

# *All Desires Known*

## *Chapter 1*

LUCY HAD NEVER SUNK SO LOW in all her life. Imagine! The Honourable Lucinda Raven, youngest daughter of Lord Mountstephen ... the brightest and most talked-about young hostess in Dublin society ... to have to stoop to *this!* Michael would only kill her if he ever found out.

She drew a deep breath and — praying that her veil was ten times more impenetrable from the outside than it seemed to her from within — turned to face the man with whom she had to do this awful, terrifying, monstrous thing.

“I’ve ...er, that is ... I never did this before,” she stammered.

He peered at her dispassionately over his half-moon glasses. Thank heavens the light in here was dim. Those eyes had seen everything, every variety of human depravity. Her fall from grace was a drop in the ocean to him. “There’s a first time for everyone, my dear,” he said mildly. “Let’s have a look at what you’ve got, shall we?” He stretched his hand toward her.

Instinctively she shrank from him. Was he allowed to call her “my dear”?

“Well, I can’t compel you,” he continued in those unshockable tones — and turned to the woman behind her.

But the woman behind her, an old Dublin shawlie who could sniff a hard case three streets away, nudged Lucy in the back and said, “Gwan, love! May you never tread a worse step than that. Your man has a heart of sugar, so he has.” She craned forward to see what Lucy had half unwrapped and then wrapped up again. The chamois-leather alone would have been worth three dinners to her and her family.

Lucy made the most of her slender figure, pressing herself tight against the counter and bending forward to shield her treasures from inquisitive eyes. But there were mirrors everywhere, and glass cabinets — dozens of surfaces to reflect the image of those sparkling jewels and fetch gasps of wonder, not alone from the old shawlie but from the other two customers, as well — a respectably dressed young woman waiting to pop a portable gramophone and four records, and an old man about to part with his teeth.

Such humble transactions gave point to the pawnbroker’s next words. Clamping a jeweller’s lens between his eyebrow and his cheek, he carried Lucy’s offering to the window. “I’m afraid, Madam,” he said — she was “Madam” now — “that these are far above my usual class of trade. I could

offer you no more than a fraction of their value ...”

“Sure you’re a-a-all heart!” put in the shawlie, quite happy to contradict her previous assertion.

“May I suggest that you try these people, instead?” He wrote *Webb & Co* on a piece of paper and turned it to face her. “They would surely know the value to a pound.”

“They’d surely recognize them, too,” she said.

“Ah!” He pondered whether he should tell her how to handle old Webb and come away without too much loss of dignity.

Before he reached any conclusion, however, Lucy scooped up the jewelry, stuffed it hastily in the chamois pouch, and turned from him. “I’ve made a mistake,” she said. “I’ll come back.”

Why did she add that last promise? she wondered as she fled from the shop. All the dragoons in Dublin would never force her back there. Now, in her confusion she turned the wrong way down Eustace Street — though she failed to notice the fact until she was almost at the bottom, near the corner with Temple Bar. She had never been in this disreputable part of the city before and was amazed that she could feel so lost and alien; she was, after all, only a couple of hundred yards from Dame Street, which she knew so well.

She hesitated, not knowing which way to turn now. Somewhere to her right — less than half a mile — was Westmoreland Street, dear, familiar territory, too. The same was true of Parliament Street, which was to her left and probably even closer. But Dame Street, behind her, was closest of all. So, even though it meant passing that unspeakable shop again, she turned about and began to retrace her steps.

To her left was a house that resembled a tavern, though it had no name over the entrance and no sign hung out over the foot pavement. A respectable-looking man appeared at the side-door and stood there a moment, wiping his beard with a little flick of his knuckles — a gesture that was disconcertingly familiar to her, though she could not immediately place it.

Even when he gazed directly at her she did not at once recognize him; all she saw was a man who looked as if he’d just risen after two hours at a groaning table — a man in search of nothing more than a quiet place where he might enjoy a good snooze.

But then she recognized him.

Panic seized her. She forgot she was wearing a veil so impenetrable it plunged this rather bright March afternoon into a deep twilight — which must also explain why she had not recognized him at once. She forgot she was wearing clothes that no one on God’s earth — and certainly no one in Dublin — would associate with her. She forgot it was a good ten years since they had last met. All she knew was that she must get as far away from him

as she could — and waste no time about it.

