

# Victoria & Violet by Rachel Brimble

## EXCERPT

“What awaits me is marriage,” he said. “But I am not a man any woman should want for a husband so it’s something I will avoid for as long as possible.”

The curiosity in her eyes made his confidence falter, and James lifted his fingers from her arm. No doubt she thought him pathetic for fearing something that so many longed for. But Violet did not know him or what he might be capable of. Of the nasty, volatile temperament passed down through the men in his family for generations.

“Better marriage than imprisonment with a mother who has controlled and belittled you your entire life.” She smiled wryly, her gaze sad. “Better a son who will one day marry than a daughter shackled to a mother who wishes her to scheme and spy upon the only person who has made her feel human, liked, and worthy of a modicum of respect for the first time in months.”

He stilled. “Do you speak of the queen?”

Mistress Parker swallowed before looking at Victoria where she stood a few feet away. “What would you like to do if not marry?” she asked quietly.

James stared at her profile, unsure of her thoughts or disposition. “Stay at court where I am happy. Work hard. Rise within the hierarchy as a single man.”

“I want to paint.”

Had he heard her correctly? “Paint?”

She softly smiled as she faced him. “Yes. I dream of my landscapes hanging in every gallery and every grand house in the country. If you think yourself an oddity in this mercenary world, whatever must you think of me? Good evening, Mr. Greene.”

James stared after her as Violet disappeared amongst the mass of finery, his heart heavy for the sadness that emanated from her, yet his inquisitiveness about her had only deepened. He looked at Victoria as she laughed with Melbourne and others in her circle. Could it be that the queen saw the same spark of something special in Violet Parker that he did?