

Vengeance Required-Alisa A. Murray

Normally, Ovasta Kaiser was awakened by the feel of wet drool from her German shepherd, Major, gently stroking her hand with his tongue. Today, she opened her eyes to the darkness of the night, hearing only the rustling of leaves blowing outside of her bedroom window. She glanced at the alarm clock on the nightstand next to her bed. *5:00 a.m.* Groggy, she got out of bed and stumbled into the bathroom to shower before work. She always enjoyed the warm pulsating water running down her body, releasing tension from the muscles in her neck, shoulders, and arms.

She needed relaxation now more than ever. The hospital board of directors was going to vote on whether she or her colleague, Phillip Michaels, would be the next president. Several candidates who were nominated had been eliminated in the initial vote leaving only her and Michaels. Ovasta felt as equally qualified as Michaels, if not more. But he had long-term relationships with more board members. Ovasta's real saving grace was that the retiring board president Stephen Gerard recommended her as his successor. Gerard was ill and decided to step down from his position to focus on his recovery. Still, Ovasta knew the vote could go either way.

A noise at the bathroom door snapped her from her thoughts. She wrapped a towel around herself, sliding out of the tempered glass shower door. A smile donned her face as she peeped into the room. It was Major. Sitting. Leash in his mouth and ears erect, he wagged his tail. Ovasta rubbed the top of his brown, domed-shaped head, gave him a hug, and took the leash from his mouth. "Okay, boy, I'll let you out so you can use it." Major trailed her to the back

door, running out when she opened it. “I won’t be taking you for a walk this morning,” she shouted after him. “I want to get to work early today.”

Since he was potty trained, Major always went to the same area outside behind his doghouse. Afterwards, he ran back in the house and ate his breakfast.

Ovasta went into her room and put on her favorite black skirt suit which she thought perfectly accentuated her slender five-foot-ten-inch frame. She decided to wear her Prada shoes, a gift she received for Christmas last year.

Since the forecast called for no inclement weather, she opted to take Major back outside with a bowl of dog food and water and place it inside his house. Major was full and would wait several hours before eating again. Ovasta rubbed him on the head and left for work.

Ovasta casually pulled into the underground hospital parking lot. Although nervous, she’d never let it show. She got out of her black Audi and rode the parking lot elevator to the second floor. As soon as she walked out, there was her longtime friend, Riya Davison, whom she’d known since grade school. They attended the same medical school as both wanted to become nurses. Midway through college, however, Ovasta changed her mind and decided to work in hospital administration, additionally majoring in clinical counseling. After getting her license, she got a job working for a behavioral health agency. When Riya got a job at the hospital, she saw there was an opening in the social work department. Immediately, she informed Ovasta about the position. Ovasta applied and was ultimately hired. Subsequently, heading the hospital’s social work department within a few years’ time.

“Hey, Vee, good morning.” Riya still called her by the nickname she had given Ovasta when they were children and Riya couldn’t pronounce her name correctly. Ovasta tried telling

her repeatedly how to say it. *Oh voss ta!* Even after all these years, she sometimes wondered if Riya could properly pronounce it.

“Come on, let’s go to my office and have a cup of coffee before we start our day,” Ovasta suggested.

“You mean before *you* start *your* day. I’ve been here since five-thirty a.m. and have already had two cups. By the way, you look nice.”

“Thanks, I’ll be glad when this day is over. I’m tired of thinking about the vote. The suspense is killing me.”

“Me, too,” replied Riya, her doe-like eyes smiling at her best friend.

Ovasta walked down the hall and into her office, followed by Riya who sat her petite five-foot-two-inch frame down in what she labeled “her chair.” It was a red leather recliner situated in the middle of two Burberry wingbacks. In front of her, pictures of birds in flight donned the walls. Several of which Ovasta painted herself, a hobby she picked up a few years ago. Ovasta grabbed an OSU mug, her alma mater, out of a small wooden cabinet in the corner. “Be back in the minute,” she said as hurried out of her office and down the hospital corridor.

Vince Parker strolled in a few minutes later while Riya was sitting in Ovasta’s office.

“Good morning. How are you?” He spoke to Riya who slid up from her slouched position once he entered the room.

“Hey, I’m good. Thanks for asking. As always I’m waiting for Vee. She went to get some coffee. She’ll be back in a minute.”

Vince walked in the office giving his head a tiny nod. Sitting in the other wing back chair next to Riya. “I figured. It’s the way she always starts her mornings.”

