

## Chapter 38

Evelyn pushes past the people gathered in the hallway. Young girls cling to their mother's skirts, most still have frightened faces that follow her as she passes them. Outside, she takes a deep breath of air and closes her eyes. The chill is welcome against her flushed skin. She opens her eyes and looks over her arms and shoulders. There are small rips in her dress where Lawrence held her, his nails have caused tiny red cuts and they sting in the fresh air.

Looking down at her feet she almost gags at the sight of her blood-soaked hem and ruined shoes. Bending down, she takes a pin from her head and makes a hole just above where the blood has saturated to. She rips the material and pulls o around five inches of her dress's skirt, leaving the underskirt showing. She undoes her shoes and slips them o, the blood has soaked through them and stained her stockings.

Straightening up, she leans against the wall of the house and watches the number of carriages decrease as guests leave. The sensible ones look relieved to be leaving but a few long to stay and live out the drama for a little longer. Evelyn silently glares at anyone who looks at her, bitter and a mess. It feels like it used to, before everything changed. Everyone watching and judging her every move except this time she isn't prepared to play the perfect part.

"Now that was dramatic," Lady Edith says, shocking Evelyn out of her dark thoughts. She gives the lady a side glance.

"It's quite the turn of events." She agrees. Already had enough of her presence Evelyn makes the decision to get away while she can.

She curtsies, "If you'll excuse me..."

"Wait a moment." Edith grabs her arm and forces her to stop. "We need to have a chat." There is something threatening in her expression.

"Whatever about? All you do is insult me and my family." Evelyn hu s, exasperated. "I have nothing to say to you."

"I have something to say to you," Edith says quietly, closing any distance between them until she is right in Evelyn's face.

"I love my son more than my life, and if you silly little cousin makes him happy then I will be happy for him." She smirks, "Of course her extensive dowry made me overlook her relation to you, but I am warning you. If another Wright hurts my son, I will show you no mercy."

Evelyn almost laughs at the audacity of the woman.

"You are in luck then madam," She says bitterly, "Henrietta is not a Wright, she's a Buxley and she will not hurt your son. You seem to be under the false impression that my aim in life is to hurt those you love but it is not." She tosses her head back and leans in closer to the woman. "As you seem only to comprehend threats, I will make my own. If you are anything less than kind to my cousin, I will ruin you without a thought."

Edith opens her mouth to argue but Evelyn doesn't give her the chance to say a word.

"Don't test me, because a er all you keep reminding me that I have nothing to lose." She whispers, deadly serious. "Do I make myself clear?"

Edith meets her hard stare with a glare, but she looks away a er a beat. "Yes." She says mutedly.

"Excellent." Evelyn says with a smile, "My deepest regrets for ball Lady Edith, you must rearrange. If you'll excuse me."

Evelyn walks away, not wasting another minute in her company. She storms away not prepared to face anyone else. The fury she feels dissipates when she sees the duke standing by himself, half hiding in the shadow, a cigar in his hand. He looks up when he sees her heading towards him.

"Hello." She says, her shoes swinging from her hand.

"Are you alright?" He asks, breathing out a pu of smoke.

"Nothing permanently damaged." She folds her arms, "Didn't know you smoked."

He shrugs and runs a hand through his hair, "Desperate times..."

"Quite." She agrees, she picks at one of her shoes. He watches her blank face.

"Detective Rawson's men have Edward; he'll receive the punishment he deserves." He says.

"Yes," Evelyn says, "He told me."

"He did what? I told him to leave you alone." Blackmoore fumes, throwing his cigar away and crushing it into the ground with unnecessary force. He only stops when she touches his arm.

"Thank you for that, I appreciate it."

It might be a shadow in the darkness, but she thinks she sees him blush. This makes her embarrassed and she drops her arm, turning away. He hates seeing the back of her, he moves to stand next to her, he wants to place an arm around her but he daren't risk it.

"Is everything alright?" He asks when she gives him an unreadable look.

"Can I tell you something?" She asks, digging her foot into the dirt, "I feel really strange."

"How do you mean?" He says, trying to get a glimpse of those stormy eyes.

"I don't know how to begin how to explain it." She sighs, "I know Lawrence is...was a dangerous man but he has really hurt me." She rests her palm on her forehead, her face scrunched in concentration. "I don't know how to explain it, I feel bad that this happened to him a er all he went through with his sister. I don't care that he wanted to kill me, I care that he lied and betrayed me."

"Evelyn, he is unstable." He says, reaching to comfort her.

"That makes it worse!" She insists, pushing him away, "I thought I was helping him, I thought he liked who I was and that we were both helping each other to not to screw-up."

"It was always his choice to do the things he did." Blackmoore says, "You can't change that, you can't save everyone."

"I know that!" She snaps, throwing her shoes onto the ground. She takes a few steps away from him, trying to clear her head.

"You saved me." He murmurs so ly, moving towards her, "For you, I am a better person." He places a hand on her shoulder. "Jordan, he couldn't see what he had in front of him, he was too distracted by revenge to appreciate the person you are. You are not the wrong in this." He tries to embrace her, but she shoves him back, he looks surprised but tries not to show it.

"Maybe I am waiting for all the wrong people to care for me." Her voice dripping in venom as she turns her back on him.

"What is that meant to mean?" He asks angrily, seizing her arm and forcing her around to look him in the face.

"Why didn't you come for me?" She asks, her eyes dark and stormy. "I thought you would, I was so sure you would, but you didn't, you le me!" She accuses, trembling slightly.

"I know, I am sorry." Blackmoore says quickly, "But I was doing it in your best interest, I couldn't have you in danger no matter how much I wanted to see you."

Evelyn shakes her heads, "I thought you forgot about me and... I don't know how to forget you."

