Anna protested. "The Opera Populaire is where I belong. I have friends, and I'm going to be the star in the next production. I belong here, and nothing you say is going to change my mind."

"What about me, Anna?" Victor asked angrily. "What am I supposed to do? I made a promise to dad that I would take care of you. How am I supposed to do that if you're living here?"

"You could live here with me." Anna said. "Madame Giry, the ballet mistress, could give you a room right here in the theatre. The owners, Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre, wouldn't mind if you lived here. And since you can act and sing, you can be a part of some of our productions."

Victor stood for a while in silence before saying, "I don't know about this."

"Trust me, Victor." Anna said. "It'll be fine. You'll see."

Victor sighed. "Alright, I'll stay here with you for a while. But if I don't like it, we're going back to London."

Anna shook her head. "No, you'll be going back to London. I'll be staying right here in the theatre."

Victor grumbled. "You are so difficult!"

Anna turned, opened the door to the theatre and stepped back inside, Victor close behind her. Madame Giry, Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre, who were waiting for them to return, all walked quickly to Anna's side.

"Is everything alright, Miss Hart?" Madame Giry asked. "You look as if you've been crying."

"My brother has just informed me of my fathers passing." Anna said, wiping away a tear.

"My word!" Mr. Firmin gasped. "Are you both alright?"

Victor nodded. "We'll be fine. Thank you for your concern."

"Is there anything we can do for you?" Mr. Andre asked.

Anna nodded. "Yes, there is. Is it all right if my brother were to live here in the Opera Populaire for a while? He wants to keep a close eye on me, and he prefers it if I am not alone during this time of grief."

"But of course." Mr. Firmin said sincerely. "Anything that will help you through this hard time. We will give Mr. Hart a dressing room close to yours."

"Thank you." Victor nodded. "I appreciate your kindness."

Madame Giry placed a gentle hand on Anna's shoulder. "Will you be alright, my dear?"

Anna nodded. "I just need a little time alone. Is it alright if I go to my room for a while?"

Madame Giry nodded. "We can continue rehearsals tomorrow." She turned to Victor. "Now, Mr. Hart. I will show you to your dressing room."

"Thank you." Victor said.

Anna gave her brother a small smile before turning and heading back upstairs towards her dressing room.

## 7 - Chapter 7

Anna slowly opened her dressing room door and stepped inside. She wiped her wet, tear-filled eyes as she shut the door behind her. Brushing her hair away from her face, Anna raised her head and jumped back with a gasp when she noticed Erik standing at the center of the room, his arms crossed, his masked face expressionless.

“Erik.” She breathed. “What are you doing here?”

He didn’t answer, but continued to glare at her in a way that reminded Anna of the way he looked at her when they first met.

Anna took a step towards him. “Erik, is everything alright?”

Finally he spoke, his voice cold. “Why didn’t you tell me about him?”

Anna blinked. “Who?”

“Victor.” Erik hissed. “Why didn’t you tell me you had a love?”

“A what?” Anna gasped. “Erik, I think you made a mist-“

Erik shook his head angrily. “Don’t try to lie to me, Anna. I saw you today at rehearsals. You were all over him, hugging and laughing. I can’t believe you never told me.”

“What are you talking about?” Anna asked.

Erik threw his hands into the air. “And here I am thinking that I might have a chance with you! For the first time since Christine left me, I’ve finally fallen for someone who treats me like I’m a normal man. And it turns out she’s in love with someone else! Unbelievable! You could have at least told me about Victor before I went on and fell in love with you! I’m a broken man, Anna. Must you toy with my heart so? How could you-“

Erik’s outburst was cut off when Anna stepped forward and slapped his cheek. Not hard, but hard enough to shut him up.

“Erik, snap out of it!” Anna yelled. “Victor is my brother!”

“Your what?” Erik gasped.

“He’s my older brother.” Anna explained. “He came from London to see me. That’s why I ran up to him. I wasn’t expecting him to show up.”

Erik blinked. “Victor is your brother?”

Anna nodded.

Erik took a step back, his face red. He covered his face with his hands. “Anna, I am so sorry. I...I didn’t know. Really, I didn’t. I’m sorry for yelling. Oh my God, I’m such a fool. Please, forgive me.”

Anna smiled, stepping towards him. She placed a hand on his chest. “It’s alright, Erik. I understand, and I forgive you. And, I’m also sorry for slapping you.”

“I deserved it.” Erik said.

Anna gave a small laugh. “Well, yeah you did. But I’m still sorry.”

“It’s alright.” He told her.

Anna raised an eyebrow. “Did...did you just say you loved me?”

Erik froze. “Um...” He sighed, knowing he’s never escape now. “Yes I did. I... I’ve loved you since the moment I heard you sing.”

Anna stood in shock for a while, tears forming in her eyes. “Erik...I don’t know what to say.”

Erik stepped closer and wrapped Anna in his arms. She laid her head on his shoulder as she felt him stroking the back of her hair. Softly, he began to sing in her ear:

“Say you’ll share with me one love, one lifetime.

Rid me, save me from my solitude.

Say you’ll want me with you here, beside you.

Anywhere you’ll go, let me go too.

Love me, that’s all I ask of you.”

When he finished singing, Anna lifted her head off his shoulder and looked up at him, her blue eyes filled with tears. He wiped one from her cheek.

“I love you, Anna.” He breathed. “More than you can possibly imagine.”

She touched his cheek with her hand, a small smile forming on her lips. “Oh, Erik. I love you too.”

He blinked. “You do?”

“Yes.” She whispered. “Yes, I love you.”

Anna leaned in and pressed a gentle kiss to Erik’s lips. He seemed a little surprised at first, but quickly kissed her back. Anna felt his arms wrap around her, pressing her closer against him. They kissed for what seemed like forever, both of them feeling their years of loneliness dissolve into longing. Finally, they parted.

Anna looked up into his green eyes and saw them gleaming with tears.

“Erik,” She whispered, stroking his cheek. “Are you alright?”

He nodded. “You’re the first person who has ever loved me. I’ve never had anyone care about me before. You’re the first.”

“I’m sure you’re mother loved you.” Anna said.

Erik shook his head. “No. Once she saw the monstrosity of my face, she gave me up. I’ve never been loved, only feared, and only hated.”

Anna pressed her forehead against his, whispering softly. “I’m not like those people, Erik. I love you for who you are, not what you look like. And nothing will ever change my mind.”

“I know that, Anna.” He smiled, hugging her closer. “It just feels so good to be able to let go of all those bad memories. Nothing else matters now except for us.”

Anna smiled warmly.

“Anna, why were you crying when you first walked in?” Erik asked.

She frowned. “Victor took me aside and told me that my father passed away last night.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Erik said sadly. “This must be really hard for you.”

She nodded. “It is, but I’ll be alright. He’s with my mother now, and I’m happy for that. He’s no longer in pain.”

Anna then turned her head away from him and began to cough. She covered her mouth with her hand as she coughed hoarsely.

Erik placed a hand on her shoulder. “Are you okay, Anna?”

Anna stood up straight, pain visible in her face. “Yes, I’m fine.”

“You’ve been pretty sick for a while now.” Erik said, clearly concerned. “Is there something wrong?”

“No, no no.” She said, shaking her head. “I’m fine. Really.”

Just then, there were a few hard knocks on Anna’s door.

“Anna, it’s me.” It was Victor’s voice. “May I come in?”

Anna stuttered. “Um...one minute, Vick. I’m a little tied up at the moment.”

Erik rushed towards the beautiful full-length mirror, sliding the glass away from the frame. “I have to

leave. If he sees me, I'm done for."

"Will I see you tomorrow?" She asked.

Erik nodded, giving her a quick kiss. "Goodbye."

Anna watched as Erik disappeared behind the mirror, sliding the glass back behind him. She then crossed the room and opened the door.

"Hello, Vick." She smiled. "What brings you here?"

Victor raised an eyebrow. "I came to see if you were okay. You seemed pretty upset before."

"Well, I'm fine now." Anna said.

"I can see that." Victor said, stepping into the room. "Whom were you speaking to in here?"

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"I heard a man's voice." Victor said suspiciously. "Who was it?"

Anna froze, not knowing what to say. "Um...there was no man in here, Vick. It must have been your imagination."

Victor frowned. "No, I'm sure I heard a voice."

Anna shrugged. "Well, how could it come from in here? If there really was a man in my room, where could he go? He couldn't have just left the room if you were right there standing behind the door."

Victor grunted. "I suppose so. But, I was sure I heard someone."

Anna shook her head. "Vick, you've had a long trip. You're tired and you're hearing things. Go back to your room and relax."

Victor stepped towards her. "I also heard you coughing. It sounded a lot worse than it was back home."

She shook her head. "No, its fine."

"Anna, you know that what you have is serious." He said sternly. "You could die if this gets any worse."

"You think I don't already know that?" Anna said angrily. "I think about it every day. But I'm fine now."

So, please, go and relax."

Victor shook his head. "Madame Giry said she needed to you for a while. It's nothing serious, she just needs to fit you into the Juliet costume, just to see if she has to make a few alterations to it."

Anna sighed. "Alright. I'll go."

Anna opened the door to her dressing room and stepped out into the dark corridor, Victor right behind her. With one last glance at her mirror, Anna shut the door and followed her brother down the corridor towards Madame Giry's dressing room.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik sat at his organ, music sheets scattered out in front of him. He was in the process of completing his latest piece. He had been working on it for at least three days, and it was very close to being finished. He continued to make several notes on the sheet music, softly humming the tune to himself. It was a song about Anna. He had been inspired to write it ever since he met her. And now, since they confessed their love for one another, it was even easier to finish the piece than ever before.

Erik put his pen down and began to play the music on his organ. His fingers danced along the keys, the sound of the song echoing through his underground lair. He had also written lyrics to the song, but he preferred to sing them to Anna, and not to himself.

After finishing the piece, Erik leaned back on his chair. He shut his eyes and thought about Anna. He could still remember the feel of her soft lips on his, and the touch of her hand on his cheek. It had been so long since he had felt the touch of another person, so long since he last held a woman. It all felt like a dream, and he didn't ever want to wake up.

Erik yawned, only then realizing how tired he was. He had been working on his piece ever since he had left Anna's room, which had to have been about five or six hours ago. It must have been night already,

and Anna was surely asleep. Erik smiled, imagining her sleeping soundly in her bed. Her beautiful blue eyes shut, the waves of her auburn hair falling gracefully around her face, her chest rising and falling with every breath she took. Erik couldn't stop thinking about her even for a second. He hadn't felt this good in years.

Finally, Erik rose from his chair and headed towards his bed. Laying himself down, he stared at the ceiling of his lair for some time, his mind swarming with thoughts of Anna. He was planning to watch the rehearsals from Box 5 again, but he knew that they didn't start until late in the afternoon. So, maybe he could be able to see Anna in the morning.

Finally, after a while, Erik turned onto his side, shut his eyes and was soon asleep.

## 8 - Chapter 8

Anna groaned at the sudden noises disturbing her sleep. She wrapped her blanket tighter around herself and turned over onto her side, slowly drifting back into her dream-filled paradise. But her eyes snapped open when she heard the sound of shuffling feet. Yawning, Anna sat up and rubbed her tired eyes, her hair a mess, the straps of her nightdress hanging loosely off her shoulders.

When she finally opened her eyes and got a good look around her room, she was shocked to find Erik sitting on one of her chairs, watching her. He smiled warmly, rising from his seat and walking to her bedside.

“Good morning, sleeping beauty.” He whispered. “Have a nice rest?”

She nodded her head as she yawned. “Yes, lovely. Might I ask what you’re doing in my room so early?”

Erik shrugged. “I thought we could spend the day together before rehearsals start. I heard you were playing Juliet, and I was hoping that maybe I could help you with your lines after breakfast.”

Anna smiled. “Yes, that would be nice.”

Anna threw the blanket off herself and swung her legs off the edge of the bed. She stood up and crossed the room to her dressing screen. She was aware of Erik watching her do this, and she knew why. Her white cotton nightdress with lace trim was the most revealing dress Erik had ever seen her in, and it seemed that he couldn’t take his eyes off her for a second.

Anna looked at him over her shoulder. “Let me just get dressed and I’ll be right with you.”

Erik nodded and watched as she disappeared behind her dressing screen.

“So,” She heard Erik say. “How does it feel to be the star of a production?”

“It’s great.” Anna answered as she removed her nightdress. “Back home in London, I starred in a few productions, but none of them were as important to me as this one. Romeo and Juliet is my favorite.”

“Mine as well.” Erik said. “Who will be playing Romeo?”

“I’m not quite sure.” Anna frowned, taking one of her dresses that hung over the dressing screen.

“Needless to say, it will be a little awkward to have to kiss a total stranger in front of hundreds of people. I’d much rather kiss you.”

Erik laughed a bit. “Well, that’s understandable. Will Victor play a part in the production?”

“Yes.” Anna said. “He’ll be playing Mercutio.”

“Ah yes.” Erik said with a smile. “The noble friend of Romeo who tragically dies in a battle against the Capulets. I’m sure Victor will do quite well. But, not as well as you will do, Anna. I’m looking forward to finally seeing you on opening night.”

“Will you be watching from Box 5, Erik?” Anna asked, slipping her dress on.

“Of course.” Erik said.

Finally, Anna emerged from behind the screen. “Well, I’ll be sure to look for you when I am on stage.”

Erik didn’t answer, but stared at her dress. It was similar to the black one she usually wore, but instead of it being black, it was a dark blue colour, which complimented her eyes. She walked towards him, and turned her back to him.

“Do you mind tying up the back of my dress?” She asked. “I can’t reach it on my own.”

Erik nodded. “Of course.”

He reached out and brushed her hair out of the way. Then, he took the dark blue silk ribbon, which criss-crossed down her back, and tied it into a bow. When he finished, Anna let her hair back down and smiled at him over her shoulder.

“Thank you.” She whispered.

Without words, Erik wrapped his arms around her from behind and pressed her back against him. He then leaned in and nuzzled his masked cheek against hers in a moment of affection. Anna smiled and, turning around to face him, kissed him tenderly on his lips, her arms wrapping tightly around his neck. When they parted, Anna whispered, “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Erik smiled, kissing her again.

Anna pulled back from him and walked over to her dresser. She sat herself down, picked up her brush and began to run it through the waves of her long auburn hair. She could see, through her mirror, that Erik was watching her do this. After a moment, she put her brush down and looked back at him.

“Why can’t you stop looking at me?” She asked, an eyebrow raised.

Erik smiled. “It’s hard for me to take my eyes off of such a captivating beauty such as yourself. I’m sorry, but I can’t help it.”

Anna smiled. “You’re sweet, Erik. A little too sweet for a man supposed to be the most bloodthirsty killer in all of Paris. Why do you have such a bad reputation as the Phantom of the Opera?”

Erik frowned. “Because, I was a bloodthirsty killer once. All those years of living beneath the Opera Populaire with no companionship literally drove me mad. I couldn’t help myself, Anna. I really couldn’t.”

Anna frowned a bit. “So, you have killed before?”

Erik stepped forward. “Yes, I have. But please, don’t hold it against me. I was a broken man, Anna. I was given no compassion by anyone in my life, and when Christine rejected me, I fell apart. But, I’ve changed now. I’m no longer the maniac I once was. Please don’t hate me for my past.”

Anna rose from her chair and wrapped Erik in a tender embrace. “I would never hate you, Erik.” She whispered in his ear. “I understand what you’ve been through. I won’t lie when I tell you that I would have done the same, if not worse. Being lonely is the worst feeling in the world. I won’t hold anything against you.”

Erik sighed, running his fingers through her hair. “You’re too good to me, Anna. A monster like me doesn’t deserve someone like you.”

Anna stepped back, looking up at him. “You are no monster, Erik. You are the kindest, smartest, most charming man I’ve ever met.”

“But...my face.” Erik frowned.

“Your face holds no horror for me.” Anna said sternly. “What is under that mask does not compare with who you are on the inside. Do you only love me for my beauty, Erik?”

“Of course not!” Erik gasped. “I love you for your charm, your intelligence, your kindness, your wit, and your ability to make me feel like a normal man. You are like no woman I’ve ever met, Anna.”

“And that’s how I feel about you, Erik.” Anna explained. “I do not judge a person by their looks, but by their hearts. And you have the purest heart of any person I’ve ever met. You can take off that mask, and it would make no difference to me.”

Without words, he leaned in and kissed her passionately, wrapping his arms tightly around her body, almost crushing her to him. She ran her fingers through the back of his hair, moaning against his mouth. She wanted him, needed him, now more than ever before.

Their kiss was broken when they heard a knock on Anna’s door.

“Miss Hart.” Came Madame Girys voice. “I brought you some tea. Are you awake yet?”

“Yes, Madame. I’ll be right with you.” She turned to Erik. “Hide! Quickly!”

Erik quickly darted behind Anna’s dressing screen, wrapping himself in his black cape to camouflage himself into the shadows. Anna approached her door, grasped the handle, and opened it.

Madame Girys stood outside the door, a tray of tea in her hands. “Good morning, Miss Hart. May I come in?”

“Um...” Anna stuttered. “Of course, Madame.”

Anna stepped aside and allowed Madame Giry to enter her dressing room. She placed the tray of tea on Anna's dresser, turned and smiled as Anna shut the door behind her.

"How are you feeling, Miss Hart?" Madame Giry asked.

"I'm alright." Anna said, her eyes glancing uneasily to her dressing screen.

Madame Giry pulled her long, dark brown braid over her shoulders. "Have you been practicing your lines?"

Anna nodded. "A little, Madame. I will do a lot more today. A friend of mine is going to help me."

"Oh, really?" Madame Giry smirked, an eyebrow rising.

Madame Giry looked over to the dressing screen, smirking. "Oh for God's sake, Erik. You can come out of there. It's only me."

Anna's jaw dropped as she watched Erik slowly emerged from behind the screen, his arms crossed.

"How did you know I was back there?" He asked her.

Madame Giry rolled her eyes. "Please, Erik. I've known you long enough to know your presence in a room. Also, I heard you speaking with Miss Hart when I was out in the hallway."

Erik snorted. "Nothing gets past you, Madame."

Anna turned to Madame Giry. "Please, Madame. I can explain everything. You see, Erik and I—"

Madame Giry raised her hand to silence Anna. "No need for explanations Miss Hart. I'm perfectly aware of the relationship you and Erik share, for you see, you are not the only one who visits my dressing room in need of advice."

Anna raised an eyebrow over at Erik, who simply shrugged with a smile.

"Now," Madame Giry said. "I should be getting back to work. I'll leave you two alone to practice your lines, and if you need me, just call. Don't forget that rehearsals are at five o'clock Miss Hart."

"I wont, Madame. Anna smiled. "Thank you."

Madame Giry crossed the room and opened the door. But she stopped in her tracks and looked back over her shoulder.

"Oh, and Erik." She said.

"Yes, Madame?" He answered.

She shook her finger at him, smiling. "You behave yourself."

Erik crossed his arms, a playful frown on his face. "Must you always ruin my fun, Madame?"

"I'm afraid so." She smiled, before exiting the room.

Once she was gone, Anna walked over to her dresser and picked up her booklet of lines, flipping through the pages.

She looked over at Erik. "Lets get to work."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Alright, Anna." Erik said. "Sing me your scales."

Anna sighed with exhaustion. She and Erik had been working on the lines for hours, and now he wanted her to sing. She was spent, but Erik seemed like he could go on all night if he had to.

Knowing she had no choice, Anna stood up straighter, cleared her throat and began to sing her scales.

Erik listened to every note intently, and when she finished, he rose from his seat.

"Very good, Anna." He smiled. "Let me just see something for a minute."

Anna nodded and stood still as Erik gently touched her neck, his fingers running over her diaphragm.

She smiled, enjoying his touch. Then, he stepped behind her and placed his hands on her lower back, straightening her posture.

"Okay, now sing again." He told her.

Anna did as she was told and sang her scales again. She blinked, noticing a great improvement in her



pitch and clarity.

Erik smiled. "Very nice."

Anna nodded. "Thank you. How did you make me sound so good?"

"I didn't. You've always sounded good. I just helped to improve you." He shrugged. "I guess when you're living on your own for years under an opera house, you develop a talent in music."

"A great talent, I must say." Anna smirked.

Erik smiled a bit, motioning over to her piano. "Would you like to work on your voice a bit more? We can sing one of the songs from the production."

Anna nodded and walked over to her piano, taking a seat in front of it. She flipped through a pile of music sheets before finally finding one titled: Come What May. She placed it on the stand in front of her.

"Here." She said. "This one is my favorite."

Sitting up straighter, Anna began to softly play the song, her long, graceful fingers dancing along the keys. Erik listened to her do this, shutting his eyes. Finally, Anna started to sing:

"Never knew I could feel like this,

Like I've never seen the sky before.

Want to vanish inside your kiss,

Everyday I love you more and more.

Listen to my heart, Can you hear it sing?

Telling me to give you everything.

Seasons may change, winter to spring.

But I love you until the end of time.

Come what may. Come what may.

I will love you until my dying day."

When Anna finished, she looked up at Erik with a smile.

"So, what do you think?" She asked.

