

## Chapter 18

At 11:30 the next day Evelyn is getting ready in her room when Henrietta storms in. She throws herself into a chair and sulks. Evelyn places a black ruby around her throat and she slips her grey cloak to cover the shine of her dress.

"There are no balls!" Her cousin pouts, "People are going silly over this murder now."

"We have been to many parties over the last week," Evelyn says confused, adding matching earrings.

"They were close family and friend meetings, not real balls." Henrietta rolls her eyes. "I want a stupendous ball with handsome strangers and available lords."

"But I thought you were terrified about being murdered?" Evelyn sits on her bed and places a pair of black heels onto her feet.

"I still am, o surely I should enjoy my time before that duke strikes again?" Henrietta wraps a curl around her finger and broods.

"Your logic is irrefutable," Evelyn says dryly. Henrietta turns to properly face her.

"Where are you sneaking off to this time? With your hair like that?" "Charity event." Evelyn lies, touching the more than elaborate updo.

"If I didn't know better I would say you have a secret lover." Henrietta giggles. "But I know better." She says to press her point.

"Do you have any plans?" Evelyn asks, passing the attention back.

"I am meeting Fredrick." Henrietta sighs contentedly.

"Again?" Evelyn raises one eyebrow. "Aunt told me he's been regularly visiting you."

"He's taking me to the park for a carriage ride." Henrietta grins happily.

The doorbell goes downstairs and she jumps to her feet. "In fact, that will be him." She bounds out of the room without a goodbye. Evelyn watches her go with amusement, it might have something to do with the fact that she only sees Henrietta for limited amounts of time or maybe the girl has mellowed out but Evelyn is finding her cousin's attitude to be less of a bother than usual. In front of the mirror, he adjusts the cloak to fully cover her skirt, the dreary old cloak looks odd with her fancy hair and jewellery. She slips up her hood and thankfully it falls forward far, disguising her face in shadow. Her painted lips are the only colour that can be seen.

Evelyn leaves the house at 11:55, she only has to wait a few moments before the duke's carriage pulls up and she climbs in.

"Good Morning," Blackmoore says, per her request yesterday he is dressed in a dark suit with gold buttons and embellishment, he has swapped out his usual hat for one that has a thin gold rim and is made of a dark velvet that matches his scarf. He looks the height of privileged rich lord. His eyes rake over her cloak.

"I dressed as you requested and you appear in such horrid cloak." He says looking bemused.

"It's necessary." She replies, not lowering her hood.

He uses his cane to lean one of the corners and a sparkle of black is revealed. She knocks the cane away with her hand. He smiles, intrigued but doesn't push the matter.

"I was going to presume we are going to Lord Mathew's house but I feel as though you know more than I do." He says gracefully.

"He will be at George Hill's house," Evelyn says, straighten the corner.

"Then that is where we shall go." Blackmoore bangs on the roof and barks the address. The carriage pulls away from Kingston Street and heads towards their first suspect. The carriage stops in front of a white marble house identical to the ones around it.

Before Blackmoore can open the door Evelyn grabs his wrist. He looks at her in surprise.

"You need to be on your guard, don't get distracted. We can't afford it." She says earnestly, her eyes wide.

Blackmoore's carefree smile rises to his lips and he removes her hand. "I don't get distracted." He assures her before slipping out of the carriage. Evelyn contains a groan of exasperation but follows him into the street. Blackmoore ignores the silver knocker and pushes the door open, a chiming sounds within. Evelyn walks into the dimly lit hallway and shuts the door behind her. A butler dressed in finery unsuited to his position appears from a side door, he bows to Blackmoore and approaches.

"Are you here for the game sir?" He asks. "It's five guineas to play."

Blackmoore reaches into his pocket and gives double the price. He nods behind him to signal that he is covering his companion.

"We don't allow women I am afraid." The butler says politely. Unknown to the men Evelyn has removed her cloak to reveal a pitch black dress. The corset is tight and pinches in her waist, sparkly jewels twinkle across the skirt and rise in swirls to the bodice. The jewels hanging from her neck and ears gleam in the candlelight and make her fair skin glow.

"I am an exception," Evelyn says taking a step forward so the butler can see her face.

"Lady Wright." The butler gasps, bowing. "My apologies, they are in the usual room."

He steps back and allows them to walk past. Blackmoore orders his arm, Evelyn takes it and they walk past the stunned man. She leads the duke down the long corridor.

"You do make things interesting." Blackmoore whispers so lowly. She laughs lightly but grows sombre when they reach the door at the end of the hall.

"Remember what I said." She breathes before pushing open the door. The room is a large drawing room, a group of men sit around a large circular table, cards in hand, drink upon the table. When Blackmoore enters the room with Evelyn on his arm they look up from their game and stare in wonder. Two drop their cards and stand up in amazement. Lord Mathew is the last to see the couple but when he does a smirk crosses his lips and he waltzes over to them.

"Well well." He kisses Evelyn's hand. "It has been a long time Lady Wright." He then looks regretful and grabs at his chest, "I am sorry...Miss Wright."

She forces a coy smile to her face.

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"We have missed you." One of the men says, his eyes appreciating her dress. Evelyn smiles and glides over to Mathew's empty chair, she takes a seat and orders the men a glowing smile.

"I have missed these games, I cannot tell you how they compare to the country." She says. Mathew clicks his fingers and the butler arrives with two identical chairs that he places on either side of her. Mathew and Blackmoore take their seats.

