

Chapter 21

The further the carriage travels away from Edward's house, the more the anger overtakes the hurt and the betrayal is overcome by bitterness. It is hard for Evelyn to describe the exact feeling that is haunting her every thought however it feels all too familiar.

"Why didn't you marry him?"

The question catches her off guard and Evelyn's tongue sticks to the back of her throat.

"I am sorry?" She chokes out.

"He seemed to be all over you despite your shortcomings," Henrietta explains. "And it's not just him. You had so many opportunities to become a married woman, a rich wife to societies finest, but you never did." She says with a dreamy expression, it vanishes and she becomes serious, "Why?"

"I don't know why you ask me these questions." Evelyn glares, "You never believe my honest answer, it's almost as though you want me to admit that it is all my fault."

"I want to know the truth." Her cousin insists. "You could have had everything."

Evelyn gives her a cryptic look but replies, "I didn't marry because marriage, is the greatest lie of them all."

"I don't understand." Henrietta pouts, Evelyn frowns,

"It doesn't matter." She dismisses the subject, too much anger in her mind to act rationally. She turns to look out the window.

"Goddammit!" Henrietta swears, "Stop treating me like a child!" She is on the edge of her seat, fists clenched, her voice raised and full of resentment.

"Henrietta!" Evelyn's eyes widen in shock and she sits back as the annoyed girl hits at the soft velvet cushions.

"Everything you talk about you say as though I am a struggling child who needs to be protected. I am not stupid and I am not a little girl!" Henrietta shouts. "You are patronising and demeaning all the time and I have had enough, I deserve respect!"

There is a pause, the energy crackles like fireworks and a black storm has swirled into appearance behind Evelyn's eyes, she has gone quiet, too quiet.

"You deserve respect?" Evelyn repeats, almost too low to be heard.

"More than anyone!" Henrietta cries.

"Henrietta, in order for you to earn anyone's respect you need to stop acting like a child, starting with this tantrum," Evelyn says, feigning calm.

"I am not having a tantrum." Henrietta howls, tears streaming down her face. "You are just a jealous whore that sabotages my every chance of happiness because you refuse to admit that you are washed up and old! You act like you know everything but in reality, you just can't stand anyone taking what you used to have!" Henrietta takes a gasp as she finishes, a vile and twisted look of sick triumph on her face.

Evelyn is shaking with anger. "I treat you like a child because that is the only way you know how to be, you are reckless and stupid. I don't claim to know everything but I know what hard work, loyalty and pain are, but you, you, with your ungrateful attitude and general disregard for anyone's feelings, will never understand that."

Henrietta's tears have turned into full-on sobs that wrack her entire body. Evelyn continues in the same controlled tone but a harshness has slipped in.

"I only ever acted in consideration of your position on the behest of my father and out of respect for my late aunt but I won't interfere anymore. You can flirt with every man now, don't worry about consequences of your actions, be passed around like yesterdays newspaper, marry a duke will sleep with a younger version of yourself while you raise the children you don't care about, I won't stop you."

"How can you be so mean?" Henrietta bawls, her red face, screwed up and hurt.

"It the truth."

"It's not! I am beautiful and...." Henrietta hiccups behind her hand.

"You are beautiful, gorgeous in fact but you are naive and your soul is rotten." Evelyn tastes the loathsome words as they pass through her lips but she doesn't regret them.

"Evelyn...." Henrietta sobs. The carriage falls silent except for the pitter-patter of raindrops, neither speaks for a long time. Evelyn can hardly believe what has been said between the pair of them, she expected to feel guilty, apologetic, at the very least regretful but those emotions are far from the relief that she feels.

"Do you really hate me so much?" Henrietta asks out of the silence, she has stopped crying and her make up is spread all over her face in streaky lines.

"I don't hate you," Evelyn mutters, the carriage stops in front of 104 but neither party move to get out,

"But you said all of those things...." Henrietta says wiping her eyes.

"I partly envy your freedom and ignorance," Evelyn admits, looking directly at her. "Your life is easy, you breeze by."

"You think my life is easy?" Henrietta sits up, "I am trying to be what my parents wanted me to but I'll never be anything compared to you, the stunning Evelyn who was a London socialite, the clever Evelyn who helps her brother study law, the kind Evelyn who looks after the cousin that no one wants!" She wipes away her tears. "The only thing I have is money, dresses, makeup, shoes but they don't matter, none of it does."

"Then stop trying to be who I was and just be you," Evelyn says, Henrietta makes no acknowledgement of her words so she climbs out of the carriage and enters the house. Anger still burns in her blood, as furious a hurricane and as deadly as a tsunami. She spots William in the parlour with a glass of whiskey and a book.

"Where's our aunt?" She asks roughly.

"She's with Lady Diana." He replies, not looking up or noticing that she is shaking or that her face is a storm of emotion.

"Good," She says. He still doesn't look up.

"Did you have a nice trip with our cousin? Did she try and seduce him into marrying her? Maybe you should do the same..."

"Be quiet." Evelyn bites out, staring at the alcohol, the rage clouding her mind.

"What's wrong little sister?" William glances up at her in surprise, her fierce expression makes him put his book down.