It was the worst possible decision, for — naturally — the sudden quickening of her pace and her general agitation drew his attention at once. She hadn't gone two steps beyond him before he said — in tones whose incredulity matched hers — “Lucy?”

She hastened onward without turning.

“Is it you?” he continued, raising his voice as the distance between them increased.

She trotted as fast as the hobble of her skirt allowed. A moment later she heard him running to catch her up. “Whoever you are,” he called as he drew near, “this bracelet is far too valuable to leave lying on the pavement.”

No other words could have halted her so swiftly. She turned and saw him holding one of her bracelets flat in the palm of his gloved hand. She had not even heard it fall.

“Ah ... why ...” she mumbled incoherently as she reached for it ... and then withdrew her hand without taking it. She could not touch him.

Even at the time the turbulence of her feelings struck her as strange. She and he had, in fact, parted the best of friends. A little sadly, perhaps, a little sentimentally, but in a friendly fashion for all that. He had said things like, “The best man won.” And she had said something stupid like she hoped they'd all have another life, and then the balance would tip in his favour — the sort of thing one says at awkward partings like that.

So why was she now behaving as if he were some sort of unexploded shell?

It was silly. She must stop it this minute.

“It *is* Lucy, isn't it,” he said, still holding forth her her bracelet.

She smiled ruefully and nodded — though, of course, he could see nothing of her expression through her veil.

His eyes twinkled and she knew he was about to say something outrageous. “I knew it, the moment you went past me. There's no other woman in Dublin whose walk is quite so exciting as yours, Lucy.”

“Dazzler O'Dea!” she exclaimed, taking the bracelet at last. “You're a thundering disgrace, so you are! You never change.” How pleasingly calm her voice sounded, she thought, despite all the turmoil.

“No,” he replied, a sad light creeping into his eyes, “I never changed.”

Only then did she realize what a cunning thing he had done. By coming out with one of his famous “outrageous” remarks, he had allowed her to respond with that sort of half-amused asperity which women are supposed to use on such occasions, when they know the fella means no harm. First he had calmed the emotional waters into which this chance encounter had thrown them. And then — the touch of a master — he tossed after it this little pebble of regret, whose ripples were now just reaching her, ripples she

would never have noticed had he not first made all so smooth. “Sure why *should* you change,” she said, determined not to let him get away with it, “when all the world adores you as you are! I’m sure they still do — don’t they?”

He brushed the jibe aside with a smile, though she could see he was not very amused. “Why did you hurry on by?” he asked. He did not add: “You surely knew it was me.” But the accusation hung between them nonetheless.

Her flight had brought her to within a few paces of the pawnbroker’s; from his point of view, the dark shopfront framed her, with the three gilded balls suspended menacingly above her. She watched his eyes making all the right connections, finishing with the chamois-leather bag, which she now clutched tighter than ever in her hand. “Ah,” he said.

There was no detectable emotion in his tone at all — neither sadness nor (as there might well have been) a grim sort of satisfaction. It was a very workmanlike “Ah,” which suggested he was already thinking on her behalf. He concluded by pulling out his watch and saying, “Teatime! There’s a very *good* little café up in Dame Street.” He raised his eyebrows.

“Oh, I don’t know that I ought ...” she protested feebly.

“What?” he cajoled. “We haven’t met in ... eight? nine? years, and you ...”

“Ten years,” she interrupted. A fraction of a second later it struck her that he had misstated the interval deliberately — to see if she would correct him.

His smile confirmed it. “How time flies when one is having fun,” he said bleakly. “But surely you can’t just say ta-ta — nice to have seen you. We must do it again in another ten years. Has it *really* been ten years, Lucy?”

“I’ve just had a wedding anniversary to remind me,” she replied, partly to excuse her precision and partly to remind him of ... the way it was now.

He stared at her coldly and then said, “Yes. Of course.”

“And you?” she asked brightly.

He shook his head, but then immediately made his denial ambiguous by saying, “If we’re going to catch up on each other’s news — which I really would rather like to do, Luce — we can’t stand about out here, in this street of all streets.”

She looked about her, reassessing their surroundings in the wake of this condemnation. “Why?” she asked. “Is it especially ... you know?”