Erik didn't answer, but leaned in and gave her a soft kiss. "It was magnificent. You have the most exceptional talent of anyone I've ever met. You will make a sublime Juliet. I only wish I could be Romeo so I can sing that song with you. It's perfect in describing my love for you."

Anna blushed a bit, kissing Erik's cheek. "I'm glad you liked it."

Just then, someone knocked on Anna's door.

"Anna, are you in there?" Came Victor's voice.

"Yes." She answered, rising from her seat. "What is it?"

"We have to go down to rehearsals, now." He answered. "It's five o'clock."

"Oh." Anna said, sounding a bit disappointed. She wanted to spend more time with Erik. "I'll meet you downstairs, Vick."

"Alright, Anna." He said. "Hurry up."

She listened carefully for Victor's footsteps to fade away into the distance before she spoke again.

"I have to go." She told Erik. "Thank you for all your help, Erik."

He nodded. "No problem at all."

As she gathered up her booklet of lines, she asked. "Will you be watching from Box 5?"

"Of course." He smiled. "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

Anna smiled and opened up her dressing room door. She stepped out into the empty corridor, Erik right behind her.

She turned to him. "Goodbye, Erik. I'll see you tonight."

He nodded and, with one final kiss, watched her run down the corridor towards the stage. When she was out of sight, Erik turned on his heels and bolted towards Box 5, his black cape billowing out behind him.

Little did he know, somewhere in the shadows of the corridor, Victor's ice blue eyes had been watching them.

## 9 - Chapter 9

Over the next few weeks before the premier of Romeo and Juliet, Anna had been spending a lot of time with Erik, practicing her lines and prepping her voice. And over that long period of time, she and Erik had become a lot closer. There hadn't been a single day where they hadn't been together, but Anna didn't mind. She loved Erik's company. He treated her like a lady, which was something she was never particularly used to.

But something else had changed over those few weeks. Victor, her brother, had become incredibly protective and suspicious of her. She couldn't go anywhere without Victor asking her a series of questions. He was even more irritating than before. But Anna couldn't figure out why. She never did anything to upset him in any way, and she was certain he didn't know about Erik. They had kept their relationship absolutely secret from anyone, except Madame Giry. But Victor had always been a little strange, so she just let it pass.

Finally, after weeks of practice and preparation, the opening night for Romeo and Juliet finally arrived, and Anna had never been more nervous. She paced up and down backstage, her ears listening as the people gathered in their seats. Dozens of actors and stagehands rushed all around her. She didn't notice them; she was too concerned about her own performance. She didn't even notice Victor come up behind her and tap her shoulder. He was wearing a costume of black pants with black knee high boots, a navy blue velvet vest with a white frilled-collared shirt underneath. A golden sword gleamed at his hip. "Nervous?" He asked.

She sighed. "A little. You?"

"Nah," He shrugged. "I've been through worse. But don't worry, it'll be fine."

She nodded. "I guess."

Just then, Mr. Femin, Mr. Andre, Madame Giry, and Marcus (the actor who was playing Romeo) approached her side.

"Good evening, Miss Hart." Mr. Femin smiled, kissing the top of her hand. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm a little nervous, Monsieur." She admitted.

Madame Giry smiled. "There's no need to be nervous, my dear. I'm sure you will do a superb job. Just take a deep breath, and you'll be fine."

Anna nodded, looking over at Marcus. "My, don't you look dashing."

Marcus blushed at her compliment, like he always did. "Merci, Miss Hart. You look lovely as well."

Anna smiled in thanks. She grew to like Marcus as a good friend; even though she had only known him for a couple of weeks. He was a very talented performer, but he was also incredibly shy. He always seemed the most nervous when he was doing a scene with her, his pale complexion failing to conceal his uncontrollable blushing.

He raked his fingers back through his curly brown hair, motioning to the stage. "Well, I'd better get to my place. The production will start soon."

Anna nodded. "I'll see you then, Marcus."

After Marcus left, Anna turned to Mr. Andre. "Did you remember to keep Box 5 empty tonight, Monsieur?" She asked.

He nodded. "Oui, Mademoiselle Hart. Just like you asked. But may I ask why you would like it empty?"

"I'm reserving it for a friend of mine." She smiled.

Mr. Andre and Mr. Femin both exchanged suspicious glances, but said nothing more, unlike Victor.

"And, who might this friend be?" Victor asked, crossing his arms.

“My friend Erik.” Anna said. “I met him when I first arrived here.”

“How come I’ve never met him before?” Victor asked.

“He doesn’t live here in the Opera Populaire.” Anna explained. “But he does visit me every once in a while. No one around here really knows him as well as I do. He’s a bit...shy.”

Victor continued to stare at Anna suspiciously, but said nothing more.

Madame Giry helped break the moment of awkward silence. “Alright gentlemen, the production will be starting now. Mr. Femin, Mr. Andre, please proceed to your seats. Mr. Hart, you’re opening scene will be starting now, so please go to your place on the stage.”

With one last suspicious look at Anna, Victor proceeded to center stage. Mr. Femin and Mr. Andre followed, moving quickly to their seats in Box 1. Madame Giry smiled over at Anna.

“Good luck, my dear.”

“Thank you, Madame.” Anna said.

Once Madame Giry left, Anna took a deep breath and walked over to the side of the stage. The first act was just beginning, and Victor, along with many more actors, had taken the stage. She stood and watched him from behind the curtain, her heart racing in her chest.

Just then, Anna heard someone whispering her name from behind her. She glanced back, and saw a tall shadow standing in the dark shadows at the back of the stage. She walked towards it, knowing who it was.

“Erik, what are you doing here?” She whispered. “Why aren’t you watching the performance from Box 5?”

Erik’s dark form shifted a bit. It was quite hard to see him in the darkness. He was wearing all black, which blended him into the shadows. But his half white mask stood out clearly, giving him a ghostly look, which sent shivers down Anna’s spine.

“I just wanted to wish you good luck before you went on stage.” He whispered.

“Thank you.” She smiled. “But I’m so nervous.”

“Don’t be. You have nothing to fear. Just think of me when you are performing. Imagine you’re back in your dressing room with me, practicing. Trust me, it will help.” He said.

“I’ll do that.” Anna smiled. “Now, get to your seat, or you’ll miss the show.”

“I will.” Erik smiled. “Just one more thing.”

“And what is that?” She asked.

Before she knew it, Erik had stepped out of the darkness and pressed a tender kiss to her lips. He pulled away, smiling. “You look beautiful tonight, my Juliet.”

Anna blushed. “Thank you, my dear Romeo.”

Anna wore a long, beautiful dress; the fabric was blood red, with gold patterns. The corset-like top was tight around her torso, and the skirt flowed elegantly. Her wavy hair was pulled back into a loose bun, some strands of hair hanging loosely around her face. Her heart shaped gold pendant hung around her slender neck, and gold jewelry festooned her ears and wrists.

She looked back over her shoulder towards the stage, before turning back to Erik. “I’ll be on stage, soon. You’d better get going.”

Erik nodded, giving her one last kiss. “Remember, think of me.”

“I will.” Anna smiled. “Now, go.”

She watched as Erik turned and ran towards Box 5, his dark form disappearing into the shadows. She sighed and walked back to her spot behind the curtain. Anna watched the rest of the first act, until finally, it was her turn to take the stage. Think of Erik, she reminded herself. Finally, after taking a deep breath, Anna stepped onto center stage.

\*\*\*\*\*

“For never was there a story of more woe, than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

The crowd gave a standing ovation as the curtain closed, ending the production of Romeo and Juliet. The crowd applauded in a way that Anna had never heard before. Their cheers were echoing through the theatre. Anna sat up from her laying position, removing the fake dagger from her side. Marcus sat up too, giving her a small smile.

“Great show, Miss Hart.” He said, helping her to her feet.

“You too Marcus.” She smiled.

Anna, along with Marcus, Victor, and the rest of the cast, all gathered into a straight line at the front of the stage. When the curtain opened again, they all took a deep bow, as the crowd roared in applause. Anna smiled, as she looked out at all the people cheering her on. When she looked up at Box 5, she saw Erik standing up and applauding just as enthusiastically. Their eyes met, and for that one moment in time, everyone disappeared and it was only the two of them. She flashed him a smile and he winked at her, before the curtain finally closed.

Anna was surprised when she suddenly felt Victor come up behind her and wrap her in a tight hug.

“You did great, Anna.” He smiled. “Mum and Dad would be so proud.”

“Thanks, Vick.” She said. “You were great, too.”

Just then, Madame Giry, Mr. Femin and Mr. Andre pushed through the crowd of actors and approached Anna’s side. Anna blushed wildly as Mr. Femin handed her a large bouquet of red roses, lilies and baby’s breath. She sniffed the sweet flowers, smiling in thanks.

“Thank you, Monsieur’s. Their beautiful.”

Mr. Andre shook his head. “Don’t thank us, Miss Hart. You were superb tonight. We should be thanking you for giving us such a brilliant performance.”

Madame Giry stepped forward and wrapped Anna in a motherly embrace. “You did very well, my dear.”

“Thank you, Madame.” Anna smiled.

Mr. Femin clapped his hands together. “How about an after show party? I’d say Miss Hart’s performance is worth celebrating.”

“Definitely.” Mr. Andre agreed.

With Victor by her side, Anna followed the three older people through the crowd of actors and stagehands, who seemed to be having their own little celebration. They all laughed as they danced and drank wine together. As she passed by them, Anna smiled at all the compliments they gave her on her performance. Other people before had never treated her so nicely.

Anna suddenly stopped in her tracks and clutched her chest in pain. The room began to spin around her and her knees trembled beneath her dress.

“Anna, are you alright?” She heard Victor ask.

She looked up and noticed, along with her brother, Madame Giry, Mr. Femin and Mr. Andre had all stopped walking and were now all staring at her with deep concern in each of their faces.

“Yes, I’m alright.” She told them. “I’m just a bit tired. I should go up to my room. I need some rest.”

“Do you need me to come with you?” Victor asked, placing a concerned hand on her shoulder. “You look a little sick.”

“No. I’m fine.” She reassured him. “I just need rest. Goodnight everyone.”

“Goodnight, Miss Hart.” Madame Giry said with clear concern.

Anna then turned and headed up the spiraling staircase towards her dressing room, trying desperately not to collapse. It seemed like forever before she finally reached her door, and opened it.

When she stepped into her room, quickly shutting the door behind her, she wasn’t surprised to find Erik standing there, a smile cut into the handsome features of his face. He walked forward and pressed a kiss to her brow.

“You were magnificent.” He whispered.

She smiled and laid her head on his shoulder, feeling safe in his arms. “I couldn’t have done it without you. You’ve helped me so much over these past few weeks, I don’t know how I’ll ever repay you.”

“There’s no need.” He whispered. “Your love is repayment enough.”

Erik then reached behind his back and pulled out a beautiful long-stem white rose with a black silk ribbon tied into a bow around the stem. He handed it to her, not saying a word.

“Oh, Erik.” She breathed, sniffing the rose. “It’s beautiful.”

“I thought you might like it.” He whispered, stroking the back of her hair.

“Like it? Erik, I love it.” She smiled.

Anna lifted her head off his shoulder and pressed a soft kiss to his lips, wrapping her arms tightly around him.

When they parted, Anna walked over to her dresser and placed the bouquet from Mr. Femin and Mr. Andre in one of the empty vases on the table, while she placed the single white rose into another separate vase. She placed that vase right on top of her piano, where she needed the most inspiration. It was too special to be mixed with the other flowers. It was a perfect reminder of how much she loved Erik, and how much he loved her back.

She suddenly gave a small gasp when another shock of pain shot through her chest. She clutched the edge of her piano, the room spinning around her. She tried to keep her balance as her knees trembled under her dress.

“Anna?” Erik asked, crossing the room towards her. “Are you okay?”

She felt him place his leather-gloved hand on her shoulder, and she looked at him over her shoulder.

“No...I...I don’t think so. I feel...I feel...”

Suddenly, Anna’s knees gave out from under her and she collapsed, the world going black around her.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik gasped, lunging forward and catching Anna’s limp body before it hit the floor. With one arm wrapped around her back, and the other under her legs, he lifted her up into his arms.

“Oh, my God.” He breathed. “Anna.”

Erik crossed the room and lay Anna down gently into her bed. She was breathing heavily, her eyes clenching as if she was feeling shocks of pain through her body. Sweat was gleaming on her forehead, and she gave out a few hoarse coughs. He stroked the side of her cold cheek.

“Anna, please wake up.” He whispered desperately, tears forming in his eyes.

When she didn’t respond, Erik began to panic. He stood up and began pacing up and down her room, thinking hard about what to do. He didn’t want her to die. She couldn’t die. If she died, his life was over as well.

Just then, an idea popped into his head. Erik leaned over Anna and kissed her brow softly. “Don’t worry, my love. I’ll be back. You’re going to be all right. I promise you.”

Erik then quickly rushed out into the dark corridor and ran towards Madame Giry’s dressing room, knowing there was no time to waste.

\*\*\*\*\*

Madame Giry nearly jumped out of her skin when Erik suddenly burst through her dressing room door. He was panting heavily, his usually perfect hair no longer slicked back, but in a mess.

“Erik. What’s the matter?”

“Madame, you have to hurry.” He panted. “Please. There’s no time to lose.”

“Why?” She asked in alarm. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s Anna.” He told her, a tear trickling down his cheek. “She’s sick. She collapsed in her room a few minutes ago. I...I don’t know what’s wrong with her, Madame. Please, you have to help her.”

“Oh, my God.” Madame Giry gasped, lifting up the hem of her brown and gold dress and running out of her room. “What are we waiting for? Lets go.”

Erik nodded and followed her back down the dark hallway towards Anna’s dressing room. Both of them with the same exact thought racing through their minds:

Please don’t let us be too late.

## 10 - Chapter 10

She didn't remember dying.

With an obscure sense of apprehension, she wondered if the distant murmuring voices drifting into her meant she was again about to experience that transcendent ending: death.

While she didn't remember dying, she dimly recalled the distant, embodied voices saying that she probably had. She knew there were people around her who didn't believe, though she was still living, that she would make it through the night. But she knew she would, she had to, for Erik.

But if she didn't remember the dying, she remembered the pain before passing into the great realm of darkness. The pain, she never forgot. She remembered the sharp shocks of pain running through her chest, she remembered how weak her body became, she remembered the scaring terror of having no breath to gasp at the agony, but she remembered most of all, the look on Erik's face as the world suddenly went black around her.

The sounds of muffled voices at last tugged Anna's eyes open. She squinted against the agony that had been tempered, if not banished, while in the cocoon of sleep. She looked around her dark room, the only light from a couple of candles on her dresser and piano. She also only then noticed how many people were gathered around her bedside. To her left, Madame Giry and Victor were sitting on chairs close to the bed. Standing at the foot of her bed, were Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre. But to her disappointment, Erik wasn't anywhere to be found. She wasn't surprised though, it would be dangerous for him to show himself to all the people who suspected he was dead. She hoped she would see him soon.

"Miss Hart!" Madame Giry gasped when she noticed Anna's eyes open. "Oh my God! You're awake!" Anna groaned, her body still incredibly weak. "How long have I been out?"

Victor grasped Anna's hand, tightly. "Almost two weeks. We thought you were never going to wake up."

Anna blinked. Two weeks? It only felt as if she had been passed out for only one night. She sunk back into her pillow, sighing deeply.

"How are you feeling, Mademoiselle?" Mr. Firmin asked.

"I'm alright, I guess." Anna whispered. "I just feel really weak and worn down. My throat is a bit sore as well."

"That's because you've been coughing a lot." Victor explained. "You just need to rest a bit more, then you'll be back to your normal self."

Anna nodded, not saying a word.

Victor leaned in close to her. "Anna, while you were unconscious, you became delusional. You muttered things in your sleep."

"Things?" Anna asked. "What kinds of things?"

Victor exchanged glances with everyone in the room before turning back to his sister. "Anna, who is the Phantom of the Opera?"

"What?" Anna gasped, sitting up quickly.

Madame Giry pushed her back down gently. "Please, Miss Hart. Lay down. You need to relax."

Anna looked back at her brother. "Vick, what are you talking about?"

"When you were unconscious, you muttered things about the Phantom of the Opera." Victor explained.

"Who is this man you speak of?"

"I...I..." Anna stuttered.



Madame Giry cut in. "He's a myth, a legend, and nothing more. She heard the stories about him haunting this opera theatre before she collapsed. She must have been having bad dreams about him." Anna nodded. "Yes, bad dreams. That's it."

"A legend, Madame Giry?" Mr. Firmin asked. "How could you say he is a legend when we all know perfectly well that he haunted this opera house three years ago? Don't you remember all the trouble that man caused?"

Madame Giry went blank. "Well, Monsieur. I..."

"You mean he's real?" Victor cut her off.

"Very real, Mr. Hart." Mr. Andre answered. "But he's dead now, so there's nothing to worry about. At least, we think he's dead."

Victor rubbed his chin as he went into deep thought. "What did this man look like, Monsieur?"

"I vaguely recall his appearance, Mr. Hart." Mr. Firmin frowned. "But I do remember he wore a black cape, and half a white mask on his face."

"White mask..." Victor muttered under his breath.

Anna did not like the look on her brother's face. He looked as if he was thinking very hard about something, and he didn't seem to like it at all. She squeezed Victor's hand, forcing a small smile.

"It's really nothing to worry about, Vick." She told him. "The Phantom of the Opera is dead. That's the end of it."

"Hmm..." Victor rose from his chair and headed for the door. "If you'll all excuse me, I have some business to attend to."

"Business, Mr. Hart?" Madame Giry asked.

Victor nodded. "It's really nothing for you to all be worried about. I'll see you all in the morning."

"In the morning, Mr. Hart?" Mr. Firmin frowned. "But, its only six thirty in the evening."

"Believe me, it's a lot of business I need to attend to." Victor said. "I'll be out for a little while, and I wont be back until later. So, I bid you all goodnight, and I'll see you in the morning."

After Victor left the room, Mr. Andre spoke up.

"Well, we'd better be going too. We have to make arrangements for our next production." He smiled at Anna. "Now, you get better, Miss Hart. We're counting on you to be at our annual Masquerade Ball next week."

"Masquerade Ball?" Anna whispered.

"Yes, Mademoiselle." Mr. Firmin smiled. "It's a great tradition to hold a Masquerade Ball to celebrate a bright new year. Everyone wears costumes, so remember to get one before next week. Now, you get some rest, and we'll see you tomorrow."

Anna nodded and watched as the two older men left the room, leaving her alone with Madame Giry. As soon as they were gone, Anna grabbed Madame Giry's hand, looking at her desperately.

"Madame, you can't let my brother know about Erik." She begged. "Victor is extremely protective of me. If he found out that I'm in love with the Phantom of the Opera, there's no telling what he'll do. He might send me back to London, or worse, he might kill him."

"Miss. Hart, your brother is not like that." Madame Giry reassured her.

"Trust me, Madame." Anna said darkly. "Victor is a very violent man when he is angry. And he's extremely untrusting of others. I hardly had any friends when I was a child because he used to scare them off." She sighed, lying back down. "I don't know how I'll ever forgive myself if he harmed Erik."

Madame Giry patted the top of Anna's hand. "Don't you worry, Miss Hart. I promise I will not tell a soul about Erik being alive." She rose from her seat. "Now, get some rest."

Before she could leave the room, Anna spoke up.

"Madame, where is Erik?"

"I told him to get some rest, so he went back down to his lair. He hasn't slept a wink since the day you

collapsed.” Madame Giry said. “Every night he comes into your room and sits by your bedside. I’m sure he’ll come back tonight to check on you.”

Anna nodded. “Good. I really need to speak with him.”

Madame Giry smiled, and opened the dressing room door. “Goodnight, Miss Hart. I will see you tomorrow.”

Anna sighed. “Goodnight, Madame.”

After Madame Giry left, Anna took a deep breath and wrapped her blanket tighter around herself. She turned over onto her side carefully, and shut her eyes. Her mind was racing with thoughts of Erik, and how much she was worried about him. She had to warn him about Victor’s suspicions, before it was too late.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik slowly slid the mirror’s glass away from the gold frame and stepped into Anna’s dressing room. He had only gotten a couple hours sleep, and he was exhausted, but unwilling to leave Anna’s side. Erik stepped towards Anna’s bed, his eyes locked on her sleeping form. She was still in the same position as when he last saw her, which did nothing for his hopes that she would ever wake up. He pulled a chair close to her bedside and sat in it, taking her hand in his. With his free hand, he softly stroked her hair.

“Hey.” He whispered softly. “It’s me again. I just came to see how you were doing.” He sighed. “I miss you, Anna. I miss you so much. You have to get better, you have to wake up. I know I ask you to do this every night, but it is because I love you. I don’t want to lose you. Please, please wake up.”

Erik lay his head down beside Anna’s and wrapped her in his arms as he wept softly. His tears stained her blankets and his hand tightened around hers.

“Please, Anna.” He whispered through his tears. “Please wake up.”

Suddenly, Erik felt the touch of someone’s arms wrapping around him, and a soft voice in his ear whispering, “I’m already awake.”

Erik sat up quickly with a startled gasp, and looked down at Anna. Her eyes were open and a small smile was spread across her lips. She slowly reached up and brushed a tear from his cheek, and he held her hand against his face.

