This story is a follow on to the Cheyenne Number series, Nesohto, Nanohto, Soohto and Mahtohto, it's a little bit of everything, heartbreak, angst, love, loss, drama and romance and a little bit of action

Heartlines
by karmo1987

Prologue

1st January 1881

It was snowing again, thick flakes filling in the cleared driveway, the one which Ben had spent all day clearing for her. The little boy trying to be helpful, like so many of her friends had tried to be over the last year. The last horrible, achingly alone year. She had been surrounded by people, whether it be her friends, her children, or just those that wished her well, but she still felt alone. So alone it hurt.

The wind rattled the pane of glass and she pushed at the gum sealing the window, she had picked at it one too many times as she had stood staring out across her home, hoping that by some miracle she would see him. But she never did, and all she ever succeeded in doing was making herself more tired and now it seemed breaking the house. The house he had built for her.

"Mama!"

Michaela turned at the sound of her daughter's voice, their surprise baby, born following a wonderful Christmas dalliance. A fourth daughter named for her Grandmother, an almost perfect copy of Esmee apart from her white blonde hair, as with all their children to her perfect in every way.

She made her way to the cot and despite her melancholy, smiled; the sight of the two year old's chubby cheeks and beautiful smile never failing to lift her. "Bethie," Michaela whispered, pausing as she noted once more, how quickly Beth was growing, and how cramped her sleeping arrangement in the cot was. "Bethie Bubbles," Michaela lifted her daughter out of the cot and cuddled her tight, "did Mama wake you up?"

"Brr," Beth answered snuggling into her mother's arms, her chubby digits gripping hold of Michaela shoulder's tightly.

"You are cold," Michaela deciphered Beth's utterance and slowly made her way to the bed. She climbed into the bed she had vacated over an hour ago, the warmth long since left it. "Mama shall make you cosy," Michaela cooed to the sleepy toddler as she fussed, tucking Beth in and snuggling down beside her. "You need a bed," Michaela whispered, her lips trailing across Beth's blonde crown.

She shuddered, she didn't want Beth to need a bed, she didn't want it at all. Each of the other children's beds were beautiful and bespoke, carved by their loving father, but who would make Beth's. Michaela squeezed her eyes shut, pressing one tear out but preventing the other's from falling down her cheek.

"Mama?" Beth's little hand trailed her cheek, her sweet face creased with worry.

"Mama loves you," Michaela forced herself to smile. "So does Papa," she kissed the toddler once more. "Please remember him, please remember who he is."

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He turned at the sound of the clink of keys, knowing who was coming before she spoke, "Mr Sully."

"Mrs Scott," Sully dipped his head respectfully at the small round woman.

"Mr Beardmore has asked me to advise you that his Lordship is ringing his bell." The housekeeper smiled at him. "While I appreciate you helping my girls, you have other duties to attend to."

"Yes Mrs Scott," Sully dipped his head.

The housekeeper watched him leave with curious eyes; so much was unknown about the mysterious quiet American. With a shake of her head she turned to survey the mess of the dining room, the chaos left over from the New Year's Eve party the night before. The mystery could wait, the room was still a mess and the family were rising. The American had been with them a year following his unfortunate arrival, and until he could raise enough money to get where he was going she had time to find out what he held behind his silence.

Chapter 1

Durlish Park Estate
Berkshire, England
3rd January 1881

The light was barely there, the early winter light bluish grey, the large window of the servants hall further dimming the light due to the fog of condensation on the glass. The bitter cold of the winter chill battling with the heat from the house, the heat bellowing out of the kitchen as the kitchen staff worked hard, preparing the food for the day. The room was full despite the early hour, the servants all running through their daily chores, mentally preparing for the monotony of the day.

Sully jerked upright in his seat as with a clatter the dishes were almost dropped on the table, the dish heaped with fluffy yellow eggs too heavy for the small wiry hall boy. Sully stood and held his hand out, taking the dish containing the toasted bread so that the young boy could put the plates down without smashing them on the table.

"Thanks," Jack whispered, small and shy, his dark hair fell into his blue eyes and he gave Sully a grateful smile.

Sully nodded retaking his seat and looking back at the smooth worn surface of the servant hall table. He stayed still as the daily battle for the best piece of bread and the biggest scoop of eggs began. The first footman won the battle, grabbing hold of the spoon a moment before anyone else, seeing the other servants off with a triumphant sneer.

"When you are quite finished Griffith," Sully smiled slightly as the housekeeper strode confidently in to the servants hall and fixed the young man with a steely glare. She moved to her seat at the right of the head of the table and sat down before looking expectantly towards the breakfast. "Well someone be mother then," she barked opening her white napkin and setting it across her black uniform. "I would like to remind everyone that Her Ladyship shall be downstairs this morning at 10am to deliver her instructions for the
week ahead. That mess outside in the hall will need to be moved," she looked directly at the poor put upon Jack. "Thank you Deirdre."

Sully shook his head, using the housekeeper's distraction to ensure the young boy knew he had a chance to eat his breakfast. "Thank you," he smiled weakly at the young woman beside him who had handed him his breakfast.

"One imagines..." The booming voice of the butler sounded, his sentence blocked out by the noise of chairs being pushed back as the other servants rose. "Be seated," Mr Beardmore muttered waving his hand and sitting in his place at the head of the table. "One imagines that everything is in hand for the shooting party?"

"Of course Mr Beardmore," Mrs Scott the Housekeeper bristles, her round body shimmering with a shake of indignation. "All that remains is for her ladyship to go over the menu with Mrs Amersham."

"Very good," The Butler cleared his throat, but before he had a chance to say anything one of the numerous bells rang behind him on the wooden board behind him. Without turning having worked in the house for decades he looked towards Sully, a small smile playing on his lips as he found that Sully was always half way towards the door.

"Jack," The clean shaven butler looked towards the young boy. "I trust the mess will be sorted before her ladyship comes down this morning?"

"Yes Mr Beardmore," The young boy nodded shoving the remainder of his breakfast into his mouth. Standing the young boy rushed from his seat eager to carry out his task and stay in Mr Beardmore's good book. He paused in the doorway, a small frown on his face as he took in the sight of Sully paused at the top of the stairs.

"Come on you don't dawdle," Jack jumped and turned terrified before giving a sigh of relief as he realised it was Millie, one of the chambermaids who although her position in the house was much more senior to his, spoke to him like an equal. "Is he sick?" Millie asked catching sight of Sully for a brief moment.

"No," Jack shook his head, "but something is wrong."

"How would you tell? He never says anything," Millie muttered tucking a loose strand of her ebony coloured hair into her bun.

"Sure he does, you just gotta know how to listen to him," Jack sighed. "I best get on."

Millie looked at the young boy curiously. "I'll help you, come on. Beatrice won't be ringing for an hour or so yet." She smiled reassuringly at Jack before looking back to the top of the stairs to the space vacated by the mysterious American, who had come to them under such curious and painful circumstances, wondering what communication that Jack was picking up from Sully's lonely silence.

"It's quite remarkable!"

Sully nodded his head respectfully as Alfred Hess, his Lord and direct employer studied his grey woollen jacket.

In his mid-forties the Lord of Ainscough was of a similar age to Sully, but their lives could
not have been more different. The Lord had lived a life of privilege and parties, never wanting for anything, his only hardship coming when his father had died five years ago and he had inherited the estate and with it the duties that meant for the first time he had had to work for a number of hours a day.

"How on earth did you manage to get that stain out? I had thought that this jacket was beyond repair. Such a shame as it is one of my favourites, but I see it is now saved from the rubbish pile."

Sully nodded, the man before him had no real interest in how the stain had been removed and was simply pleased that his coat had been saved. "Well, very well done." The Lord sent Sully a beaming smile through the mirror, slowly his gaze shifted to the cold window, his hazel eyes widening with the sight of the condensation and the knowledge that the air outside would be bitterly cold. "Sully, I don't suppose that I could put upon the request that you walk Fallon today."

"Of course my Lord," Sully nodded respectfully, secretly pleased that he was able to get out of the house he hated so much.

"Excellent." The Lord of the house gave a sigh of relief. "Well I shall not keep you, Fallon will be in far more need of your attention then I."

"My Lord," Sully bowed his head, reprieved for a moment, able to get away from the job that he hated, able to get a moment to himself away from the chaos of the house that was in no way his home.

He crouched beside the dog as the elderly brown gundog gave up on its walk. Fat and old, Fallon had had enough, the tired animal slumping onto the frost covered lawn and gave Sully an apologetic and pathetic look.

"No matter boy," Sully scratched the animal behind his ears. The animal gave an indulgent noise, luxuriating in the attention. Slowly Sully tipped his head to look up at the house. It was a building that he hated, the huge imposing building was beautiful, but it was not his home, it was not that wooden cabin he had built for his family, it was big and airy and cold so unlike what he was used to. The people here, were kind, even the Master who for all his failings he did seem to genuinely care about his staff and he had allowed him to stay, to work his way back. Sully sighed, he hated Durlish Park, not because it wasn't his world but because he was away from his family. He knew he could live anywhere do any job when he was near them, but here so far away from them, it was so hard, so difficult. He just needed to work another few months and then he would have saved enough money to get back to America, enough money to get back to her and his children. Enough money to search for her, to find why she had not responded to any of his letters; enough money to be able to get to them and hold them safe in his arms. So tight he would never let them go again. He would find them, he would find her, until he did he was not a full person, without her he felt like nothing, like he was missing a limb, like a huge part of him was missing, his best part, his part with her.

Chapter 2

Colorado Springs

3rd January 1881

*Her chest tightened as Violet's legs slithered into view, sliding off the wooden roof, her*
skinny legs dangling over the tracks, her body slipping as her young hands struggled for grip on the icy roof.

She watched helpless as her daughter slid closer to the edge, the sound of the approaching train signalling that there was little time before Violet came under even more danger. Instinctively Michaela gripped hold of Beth, her arms squeezing vice like around the fourteen month old’s waist, causing the baby to let out a howl.

"DO SOMETHING!"

Michaela looked to her left, surprised that Katie had found her voice when hers was locked in her throat. Michaela opened her mouth hoping to add her plea to the men at the station who were scrambling to try and save the little girl. But the words did not come, not because they were frozen in her voice box but because they were silenced by the sound of a gun, the sound of a scream, not of a terrified little girl but of two men.

"Papa that was Papa!" Esmee started to run towards the sound of the gunshot,

"ESMEE NO!"

Michaela jerked awake, her body despite the cold air glistening with sweat. She forced herself to relax into the pillows, struggling to regulate her breathing as she tried to push the horrible images that stained her few moments of sleep to the back of her mind. Every time she relived those moments it felt like her heart would crack once more. The horror of everything that happened, the five minutes that had torn her family apart, that had changed everything. The sounds of her children screaming in terror and fear. The body, not Sully's but the man who had grabbed Violet, while Sully was nowhere, vanished into thin air, but he was not as the authorities had told her dead. The absence of a body delaying the official decree of his death, something which she was told would take seven years, and she would use the six years that remained to prove them wrong, prove everyone wrong. She knew he was alive, she could still feel him, still feel her heart pull to him. Wherever he was, she would find him.

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Michaela slowed the wagon into its customary place outside the clinic and turned to look back at her children. Bundled up against the cold, her elder three daughter's wore excited smiles, all three pleased to be going back to school, eager no doubt to disappear into the unreal reality of school, a place where they could be happy and recover from the terrible time of the first Christmas they had had to spend without their father.

"Have a good day," she smiled down at her daughters as Katie, Esmee and Violet all began to stand up so they could begin their day. "Reuben sweetheart, let your sisters get off to school."

Reuben turned his head and gave a little sighing pout, a 3 and a half the little boy wanting so much to go with his sisters to school and be a big boy. "Reuben," Michaela reached across the seat to touch his cheek. "I was wondering if you would be able to help me with something today?"

Slowly Reuben's eyes rose to look at her and she was forced to take a steeling breath, their little boy looking so much like him. Recovering she made her smile a bit wider. "I need to move a chair and I need someone big and strong to help me with it."

"I big and strong," Reuben nodded, smiling to himself.
Michaela sighed and slowly climbed down from the wagon. She smiled as she turned to go to the back of the wagon and found a small gaggle of children, all waiting patiently for her own to dismount. "Good morning."

"Morning Dr Mike," the chorus sounded, the children all smiling to look up at her as Katie dropped out of the wagon and held her hands up for Esmee.

"Are you ready for school?" Michaela asked lifting Violet down from the wagon and set her to the ground.

"Oh sure," one of Hank's daughter's piped up, the two little girls were completely identical and Michaela often found it difficult to tell them apart. "Will you look after Klara?"

"Of course I shall," Michaela touched the young girl's dark brown hair.

"Dad says she looks like she'd gonna drop that baby any day now," the little girl grinned and grabbed the arm of her partner in crime. The identical girls sent Michaela beaming looks before pushing their way past their brother to stare adoringly at Ben. The boy was the eldest in the red school house and he and Katie were very much idolised by their younger classmates.

"Have a good day Katie," Michaela called over the heads of the children to her firstborn, waving slightly. Katie nodded and slid her hand into Ben's arm, the two children moving towards the school seemingly oblivious to the little gaggle of children who took after them.

"Bye bye Esmee," Michaela smiled at her tall curly haired daughter, making her daughter look around from her conversation with Robert E's doppelganger son, Freddie.

"Bye Mama," Esmee smiled and waved before trotting off with her friend. Rhys Lawson a step behind her following her like a lost little puppy.

"Ma," Violet sounded, tugging her hand.

"Would you like me to walk you?" Michaela asked her auburn haired almost 6 year old daughter, enunciating clearly so that her partially deaf daughter could make out the words.


"I love you too," Michaela kissed her daughter back. She straightened and watched as Violet ran off in chase of her friends, the little girl looking more like she should be Reuben's twin then her actual age of 6. Her little miracle baby still tiny, but oh so fearless.

"Mama," Reuben called her, his chubby little arm reaching out to her. "Mama, I wanna help ya wiv da tchair."

"You do?" She smiled and lifted her son from the wagon.

"Corwus," Reuben gave her a lopsided smile. The little boy pivoted, missing his mother's
tearful look, not realising the affect he had on her, not realising how much he looked like his missing father.

"Ma Ma," Beth stood up unsteadily in the back of the wagon, her lip trembling as she saw her mother's tearful expression.

"Oh My Bethie Bubbles," Michaela smiled brightly, grabbing her daughter and swinging her exuberantly out the wagon, the little girl chortling with delight. "Is my Bethie Bubbles going to help me today?" Michaela bounced her baby girl on her hip, the 2 year old grinning with the fun of it. Michaela chuckled as Beth shook her head, the toddler's blonde hair, flicking wildly as they played their little game, the game they always played with each other every morning. "Is my Bethie Bubbles going to help me look after Klara today?" Michaela smiled towards the door of the clinic which Klara had opened, the nurse, who had been her rock in the past year, staring tiredly out of the door, at 34 weeks pregnant ready for her confinement to be over.

"Yup," Beth nodded, "Lo Kara."

"Hello Bubbly girl," Klara greeted the youngest Sully. "Let's get you settled," she deftly took the toddler from her mother moving towards her own son who was already playing in the corner.