He laughed. “Oh, Luce! You always wanted to know *everything!*”

“No one’s called me Luce for ... ten years.” It wasn’t true, actually, but it flattered him.

“Well — shall we share this pot of tea or shan’t we?”

She came to him smiling and took his arm; for some reason all her worries had evaporated. Dazzler had always been able to work that magic,

somehow. He'd find a way out of this present mess, too — and without doing anything crass like offering to take her jewels in pawn to himself. "Dazzler O'Dea!" she said. "I thought you were in Cork."

"I was," he replied, giving his hat a tip as he caught sight of himself in the pawnshop window. "But I'm back in Dublin now — for good, I hope."

"You look a lot more prosperous than when you left, I must say."

"Anyone can *look* prosperous, Luce." He nudged her to show he didn't mean it unkindly.

"Ha ha," she said in a tone she hoped would dissuade him from further humour of that kind.

They had reached the corner with Dame Street. She paused and looked back into that alien world. "Is it *very* disreputable, Dazzler?" she wondered.

"Out with it," he said. "The question you're dying to ask."

She rose to his challenge — as ever: "Was that one of those *houses* you came out of?"

"It was," he replied evenly.

"Oh." She felt herself blush and was grateful, once again, for the veil.

"Hit the nail home," he continued. "What good is a single tap?"

She cleared her throat awkwardly. "It's none of my business, I'm sure."

"It wasn't," he agreed. "Until you made it so. Not that I mind — not in the least. But you've left the furrow half-turned."

After a brief silence she said, "Because the field seems to have an Irish bull in it as large as the Lucan tram!" She laughed, hoping her wit would close the subject, for she fervently wished she had let his challenge lie.

"I'll tell you, then," he said, taking her arm and guiding her down the hill toward Parliament Street where — presumably — this café of his was to be found. "I was collecting the rents for my Uncle Ebenezer. You remember Uncle Ebenezer?"

"I remember your Uncle Ebenezer," she said fervently. "I doubt he ever forgave me."

"He forgot it the next day," O'Dea assured her. "Don't give yourself airs. He's the ground landlord for every building on that side of the street. If I hadn't met you, I'd be calling at every single one of them now."

It was a polished performance, but she remembered that debauched glint in his eye, before he knew who she was. "How is your Uncle?" she asked.

"Not too well, I'm afraid. I'm his leg-man now. He can't get out as much as he once did."

"I heard he's in a sedan chair now?"

"Yes. Very sudden." Dazzler was awkward, wanting to move off the subject. "But he has a good nurse. A strong colleen, up from the country. Perfectly suited to him."

Lucy wondered what sort of woman at all could be "perfectly suited" to

that ogre.

Then Dazzler told her. “She *looks* like the flaming-red-haired temptress beloved of three-volume novelists. But she’s the Ice Maiden, herself. No breath of passion has ever melted the frost that rimes her heart.”

“My, my, Dazzler — there’s passion of some kind in *that* judgement!”

“Tcha!” He began to parody his distress. “I give myself away at every turn! Still, she suits Uncle Ebenezer, and that’s all that really matters.”

As they passed the Empire Theatre he paused to read the notices. And Lucy seized the chance to take stock of him. His mock grievance — that he gave himself away at every turn — was still in her ears. And all at once she realized it was true. He was no longer very good at hiding things to do with himself. Or had the intervening years taught her to pick them up a lot quicker? That was probably it. After all she had been a mere girl of seventeen, hardly out of the nursery, when they’d last met. And that was now *more* than ten years ago, in fact, for she was now twenty-eight. Twenty-eight years and ten days.

“Sorry,” he said as they resumed their stroll — something he would never have done in the old days. Then he had considered his passion for the music hall to be the most natural thing in the world. He probably still did — except that he now realized it was something to say “sorry” about, too.

“You were the last fellow to take me through those doors,” she told him. “D’you remember the fuss my father made?”

“Fuss, is it?” he said drily. “He ate me a mile off. The last straw, he called it.”

It had been the last straw, too, though neither of them said as much now.

“All those ... *things!*” she said vaguely.

“Things?”

“Life-and-death things. We thought they were so important.”

He made no reply to that.

“And what’s important now?” she asked glumly. “Keeping our heads above water. It’s all dwindled down to that!”