“Anna,” He breathed. “You’re alive.”

“Of course I am.” She smiled weakly. “I’m too stubborn to die.”

He smiled, kissing her hand. “I thought I’d lost you. You have no idea how worried I’ve been.”

Anna stroked his cheek. “Well, stop worrying...and kiss me.”

Erik leaned in and pressed a soft, affectionate kiss to Anna’s lips. She slowly wrapped her arms around him, so as not to hurt herself. Erik smiled against the kiss, relieved that he finally had his dear Anna back.

When they parted, Erik pressed his forehead against Anna’s, looking deep into her eyes. “I’m so glad you’re alright.”

She frowned a bit. “Erik, Victor might know about you.”

“What?” Erik asked, pulling his face back.

“Victor, my brother, might know about you.” Anna repeated.

“How?” Erik frowned. “You haven’t told him, have you?”

“No, no.” She shook her head. “But when I was unconscious, I muttered things about the Phantom of the Opera in my sleep. I dreamt about you everyday, and I guess Victor heard me talking in my sleep. Now, he’s asking a lot of questions about whether you exist, and what you look like.”

Erik went blank. “And you told him?”

“No. Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre did.” She explained. “Now, Victor’s getting all suspicious and worried. We tried to convince him that you were dead, but he didn’t seem to buy it. I’m afraid of what he’s going to do.”

Erik sighed. “He won’t do anything, Anna. I’ve been living here for two years, and no one except for you and Madame Giry knows of my return. I’m perfectly safe.”

“I know.” She whispered, tears gleaming in her blue eyes. “I’m just afraid that if he finds you, he’ll hurt you. I’ll never forgive myself if anything were to happen to you, Erik.”

When she began to cry, Erik leaned in and embraced her in a comforting hug. “Shh...Anna, it’s okay.” He whispered. “Everything will be fine, I promise. Victor will never know I’m here.”

“I’m just so afraid of losing you, Erik.” She sniffed back her tears. “Ever since my mother died, I was never able to have any friends or any loves, because none of them understood me in the way that she did. And now, I finally find the one person who cares about me, and who understands me. You helped free me of my loneliness and were able to help me let go of my mother’s death. I love you so much, Erik. I can’t lose you.”

Erik wrapped his arms tighter around Anna, and kissed her brow. His tears rolled down his cheek and fell onto her face like rain. “I love you too, Anna. More than you can possibly imagine. Nothing of this world will ever keep me from loving you. Not Victor, not anybody.”

Anna smiled and kissed his lips tenderly before saying, “Will I be dancing with you next week?”

Erik raised an eyebrow. “Excuse me?”

“The Masquerade Ball is next week.” She explained. “I’m going to attend it, and I was hoping that you would as well.”

Erik frowned. “Anna...I don’t know.”

Erik didn’t much care for Masquerade Balls anymore. The last time he attended one; it didn’t go as well as he’d hoped. Besides, it was too dangerous for him to be out in public again, now that Victor was probably aware of his existence. But he couldn’t say no to Anna. He never could.

Giving a defeated sigh, Erik said, “I’ll think about it. But I can’t guarantee that I’ll be there, Anna. It’s too risky.”

Anna nodded. “I understand, Erik. But I do hope you’ll change your mind.”

Erik smiled. “We’ll see, Anna. We’ll see.”

## 11 - Chapter 11

Victor wrapped his coat tighter around himself as he walked swiftly through the dark streets of Paris. The cool night wind blew through his wavy blonde hair, as his ice blue eyes scanned over the houses. He looked down at the piece of paper in his hand with her house number written on it. It had to be around here somewhere.

Victor turned the corner onto another street, his boot strikes echoing off the cobblestone. The street was completely deserted, and a thin fog began to linger in the air. He scanned the house numbers on all the buildings he passed, until finally, he spotted the right house.

The windows were completely dark, except for a small light shining from the Parlor. Victor took a deep breath and, opening the iron gate, walked up the stone path towards the wooden door. He hoped she was home at this hour. He needed information, and she was the only one who could give it to him. Stopping in front of the door, Victor raised his fist and knocked hard. He heard the sound of muffled footsteps coming closer to the door. Just then, the door opened and a short, plump woman in a maid's outfit greeted him.

"Can I help you, Monsieur?" She asked.

"I'm looking for the lady of the house." Victor said. "Is she in?"

"Oui. She is." The maid smiled. "May I ask who you are?"

"Victor Hart." He answered. "I work at the Opera Populaire. Can you please tell the lady of the house that I must have a word with her? It's urgent."

The maid nodded, stepping aside and opening the door wider. Victor nodded in thanks and stepped into the warm house. He looked around at the candle-lit hallway. The walls were decorated with dark red wallpaper with gold leaf patterns, adorned with white crown molding, pink baseboards and door castings, and a hardwood floor almost entirely covered with a long scarlet rug. Black and white framed photographs were hung on both walls, and a small table with an oil lamp and a pink vase of red roses stood against the left wall.

"May I take your coat, Monsieur?" The maid asked after shutting the door.

Victor nodded and unbuttoned his long black coat. He handed it to the maid, who hung it on a coat rack in the corner. She walked over to one of the doors and turned back to him.

"I'll just see if she's not too busy to speak to you." The maid said. "Please wait here, please."

Victor nodded and watched as the maid opened a door and disappeared behind it. He placed his hands inside the pockets of his black trousers as he looked around the Victorian style house. He listened to the low voices coming from the other room, trying to see if he could understand a word they were saying. Just then, the door swung open and the maid appeared.

"She will see you now, Monsieur." She smiled.

Victor smiled in thanks, and stepped through the door into the Parlor. If it were possible, the Parlor was more jarring to the senses than the hallway, with the red theme carried into the carpets, velvet tufted chairs, immoderate collection of ornate, gold-fringed crimson pillows, and the swirled, pink marble fireplace mantle.

Only half the lamps in the Parlor were lit. Several blown-glass bowls set about on tables and the desk were filled with dried rose petals, their fragrance mingling with the lamp oil to permeate the air with a heavy, sickly-sweet odor.

Victor stopped and stood as he looked at the woman sitting with her legs crossed in one of the velvet chairs by the glowing fireplace. She glared at him silently with her piercing green eyes, her left hand

casually petting the little white poodle curled up on her lap. Her hair was long and curly, and as red as the room itself. She lifted her hand and motioned to the chair in front of her, inviting Victor to sit down. Victor nodded in thanks and crossed the room. He sat himself down comfortably in the chair across from her. After a short while of awkward silence, Victor decided to speak up.

"I want to thank you, Senora, for seeing me so late."

She didn't smile, but continued to glare at him. "I have no business dealing with anyone associated with the Opera Populaire, so you are lucky I even let you in. What is it you want from me?"

Victor straightened. "Well, Senora...My name is Victor Hart, and came here wond-"

She cut him off. "Did you just say 'Hart'?"

"Yes, Senora." Victor answered confusingly. "Why do you ask?"

"You do not happen to be related to Annabelle Hart, would you?" She asked.

"Y-yes I do." He answered. "She is my younger sister."

Her eyes flashed darkly. "That little know-it-all stole the role of Juliet from me. I, La Carlotta, was the greatest performer in all of Paris. But that was until she showed up. She has everyone in the theatre wrapped around her little finger. I despise that woman."

Victor frowned. "Senora, my sister is not like that at all. She is a good woman. And she happens to be very sick."

"Sick?" Carlotta asked curiously.

"Yes. She is very sick." Victor said sadly. "She has been cursed with the same lung problems that unfortunately killed our mother. She collapsed two weeks ago and she only just woke up tonight. I'm afraid that if the same thing happens again, she is most certainly going to die."

Carlotta looked away from him and stared into the fire for a short period of time. She sighed deeply.

"What is it you want from me?"

"I need you to answer a few questions for me, Senora Carlotta." Said Victor. "Questions about the Phantom of the Opera."

Carlotta's eyes widened a bit. "Why in the name of God would you want to speak of that man?"

"Please, Senora." Victor pleaded. "Its very important."

Carlotta snorted. "I can't see why it is so important if the Phantom is supposed to be dead. Its useless information if you ask me."

"No, its not." Victor frowned. "For you see, I believe that the Phantom is still alive, and he is living in the Opera Populaire."

Carlotta gasped. "Why would you believe something like that, Monsieur?"

"Because, I think I've seen him before." Victor said darkly. "And I think he is having a close relationship with my sister."

She placed a hand over her heart. "This cannot be. That man is a danger to us all. He is a maniac and a murderer. If he really is having a relationship with your sister, then she is in great danger."

"I was afraid you might say that." Victor sighed. "Now, can you answer these few simple questions for me? Its late, and I would really like to be off to bed, as I'm sure you would too."

Carlotta nodded. "Yes. I will answer your questions."

"Thank you." Victor said, sitting forward in his chair. "Now, do you know anything about the Phantom's past?"

Carlotta shook her head. "I'm afraid not, Monsieur. Only Madame Giry would know such things."

Victor frowned. "I can't ask her. She's too close to Anna."

Carlotta scratched the poodle on her lap behind the ears. "All I know is that he has been living under the Opera Populaire for sixteen years. He has some sort of lair beneath it, which he has access to through a variety of secret doors throughout the theatre. He was obsessed with a chorus girl named Christine Daae, and he killed any man who stood between them."

Victor nodded. "So, you're saying he can't be trusted?"

"Not in a thousand years, Monsieur." Carlotta said. "He is a monstrous, evil, insane man. You're sister is not safe with him."

Victor nodded. "I will take that into consideration. Do you know any details about the Phantoms appearance? Other than his black cape and white mask."

Carlotta thought for a long moment before saying. "I remember he was a tall man, and rather handsome on the one side of his face. His eyes were sharp and green, and his dark hair was always slicked back and never messy. He had a kind of elegance to the way he dressed. When he spoke, his voice was gentle, yet commanding. And when he sang, it was powerful and possessing. He would send shivers down your spine. But I knew that deep beneath this man was the black heart of a murderer. Whenever he appeared, it was as if death walked into the room. I can't believe he's still alive after all these years."

Victor sat very still, staring into the fire. That description of the Phantom was a perfect match to the man he saw with Anna in the corridor many weeks ago. He could still remember the kiss they shared, so affectionate. How dare that man touch his beloved sister! How dare that murderer try and trick Anna into falling in love with him! And she was falling for it! Unbelievable! Did she not realize what a danger this man is? Did she not think that if she did anything to upset this man, he would probably kill her?

Victor rose from his chair and began to pace up and down the Parlor, Carlotta watching his every move. He stopped and looked back at her.

"Do you know any ways that we can stop this man?"

She shook her head. "No, Monsieur, I don't. This man is very troublesome and tricky. He's also very powerful. I would be very surprised if you were able to catch him. He's like a shadow, blending into the darkness."

"What about the police?" Victor asked desperately.

She shook her head. "We tried using the police before. They surrounded the theatre, all of them armed. But the Phantom still managed to escape. It's no use trying to catch him, Monsieur."

"But what if we get him by surprise?" Victor suggested. "We'll have the police capture him when he least expects it. He'll notice if we have hundreds of armed officers in the theatre, but if we have three or four, then it is certain he will not see them. We can save my sister and finally stop his reign over the Opera Populaire once and for all."

Carlotta sighed, still looking doubtful. "You do what you wish, Monsieur. I am not going to stop you. But don't say that I didn't warn you about him."

Victor nodded. "Thank you, Senora Carlotta for all your help. I never would have been able to figure out a way to help my sister if it weren't for you."

She shook her head. "It's no trouble, Monsieur. I will do everything I can to bring that man to justice."

Victor turned and walked out of the Parlor and into the hallway. He grabbed his coat from the coat rack and put it on. Carlotta stepped into the hallway and watched as he opened the front door.

"Good luck, Monsieur Hart." She told him. "You're going to need it."

He looked back at her and smiled. "Thank you, Senora. Goodnight."

He stepped out into the night, wrapping his coat tighter around himself. He was about to close the door behind him, when Carlotta placed her hand on it. He looked back at her, curiously.

"Oh, and Monsieur Hart..." She said with a smile. "Be sure to tell Mr. Femin and Mr. Andre that I will be returning to the Opera Populaire to attend the Masquerade Ball. But I will not be a part of any of their performances unless they make me the lead. Understood?"

Victor nodded. "Yes, Senora. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." She smirked, shutting the door behind him.

Victor sighed and proceeded to make his way back to the Opera Populaire.

\*\*\*\*\*

Arriving back at the opera house, Victor climbed up the spiraling staircase towards his dressing room. The corridors were dark and silent, giving the theatre an eerie feeling. Feeling rather hot, he unbuttoned the front of his coat and took it off, draping it over his arm. He continued to walk through the empty hallway, until he came to a sudden halt in front of Anna's dressing room. He thought he could hear voices coming from the other side of the door.

Curious, Victor crept towards the door and pressed his ear against it, trying to get a better listen. There were two voices in there. One was a woman, definitely Anna; and the other was a man. Victor clenched his hand into an angry fist, knowing that that voice belonged to the Phantom of the Opera, or Erik, as Anna called him.

He couldn't really interpret what they were saying. Desperate, Victor grabbed the door handle gently and slowly turned it, so as not to make a sound. He opened the door just a crack and peered inside. Anna was still lying in her bed, the blankets wrapped around her, her head propped up on two pillows. She looked as if she had been crying. Erik was sitting at her bedside, his arms wrapped around her. Victor had to repress the urge to burst through the door and strangle the life out of that man. He was whispering something to Anna, and Victor leaned in to listen to his words.

"He won't do anything, Anna." He heard Erik say. "I've been living here for two years and no one except you and Madame Giry knows of my return. I'm perfectly safe."

"I know." Anna whispered. "I'm just afraid that if he finds you, he'll hurt you. I'll never forgive myself if anything were to happen to you, Erik."

Victor blinked. Who were they talking about? He looked back through the small crack in the door and saw that Anna was beginning to cry. He watched as Erik leaned in and embraced her, whispering softly.

"Shh...Anna, it's okay. Everything will be fine, I promise. Victor will never know I'm here."

Victor stepped back from the door, gasping softly. So, they were talking about him. Anna seemed to be afraid that if he found out about Erik, that he would try and hurt him. Well, she was right.

Not wanting to hear a word more, Victor turned and stormed down the dark hallway towards his dressing room. When he finally reached it, he opened the door, threw his coat onto the bed and sat down on one of his chairs. He sighed deeply, running his fingers back through his wavy blonde hair.

Anna had to know the truth about the Phantom's murderous past. He knew it would upset her, but he'd rather see her sad, than dead. She'd get over it soon enough, then they could go back to London and forget this ever happened. Once Erik was arrested and locked away forever, they could go back to living their normal lives back home.

He was going to end it, once and for all.

## 12 - Chapter 12

After a few days, Anna had made a full recovery. She usually spent most of her time in her room, trying to get her strength back, but sometimes, she would go for walks around the theatre with Madame Giry and Victor. She noticed, however, how much Victor's protectiveness towards her had increased.

Whenever he came into her dressing room, his eyes would dart around all the dark corners of the room, and whenever they walked around the theatre, he would look around the dark rafters, as if searching for something hiding there.

Also, every night, Erik would come into her room and sit by her bedside. They would spend hours talking and laughing together. They talked easily, but sometimes he would stop speaking and just stare at her. When he did, she felt as though she should say something, but nothing meaningful ever came into her head. Lost in thought, she usually just kissed him.

Now, one week after waking up from her collapse, Anna sat at her dresser, preparing for the Masquerade Ball. She ran her hands through her wavy, auburn hair, trying to decide if she should pin it up, or leave it down. Unable to think up a decision at the moment, Anna stood up and crossed the room towards her dressing screen, where her costume was hung. She ran her fingers over the silvery blue silk fabric, smiling. Victor had gone out of his way to pick up this costume for her, and she had never been more grateful. It was the most beautiful dress she had ever seen. She also had a white mask shaped like birds wings that she fell in love with the moment Victor showed it to her.

Anna took the dress and held it against herself. She twirled around in circles in front of the mirror, smiling. She couldn't wait to put it on, but mostly, she couldn't wait for Erik to see her in it. She hoped he would attend the Masquerade Ball, but he still seemed doubtful. She wanted so much to dance with him, to hold him close, so everyone could see.

Just then, the door opened and Madame Giry stepped into the room. She was wearing a long black Japanese style dress with gold patterns, and her hair was tied into an elegant bun with chopsticks crossed through it. She had a fan in her hand, and black ballet slippers on her feet.

"Good evening, Miss Hart." She smiled. "How are you feeling?"

"Much better, thank you." Anna answered. She held out her costume. "What do you think? Do you like it?"

Madame Giry gasped lightly, gently touching the dress. "Its beautiful, Miss Hart. You will look stunning in it."

Anna blushed. "Thank you, Madame. How should I wear my hair?"

Madame Giry thought for a moment, her head tilting to the side a bit. "Up. You should wear it up."

Anna looked back at her mirror. "Do you think so?"

"I know so." Madame Giry smiled. "Here, take a seat. I'll show you."

Anna walked over to her chair in front of her dresser and took a seat. Madame Giry came up behind her and handed Anna her fan. She took the brush off of the dresser and began to run it through the back of Anna's hair. After a few minutes of brushing, Madame Giry looked at Anna and noticed a few tears in her eyes.

"Are you alright, Miss Hart?" She asked, concerned.

Anna sniffed. "Yes, Madame. It's just that...my mother used to brush my hair like that. Ever since she died, I've never had anyone care for me like you and Erik have. You're a lot like my mother, Madame. Having you around feels like she's still here with me."

Madame Giry smiled and squeezed Anna's shoulders. "And you are like a daughter to me, Miss Hart."



“Please, Madame.” Anna said. “Call me Anna.”

Madame Giry nodded. “Alright, Anna.”

She placed the brush back on the dresser and picked up a sparkling gold hair clip. With one hand holding up Anna’s hair, Madame Giry used her other hand to clip it up into a loose bun, letting some wavy strands frame her face. When she finished, she asked, “What do you think?”

“I love it, Madame.” Anna smiled. “Thank you.”

Madame Giry nodded, taking her fan back. She watched as Anna crossed the room and disappeared behind the dressing screen with her costume.

“Anna, will Erik be attending the Ball?” Madame Giry asked.

“I truly hope so, Madame.” Anna answered, slipping the dress on. “But he seemed a little uneasy to be out in public.”

“I don’t blame him.” Madame Giry frowned.

Anna emerged from behind the screen, tying the back of her dress. She spun on the spot, the skirt of the dress flowing outward.

“What do you think?”

“Beautiful, Anna.” Madame Giry smiled. “You’re brother has excellent taste when it comes to buying clothing for women.”

Anna giggled. “What can I say? He has a gift. I’m just surprised he doesn’t have a woman on his arm every night.”

“To tell you the truth, so am I.” Came a familiar voice.

Anna turned and smiled as she noticed Victor standing in the doorway, smiling at her. She thought he looked quite handsome in his swashbuckler’s costume. She especially liked the sword that gleamed at his hip.

“The costume fits, I presume?” He asked, stepping into the room.

She nodded. “Yes, its beautiful.”

Victor pulled out his pocket watch. “We should be heading downstairs. The guests should be arriving now.”

Anna nodded and walked over to her piano and gently touched the white pedals of the rose inside a vase. She leaned in and smelled the sweet flower, which was given to her by Erik as a sign of his love for her. Then, she took her white mask shaped like bird wings and placed it on her face.

Sighing deeply, she turned to Victor. “Lets get to it.”

Victor nodded and, taking her arm, led her out of the room and down to the Ballroom, Madame Giry following.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik slipped into the Ballroom unnoticed. He had found a very convenient window that no one had bothered to lock, making it very easy to attend uninvited. Erik hadn’t seen Anna all day and he didn’t know what her costume would be, but he was rather confident that he would recognize her easily. Not knowing what else to wear, and having little time to find anything, Erik had come in some of his normal attire, complete with cape. The only real change was a black eye mask, replacing his usual half white one. It was the same mask he had worn three years before, when he and Christine performed in Don Juan Triumphant. He had considered coming as Red Death again, but he didn’t want to be noticed by anyone, and that particular costume was rather eye-catching to say the least.

Erik slowly walked down the marble stairs towards the dance floor. Hundreds of costumed guests were flooding into the Ballroom, the sound of their chatter and laughter echoing through the farthest reaches of the theater. He could see Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre at the other side of the room, conversing with (to

his great disappointment) Carlotta. Would that woman ever go away?

As the orchestra began to softly play their music in the background, Erik softly sung under his breath:

“Masquerade.

Paper faces on parade.

Masquerade.

Hide your face so the world will never find you.”

He was surprised that no one had recognized him yet, which was a relief. He had almost considered not coming, but he didn't want to disappoint Anna. He only hoped that Victor wouldn't catch sight of him.

That man was a nuisance, and a dangerous one to say the least.

Erik watched the door unceasingly from the other side of the dance floor. His breath caught in his throat when Anna came into view. She looked positively radiant in her costume. It was a silvery blue silk dress that enhanced the mystery of her blue eyes. The dress was cut in a similar way to all her other dresses. The shrugged shoulders helped compliment her graceful neck, and the long, flowing skirt gave her an elegant grace he'd never seen before.