Michaela took a deep breath as she closed the door, slipping her arms from her coat and getting ready for work. Safe in her clinic, where she could pretend everything was normal and that she could pretend at the end of the day she was going back to him. Going back home to her Sully.

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Michaela settled the dishes onto the kitchen counter and began to pump the water into the sink. The children where chattering behind her, discussing the merits of each bedtime story, trying to decide amongst them which they should have read to them. She paused as a body pressed against her, arms wrapping around her middle. With a sigh she reached behind her, wishing so much that she could drop her head back onto his shoulder, instead her hand finding the long soft tresses of her daughter, "Katie?"

"Mama," Katie whispered into her back.

"Are you alright?" Michaela asked softly, wiping her hands on her apron and rotating within her daughter's arms to embrace her daughter properly.

"Yeah," Katie nodded sadly.

She was tired Michaela could see that, the day at school had tired all of the girls out and they became all the more cuddly when they were tired, more in need of her. Michaela smoothed her hand over Katie's crown. "Have you finished your homework?"

"Uh huh," Katie nodded, pressing herself tightly into her mother, holding her fiercely.

"Katie?" Michaela whispered softly, conscious that the younger children had stopped chattering and were looking towards them "Would you like to talk to me about something?"

Slowly Katie lifted her head, her big brown eyes staring mournfully into Michaela's. "How come, you call Beth, Bethie Bubbles, but ya don't call me Twink?"
"I..." Michaela paused, Esme, Violet and Reuben all rushing to her side, "I'm sorry..." she opened her arms to encompass the other children. "I suppose, I..."

"Is it coz she's little?" Katie asked softly. "Coz she won't remember Papa?"

"I..." Michaela froze, her façade, of Sully just away working slipped, her children, just like her husband, the only people she could not hide from. "I believe so, yes."

"Oh," Katie whispered.

"Mama," Esme wriggled closer to her mother, ensuring she was tightly pressed to Michaela but still allowing her younger smaller siblings close contact with their mother as well. "We're gonna find him, ain't we?"

"Yes, we shall," Michaela looked towards the fire, unable to look down, unable to look into their eyes. "I just need to get a bit more money and then I shall be able to pay the gentleman in Chicago to follow the lead he has."

"I gotted money," Reuben looked at her. "I gotta dollar."

"I got 4," Esmee offered.

"No thank you my darlings," Michaela shook her head. "That is your money, you must spend it on things tha..."

"We want," Katie finished. "Mama, all we want is Papa."

"I know," Michaela's arms tensed around her children, wishing beyond anything that she could give them what they wanted. That she could give all of them what they needed. So she could take away the pain, the pain of him not being with them. "I want him too."

"Don't cry," Reuben called reaching to touch his mother's face, his little hand not able to reach her tear covered cheek. "Mama! No cry."

"I..." Michaela sighed and crouched down, allowing the children to scramble in tightly to her, Beth toddling in having found herself alone. "I want to huggle." Katie gave a snort of laughter, and a chain reaction took off each of the children giggling at their mother's uncharacteristic use of their made up word. "Am I...?" Michaela lay down on the dirty kitchen floor allowing the children to clamber over her. "Am I doing it right?"

"Yeah," Katie nodded, her cheek pressed tightly against Michaela's, her skin soft and warm. "Mama you always do it right."

Chapter 3

So more about Sully's life in England, and more about why he's not been able to leave.

Durlish Park Estate
Berkshire, England

6th January 1881

His spit sizzled on the hot surface and with a sigh he placed the iron on the thick green brown trousers which required pressing. There were three identical pairs to press, clothes
that would be needed in by His Lordship in the cold Berkshire weather whilst out shooting. The fabric was coarse and thick, difficult to press, but in his year at Durlish Park he had learnt how to press any item of clothing, what puzzled him still, was that strangely the act satisfied him, more than likely because it took deep concentration to ensure the clothes were just right, that and no one bothered him, no one ever bothered anyone when they were ironing the families clothes, a mishap would be too costly for words.

"Oh Mr Sully."

Sully froze but lifted the iron before straightening upright, the iron extended away from the fabric. "My Lady," he dipped his head respectfully to the Lady of the House. Helena Hess smiled pleasantly at him, she was by all accounts a beautiful woman but the only thing that he ever saw was her hair, her beautiful coppery coloured, Michaela's colour, sometimes he wondered if it too smelled like honeysuckle or if it was as soft. She was younger then Michaela though and taller and her voice was slightly curt, tinged with the accent of whichever European country she had been born in. When she spoke she always broke the wonderings of honeysuckle blossoms.

"I do apologise for interrupting you," she straightened her skirt. "Alfred asked me to let Mr Beardmore know that Mr Johnson wishes to see you when he arrives, yet it seems Mr Beardmore is busy elsewhere in the house so I thought I would tell you directly."

"My Lady," Sully repeated, his brow wrinkling wondering why he was being sought out by the House Steward.

"Oh, I'm sure it's nothing to worry about, believe me Alfred wouldn't let you go," Helena smiled once more, before reaching nervously to pat the back of her hair. "Well I best let you get on, there is so much to do!" She turned her black boot grating on the tile floor. "Oh before I forget, would you be able to watch Fallon during the party? He's such a fat old thing, he will just get in the way."

"Of course My Lady," Sully nodded, bowing his head respectfully once more, nervousness rising in his chest over why he could be summonsed.

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Shoving the hunk of bread down is throat Sully stumbled across the hallway to Mr Beardmore's parlour. It was fitting that Mr Johnson, the House Steward and Lord's Business Manager, would come in the break, never wanting them during the 17 hours a day they worked, always those stolen away breaks. Choking down the last of the crumbs of the bread, Sully brushed down his restrictive waistcoat and knocked on the door. The dark wood door creaked open to reveal the narrowest of men. Andrew Johnson looked as though he was made of wire, everything about him was thin and straight, his arms, his legs, even his wire rim glasses perched on his bone straight nose. Sully dipped his head respectfully. The House Steward was second only to Lord Ainscough himself and despite being in service he was a middle class gentleman and a shrewd business man. His very position commanded the respect.

"Mr Sully," Andrew Johnson's words were spoken like a questions though Sully knew that Mr Johnson knew exactly who he was, and he knew exactly how the other man felt about him. It was one of his earliest memories of England, the Steward's reedy thin voice arguing that he should be reported as a stowaway, yet for some reason, Sully had been given a reprieve and instead only worked his hours of the day away instead of wallowing in a prison. Sully dipped his head again. "Have a seat."
Sully raised his eyebrows but moved to the worn seat tucked in the corner of Mr Beardmore's parlour as indicated.

"I'm sure you are aware that I work in London," The House Steward continued this time not asking a question, he cleared his throat slightly, "as such, I have access to numerous political buildings, including the office of the American ambassador." He looked coolly over his shoulder as Sully shifted slightly. "It appears that despite your curious arrival, his Lordship holds you in high regard, and as such had my office procure these," he lifted a sheath of papers from his black leather bag and held them out. "I do not need to advise you of the importance of keeping these safe, they have been immensely difficult to secure," he cleared his throat once more. "I would remind you that there is a month's notice period required in this household. That is all."

Sully stared at the cream paper in his hand, stunned for a moment to be holding the documents, documents that meant so much, that meant everything.

"Mr Sully," Johnson cleared his throat. "That is all. Do you not have duties to attend to with the shooting party?"

"Sir," Sully muttered, rushing to stand and stumbled out the room, his feet feeling like he was walking two inches above the ground.

"SULLY!"

He turned, barely missing a kitchen maid as she scurried to her next chore of a seemingly never ending list. Sully nodded at the groom who appeared at the doorway, the other man wary of entering the house with his dirty boots for fear of eliciting a smack from one of the house staff. "Luke," Sully whispered, his fingers gripping the paper that meant so much.

"Sorry to bother you I know you're busy." The groom ran his hands through his hair nervously. "You seen young Jack?"

"He's about," Sully muttered, his eyes fixed firmly on the papers in his hand, trying to hold back tears of relief.

"Just the post master dropped this off," Luke whispered holding a telegram out for Sully to see. "It's from War Office."

"War Office?" Sully repeated, for the first time paying attention to the man. "Oh," he took the telegram from the groom. "I'll make sure he gets it."

"Thanks, I best get on, Lord knows how many horses we're boarding." The other man gave a relieved smile, glad to pass on the burden of the telegram.

Sully nodded and turned coming face to face with the Butler, Mr Beardmore.

"What did the groom want?" The man stared out the open door, his face bearing the signs of stress, even though he maintained the air of calm, his nose red and florid.

"Telegram from War Office for Jack," Sully mumbled clutching hold of the two life changing envelopes.
"Oh," Mr Beardmore's composure dropped for a second. "I'll ask Mrs Scott if we can use her sitting room for the...I ..." he coughed, clearing his throat. "I must find him."

"I'll do it," Sully straightened, his joy at holding his pass home slipping.

"No no," Mr Beardmore patted Sully on the shoulder. "He already hates me. You need to be his comfort; I understand you are watching Fallon?"

"Huh?" Sully blinked surprised by the change in topic. "Yeah, I mean Yes."

"The dog will provide him comfort too," Mr Beardmore smiled weakly. "I will find him. Carry on; we have a lot to attend to today."

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Slowly the door to his miniscule bedroom opened, and though he should stand up Sully remained seated. For once able to have an excuse for not standing to attention, his legs laden down with Fallon's fat warm body and Jack's head weighing heavily in his lap. The boy had cried himself to sleep, after hours of keeping up appearances he had finally lost his composure as the starter was being sent up which had given Sully the chance to do what he did best and be a father, the thing he missed most in the world other than being a husband.

Sully dipped his head as the Lord of the House stared sadly into the room. Sully studied the man for a moment, he could see it, the fatherly urge reaching our of Alfred's hazel eyes, the fact that Jack was the same ages as the Lord's son not lost on his employer, the fact that this hall boy was only twelve years old, yet his life was so different. But the fact that Jack was here was probably a blessing in disguise, a twelve year old orphan was a bad place to be, but if you had a position, even a menial one, meant that Jack stood a chance. It meant he was kept out of the workhouse.

"Is he..." Alfred stopped himself. "Has Fallon been good?"

"Yes Sir," Sully nodded, running his hand through the dog's thick fur, "Been a comfort to Jack."

"That is good," The other man sighed, his eyes fixed on the way that Jack was hugging hold of the animal by the scruff of the neck. "I much suspect Fallon will be better down here tonight."

"Sir?"

"I shall see you tomorrow," Alfred dipped his head. "I sharn't need waking tomorrow Sully, you have more important things to attend to, and I am capable of dressing myself for one day," he nervously rubbed his knuckles. "I hope you get some sleep."

"Thank you Sir," Sully whispered, his arm moving to stroke Jack's back, as the boy gave an involuntary shudder. "For today."

"Today?" Alfred raised his eyebrows quizzically before realising what Sully was talking about. "Mr Johnson. Well everyone should have some form of identification, it makes your position here more tenable. Good night, Sully."

Sully stared as the door closed, a multitude of emotions pummelling around his head, the happiness, the sadness, the confusion and love of wonder and worry. With a shuddering
breath that was echoed by Jack, Sully closed his eyes, his hand lovingly stroking the young boy’s shoulder, pretending that he was back home that the warm body in his lap was one of his children. That he was safe, that they were safe, that they were together.

Chapter 4

Colorado Springs

7th January 1881

Nervously Reuben stepped off the walk of the clinic, he wasn’t supposed to do this, he was supposed to stay inside and be a good boy, but what he had to do was more important than being a good boy. He was lucky Klara had fallen asleep in the corner and Beth and AJ were happy playing together, it meant that he could do what he needed to do.

Cautiously the three year old walked his way across the roadway. The gravel was cold and wet, crunching under his feet. He didn't like the road, there were big horses but he knew he had to be brave, it was his job to be brave now, at least until they found Papa, when they found Papa he could be scared again. Reuben took a large gulp of frigid air and reached for the handle to the jail. He exhaled loudly, his shoulders sagging in defeat, the door was locked, Sheriff Carl wasn't there, the journey out of the clinic had been in vain.

"So Master Sully?"

Reuben spun on his heels, his smile stretching across his face as he looked up at his quarry. "Shewif Carl," he gushed happily.

"What’s up Reuben?" The sheriff crouched down beside the little boy. "Ya Ma know ya out here?"

Reuben chewed his lip and thrust his hands into his pockets looking sadly at the floor. "Uh uh."

"Well maybe we should go back to the clinic," The Sheriff smiled at the little boy.

"In a bit," Reuben requested hopefully. "I gotta talk to ya."

"You do huh?"

"I gotta," Reuben nodded seriously. "Pwease?" he sniffed the cold January air making his nose drip.

"Alright," Carl stood up and reached for his keys to unlock the door. "We'll chat for five minutes, and then I'm taking ya back to ya Ma." He held his hand out for Reuben, the barely out of diapers little boy looking up at him with such a serious grown up look that he felt he had no choice. The Sully kids were all too good to disobey Michaela without a reason, and because of that he knew that whatever Reuben had to talk to him about he had to listen.

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Loren looked up as a shadow fell over his paper, and smiled as he saw Katie. The little girl he thought of as his granddaughter was rapidly growing out of her childhood, she was already beautiful, each day looking more and more like her mother, especially now that her hair had started to darken. Loren lowered his paper onto the worn table, his smile waning a little as he took in Katie's solemn expression.
"Hello there Katie, how is school going?" Loren held out his arms inviting Katie to sit on his knee.

"Alright," Kate smiled weakly, she hesitated for a moment before slowly sinking into position on his knee, her head falling back onto Loren's shoulder.

"Come on," Loren hugged her tightly. "What's up with my favourite girl?"

Katie sighed heavily. "Ya gotta be careful when you say that you know," she lifted her head from his shoulder and looked at him sadly. "Esmee and Violet might hear you and get upset."

"I'm allowed to have more than one favourite you know," Loren smiled at her, his face wrinkling with the action, "You're just a tiny bit more than them, you know why?"

"I'm the eldest," Katie shrugged.

"You called me Grampy first," Loren grinned and rubbed her arm comfortingly. "So you were my first granddaughter."

Katie smiled, "I like having you as my Grampy."

"Well that's good," he nudged her slightly. "So..." he raised his eyebrows, inviting her to tell her why she was here during her lunch break, why she wasn't playing with her friends.

"Grampy," Katie sighed heavily, "Grampy will you give me a job?"

"A job?" Loren frowned.

"I'll do anything, anything at all," Katie twisted her head and looked up at him earnestly, her brown eyes burning into Loren's with their hopefulness.

"But you're a little girl, little girls shouldn't have jobs," Loren shook his head.

"Benny has a job," Katie protested, twisting her body on Loren's knee so that she could protest more easily.

"Benny has chores," Loren pointed out the difference between what Ben did around the store and what Katie was asking. "He sweeps, mostly all that dog hair," he glanced over at the sleeping Fidget. "He doesn't work, sure he might help out when we are busy but that is because he says he wants to. Why do you want a job Katie?"

