

Chapter 11

"Good morning," Juliet says, handing Evelyn her tea. The glowing light streams through the window and catches the golden streaks in her hair.

"Thank you." Evelyn takes the tea gratefully. The steaming cup warms her hands and soothes her tired mind. Henrietta doesn't make a move as Juliet moves around the room tidying and putting away the mess that has been created.

"Breakfast is in an hour." She reminds Evelyn as she starts to leave, a few dresses in her arms.

"Is anyone up yet?" Evelyn asks the pistol weighing heavily on her mind.

"Not at the moment, your aunt is still in bed and I doubt your brother will return to the land of the living anytime soon," Juliet replies with a small grin.

Evelyn nods her thanks and as soon as the door shuts she jumps out of bed and changes into a pale green dress with cream corset. She throws on some slippers and wraps a cloak around her shoulders. She creeps past Henrietta's bed and hurries out of the room. She meets no one on the stairs and manages to sneak all the way to the front door with being intercepted. She quietly draws the door up until it is almost shut, and patters down the steps. The fresh morning sends a shiver down her spine and the icy air pinches at her cheeks.

The carriage sits in the deserted street, right outside the house. It looks identical to the ones that follow the curve of the street.

Evelyn checks that no one is watching from the windows of any surrounding house before she approaches the vehicle. She tries the door but it is locked, she puts her full weight on the handle but it doesn't budge. The chances are that someone will see her in the next few minutes and she won't get another chance today.

She racks her brain. An idea appears in her mind. An idea that makes her bite her lip and curse her meddling before wrapping her right arm in her cloak. She turns her head to the ground, to protect her eyes and forces her arm through the window. The glass shatters and spills onto the floor. The high pitch smash covers her gasp of pain.

She reaches in, being careful of the shards still stuck in the frame and opens the door from the inside. She lies her coat on the glass covered floor so she can kneel on it and reach to the back of the leather seat. She tugs it away and fishes the pistol from in between the springs. Pistol in hand she picks up her coat in the other and gives it a shake. Tiny shards of glass fall onto the ground like a sparkling mist.

She then wraps the weapon in her coat and shuts the carriage door. She turns on the spot to survey the area, luckily there is no bewildered face to be seen. She calmly walks back into the house. She shuts the door silently and gets as far as the stairs when a voice catches her.

"Are you in need of anything miss?" Juliet says as she comes into view, her eyes drop to the balled up cloak.

"I was going to go for a walk but even with this, it is too cold." Evelyn holds up the cloak in explanation.

"It's a bit early for a walk," Juliet says confused.

"That too, it's frightful outside," Evelyn says, taking a step back. "I think I'll go back to bed."

She half nods and then turns and climbs up the stairs. She can feel Juliet befuddled eyes following her path up the stairs and she has to fight the urge to run.

As soon she feels that Juliet is no longer watching her she sprints up the stairs and dashes into her room. She breathes a sigh of relief when she collapses onto her bed. She leans against the window and unwraps her cloak. The pistol stares back at her. It has a heavy wooden grip and is over thirty centimetres long. She picks it up and holds it up, it weighs more than she expects and doesn't feel very well balanced in her hand. She runs her thumb over the engraving, V.B. With her rational mind now intact she questions whether taking the gun from the crime scene was the wisest decision, it is really none of her business. But by taking the gun it is now her business. The murder weapon falls heavily onto her bed and she glares at the vile thing. The criminal law book on her table seems to accuse her with its very presence.

Henrietta stirs in her bed and Evelyn starts, alarmed. Henrietta turns over in her bed but her eyes are firmly shut. Evelyn stays frozen until she is sure her cousin isn't waking. She looks around for a place to stash the pistol without the risk of Henrietta accidentally finding it.

She opens the window to breathe. The cool air kisses her pink cheeks and clears her foggy mind. Leaning out she realises that there is a thick window ledge jutting out from the window frame, her eyes spot the perfect place to hide the pistol.

She leaves her bed and takes out one of her scarfs, a dull grey one, she wraps the pistol in it and goes back to the window. She kneels on the inside window ledge and reaches for the flower box that sits on the end of the ledge, she digs a small hole in between a few dead plants and places the hidden weapon in the soil before covering it with more earth. She retracts her arm and shuts the window. Her heart continues to pound within her chest but strangely no guilty feeling settles in her stomach. She sits, unsure what to do with herself or the obvious crime she has committed.

She reaches for her book and turns to the page detailing the case of Mary Bailey and John Quin. There was significant evidence that Mrs Bailey did kill her husband, however, the case of her lover's, Mr Quin, with little to no evidence he was hanged than dissected. The graphic description of his extensive torture and killing has her closing the book with a shudder.

"What time is it?" Henrietta asks, sleepily, finally waking up.

"Around 8," Evelyn replies, feeling slightly sick at the prospect of being hanged.

Henrietta rubs her eyes and stretches, she looks at her cousin with contentment. "What a night."

"Hmm," Evelyn replies, tapping her fingernails on the cover of the book, the image of a noose not leaving her mind. Henrietta sits up and pulls on a dressing gown.

"I still cannot quite believe it happened." She says, sliding slippers onto her feet before padding over to the vanity and sitting in front of the mirror. She starts to brush her hair, humming to herself as she does. Evelyn is tidying her own hair when a knock at the door makes her pause in plaiting her locks.

Lucile sticks her head around the door, her expression is guarded.

"Could you come downstairs? There's a constable to see us." She looks very uncomfortable.

Henrietta stops powdering her cheeks and glances to her cousin, fear evident in her eyes.

"We won't be a moment," Evelyn tells her aunt. Lucile shut the door with a sharp nod. Evelyn finished the braid with a ribbon and calmly ensures her appearance suggests innocence. The thought that a constable would appear at the house, hours after the murder had crossed her mind once or twice but it seemed to be a less important issue than the ones she has been dealing with.