When Anna lifted her floor-length skirt a little to walk down the staircase, she revealed white colored sandals with straps weaving up her calves and tied in a bow at the back of her knee. The dress was fitted and clinging, accentuating curves that Erik couldn't take his eyes off of. Her white mask was shaped like a bird's wings and the only jewelry she wore was her heart shaped pendant, and a pair of gold earrings. Her long, wavy auburn hair was pulled back into a loose bun tied with a gold clip, some loose strands framing her face.

She looked like an angel sent from the heavens.

Erik barely noticed Victor and Madame Giry walking at Anna's side. Anna was walking, no gliding, along the edge of the dance floor, so his thoughts weren't with any of the other people in the room. In the time that he had spent with her, he had never noticed how graceful she was.

Taking a deep breath, Erik crossed the dance floor towards Anna, his eyes never losing sight of her. She had her back to him as she was speaking with Victor and Madame Giry. Finally reaching her side, Erik cleared his throat and tapped on her shoulder. She turned around and looked at him. When she met his eyes, a smile spread on her full lips. Erik couldn't help but smile as well.

Erik reached out and took her hand, kissing the top of it gently. “Good evening, my lady. You look lovely tonight.”

“Why thank you.” She smiled.

Erik turned to Madame Giry and smiled. “Good evening, Madame.”

She smiled back, but said nothing.

Erik looked at Victor and noted how he was glaring at him. Anna seemed to have noticed too, because she had stepped between them.

“Um, Victor, this is...” She said.

Her words trailed off and she watched as Victor began to circle Erik, looking him up and down.

“Why are you circling me?” Erik hissed. “What, were you a vulture in another life?”

Victor stopped and stood in front of the taller man. “You're Erik, I presume?”

Erik glared back at Victor just as coldly. “Yes, I am Erik. You must be Victor, Anna's brother. I've heard a lot about you.”

“Likewise.” Victor said darkly.

The two men continued to glare at each other hatefully, until suddenly, Mr. Firmin, Mr. Andre, and Carlotta approached them all.

“Good evening, everyone!” Mr. Andre smiled. “Lovely party isn’t it?”

“Yes, Monsieur.” Anna smiled uneasily, still standing between Erik and Victor. “Its wonderful. Best one I’ve ever attended.”

Mr. Firmin looked over at Erik, an eyebrow raised. “And who might this strapping young man be?”

Anna stuttered. “Um...this is...Erik.”

“Erik, is it?” Mr. Andre asked. He held out his hand. “Charmed to meet you.”

Erik took the older man’s hand and shook it. “Likewise, Monsieur.”

Mr. Firmin stared suspiciously at Erik. “Have we met before, my boy?”

Erik went a bit pale. “N-no. No we haven’t, Monsieur.”

Carlotta stepped towards Erik and held her hand out to him, batting her eyelashes. “I am La Carlotta. Pleasure to meet you, Monsieur.”

Erik forced a fake smile and took Carlotta’s hand, kissing the top of it. “Please, Senora. The pleasure is all mine.”

She giggled a bit, making Anna roll her eyes.

“So,” Mr. Firmin said to Erik. “Are you a friend of Miss Hart?”

Erik looked over at Anna, smiling. “I guess you can say that.”

Mr. Firmin laughed. “Ah, young love.” He placed a hand on Erik’s shoulder. “Come, Erik. Let us get you some wine.”

Erik looked at Anna, as if wordlessly asking her permission. He did, after all, attend the Ball just for her. She smiled and nodded at him, and Erik followed Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre to the other side of the Ballroom.

After they each got a glass of wine from a passing waiter, the two older men led Erik outside to the front of the theatre. A few other men were out there, chatting and smoking cigars.

Mr. Andre reached into his pocket and pulled out three cigars. He handed one to Mr. Firmin, stuck one in his own mouth, and then held the last one out to Erik, who shook his head politely.

“No thank you, Monsieur.” Erik said. “I do not smoke.”

“Good boy.” Mr. Andre smiled, placing the cigar back in his pocket. “It’s a filthy habit.”

Erik watched with a bit of a smirk as the two older men lit their cigars and began to take a few puffs.

“Tell me, Erik.” Mr. Firmin said. “Where do you live?”

“A lot closer than you think, Monsieur.” Erik smirked, sipping his wine. “I’m sure you’ve seen me around. Everyone has.”

Mr. Andre and Mr. Firmin shared a strange look, before taking a few more puffs of their cigars. Erik smiled softly to himself. He could not believe how easy this was. How could these two men not recognize him? He had worn this mask in front of them before, and they should have at least recognized his voice. He took a deep breath of the cool night air as he gazed out to the streets of Paris.

“Do you sing, Erik?” Mr. Firmin asked.

Erik looked back at the two men. “Yes. Why do you ask?”

“We like you, Erik.” Mr. Andre said, puffing his cigar. “You are a very charming young man. You also have a very nice voice. Tell me, have you ever performed on stage before?”

“Once or twice.” Erik answered. “Why?”

“How would you like to be a part of the Opera Populaire?” Mr. Firmin asked. “We could use a man like you. You could star in a few of our productions. What do you say, hmm?”

Erik looked away from them and out towards the streets. He had always wanted to perform on stage, but his deformity always kept him from living his dream. How could he ever go on stage with a mask? Not a lot of Operas had characters that wore a mask all the time. Sighing deeply, he turned back to the older

men, who had been watching him the entire time.

“That’s very kind of you, Monsieur.” He said. “But I’ll have to think it over.”

They both nodded.

“Very well.” Mr. Andre said. “No pressure. When you make your decision, please feel free to tell us.”

Erik nodded. “I will. Thank you.” He turned towards the door. “Now, if you will excuse me? I must return to Anna.”

Mr. Firmin smiled. “Of course, my dear boy. It was a pleasure meeting you.”

Erik bowed politely, then walked back into the theatre, his black cape billowing out behind him. He re-entered the Ballroom and walked swiftly back to where Anna was standing. She was still in the same spot as when he last saw her. She was speaking with Madame Giry, while Victor and Carlotta were off somewhere else.

When he reached Anna’s side, Erik surprised her by pressing a quick kiss to her cheek. She turned and smiled at him.

“Sorry I was gone so long.” He told her.

She shook her head. “It’s not a problem. What did Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre speak to you about?”

He shrugged. “Oh, a few things. They seem to like me very much. Unlike you’re brother, for some reason.”

She touched his shoulder. “Don’t worry about him. He can’t help but be a bit odd at times.”

“‘Odd’ isn’t really the word I was looking for.” Erik said. “I’d say mental.”

Anna laughed. “And I can’t believe you actually kissed Carlotta’s hand. I thought you hated her.”

“I do.” Erik shuddered. “But I had to be polite to her. But, I swear if I have to do it again, I’ll be sick.”

Anna laughed a bit, hugging him close. “Let’s not worry about that anymore, Erik. Let’s just enjoy the party.”

He smiled, kissing the top of her head. “I couldn’t agree more.” He took her hand and motioned to the dance floor. “May I have this dance?”

Anna smiled. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Smiling from ear to ear, Erik led Anna to the center of the dance floor. He took her in his arms, and together, they began to sway to the orchestra’s music.

## 13 - Chapter 13

“Wow, Erik.” Anna smiled at the end of their fourth dance. “You’re quite the dancer.”

Everyone in the Ballroom, who had been watching them with interest, clapped and cheered. The dance floor had been cleared for them, and Erik hadn’t even noticed a thing. They both took small bows toward the crowd, before leaving towards the other side of the Ballroom. People complimented them as they walked by, telling them how talented they were.

Finally getting off the dance floor, Erik ran his leather-gloved hand back through his slicked hair, panting slightly. Anna seemed a bit tired too.

He smiled at her. “I didn’t even know they were watching us.”

“Can you blame them?” Anna asked, leaning back on the wall. “You were amazing out there. Why didn’t you ever tell me that you could dance so well?”

Erik shrugged. “I didn’t think you’d be interested.”

Anna smirked a bit. “What I want to know, Erik, is how you could possibly be such a good dancer when I’m the first dance partner you’ve ever had.”

Erik gave an adorable smile. “It’s a gift, I guess.”

Anna laid her head on his shoulder. “You never cease to amaze me, Erik. Is there no end to your talents?”

He shrugged. “No, I don’t think so.... Wait, no I’m wrong...I can’t juggle.”

Anna stepped back, laughing a bit. “You can’t juggle?”

Erik held his arms out, shrugging. “Nope. I can’t juggle. No matter what I do, I just can’t seem to keep all those balls in the air at once. They go flying everywhere. It’s insane, I know. But I just can’t juggle, even if my life depended on it.”

Anna laughed. “You can’t juggle. That’s hilarious.”

“Can you?” He asked.

“No. But it’s still funny.” She giggled.

Erik gave a playful pout. “I don’t see what the big laugh is. It’s a serious problem of mine. And here you are, making fun of me. That hurts, Anna.” He crossed his arms, turning away. “I’m not talking to you anymore.”

She smiled, hugging him from behind. “Oh, Erik. How do you always manage to put a smile on my face?”

He looked over his shoulder at her. “It’s a talent.”

Anna smirked, unable to help herself. “Unlike juggling?”

Erik threw his arms into the air. “Okay, now you’re just mocking me!”

Anna laughed, grabbing his collar and spinning him around to face her. Erik smiled at her. He loved making her laugh. It gave him such a feeling of happiness, of... normality. He cupped her chin, lifted her head up, and kissed her softly.

She smiled softly at him when they parted. “It’s a little stuffy in here. What do you say about going outside for a while?”

“I’d say it’s a great idea.” He said.

She took his hand and began to lead him towards the front door of the theatre, but he held back. She looked back at him.

“Is something wrong, Erik?”

“No, but when it comes to getting some fresh air, I prefer a place where we can have a bit

more...privacy." He said.

Anna raised an eyebrow. "Privacy? And what place would that be?"

"The rooftop." He said.

Anna apparently liked that idea. "The rooftop. I've never been to the rooftop."

He tightened his grip on her hand. "Well then it'll be a very nice experience for you. Come, I will take you there."

Anna smiled and followed Erik out of the Ballroom and up the stairs towards the rooftop.

\*\*\*\*\*

"I cannot believe you!" Victor hissed.

Carlotta raised an eyebrow, her fingernails tapping the marble stairs on which she sat. "What are you talking about?"

Victor sighed in clear frustration. "Do you remember that man that was with my sister a while ago?"

She smiled a bit. "That tall, dark and handsome Monsieur Erik? Yes I do remember him. Why do you ask?"

Victor looked around the crowded Ballroom, to make sure no one was listening. He leaned in close to Carlotta, whispering softly.

"Monsieur Erik is really the Phantom of the Opera."

"What!" She gasped, jumping up quickly.

Victor nodded. "Erik is his real name, Senora. He was in disguise so he could attend the Masquerade Ball with Anna. How could you not recognize him, when you gave me such a vivid description of him when I visited your house?"

She shrugged. "I guess I wasn't really paying attention. He was so...charming and handsome. Nothing like the Phantom I remember. I can't believe it was really him."

Victor crossed his arms. "Well he didn't fool me. I could see right through that disguise of his."

He looked back over his shoulder and growled softly when he caught view of Anna and Erik kissing on the other side of the Ballroom. His fists were clenched as he watched them part from their kiss. Anna whispered something to Erik, and then they exited the Ballroom together. Victor tilted his head a bit; trying to see them passed the crowd of people. They were headed upstairs for some reason.

Victor looked back at Carlotta, who had also been watching them.

"Where do you think they're headed?" She asked him.

"I don't know." He said darkly. "But I'm going to find out."

She ran her hand over the creases of her long blue skirt. "I don't know if that's a good idea, Monsieur Hart."

"I don't care." He said. "I'm not allowing that man to be alone with my sister anymore. Who knows what he'll do to her. I have to follow them."

Carlotta gave a dismissive flick of her hand. "Do what you wish, Monsieur. I'm not going to stop you."

Victor then spun on his heel and marched towards the door leading to the rooftop. It was going to end tonight.

\*\*\*\*\*

Anna gripped Erik's hand tight as he opened the wooden door leading outside to the rooftop. She followed him out the door and gasped at what she saw. The sky was clear and the stars shone so brightly, it was as if you could reach up and touch them. She could see all of Paris from where she was standing. She walked slowly to the roofs ledge and looked out over the streets of Paris. She could see

crowds of costumed people gathered around the front of the theatre, along with dozens horse-drawn carriages.

She looked up at Erik. "It's breathtaking up here."

He smiled. "It gets better."

"Better?" She asked curiously. "How so?"

Erik grabbed her shoulders and turned around. "Watch the sky." He said.

Anna waited with growing curiosity, until suddenly, the sky lit up with bright colourful fireworks. She gasped and marveled at the shimmering colours that lit up the night sky. She felt Erik wrap his arms around her waist from behind, and rest his head on her shoulder as he looked out at the sky.

"Oh, Erik." She breathed. "Its so beautiful."

He kissed her neck softly. "I knew you'd like it."

She lifted her hand and stroked his cheek. "Of course I like it. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

"Really?" Erik asked surprisingly, glancing towards the sky.

She turned to face him, an eyebrow raised. "What? Are you telling me that you've seen something more beautiful than this?"

"Oh yes." He smirked.

"What is it?" She asked curiously. "What could possibly be more beautiful than a clear, starry night filled with fireworks?"

Erik took a step closer and pressed his forehead against hers, looking deep into her blue eyes. "You." He breathed.

Anna gasped lightly, her eyes filling with tears. Erik wrapped his cape around her and held her close to the heat of him. She laid her head on his shoulder and closed her eyes as she listened to his breathing, feeling safe in his arms, feeling as if the world was finally right again.

Finally, Anna lifted her head and looked up into his green eyes. "I love you."

Erik smiled and stroked her hair. "I feel so frustrated that there aren't any better words than 'I love you'. It doesn't seem enough for the way I feel about you. I'm sorry there aren't any better words."

"They're words enough for me." She whispered.

Erik kissed the top of her head and whispered softly. "Then, I love you Annabelle Hart. A thousand times, a million times, I love you forever. I always have, and I always will."

She smiled and kissed his neck softly. "I love you too, Erik. And don't you ever think otherwise."

Erik leaned in and kissed her long and deep. He wrapped his arms around her tightly, nearly crushing her to him. She clutched the back of his hair as the kiss became more insistent, nearly lifting her toes off the ground. She wanted him, needed him, now more than ever.

Just then, Anna heard the door leading to the rooftop slam shut. She pulled back from Erik's lips, but before she could react, Victor appeared out of nowhere and slammed his shoulder right into Erik, sending him flying to the ground.

"Victor!" Anna shouted. "What the hell are you doing?"

She looked over at Erik, who was lying back on his elbows, glaring venomously at Victor. She wanted to help him up, but Victor grabbed hold of her arm tightly, yanking her back.

"Let go of me!" She hissed.

"Anna, this man is dangerous!" Victor said angrily. "He's the Phantom of the Opera for God's sake! A killer! Don't you understand?"

She yanked her arm back. "What I understand, Victor is that you've gone completely insane! Erik is not dangerous at all."

"He's a killer, Anna!" Victor shouted.

"He was a killer, Victor." Anna said. "He's changed now."

Victor grasped her shoulders and shook her. "Anna, have you lost your mind? This man is a monster!"

"No, Victor." She hissed. "It is you, who is the monster."

Victor let go of her shoulders and glanced over at Erik. "If you wont listen to reason," He whispered to Anna. "Then I'll just show you."

Victor then walked over to Erik and stood over him, his hands on his hips. Anna could read in Erik's face that he was holding back the urge to lash out at him. She watched as Victor pulled his sword out of its scabbard and pointed it an inch away from Erik's masked face.

"Be a man, Erik." Victor said darkly. "Fight me."

"A real man does not use violence to settle his problems, Victor." Erik said just as darkly. "As much as I would like to knock some sense into you, I will not."

"Fine." Victor shrugged. "Then let me."

He stepped forward and sliced the tip of his sword across Erik's arm. Erik cried out in pain, clutching the wound. Anna gasped when she saw blood oozing from the cut.

"Victor, stop!" She cried out. "Leave him alone!"

Victor ignored her, and walked around to Erik's back. Then, he threw his sword to the ground, and clutched a fistful of Erik's hair, yanking his head back. He looked down into Erik's eyes, smirking.

"Lets see how my sister reacts when she sees the real you."

With that, Victor grasped Erik's mask, and yanked it off his face.

"No!" Erik cried, quickly covering his exposed face with his hands.

Victor laughed, looking over at Anna's horrified face. "You see, Anna? He is a monster under this mask. A creature of darkness."

Anna's horrified expression quickly turned to uncontrollable rage. She walked towards Victor and slapped his face hard.

"You monster!" She hissed at him. "How dare you do this?"

She leaned in and knelt beside Erik, who was still covering his face with his hands. She stroked his hair.

"Go, Erik." She whispered. "Get out of here."

Without words, Erik quickly got to his feet and ran for the door. Once he was gone, Anna turned back to Victor.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

Victor rubbed the cheek she slapped. "I'm trying to protect you, Anna. That man is dangerous. He'll kill you."

"How many times do I have to tell you, Victor?" She said. "Erik is not the man he once was. He is not dangerous."

Victor shook his head in disbelief. "You are not thinking straight, Anna. I have to get you out of here and back to London, away from that man."

"Its not Erik I have to stay away from." Anna said. "Its you."

"Me?" Victor asked.

"Yes, Victor. You." Anna said. She stepped forward and took Erik's mask from his hands. "You're not the brother I once knew. You've become a monster. Father would be ashamed."

As she began to walk away, Victor grabbed her arm.

"Anna." He said. "I'm trying to help you."

"If you want to help me, Victor." She said, pulling her hand back. "Never speak to me again."

Anna then turned away and exited through the door, leaving Victor alone.



## 14 - Chapter 14

Gripping Erik's mask in her hand, Anna walked through the corridor towards her dressing room. She couldn't believe what had just happened. How could Victor do that to Erik? To her? She hated Victor. Hated him more than she had ever hated anyone before. It would be too soon if she never saw his face again.

Finally reaching her dressing room, Anna reached for the doorknob, but stopped suddenly when Madame Giry approached her.

"Anna, where have you been?" She asked her. "I've been looking everywhere for you. And where's Erik?"

"I'm not really in the mood to talk right now, Madame." Anna said. "Erik and I have just been through a hard time."

"Why?" Madame Giry asked, concerned. "What has happened?"

Anna didn't answer, but held out Erik's mask for Madame Giry to see.

"Oh my God." Madame Giry breathed. "That is Erik's mask. Did you take it off of him?"

Anna shook her head. "Victor did."

"Victor?" Madame Giry asked surprisingly. "Why would he do that?"

"He said he wanted to prove to me that Erik was a monster." Anna answered darkly. "So he ripped off Erik's mask right in front of me."

"Did you see his face?" Madame Giry asked.

Anna shook her head. "He covered his face with his hands before I got a chance to. I told him to leave Victor and I alone for a while, and he did." She clutched the mask angrily. "I've never been so mad in my entire life. I hate Victor. I never want to speak to him again. I hate him."

Madame Giry stepped forward and placed a hand on Anna's shoulder. "I'm so sorry for what has happened to you. Is there anything I can do?"

Anna nodded. "Keep Victor away from my room for the rest of the night. I will be with Erik, and I don't want Victor to disturb us. Please, can you do that for me, Madame?"

Madame Giry nodded. "I will try, Anna."

"Thank you." Anna said.

She turned back to her dressing room door, opened it, and stepped inside. When she looked into her room, she expected to find Erik there, waiting for her. But to her surprise, he wasn't. Anna shut the door and sighed deeply. She removed her white mask shaped like birds wings and threw it to the ground. Then, she reached up and unclipped her hair, letting the waves fall around her face.

Looking intently at the black eye mask in her hands, Anna crossed her room and stopped in front of her full-length mirror. She then reached out, grabbed hold of the glass, and slid it away from the gold frame. She looked down the dark passageway leading to Erik's lair.

Taking a deep breath, Anna walked through the mirror and into the dark passageway. She shut the mirror behind her and began her descent towards Erik's underground lair. She remembered the first time she had come down here. She was so scared, yet excited about what she may find. It was the first time she met Erik, many months ago.

Anna smiled when Erik's black stallion came into view. When the horse caught sight of her, it whinnied in excitement. When Anna reached its side, she stroked its long black mane, while it nuzzled her side. She still couldn't figure out how Erik managed to sneak this horse down here in the first place.

Shrugging it off, Anna continued her walk down the passage.

She walked in silence, until finally, the underground lake came into view. She looked out into the torch-lit chamber and gasped when she saw Erik sitting at the waters edge, his face in his hands. She slowly climbed down the stone steps and approached Erik's side. He didn't seem to realize she was there. Anna knelt down close to Erik and gently brushed back his brown hair. Erik raised his head a bit, and removed one hand from his face, leaving the other to hide what a mask once covered. He looked at her, sadness filling his green eyes.

"Are you alright?" She whispered softly.

Erik nodded, not saying a word.

Anna sighed, looking out to the misty lake. "I'm sorry for what my brother did. I don't know what's gotten into him."

"It's not your fault." Erik whispered so softly, she almost didn't hear him.