When Ovasta returned, she stood in the doorway holding a cup of coffee, looking at Vince, the hospital’s top neurosurgeon and her longtime love. The couple met four years ago at a medical convention. He lived in New York and she in Ohio. When offered a position at a hospital in Ohio, he jumped at the chance. It was a win-win situation —promotion *plus* close proximity to Ovasta. At six-foot-one, with wavy black hair, the chiseled facial features of Superman, and a muscular build, Vince was strikingly handsome even in scrubs. The hazelnut aroma began to fill the air around her. “What are you two talking about?” she questioned.

Vince laughed. “Why, you of course.”

Riya rose out of the chair, fluffing the back of her curly, shoulder-length, reddish-brown hair. “I’d better go back to the nurse’s station before they start paging me. See you lovebirds later.” She blew a kiss at both of them. “Vee, call me as soon as you hear anything. You know I’m rooting for you.”

“Thanks for the well wishes. I’ll call you.”

Vince stood up and waved goodbye and turned to Ovasta. “You’re beautiful today as always and I especially like those shoes.”

Ovasta chuckled. “Of course you like them. You were the one who gave them to me.”

Vince smiled. “How could I have forgotten?” he questioned sarcastically while taking the coffee mug from her hands and placing it on her large oak desk. Gazing lovingly into her hazel-brown eyes, he ran his fingers through her coal-black, shoulder-length hair. Leaning forward he gave her a quick peck on the lips. “I came by to wish you luck.”

“Thanks, it is going to be a close vote. I need all the luck I can get.”

“Since the vote is not until two, why don’t we go out to lunch around noon? That way you can at least have one relaxing moment during the day. Anyway, there are a few things I want to discuss with you.”

Ovasta tilted her head to the right, squinting her eyes. She was trying to figure out why he wanted to go to lunch when her day was already extremely busy. “Can’t it wait until after the vote?” she replied with mild irritation in her voice.

“No. You need to relax and I want to talk,” Vince stated sternly, the smile fleeting from his face.

Ovasta sighed, blinking her eyes swiftly several times in a row. “Alright, then noon it is.”

“So it’s settled. I’ll meet you here and we can ditch this place for about an hour and a half. We’ll go someplace nice for lunch. I’ve got time. My next surgery isn’t until three.”

After giving Ovasta another peck on the lips, Vince left the office. Ovasta wondered why he insisted on going to lunch today, of all days. But she had to admit a little time spent away from the hospital was exactly what she needed. Vince was extremely perceptive and could always tell when she needed some time away from work. Ovasta smiled within herself. Vince always had her best interest at heart. It was one of the main reasons why she loved him so much.

Punctual as always, Vince was back in her office at 11:54 a.m. “Come on, honey, let’s go.” She glanced up at him from her desk. Vince changed from hospital scrubs into a tailored black suit and the tie she gave him for his birthday.

Although he always looked nice, she was surprised he was so well dressed in the middle of the day. Especially considering he had to change in a couple of hours for a late afternoon surgery. She pondered the more about what was going on, knowing that Vince always had something up his sleeve. Whatever the case, she decided to let those feelings pass her by.

She smiled at him and said, “You look nice. I especially like the tie.”

“Of course you do,” he laughed. “You’re the one who bought it.”

“How could I have forgotten?” she replied mocking their previous conversation.”

“Oh, come on, let’s get out of here and get something to eat.” He reached for her hand, rushing her out of the building.

Shortly after arriving at La Restaurant de la Garden, Vince whispered something to the maître d’ who seated them immediately. Ovasta was very surprised at how hastily they were seated. Suspicion nagged at her.

“How did we get a table so fast?”

“I have connections,” he winked with a wry smirk on his face. Vince eased out the chair and signaled for her to sit down, then he sat across from her and loosened the tie around his neck.

The table was near the window. The sunlight bathed Ovasta’s face giving her a clear view of the landscape. The orange and brown leaves were falling from the nearby trees. In the far distance, she could see the lake which ebbed and flowed upon the distant shore ever so calmly.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Vince’s voice interrupted her thoughts.

“Yes, it is.” Ovasta leisurely turned her head away from the window.

As soon as she did, she could see the servers coming with food. Placing petit fillet mignon with a baked potato and a salad in front of Vince and giving her salmon, rice pilaf, and a salad. Vince pulled the silverware out of the cloth napkin on the table then put the napkin across his lap. He gave Ovasta a broad smile, exposing most of his upper teeth. “I took the liberty of ordering our meals in advance so we can get back to the hospital in a timely fashion.”

“Wait a minute. First, you take me to an expensive restaurant during the middle of the day when we both have to get back to work. Second, once we get here our table is ready as soon as we walk in the door, and now you are telling me you’ve already ordered our meals. What in the world is going on?” She questioned as her peering eyes scanned Vince’s face.

“I’ve got a big surgery this afternoon and really need to eat. Can we just enjoy our food for a moment?” Vince had already cut his meat and was placing a bite in his mouth.