"Do you want to forget about me?" He asks, scared of the answer. She opens her mouth but no words come out. He traps her with a dangerous look, her heart races and she doesn't know where to look.

"No, I don't think...."

Her sentence is cut short when Blackmoore wraps his arms firmly around her. She tenses at first but then relaxes and wraps her arms around his neck.

"Don't ever forget me." He whispers into her ear, she nods into his jacket, small tears appearing in her eyes. She wanted to hug him for so long, but it never seemed possible.

"I am glad I was never that clingy." An amused voice says behind them. They hurriedly break apart to see Eliza and Jasper standing in front of them.

"I'd be careful with him Evelyn; clingy men are notoriously bad kissers." Eliza comments, a hand on the small curve of her stomach. Evelyn grimaces and looks down at the ground, embarrassed.

"Thank you for your help, both of you." Blackmoore nods to Jasper who returns the gesture with a tip of his hat.

"Yes, well we couldn't have London society without a bit of scandal, this will keep everyone talking for months." Eliza smiles at them fondly, "And I am glad things have worked out in your favour. I may dislike a great many people but you two are in the few that I value."

"Thank you?" Evelyn says, unsure how to respond.

"And? What else?" Jasper speaks pointedly to his wife and she shoots him a look of annoyance and love but turns directly to Evelyn.

"And... now that you aren't going to be hanged for murder, I was wondering if you'd like to have tea sometime and we can talk about...anything. My friend Charlotte and I could use the entertainment, pregnancy is tiring, and your husband doesn't let you do anything fun anymore."

"I'd be delighted." Evelyn replies, "I don't know how entertaining I'll be, but I can always make the tea."

"Splendid." Jasper smiles, "We must be going, I need a lie down a er that mayhem." He takes his wife's arm.

"And I thought I was the pregnant one." She says with an eye roll.

"Goodnight Evelyn, Nathaniel."

"Goodnight." They reply and the Duke and Duchess Harrington walk. Evelyn turns back to Blackmoore, her feelings stuck in her chest, bursting to come out. Instead of voicing what she feels, she tucks a curl behind her ear and coughs awkwardly.

Blackmoore doesn't know what to say to her so he remains silent, but a dark expression falls over his face as an unwelcome thought enters his mind.

"Are you going to leave London?" He asks suddenly. She looks at him, surprised at the question.

"Uh...I don't..."

"Evelyn!" Lucile spots her and hurries over. She looks very pale and shaken. "We are leaving, Henrietta is in the carriage." She places an arm around Evelyn, who doesn't resist.

"Where are your shoes?" Lucile asks when she sees Evelyn's stocking feet. "Never mind, we must go. Goodnight your grace." She says to Blackmoore, he nods to them.

Evelyn looks back as she heads towards the carriage, she gives Blackmoore a small wave and a tiny smile, but he remains impassive as he watches her climb into the carriage. The door slams shut, and carriage soon trundles away, leaving the duke on his own, in the dark. He walks back towards the front door to the house, keeping an eye out for Detective Rawson. A carriage draws up to the front door as he reaches it.

"So, where's the girl?"

He spins around to see Verity Blackmoore taking the hand of her footman and stepping down from her carriage.

"Mother?" Blackmoore stares in surprise, his mother is wearing a simple dress and coat with wild hair and no jewellery, not the normal picture of sophistication and wealth.

"Where is your girl? Have I missed her?" She ignores her son's shock and looks around.

"She just le."

"Pity." She looks him up and down and tuts. "You're alive then. That's good. It's a shame about Edward though, he was such a nice boy."

"He tried to kill Evelyn!" Blackmoore says immediately on the defensive, "And me!" He remembers, incredulously. He pinches his forehead. "Why are you even here mother?"

"My servants have a talent for finding out the scandals as soon as they happen." She looks very vulnerable for a moment. "I needed to see with my own eyes that you were alive."

His heart caves and he steps forward with his arms outstretched. She sni s and looks at him with alarmed eyes as he embraces her.

What are you doing?" She questions.

"It's called a hug." He says. Verity's manservant and driver look even more concerned than Verity as her son holds her for a moment more before letting go. She blinks several times and nods to herself.

"I also came to tell you that you are right, there is a pistol missing from your father's collection." She says, "He was quite shocked and upset when I informed him of Edward's action, it almost gave him a heart attack. I wish it did."

"Mother!" Blackmoore frowns at her but she waves him o.

"I also wanted to meet this girl, she has quite the scandalous life I have heard. My lunching ladies had quite the tales to tell about her."

"Vicious gossip I am guessing." He cuts across her. She produces a fan from her coat and lightly smacks his arm.

"Don't interpret me." She warns, "But yes, it gave me quite the assessment of her character." She looks at him seriously. "Girls like that don't come around very o en, you'd do well to marry her."

"She's not got any money." Blackmoore warns, "And she too stubborn and unattractively clever."

Verity rolls her eyes and folds her arms, "If that is what is stopping you then you are more stupid than you look. You don't need any more money and she is going to have to be stubborn to deal with you. Also, one would hope that if she is clever as you say then she can stop you from making poor decisions."

"So kind mother." He smiles. She grimaces.

"My mistake," She says. He laughs and then looks solemn.

"I took grandmother's ring out of her vault."

Verity sco s, "She should have le that vault to me."

"You hated each other," Blackmoore points out.

"Still," She says, "I didn't hate her taste in jewels. It sounds like you've made your mind up then," Nodding, she smiles quickly and then climbs back into her carriage without a goodbye. Blackmoore moves forward and closes the door for her.

"I'll visit." He tells her.

"Don't." She snaps but without malice, she sits back in her seat. "But if you feel you must, bring the girl, I wouldn't protest at meeting her."

"I will." He promises.