Without words, Anna took Erik's mask and held it out to him. He looked at it for a short time, before finally taking it. He turned his face away from her, removed his hand, and slipped the mask on. Anna could understand why he still didn't want her to see his face. He knew that she would not judge him. He knew that she would love him no matter what.

Anna watched as Erik turned back to her and got to his feet. He held out his hand and lifted her off the ground. Anna looked at Erik's arm and gasped when she saw the rip in his black shirt where Victor had cut him. Blood was running down his arm, staining the fabric.

"This needs attention." She told him. "I can bandage it up for you."

Erik shook his head. "No, it's alright. I'm fine."

Anna gripped his hand. "No, Erik. I don't want it to get infected. It's a deep cut. I need to bandage it up."

Erik looked into her eyes for a long while. Knowing that he'll never be able to defeat her stubbornness, he gave a sigh and nodded.

Anna gave him a small smile before taking his hand and leading him over to the gondola, which was docked at the waters edge. He climbed into the boat and grabbed the pole, which was used to steer. Anna climbed in after him and sat down at his feet. Erik then untied the rope, which kept the boat from floating away, and began to steer it across the misty lake towards his lair.

After a long while of silence, Erik steered the boat around the corner and his lair finally came into view. The hundreds of candles, which filled the vast chamber, gave a warm, comforting glow to the room.

Anna loved the way this lair looked. It had a sort of elegant, gothic, and romantic feel to it.

Finally reaching shore, Erik jumped out of the gondola and leaned the steering pole against the wall.

Then, he held his hand out and helped Anna out of the boat. She smiled at him and motioned to his bed.

"Go sit down." She said. "So I can take a look at your arm."

Erik nodded and walked up the stone steps towards his large bed with the red silk sheets. He sat down comfortably on the edge of the bed and looked up at Anna.

"Take off your cape and jacket." She told him.

Erik raised an eyebrow, but immediately did as he was told. He removed his long black cape from his shoulders and threw it to the ground. Anna knelt down in front of him and helped him unbutton his black jacket, since it was hard for him to do it with one hand. Slowly, she helped him pull the jacket over his shoulders, trying to be as gentle as she could be when she uncovered his cut. When it was finally off, and Erik was wearing nothing but his open collared white shirt and his tight black pants, Anna gently took hold of his arm.

She looked at the stained red fabric and frowned.

"I'll have to rip the sleeve off." She told him.

Before Erik could say a word, Anna took the thin white fabric of his sleeve and tore it off about an inch above the cut.

"You know," Erik said. "I don't have a lot of shirts like this."

"Well, would you rather have a shirt, or an arm?" Anna asked him. "Cause if I don't treat this cut, you could lose your whole arm."

Erik raised an eyebrow. "Don't you think you're over exaggerating a little?"

"Absolutely not." She said. "I just care too much."

Erik smiled and watched as Anna walked over to the lake's edge and dipped the sleeve into the water. Then, she walked back, kneeled down in front of him, and gently began to wipe the blood off of his arm. Erik bit his lip, trying not to wince at the pain. Anna worked delicately, so as not to hurt him. After all the blood was wiped off, she placed the wet sleeve on the ground beside her. Reaching for the hem of her dress, Anna grasped the shimmering blue fabric tightly, and tore a strip right off the skirt.

"Anna." Erik gasped. "Your dress."

"I don't care." She said. "Victor gave it to me."

Erik frowned as Anna gently wrapped the fabric around his wound. Once it was tight enough, she tied the ends together, and smiled at him.

"All done." She said. "Feel better now?"

Erik flexed his arm a bit. "Much."

Anna smiled, standing up. Before she could make another move, Erik grasped her hand tightly, smiling at her.

"Thank you, Anna." He said. "I've never had anyone worry about me before. Even if it is for a little cut."

"Hey, that little cut could become a big problem." She said sternly. Her serious expression softened to a smile as she leaned down and kissed his cheek. "But you're welcome anyway."

Erik motioned over to his organ. "Could you please get me my white mask? I'd feel more comfortable wearing it."

Anna nodded. "Of course."

Exiting the bedroom, Anna walked down the stone steps and over to Erik's grand, beautiful organ. Dozens of candles covered the top of the instrument, along with hundreds of scattered music sheets. Anna spotted Erik's half-white mask instantly, but as she went to pick it up, something caught her eye. It was a sheet of music sitting upright on the organ stand, and it was titled "My Angel You". Curious, Anna picked up the music sheet, along with the mask, and headed back to the bedroom.

As she walked, her eyes read over the notes. It sounded like an absolutely beautiful song. Erik must have written it. Finally reaching the bedroom, Anna handed the mask to Erik, her eyes never leaving the music sheet.

As Erik turned his face away to slip on his mask, he asked, "What's that?"

"A sheet of music with a song on it." She told him. "Did you write it?"

With his half-white mask finally on his face, Erik shrugged. "I've written many songs, Anna. You'll have to refresh my memory. What's it called?"

"My Angel You." She answered.

Suddenly, Erik jumped up and snatched the paper out of her hand.

"What? What is it?" She asked, alarmed.

Erik held the music behind his back. "Its just something I've been working on. Nothing important, really."

Anna raised an eyebrow. "If its not so important, then why wont you let me see it? What's so bad about a song?"

"Nothing." He answered quickly.

Anna smiled and stepped towards him. "Then, how about you play it for me on your organ? I would love to hear it."

Erik stood for a while, apparently thinking of a way to get out of the situation he was in. But Anna knew he'd never find one. Without warning, Anna snatched the sheet music back and walked to his organ.

"If you wont play it, I will." She said over his shoulder.

Erik sighed and ran after her. "Fine, Anna. I'll play it."

She shook her head, sitting down at the organ. "You wont be able to play it with your bad arm. I'll play, and you can sing the lyrics to it if you like."

Erik leaned his back against the organ and watched intently as she began to softly play the tune he was so familiar with. Her fingers danced along the keys, the notes echoing through the underground chamber.

When the lump in his throat finally subsided, Erik began to sing:

"As I look into your eyes,

I see all the reasons why,

My life's worth a thousand skies.

You're the simplest love I've known,

And the purest one I'll own,

No you'll never be alone.

My Angel you

Are the reason I could fly.

And cause of you,

I don't have to wonder why.

Angel you,

There's no more just getting by,

You're the reason I feel so alive.

Though these words I sing are true,

They still fail to capture you

As mere words can only do.

How do I explain that smile?

And how it turns my world around,

Keeping my feet on the ground.

I will sooth you if you fall,

I'll be right here if you call,

You're my greatest love of all.

You are the reason I could fly,

And cause of you

I don't have to wonder why.

My Angel you,

There's no more just getting by.

You're the reason I feel so alive.

Anna you make me feel so alive."

As soon as he finished singing, Anna stopped playing the organ and just sat in silence for a long period of time. Her head was bowed and her body began to tremble as tears trickled down her cheek. She felt Erik's gentle hand on her shoulder and she looked up at him.

"That song was about me?" She whispered.

Erik nodded. "I started writing it the very same night I heard you sing. Do you like it?"

Anna stood up, wrapping him in a tender embrace. "Oh, Erik. It's beautiful. I love it. I absolutely love it."

She raised her head and looked into his eyes. "I love you so much, Erik. Thank you."

He smiled, stroking her hair. "Anything for you, my angel."

Anna smiled and pressed a tender kiss to his lips.

He was hers at last.

\*\*\*\*\*

Grasping his hand tightly, Anna led him back towards the bedroom, their eyes locked in a look of desire. When they finally reached the bedroom, Anna kissed him again, still soft and tender, and he kissed back. He kissed her neck, her cheek, her eyelids, and she felt the moisture of his mouth linger wherever his lips had touched.

She pulled back from him and, without speaking, started to undo the buttons of his shirt. He watched her do this, and listened to her soft breaths as she made her way downward. With each button, he could feel her fingers brushing against his skin, and she smiled softly at him when she finally finished. Erik felt her slide her hands inside, touching him as lightly as possible. Anna admired his toned body and porcelain skin. But she suddenly saw on his chest...scars. Long, brutal scars, some crossing over each other in a brutal manor. She looked up at him, but he said nothing. Anna knew what they were from. All those years of being beaten in the Gypsy Circus, of course Erik had wounds. Leaning in, she kissed the scars on his chest gently, as she pulled his shirt over his shoulders, locking arms behind his back. She lifted

her head and allowed him to kiss her as he rolled his shoulders, freeing himself from the sleeves. With that, Erik slowly stepped towards her. He pressed his body against hers and she felt his hands running up and down her back. She kissed his bare shoulders lightly as his hands slowly untied the back of her dress. When he finally finished, Anna stepped back and allowed her dress to slip off her shoulders and fall to the floor. Erik then removed her corset and undergarments, exposing her body to him. She felt short of breath as Erik leaned in and kissed her between her breasts, running his tongue up to her neck. His hands gently caressed her back and she felt their heated bodies press together skin to skin. He kissed her neck and she slowly reached for the button of his pants, undid it, and watched as he slipped them off his body. It was almost slow motion as their naked bodies finally came together, both of them trembling with the feeling of what they've always dreamed of sharing.

Anna kissed him again, and with his hands on her back, she felt him slowly lowering her down onto the bed. He was struck by her beauty. Her shimmering hair trapped the light and made it sparkle, and her skin was soft and beautiful, almost glowing in the candlelight. He felt her hands on his back, beckoning him.

He kissed her softly, and she brought a hand up to his face and touched his cheek, brushing it softly with her fingers. He smiled at her, and she raked her fingers back through his usually perfect hair, messing it up even more. She smiled, but ever so slowly, her smile slipped away and she was left gazing at his mask. Erik could feel that she was uneasy and he sighed, looking away from her. He began to get up, but Anna held him down.

"No, Erik...please...let me see you..." She pleaded.

To her astonishment, after Erik searched her eyes for a long time, he nodded and leaned in towards her. He remained still, and his eyes refused to make contact with hers.

Slowly, Anna reached up, hands trembling. As she curled her fingers underneath his mask, his eyes shut in fear. He looked so frightened, her heart wept for him. She was as gentle as she could be in removing his mask, and when she saw his face, she dropped the mask on the floor. Erik still hadn't opened his eyes, but with his chest pressed against hers, she could feel his heart racing. Slowly, Anna reached up and touched his deformed cheek. She smiled, and kissed it without fear. Erik opened his eyes and she saw terror, surprise, and hope gleaming in them.

"You do not fear me?" He asked.

"Never." Anna replied, and with that, she lifted her head and pressed a tender kiss to his soft lips. Erik kissed her back, and she felt a tear roll off his cheek and fall onto her face like rain.

Erik gazed down into her blue eyes. "I love you, my angel. Now and always."

She smiled. "And I you, my Erik."

As they pressed their lips together, she wrapped her arms around his neck and her soft legs around his. They were one.

## 15 - Chapter 15

Erik watched her sleep.

He couldn't help himself. She looked so peaceful lying there beside him; her body was spent and radiant. He felt her steady, warm breaths on the side of his neck, and he wrapped her tighter in his arms. Never in his life had he felt as good as he did right there and then. Never in his life had he loved anyone as much as he loved Anna. Never in his life had any woman accepted his deformity like she did. He lifted his hand up to his face and touched his tender cheek. For some strange reason, he didn't wince in repulsion like he always did. Now that Anna had seen his face and accepted it, he learned to do the same. He didn't think of himself as a monster any longer, but as a man. The luckiest man in the world.

Just then, Anna stirred in his arms. Erik watched as her eyes slowly fluttered open and looked up at him. She smiled, and Erik placed a finger to her lips, to keep her from speaking. And for a long time, they just looked at each other. Erik stroked the back of her wavy hair, trying to build up the courage to finally say something. She continued to smile at him, her hand running over his bare chest.

When the lump in his throat finally subsided, Erik whispered, "You are the answer to every prayer I've offered. You are a song, a dream, a whisper, and I don't know how I could have lived without you for as long as I have. I love you, Anna, more than you will ever imagine. I always have, I always will."

Tears gleamed in Anna's eyes. "Oh, Erik."

She wrapped her arms tightly around him, holding him close. He could feel her warm tears falling onto his chest, and he kissed the top of her head. For a long time they just held each other, there being no need for words. In all his years of living, Erik had never felt more complete. He had always known that something was missing in his life, and now he realized that it was Anna. She was his soul mate, and his world. He would do anything just to see her smile.

Erik brushed back Anna's hair. "It's still early. Go back to sleep. You've had a long night."

Anna breathed deeply, nuzzling his neck. "I will. But you have to as well. I know for a fact that you haven't slept at all."

Erik laughed a bit. "You caught me, Anna. I've been watching you sleep the entire night. How do you know me so well?"

She smiled. "It's a talent."

Erik gave her a warm smile and turned onto his side, so that he was now facing her. They stared into each other's eyes for what seemed like forever, none of them wanting to lose sight of the other. Erik was lightly playing with Anna's wavy hair, as she softly ran her fingers up and down his arm. After a while, her eyes began to slowly flutter shut as sleep once again wrapped her in its wings. Erik was also feeling very tired, as his eyelids started becoming heavy.

"Anna..." He whispered softly into her ear.

"Yes Erik?" She breathed, her eyes closing.

"I love you." He whispered.

A small smile formed on her lips. "I love you too."

Erik watched as she began to drift to sleep, but he couldn't let her fall asleep yet. Not until he finally asked her. After a deep breath, and a silent prayer, Erik snuggled closer to her warm body.

"Anna..." He whispered softly.

Her eyes remained shut. "Yes, Erik?"

"Will you marry me?" He breathed into her ear.

At that instant, Anna's eyes shot open and she looked at him in shock, tears brimming in her eyes. Erik held his breath as he waited for an answer.

She hugged him tightly. "Oh, Erik. Of course I will."

Erik smiled and wrapped her in his arms, burying his face in her hair. A tear rolled down his cheek as he rubbed her back. Kissing the top of her head, Erik pulled the silk sheet tighter around both of them and held her close.

"Go to sleep, my angel." He breathed. "Dream of me."

She smiled, closing her eyes. "Always do."

And with that, they both quickly fell asleep in each other's arms, feeling happier than they had ever felt in their entire lives.

\*\*\*\*\*

After spending the night and most of the morning sleeping, Anna and Erik finally awoke. They had breakfast in bed, tea and biscuits, nothing spectacular. They bathed together in the misty lake, and afterward, they dressed. Erik wore his normal attire, half-white mask, white shirt, tight black pants and black boots, and Anna put on her silvery blue dress.

They held hands as they made their way up the passageway towards Anna's dressing room. As they walked, Erik would sing a few of his favorite songs, and Anna would listen with her head on his shoulder, almost feeling the words. She loved his singing voice, along with everything else about him. She couldn't believe she and Erik were engaged to be married. It was like a dream come true.

"Erik..." She whispered.

He looked down at her. "Yes?"

She frowned a bit. "How are we to be married if you can't be seen in public? And how are we to keep this secret from Victor?"

He smiled. "Don't you worry, Anna. Victor will never know. We are going to elope, and be married in a place far from here, where we can be in peace."

She smiled and nodded. "Good idea. But will we ever return?"

"Of course." Erik said. "This is my home. I could never leave it. And you belong here in the Opera Populaire. Great talent such as yours can't be wasted."

Anna squeezed his hand. "So, until we elope, our engagement is to be kept secret from everyone?"

Erik nodded. "Yes. But you may tell Madame Giry if you wish. I know she would be happy for us. Happy that we can both finally be together forever, and not have to worry about anything. We just have to make sure Victor doesn't find out. He'll be a big problem."

Anna nodded with a frown. "I know. I just hope he'll grow to understand how much I love you."

Erik kissed her cheek. "Don't worry. He will soon enough."

Finally, after walking a bit more, they arrived back at the two-way mirror leading into Anna's dressing room. Erik slid the glass away from the frame and they both stepped through the mirror. The room was quite dark, and Anna had to be careful and watch her step as she walked over to her dresser. She lit a few candles, and brought the room to view.

Turning back to face Erik, Anna's smile quickly reverted into a look of utter horror when she noticed who was standing at the wall behind him. Erik noticed her expression and looked over his shoulder to see what she was looking at.

He gasped.

"Hello there." Victor smirked, stepping towards them. "Where have you two been all night?"

Erik held his arm out in front of Anna, as if trying to protect her from her brother. "Stay back." He hissed.

Victor looked offended. "Erik, Erik, Erik, is that a way to talk to me? I'm just trying to make light



conversation with you. I'm your friend."

Erik snorted. "If we're friends, I'm the bloody Queen of England."

Victor just continued to smile, which made Anna even uneasier.

"Trust me Erik." Victor said. "After today, you'll be begging to be my friend."

"How so?" Erik asked.

Victor spread his arms. "Why, I control your fate."

"My fate?" Erik asked, confused. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Victor smiled as he lifted his hand into the air. As soon as he snapped his fingers, the doors to Anna's dressing room burst open and five police officers, armed with guns, stormed into the room.

"No!" Anna cried out.

They headed for Erik. Anna tried to block them, but Victor grabbed hold of her arm and yanked her away. She watched helplessly, tears in her eyes, as they threw her lover onto his knees and tied his arms behind his back. Erik struggled, but they overpowered him easily.

Victor smiled smugly down at Erik. "You sir, are under arrest for murder. I think everyone will be quite pleased that the infamous Phantom of the Opera had finally been caught. I say, I might get a medal for this."

Anna glared hatefully at her brother. "You monster. I can't believe you. How could you do this to me? I'm your sister!"

Victor snorted. "You'll thank me one day, Anna, for freeing you from this man's murderous clutches. I've just saved you from becoming another one of his helpless victims."

He looked back at Erik, who was glaring up at him hatefully. If the police hadn't been holding him down, he definitely would have jumped up and strangled Victor to death. At that moment, Anna wished he would.

"You see, Erik? I called the police, informed them of your whereabouts, and helped them succeed in your capture. And now, they've allowed me to decide your sentence." Victor bent down towards Erik, whispering, "Don't you wish you were my friend now?"

Erik jerked his head away, growling. "I would sooner die than call you my friend, you wretched monster."

Victor frowned, standing up straight. "So be it." He turned to the police. "Lock him up with no food or water for the rest of the day and night. Tomorrow at sunrise, he shall be hung."

"No!" Anna cried out. "Victor you can't do this!"

She grabbed his arm desperately, but he looked at her with no sign of pity in his ice blue eyes.

"I'm afraid I already have." He said emotionless.

And with that, he walked out of the room. The police followed close behind, dragging Erik with them. As soon as they were gone, Anna fell to her knees and began to weep uncontrollably. She trembled and covered her face with her hands as the tears poured down her cheeks. How could this happen to her? Just a few hours ago, she and Erik had made love, and had become engaged. Now, Victor had betrayed her, and Erik was sentenced to death. It was all a horrible nightmare.

Hearing footsteps enter her room, Anna raised her head a bit. Through her blurry vision, she saw that it was Madame Giry and (to her surprise) Carlotta. Both older women rushed to her side and knelt down beside her. Anna looked up at Madame Giry, and collapsed into her arms, weeping.

Madame Giry wrapped her in a comforting hug. "I'm so sorry, my dear."

"Madame, you were supposed to keep Victor away from my room." Anna said. "What happened?"

"I tried to keep him away, but when the police showed up, I was forced to stand aside and let him in."

Madame Giry frowned. "I'm so sorry."

Anna hugged the older woman tighter, crying even harder. "I can't believe they're going to kill Erik. If...if he dies, I will not be able to live again. My life is incomplete without him. I'll die without him."

Madame Giry hugged her tighter, tears forming in her eyes. "I know, Anna. It's a tragedy. Erik was like a son to me, and I loved him like one."

Anna suddenly felt Carlotta's hand on her shoulder. She looked back at her supposed rival and saw that she was also crying.

"I am so sorry, Anna." Carlotta said. "This is all my fault. I always thought Erik was a monster, and I told Victor he was. But now, as I see your reaction, I realize that it is Victor who is really the monster."

Anna wiped away a tear and allowed Carlotta to give her a comforting hug. She even managed to hug back. At this time, Carlotta was one of the nicest people in the world compared to Victor.

Pulling away from Carlotta, Anna turned to Madame Giry. "Where are they locking Erik up?"

"There's a jail not too far from here that I'm sure he will be held." Madame Giry answered. "I know you want to see him Anna, but trust me, it's not the safest place for a woman like you."

"I don't care." Anna said angrily. "I am going there tonight, and I am going to see my Erik. I don't care what happens to me, just as long as I see him."

Madame Giry nodded. "I will go with you."

"As will I." Carlotta added.

Anna shook her head. "No. This is something I'd rather do alone."

Madame Giry and Carlotta both nodded in understanding.

Slowly, Anna rose to her feet and walked over to her piano. There, in the vase, was the white rose Erik had given her. It was beginning to wilt and die, just like her soul. She touched the flower softly, and watched as two white petals crumpled up and fell onto the piano. Anna shut her eyes tightly as a tear rolled down her cheek.

Everything was falling apart. If Erik died at sunrise tomorrow, her life would not be worth living any longer. She would crumple up and die of loneliness, just as the white rose did. Erik was the reason she woke up every morning. He was the reason she continued to fight the lung problems she had. He was the reason she was still living. But now, because of Victor, she was going to lose the one person in her life who truly understood her, and she was going to give up her fight, and die.