"Why do you drink so much?" She asks, standing over him. "It's been four bloody years! Get over yourself, you aren't living in a goddamn tragedy! People die of starvation, disease and war every day and yet you mope around like a lame dog. Don't you know, no one cares anymore." Her voice breaks, "You were meant to look after me! I am your little sister, you should have protected me." Her voice breaks. "Instead you made me feel like it was all my fault, all because of me!" She takes a shuddering breath, "Everything I have done is for us, but no one bothers to ask how I am, or what I want and all you do is drink your pitiful life away."

William sits in complete shock, his whiskey glass slips from his grip and splashes onto the carpet. When he doesn't speak, Evelyn just nods her head sighs.

"Of course." She murmurs and then walks from the room. She slams into her aunt at the front door.

"I heard shouting," Lucile says, handing her soaking bonnet to the butler. She looks past Evelyn to Henrietta who is sitting on the bottom step, clutching at the bannister, tears all over her face. Evelyn looks from her cousin to her brother who emerges from the parlour, ashen-faced. She doesn't say a word and pushes past her aunt into the street. The rain pours down in fast torrents and soon she is soaked to the bone as she walks down the streets. She falls into her mind, with the feelings she would normally push down, free, she feels empty. She squeezes her eyes closed and refuses to cry. Her feet carry her down streets she doesn't recognise and past houses that become slowly more broken down. By the time her feet cannot carry her anymore she has entered an area of London that is dark, dangerous and dilapidated. She collapses onto a bench outside a small pub named the Deer and Hound. The rain has eased off but the wind chills her bones through her wet dress, she closes her eyes, her head lolls against the wall of the pub and she silently cries.

"Evelyn?"

A kind tired voice has her reluctantly opening her eyes and then jumping up in delight, wiping her eyes.

"Father?" She cries, Mr Wright stands in the street with an umbrella. He drops the suitcase he is carrying onto the ground as his daughter throws herself into his embrace and hugs him tightly. Evelyn breathes in the smell of worn paper and ink and she feels safe, her heart finally begins to slow for the first time during the day. Mr Wright strokes the top of her head as she holds onto him.

"What's wrong?" He asks. "What are you doing in this part of town?"

"Nothing." Evelyn sniffs and pulls away with a watery smile. "I missed you."

"As did I."

"What are you doing here?" She asks "I thought you were on business."

Mr Wright suddenly looks very guilty. "I am on business," He replies vaguely. Evelyn frowns but dismisses the doubt immediately.

"Everyone will be so pleased to see you." She says picking his bag and taking his arm to move forward but he doesn't move.

"I am afraid I am on to Yorkshire in two days." Mr Wright says gravely. "I am staying in this pub." He gestures towards the dingy little public house with musty windows and slanted tiles.

"Oh." Evelyn deflates slightly but she still smiles. "Do you have time for tea?"

"Just sit with me." He says, guiding her to the bench, she drops down next to him reluctantly.

"Don't you want to see William and Henrietta?" Evelyn asks, confused.

"Can't I spend a little time with my daughter." He teases, "Or is she too grown up for that?"

"Of course not," She says, lightly pushing his shoulder and rolling her eyes at his amused expression.

"So tell me why you were out here in the pouring rain unaccompanied." Mr Wright says. Evelyn leans away from him and rests her head on her hands, elbows on her thighs.

"I snapped." She whispers. "I lost all of my control, I couldn't take it anymore."

"You are so like your mother." He says, rubbing her back. "You look after everyone, you keep our family together."

"And who looks after me?" She asks, "Who cares for me?"

Mr Wright looks annoyed and he places his hands in his lap. "You aren't a child, you can look after yourself."

"But William? And Henrietta? But they need to be mothered? Cared for?" Evelyn asks heatedly. Her father doesn't reply, he keeps a stony silence.

"Can I ask you a question?" She asks. He nods his head once.

"Are you working this much because you have spent Henrietta's inheritance?"

He freezes and looks at her.

"How...." He starts.

"I am not stupid." She says bluntly. Mr Wright shoots her an unreadable look, he sighs and runs a hand through his hair.

"I used that money to save us, it kept us in society, meant that we could still have a future." He defends hotly.

"You spent it on William's career right? You thought he could raise us up but he hasn't and now you're making up the money you stole."

"William is going to make it, he has too." He says determinedly.

"I think someone should let him know that," Evelyn replies bitterly, there's a foul taste in her mouth and she feels empty, lifeless. She stands up, clears her throat and pushes silver strands behind her ears.

"I need to get back." She says not looking at her father's face.

"Evelyn...." He begins, but she shakes her head and walks away. Despite being in a dangerous area of town she takes no care as her mind tells her to get as far away as possible from her father, from the only person she thought would look after her. Her entire body is shaking like a leaf, her breaths are short and panicked as she walks down the street, her mind is a vast vat of emotion and thought.

It surprises her to suddenly find herself in front of 104. She stares at the building for a long time before she enters the house. It's quiet, no one is around, the first person she sees is William sitting on her bed, he looks up as she shuts the door. His face is red and streaky, it is apparent that he has been crying.

"I am sorry." William whispers. She crosses over to him and sits on the bed, she waits for him to say more but he doesn't so she picks up a pencil and scribbles something down on a small piece of paper. She hands it to him.

"Please pass this along to Juliet." She says. His tear rimmed eyes try to find her closed-off grey ones but she looks away. He eventually stands, kisses her cheek and leaves the room. Evelyn lets out a shaky breath as soon as the door shuts, a single tear escapes but she brushes it away. She slips her shoes off and curls up on the bed. Her eyes flutter shut and dreams take her away from the life she is enduring.