

Chapter 35

Evelyn can barely take three steps out of the carriage before she is embraced by her brother. He squeezes her tight and doesn't let go until their father appears at his shoulder. He drops his arms and steps away. Evelyn kisses her father's cheek lightly, but she doesn't meet his eyes. Lucile is also part of the welcome party; she embraces her niece and kisses her cheek.

"How did you know it was me?" Evelyn asks once she is released from the hug.

"I recognised the carriage, you only get those up north," William says, "Odd choice though, surprised it made the journey."

"I wasn't expecting such a welcome," Evelyn says looking around for Henrietta. "But where is..." She looks expectantly at Lucile, but her aunt looks to the ground and her hands twitch. Evelyn glances from guilty face to guilty face.

"Will someone tell me before I fear the worst." She says, laughing slightly to cover her fear. "Father?"

Mr Wright sighs, he runs a hand through his crinkled hair. "She's at Lady Edith's. She's meeting Fredrick's father. Fredrick proposed to her and...and she said yes."

Evelyn blinks, astounded, "Fredrick is going to marry Henrietta? And Edith's fine with this? And you're fine with this?" She shakes her head and paces in front of the carriage. "I don't believe this."

"Eve, you had your chance to have him, but you said no. He's entitled to marry someone else, even if that someone else is your cousin," William says apologetically.

"I neither asked nor care for your good opinion brother," Evelyn spits without thinking. She closes her eyes in regret when she sees the hurt in his eyes. She sighs. "I am sorry, I am not angry...just surprised. When did this happen?"

"Five days ago." Mr Wright says, "It's their engagement ball tonight."

"It's lucky you were cleared last week or you might not have been able to come," Lucile says trying to lighten the mood.

"Lucky? Yes, I suppose...wait last week?" Evelyn frowns, her heart missing a beat, "I am cleared? I've been cleared since last week?"

"Yes, but we thought that you knew." Mr Wright says. Evelyn looks from one to the other, disbelief and fury in her mind.

"Why did no one write to me and tell me I was safe?" She demands, "I was terrified on the journey here, I thought I was going to be arrested at any moment!"

"You were on the run for murder, we didn't know where you were," William states defensively. "Blackmoore wouldn't tell us anything other than that you were safe."

"Screw him! You didn't think to use logic? I mean where could I have actually gone?" She snaps, throwing her hands in the air and groaning.

Her aunt reaches to take her hand, but Evelyn snatches her arm away and pushes through her family. She gives Juliet a pointed look as she passes her in the doorway and marches inside. Evelyn hurries up the stairs to her room, she flings the door open and flops onto her bed. Thoughts and words swirl around her head and a dull ache settles in her heart.

"Miss?" Juliet enters and walks up to her bed. Evelyn sits up and fixes the maid with a calculating look.

"What happened?" She asks, not bothering to hide her annoyance.

"In regard to...?" Juliet shushes slightly.

"Everything."

"When you vanished, we were all shocked, even more so when we learnt you were to be arrested. Your father returned from his trip almost immediately and William was removed from the prosecution soon after. We all stayed in the house in case you returned and then Fredrick showed up and proposed to Henrietta. After that Duke Blackmoore visited and told us what happened with you both." Juliet says.

Evelyn jumps up and begins to pace up and down. "I suppose he was utterly charming about the whole thing?" She seethes, her hands resting on her hips. Juliet raises her eyebrows at the harsh tone but continues.

"He was very kind to us, he offered to pay for the trouble he caused. We thought you two had a plan worked out for all of this."

"Well we didn't!" Evelyn half-shouts, kicking the side of her bed and then wincing as pain shoots through her foot.

"Miss, may I say something a bit out of order?" Juliet asks, stepping forward, Evelyn studies her and then sighs sitting back down on her bed, nursing her sore foot.

"I'll listen to anything you have to say."

Juliet sits down on the bed too. "I wonder if the reason he kept you away is that he doesn't want you in danger, they still haven't found Phillipa's killer you know."

"Perhaps," Evelyn grumbles. "But even if that is the reason, he didn't tell me, I've been isolated from everything, completely cut off!"

"And maybe he did that because he cares and knows that the only thing that kept you away all this time, was the fear of conviction," Juliet suggests gently. "Wouldn't you do the same if you cared?"

Evelyn gives her a narrowed look.

"Of course I care." She says, "Otherwise I'd have let him hang."

"Think about this way." Juliet says, "You have spent all this time with him, and it's made you care about him differently and that's affecting how you feel," Juliet says.

Evelyn scoffs and stands up. "I don't know what you are trying to suggest but whatever it is I don't care to talk about it." She says walking over to her wardrobe and running a hand over the polished wood. She hides her face because her true feelings are written all over it. Before her maid can reply there is a soft knock on the door and Mr Wright pokes his head around the door.

"Evelyn, do you have a moment?" He asks, an apologetic expression on his face. She nods. Juliet curtsies, making her excuses before heading downstairs.

Mr Wright edges into the room, his hands behind his back.

"I...am glad to see you safe." He says, she doesn't reply but glances in his direction.