"We need the money," Katie sighed sadly. "So we can pay the man to find Papa."

"I see," Loren whispered his hands tightening around Katie, holding her tight as the little girl sighed sadly once more. "Well I'll think about it."

"You will?" Katie smile brightened. "Really?"

"Sure," Loren lied to the little girl, having no intention of letting her work for him or anyone else while she was still so young. "Now, how about a piece of candy?"
"I'm only allowed candy at the weekend," Katie pointed out.

"Well," Loren pushed her off his lap so he could stand and take her to the candy display. "It's just gonna have to be our little secret," he reached for the jar of cinder toffee, one of Katie's favourites. "And sides any Grampy is allow to give his grandkids candy whenever he wants," he handed Katie the sweet treat and watched as she delicately nibbled on the corner, her youthful innocence delighting in the sweet yet bitter taste, the way she was eating so different then when she was very small when she would have thrust the whole piece in her mouth. "Just mind you clean your teeth good." Loren kissed her softly on the crown. "Now get off with you," he shooed her towards the door, watching sadly as she ran away, wishing he could do something to take away any of the pain that the family he loved so much was feeling.

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Michaela looked up surprised as the door to the clinic opened without her permission, "Reuben?" She gasped in shock as the little boy trotted in closely followed by the tall town Sheriff, "Carl?"

"Hey there Dr Mike," The Sheriff smiled easily at her. "Hey why don't ya go play," he tapped Reuben on the head. "I'll talk to ya Ma."

"Kay," Reuben smiled up at Carl and darted for the internal door.

"He came to see me," Carl explained as Michaela stared wordlessly at him. "Said Klara was sleeping, guess it's tiring being," he gestured the shape of a pregnant stomach and shrugged. "I mean you know," he cringed as Michaela looked down at her almost too thin frame.

"Yes," Michaela whispered softly, slowly raising her head to look at him once more. "Reuben walked to the jail?"

"Yeah, don't get mad at him," Carl requested. "He wanted to talk to me." He sat on the edge of the cot and looked up at Michaela.

"Why?" Michaela frowned trying to fathom what Reuben would have wanted to talk about.

"Bout this man in Chicago," Carl winced as Michaela's eyes widened, her expression making him feel like he had just slapped her. "Sorry, he, well you know."

"Misses his father," Michaela whispered.

Carl frowned as Michaela suddenly went bright red and rose from her seat fanning herself. "I didn't mean to upset ya."

"You haven't...I..." she exhaled through pursed lips.

"You sick?" Carl rose nervously.

"No," Michaela shook her head and moved to the pail of water, scooping some into her hands and splashing it across her face. "Honestly I'm not sick, it's a part of being a woman of a certain age," she straightened her hair before turning and looking at Carl. "I'm sorry he bothered you."
"He didn't," Carl shook his head. "Look My Clairee had a sister up that way, I could drop by and see if I could fin..." he trailed off as he watched Michaela sink into her chair, a look of complete defeat on her face. "He doesn't have a lead does he?"

"Not really," Michaela whispered her hands coming to cradle her face her eyes staring resolutely at the desk, not making eye contact. "Nothing concrete, what he has could be any man, I just can't give up," she forced herself to smile. "I have to keep going. Everyone believes that I am just pretending but I know he isn't dead, I know it, I know I will find him, I can feel him here," she touched her chest. "I hear what people say about me, that I am clinging onto this hopeless hope because of my age and that I don't want to be an old..."

"Michaela no one thinks that," Carl picked nervously at the brim on his hat. "You ain't old, and even if ya ain't as young as you were, if we knew for definite that he was gone after an appropriate amount of time, then well," he grinned sheepishly. "I would. Ya beautiful because you are you, not because of ya hair being red and having smooth skin," he put his hat back on his head using the action to hide his embarrassment, "but the thing is, no one ever will do that, because if you say Sully is still alive then people believe you. We all saw what you were like. We all know how you two are together. God, you nearly went off traipsing into that early snow when you were pregnant with Beth, after his horse came back without him. Everyone told you he would be dead and you refused it, you knew. Half the men of this town went out in that freezing weather to look for him because we knew it was the only way to stop you, all eight months pregnant and barely able to walk in a straight line from doing it yourself. If it had been anyone else we would have given her black to wear." Carl reached for his hankie to offer to Michaela as she gave him a teary smile. "You knew and you were right. And those that matter, we know you are right. We know you will find him, and so does Reuben he just knows that his Ma needs a bit of help."

"Thank you," Michaela whispered.

"No worries," The Sheriff rose and smiled weakly. "Look the offer is there whether it be something or nothing, I don't mind, I can go speak to him for you. And if you need anything doing just shout, that's what I'm here for, to help," he crossed to the door and his smile strengthened "You're right Michaela, I ain't never known you wrong, you'll find your Sully, I know it."

Chapter 5

Durlish Park
Berkshire, England

8th January 1881

Sully blinked as another faceless servant rushed past him, banging him with their own master or mistresses' clothes. The downstairs at Durlish Park had turned into some kind of three ringed circus with all the extra maids, grooms, and valets, each new person named for ease after their employer. Sully twisted his body through the throng as the barely organised chaos carried on around him, carefully negotiating the passageway while holding Fallon in his arms, the dog too slow to be allowed to walk the passageway as he would be a tripping hazard.

"How's Jack?" Sully turned and stared blankly at one of the young kitchen maids, her
dark hair plastered to her head due to the heat that bellowed out of the kitchen which had to feed three times the number of people it usually did.

"He's coping," Sully muttered softly.

"Don't you dare come any closer," A voice barked out of the heat as the house cook barged to the doorway. "I am not having that dog in here."

"No Ma'am," Sully nodded, tightening his grip on Fallon who had become animated at the smell of food.

"Get in with you," The Cook swiped the maid around the head sending her back into the furnace. "You wouldn't have thought we had a house full with the way that girl carries on," she rolled her eyes and made to turn to go back into the largest room in the servant's area. Before she moved off she looked back over her shoulder her eyes narrowing slightly. "You minding that lad?"

"Yes," Sully nodded. "He's sleeping. I'm gonna get him out for a walk tomorrow."

"That's good," The cook nodded. "Got to look after that lad now." She pressed her lips together and turned once more. "Say?"

Sully paused mid step having thought he had been dismissed. "Mrs Amershams," he looked at the cook curiously.

"What's this fascination you American's got with Apple pie?" The cook smiled slyly at him. "Miss Nibs had me add it to the menu for some American powerhouse couple that are attending."

"Just a dessert," Sully shrugged. "Anyone who likes sweet..." he trailed off his mind playing a shot of Michaela in front of his eyes as he saw her delighting in a mouthful of Grace or Rosie's pie, the fork lingering in her kissable mouth as she savoured the taste, her eyes closed in contentment. Sully cleared his throat. "It's just a taste thing."

"Alright then," The Cook looked at him curiously, puzzled by his hesitation. "You get that dog upstairs, and watch that boy."

"Yes Ma'am," Sully repeated holding Fallon tightly, the dog an unlikely comfort blanket.

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He fiddled with his collar, the starched white fabric uncomfortably tight around his neck. As the Lord's valet it was rare that he was asked to serve at a dinner but with the number of the people staying in the house it was needed so that the service was as flawless as the guests expected and the Hess's demanded. Nearly all the male servants in the house with the exception of Jack and the grooms were serving tonight, all playing their part in this over the top bizarre reality.

With a well-timed clearing of the throat, Mr Beardmore opened the door to the dining room and began the silent procession of servants into the ornate room. The table was surrounded by people in their finery, their clipped voices filling the enormous space with information that interested no one but themselves. Sully moved forward, fourth in line behind the first, second and third footmen, the men who usually served the family, the ones who knew what they were doing. Sully took a deep breath, he was just there to lend a hand; that was all, walk round the table, let Mr Beardmore serve the soup from the tureen.
he was holding.

Three paces into the room he froze, a wave of ice cold blood rushing round his body with lightening quick speed.

"Go forward," he heard someone whisper, a tray pressing insistently into his back trying to force him forward. But he couldn’t, he couldn’t make his body move while his brain tried to process what he was seeing in front of him. Or more importantly who he was seeing. Dressed in her finery with her hair piled elegantly on her head he blinked as he took in the form of the woman who was unmistakably Michaela’s older sister, a woman who looked so similar to her sister yet at the same time was so appallingly different.

"Is she alright?" he whispered, his voice catching in his throat, unheard by no one except his own straining ears. He shuffled forward slightly, oblivious to the jam of staff he was creating or Mr Beardmore striding towards him with a face like thunder. His arms began to sag, the weight of the silver soup tureen like lead weights pulling him under a still pond.

The silver dish clattered to the ground, the soup inside splattered across the impossibly ornate dining room. Silence greeted him like a smack in the face. The room which had moments ago been filled with inane chatter suddenly silenced with the intrusion.

"Mr Sully," Mr Beardmore marched forward. "Are you unwell?" he hissed.

"Is she alright?" Sully asked, moving a step forward his eyes firmly fixed on Claudette, the woman shifting uncomfortably in her seat under his scrutiny.

"Mr Sully," Mr Beardmore reached him. "I apologise my Lord," he shot over his shoulder at Alfred who was standing slowly with concern. "Griffith, Andrew, get him downstairs," he hissed instructions at two of the footmen.

"No," Sully shrugged from the butlers grip. "Please, is Michaela alright? are the children? Please I gotta know!"

"MR SULLY!"

Sully struggled as a series of arms grabbed him and began to drag him towards the servant's quarters. "No!" he found his strength and charged forward, needing to know that his family was alright, yearning to hear just a hint of a clipped Boston tone. "PLEASE!" he banged into the table, "Tell me, tell me she's alright, that Violet is OK, you gotta tell me!" he yelled as more arms grabbed him, dragging him from the room. "PLEASE CLAUDETTE, it's SULLY, Michaela's husband you gotta remember, you gotta tell me that my family is safe. PLEASE. I NEED TO KNOW, PLEASE I NEED TO KNOW!"

The door closed blocking his sight of the party but he continued to rage, continued screaming for answers to what had happened to them, to why he had never heard from them. The scenery changed, the oppressive warmth of servant's halls wrapping around him, mixing with his anger making his face feel like it was burning; curious and concerned faces staring at him through the packed halls. His feet were scrabbling, trying to find purchase on the worn stone floor, trying to move back to the room where he could find answers.

Another door closed putting another barrier between him and the truth and the tell-tale
sound of a lock closing filled his ears. Had he been in his rational mind he would have picked the lock with ease, but he was not, he was hovering between elation and madness and his body was fighting itself. Rational thought was not something that in this moment he was capable and instead he slammed his body against the barrier screaming with wife's name, screaming for someone to tell him what had happened to his Michaela.

Chapter 6

Colorado Springs

8th January 1881

A knock at the door roused her from her musings; the day had been quiet, especially as she had sent an exhausted Klara home early for a rest. Slowly Michaela rose from her desk to cross to the door, her eyes washing over her two youngest children to ensure that they were both occupied and would not get caught in a cold draft. She forced a smile on her face and opened the door, her smile instantly relaxing into its natural position as she saw the familiar welcome face of Loren.

"Loren," she took a step back and allowed him entry into the clinic, "are you well?"

"Oh course," Loren winked at her, "just I got this candy that is going old and I figured that I knew where I could get rid of it. If that is alright with you?"

"I'm sure the children will appreciate that," Michaela smiled, extending her hand out to take the bulging paper bag that Loren was holding in his hands.

Loren allowed her to take the weight of the bag but instead of letting it roll out of his palm and into hers, he used the opportunity to capture her wrist with his free hand, holding her firmly but tenderly "Michaela," Michaela looked at him warily, Loren rarely used her given name, instead always favouring 'Dr Mike', "can we talk?" he asked her earnestly.

"Gampy!" a delighted squeal prevented Michaela from answering, Reuben and Beth spotting their beloved pseudo grandpa and rushing to greet him.

"Heya kids," Loren beamed down at them. "You reckon I can talk with ya Ma?"

"Uh huh," Reuben nodded. "You tawlk weal good Gampy."

"Thanks Rubes," Loren released his hold on the bag of sweets and ruffled the little boy's honey coloured hair.

Reuben raised his shoulders to his ears in delight and beamed at Loren before pivoting on one foot and grabbing hold of his younger sister. "Betfie we play," he instructed, dragging his waving sister back to their corner.

Loren waved back at the toddler before slowly turning his attention back to her terrified looking mother. "Michaela," he squeezed her hand. "Do you need me to help you find Sully? I mean pay for it, coz if you want it, I'll pay for it"

"Loren," Michaela whispered, her eyes burning with threatened tears. "You don't need to do that."
"Sure I do," Loren asserted, his blue eyes catching Michaela's weary two tone ones and holding her gaze. "I don't want you killing yaself for a few extra cents, and I don't want my Grandkids working when they are still kids. They got their whole life for that," Michaela's brow creased in confusion at his final words. "Katie came and asked me for a job," Loren clarified.

"Oh," Michaela's shoulders deflated. "It's a wonderful offer Loren, but I'm afraid, the information..." she glanced across at the children in the corner, "the information does not warrant that ..."

"Any information on Sully is worth the cost," Loren stared at her in confusion, struggling to understand her hesitance when he knew how strong their bond was.

"I don't think it is him," Michaela sighed once more, her body seeming to regress towards childhood as she stood under Loren's gaze, her resolve slowly stripping away like layers of an onion. "I had some credit with the investigator, the lead talked of a man who while he fitted..." she glanced at the children, "fitted his description, the man was seen with known prostitutes, I...It can't be him," she blinked, sending heavy tears down her face.

"I'm sorry," Loren squeezed her hand. "Ok," he shifted from one leg to another, uncomfortable and unsure of how to look after the remaining facsimile of a once strong woman. "Michaela, finish for the day," he suggested, "lemme take you and the kids to Grace's. Lemme treat you. Please, I can do that, lemme look after you a bit," he looked at her hopefully. "Please, let me feel like I'm doing something to help, even if it is just pie," he grinned as Michaela gave a soft smile and surreptitiously nodded her head. "Well ain't that grand," he clapped his hands before holding them out to Beth who was watching him. "Come here my Bethie Bubbles, Grampy is takin ya for pie."

"Mama," Reuben pointed out a bird that flew out of the tree the covered the café. "That an eagle?" he asked hopefully.

"No sweetheart," Michaela watched the bird swoop down and claim a scrap of bread, the bird elegantly balancing on the wind to get to its perch on the branches above.

"Oh," Reuben sighed sadly. "I wanna get an eagle feaver," he gave a sad smile, "for my hair."

Michaela smiled. "So you can be like Cloud Dancing?" she deftly moved a glass that Beth nearly knocked over, as the toddler reached for her own cup of milk. "I wonder if he ..." she froze and swivelled in her seat looking over her shoulder towards the East as she swore she heard someone scream her name. Finding the path behind her empty she turned back to her children "I wonder if Cloud Dancing might be able to get you one," she mused.

"He might," Loren added as he returned with a plate of apple pie for Michaela to enjoy. "There ya are Doctor Mike," he set the plate in front of her. "Dr Mike, you alright?" he asked nervously, watching in fear as the colour drained from her face and her brow wrinkled in pain. "Dr Mike?"