“Oh, all right. This salmon does look good.” Ovasta placed the napkin in her lap and began eating.

Within a few minutes, Vince had finished all of his food while Ovasta had only eaten the salad but only a bit of salmon. She gazed up at Vince while pushing the plate away from her.

“The food is good, but I’m really too nervous to eat it all. My stomach is full of butterflies.”

“Don’t worry. I believe that everything will work out fine. Anyway, you can always take it home. If you don’t eat it, I’m sure Major would love some fish.”

“He absolutely would!”

Vince snickered as he flagged down the waiter and asked for the check. It was quickly brought to the table. He cleared his throat, then looked directly into Ovasta’s eyes. “Right before

we began eating, you asked me what in the world was going on. Allow me to answer your question. It's you, Ovasta. You are my world. I'd like you to become my wife."

Vince stood up, walked over to her side of the table, and got down on one knee. He pulled a tiny box out of his suit jacket pocket, opened it, and lifted the box with a ring inside towards Ovasta. Staring into her face. His eyes shone like opal gemstones. "Will you marry me?" he questioned sweetly.

Ovasta laid her right hand across her chest to stop her heart from pounding. Her tear-filled eyes twinkled at Vince. "Yes!" she exclaimed with overwhelming glee.

Vince placed the ring on her finger. "This seals the deal," he whispered happily as he rose to his feet.

Applause and joy filled the room as he kissed her. At that moment, the crowd appeared to shrink. It seemed as if they were the only people there.

A stately gentleman, who appeared to be in his mid-seventies, came over to their table. "Congratulations!" he said in a British accent as he picked the bill up from off the table. He smiled at the pair focusing his gaze on Vince. "I want to pay for your meal today. My wife and I recently celebrated forty years of marriage. She's the boss," he said pointing to Ovasta. "Remember that."

"I'll keep that in mind," chuckled Vince. "Thank you so much for your generosity."

"You know, I'm in total agreement with what he said," joked Ovasta as they headed out and got in the car to return to work.

“Oh, I have no doubt that you are.” Vince looked at her while putting the key in the ignition. “Do you know why I wanted to propose today? Prior to the vote? It’s because I wanted you to know I love you, board president or not.”

“I see you put a lot of thought into this. However, I could never believe you proposed for any reason other than you love me and want us to spend the rest of our lives together.”

Vince took his right hand off the steering wheel and gently caressed hers. “I certainly do.”

The ride back to the hospital was pleasantly silent. Ovasta replayed the proposal repeatedly in her mind, staring at her magnificent diamond in awe. Every now and then Vince would glance at her with a loving smile that she’d return. Tickled with excitement, they hopped out of the car as soon as Vince pulled into a spot in the parking garage.

“I’ll call you when I get out of surgery. You should know the results by then.”

“I’m still feeling a bit edgy, but I think I can accomplish good things for the hospital whether I’m head of the board or not.”

“That’s my girl.” Vince brushed his hand up and down the small of her back as they rode the garage elevator to the main floor. He hugged her and headed to surgery.

She went straight to the nurse’s station as she couldn’t wait to tell Riya the good news. She had always wanted to marry Vince but was beginning to wonder if the feeling was mutual.

Ovasta glided down the hall like a runway model. Shoulders back, head erect. She could see Riya at the end of the corridor.

Riya started moving in Ovasta's direction and when she neared her, asked, "What's going on, Vee? You seem so excited. Did they take the vote already?" Riya's eyes broadened, her eyebrows elevated as Ovasta lifted up her left hand displaying the two-carat marquise diamond ring. Riya screeched. "Oh, my God! Did Vince propose?"

"Yes!" Ovasta extended her arms toward Riya who grabbed her, squeezing her tightly. "Even if I don't win the vote, this is still one of the happiest days of my life!"

"I am so happy for the two of you. I can't wait to start helping with the wedding plans," exclaimed Riya as she hugged Ovasta a second time.

Riya left to return to the nurse's station and Ovasta bounced happily to the boardroom to speak with several members one more time prior to the vote. Upon arrival, she saw her opponent, Phillip Michaels, whispering to another board member, Samuel King. Michaels was extremely well dressed in his expensive-looking navy suit which was tailored to fit his lanky six-foot frame. King, who was several inches shorter than Phillip, saw Ovasta coming and stopped speaking.

"Hey, Ovasta, we were just talking about you," remarked Phillip, glancing around once King had abruptly gotten quiet.

"I'm sure you were," she replied in a less-than-friendly tone.

Phillip chuckled, his brown eyes dancing in Gucci glasses. He extended his hand in order to shake hers. "May the best *man* win."

Ovasta held out her limp hand. As soon as Phillip saw the other board members entering the room, he quickly clutched her hand.