He held open the door of the café, arching his eyebrows to prepare her for his next question, or the closest he dared get to it: “Michael must be doing well, surely? Consultant general surgeon at Eli’s ... and his practice in Fitzwilliam Square ...” He helped her into her chair.

“You *have* kept yourself informed!”

“My dear Luce, one cannot open a newspaper without seeing either your name or ...” His voice tailed off as she lifted her veil at last. His jaw dropped and all he could do was stare at her.

“But not my photograph, obviously,” she said in some embarrassment.

“I’m sorry.” He breathed in deeply and pulled himself together. “I’d forgotten. Your eyes ... I’d forgotten. Where were we? Oh yes — you seem to be on every worthy committee going, one or other of you. The Dublin

Season has little to do with the Castle these days, they say. It begins when Mrs Michael Raven gives a select little dinner in Clyde Road ...”

“Would you stop that!” She waved away his blarney with a laugh.

“... and it ends with a magnificent ball at that same address. Am I wrong?”

The waitress came and took their order, which gave time for her amusement to expire.

Then, like a true devotee of the theatre, he gave her the cue he must have known she needed. He reached forward and tapped the chamois-leather bag. “Does all that expensive *grandeur* explain this little expedition?”

She slumped in her seat and nodded. “D’you know, Dazzler, if I’d met you in Dame Street on my way to that awful ... *mont de piété* ...”

“Ah!” he mused, “how much more civilized it sounds in French!”

“... and if you’d said something like you said just now — about Michael doing pretty well — sure I’d have laughed and said never better!”

“*But ye cot me unawares,*

*a-bending on the stairs ...*” He half-sang it like a snatch of music-hall song — and then said — yet again — “Sorry!” He smiled sympathetically. “You hardly need distress yourself with an explanation, Luce,” he went on. “It’s obvious to anyone that keeping up a position in society cannot be done on bread and cheese and kisses.”

“It was so easy in the beginning,” she said.

“Before the children came along — what is it now? Four?”

She eyed him askance. “Dear God! I’ll bet you know their names, too!”

He made an arch of his hands and rested his chin there. He did know their names, she could tell; he was merely wondering whether or not to admit it.

“Alice, Charley, Tarquin, and Portia?” he said. At least he had the grace to make a slight question of it. Then, out of the blue, he added, “What ever possessed you to go to a dingy little back-street pawnbroker like that, Luce?”

“What else should I do?” she challenged. “Take them back to Webb? Say, ‘We gave you eight hundred for these — how much d’you want to take them back?’ I might as well put an announcement in the *Irish Times*.”

“Not at all!” He laughed at her naïvete. “You always were the extremist — all or nothing! Why not do what Lady Ardilaun herself would do ...”

“Well, she’s certainly not hard up!”

“Precisely! Would you ever just listen! Do what Lady Ardilaun would do. Go back to Webb and say how unfashionable these baubles are and how tired you are of seeing yourself in them, and ...”

She cut him short. “But he’d never offer more than four hundred.”

His eyebrows shot up. “You’ve tried already, then?”

“Of course not. But I know those jewellers. Webb wouldn’t give his

own mother more than half what she paid.”

“Even so, four hundred is not to be sneezed at.”

“It’s the *other* four hundred that would hurt.”

“You could call it the price of keeping up appearances?”

She stared at him in something close to disgust. “It’s easy for some to be so high and mighty,” she said. “May we talk about something else?”

“Surely!” The smile never left his lips. “Shall we talk about where you might get ... what shall we say? Six hundred and fifty for them — and the chance to redeem them when needed?”

It was bait, and she knew it — bait of the most flagrant kind. Also it showed her a new side to this man, new since the days when she had known him so well. It was hardly surprising that he should change in ten years, even a man as flamboyant and outgoing as Dazzler, but it made her wonder how well she knew him now — or even whether she knew him at all. The similarities between the man who now sat facing her and the gay blade she had once loved so dearly might be all on the surface — the looks, the clothes, the mannerisms ... the shared memories. Inside, he might be ... anybody.

For all her caution, however, she was too desperate to pass his offer by. “Who?” she asked in a whisper. “Where?”

He shrugged, as if he now wished to imply he had not been quite so positive. “My Uncle Ebenezer?” he suggested.