She hoped Victor was happy with his so-called accomplishments. He was going to lose everything, and she hoped with all her heart that he regretted what he did to both her and Erik. And when he died, she hoped he enjoyed his stay in hell. He deserved it.

Tonight, she was going to see Erik, and she was going to stay with him until sunrise. Even if it killed her, she was going stay with him.

## 16 - Chapter 16

Erik struggled violently as the police hauled him through the dark corridors of the prison. Torches lined the stone walls, and there was a slight, uncomfortable dampness lingering in the air. They passed by barred jail cells occupied by hollow-eyed criminals that watched as he passed. He could hear their mutters and mocking laughter as he was dragged to his cell.

Victor led the way to where Erik's cell was. Erik couldn't stop glaring at him for a second. This man ruined his entire life, and Anna's as well. He hated him more than he had ever hated anyone in his life. He was so close to finally completing his life, so close to finally marrying Anna, and Victor had to ruin it all.

Victor looked back over his shoulder. "Not much farther now, Erik."

Erik growled hatefully at him, as he was continuously being shoved forward towards his cell. Finally, after some more walking, Victor came to a halt at one of the last cells in the corridor. One of the police fumbled through a ring of jangling keys and unlocked the barred door. Victor pushed open the door, and stepped aside as the police threw Erik inside the small cell.

Erik hit the cold stone floor hard, nearly knocking the sense out of him. He hadn't even gotten up before the police grabbed hold of his arms and dragged him to the other side of the small cell. He struggled as they sat him with his back against the stone wall. Then, they pulled his arms behind his back and chained them to the wall. When they had finally finished, the five police stepped aside and allowed Victor to step forward.

"Comfortable, Erik?" He asked. "No? Good."

Erik shook his head a bit, trying to get his bangs out of his eyes. "I swear to God, Victor. I hope you burn in hell for this."

Victor laughed a bit. "Oh, it won't be me in hell, Erik. You see, I'm not the murderous criminal here. You are."

"I am no longer the man I once was!" Erik shouted angrily. "Can't you get that through your thick head? I've changed!"

"I don't care what you, or Anna say." Victor said. "I won't let you hurt my sister. She's suffering enough as it is."

Erik blinked. "What do you mean?"

"She's dying, Erik!" Victor shouted. "She's dying! You know all the coughing and the sudden collapses she suffers from? Those are results of the lung problems, which killed our mother twenty years ago. She has been diagnosed with the same problems, and they are slowly killing her. Don't you see, Erik? She hasn't much time to live."

Erik's jaw fell open. "No... You're lying."

"I wish I was, Erik." Victor frowned. "But it's the truth. Anna is dying. And I'm just trying to protect her for as long as I can."

Erik lowered his head, tears stinging his eyes. "But putting me in prison and sentencing me to death will only make her worse." He whispered. "If I die, she will follow after me."

Victor knelt down beside Erik. "Erik, I know my sister loves you, but I can't let you hurt her. You are the most wanted murderer in all of Paris. You are a monster, and I can't let my sister suffer because of you."

"I am no monster!" Erik shouted angrily. "It is you, Victor, who is the true monster. By putting me to death, you have lost your sister forever. She will never forgive you for this."

“It doesn’t matter if she does or doesn’t.” Victor said. “As long as she’s safe, I’ll be happy.” He rose to his feet. “I must go now, Erik. But don’t worry; ten o’clock is visiting hours, so I will allow you to see Anna for one last time. After that, it’s only the rays of the morning sun you shall fear. For when you see them, it will be the dawning of your last day on earth.”

Then, Victor bent down, took hold of Erik’s half-white mask, and ripped it off his face. Erik quickly turned his face away. He heard the startled gasps of the five policemen who had been watching from the other side of the cell. Victor took hold of Erik’s jaw and turned his face back towards him. Erik glared venomously as Victor’s ice blue eyes studied his maskless face.

After a short while, Victor let go of Erik’s jaw and stood up. He looked at the half-white mask in his hands. “You won’t be needing this anymore, Erik. I’m sure the crowd will want to see your face before your hanging.”

And with that, Victor turned and exited the cell, the five policemen following. They shut the barred cell door behind them, and locked it quickly. Erik shared one last hateful glare with Victor, before they all walked back down the corridor, the echo of their footsteps fading into silence.

Erik lowered his head as tears began to sting his eyes. How could this happen? How could Anna, his beloved angel, be dying? How could she, when she seemed so full of energy and life? Just the very thought of her suffering made the tears pour down his cheek even faster.

Erik raised his head and looked up at the small barred window near the ceiling of his cell. He could see the light blush of afternoon sunlight shining into the small room. It would be a long time before ten o’clock arrived, but he was sure that sunrise would come far too quickly.

\*\*\*\*\*

Anna’s face was expressionless as she walked briskly through the dark streets of Paris towards the prison. The cool night air caused the skirt of her black dress to billow, and she wrapped her long, black hooded cloak tighter around herself. She could already see the tall, dark silhouette of the prison against the starry night sky. Moonlight shone over the stone walls, giving the building a dark, menacing look, which sent shivers up Anna’s spine.

The prison looked so frightening, it was hard for her to picture Erik being locked up inside it. She couldn’t even imagine what it must be like to be a prisoner in such a dark, frightening place.

As Anna approached the front doors of the prison, she could see a group of about six men all constructing a platform of some sort. She could see a tall beam standing on top of the platform, and a few men hammering a few nails to it. When one of the men spotted her standing a few feet away, he jumped off the platform and approached her.

“Is there something I can do for you, Madame?” He asked.

Anna shook her head. “No, Monsieur. I was just wondering what the wooden platform was for.”

He scratched his fuzzy black beard. “Why, it’s for the hanging of the Phantom of the Opera tomorrow at sunrise. Didn’t you hear? He’s been caught and he’s locked up in this very prison.”

Anna shut her eyes and bowed her head. “I see.” She whispered.

“What are you doing out so late at night, Madame?” The Man asked. “This is no place for a lovely woman such as yourself.”

Anna sniffed back her tears. “I’m here to visit my fiancé. He’s been locked away and is sentenced to death.”

“Oh dear.” He said. “What’s he imprisoned for?”

“Murder.” Anna frowned. “But he’s innocent.”

The man nodded sadly. “We’ve had a lot of men who have been imprisoned for a crime they did not commit. I’m sorry for what has happened to you.”

Anna nodded. "Thank you."

She then turned away and headed towards the tall wooden doors of the prison. Grabbing hold of the rusted handle, she opened the creaking door and stepped inside the dark building. It was very cold and damp inside the prison, even after she shut the door behind her. Torches lined the stone walls, rats scurried around the floor, and dozens of guards armed with swords marched up and down the corridors. Anna shuddered and wrapped her cloak tighter around herself. She took a few steps forward and froze when she heard footsteps coming towards her.

Anna looked back and a deep feeling of loathing and anger filled her body when she saw that it was Victor's footsteps she heard. She watched as her older brother stopped in front of her and crossed his arms.

"I see you've come to visit the murderous Phantom of the Opera?" He asked.

"His name is Erik." Anna hissed. "And yes I've come to visit him."

Victor shrugged. "Fine. Do as you wish. Follow me."

He turned and began to walk down one of the dark corridors. Anna remained still, and when Victor noticed she wasn't following him, he stopped and looked at her.

"Are you coming?" He asked.

"I don't trust you." She hissed.

Victor shrugged. "I'm not asking you to. But if you want to see Erik before he dies, I suggest you follow me. I will take you to his cell."

Anna hesitated a bit before finally deciding to follow Victor. They walked in complete silence, the only sound coming from their boots hitting the stone floor. Anna refused to look at Victor for a second and just let him lead her to where Erik's cell was. After a long while, they came to a halt at one of the last cells in the corridor. Victor pulled out a set of jangling keys, unlocked the door, and stepped inside.

"Go on in." He told her. "I'll be back for you later."

Anna gave her brother one last hateful glance before opening the barred cell door and stepping inside. She heard Victor shut the door behind her and walk away, his footsteps fading down the corridor. She looked around the small stone room until her eyes finally stopped at the dark figure sitting against the back wall. The moonlight, which shone in through the small barred window near the ceiling of the cell, was her only way of seeing him. She held her breath as she stepped towards her lover. His head was hung low, his arms were chained behind his back, and he was shivering. No wonder, the small cell was quite damp, and the cool night breeze was blowing in through the window. He didn't seem to notice she was there.

Kneeling down beside him, Anna removed her long black cloak and wrapped it around Erik's shivering body. Erik shifted a bit and ever so slowly, his head rose and he looked at her with wet green eyes. Anna noticed that his mask was gone, and she stroked the side of his face gently. Erik shut his eyes, and a tear rolled down his cheek. Anna could feel tears stinging her own eyes and she buried her face in his neck.

"I'm so sorry." She breathed into his neck.

Erik nuzzled the top of her head. "It's not your fault. Don't blame yourself."

She lifted her head and looked at him. "Yes it is, Erik. If I hadn't come here, then Victor wouldn't have either." She looked away. "It would have been better if we never met. None of this would have happened."

Erik frowned. "Anna...look at me."

Anna sniffed back her tears and looked back into Erik's green eyes.

"Anna, I'd rather die tomorrow, than have spent entire life without knowing you." He whispered.

"You're the greatest thing that's ever happened to me."

Tears poured down Anna's face as she wrapped her arms around Erik and buried her face into his

neck. She began to weep quietly and he kissed the top of her head. Softly, he began to sing in her ear:

“If I never knew you,

If I never felt this love,

I would have no inkling of,

How precious life can be.

And if I never held you,

I would never have a clue,

How at last I’ll find in you,

The missing part of me.

In this world so full of fear,

Full of rage and lies,

I can see the truth so clear,

In your eyes, so dry your eyes.

And I’m so grateful to you,

I’d have lived my whole life through,

Lost forever,

If I never knew you.”

Anna raised her head and looked at him with wet eyes. She held her hand to the side of his face, and he gave her a small smile. Anna then wrapped her arms around her lover’s neck and pressed a tender kiss to his soft lips. He kissed back, and she felt a warm tear running down his cheek.

When they parted, Erik whispered, “I love you, Anna. Even after death, I will still love you. You are my everything, and I would have loved to dance with you on our wedding day as your husband.”

“I love you too, Erik.” She breathed, kissing him again.

“Anna...” He whispered when they parted. “I don’t want you to be at the hanging tomorrow. I can’t bare to have you see what they will do to me.”

She raised her head. “But, Erik...”

“No buts.” He said sternly. “Please, Anna. Don’t come to the hanging.”

Anna looked at him for a long time, her eyes searching his. “Erik, I love you more than anything in my life. I always will, but I have to be there. I don’t know why, but I have to.”

Erik frowned. “You’re not going to like what you will see.”

She laid her head on his shoulder. "I don't care. I'm going to be there."

Erik sighed and buried his face in her hair. They held each other for a long while, until they heard the sound of footsteps growing louder and louder. Anna raised her head and looked back to the cell door. Just then, Victor appeared and took out his set of jangling keys. He unlocked the barred door and opened it.

"Come, Anna." He said. "Time for you to leave."

Anna looked back at Erik. "I can't leave you." She breathed.

"You never will." He told her. "No matter what happens, I'll always be with you...forever."

Anna leaned in and kissed Erik softly before getting to her feet. She then crossed the small room and walked through the door. She watched helplessly as Victor shut the door behind her and locked it.

Victor placed the keys on a hook on his belt. He looked up at her. "You should head back, Anna. It's late, and you need your rest."

She flashed him a deadly glare. "It's a little late for you to start becoming compassionate, Victor. Just leave. I can show myself out."

Victor sighed and turned away, walking back down the corridor and out of sight. Anna looked back through the bars of the cell door at Erik's dark form.

"Goodbye, my Erik." She breathed quietly.

And with that, she turned and walked back down the dark corridor towards the front door. When she finally exited the prison, she wiped away her tears and looked up at the night sky in despair.

Sunrise was only a few hours away.

## 17 - Chapter 17

Erik slowly raised his head when he heard the faint sound of footsteps growing louder. He yawned and saw, through his blurry vision, three dark shadows. He heard the sound of jangling keys, and the barred cell door slowly squeak open. Erik blinked a bit, and when his vision cleared, he saw that the three shadows were none other than Victor accompanied by two guards.

Erik froze and looked up at the small barred window. A wash of fear filled his body when he saw the faint orange glow of the sunrise. But how could that be? He felt as if he had only just finished speaking with Anna. He had fallen asleep shortly after she had left, but it only felt like a second, let alone the entire night. He was right about one thing...sunrise had come far too early.

He looked up at Victor, who was standing a few feet away from him, his arms crossed, his face expressionless. He looked as if he hadn't slept most of the night. His wavy blonde hair was all disheveled and his once sharp blue eyes were now dull and tired looking. But though he looked tired, his face bore the look of determination.

"It's time, Erik." Victor whispered. "Do you have any last words before we take you to your death?"

Erik lowered his head. "Though we may hate each other, Victor," He whispered. "I'm asking you to take good care of Anna for me. Tell her that I love her, and please make sure she doesn't suffer after my death. Tell her that I will always take care of her, and I will always watch her. Tell her that I will be her Angel of Music." He looked at him. "Can you do that for me?"

Victor stood frozen for a while; apparently surprised that Erik was asking such a thing of him. Finally, he spoke.

"Of course I can."

Erik looked away from him, and said nothing more. He sat completely still as the two guards leaned over him and unchained his arms from the wall. Erik flexed his sore arms, before the two guards grabbed them and pulled him to his feet. They used a rope to tie his hands behind his back, and they clutched his upper arms tightly, making sure he wouldn't escape easily. He and Victor shared one last emotionless look, before the guards hauled him out of the cell. Victor stood in the cell for a short while, before finally following close behind.

They walked in complete silence back down the torch-lit passageway, until finally, they exited through the front doors of the prison. Erik took a deep breath of the cool morning air as he looked up at the golden sky. This was the dawning of his last day on earth.

In the distance, he heard a low sound of people shouting. But when the guards hauled him around the corner to the side of the prison, he realized that the crowd was a lot closer than he thought. There were about a hundred people, men and women, young and old, gathered around a wooden platform. When they caught sight of him, their shouts got louder and angrier than ever before.

"There he is!" A man shouted.

"The Phantom of the Opera!" Cried another.

"Hang him!" They all said. "Hang the murderer!"

The crowd all roared with angry shouts as the guards pushed Erik up the stairs and onto the platform.

Erik looked around the crowd and a wave of sorrow fell over him when he caught sight of Anna, Madame Giry, Mr. Firmin, Mr. Andre, and Carlotta all watching at the front of the crowd.

Erik stared at Anna for a long time. She was wearing her black dress and another long, black cloak. Her hair was tucked into the hood of her cloak, and he could see tear stains on her cheeks. She looked as if she hadn't slept all night. He hated seeing her like this.



Erik stood completely still as the two guards positioned him onto the center of the platform, right on top of the trap door. They took the noose, which hung from a tall wooden beam, and wrapped it around Erik's neck. Erik winced a bit when they tightened it. He looked over at Victor, who stood at the front of the platform, his arms crossed, his eyes filled with thought.

Just then, the Chief of Police raised his hands to silence the crowd. When all was silent, he spoke in a clear voice.

"Madame's et Monsieur's... Justice has been served this day. We have captured and arrested the most wanted man in Paris, and because of his murderous crimes, he shall be executed for all to see."

The crowd roared in applause, then hushed when the Chief spoke again.

"Now, members of the Opera Populaire can live in peace once and for all." He said. "For this shall be the end of the reign of the Phantom of the Opera!"

The crowd cheered and applauded as the Chief walked off the platform. Then, all went completely silent as one of the guards approached the lever that would open the trap door from under Erik's feet. Erik saw Anna bury her face in Madame Giry's shoulder, unable to watch. As a tear rolled down Erik's cheek, he shut his eyes tightly, and waited for the end to come.

"Wait!"

Erik's eyes snapped open and he looked over at Victor, who had his hands raised in the air. The guard who had his hand on the lever immediately let go of it, and everyone in the crowd were staring with wide eyes.

Victor looked back at Erik, before turning to the crowd. "I've made a terrible mistake. This man does not deserve this punishment."

Erik's jaw dropped. What in the name of God was Victor doing?

Victor turned to the Chief. "Let him go."

"What!" The Chief shouted. "Monsieur Hart, have you gone mad? This man is the murderous Phantom of the Opera. And besides, this punishment was all your idea in the first place."

"I know." Victor frowned. "I was wrong."

"So, you're just going to let this man go?" The Chief asked. "With no form of punishment whatsoever?"

Victor shook his head. "No, there will be a catch to my decision." He looked down at his sister in the crowd. "Anna, come up here."

Anna walked up onto the platform slowly, her face filled with shock. When she reached her brother's side, he took her hands.

"Anna, I am willing to spare Erik's life on one condition." He said.

"What is it?" She asked uneasily.

Victor looked over at Erik, before turning back to his sister. "You must return to London with me and never see him again."

Anna gasped, pulling away from him. "No..." She breathed.

"Anna, would you rather see Erik die?" Victor asked. "Would you rather live a life thinking that his death was all your fault? Or would you rather let him live knowing you'll never see him again?"

Tears trickled down Anna's cheek as she thought hard for a long while. The crowd was dead silent as they waited for her to make a decision.

"Anna, don't give into it." Erik called out. "Just let me die."

She looked at Erik for a long time, thought filling her wet blue eyes. She glanced over at Victor, who waited patiently.

Anna shut her eyes tightly as a tear rolled down her cheek. She looked over at her lover and whispered, "I'm sorry Erik." She then turned back to Victor. "It's a deal, Victor. If you spare his life, I will return to London with you."

Victor nodded. "A wise decision." He looked over at the guards. "Release him."

The two guards did as ordered and quickly removed the noose from Erik's neck. Then, they untied his arms and stepped back from him once he was free. Everyone in the crowd roared in outrage. Erik rubbed his throat and looked up at Anna. She was just about to run over to him, but Victor snatched her arm.

"No, Anna." He said. "We must go and pack. We leave for London immediately."

Anna glanced back at Erik, before Victor pulled her off the platform and disappeared into the crowd with her. Madame Giry quickly ran up onto the platform to Erik's side.

"Are you alright, Erik?" She asked.

He shook his head, his head hung low. "To tell you the truth, Madame. I'd rather be dead right now."

\*\*\*\*\*

Anna sat quietly on the edge of her bed, her full suitcase lying beside her. She gently touched the dying pedals of the white rose in her hands, and the wilted petals broke off and fell to the floor. A tear rolled down her cheek and fell onto the rose like summer rain. This was all happening so fast.

She couldn't believe she was going back to London. It felt like only yesterday she had first walked into the Opera Populaire, eager to find work. Now the Opera Populaire felt like her home, and everyone in it felt like her family. Especially Madame Giry, who was like a mother to her.

And Erik, her beloved Erik...she was going to leave him forever. It was so hard for her to imagine what her life would be like without him. He filled the empty hole in her heart with his love and compassion; she didn't know how she would be able to handle never seeing him again. But if all this meant saving Erik's life, then she had to do it.

Anna wiped her tears away and looked around her dressing room. She was going to miss living in here. It was nothing like her huge room back home in London, and that was what she loved about it. It was so simple, yet so elegant at the same time. This truly was her home. Though someone might occupy it once she left, it would always be her room.

A knock on the door alerted her.

"Come in." She said, sniffing back her tears.

The wooden door slowly creaked open and Victor poked his head inside. "The carriage is here, Anna. Time to go."

Anna sighed and rose from her seat. She placed the wilted white rose on her dresser, and picked up her suitcase by its handle. She gave the room one last look around, before finally exiting the room. Shutting the door behind her, Anna silently followed her brother through the dimly lit corridors of the theatre. They walked in silence through the corridors, down the spiraling staircase, across the stage, and out the door. The warm afternoon breeze blew through the waves of her long auburn hair as she climbed down the stone steps of the theatre. A small crowd of people was standing next to the horse-drawn carriage that would take her home. She could see Erik standing at the front of the crowd, next to Madame Giry. His head was hung low, and his long black cape was billowing in the breeze. Next to him were Mr. Firmin, Mr. Andre, and Carlotta. When they reached the carriage, Victor took her suitcase and placed it inside. He opened the door wider and stepped aside.

"Go on in." He said.

"Can't I at least say goodbye?" She asked him.

Victor sighed and nodded. "Very well. But make it quick. It will take hours to get back to London."

Anna turned and walked towards the crowd of people she grew to love and respect. When she got close enough, Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre both stepped forward and handed her a bouquet of fresh red roses, before wrapping her in a warm hug.

"It was a pleasure working with you, Mademoiselle Hart." Mr. Andre smiled.

"We will never forget you." Mr. Firmin added.

Anna smiled and kissed their cheeks. "You two are the finest gentlemen I've ever worked with. I will miss you terribly."

She turned and looked over at Carlotta, who had a serious expression on her face. Both women stared loathfully at each other for a short while, before a small smile spread on Carlotta's lips.

"I always did like you, Anna." She admitted. "Though you were a know-it-all at times, I admired your spunk."

