

## Chapter 24

"This is a dangerous part of town." Blackmoore comments as the carriage trundles down Gargoyle street to Carpenter's Yard. Evelyn doesn't reply but looks out of the window at the crooked houses and dirty streets that seem to go on forever. When the carriage stops she doesn't wait for him to help her and steps out in front of the Deer and Hound. In the lack of natural light, it looks even more run down. ↻

"Evelyn, wait." Blackmoore calls, jumping down but her hand is already on the door handle.

The inside is even more dark and dingy than the outside. Most of the rotting wooden floorboards are taken up by occupied circular tables with small stubby candles and beer tankards. The people that have taken the seats are similar to their inhabitance, they have seen better days.

The small bar has been pushed into the furthest corner of the room and behind it, there is a set of stairs that disappear upwards. She steps inside and the dull murmuring of drunken chat stops as everyone stares at her. Blackmoore appears at her shoulder and casts a disparaging look around the room. She tries to look apologetic while she crosses the room to the bar where she takes the only unoccupied seat, he follows her and stands at her shoulder, on edge.

Behind the bar, the bartender watches her out of the corner of his eye as he serves a toothless man. A woman stands a little behind cleaning glasses with a rag cannot be described as clean. The bartender places a glass in front of his customer but he doesn't over to her, she waits patiently, placing her hands on the bar and then regretting it. Eventually, he hobbles over to her side, he takes a long look at her dress and painted face before even speaking, the disgust is evident.

"What can I do to help you, my lady?" He rasps out.

"There's a man staying here." She says, "Under the name Wright."

"Never heard of that name before." He replies curtly, he starts to move away but she doesn't let him get further than a step.

"I find that hard to believe as I spoke to him yesterday." She narrows her eyes but smiles politely.

"Must have given you a false name." The bartender says. "We don't get your sort around here."

"We should go," Blackmoore whispers, conscious of the entire pub's attention on them but she shrugs him off, leaning forward.

"I just need to talk to him." She says to the man behind the bar, he doesn't respond. "Please."

The man remains in stoic silence. Evelyn can feel her control on her emotions slowly withering away, she sits back on her stool, defeated. The bartender moves away and Blackmoore is torn between whether to offer her comfort or to get her the hell out of this dogy pub.

"Oh for god's sake." The woman cleaning glasses marches over and claps the man behind the ear. "Are you the daughter, Evie or somthin like that?"

"Yes," Evelyn says in surprise. "My name is Evelyn."

"Go on up." The woman nods to the stairs, "He's in room 12."

"Thank you." Evelyn smiles gratefully and quickly bounces out of her seat to the climb the stairs. The stairs wind up to a straight corridor, every door is identical except from the number that hangs from broken nails. She follows them down to one of the last doors, the 12 is upside down and the paint is peeling all over. Blackmoore has followed her but he hovers at the top of the stairs to give her some privacy.

Evelyn takes a steadying breath before she knocks on the door. There is a loud scuffling sound and then the door opens wide and Mr Wright stands in the doorway.

"Evelyn?" He stares at her in surprise.

"Father," She says calmly, she pulls the bag from within her corset, "This is Henrietta's inheritance plus a little to cover any other debt and a bit to allow for comfort as you start work again." She places it into his hand.

Mr Wright is so surprised at her sudden announcement and the sheer weight of the bag in his hand that he doesn't say anything for a very long time. He looks from the bag to his daughter's face and a million and one questions spring to his mind but he can only choke out one.

"How did you get such an amount?"

"It doesn't matter." She says firmly, "It's legal and cannot be taken away." She goes to leave but as she catches sight of Blackmoore bewildered but concerned expression it gives her another spur of confidence and she turns back to her father.

"There's another thing, with your permission I am going to ask Lucile whether I can stay in London indefinitely."

Still struggling to process the acquisition of such a fortune that is in his hand, Mr Wright has to blink a few times to realise what she has said.

"But you hate London?" Her father frowns. "What about me? Willaim and Henrietta? They need you."

"I know that but what about what I need?" She asks, "Everything I have ever done is for the sake of this family and it's time I thought about myself, that's what the rest of you do." She shrugs. "None of you would need me if you tried just a little bit."