"I'm..." Michaela winced, a sharp pain in her shoulder, like she had just struck something heavy or immovable. "I'm..." she tried again, the sound of her name reverberating from a screech bouncing round her skull, with excruciating agony. "I don't feel..." she gripped the table tightly as her eyes began to lose focus. Her body reacting to some terrible yet unseen
trauma, battling to remain conscious, she was barely aware as Loren called for help, as the
old man forced his hands underneath her arms to keep her upright, but in the
moment before her brain plunged her into darkness it fully processed the voice that was
screaming so painfully around her head and as involuntarily as a breath of air his name
slipped from her lips, "Sully."

Michaela stirred as she felt a tickle on her nose, like a cool breeze blowing across it, or
more to the point right at it. Slowly her eyes peeled over and she blinked several times,
bringing her daughter into view. "Katie," she croaked, instinctively reaching to caress her
daughter's cheek.

"Mama," Katie breathed a sigh of relief and almost collapsed onto her holding her tight. "I
was so worried," she mumbled into Michaela's body.

"I'm sorry, I wasn't feeling very well," Michaela told her softly, her arms lightly stroking
Katie's back, an act which was comforting for both of them. "Where are the others?"

"Rosie and Brian are watching them in the café." Katie raised her head and smiled
cheekily at Michaela. "You missed ya pie, ya musta been feeling poorly," her smile
wavered a little. "Ya mustn't miss eating ya pie Ma, ya need it."

"I do?" Michaela smiled at the notion of needing pie, "why is that?"

Katie shifted nervously. "Ya ain't as soft," she resumed the tightness of her hug. "I like it
when ya soft."

Michaela nodded softly, she knew she had lost weight, the act of eating often made her
feel sick, so her meal could go uneaten, when she felt like that she could she only eat the
bare minimum, enough to keep her functioning.

"Sounds like someone is gonna follow in her Ma's footsteps."

Michaela looked up as Klara waddled into the room, holding a tray. The pregnant nurse
set the tray by the bed, and moved her hand to rest on Katie's back. "Good job at waking
her up, I got to check on her now."

"Alright, if ya gotta," Katie sighed and slowly disentangled herself from Michaela. "Mama,
I love you."

"And I you," Michaela returned Katie's kiss.

Katie smiled and looked towards the door hesitant at leaving her mother, the little girl
smiled as she saw the tray that Klara had brought in. "Oh Good Mama, Pie," she smiled.
"I'm gonna let the others know ya Ok," she moved to the doorway and grabbed the door
handle hanging from it as she had done as a small child. "Can we come see her when she's
eating her pie?"

"Only if you lot let her eat it," Klara winked at the little girl. "Now you go give your
brother a hug. He's being brave and won't let anyone hug him."

Katie rolled her eyes, "Rubes is soooo stubborn sometimes, don't worry Klara I'm on it."

"Thanks Katie," Klara watched the little girl make her way out the room before turning
back to the bed. "You mind if I sit?" she asked with her arms bracing her back. "My back is killing me, and I think bending over to check you would finish it."

"Of course," Michaela shifted across the bed to give Klara the space she needed to sit down. "Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm fine, just feeling it," Klara gave a sigh of relief as she sat on the bed. "Besides it's you I want to talk about. What happened?"

"I'm not certain," Michaela answered honestly, her brow wrinkling as she thought back over the sensations that had overcome her before she blacked out.

"Loren said you said Sully," Klara murmured as she took Michaela's wrist to take her pulse.

"I think I heard him," Michaela admitted, "and I had pain in my shoulder, as if I had struck something."

Klara frowned and leaned in to check the shoulder that Michaela had indicated, finding the Michaela's skin was not damaged. "There is no bruising."

"As stupid as this must sound to you. I think it was Sully. I heard my name, it was so far off. I think he was trying to get to me," Michaela wiped her hand across her face. "I sound so ridiculous."

"No you don't," Klara tenderly put her hand on Michaela's shoulder. "You don't sound ridiculous at all. We all know wherever Sully is he'll be trying to get to you."

"I just wish I knew where he was, that he is alright," Michaela shuddered and then sat up suddenly, her arms flew out and she lunged at Klara, falling in to a hug.

Klara blinked at Michaela's uncharacteristic move but enveloped her friend and employer with her arms. "I know Sweetheart," Klara whispered rubbing Michaela's back comfortably. "I wish I knew where he was too. But you'll find him, if anyone can, it will be you."

Chapter 7

Durlish Park
Berkshire England

9th January 1881

The servants of the house lined the servants hall nervously, the clock had struck one in the morning before the house and the guests retired to their rooms and now the hour hand was reaching towards two, counting down to when they should be rising for the next day of chaos. There was little chance of any of them getting any sleep on this strange night, not with the way first Mr Johnson and now Mr Beardmore was berating and instructing them. Telling them what extra mile they would need to go to overcome the American's enormous faux pas. What they would all need to do to ensure the house was not put into disrepute.

The butler was a large man, his position requiring a man of stature, of presence and even
those who had known him for many years shrunk back against the wall as he paced around the worn table, all trying to blend into the wall as he ranted in his whispered shout spewing orders and demanding answers. It was a squeak that caught his attention, a whisper from one of the maids, whispering something, confessing her sins to herself, admitting something without admitting it to anyone. In his 17 years as a butler, George Beardmore had learnt to hear all and he swivelled, his feet striding across the flag stones to bear down upon the young maid, her blue eyes widening to the point of extrusion. "What?" The butler hissed venomously, "If you have something to say..."

"I didn't know she was his wife," The maid whimpered shrinking into the wall. "I didn't know, they were addressed to Michaela Quinn, I thought she was his mistress or a friend."

"What were addressed to Michaela Quinn?" Mr Beardmore asked taking a step back away from the maid as he felt the burning gaze of Mrs Scott on the back of his neck. "Deirdre, what was addressed to Michaela Quinn?"

"He wrote some letters, and I always offered to post them," Deirdre whispered her eyes filling with tears of fear and guilt, "except I didn't."

"Why ever not?" Mrs Scott bustled forward, her lips pressed thin with displeasure at the girl who came under her jurisdiction. "Oh you silly girl," she rolled her eyes as Deirdre gave a whimper and burst into tears. "None of that thank you Griffith," the short housekeeper shot at the first footman as he made a lewd remark under his breath. "Deirdre you are to remain in your room until further notice. The rest of you off to your rooms, we have a busy morning tomorrow." Mrs Scott stepped back to allow people to pass as they filed out, all the while studiously ignoring the butler who was watching her intently. She waited until the last of the servants had filed out of the hall before she turned to her male counterpart. "I will speak to him."

Beardmore shook his head, "I cannot allow that, he has been violent. We could hear him through the door. I would be surprised if I have a parlour left."

"George," Mrs Scott sighed tiredly. "I do not think Mr Sully is the type of man that would strike a woman, and forgive me but this requires a certain delicacy that you do not have."

"I..." the proud butler stumbled over his words.

"If you are concerned for my safety you can remain outside," the housekeeper smiled. "Besides I shall need you to keep the gossips at bay," she nodded towards the servants who were lingering hoping to find out more of the curious situation.

"Very well," Mr Beardmore sighed resignedly, years of working with Louise Scott had taught him when he should argue and when he should give in. He nodded his consent, and despite the housekeeper having a key to his room, on her large bundle that hung from her belt, he held out the key to his room. "I hope you are right."

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Slowly Louise pushed the door to George's parlour open, there was something against the door, a broken chair and she was forced to push hard to allow her enough space between the door and the jamb to gain access to the normally immaculate room. "Byron?" she whispered warily as her eyes surveyed the wreckage of the room. Items were strewn across the floor, some broken, looking as if they had been thrown against the door and wall, all of them used in a failed attempt at freedom. "Bryon?" she repeated again.
"It's just Sully," a voice croaked out.

Louise followed the noise, her eyes falling on a shape sat on the floor propped against the wall. "Sully, I'm going to light a candle, and then I shall close the door. I would like to talk with you if that is alright?" Getting no response Louise did as she had said and lit a candle, her eyes widening as she saw the damage to the walls. She turned slowly and frowned. "You're hurt."

"I guess."

"There is no guessing," Louise moved towards him, and set the candle on the desk before crouching down awkwardly beside him, to take his cut and bruised hands into hers. "I should be able to fix these, no need for a doctor."

"Michaela's a doctor," Sully whispered, his brilliant blue eyes staring into the distance, the candlelight flickering across their watery surface.

"Michaela is your wife?" Louise pressed gently as she tended to his hand. "You never spoke of her before."

"Hurt," Sully mumbled, wincing as Louise tended to his hands. "Like piece of me missing, feels like when I got shot, like when I was sick, it hurts like my blood is on fire when I think about not being with her. I don't talk, I don't think, I just be. I ain't anthing without her."

Louise nodded slowly. "You must love her very much," she sighed as Sully nodded, his body shrinking away from her touch, the words he had just spoken the longest conversation she had ever had with Sully, and it seemed that she was having it with a man who was slowly regressing, slowly becoming a frightened child as his body struggled to assimilate what had happened. She smiled warmly, in reality she was no more than five years older than him but she was most definitely the grown up in the conversation, slowly coaxing the information she needed to help him. "Who is Violet?"

"One of my daughters," Sully croaked a loan tear rolling down his cheek. "I don't know if she's Ok. She was on the..." he trailed of  his mind moving to another place.

"You have other daughters, other children?" Louise asked, her voice quiet despite them being the only ones in the room, gently pulling Sully back into the conversation.

"We got eight, and we got grandchildren, I gonna have one more, Brian, his wife just found out. I don't know what happened to any of them." Sully shuddered involuntarily. "I...she never wrote me...I dunno if they are Ok?" he crumpled, the usually rigid stoic man sliding listlessly down the wall as he slowly unravelled.

"She never would have got your letter," Louise told him softly. "Deirdre didn't post them," she gasped as Sully's eyes shot up at her, making her feel like she had been slapped. "She's a foolish girl and I will deal with her. But I need to help you first, and what we are going to do, is you and I will write to your wife and to your children. And on Monday, you and I will go down to the village and post your letter together. Regardless of what happens I will do this for you."

"What's gonna happen?" Sully looked up at her confused.
"Sully," Louise wiped his face tenderly. "You caused a scene at a party, you embarrassed the house. I don't know what his Lordship will do, I don't even know if he is angry." She smiled sadly at him. "I will speak to him, and I will explain but we have to just hope that his fondness of you and his intrigue into how you came to be in his luggage on the boat will be enough to overcome the shame, to overcome that embarrassment. I don't know if you will be allowed to remain at Durlish Park, but I promise I will do all I can." She squeezed his wounded hand softly in reassurance. "Even if that is just letting your wife know you are alive."

Chapter 8

Colorado Springs

28th January 1881

Brian looked up as the bell on the gazette office tinkled with the sound of the door opening. He smiled at his mother as she closed the door behind her. "Ma?"

"Good morning Brian," Michaela smiled serenely at him. "I saw Rosie earlier she said Vicky was being a bit snuffy and was with you today. I thought I might take a look at her, if that was alright?"

"Sure," Brian smiled and bent behind the counter to collect the Moses basket that held his sleeping six month old daughter. "It's nothing serious though Ma, she's feeding fine and her diapers are normal." He set the basket on the counter. "She's sleeping right now."

"No matter," Michaela smiled at him. "I can handle a cranky baby."

"Alright," Brian lifted his sleeping daughter out of the basket and tucked her head into the curve of his shoulder gently jostling her to wake her up. With a squeak of annoyance his little girl woke and lifted her head and then dropped it against his shoulder "Sorry Vicks, Nanna wants to check you over," he glanced at Michaela. "You wanna sit?"

"Thank you," Michaela moved to the seat and held her arms out to take her youngest granddaughter, she sighed reflexively as Brian placed the little girl into her arms, Victoria staring glumly at her, clearly annoyed at being woken up. "Hello my angel," Michaela cooed cuddling the baby before she started examining her. "Have you heard from Matthew?" Michaela asked Brian as her son hovered over her.

"Yeah, Good news, reckon it will be a boy this time?" Brian grinned as she moved back to the typeset. "As much as he loves Mattie and Cleo I think he wants that little boy."

"He will not care one jot what the baby is," Michaela commented wisely. "Did you care that Vicky was a girl?"

"Nope," Brian shook his head, "but if we have more, it would be nice, ya know to have one of each."

"I understand," Michaela nodded and looked down at the baby using the action to mask her eyes blurring with tears slightly, she loved her own family set up, loved having Sully's little copy in Reuben, no matter how much it hurt to look at him sometimes. "Now Miss Vicky," she muttered using the baby to push her thoughts from her head. "Are you feeling
poorly?” she asked the baby. “Can Nanna listen to your chest?” she bent over to reach for her stethoscope. “Can I listen?” she brought the bell to Vicky’s chest.

“DR MIKE!”

Her head jerked up away from the baby as she heard Horace’s frantic shout.

“DR MIKE!”

“I’ll get him,” Brian muttered rushing to the door.

Michaela closed her arms around the baby making sure she didn’t get blasted by the cold air when Brian opened the door. In moments Horace was bounding into the gazette office, his eyes wide and shocked. “Horace?”

“Dr Mike, I got a telegram for ya,” Horace thrust out the piece of paper holding it out to her. "From ya sister Rebecca, she says one of ya other sisters,” he gulped a breath of air as he relayed the message without letting her read the telegram, "the one in England, she thinks she's seen Sully, seen him in England."

Michaela blinked as Horace finished speaking, not sure what she had heard. Time began to move slowly, she was aware of Brian talking and Horace responding, but nothing them said made sense, nothing at all, save for one thing, his name, Sully's name.

Katie watched her mother’s departing figure and a sigh escaped her. They had almost fought, each of them begging to go with her but Mama saying no, now Michaela was heading for the station and Katie did not know how long she would be without her mother for.

The morning had passed in a blur, she, Esmee and Violet had been pulled out of school when the news of the telegram had come through, Rosie coming to get them while Michaela had rushed home. Now her mother was rushing away, desperate to get to Boston, her arrangements for them up in the air with Brian promising to look after them, while Mama searched for more information on Papa.

Her mother’s franticness was understandable but her decision did not make one bit of sense to her, Katie could not understand why she was not allowed to come to Boston with her mother when there was a chance, even a small chance that they would find her Papa.

"Katie, love," Loren called to her.

The young girl turned and looked over the counter to her Grampy, who was sat with Violet on his knee, his face twisted in confusion as he tried to understand what Violet was rapidly signing. The little girl in her excitement and confusion reverting to the manner of communication she found most easy. "She's asking what's going on?" Katie deciphered.

"Ahh, I don't know angel, Brian will come tell us," Loren gave Violet a comforting hug. "You girls Ok, or do ya want to go sit with Reuben and Beth in with Brian."

"No," Esmee shook her head, joining Katie to hang off the counter to look at him. "We can see station from here, we can see when the train goes."

"She'll write ya when she gets to Boston," Loren assured her. "I'm sure she'll find out
some more information on ya Pa."