Anna smiled. "Even though you are the biggest diva I've ever met, Carlotta, I have managed to look past that and consider you as a friend. I will greatly miss our quaint 'conversations'."

Carlotta smiled and wrapped Anna in a tight hug.

When Anna reached Madame Giry's, she couldn't stop herself from crying. She wrapped the older woman in a tight embrace.

"I will never forget you, Madame." She said. "You've treated me like a daughter ever since I arrived here, and I've never been more thankful. You've guided me, supported me, and loved me like a mother would do. You will always have a special place in my heart."

Madame Giry smiled, a tear running down her cheek. "I will always remember you, Anna. You have made such an impact on not only my life, but also everyone here at the Opera Populaire. You have amazing talent, and you will go very far in life. Just remember to think of us from time to time."

"I always will." Anna smiled, hugging her once more.

After letting go of Madame Giry, Anna stepped towards Erik. She could already feel tears running down her face. He didn't look at her, but continued to stare at the ground. Anna cupped his chin and lifted his head, looking into his eyes. She could clearly read the sorrow and despair in them.

She stroked his cheek softly. "I will always love you, Erik."

He breathed deeply, his eyes gleaming with tears. Without words he stepped towards her and wrapped her in his arms, holding her close. Anna immediately gave into her urge and started to weep uncontrollably on his shoulder. Erik buried his face in her hair and she could feel his warm tears. They held each other for a long while until finally, Erik pulled back.

"I love you more than my life." He whispered. "Please don't forget me."

Anna reached behind her neck and removed her gold heart shaped locket. She took Erik's hand, opened it, and placed the locket inside. She looked up into his eyes and whispered, "I never will."

With that, Anna pressed a warm, tender kiss to his lips. He kissed back and wrapped his arms tight around her, holding her close. They kissed for a while, none of them wanting to let the other go. Finally, they parted.

"Remember me." She whispered softly.

"Always." Erik breathed, kissing her again.

When they finally parted, Anna stepped back from Erik. Her eyes never leaving his, she let go of his hand and walked towards her carriage. Victor opened the door wider and allowed her to step inside.

Once she was seated comfortably, he entered, took a seat across from her, and shut the door behind him.

Anna gazed out the window of the carriage and gave one last look to the one place she truly belonged: the Opera Populaire. She gave small smiles to everyone in the crowd, and they waved goodbye to her. Anna shared one last look with Erik, before the carriage finally moved forward and took off towards London.

## 18 - Chapter 18

Anna stared out the carriage window at the passing countryside. The sun slowly began to set over the horizon, setting the sky a bright violet and gold, and illuminating the passing hills and forests. She could already see the silhouette of her large manor house in the distance. She would soon be home.

She glanced over at Victor sitting across from her. He was lying back in his seat, fast asleep. She frowned at him. How could she possibly forgive him for making her return to London? But...how could she hate him when he saved Erik's life? It was all so complicated, and she didn't really want to think about it at the moment.

What she really wanted to think of was Erik. She shut her eyes and lay back in her seat. A tear trickled down her cheek, and she wiped it away. How could she possibly live without Erik? How could she last a day without hearing his voice, or feeling his touch, or kissing his lips? He was everything to her. He saved her from a life of loneliness and despair, and helped make her the woman she was today. He was her friend, her lover, her teacher, and her soul mate. How could her life ever be fully complete without Erik? It couldn't, not now, not ever.

Noticing how the carriage was starting to slow down, Anna looked out the window and saw that they were headed down the dirt path up towards the front of the house. She picked up her suitcase and placed it onto her lap. When the carriage went over a bump in the path, Victor bounced in his seat and hit his head against the roof of the carriage, jolting him awake. He looked around the carriage in alarm, clearly still half asleep. If Anna hadn't been upset at the moment, she definitely would have laughed at him. But now, after all she had been through, she knew she would never be able to laugh again.

Victor yawned and rubbed his eyes. "Where are we?"

Anna didn't look at him, but continued to stare out the window. "We're home." She said quietly.

Victor looked out the window and smiled. He seemed apparently pleased to see the house again.

Ruffling back his wavy blonde hair, he grabbed his own suitcase and sat up straighter in his seat.

Finally reaching the front of the house, the carriage slowed down to a complete stop. Victor immediately got up from his seat, opened the door, and jumped out of the carriage. He held the door open and waited as Anna slowly stepped out of the carriage, suitcase in hand.

He took a deep breath of the fresh country air. "Good to be home."

Anna didn't respond. Instead, she was gazing up at the beautiful Victorian manor house she once referred to as home. It was three stories high, with red brick walls, tall windows, and a stone walkway leading through the blooming garden and up to the tall cherry wood doors. Since her mother used to be a famous concert pianist, and her father a world-renowned opera singer, they managed to afford the manor house with their earnings from every show. Anna had grown up with one of the richest families in London, and she never once thought herself as lucky. That is, until she moved to the Opera Pupulaire and met Erik. For some reason, this place didn't feel anywhere near as comfortable as the opera house. This wasn't her home.

Victor looked at her and smiled. "Well, don't just stand there. Come on! Let's get inside before it gets too cold. I could really go for some tea right about now."

Anna frowned as she walked alongside her brother up the stone pathway towards the front doors. She couldn't believe how Victor was acting. How could he act like nothing had happened between them? How could he seem so calm and relaxed, when she was slowly falling apart inside? Was he really that shallow? In Anna's mind, all signs pointed to yes.

Reaching the front door, Victor took hold of the large brass handle and pushed the door open. He

stepped inside, Anna following close behind. As Victor shut the door behind them, Anna looked around the grand front hall. It was dimly lit with gold candelabras mounted upon the walls, which were painted a dark blue with white crown molding. The tall windows were dressed with gold and blue drapery, and there was a grand stone staircase leading up to the bedchambers.

Just then, the door to the Library opened wide and two people stepped into the front hall. One was an older man in a black suit Anna remembered as being Richard, the butler. The other was an elderly woman who was the head maid of the household. Her name was Miss Berdine, and she was one of Anna's loyalist companions. When they caught sight of them, they beamed.

"Mr. Victor! Miss Anna! What a surprise to have you back." Richard smiled. "I thought you were going to stay in Paris longer."

Victor shook his head. "No, we decided to return home. It wouldn't be right to just abandon everyone here. Especially after father died."

Richard nodded. "Bless him, he was a good man." He looked at Anna. "Why, Miss Anna. You look lovelier than ever. You've certainly grown since I last saw you."

Anna forced a small smile. "Thank you, Richard. It's a pleasure to see you and Miss Berdine again. I've missed you all."

Miss Berdine walked forward and took Anna's suitcase. "Come, Miss Anna. I will take you to your room. You must be tired from the long trip. Would you like some tea, or maybe I can draw you a bath?"

Anna shook her head. "No, that's alright. I just need some rest."

Miss Berdine smiled and began to walk up the stone steps towards Anna's bedchamber. Anna followed close behind, not even looking back at Victor. Lifting the hem of her black dress a little, she climbed up the stone steps behind Miss Berdine. They walked in silence, passing glowing candelabras, paintings, and other doors. Anna smiled a bit, remembering how her and her mother used to play hide-and-seek in these very rooms when she was a little girl.

Finally reaching Anna's bedchamber, Miss Berdine opened the two tall cherry wood doors and stepped inside the large room, Anna following. The room was quite cozy looking, with gold candelabras mounted on all four walls, and dozens of tiny candles covering the tabletops, fireplace mantle, and the top of the grand piano. The walls were painted a dark purple colour, with silk black and gold draperies hanging over the tall windows. The bedcover was black with gold embroideries, covered with an immoderate collection of black-fringed violet pillows. The carpet under Anna's feet was black and gold, and there were two purple velvet chairs sitting next to the fireplace. A violet dressing screen stood at the corner of the room.

Miss Berdine placed Anna's suitcase on her bed. "Now, would you like me to help you unpack?"

Anna removed her coat and hung it over the dressing screen. "No, that's alright. I can do it myself."

Miss Berdine headed back towards the door. "The chefs are preparing dinner now. Would you like me to call you when it is ready?"

Anna shrugged. "If you like. To tell you the truth, I'm not feeling all that hungry at the moment."

Miss Berdine nodded and quickly left the room, shutting the door behind her.

Once she was alone, Anna sighed deeply, opened her suitcase, and started to unpack her clothes. She was almost finished, when she suddenly froze and looked down at the clothes at the bottom of her suitcase. Hands trembling, she reached down and slowly picked up the white shirt that belonged to Erik. She still had it from the day he lent it to her. She had almost forgotten she had it.

Anna ran her fingers over the thin white fabric, tears stinging her eyes. She looked into the suitcase and saw the black pants which also belonged to Erik. Anna gave a shaky sigh and picked up the pants.

Wiping away a tear, she headed towards her dressing screen. Anna then removed her black dress and slipped on the black pants, tucking them into her boots. She then slipped on the white shirt, buttoning it up at the front. Anna ran her hands over the sleeves of the shirt. Wearing this almost felt as if Erik was

holding her.

Emerging from behind the dressing screen, Anna walked over to the tall window. She gazed out at the rolling countryside lit up by the golden sunset, and thought of Erik. Just then, she heard a knock on the door.

“Come in.” She called over her shoulder.

The cherry wood door of her bedroom slowly squeaked open and Victor stepped inside the room.

“Have you finished packing?” He asked her.

She glanced at him quickly before walking over to her piano and sitting in front of it. “Yes, I have.” She shuffled through some music sheets.

Victor looked her up and down, an eyebrow raised. “What on earth are you wearing, Anna?”

“Clothes.” She said coldly, not looking back at him.

Victor sighed, knowing she was still mad at him. “Miss Berdine has made some tea, and I was wondering if you would like to join me for some in the Parlor before dinner.”

“I’m busy.” She answered, still refusing to make eye contact.

“Doing what?” Victor asked.

Anna shot him a poisonous look, causing him to take a step back. “Is that really any of your business?” She hissed.

Victor raised his hands defensively in the air. “Alright, fine. Be that way.” He headed towards the door.

“I’ll see you at dinner.”

Once he left the room, Anna placed her hands over her face, her elbows hitting the keys of the instrument. The loud, dissonant notes echoed through her room. She sighed deeply, raking her fingers back through her hair. She didn’t know how long she could put up with this. It was bad enough not seeing Erik, but now Victor was getting on her nerves.

Anna straightened her back and scattered the sheets on top of the piano in front of her. Taking out a pen, she wrote down the title Taking Over Me on the top of one of the blank sheets. Then, she made a few notes on the staff. Putting her pen down, Anna then began to play the song on the piano. She stopped and wrote down a few more notes, before continuing on.

As she worked on her composition, Anna was unaware of a pair of ice blue eyes watching her from the darkness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Victor leaned his back against the wall of the hallway as he peaked into Anna’s room through the small crack in the door. He watched as she softly played a song he never heard before, stopping occasionally to make a few notes on the music sheet in front of her. He listened to the rhythm and tune of the song. It sounded so sad; it was hard to imagine such sound coming from his once cheerful, spunky sister. Just then, Anna started singing. Victor stepped closer to the door, so he could hear her voice better. He opened the door just a tiny bit more, and listened carefully to the words she sung.

“You wont remember me,

But I’ll remember you.

I lie awake and try so hard

Not to think of you.

But who can decide what they dream?

And dream I do.

I believe in you,

I'll give up everything just to find you.

I have to be with you

To live, to breathe,

You're taking over me.

I look in the mirror and see your face

If I look deep enough.

So many things inside that are just like you

Are taking over.

I believe in you,

I'll give up everything just to find you.

I have to be with you,

To live, to breathe,

You're taking over me."

After she finished singing, Anna stopped playing the piano and placed her hands over her face. Her body trembled as she began to cry quietly to herself.

"Oh Erik." She whispered through her tears.

Victor took a step back from the door, shaking his head. How could he stand there and not say he hadn't broken his sister's heart? Erik was everything to her, and he ruined it all. What was the matter with him?

Victor sighed and turned away, but before he could take three steps, Anna began to cough. Victor looked back into her room and saw her clutching her chest as she coughed violently. She sounded a lot worse than before, which concerned Victor greatly. He opened the door.

"Anna, are you okay?" He asked.

Anna clutched the edge of her piano as she coughed. Her face was twisted with pain as she looked at him, clutching her chest. He could see that her knees were trembling, and she was swaying a bit.

Victor rushed to her side. "Anna...what's wrong?"

Anna looked up at him, her breathing shallow and uneven. He had never seen her in so much pain. She placed her hand over her mouth as she coughed again, and when she removed it, Victor gasped when

he saw blood on her palm.

“Anna, you’re coughing up blood.” He said, panicking.

She looked at her hand, her eyes wide. She looked up at him; worry filling her eyes. “Vick...” She breathed.

Before either of them could say a word more, Anna knees gave out from under her and she collapsed. Victor lunged forward and caught her in his arms before she could hit the floor. He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed, laying her down gently.

Victor quickly then rushed to the door and shouted down the hall. “Richard! Richard get over here!”

The old butler quickly rushed around the corner, stopping abruptly at Anna’s door. “What is it, Mr. Victor?” He asked.

“Get the doctor!” Victor said.

Richard went blank. “Why? What has happened?”

“Anna’s had another collapse.” Victor explained. “Only this time she’s coughing up blood. Please Richard, get the doctor. There’s no time to waste!”

Richard nodded. “Yes, of course. Right away.”



## 19 - Chapter 19

Erik ran his fingers over the gold, heart-shaped pendant in his hands. He sighed deeply, lying back onto his bed. He wiped a tear from his cheek, and clutched the necklace tight against his chest. Shutting his eyes, he tried to draw the images of Anna out of his mind. But it was no use. He couldn't stop thinking about her for a minute. She was everything to him, and there was not one moment where she wasn't on his mind.

Erik covered his face with his hands. Would the Phantom of the Opera ever experience a happy ending? First Christine, and now Anna. Maybe he was never meant to have a love. Maybe he was never meant to experience happiness. Erik stared up at the ceiling of his lair, a small smile forming on his lips. He had experienced happiness. He was happy whenever he was with Anna. Her mysterious ocean blue eyes, her shimmering hair, her warm smile, her beautiful voice, her soft touch; everything about her made him feel like the happiest man in the world.

And now she was gone forever.

How would he ever be able to live without his beloved Anna? How would he ever last a day without seeing her, or touching her, or kissing her? Erik sat up straight and rose from the bed. He walked out of the bedroom and approached his organ. He then draped Anna's heart-shaped pendant over a small vase holding a single long-stem white rose. Erik gently touched the soft pedals of the rose, reminded of how he used to touch Anna's soft skin.

He shut his eyes as a tear rolled down his cheek. He wiped his cheek and looked down at the music sheets lying on the top of the organ. When his eyes found My Angel You, he began to tremble. He let out a shaky breath as he sat down on the chair in front of his organ. Sniffing back his tears, he sat up straighter and gently began to play her song.

"My Angel you

Are the reason I could fly.

And cause of you,

I don't have to wonder why.

Angel you,

There's no more just getting by,

You're the reason I feel so alive."

Unable to finish the song, Erik placed his hands over his face. His hands shook, and tears poured down his cheeks. He was never going to forget Anna, no matter what he did. She was a part of him now, and without her, he was incomplete.

Wiping his tears away, Erik raised his head and took a deep breath. What was he to do? Nothing. There was nothing to do. Nothing he did would ever replace the happiness he felt when he and Anna were together.

Erik sat back in his seat and stared up at the ceiling. If only he could end it. If only he could put a stop to his uncontrollable agony. Glancing downwards, he noticed his dagger lying on the ground, still in its sheath. Erik bent down and picked up the weapon.

Erik ran his fingers over the patterns sewn into the brown leather sheath in his hands. Grasping the silver handle, he drew the dagger out of the sheath. Erik examined the gleaming razor sharp blade, running his finger down the edge of it. A tear rolled down his cheek as he looked up at the white rose. Without Anna, life wasn't worth living anymore.

He was going to end it.

\*\*\*\*\*

Victor paced up and down the hallway outside Anna's room. How long had it been? An hour? Why was the doctor taking so long in there? His hands trembled as he leaned his back against the wall, sliding down until he was sitting on the floor. Richard and Miss Berdine stood beside him, both of them completely silent.

Victor raised his head. "What's taking him so long?"

Richard sighed. "I don't know, Mr. Victor. But be patient. He's one of the best doctors in London."

Victor groaned in frustration, running his fingers back through his blonde hair. "I can't be patient! Anna's life is at stake here."

Richard sighed, but said nothing more.

Just then, the bedroom door squeaked open. Victor shot to his feet when the doctor stepped out into the hallway, shutting the door behind him. His face was grim and expressionless, which did nothing for Victor's nerves.

"How is she, doctor?" Victor asked, panicking.

He sighed, running his fingers back through his graying hair. "I'm afraid, Mr. Hart...I have some bad news."

Victor went rigid. "What is it?"

The doctor studied the faces of the three people in front of him, before beginning. "I'm afraid Miss Hart's condition has worsened severely. She is terribly weak, and now her coughing has produced blood. I've done my best to try and treat her condition, but I'm afraid it might not be enough." He touched Victor's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hart. But your sister might not make it through the night."

Victor gasped, stepping back. "No."

The doctor shook his head. "I'm very sorry."

Victor stood, mouth agape, tears stinging his eyes. Richard hung his head low, and Miss Berdine covered her face with her hands.

The doctor gave Victor one last comforting pat on the shoulder, before walking back down the hallway and out of sight.

Victor wiped a tear from his cheek and opened the door to Anna's room, stepping inside. Richard and Miss Berdine followed close behind. Victor walked swiftly to Anna's bedside, kneeling down beside her. She was lying on her back, the blankets pulled up to her waist. Her face was pale, and gleaming with sweat. Her breathing was shallow and uneven. Her body was trembling slightly.

Victor took his sister's cold hand, hanging his head. "This is all my fault." He whispered. "If I hadn't..." His voice trailed off as he covered his face with his hands.

Miss Berdine touched his shoulder. "Don't say that, Mr. Victor. None of this is your fault - you know that. Miss Anna has always had these problems."

Victor shook his head. "No...I mean I made her worse. Back in Paris, she was a lot happier, which helped improve her condition. She collapsed once before, but she made a full recovery."

"Is there a particular reason why that is?" Richard asked.

Victor wiped away a tear, nodding. "Yes. When Anna was in Paris, she fell in love with a man named Erik. They were always together, and Anna was always happy with him. That is...until I stepped in. I didn't approve of Erik, and I betrayed Anna's trust in me by forcing her to come back here with me." He groaned, placing his hands over his head. "Its my fault she's dying."

Richard and Miss Berdine both exchanged strange looks.

"I have to do something." Victor whispered, sniffing back his tears.

"What is there to do?" Richard asked.

Victor got to his feet, breathing deeply. "I...I have to go back to Paris and find Erik. I have to beg for his forgiveness and bring him here to London."

"How will that help?" Miss Berdine asked.

"Anna and Erik are in love, Miss Berdine." Victor said. "And there is no better medicine than having the one you love beside you in your time of need."

Richard nodded. "When will you be leaving?"

"Immediately." Victor said. "I'll take the carriage back to Paris, while you two stay here and watch over Anna. Please don't let anything happen to her."

"We promise, Mr. Victor." Richard said. "She is safe with us."

Victor smiled in thanks, grabbing his overcoat from the chair. He leaned in and kissed his sisters brow lightly. "Don't worry, Anna. I'm going to get Erik, and he will help you. I promise."

Throwing on his overcoat, Victor quickly darted out of the room and down the stairs towards the carriage waiting outside.

There was no time to lose.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erik sat on the edge of Anna's bed, stroking the soft petals of the long-stem white rose in his hands. He didn't know how long he had been sitting there, lost in memories of his beloved Anna, but it had to be more than a couple of hours.

Erik laid the rose gently on the bed beside him, and pulled his dagger out of his belt. In a daze of anguish, he put the point to his heart. His knuckles were white around the silver handle.

It was time.

At last it was going to be over. The pain would end.

Shutting his eyes tightly, Erik whispered, "I'm sorry, Anna."

All of a sudden, the doors to Anna's dressing room burst open and, to immediate shock, Victor ran into the room. Madame Giry closely followed him. Erik blinked, lowering the dagger from his chest.

"Erik..." Victor panted heavily. "You have to come quickly."

"Why?" Erik hissed. "What the hell could you possibly want from me?"

Madame Giry grabbed Victor's shoulder. "Mr. Hart, please. Erik has been through enough."

"Please, Madame, you have to listen to me." Victor begged. "Time is a factor here. We have to hurry."

"This isn't some sort of trick, is it?" Erik asked suspiciously.

"No!" Victor shouted. "This is serious, Erik. Anna's life is at stake."

Erik immediately shot to his feet. "What are you talking about?"

Victor looked back at Erik. "Anna has had another collapse. Only this one is much worse than any of the others she's had. She's beginning to cough up blood."

Madame Giry placed a hand to her chest. "Oh mon dieu." She breathed.

"We had a doctor come in and examine Anna's condition." Victor continued on. "He did the best he could do, but it wasn't enough. He...he told me that Anna might not survive the night."

Erik gasped, stepping back. "No."

"Oh my God." Madame Giry breathed.

