

A LADY OF ADVENTURE (Vesper von Eternity)

"I never want to die," you told your brother once. You had just finished reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. "If I die, make me a Frankenstein body. A beautiful one, with pale skin scarred like spiderwebs and shiny dark doll's hair. I want to live forever, Edgar."

Three weeks later, you killed yourself.

Back then, you weren't Vesper von Eternity -- you were Lily Eakins. Bookish, longing for a life of adventure, out of place in her own body, trapped by her brother's love. In the bedroom next to your brother's you lost your maidenhead to a man with a gentle mouth named Alexander Clay. The next morning your parents found you in bed, sticky with semen and sweat, with news of your misdeed already clear across town.

Alexander had seduced you, recited poetry, said he loved you, but you never saw him again.

Your father raged and called you a whore. Your mother wept and blamed books for it all. Your little brother looked at you with all the sneering, jealous rage of a sibling betrayed. "Alexander Clay ruined you, yeah?"

You'd turned away from him tearfully, then, turned away from everyone, and the next day you threw yourself off London Bridge.

They say that when you're dying, you see your life pass before your eyes. Instead you experienced a perfect moment of clarity. You had, you realized, trapped yourself -- denied yourself a life of adventure, let yourself be held back by your parents' expectations, your brother's, yours. You could have brushed off what your family thought. You could have run away and never come back. Instead you had thrown yourself off a bridge, not even because you wanted it, but because it was what you were supposed to do.

At that very last moment, you didn't want to die. At that very last moment, you hated yourself.

When next you woke up, you weren't afraid of anything.

Miraculously, you were uninjured. You had been pulled from the water by the good ship Narwhal, heading to India, sorry we can't take you back, Miss.

You told them not to worry. You didn't want to go back.

On the Narwhal, the crew treated you like something precious. When you grew well enough to walk about on deck, they began teaching you things -- how to speak some broken Hindi, how to spit and how to gamble, how to steer just by the stars and play the pipes and play the banjo.

In Bombay you asked an Indian man to teach you how to charm cobras. He was reluctant; you were an Englishwoman, he expected hysteria. After some hours, he was amazed by your steadiness. He taught you to charm the largest of the cobras. People flocked from all over Bombay to see the Englishwoman dressed like an Indian who could charm snakes, and often people.

You travelled when you could and sought adventure always, climbing red rock cliffs to Jaipur libraries, hopping new-built already-rickety trains, trading wine and riddles with a Raja and sleeping in a palace that floated on the sea. In the jungle near Udaipur, you stared down a tiger: graceful and fearless, entirely of itself. But as that was true of the tiger, so, you realized, was it true of you.

You began writing up your adventures, sending them to a London press; they became shockingly popular pulps and you made yourself a tidy sum. The name you took for your pulp adventures, for the reading public, was ostensibly German and highly improbable -- Vesper von Eternity.

Thirteen years after Lily's suicide, high adventure and pulp fame in hand, you went to a doctor for a lump on your breast. You discovered you had cancer, a year to live, or less.

At around the same time, you heard, again, the name of your erstwhile paramour. And you discovered that, of all people, Alexander Clay could never die.

He hadn't aged for thirteen years -- longer, if the rumors were to be believed. Diseases and bullets couldn't kill him and you want what he has, badly.

And he left a very clear trail, searching for the fabled "Cave of Elixir." You did your research and found that, in tales, that cave contained a potion that granted its drinker immortality.

You want that potion.

You don't know what Alexander wants in the cave -- he already can live forever. There are other potions in the cave; perhaps he's come to get one of those. You hope he doesn't get what he wants.

(You don't begrudge him for sleeping with you so much as you begrudge that thirteen years later, as far as you can tell, he's still doing the exact same thing: sleeping with girls, sleeping with boys, spreading the story and ruining them. He has immortality, infinite time, and he spends it driving adolescents to suicide. You can't imagine anything more inexplicable, or pathetic.)

The other person going for the cave -- who seems to have found it independently, without following you or Alexander -- is Edgar Eakins, your brother.

He wants to raise you from the dead. He's built a Frankenstein body, snips of pale skin and doll's hair, and it's beautiful and it disgusts you and you don't want to be that thing. He wants to resurrect you and you're afraid he'll find out how. Afraid that whatever he manages will pull your soul from your body, ill though it is, and put it in the body he's built, the body of a dead girl, and you don't think you could stand that.

But you cannot -- cannot tell him who you are.

You don't want to be Lily again. Lily was a coward, scared, trapped, trapped by her family's expectations, her class's expectations, her brother's expectations, her own. Your brother wants you to be the girl you were thirteen years ago, when you looked after him and played your part and you're not that, you can't be that, you're not even sure you love him anymore, and you don't want to be the miracle girl, survivor of suicide, back again.

You want to be Vesper von Eternity.

Lily is dead. Lily should stay dead.

Vesper von Eternity wants to live forever.



SPECIALS:

I'm Not That Girl: Edgar doesn't recognize you; you've changed a lot in thirteen years. Alexander doesn't recognize you either; you met him, briefly, before you entered the cave. He asked you what you wanted in the Cave of Elixir; you told him you wanted immortality. You see no use in keeping that desire secret.

Seeing Red: The potions are all different colors, you know, but your favorite color is and always has been red. You've nothing to guide you in the Cave of Elixir except sheer instinct and your shockingly good luck...and a fortune-teller's admonition, a few days ago, to keep your favorite color in mind. So you've decided, if no better options present themselves, to drink the red drink and see what happens when you do.

The Pocket-Watch: You seem to be the only person on this expedition who's brought a pocket watch, so by default you're in charge of tracking the cave's one-hour time limit. However, the pocket watch you brought with you (which you acquired in an adventure) is very special: at your bidding, it can slow time slightly, allowing you and your companions a bit more than the cave's allotted hour.

You begin the game with sixty minutes on the clock: once per game, if you so choose, you may add five minutes to that time.