Henrietta hasn't moved an inch since Lucile left and the fear in her face has turned to full-blown terror.

"Let's go." Evelyn saying walking over to her. Henrietta's hands shake as she puts her powder pu down and adjusts the position of her necklace. She seizes Evelyn's wrist as she moves past her and violently shakes her head. She is on the verge of hyperventilating, her entire body shakes and tears frantically pour from her eyes.

"You have done nothing wrong," Evelyn says confidently. "Just tell the truth."

"But why is he here?" Henrietta whispers, her lip wobbles and she wipes her streaky face.

"Let's go find out." Evelyn orders her hand and for once Henrietta follows her from the room in silence. They walk down the stairs to the parlour where Lucile and William are already inside. The two girls walk in and stare at the constable as they sit down on either side of their aunt. The constable is well over 6 feet and has a large build that suggests he could easily overpower all of them in a minute. His wiry beard matches his scrubby tan hair on the top of his head.

"I am sorry to call on you so early." His voice is gruff but his kind eyes take away from his imposing figure. "Only we've been asked to interview everyone who was at the party last night."

"Interview?" Henrietta squeaks, her skin whitening. The constable looks at her and then away quickly. Henrietta is still in her night clothes.

"We understand, it was a terrible incident," Lucile says. The man nods and takes out a pad and pencil.

"Could you tell me where you all were around 8:30?" He asks, pencil poised. Evelyn sits rigid in her position and stares at a spot above the man's head.

"I was with the hostess, Lady Edith." Lucile says, "She was telling us about her new Persian rugs."

The pencil dances over the page as he scribbles down all her words.

"I was with Fredrick, he was introducing me to some of his friends." Henrietta barely whispers, her hands twisting in her lap.

"You are new in town I gathered." The constable says, nodding.

"That's right, they arrived two days ago," Lucile says. He nods again and makes a note, he tilts his pencil in Evelyn's direction.

"And where were you?"

She blinks and turns her gaze on his face.

"I was with my brother." She says confidently. He turns to William who looks up at him and winces. The hangover is evidently taking its toll as he slumps deeper into his chair.

"Yes." He says. "I was in the corner and Evelyn joined me, I specifically remember because she didn't have a drink for me."

The constable considers this before continuing his questions. "Did any of you see Lady Tremontane leave with anyone? Was she acting strangely or differently? Did you speak to her at all?"

Henrietta lets out a strangled whimper and clutches at Lucile's arm.

"Sir, please, they don't know who she was. They have just arrived." Lucile protests, comforting the distressed girl. "This whole tragic incident has scared them."

The constable flips a page of his pad, "According to my notes, Mr and Miss Wright used to live here."

William frowns, squinting his eyes. Lucile turns her head to Evelyn.

"Yes, four years ago." She answers, glancing at her brother. "But we never knew everyone when we were here and we certainly are not going to remember them."

"Well, I have been informed that you were quite the social butterfly back then." He looks curiously at her.

"It's true, I was well known but I didn't know Lady Tremontane. Now or then." She replies, her expression final.

She stands. "Now if that is all."

The constable clears his throat. "Thank you all for your time."

The rest of the room rise to see him out. He bows his head and moves towards the door.

"Do you have any suspects?" Henrietta speaks suddenly, tears glistening on her face. The constable suddenly looks very uncomfortable.

"I heard it was her lover." She sniffs, "Some duke."

"Yes," He lowers his head, "I am not really supposed to say."

"Aw." Henrietta pouts prettily. "I am scared that he might harm more innocent girls."

Evelyn has the urge to shake her cousin but at the same time, she wants to know who the man in the garden was.

"Duke Blackmoore has been interviewed and is still involved in this ongoing enquiry." The man says. "But he is not a threat to you, miss, I assure you."

"Nathaniel Blackmoore?" Evelyn asks, surprised, her head tilted.

"Yes miss, do you know him?" The constable says, flipping his notebook back open.

She looks distractedly around the room, "Not really, I may have talked to him once four years ago." She lies.

The constable nods, convinced and bows to everyone. "Again thank you for your time."

They walk as far as the door but the constable turns around before the butler can open it. The family stop behind him.

"I saw that your carriage window has been broken." He says. Evelyn's breath catches in her throat.

"Yes," Lucile says, "Some thugs I have been told."

"Would you like me to report it?" He asks, "We take the destruction of property very seriously."

"This is the first time it has happened, I am sure it is an anomaly."

Lucile gestures to the door. "Besides, one of my servants has already visited the station."

He smiles for the first time and walks out of the house. The butler shuts the door and vanishes into the parlour.

Henrietta turns to Evelyn with raging curiosity.

"Who is Nathaniel Blackmoore?" She asks.

"The fifth Duke of Winchester," Lucile answers.

"Is he rich?" Henrietta says excitedly.

"Most doubtedly." Lucile says, "He won't be if he is found guilty though. I am not surprised that he is a suspect, I hear the most scandalous things about him"

"You think he is a killer?" Evelyn says, an edge to her question, "It one thing to hear rumours of a certain undignified nature but it's another thing to call him a murderer."

"Who else would kill Lady Tremontane? Only her jilted lover."

Henrietta seconds Lucile's opinion like it is obvious.

"I don't know," Evelyn says finally.

"Well whoever it is, I hope they are caught soon." Lucile says, "Now shall we have some tea?"

"Actually, I was invited to Lady Edith's for tea so I need to get ready." Henrietta excuses herself and leaves the room.

"Evelyn?" Lucile asks.

"I think I might go for a walk," Evelyn says, trying to devise a plan. "I have missed town and it is a nice day."

The grey clouds from outside disagree but she leaves the room before her aunt can protest.