Victor sighed deeply. "That's why I came here, Erik. To ask for your help. You and Anna have always been very close, and it would mean the world to her if she saw you again. Even if it may be for the last time."

Erik covered his face with his hands. "This can't be happening."

Victor stepped towards him. "Can you come back to London with me, Erik? I want you to be there in Anna's last moments."

Erik looked at Victor and nodded. "Of course."

Victor smiled a bit. "Thank you, Erik. You really are a good man. I'm sorry for hurting both you and Anna. I was an idiot."

"True, but only to protect your sister." Erik said. "I forgive you."

Madame Giry stepped forward. "I will come as well."

"No, Madame." Erik said. "You wouldn't be able to handle—"

She cut him off. "Anna was like a daughter to me, and I loved her as one. I am going with you to see her. End of discussion."

"But you're needed here." Erik argued.

"Mr. Firmin and Mr. Andre can handle things on their own." Madame Giry said. "It's Anna we should be worrying about."

Erik nodded. "You're definitely right, Madame. We should be leaving now. There is no time to waste."

Victor nodded and quickly ran out the door, Erik and Madame Giry at his heels. They all climbed down the stairs of the Opera Populaire, and entered the carriage waiting for them outside the front doors.

Shutting the carriage door behind them, Victor shouted up to the driver, "Back to London. And hurry!"

At that instant, Erik felt the carriage quickly take off down the cobblestone streets of Paris towards London.

Oh God, he prayed, Please don't let us be too late.

## 20 - Chapter 20

As the carriage came to a halt outside Anna's grand Manor House, Erik immediately opened the door and jumped out onto the cobblestone ground. Victor and Madame Giry followed close behind. Erik looked up at the tall house, which was illuminated by the full moon in the sky. He could hear the soft sounds of crickets chirping in the bushes.

He didn't even bother to wait for the others to catch up. Erik simply ran up the stone steps to the house and opened the tall cherry wood doors. He stepped inside the dark house illuminated by candelabras mounted upon the dark blue walls. He looked around the large entrance hall, frantically searching for where Anna's bedroom might be.

"Victor," Erik said over his shoulder when he and Madame Giry entered the house. "Where is Anna's bedroom?"

Victor pointed. "Upstairs. I'll take you there."

With Victor leading the way, Erik and Madame Giry headed up the grand stone staircase. They walked at a swift pace down the long, candle-lit halls, passing many doors and rooms. Finally, after a few more agonizing minutes, Victor came to a halt outside a set of two tall cherry wood doors. Victor stepped aside and allowed Erik to open them and step into the room first.

There were two people standing in the room. One was an older man with graying hair and moustache, wearing a black suit. He must have been the butler. The other was a short older woman with brown hair tied into a bun, wearing a maid's outfit. When they caught sight of Erik, they froze in their spots.

"Who are you?" The butler asked.

Victor stepped forward. "It's okay, Richard. This is Erik, the man I told you about before. He's here to see Anna." He motioned over his shoulder. "And this is Madame Giry. She was a close friend of Anna's."

Richard nodded. "Pleased to meet you both."

Erik stood frozen, staring at Anna's form on the bed. He almost didn't recognize her. Her beautiful face was so pale, and she seemed to be trembling slightly. She was breathing deeply, her face twisted with pain.

"No...Anna..." Erik breathed.

He ran swiftly to her side, sitting down on the bed beside her. He took her cold hand in both of his, tears stinging his eyes. "I'm here, Anna." He whispered softly.

He stroked her cold cheek, and laid his head beside hers as he wept. He could hear Victor whisper something to the others, before they all left the room, shutting the door behind them. Erik raised his head and just watched her breathe. Her beautiful ocean blue eyes were closed, and her soft, wavy auburn hair flowed out over her pillow. The candlelight played with the soft features of her fair face. Erik had never known anything so beautiful had ever existed. He couldn't keep the tears from flowing down his cheeks.

Erik leaned in and kissed her brow gently, letting his tears fall onto her face, before he buried his face into her neck as he cried.

"Erik..." Came a soft, weak voice.

Erik gasped, raising his head quickly. He looked down at Anna, and was shocked to see her gazing up at him.

"Yes, Anna." He whispered. "I'm here."

It seemed as if with every breath she took, a shock of pain ran through her body. She clutched his hand

tightly. "Erik...I'm so sorry." She breathed. "I should have told you I was dying."  
He stroked her hair, leaning in close. "Shh...don't talk like that. You're not dying, Anna. I promise, you'll be okay."  
She shut her eyes tightly, and tears rolled down her cheek. Erik wiped one away, before holding her close. He could feel her weak body trembling slightly as she wept. He kissed the top of her head, pulling back slightly.  
"Anna...please don't die." He whispered.  
She reached up and touched his face. "Erik...I can't hold on much longer."  
"Yes you can." He said desperately. "You're going to live, Anna. You're going to get better, and we're going to get married. You have to."  
She brushed a tear from his cheek. "Listen...you have to go on."  
He shook his head. "I can't go on without you."  
"Yes you can, Erik." She whispered weakly. "You have so much to give to the world. You're talent will get you so far in life."  
"Its not a life if you're not in it." He told her.  
Anna shut her eyes and gasped slightly as a shock of pain ran through her body. She clutched Erik's hand tightly, until the pain subsided and she finally relaxed, breathing hard. Erik hated seeing her like this. He would do anything to help rid her of her suffering and pain.  
"Erik..." She whispered, opening her eyes. "Promise me one thing."  
"Anything." He breathed.  
"Promise me you'll never forget about me after I die." She whispered.  
"I could never forget you, my angel." Erik whispered, kissing her brow. "And you are not going to die. You can't leave me."  
She touched his cheek. "I never will. No matter what happens, I'll always be with you...forever."  
Tears trickling down his cheeks, Erik leaned in and pressed a gentle kiss to Anna's lips. She kissed back, pressing her hands to the sides of his face. When they parted, Anna whispered softly.  
"I love you, Erik."  
Erik gasped as Anna's eyes slowly fluttered closed, and her body went limp in his arms. "No..." He breathed. "Anna...no, please, no."  
He shook her shoulders gently, trying to see if she would wake up. She didn't.  
"No, Anna, please wake up." He whispered desperately, tears pouring down his cheek. "Please...come back. Anna, come back. Don't leave me."  
No response.  
"No!" Erik cried, holding her close. "No, please, no!"  
He held her head against his chest and wrapped his arms around her as he wept uncontrollably. Erik ran his fingers through her hair, and kissed her brow gently, his tears falling onto her face like rain.  
"My Anna..." He wept. "My beautiful Anna."  
Erik sat on the bed, holding Anna tightly in his arms as he wept. He held her for the rest of the night, until the soft rays of the morning sun shone into the room.  
It was all over.

\*\*\*\*\*

Victor sat in one of the velvet armchairs in the Library. Madame Giry was pacing up and down the room, Richard was standing behind Victor, and Miss Berdine was sitting on another armchair beside the fireplace. Each of them had the same amount of worry in their eyes.  
Victor rubbed his tired eyes and looked up at the grandfather clock standing against the wall beside him.

It was almost six-thirty in the morning, and Erik had been in Anna's room all night. He wondered how Erik was handling it. It must have been hard seeing Anna in the state she was in.

Just then, the Library door slowly squeaked open and Erik stepped into the room, his masked face filled with complete and utter despair. Victor shot to his feet and walked quickly to Erik's side. He placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Erik how is she?"

Erik stood quiet for a short period of time, his green eyes gleaming with tears. He shook his head.

"She's gone."

Everyone in the room gasped in horror.

"What?" Victor breathed. "No...this can't be."

"Well it is!" Erik shouted angrily, tears trickling down his face. "Anna is dead, Victor. She died in my arms last night."

Erik left Victor's side and walked over to the velvet armchair. He sat down on it and placed his hands over his face. Madame Giry approached Erik and knelt down beside him. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"I'm so sorry, Erik." She breathed.

Erik looked up at her. "We were going to be married, Madame. Anna was going to be my wife. But now..."

His words trailed off as he covered his face and began to weep. Madame Giry wrapped Erik in a comforting hug, also crying. Richard and Miss Berdine were both frozen in complete shock, but Victor could easily see that they were both falling apart inside. Victor backed up against the wall and slid down till he was sitting on the floor. His hands were trembling, and tears were stinging his eyes.

"I can't believe she's gone." He whispered.

"Neither can I." Madame Giry said, straightening. "Anna was such a strong young woman, it's so hard for me to imagine her giving up the fight."

"So what are you saying?" Victor asked, sniffing back his tears. "She might still be alive?"

Erik raised his head a bit and looked up at Madame Giry hopefully.

"I don't know, Mr. Hart." Madame Giry finally answered. "But...I have to go up there and see for myself."

She crossed the room quickly, and opened the Library door. Giving Erik one last sad look, she stepped out into the entrance hall and shut the door behind her.

"We should go too." Richard told Victor.

Victor nodded and watched as Richard and Miss Berdine both exited the Library after Madame Giry. When they were gone, Victor looked up and watched as Erik rose from his seat and approached the tall window. He stood with his back to him, staring out towards the rolling countryside lit by the golden morning sun.

"Victor..." He whispered after a long silence. "I can't live without her."

Victor rose from the floor and wiped a tear from his cheek. "I know."

"No you don't." Erik whispered.

"She was my sister, Erik." Victor said. "She was the only thing I had left of my family. I've lost everything now that she's gone."

Erik gave a shaky sigh. "I loved her, Victor. She was my whole world."

Victor ran his hand back through his blonde hair. "I know that now. I just wish there was something I could do to help you."

"There is." Erik answered grimly.

Victor blinked. "What?"

Erik turned to face him. He walked towards Victor and stopped a few feet away from him. Victor watched as he pulled a silver dagger from his belt and held it out to him.

"I need you to kill me."

"What!" Victor shouted, stepping back. "Erik, I couldn't."

"You seemed to have no problem with it when you sentenced me to be hanged." Erik said.

"Well...I mean...that was when..." Victor frowned. "You said you forgave me for doing that to you."

"I said I forgave you, but you've put me through nothing but hell since the day we met." Erik said. "You owe me, Victor."

Victor looked down at the weapon in Erik's hands. "Erik, I can't do it."

"I'm in pain, Victor." Erik said miserably. "My heart is torn without Anna. There is no point in me living if I can't be with her." He held out the dagger again. "Please...do me this one favor. Put me out of my misery."

With shaking hands, Victor reached out and took the dagger from Erik's grip. He watched as Erik took a deep breath and dropped to his knees. He spread his arms out and whispered, "Do it."

Victor gripped the silver handle tightly in his shaking hands. "Erik...I don't know if I..."

"Either you do it, or I will!" Erik hissed.

Victor sighed and held the dagger over his head, ready to stab Erik. Sweat was gleaming on his forehead and his breathing was shaky. He had never killed a man in cold blood before, and he didn't ever want to. Erik seemed strangely calm at the moment. He shut his green eyes and waited patiently for the end to come.

Victor held his breath and raised the dagger into the air

This was the end.



## 21 - Chapter 21

Erik held his breath as Victor raised the silver dagger high into the air above his head. He could tell that Victor didn't want to kill him, but there was no other way for him to end his pain once and for all. At least when he died, he would be reunited with Anna once again.

Erik opened one eye and looked up at Victor who still stood with the dagger held above his head. He seemed incredibly nervous and scared. His hesitation only made Erik want to die faster.

He watched as Victor shut his eyes tightly. He took a deep breath, then suddenly lowered the dagger and threw it to the floor. "I can't do it!" He shouted. "I can't kill you."

Erik huffed angrily. "Could you be anymore of a wimp?" He picked up the dagger and rose to his feet. "I guess I'll have to do it myself."

"No!" Victor said, grabbing his wrist. "You can't kill yourself."

Erik yanked his wrist away. "Watch me."

He didn't want to live anymore. He didn't care anymore. He just wanted to die. He just wanted it all to end. He wanted the pain to stop. Erik grasped the silver handle in his hands and pointed the razor sharp blade up to his chest.

"Erik...don't do this." Victor pleaded. "Please, don't kill yourself."

"Well why not?" Erik shouted angrily. "What point is there if I live? I can't go on without Anna. She was the only woman who ever treated me like a normal man. She was the only woman who ever accepted my deformity. She was the only woman who ever loved me. And now she's gone, and the only way I can see her again is if I die as well."

Victor opened his mouth to protest, but no words came out. He knew there was no way he could convince Erik not to kill himself. He knew he could never beat Erik's stubbornness.

"You're making a terrible mistake." Victor finally managed to say. "Anna wouldn't have wanted you to end your life. I'm sure she wanted you to live on, and never forget all the memories you two shared. Am I right?"

Erik stood quiet for a while. Yes, that was exactly what Anna wanted. But how could he ever live his life without her? How could she think that her death wouldn't kill him inside? He was nothing without her. Not a man, not a monster, not anything. There was nothing left to do but end it once and for all.

"I'm sorry, Victor." Erik whispered. "But I have no choice."

Victor sighed and looked away. It seemed as if he couldn't bare to watch a friend die. Erik sighed and turned his back to Victor, pointing the blade of the dagger to his chest once more. He shut his eyes and pictured Anna in his mind. He thought of that one wonderful night where they had made love together. He could still remember her soft skin against his, the feel of her hands holding tightly to his back, and the soft kisses she planted on the unmasked side of his face. But the most memorable part of all was when she agreed to be his wife.

Erik took a deep breath and clutched the silver handle tighter in his fist.

Just then, the Library door squeaked open. Erik looked back and watched as Madame Giry entered the room. When she spotted the dagger in Erik's hand, she froze in her tracks.

"What on earth is going on in here?" She asked.

Erik lowered the dagger. "Nothing, Madame. I was just...nothing."

She crossed the room swiftly and approached Erik's side. She took his hand. "Come upstairs with me."

"Why?" He asked.

She smiled a bit. "I have something to show you." She looked at Victor. "Both of you. Now, come with

me.”

Erik and Victor both exchanged curious looks, before quickly following Madame Giry out of the Library and up the stairs back towards Anna’s bedroom. Erik didn’t feel much like going back there. He knew he wouldn’t be able to handle seeing Anna lying there dead. He just wanted to kill himself now and get it all over and done with.

Finally reaching Anna’s bedroom, Madame Giry opened the door and stepped inside. Erik and Victor followed close behind. Erik looked over at Anna lying motionless in her bed, and he tried hard to keep the tears at bay. Madame Giry closed the door and walked swiftly over to Anna’s bedside. She held her hand out to Erik.

“Come here, Erik.”

Erik did as he was told and crossed the room over to Anna’s bedside. Madame Giry took his leather-gloved hand and motioned for him to sit. Erik sat on the edge of the bed, bewildered at what Madame Giry was up to.

“Place your ear to her chest.” Madame Giry told him.

“Why?” Erik asked.

“Trust me.” She smiled. “Go on. Do it.”

Erik looked over at Anna lying motionless beside him. He sighed deeply and leaned in close to her. Turning his head to the side, he put his ear to Anna’s chest. It was only a few seconds, before he jumped back and gasped in shock.

“What is it?” Victor asked in alarm.

“Her...her...” Erik breathed in shock.

“What?” Victor asked. “What is it?”

“Her heart.” Erik whispered. “Her heart is beating.”

Victor’s jaw dropped. “But...that means she’s...”

“Alive.” Madame Giry smiled. “Anna is still alive.”

Erik placed his hand to the side of Anna’s cheek, stroking it softly. “But...that’s impossible. I could’ve sworn she died in my arms. I could’ve sworn I had lost her forever.”

“I did too, Erik.” Madame Giry said. “She certainly looks it. But when I put my finger to the side of her neck to check her pulse, I felt her heart beating. She’s still alive, Erik.”

Tears trickled down Erik’s cheek as he smiled. “Alive. My Anna is alive.”

He leaned in and kissed her brow gently.

Victor rushed to the door and opened it. He shouted down the hall. “Richard! Get the doctor! Hurry!”

“Why are you getting the doctor?” Erik asked him.

“He needs to see this.” Victor said. “This is a miracle. Anna was never meant to survive this illness. And now she’s alive. It’s a miracle!”

Erik smiled when he saw tears of joy in Victor’s ice blue eyes.

After about half-an-hour of silent anticipation, the bedroom doors opened and the doctor entered the room swiftly with Richard and Miss Berdine at his heels.

“What is it, Mr. Hart?” He asked. “Is something wrong?”

Victor grabbed the doctor’s shoulders. “Doctor, she’s alive! My sister is alive! She made it through the night!”

He blinked. “But...that’s impossible.”

“Go see for yourself.” Victor said, motioning to the bed.

Erik rose from the bed and stepped aside as the doctor leaned in to examine Anna’s condition. He took the stethoscope, which hung around his neck, and placed it into his ears. He then unbuttoned Anna’s shirt a bit, and placed the other end to her chest. He gasped.

“See? I told you.” Victor smiled. “She’s alive. Her heart is beating.”

"No, it's not that Mr. Hart." The doctor said. "I'm listening to her lungs. With every breath she takes, they become clearer. Before they were raspy, and filled with liquid, but now they are fine. Its...its like she was never sick in the first place."

"So, she's cured?" Madame Giry asked.

"Strangely, yes." The doctor smiled. "I believe she is cured."

"And she's going to wake up, right?" Erik asked desperately.

The doctor thought for a moment. "If her health continues to improve...yes, she will wake up. I don't know when, but she will."

Erik breathed with relief. Madame Giry smiled, joyful tears gleaming in her eyes. Victor was grinning from ear to ear, along with Richard and Miss Berdine. The doctor stood up and approached the door. He patted Victor's back.

"Good luck, Mr. Hart." He smiled.

"Thank you, doctor." Victor grinned. "Thank you so much."

After the doctor left the room, Erik pulled a chair up to the edge of Anna's bed and sat in it. He took her hand in both of his.

"I'm going to stay with her until she wakes up." He told the others. "You should all go and get some rest. You need it."

"So do you." Madame Giry said.

Erik shook his head. "No, I'll be fine. You go."

They nodded and all shuffled out of the bedroom, shutting the door behind them. Once he was alone, Erik moved his chair closer and kissed the top of Anna's soft hand.

When he did, he could've sworn he saw her smile in her sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

"My Angel you,

Are the reason I could fly.

And cause of you,

I don't have to wonder why.

Angel you,

There's no more just getting by.

You're the reason I feel so alive."

The sound of his voice echoed through her mind. Was she dreaming?

For some reason, Anna doubted that it was a dream. She also doubted it was real. After all, how could the dead dream? And yet...his voice sounded so real, so close. Oh why wouldn't his voice leave her mind? Couldn't she just die in peace without having to be reminded of the man she left behind? Oh God, how she missed Erik so.

Anna groaned and slowly opened her eyes. When her vision cleared, she was shocked to find herself still lying down in her bed, just as she last remembered it. But...how could that be? Wasn't she supposed

to be dead? She tried to move, but her body protested. She was weak and aching all over. She could hardly lift her head from her pillow.

Anna breathed deeply. She blinked. Something wasn't right. She took a deep breath again. For some strange reason, her lungs didn't hurt. She didn't have the overpowering urge to cough anymore. She felt...better. Like she didn't have the lung problems anymore. But, how could that be?

"Anna..." Came a breathy whisper.

She turned her head and gasped to find Erik sitting on her bedside, gazing down at her. The room was dark, but the soft firelight coming from the fireplace illuminated the handsome features of his masked face. She slowly reached up and touched the exposed side of his face.

"Erik...what's going on?" She whispered weakly.

He didn't answer. Instead, he touched the side of her face gently. Anna could see tears running down his face. She was just about to ask him what was wrong, but he cut her off by pressing a tender kiss to her lips. She kissed him back, wrapping her weak arms around his neck.

When they parted, Erik buried his face into her neck. "I thought I'd lost you."

She stroked the back of his hair. "For a moment there, I think you did. How come I'm not dead?"

He raised his head, sniffing back his tears. "To be honest with you, Anna, I have no idea. The doctor said you wouldn't survive the night, but you did. And your lung problems are completely cured. Its...a miracle."

She smiled and shut her eyes as tears trickled down her cheek. She could feel Erik lean in close and hold her in his arms. Just the feel of him warm, gentle touch made her cry even harder.

"What's wrong?" He whispered.

She sniffed, opening her eyes. "I was just so worried, Erik. I didn't want to leave you, but I couldn't hold on much longer. I was so afraid that you hated me because I gave up."

"No, no, no." He whispered, kissing her cheek. "I could never hate you, Anna. I understand that the sickness made you weak." He smiled. "I'm just so happy that you're alive."

She nodded weakly. "Its as if an angel was watching over me."

"There was, Anna." Erik whispered softly. "An Angel of Music."

She smiled and held her hand to the side of his face. "I love you, my Erik."

"And I you, my angel." He breathed.

He leaned in and kissed her again, harder this time, and she kissed back, wrapping her arms tightly around his neck. When they parted, Anna shifted a bit in her bed and allowed Erik to lie down in bed beside her. He wrapped her in his arms and kissed her cheek.

She snuggled in close to him. "Go to sleep, my Erik. Dream of me."

"Always do." He whispered softly.

And with that, they quickly fell asleep in each other's arms, knowing that nothing could ever stop them from loving each other.

At last, they were at peace.