"I wasn't aware that you enjoy cards," Mathew says to the Duke as he collects up the fallen deck.

"It has long been my intention to experience your famed card games," Blackmoore says smoothly. "Evelyn convinced me to come along for a price."

"She certainly knows how to barter for what she wants," Mathews agrees with what could have been interpreted as a fond smile though it doesn't quite reach his eyes. "What shall we play?" He asks. "Any requests, Blackmoore?"

"Ladies choice, surely?" The duke says politely.

The men around the table laugh, Evelyn herself smiles, genuinely amused.

"We are far too clever to allow Miss Evelyn to pick the game, we don't want to lose all our money tonight." One of the men says through chortles.

"It's not your money I am after." She says over the chuckling, it immediately dies down and they all look shyly.

"What is it you desire?" Mathew asks, interested.

"Information." She places her elbows on the table.

"Of what nature?" He leans forward.

"Dangerous."

"My favourite kind."

Evelyn smiles but her eyes grow stormy and Mathew flinches at something, he looks at his friends around the table.

"I think our game has concluded for today." He says. The men look for one to another, confused and put out, several look like they want to protest. Evelyn leans back in her chair, she looks coolly confident.

"Now!" Mathew demands, slamming his fist on the table, the dice jump on the wood and the cards slip out of the pile he just made. They stand up, muttering and leave the room, looking back at the three remaining. The butler shuts the door behind them and himself. Mathew relaxes as soon as the door clicks shut. He crosses the room to a table full of glass bottles, he pours himself a large whiskey. He turns to his guests.

"Do you want one?"

"Please," Blackmoore says but Evelyn shakes her head. Mathew pours a second and passes it to him and he retakes his seat. He swills the amber drink around his glass and then looks at her.

"What information are you after then?" He asks.

"Lady Tremontane." Evelyn begins.

"The dead girl?" Mathew raises an eyebrow.

"You knew her before she married the Duke of Sheffield." Blackmoore accuses. Mathew waves a hand in dismissal, he looks directly Evelyn.

"Are you trying to find her killer?" He asks, mystified.

"I want to know whether I am looking at him." She counters.

"I am hurt you think I would ever harm a woman." He says with mock pain. "I only ever please them."

Evelyn looks away in disgust.

"But..." Mathew finishes his whiskey, "I did know Phillipa before she married the old guy, we had fun together, she was my longest muse, I was upset when she told me she was to marry him but I wasn't jealous, just....disappointed. Women are disappointing creatures."

"Why didn't you rekindle your romance after she married?" She asks, "She obviously didn't care about remaining monogamous."

"I don't screw with married women," Mathew states looking at Blackmoore.

"You toy with them." Evelyn challenges.

"But of course." He says, spreading his arms, "It is my favourite game."

Blackmoore scoffs in disgust, Mathew turns his gaze on the duke before addressing Evelyn.

"Are you sure you want to be defending this man? There are things I have heard about him that would make your beautiful skin crawl."

"Things that make him a murderer?" She asks. Mathew shrugs as Blackmoore sits down.

"As far as I am aware he has not shot, stabbed or throttled anyone and that is good enough for me." She says, her eyes glowing.

Mathew opens his mouth but words never surface as a close bang sounds, deafening them. The whiskey bottle shatters into thousands of glittering pieces as the bullet hits it. Evelyn is the first to react, she slides to the side of her chair and drags Blackmoore onto the ground with her. Multiple shots sound and they continue in a random but fast pace.

A bullet whizzes past her and lodges itself in the wall along with several more. It takes several kicks but she manages to topple the table away from them so the face of the table shields them. She crawls behind the table and helps Blackmoore to sit up. The cover the table is currently providing is less than ideal as they have to squish together to ensure no limbs are in the firing line. The blasts aren't stopping, vases, glasses and ornaments are showering them in fine pieces as they break. Evelyn can't hear anything, but she spots Mathew on the floor, a meter away. He is lying on his back but there are no signs he has been hit. She hits Blackmoore's hand and points to the helpless scoundrel, the duke shoots her a look but she glares until he reluctantly drags him behind the table too.

"What the hell is going on?" She shouts as the pistols continue to fire at them.

"We are being shot at," Blackmoore says, unhelpfully. "By several people."

Too exasperated to reply Evelyn falls silent and curls inwards as a bullet comes too near her side of the table. One of the windows smashes and a rush of warm air enters the room along with the smell of wood. Crackling mixes in with the sound of pistol blasts.

"Oh, bloody hell." Blackmoore stretches his neck and peers over the side of the table.

"Is that what I think it is?" She asks as the sound of roaring flames reaches her ears.

"They have set fire to the curtains." He says, "We need to leave now." He helps her to scramble to her feet, both of them still crouching behind the table. Evelyn sees that the fire has greedily licked up the curtains and is devouring everything on the wall, it spirals, closer and closer to their table.

"Mathew, we need to leave." She says urgently, tugging him. He slaps her hand away and straightens up. Evelyn opens her mouth to scream as a bullet rips through him but no blast sounds. He stands there unaffected. She listens hard to hear bullets under the roaring flames but all she can hear is the flames consuming everything in its path. The smoke from the flames covers their heads and swirls around them.

"We need to leave," Blackmoore says grabbing Evelyn's hand. She nods and staying low to the ground he pulls her from the room.