"I don't want to read it in a letter," Esmee shook her head, her arms folding across her chest. "I wanna be with her. I wanna find Papa."

"Me too," Katie whispered.

"Me fin Papa," Violet nodded, her brow creased as she studied her sisters lips. "Papa," she sighed.

"Grampy," Katie sighed, "Would ya?" she looked at her feet. "Would ya pay for us," she looked up hopefully at Loren, "to get to Boston?"

"Ya Ma wants ya to stay here," Loren shifted, letting Violet slip from his lap, "you got school."

"We can make up with school," Katie frowned. "We need Mama and Papa, that's all, we can learn over the summer if we miss stuff."

"Yeah," Esmee nodded in confirmation.

"I understand girls, I do, but ya..." Loren trailed off as a clatter of feet sounded into the store, the children of the red school house rushing into the store.

"We gotta plan," Ben announced breathily. "Come on." He grabbed hold of Katie as the children swarmed around Esmee and Violet.

"Ben," Loren called to his son. "Lad, Dr Mike wants them to stay here," he called after the children as they rushed out onto the street.

"Benny," Katie ran along beside her friend. "What are we doing?"

"We're getting ya to ya Pa," Benny tugged her along. "Sammy's getting the tickets, Dad will have to pay if ya get on the train," he glanced back at Katie's face. "I'll pay him back, he knows it. It's starting to leave." He tugged harder at Katie's hand as he saw the engine starting to shift. "COME ON!" He yelled not only to the girl on his hand but to the rest of the children who were buffeting the other two Sully girls along. "COME ON!"

Ben loosened his grip on Katie's hand as they began to run alongside the back of the train. "Get on," Ben shoved Katie. "I'll get the tickets," he peeled off as Katie scrambled onto the slow moving carriage, pulling herself onto the carriage as the momentum and shakes of the track trying to dislodge her. Esmee took Ben's place as she raced to grab the handrail and pull herself onto the carriage. Katie dropped to her knees and held her hand out to her sister as the train began to pick up steam, seizing her sister's soft hand and helped her on. "VIOLET!" Katie reached out again as Esmee slumped onto the wooden planks of the carriage. "COME ON!" She screamed at her sister, watching as her much smaller younger sister, began to lag behind as the train began to pick up speed. "RUN!" Katie watched helplessly as her younger sister stumbled, the distance between them growing, "Violet," she called desperately.

In an instant Ben was back on the track, his longer legs clearing more distance then Violet's. He seized Violet around the waist, hauling her to her feet and then picking up his pace, Violet's feet barely touching the ground as Ben ran for the train. He cleared the
distance and then half threw Violet, keeping his pace as he ran alongside.  

Katie seized Violet’s wrist as her sister flew at her, grabbing her just in time preventing Violet from being dragged under the train. Esmee managed to grab hold of Violet’s other arm pulling her sister onto the train to land on top of her.

"Katie," Ben called, reaching out with the last piece that they would need to get to Boston, the tickets. Katie took a step down onto the metal step, reaching back desperately to grip the pieces of card that meant that they could get to Boston. Her fingers closed round the card a second before Ben stumbled to the ground.

Katie watched as the town she had spent most of her life in began to recede and she hesitantly got to her feet. Nervously she reached for the door, forcing Esmee and Violet into the carriage.

"Hey you kids," The porter strode down the carriage towards them.

"We got tickets," Katie brandished the pieces of paper at him.

"Katie?" Michaela’s startled voice sounded, her head slowly following her voice over the bench. "What are you... Girls what are you doing?"

"We’re helpin ya find Papa," Esmee told her forcefully as she guided Violet into a seat. "Right Katie."

"Right." Katie nodded. "No arguing, he's our Papa and we miss him just as much as you. We're helping ya find him, and there ain't nothing ya can do ta stop us," she swallowed nervously as her mother blinked with surprise. "I mean if that's Ok with ya Mama. We just gotta help," he looked nervously at her sisters. "We just gotta find him."

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Brian raced onto the platform and stared in shock at the children and adults milling around, Ben being helped as he was scolded by Loren up to the ticket office where Klara was stood, wide eyed, the nurse having been in the station helping Michaela onto the train. "Klara, is it true?"

"The girls got on the train," Klara whispered, "the children, they all helped them."

"Whoa," Brian swallowed, running his hands through his hair, using the action as a distraction to give himself time to process what was going on around him. "But they didn't have tickets."

"I got them," Samantha Bing called out sheepishly from the ticket office as Horace stood looking shocked, holding the day’s mail like a child holds a toy for comfort. "Benny said his Dad would pay for them."

"I'll pay for them," Brian shook his head as Loren made his way to the ticket office, holding Ben with one arm as the boy limped, his knee bleeding quite heavily from where he had fallen.

"Needn't worry about it," Loren shook his head. "I got it, this one here will be paying me back."

"Ya can't be mad at me Dad," Ben begged bending over and pressing his hand against his bleeding knee. "They need their Papa, I weren't about to let Katie be without her Ma."
"What about Beth and Reuben?" Brian scowled as he watched Loren pull out the money to pay for the girls tickets. "What do I say to them huh?" he sounded at Ben, angry at the little boy though at the same time proud of what he had done. "What do I say to them? They're gonna think everyone has left them."

"No they won't," Ben shook his head, wincing as Klara forced him into a position so that she could tend to his knee, her week from term belly preventing her from looking at his injury as she usually would. "Just tell Reuben he's gotta look after Beth, he'll be fine. If he thinks he's looking after someone he'll be alright," Ben smiled confidently. "I had to do it Brian, I hate it when she's unhappy."

Brian nodded in understanding at the young boy's logic, "I know, you just should have said."

"There wasn't no time," Ben sighed. "I'm sorry though."

"Thanks," Brian tiredly rubbed his face. "Loren, I'll make sure ya get this back as soon as I can," he turned moving away towards the gazette office where his two youngest siblings were, steeling himself for more tears as the little ones realized they had been left alone.

"Brian," Horace called him back. "You wanna take Dr Mike's mail?"

"Anything look important?" Brian asked pausing.

"Letter from San Francisco, and something from Durlish something, kinda hard to make out," Horace studied the beaten envelope.

"No, they can wait," Brian sighed. "If it's a bill they'll chase it anyway and I'll deal with it then."

"No worries," Horace nodded watching as the young man walked dejectedly away. He turned and headed to the post boxes, studying the beaten up envelope curiously once more, before tucking it in the Sully's pigeon hole ready to be opened when and if Michaela returned.

Chapter 9

Durlish Park
Berkshire England

29th January 1881

Sully took a breath as he finished polishing the master's shoes. The past few weeks had felt like a weight had been lifted from him, now that he knew why Michaela had not responded to him, now that he knew his letter was on his way to her there was a glimmer of hope. Everything about Durlish Park seemed brighter, cleaner somehow, like his worry had been clouding his world. Now he could see colour, he could take joy from the paintings that lined the hallways of the Great House, he could enjoy the cool crisp mornings as he walked the poor fat old Fallon. He could even enjoy the company of the staff of the house. Now that they knew, now that there wasn't this big mystery of who he was they didn't poke and pry. He was even able to enjoy the company of the stupid girl who had kept his letters his conscience, despite his anger, unable to hate her when she
had so tearfully apologised almost prostrating herself at his feet.

He looked around as he heard his name being called, someone from within the staff seeking him out.

Slowly he stood, attracting the maid who was calling him, notifying her he was nearby.

"Oh there you are, His Lordship rang for you," the maid told him before slipping off to carry on with her own tasks. Collecting his tools Sully made his way inside the house, wondering why he was being summoned at the unusual time of the day.

Sully knocked gently on the Lord's office door. The room was just off the House's large library, and despite the fact that Sully was his valet, the Lord rarely called for Sully in the room; instead the room was usually the jurisdiction of one of the parlour maids or Mr Beardmore who would deliver the tea or anything else that his Lordship desired.

Hearing the permission to enter Sully slipped quietly into the room, only to find the Lord of the House stood waiting for him.

"Sully," Alfred Hess smiled warmly at him.

"Sir," Sully dipped his head respectfully. He frowned slightly, echoing the expression of Alfred as the other man twisted his mouth with displeasure. "You..."

"No," Alfred held up his hand, "don't call me that." He spun holding his hand out indicating the chair. "Sit, we must talk."

"Okay," Sully swallowed, his brow creasing further as he struggled to understand what was going on. His relationship with his employer had been strained since the incident at the shooting party, but he had not been fired and he had not been punished. Instead, Alfred had been mostly quiet and aloof, only asking for what he needed and not keeping up an inane stream of chatter throughout their time together. Slowly he sank into the green leather chair pulling his day jacket around him as he watched Alfred move to stare out of his window.

"I have not been fair to you," Alfred murmured as he stared out at the gardeners working on the lawn. "I could have helped you, this month, or even before. It has troubled me that I haven't, but you see," he looked sheepishly over his shoulder, "you intrigued me. I wanted to know the reason you came to be shot and in my luggage, why my staff sort to help you and mostly I think I was intrigued by your silence." He sighed and moved to his drinks cabinet. He lifted a decanter of whisky from the walnut cabinet and held it out, offering a drink to Sully.

Sully waved his hand declining the offer, her brain whirring with what Alfred Hess had just said to him. "I don't understand," he mumbled truthfully.

"Mr Johnson said I should report you but I didn't," Alfred muttered as he took a sip from his drink and grimaced against the bitter tang the liquid gave him in his throat. "I didn't want to. I am used to doing what I want to do," he sighed. "It never occurred to me that you might have a family. You have no ring, and you never spoke of them."

"Mr Beardmore said I was not to talk of my personal life to you," Sully closed his eyes, his brain feeling like it was splitting. "I don't mean ta be rude Sir but are you saying ya would
I don't know." Alfred tipped his head as if to study Sully. "See, I have never heard you say 'ya' before. Is that how you talk?"

"I guess," Sully shrugged. "So what are you saying Si..."

"Alfred," Alfred corrected him. "I want you to tell me about your family. From what I understand you have only a month before you have earned enough to travel home."

"My family," Sully sighed, even though his secret was out downstairs no one had asked of his family, except for Jack who was endearingly curious about them. "I gotta wife, her name's Michaela, she's a doctor, most intelligent beautiful woman I ever met, and she chose me," he blinked as his eyes began to water. "I don't really understand it, but there is this thing between us, this connection, makes everything work, even though on paper it ain't supposed ta. We got 3 adopted kids and we got five kids together."

"Five!" Alfred's eyes widened. "I only heard of the one daughter, the one you were trying to protect."

"Violet," Sully nodded. "She's my middle daughter, when we was coming home from Michaela's Ma in Boston, she got grabbed by some man in Chicago. Violet was born real early and she's pretty much deaf, she didn't hear him and he grabbed her to use as a screen." Sully pressed his fingers into the corner of his eyes trying to stop the image from bursting out of the blue pools, trying not to remember the horrifying moment when Violet had been snatched. "He didn't reckon on me though. I get real protective of them, there ain't nothing I wouldn't do to keep em safe. So I went after them. We was on the roof. I managed to grab Violet but the man had his gun so I had to lead him away over the roof, I left Violet so she wouldn't get shot but I don't know what happened to her. He went to shoot me but I ran at him. Felt like I was splitting apart with the pain, and then I was falling," Sully opened his eyes, swallowing as he took in Alfred's enthralled expression. "Next thing I knew, Millie was over me and we was on the boat waiting to leave New York."

"How remarkable, a strange series of events," Alfred took a sip of his forgotten drink. "Do you know I only ended up in Chicago by fluke that week. Had the baggage car not been there, you could have fallen onto the platform."

"I guess," Sully nodded. "So... was that all you wanted to know?"

"No," Alfred smiled. "Where are you from, you were going home, where is home?"

"Colorado Springs, Colorado," Sully mumbled, his lips pulling into a smile as he thought of the dusty streets, his friends, his home, his family.

"Remarkable," Alfred mumbled again. Slowly he stood and reached into his pocket. "This is for you."

"What is it?" Sully stared curiously at the envelope that he was offered.

"A ticket," Alfred told him, placing the envelope on the coffee table when he realised that Sully was not about to take it. "I know that you are waiting for your wife to respond to a letter that you wrote to her, but this is a way of assuaging my guilt," he smiled. "I've asked..."
Mr Beardmore to arrange the carriage for you. It will need to leave within the hour if you are to catch your passage."

"Sir?" Sully blinked. "I really don't understand."

"I'm sending you home," Alfred smiled. "I should have done it long ago."

"But..." Sully fumbled for words. "Let me pay ya."

"No no," Alfred waved his hand. "Colorado is a long way in land from my recollection of geography. Use what you have saved to reach your wife," he drained his glass and held it out to Sully. "Would you do me one more task as my valet and take this to be cleaned."

"Of course Sir," Sully took the heavy lead crystal glass.

"I wish you a pleasant journey Sully." Alfred smiled pleasantly as he moved to sit as his desk. "I hope you will remember to write me, when you arrive home."

"Of course," Sully nodded his body straining to want to run. "Of course."

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"WAIT!"

Sully paused, stopping himself at the last minute from closing the carriage door. Unusually for a servant he was being allowed to use the family carriage and even more strangely he had been allowed out of the main door, instead of the side door, being treated like an equal to the family he had spent a year serving.

"WAIT!" a clatter of heavy boots across the polished limestone floor of Durlish Park's grand hallway.

Sully sat up straighter as he watched Mr Beardmore move to catch the racing figure of Jack, the young boy racing to say goodbye, forgoing all protocol as he raced to stop Sully from leaving. Sully grinned as the boy dodged the butler's hands and skidded into the driveway. In one smooth move Sully slid from the carriage and opened his arms wide, accepting the boy into his arms.

"You can't leave me," Jack mumbled as he pelted into Sully. "You can't just go."

"I gotta," Sully told him simply. The ticket he carried in his pocket seemingly burning into his skin as he felt the moments tick by and the time he had to get to the port lessen. "My family."

Jack blinked and nodded his head, silently accepting what he knew to be true, "but you was just gonna leave me," the young boy hugged the man who had helped and guided him through the last year.

"I'm sorry," Sully whispered truthfully, hugging the young boy tightly. "I have to go and no one could find you."

"I was practising my reading," Jack mumbled. "I was in the hidy," he told Sully referring to an area in the attic of the house that was out of the way and seemingly never used by anyone. he took a step back from Sully and wiped his nose on his sleeve. "You said you were gonna teach me how to do that bow and arrow thing. Like ya taught Master Albert."
"I know, and I'm sorry," Sully took a deep breath, "but I taught ya something better. I taught ya how to read and write. You can do anything with that."

"I know," Jack sniffed, looking over his shoulder as Mr Beardmore cleared his throat, indicating his displeasure at the carry on in front of the Lord of the House. "I could even own a place like this," he gave Sully a lopsided grin. "Well I might be butler one day."

"You might," Sully grinned, ruffling the boy's hair. "Don't take no stick from Griffith or the others."

"I won't," Jack grinned. "I hope you find her and your kids," he rubbed his nose again, "they're real lucky." He looked behind him as Mr Beardmore once again cleared his throat. "Best you get going huh?" Jack smiled at Sully. He sniffed once more and swivelled on his heels, running off towards the side of the house, towards the servant's entrance.