Mr Wright sighs and runs a hand through his hair. "I am not going to stop you but...."

"I need this." She cuts him off. "I need to know that I can have this for myself because I bloody well deserve it."

"No one can deny what you have done for this family." He says and that is permission enough for Evelyn, she smiles and kisses both his cheeks.

"Stay well father." She turns on her heel and walks away without a backward glance. She meets Blackmoore on the top of the stairs but slips past him before he can get a concerned word in. She skips up to the bar and places several coins into the hand of the grumpy barkeep.

"For your trouble." She says sweetly, he stares in alarm at them but she doesn't look back as she walks out of the pub.

Outside on the street, she collapses onto the bench and starts to laugh. She looks at the sky and smiles. It feels unreal to have that amount of responsibility lifted from her shoulders, no more dress fittings, drunken rescues or catty fights, maybe not forever but for now and that's enough. She starts suddenly as the duke sinks onto the bench next to her, he wears an expression of cautious optimism.

"Are you alright?" He asks, joining her in watching the dark sky.

Her eyes follow the twinkling stars, their light, a gleaming dot in an inky black canvas. "Yes." She says simply.

"I don't pretend to know anything about your family but when no one is looking out for you then you need to." He says so ly.

"And I don't pretend to know anything about your club but it wasn't you that got the girl that killed her self pregnant and then messed around with her sisters was it?" She says quietly. His silence is all the answer she needs. They sit for a while, just staring at the sky. There is no need to talk, to discuss anything, it is not the time for words.

"Do you think I would be a good governess?" She asks suddenly, looking at him. "Or a companion?" ↻

"Why do you ask such a thing?" He looks at her and frowns.

"I could do something worthwhile, earn my independence." She explains. He snorts and folds his arms.

"I think you'd be an awful governess." He replies lightly.

"How dare you?" Her mouth drops open and she glares at his amused expression.

"You are too pretty and clever to be wasted as a governess." He says matter of factly.

"I believe you have just complimented me." She says with a smile.

"That was careless of me." He quips, "I must remember never to compliment Miss Wright."

In response, she lightly shoves his arm. "I thought that coming back here was going to remind me how much I don't matter but it has shown me how free insignificance is."

Blackmoore grabs both her hands and forces her to swivel to face him. He leans in and goes nose to nose with her, his eyes are flashing as they look deep into her silvery ones.

"Never say you don't matter." He murmurs, "You matter.....you matter to me."

Her heart has almost stopped from the way he is looking at her and it does a cartwheel in her throat when his eyes drop to her lips and he leans in further, her eyes travel all over his face at a frantic pace but she doesn't pull back.

"I wonder..." He brushes his lips across hers, his hand travels up her waist and stops at the back of her neck. She is given a split second warning as his eyes darken and then his lips are crashing down upon hers. He kisses her with all the fury and worries he felt when Robert pointed the pistol at her, for all the times she contradicted him and made his life difficult. ↻

She is too shocked to stop her lips from responding and he groans, cupping her face with his hands. She reveals in the way his lips dance across hers and the ferocity in which he holds her close. She moves her hands to his chest to push him away but they end up slinking around his neck and tugging him closer. She bathes in the feeling of his lips against hers, so and loving, suddenly nothing else matters, nothing else is important.

She rips her mouth away and takes a deep breath, her cheeks are bright pink exhilaration. Her lip stain is evident around his mouth. Her arms drop to her sides.

"You're distracting me." She says for lack of a better excuse, she looks around and then feels a fresh shock of alarm. ↻

"Where's your carriage?"

"I thought it was dangerous for him to wait on the side of the road, so I sent him to wait on the corner two streets away." He explains.

"Of course." She stands, "I am sorry, I shouldn't have dragged you into my mess."

He stands too and takes her left hand. "You hardly dragged me, I distinctly remember offering."

"More fool you then." She says with a small smile, he grins and nods. She tries to ignore that in this moment of peace, he looks more handsome than ever before.

Blackmoore clears his throat and nods. "I think it would be wise to return home." ↻

"Quite right." She agrees and although she smiles, her heart breaks a little inside, knowing that the impossible rarely becomes possible.