"I wanted you to have a special dress in case you arrived back before Henrietta's ball." He says, revealing a box from behind his back. The white box is shiny and tied with a red ribbon. Mr Wright walks over to her and holds out the box, but she makes no move to take it. She stares at the box for a moment before looking at him. She recognises the label; the dress is from Madame Olive's.

"How could you afford a dress like that?" She asks, returning to her bed to look out the window. Mr Wright follows her path and places the box on her bed.

"I used the money you gave me, for Henrietta's dowry and inheritance. I cleared my debts too. I put a bit in to restart the business, I have saved some in case we hit rough times and the rest went on this dress and a suit for William." He explains. "I am going to pay you back too; every penny will be returned."

Evelyn faces her father, "You don't need to pay me back," She says sofly, "It was never my money really." She smiles and takes his hand, "And even if it was, I would happily give up every penny to support my family."

Mr Wright raises a hand and strokes her cheek. "I am sorry for the past few years; it is my deepest regret that you have been unhappy." He sighs and a tear rolls down his face. "You are so beautiful and grown-up. When did you become so like your mother? I feel like I have missed everything."

Evelyn smiles, catches his hand and pulls him into a hug. "I am right here, you've missed nothing." She sighs as they break apart, "And I am sorry about the recent chaos, it was never my intention."

"I know, there is nothing to forgive." He sighs, wiping his tears with his free hand, "Will you come tonight?"

"Of course, I will." She says, squeezing his hand. "I need to rest first."

"You must nap." Her father says, "I'll send some food up in an hour or so."

"Thank you." She says. Mr Wright nods and leaves the room. Evelyn moves her present to the vanity table and strips off her worn travelling clothes. She climbs into her cold bed and feels a wave of relief and comfort wash over her. She closes her eyes and snuggles down into her covers before falling into a light sleep.

Juliet wakes her up later with a light meal of bread and cheese that Evelyn wolfed down alongside a cup of sweet tea.

"Is Henrietta getting ready somewhere else?" She asks, stripping off her underclothes and changing into light ivory underwear. She wraps a dressing gown around herself to keep warm and pulls on a pair of slippers.

"She's with Lady Edith, she'll be there when we arrive," Juliet says, hunting around for a hairbrush.

"Is that by choice?" Evelyn says, undoing the ribbon on her present and lifting the lid.

"Lady Edith made her own she couldn't really say no to," Juliet says, finding a brush in a draw. Evelyn makes a noncommittal sound and lifts the tissue paper to reveal a stunning mint coloured silk dress. She lifts the dress out of the box, and it unfolds smoothly.

"Wow." Juliet says admiringly, "That is a beautiful dress."

Evelyn nods, hardly believing her eyes.

"Here, let me hang it up." Juliet takes the dress and hangs it on the front of the wardrobe. Evelyn takes back into the box and notices a matching pair of mint coloured heels that are decorated with white lace and tiny bows, as well as a white lace fan and a masquerade mask.

"It's a masquerade ball?" Evelyn questions holding up the mask with distaste. Juliet takes the mask, removes the shoes and from from the box and places them on the table.

"Yes, now sit down I need to do your hair." She says. Evelyn slumps in front of the mirror and begins to take down her messy updo.

45 minutes later Evelyn's hair is complete, and she is stepping into her new gown.

"Why a masked ball?" She complains as Juliet tightens the corset of her pale mint dress.

"It's romantic," Juliet replies, smoothing out the back of the gown.

"It's silly." Evelyn contradicts, turning so Juliet can flatten the rest of the hairline. Juliet tuts in response but doesn't argue. She steps back to admire her work.

"What do you think?" She asks, positioning Evelyn in front of the mirror so she sees her full appearance.

Evelyn does a small circle, analysing every inch of herself. Her dress is made of light mint silk that is edged with thin white lace, a small lace bow sits in the middle of the square neckline and the ruffled in waist billows out into a wide skirt that flows elegantly to the floor. Tiny pearls hang from her ears and drape around her neck. The top of her hair has been pulled into a loose but voluminous French plait that is held in place with ivory pins, the rest of her hair winds down the back in thick waves. Three white roses have been pinned to the left side of her head.

"I look nice." She comments, swishing her skirts.

"You look more than nice thank you very much." Juliet hugs her, very much a ronted.

"Juliet you work miracles." Evelyn says quickly, "What I am meant to say is that I don't look like I normally do, I just look nice." She eyes her reflection. "Not like how people want me to look, not seductive or innocent, just me."

"Just you is gorgeous but don't forget this." Juliet picks up the mask that lies on the vanity. The mask is made of intricate swirls of white glitter on mint silk that is set with icy diamonds. She carefully places it over Evelyn's head and ties it at the back. The winged shape of the mask gives her a mysterious look and contrasts with her pink lips.

"And." Juliet hands Evelyn her white lace fan. "Positively stunning."

"I can't thank you enough," Evelyn says, slipping on her mint shoes. "I know this visit to London has been somewhat chaotic, to say the least, but you have kept us all grounded. You are such a friend to all of us."

"It's what I am here for," Juliet says. "I thrive in chaos."

Evelyn chuckles as she wraps a white fur shawl around her shoulders.

"He's going to be there you know." Juliet murmurs, "You can't avoid him."

"Just watch me," Evelyn says with a wink and she flounces out of the room.