Sully watched the young boy move away before pulling himself into the carriage. With a nod he bid farewell to his watching former employer and with a flick of the reigns the driver of the carriage got his journey underway, taking him away from Durlish Park, away from the house that had been his life for a year, away towards the ship that would take him to Michaela and his kids, to his true home.

Chapter 10

Michaela's last final hurdle before finding Sully...her mother

Boston, Massachusetts

3rd February 1881

Michaela smiled by way of thanks at the man who assisted her from the carriage as she disembarked. Burdened with a sleeping Violet in her arms she walked unsteadily forward ignoring the curious looks that followed her. She knew she was a sight, not least for the way she carried her sleeping daughter, as well as for Esmee and Katie tiredly following her, all three of the girls still in the clothes they had on when they had left Colorado Springs. But the real reason she knew was her own appearance, the tired red rimmed eyes. She had barely slept on the journey, her mind shifting between happiness, panic and paranoia as she tried to process her sister's cryptic telegram.

"Mama," Esmee mumbled resting her head against Michaela's arm. "Is that your one?" she pointed to a suitcase being unloaded from the baggage car. The only bag she had with her, a bag which contained only two changes of clothes for herself and mostly photographs. Photographs of her life with Sully, or their world, of their family, of everything. In the moment she had spent packing the idea that maybe he had forgotten them flashing through her mind, and her logical brain telling her that their precious photographs would be a way of helping him find his way back to them.

"Yes Sweetheart," Michaela nodded.

"I'll get it," Katie told her, weaving her way elegantly between the set out bags to retrieve it.

Michaela smiled at her daughter as she watched her move, as shocked as she had been at
their sudden arrival on the train, they had provided her some welcome relief, almost as if they had been her lightning rod, grounding her to reality and preventing her from going into her own fractious mind too much.

"Michaela!"

She turned at the sound of her name being called, her sister's voice calling to her as Rebecca spotted her and rushed to greet her. Esmee reached Rebecca first, the tall curly haired youngster desperate for a pair of adult arms to wrap around herself, an innocent action that made Michaela ache as she realised not for the first time how full her hands were and how much the girls had been forced to age.

"Michaela," Rebecca smiled as she moved towards her younger sister, forced to waddle by the way Esmee was holding onto her. "How are you?" she whispered out of duty. "I didn't know you were bringing the girls."

"Neither did she," Katie muttered sidling close to Michaela.

"No," Michaela shrugged, "they surprised me."

"Well it won't be a problem," she fixed Michaela with an apologetic smile, "you were to be staying with us but as of this morning..." she left the words unsaid and grimaced slightly, indicating the argument that she had had and Michaela still faced.

"Mother," Michaela whispered tiredly, subtly shifted Violet's weight.

"Yes, Mother," Rebecca reached forward and took the suitcase from Katie. "She has promised to at least let you have tonight," she smiled sympathetically. "Come let me take you to get settled, I'm sure you could do with a rest." Rebecca reached and touched her arm tenderly. "I'll hail us a carriage to take us to the house."

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Michaela looked up as a throat was cleared; Harrison the ever faithful family butler raised his eyebrows indicating to her that her mother was approaching. Instinctively Michaela straightened; her tired muscles clamping down over her skeleton and making her become painfully rigid.

Elizabeth entered the sitting room slowly. At 82 years old, her age had finally caught up with her and she moved slowly and purposefully, clutching an ornate cane to support herself and ease her passage. She had grown thin in recent years, beginning to look almost frail, but Michaela knew better, her mother's mind and tongue were still razor sharp, still capable of making a savage blow.

"Michaela," Elizabeth smiled weakly as she came to a stop, her hand resting on the back of a wing backed chair to keep her balance. "Shall I have Harrison have Martha prepare you something to eat?"

"I'm not hungry," Michaela shook her head, hugging herself as she prepared herself for what was to come.

"You look thin," Elizabeth told her, "you should eat something. You have had a long journey."

"I'm not hungry," Michaela repeated, her voice ringing in her ears like a petulant child.
"Well..." Elizabeth's voice sounded strangled. "I insist you at least drink some tea."

"I don't..." Michaela started.

"No," Elizabeth held her hand up. "I insist."

"Mother I don't want tea, I want to read Claudette's letter." Michaela finally made eye contact with her mother, her mother's cool blue eyes looking how she felt a swirl of anger and love. "Please," she added out of practise.

"It's on the mantle," Elizabeth pointed to an envelope sat tucked behind the last family portrait Michaela and Sully had taken. Michaela stared at the picture for a moment, frozen by the sight of the smiling faces, they had been so happy, and yet 3 months after the photograph had been taken their life had been pulled apart. "Michaela, why do the girls have no clothes?" Elizabeth asked softly, nervous as to how her daughter would react as she read Claudette's curious words.

Michaela shot her an injured look as she turned to make use of the better light, not interested in stupid questions that her mother already knew the answer to.

"We shall have to take them to Jordan Marsh," Elizabeth told her trying to make conversation, trying to ground Michaela, to quell the outburst that she knew was coming.

"He's in England," Michaela blurted.

"Not necessarily," Elizabeth shook her head. "Your sister does not make that clear. I find it im..."

"Mother, he had to be dragged from the room," Michaela stared back at the paper again. "I must go," she moved towards the door.

"No you may not," Elizabeth shook her head, releasing the chair and moving to block Michaela's way "You may not go anywhere at this present time."

"You cannot stop me!" Michaela's eyes widened. "He is my husband, I have to find him!"

"I do not dispute that," Elizabeth raised her hand, "but before you are a wife, you are a mother Michaela. That is your primary concern; you must tend to your children."

"You mean in the way you tended to us," Michaela spat at her mother, her tongue working before her mind.

Elizabeth wobbled slightly, looking as if she was reeling from a blow, her head circling backwards before coming straight again. "I always gave you what you needed." She cleared her throat. "You have abandoned 2 of your children, I never did that to you, I simply placed you in the care of a professional."

"I haven't abandoned..." Michaela trailed off, for the first time realising that she had thought little of her youngest children in the week since she had left Colorado Springs.

"No?" Elizabeth raised an eyebrow. "I think from the lack of clothes it is telling that you were planning to leave all the children behind and the older girls thought better of it. You
cannot renege on your responsibility as a mother."

"I..." Michaela chewed her lip. "I just have to find him."

"I know, and I do not dispute that," Elizabeth's hand moved forward to touch her daughter but Michaela shied away, "but you have to open yourself to them. Your behaviour is just as damaging to this family as Sully's disappearance. You are not going anywhere until you spend some time with your daughters as they are used to."

"I have to go to England," Michaela screwed up her face in frustration, unable to comprehend why her mother was being so obstructive.

"I know that," Elizabeth rolled her eyes, "but there is no boat to England until Thursday," she nodded slightly as Michaela whipped her head to look at her in surprise. "I have purchased you a ticket, but..." she raised her hand. "I will not allow you to leave this house unless you remedy some of the damage that is being done to my granddaughters. Firstly, you will eat at every meal, you will eat what I have Martha put on your plate and you will do this without complaint, I do not think you realise the damage in which you are doing to the girls over your attitude to food. Secondly, tomorrow you will accompany me to the department store and we shall spoil the girl's in a financial manner after which we shall adjourn to a tea room for a female family outing. Thirdly, you will have Reuben and Bethan brought to Boston so that the children will be together and will have the comfort of their siblings for the period in which you are away. The children shall remain here under my care, I shall arrange for them to have a tutor so their schooling will not suffer."

"Mother..." Michaela began.

Elizabeth raised her hand indicating her mandate was not yet complete. "Finally, you must return to Boston 6 months from the day you leave. If you fail to do so, I shall take legal steps to formally declare you unfit and shall have your sister or one of your older children formally adopt the children so that they can receive the stability they deserve."

"What!" Michaela stared aghast at Elizabeth. "You cannot take my children!"

"No?" Elizabeth rose a haughty eyebrow. "You were intent on abandoning them, I consider that to be the very characteristic of an unfit mother. 6 months is fair, that shall give you 5 months to find Sully, or at the least what happened to the person who claims to be him," she fixed her daughter with a steely glare. "This family is already shattered by his loss, I will not have you damage it further by you reneging on your duties as a mother. These children deserve better than this. Do you accept my terms?"

"Do I have a choice?" Michaela asked her voice strangled by her closing throat, her mother's words beating her around her head, her mind slowly opening to the possibility that she was doing harm to her children.

"If you want to leave for England than you must," Elizabeth told her simply.

Michaela closed her eyes. "Then I consent," her voice barely more than a whisper. Her body shaking, she wretched, her empty stomach giving nothing as the acrid thought plunged through her like a knife, that going to England although it could bring her everything, she had equally as much chance of losing her whole world.

Chapter 11
New York City, New York

7th February 1881

Michaela dismounted from the train and was immediately engulfed in the bustle of the New York station. The noise was overwhelming, people, trains, sweat and soot, pressed together in a building too small for it to be contained. She allowed herself to be buffeted along the platform towards the small concourse. She had left early this morning, as she needed to collect her ticket which her mother had purchased for her and she had wanted to leave before the girls had woken.

They had had a wonderful few days together, her mother's ultimatum and presence forcing her to just be a mother had done her and the children a world of good, but it had made the leaving so much harder. Last night there had been tears and tantrums, none of the girls accepting that they would be left at their grandmother's house; all of them wanting to come to England with her to find Sully. It had been Elizabeth who had calmed things down and one by one Michaela had taken the girls to their new beds and had a whispered conversation with them, reaffirming their love for each other, plunging it deeper, so that the mere thought of them not being with her stung. She had tried to leave without too much drama, waking early so that she could catch the first train to New York, and she had been able to say goodbye to her children as she had hoped, at least at first, a sweet and sleepy kiss and hug. Her plan had not been fruitful though as by the time she had said goodbye to her Mother the girls had fully awoken and the tears had begun again, this time from all corners, Elizabeth and Harrison included, as the children had had to be dragged from her. She had cried for the first two hours of her journey to New York, the scenery slipping past her unseeing eyes for the rest.

Finally the crush thinned and Michaela found herself stood alone in the concourse, people moving round her like water flowed round rock. She blinked, trying to focus on what she needed to do, on where she needed to go. She was on a deadline now, she had six months to pull her family together once more, she had to use the pain of being on her own to spur her on. To send her forward, if she failed she would lose everything and she could not let that happen, she would not let that happen. She tightened her grip on her suitcase as she strengthened her resolve and turned 90°, towards the rank of waiting taxi cabs.

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Sully paused for a moment as he stepped onto the firm surface of the dockside. He loved water, and he enjoyed and marvelled at the power of the ocean, the endless ebb and flow of the tide, but he had discovered he was not made to travel across it. He had spent most of his passage sat on the deck, trying to keep hold of the contents of his stomach, that or flat on his back on the reed thin mattress of his steerage cabin. But that was over; he was back in his home country.

Stretching he inhaled slowly, his senses taking in the noise and the smell of the city he had last been in a year ago and before that as a boy. The docks were still noisy and busy, a lightly organised chaos, the more unsavoury side of the dock life out in the open now that the first class passengers had departed.

Slowly he began to follow the rest of the steerage passengers up the quayside towards the final check point. He joined the queue watching as the guards checked each of the papers that they were handed, his nervousness rising as he got closer and closer to the front until it was his turn. He handed over his documentation, the immigration officer giving it a quick glance before shoving it back at him and waving him through.
Sully released a breath he had not known he had been holding as he stepped through into New York proper. Blinking he took stock, trying to remember which way he needed to go to find a telegraph office. He needed to find where she was, during his journey across the Atlantic he had realised that Michaela could have easily not returned to Colorado Springs after he had gone missing, she could have stayed in Chicago to try and find him, she could have gone to Boston to be with her mother, she could have gone anywhere. So the easiest way to track her down was send a telegraph to Colorado Springs, Elizabeth in Boston, Matthew in Cincinnati, and Colleen in Philadelphia. He needed to find where she was before he found her. Needed to find where he needed to buy his ticket for.

Throwing his bag over his shoulder Sully began to walk, walking in the general direction of the station, knowing that most telegraph offices were near to stations. If he wanted to find his way home it was the best place to start.

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Michaela stared listlessly out of the cab, the scenery of the bustling city was of no interest to her, despite her love for history and architecture, her mind was too preoccupied with what would now happen with her children. The moment she had sat in the cab the knowledge that she was moving further away from her had hit her harder. That and the realisation that she had perhaps made a mistake in asking Matthew to take Reuben and Bethan to Boston. Both the children had only met him once, and Beth had only been a few months old at the family reunion. She sighed; it had seemed a good idea at the time. Matthew had the capital in which to make the journey without the need for Mother to make a money transfer which she disliked to do and he would have the time to do so when his latest case came to an end in the next few days. She could not change the arrangements now but she just hoped that it did not cause more problems for her already upset children.

She wriggled in her seat, the bouncing of the carriage making her uncomfortable and she fixed her eyes on the street, trying to make her mind off of her discomfort.

With a jolt she sat forward, her eyes processing the walking figure of a man, thinner, paler, with shorter hair but the walk, the elegant lolloping gait unmistakable, the two blue marbles that were his eyes still vibrant even without the sun kissed skin. Her body followed her eyes and she dropped to her knees on the floor, craning her neck to follow the man as the taxi moved past.

Finally her brain caught up and she grasped for the bell pull to indicate to the driver that she needed to him to stop. She was opening the door before the carriage came to a halt, the ground moving as she started to dismount. She staggered, stumbling to the ground as the driver called to her that she was mad. Michaela stared down the street, the man nearly at the corner, about to turn the corner, about to move from view.

She screamed his name; her voice coming out of her with so much force that she nearly fell over.

He turned his head, whipping round with surprise. Michaela started to run, her feet stumbling over the dirt of a working street, her skirt getting in the way as she closed the distance between them. He running to her, the distance closing each second. They hit each other with force, ploughing into one and other with so much force it was as if they had been in an explosion. Michaela's feet left the ground as her arms wrapped around his neck and in moments she was on the floor, his legs giving way as they basked in each other's nearness, in each other's scent and smell and love.
"Sully," she whimpered into the curve of his neck as he blessed her cheek with feathery kisses. "I found you," she cried as the tears began to roll down her cheeks, "I found you."

Chapter 12

New York City, New York

7th February 1881

Sully lifted his lips from her skin, his eyes roving across her face as he struggled to take her in. "It's really you" he whispered his face feeling like it would split open from smiling. The relief pouring out of him, threatening to tear him apart. It was her, his beautiful precious Michaela, she was here in his arms, he was holding her.

"Hey!"

He looked up the cab driver the one that Michaela had been riding in breaking the moment, his frustrated face staring down at them.

"Oh yes," Michaela mumbled and lightly pressed against Sully's chest, instinctively he knew she wanted to get up.

He stood, lifting her to her feet allowing her to face the driver but his hand remained protectively around her waist, not wanting to risk letting go of her and have her vanish. Michaela reached into her purse which was looped around her wrist and held out a coin. "Thank you," Michaela whispered courteously and reached to take her suitcase the cab driver had had the foresight to unload. She dipped her head before slowly rotating in his arms and staring up at him.

Sully swallowed, his eyes diving into hers, drinking the two tone splendour for what felt like eternity. He didn't need any words and neither did she, just to stand, to hold, to stare.

Finally he frowned, noticing the tremor in her arm, noticing how thin her arm was, "you're trembling. Are you cold?"

She shook her head a soft cloud of auburn fluttering around her face, hair dislodged by their unexpected roll across the ground. "No, I just can't believe this is real. Am I dreaming?"

"Only if I am too," Sully smiled and then pinched his arm harshly, he winced. "I guess not," he looked around for a moment trying to place himself, with a smile he noticed a bench and gently guided her to it. "Why are you in New York?" He asked her taking her bag with one hand while his other remained firmly on her tiny waist, "did you get my letter?"

"No," Michaela frowned. "Claudette wrote to Rebecca, Rebecca wired me. I was coming for the boat, I was going to go to her to find where she had seen you, I was coming to find you." she raised her hand and traced her finger across his skin. "What happened Sully?" she blinked, her fingers remaining in contact with him, committing every minute change in his features to her memory of him.

"Is Violet alright?" Sully asked for the first time since there reunion remembering they
had children. "Are they all ok?"

"They are well. Missing you," Michaela brought her fingers to caress his lips, his lips gently pulsed against her finger tips, instinctively reacting to the pressure creating soft kisses that made her entire body tingle. "The older girls are in Boston, they followed me," she sighed sadly. "The last two weeks have been somewhat of a blur." Her brow wrinkled, "I don't understand how you came to be in England?"

"Neither do I. It's all a blur but someone was looking out for me," Sully slid closer to her across the bench his leg pressing hard against her's his arm moving to encapsulate her, protect her from the chill wind, to keep her from ever leaving him. "On the roof, I got clipped by the bullet and I fell. I guess the fall knocked me out. I guess I was lucky because I landed in the Hess's luggage."

"The baggage car," Michaela whispered, "it looked covered," she whispered remembering the horrific day, the sight of the man who was not Sully lying broken on the platform after his fall from the station roof, and no more than fifteen feet from the body, a baggage cart, "you were right there."

Sully nodded slowly, his hand tightening on her elbow as her hand on his shoulder squeezed him. "I remember waking up, but still feeling like I was asleep, I was bleeding and cold. I knew I was on a train coza the movement. I tried calling but no one came. My blood felt like I was on fire and I guess I passed out. The next thing I remember was Millie. I musta scared her half to death, all she came down for was a doll. She was screaming and then it got all blurry. Faces and words all mixed up, all I know is that I felt like I was dying and all I wanted was you."

"Who is Millie? What doll?" Michaela blinked struggling to assimilate what he had told her.

"Millie was a maid at the house, Lady Beatrice wanted her doll in the trunk," Sully whispered. "It don't matter though, all that matters is I got you. I found you," he took a deep breath. "I missed you so much."

"I missed you too," Michaela leant forward, resting her head against his chest, her ear filling with the sound of his steady heartbeat. A noise that was so blissful, it was nirvana.

"I'm sorry," Sully whispered kissing her crown, her hair though peppered with grey still as soft as silk. "I had to earn my passage back a valet doesn't earn that much, I'm sorry it took so long."

"A valet?" Michaela repeated, lifting her head. "You were a servant." A tear trickled down her cheek, "oh Sully," she took a deep breath, "why didn't you write? I would have found the money to bring you home. I could have asked Mother."

"I did," Sully stroked her cheek wiping the tear away, smoothing the film of salty tears across her skin. "I trusted the wrong person. Another one of the maids. She never posted the letters," he shrugged, "apparently she liked me," he gave Michaela a wry smile, he shook his head slightly, the colour in Michaela's cheeks rising her anger blossoming. "It was my fault," he stopped her outburst before it spilled from her mouth. "I shoulda talked about you, I just couldn't it hurt too bad. I never missed anything as much as I missed you this past year," he leaned in softly kissing her cheekbone. "I guess you missed me too," his hand stroked down her arm, "that why you're so thin?"
"I've not been hungry," Michaela admitted. "I felt very nauseous when I did eat, you not being here, I just found everything lacked...lacked..." she began crying again, big tears of relief rolling down her cheeks. "Oh Sully," she leant forward collapsing into him. "I love you," she mumbled into his chest, her breath warming his white shirt with its moisture. "Don't ever leave me; please don't ever leave me again."

"I swear," Sully held her as tightly as he dared her frame birdlike in its fragility in his arms. "I ain't never leaving you again. I can't be without you. I ain't got enough left to survive without ya," he buried his head into her hair, trying to drink in her scent, trying to fill the gaping hole left from their separation. Finally able to heal, now he was with her once more finally able to be complete.

Chapter 13

So time for Michaela to take Sully back to Boston, and you get a glimpse of Claudette's letter to Rebecca

Boston Massachusetts

8th February 1881

Violet lifted her head from the soft feather pillow as she felt a soft thud reverberate through the floor. Lifting herself off of her stomach she knelt staring at the dark wood headboard before rubbing the sleep from her eyes. Turning her head to her left she checked that Esmee was still sleeping, that she had not woken her up when she had moved. The girls even they had been given their own rooms were sharing, like they did when they were at home, both of them much preferring to snuggle together in one bed. Satisfied that Esmee was still asleep Violet slid out of the big bed and padded softly to the door. Opening it took considerable effort but the tiny little girl managed it and made her way out into the chilled hall. Hugging herself against the night time February cold she crept her way down the long passageway of the house to see what had made the noise, her inquisitive young mind needing answers.

She paused as she neared the stairway, the familiar high notes of a voice belonging to someone who should be so far away registering on the level of hearing she was capable of.

"Mama," she called happily, bouncing around the corner to greet her mother. She froze and her mouth dropped open, her eyes widening as she took in the man beside her.
"Papa?" she whispered scarcely able to believe who she could see before her, "Papa?" she stepped down onto the main staircase. His lips moving, saying something that she could not hear and in her shocked state not able to read. He opened his arms, welcoming her in, "PAPA!" Violet screamed and ran down the stairs, moving so fast she nearly fell, and when she did, she fell into his arms, into his warmth and safety. Violet clung to him, not caring that she might be hurting him with the way she was clinging to him, all she wanted was to be in his arms, to feel the beat of his heart against her own, to feel his warm breath against her, to know her Papa was real. Violet let out a delighted cry as his voice finally reached her broken ears, his special name for her filling her audio canal with the warmth and richness of his voice, 'Móneške.'

Sully looked up as a rumbling sounded from overhead, his arms wrapped firmly around his little girl he knew what was coming, he knew that Violet's scream had woken the other girls, that in moments he would have his arms wrapped around two other daughters, two other pieces of him. His eyes filled with happy tears as Esmee and Katie rounded the corner, both stopped by the sight of him before they too screamed his name and flew...
down the stairs. The two girls hit him with monumental force, making him trip and fall, landing with a thud that knocked what little breath he had left in him out of his lungs. But he didn't care, not one bit, all that mattered was this mass of blonde, auburn and brunette in front of him, each of his daughters so beautiful, so different, yet so intrinsically part of them. Them, he panicked for a moment, nervous as he was unable to see Michaela, unable to see where she was. It was Esmee who rectified his predicament, his Na'he lifting her head to turn to look towards her mother to call to her happily.

"Mama you found him, you brought Papa home."

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…Now that the pleasantries are out the way I am afraid I reach the true purpose of my letter. I write after experiencing a somewhat curious event at a Great House belonging to one of the men that Anthony deals with. A servant at this House screamed at me, knew my name, begged me if Michaela and Violet, which if I remember rightly is the poor little deaf one, were alright. It all happened rather quickly and the man was half crazed and dragged from the room by the other servants. I have to say up till then the party had been rather wonderful and indeed it did continue to be though Lord Hess was somewhat distracted by what had occurred, his lovely wife was most apologetic. It did lead me to wonder where Michaela had been making her hopeless inquiries and if some unscrupulous person was trying to impersonate him, but then that struck me as odd as surely if they were they would be demanding money from the family, though this could have been the start, it certainly would not be difficult to find the link between myself and mother. Though it does seem rather strange that a savage oaf like Michaela’s husband would be in a great house in England of all places. I have the notion that perhaps it is ‘her Sully’ or whatever foolish name she calls him, the fervour and passion that this man exhibited in the moment of chaos was very believable. The truth eludes me. However, I thought as you are much closer to our baby sister you would perhaps be able to find out if in fact she had put the feelers out in England and if not I would be more than willing to approach the Hess’s about enquiring as to who this man actually is. Your thoughts on the matter would be most appreciated as I do not want to vex Michaela further and cause her any undue hurt...

"My daughter does not think that highly of you it seems."

Sully lowered the letter and turned to look at Elizabeth who stood in the doorway observing him, "Though I think that does not concern you."

"She did something," Sully conceded. "It’s more than I thought she had done, sides I ain’t seen her for six years."

"No indeed," Elizabeth hobbled forward to lean against one of the arm chairs, "though I find that very charitable on you front."

Sully shrugged, "Sorry I shoulda asked before I..."

"It is not my letter," Elizabeth pointed out. "Rebecca will not mind," she cocked her head, observing him. "You do not need to leave so soon."

"I wanna get home, get to Rubes and Beth," Sully told her.

"I understand," Elizabeth nodded sadly, "but I enjoy the noise and energy that comes with the girls being here."
"We'll come out to see you in the summer," Sully promised. "The girls will like that, and Michaela says you ain’t seen Beth since it happened."

"Nor have you," Elizabeth commented, "but I shall like that. I have books and items that I would want them to have." She shuddered, "I hate the thought of my belongings being sold to the highest bidder."

Sully opened his mouth to respond and then closed it, uncertain of what to say, suddenly aware that Elizabeth was saying a kind of goodbye to him, preparing him, so that he could prepare Michaela for something which no doubt his wife had not focussed on the past year.

"I've left you speechless," Elizabeth chuckled. "I do enjoy that when it happens. I hope this summer you will bring Brian, I would like to meet my great-granddaughter, Violet's drawings of Victoria are good but not a true likeness I fear," she indicated the desk which bore the damage of Violet's creativity.

"Victoria," Sully whispered, a soft smile pulling on his lips, "Chaela never said about her."

"I think she has had other things on her mind," Elizabeth offered with a smile. "Sully, you must never leave her again you know."

"I don't intend to," Sully blinked, Elizabeth's words pulling him back to reality.

"Even for work," Elizabeth cautioned, "your absence has nearly killed her, I don't think she could bear being apart from you again. I will make sure that you are appropriately provided for, I’ve amended my will. After your disappearance I thought it prudent." Elizabeth hobbled forward, holding her arm out for him to take and support her. "Promise me," she looked up at him, blue eyes meeting blue eyes, the love, care and understanding Sully and his mother in law had for each other passing silently between them, their common link of Michaela and the children, bridging the societal notions of what each of them thought was right or wrong. "Promise me," Elizabeth begged again.

"I promise," Sully leaned in and kissed her fragile skin, he looked up as four excited voices filled the hallway, Michaela and the girls finished with their ablutions, which was the only thing they did not want him to be part of.

Violet entered the parlour first, remembering her new colouring supplies and eager to collect them before they left for the train.

"Ah my little dancing flower," Elizabeth smiled happily at the tiny girl. "I have given your mother a present for you to open on your birthday," she spoke clearly, earning herself a beaming smile from Violet who quickly swept her pencils into her new purse and ran for her father. Elizabeth smiled exuberantly as Sully acted with instinct, lifting Violet into his arms. "It does me good to see this," Elizabeth reached and touched Violet on her nose.

"Does me good too," Sully admitted bouncing Violet, he turned as Michaela and the other girls entered, each of their faces brightening further at the sight of him.

"I have no doubt," Elizabeth touched his back softly before fixing her smile unnaturally wide. "Now Sully you must see what you can do about fattening my daughter up, she is much too thin."
"Mother," Michaela blushed, her arms moving self-consciously across her grey jacket, "but you needn't worry I found my appetite," she smiled happily at Sully, this morning the first time in over a year she had been hungry for breakfast.

"Yes," Elizabeth nodded, her quick eyes moving between her daughter and son in law, "but alas now I fear you must leave," she glanced at the clock. "As much as I do not want you to leave," she reached her hand out for Katie and Esmee, "you girls must take your father home to that lovely house and your younger brother and sister," she squeezed the two children tightly against her as they mumbled a tearful goodbye. She straightened and fixed Sully with a serious yet happy smile. "It is time for you to go home Sully. It is time for you to be home."

Chapter 14

Penultimate chapter time, time for Sully to be reunited with his boys.

Colorado Springs, Colorado

16th February 1881

The noise of excited chatter filtered through the noise of the settling train. Horace looked around, surprised that he could hear the Sully girls, especially as he knew that Matthew was due to collect the youngest Sully children in a few days.

"Hello Mayor Bing," Katie approached him, dashing up the platform from the train. "Mama and Papa have asked me to get the mail, if we have any," her smile widened.

"Sure," Horace moved to enter the post office to get the mail he had been holding for Michaela's return. Freezing he let her words sink in, the words the young girl had used fully penetrating his brain. "Papa?" he questioned, slowly turning to look towards the train, Esmee and Violet stood on the platform beside their laughing mother. Michaela's face alive and filled with amused merriment, her face for the first time in a year, upturned and laughing, laughing at someone who was coming out of the baggage car. Slowly that person came into view, laden down with the family's bags. A face which had been away from Colorado Springs for far too long. "Sully!" Horace shouted with surprise.

Others in the station turned at his shout, residents of Colorado Springs, gasping in surprise at the sight of the town's long absent son.

The family was engulfed scores of well-wishers clambering to welcome him back before a shout of surprise broke the crowd up. "Pa?"

Sully grinned as the crowd parted to let Brian, his arms filled with folded newspapers, see him. Through his smile his eyes clouded with tears, the sight of his son staring at him with surprise making his heart sing. The fact that his son was now a father, as opposed to the baby being a tiny bundle of hope was also a joyful gift to return to. "Brian," he raised his arm, welcoming his son in. "It's good to see you."

Brian dropped his newspapers, his works scattering across the wet platform. The February wind picking up the pages and scattering them further as he moved forward into his father's arms. "Pa," he hugged Sully strongly. "I can't believe ya back."

"I'm real glad I'm back," Sully patted Brian on the back, "and I want to meet this daughter of yours."
Brian beamed in reference to his little girl. "She's with Klara, so are Reuben and Beth," he found Michaela's face, his mother only a step behind his newly returned father, "she had a little girl, day after you left." Brian slapped Sully on the shoulder. "Come on Pa, Rubes and Beth will be dying to see ya."

Sully allowed himself to be led by his son; at some point the bags that Michaela and the girls had accrued in Boston were lifted from his hands, allowing Michaela to hold his hand and the girls to flutter around him like summer butterflies. Friendly if not surprised faces called out in greeting welcoming him home, calling out salutations and joy. Familiar and not it seemed that everyone knew him, that everyone was pleased to see him. The crowd following grew until finally someone, called for them to halt, someone calling for the family to be left alone as the final pieces of the family was brought together. Sully grinned as he approached the smart blue door, raising his arm he knocked.

After a moment the door was opened and Klara stared at him in shock.

"Hey," Sully greeted her.

"Sully?" Klara blinked at him. "Hey," she stepped back waving him in. "The children are over there," she told him, the young woman knowing immediately what he would want. She watched Sully move past her with an open mouth before turning and greeting Michaela.

Michaela accepted Klara's welcoming hug, watching over her friends shoulder as Reuben raced at his father with exuberant love.

"Where was he?" Klara asked breaking the hug and smiling tearfully at the sight of father and son reuniting.

"England," Michaela whispered her hand stroking Esmee's crown of brown curls, the six year old slumping tiredly against her as her excitement wore out. "He had earned his passage back, he walked past me when I was travelling to get the boat in New York." She smiled happily at the memory. "Brian said you have a daughter."

"Shiloh," Klara gushed, "she's over here with Vicky," she indicated a cot in the corner of the room. Slowly she and Michaela moved towards the cot which contained the sleeping babies. Michaela gently pulled the girls along with her, conscious that Reuben and Beth should be allowed to have some time of their own with their father just as each of the girls had had during the journey home.

"Oh She's lovely," Michaela cooed at the sleeping infant, opening her mouth to question Klara on the baby's weight and details of the birth, she was silenced by a fearsome scream. Turning she held her arms out, crouching down ready to catch her youngest daughter who ran at her. She lifted Beth into her arms and cuddled the two year old tightly. "It's Ok Bethie Bubbles," she whispered into her daughter's soft white blonde hair. "It's Papa," her eyes met with her horrified husband's. Sully looking utterly devastated as it seemed their youngest child did not know who he was and had run away from him in fear because of it.

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He grinned in the sun the house looked as beautiful as the day he had completed it, the day it had finally become their home, even now 11 years later the very sight of it filled him with joy. He looked down, Michaela's hand creeping across his leg to find his, his own hands wrapped around the soft leather reins.
"They closed it up," she murmured noting the shutters on the window.

"I helwped," Reuben announced from the back of the wagon his smile wide, happy that his Papa was back. "Miss Cintia putted seets on da chairs, I helwped her."

"Good job Storm," Sully grinned over his shoulder, Reuben's little face glowing with the praise.

Sully brought the wagon to a halt. "Everyone out," he ordered softly. He grinned as a pair of arms wrapped around his neck, his older daughter leaning against him as she used to as a small child, "You glad I'm back Twink?" he asked holding her arms. He grinned, almost hearing her as she blinked and then rolled her eyes.

"That is the stupidest thing you ever asked Papa," Katie told him. "I don't think I ever been this happy," she scrambled over the back of the wagon taking her mother's vacated seat, "you gotta look after Mama," she told him seriously, "she ain't been eating."

"I know," Sully nodded, watching Michaela as she lifted Beth from the wagon, the toddler watching him cautiously the whole time, "but she ate on the train."

"Yeah," Katie agreed, "there is something else though," she looked nervously at her mother, "we tried but sometimes," she sighed, "we were missing you and we forgot we had to look after her too." Katie rested her head against his shoulder. "I love you Papa."

"I love you too," Sully kissed Katie's crown. "Come on, let's go in."

He waited until Katie had clambered down before following her, as soon as his feet touched the ground Reuben and Violet swarming him and each seizing one of his hands. He grinned up at Michaela, stood by the open doorway, waiting for him to enter the house first.

"If I had free arms I'd carry you in," Sully grinned at her, his happiness dampened slightly by his youngest daughter's narrowed eyes, her fear passing to one of distrust.

"Carry Mama in?" Esmee looked at her father with confusion. "Why would you do that?"

"Coz," Sully leant over and kissed the top of Esmee's head. "Ya carry a woman into a house the day ya marry her. I ain't been this happy about coming into this house since I married ya Ma."

"But if you just married Ma, you wouldn't have us," Katie pointed out with an impish grin.

"Well that would be quieter," Michaela teased her daughter, "and cheaper."

"Mama," Katie rolled her eyes. "Go in Papa, you need to go in to be home properly."

Sully did as he was bidden, his highly polished black shoes stepping into the house with a soft crunch, the wet sand on his soles scraping over the wooden floor. He breathed in deep, taking in the smell not yet departed despite their long absence, the air warm with their memory. "It's good to be home," he murmured as the children rushed in. He smiled as Michaela touched his back as she slipped in beside him, pausing by his side she looked up at him, raising her chin for a kiss. The warmth and tingle of her lips cut like a knife by
Bethan bursting into tears. He swallowed as Michaela moved away to comfort the little girl, his relief and joy tempered by his youngest’s daughters reaction. It seemed that he was not yet home, that there was still one thing left to remedy before he could be truly home.

Chapter 15

And so the final curtain, the final reunion and a few loose ends to tie up. I hope you guys enjoy it, that I didn't frustrate you all too much and that ultimately you all had a good time with it (well you get my meaning).

Colorado Springs, Colorado

16th February 1881

He smoothed his hands across his seat, luxuriating in the softness of the tanned leather that now blessed his skin. He had missed his buckskins, more then he realised, the smooth supple leather unsurpassable in comfort. Slowly he turned, taking in the room that was so much his home, more than any other place. The place he had laid with his wife, where he had made most of their children together.

"Man."

He turned and stared at his youngest, her blue eyes narrowed with curiosity. She had been asleep, or at least appeared to have been when he came up to change into his clothes. He approached the cot and shook his head as he crouched down, "Pa," he told her touching his chest, "Papa."

Beth twisted her lips, struggling to remember but Sully took comfort from the fact that she was not crying or squinting at him.

"Papa," Sully repeated touching his chest, "can you say Papa?"

Beth tipped her head to one side and nodded but no sound came out of her lips.

"Can you say Papa?" Sully repeated, "Please?"

"Peaz," Beth muttered, she flopped down onto her stomach and stuck her hand through the bars of the cot, her little hand stroking the soft leather of his trousers. Sully grinned as something seemed to resonate within the toddler's memory, his smile echoed by the little girl.

"Papa, can you say Papa?"

"Man," Beth stated sitting up and blinking at him. "Manpa."

Sully chuckled, "close enough," he reached into the cot and lightly stroked the two year old's head. "You didn't recognise me in the monkey suit, huh?"

"I nearly didn't."

Sully glanced over his shoulder, his beautiful wife stood in the doorway, watching him. Her hair was damp, moisture still clinging to her after her bath and she was dressed in only her chemise and undershorts.
She smiled as Sully made a noise of appreciation. "She said Pa?"


"It felt wrong to ask someone to make a bed for her," Michaela admitted entering the room properly and pushing the door too. "You've made all the other children's."

"It can be my first project," Sully turned to study his youngest daughter once more. "I can't believe how much she's grown."

"They've all grown," Michaela whispered stepping up behind him and wrapping her arms around him.

"Sept for you," Sully mumbled. "You know, I can think of one way to fatten you up, and it goes with Beth vacating the cot, and we'd have fun doing it," he frowned as he felt Michaela stiffen. "I'm sorry, I didn't..."

"It's alright," Michaela blushed sheepishly and crept back to the edge of the bed. "I'm afraid that part of our life is over," she sighed sadly. "I'm going through the change in life."

"Michaela," Sully frowned, a faint glimmer of sadness washing over him, before being eroded by concern, slowly he approached the bed. "Can I do anything to help with it?"

"No," Michaela shook her head. "I just might do things that are a little odd," she gave him a wry smile, "and I shall probably start to look like the grandmother I am."

"Most beautiful grandmother I ever seen," Sully knelt between her knees. His hands reached for her hair, the soft damp strands falling through his fingers. "Don't matter if ya hair is auburn or if it is a sheet of silver. Ya still gonna have those beautiful eyes, that beautiful mind, that beautiful mouth that I can only quieten in one way."

"Oh?" Michaela leaned forward, "what way is that?" her eyes sparkled at the thought. Since their reunion they had been surrounded by children, unable to give in to the unrewarded passion they had for each other.

"Well," Sully grinned leaning forward so that their lips were almost touching. "I," he dipped his neck and nestled his lips into the curve of hers, his lips softly nibbling on her smooth skin.

"Papa?"

Sully dropped back onto his knees and gave Michaela a sad yet frustrated look. "Rubes?"

"Sorry Papa," Reuben looked chaste, suddenly realising he had not knocked on the door. "I wanned to say night to Betfie."

"Ya did huh?" Sully grinned.

"Um kinda," Reuben tried to shove his hands in his pockets only to remember he was wearing pyjamas, "and you and Mama..." he looked nervously at the floor, "and...can I sweep with you?" he looked up hopefully. "I ain't swept wiv you for a long time."
"Neither has ya Ma," Sully mumbled getting up from the floor. "I dunno Storm, it's up to ya Ma."

"Mama please?" Reuben looked at his mother hopefully. "It's all we want."

"We?" Michaela took Sully's hand and squeezed it tightly, knowing what was about to come.

"Uh huh," Reuben nodded seriously.

"We wanna sleep with you too," Katie sounded, pushing open to door to reveal herself and her younger sisters.

"What do you reckon?" Sully winked at Michaela. "Think you can share me for one more night?"

"I supposed I will have to," Michaela sighed in mock frustration, "but I suppose I will enjoy it as well, especially if we are hugging." She smiled and patted the bed. "You get in first."

The children rushed forward, each bouncing onto the bed to find their space while their parents watched with amusement.

"I don't think we're gonna fit," Sully grinned, nudging Michaela with his hip. "They all grew so big."

"I big Papa," Reuben stood up to show Sully how much he had grown. "I hadta be manof da house."

"You did a real good job," Sully blinked, distracted momentarily by a little hand touching him. Michaela had lifted Beth from her cot so that she could join them in bed and the toddler had reached out to him. Sully dipped his head and kissed the toddler on the crown before straightening and kissing his wife. Finally he turned back to his son and the other children crowded on the bed. "You did a real good job Rubes but I'm man of the house now."

"And for always," Michaela whispered, pressing herself against him as she lowered Beth onto the bed. "I never want to lose you again," she kissed him softly, the tingle from her lip dampened the sound of the children agreeing and once again Sully was drawn into her spell. "I never want to be apart from you again," she whispered, kissing him softly. "Our place is together, it doesn't matter where we end up," she paused, looking at him to finish. "We will always be together," Sully whispered this time pushing his lips onto hers, the children giggling in mock disgust at their parents display of intimacy.

Sully woke with a start as a limb made contact with his gut. Coughing down his shock he blinked trying to process the wooden ceiling instead of the plaster one he was used to. He smiled sleepily and looked down, his lips pulling wider at the mass of entangled limbs on the bed, the children all huddled together. He lifted his head from his corner of the pillow and frowned, the space were Michaela had been was now take up by Esmee, the little girl in her sleep taking up the needed space once it had been vacated. Sully swallowed nervously and slowly slid out from under Katie's leg. He paused for a moment looking down at the children he had had a hand in making, children who were so different to look
at because of how they had grown but inside still the same, inside still that wonderful mix of everything he loved about them. Sighing he slipped out of the room, the only thing able to tear him away from the wonderful sight of his children pulling at his heart.

The air was cool but warmer then he was used to, the wood of his home so much warmer and more comforting then the stone that Durlish Park was built of. The warm glow of the firelight was seeping up through the stairwell and he slowly made his way down into it. The sight of Michaela had the same effect of the flames she made his body feel warm, the love flowing through his blood warming him from the inside.

He approached her slowly, studying her, enjoying just looking at her until she raised her hand, her fingers brushing under her eyes, wiping away tears. "Michaela?" he whispered softly not wanting to startle her.

She looked up at him and gave him a soft watery smile. Silently she reached out with her hand inviting him to take it into his, to be connected to each other. "What is it?" Sully asked her entwining his hand with hers, "What's wrong?"

Michaela squeezed his hand and with her other held out a piece of paper. "Your letter," she blinked sending a fresh trail of tears down her cheeks. "You sound so..." she paused unsure how to communicate her understanding of his tear stained words.

"I meant it, without you, I just hurt," Sully shrugged, crouching down beside her so that he could see her face more clearly. "Never thought I could love someone as much as I love you."

"That's a lie," Michaela shook her head, slowly turning her body on the chair to face him. "You love that is who you are. That is why you did those things when Abagail died. Why you felt so deeply when we lost our first little boy," she squeezed his hand. "You love, you are love," she smiled, his letter slipping from her hand so she could touch his face. "You are my love," she leaned down and kissed him tenderly.

"You are my love," Sully repeated returning her embrace. "I love you."

"And I you," Michaela whispered, slowly sinking from the chair to rest on his lap.

Sully dropped his knees to the floor so he could support her better, his free arm moving to hold her close. With a gasp of breath he buried his face into her hair, drinking in her scent.

"Sully?" Her soft voice broke his reverie.

"Mmm," he mumbled giving her a lazy smile as he lifted his head.

"I would like..." she paused and looked sheepish. "I would like for you to hold me"

"I am holding ya," Sully gave her a bemused look, tightening his grip on her to prove his point.

"No," Michaela shook her head, her silken tresses reorganising themselves over her shoulders. "I would like to lie in front of the fire and hold you and you hold me. I would like for us to sleep like that."
"Kay," Sully nodded. He untwined his fingers from hers, before shifting his feet to gain purchase on the floor, pushing with his toes to push himself upright his bride in his arms. He staggered forward a few paces to bring them beside the fire and nearly collapsed to his knees. "Phew," he exhaled. "I'm getting old."

"We can work on your stamina later," Michaela squeezed his arm reassuringly. "I don't need you to be strong to hold me." She slid from his lap and found a place on the floor wriggling into it as one would into a cushion. "Here," she patted the floor beside her.

Sully coughed as he took her in, her being glowing in the flickering light. "One sec," he rose and crossed to the table to collect the fallen letter, feeling her eyes on him as he moved. As he walked back, her brow was creased with curiosity. "Ya don't need this," Sully told her softly as he knelt down in the position she had indicated. Leaning over her he took her lips while his hand reached out and gently released the sheet of paper.

"Sully!" Michaela gasped breaking the kiss as his words to her started to curl in the heat of the fire, the paper blackening to ash.

"Ya don't need it," Sully repeated wrapping his arms around her and coaxing her to lie down to watch the words burn. "Ya don't," he whispered soothingly, "because I'm here to say them to you," he kissed her temple. "My darling Michaela, I am sorry if you are hurting because I am hurting also. I cannot explain why I came to be here because that is what is to be said when I see you again," he kissed her once more as she gave a soft sniffle, "and I will see you again. I will hold you and I will never let you go. You are my hësta-noo'ôtse, my heartsong." She squeezed her hand that gripped him tightly.

"You can stop now," Michaela whispered. "You're not in England anymore," she gave an involuntary shudder as the last of the letter burnt away.

"No," Sully pressed himself tightly to her, "but I will never let you go," he kissed her once more before resting his head against her shoulder, for now both of them content after so long apart from each other just to be near to one of other. Just to be able to show each other the love they had for their soul mate. Just to be able to hold each other.

The End