

Epilogue

2 Months Later.

Evelyn's eyes mist up as she watches Henrietta and Fredrick exchange vows. She grips tightly onto the bridal bouquet and claps along with the rest of the congregation as the newly married couple share a sweet kiss. Evelyn gazes around the church as the couple make their way back down the aisle. She meets the eyes of Lady Edith and smiles politely, silently relishing her recent victory over the woman.

During the wedding planning, Edith had insisted that her daughter Petunia be the maid of honour until Henrietta shouted her down in a row that lasted several days. It was only resolved when Fredrick spoke to his mother about the importance of the bride planning her own wedding and then Edith consented into letting Evelyn into the wedding. This didn't come without consequences, one being that the reception is at Lady Edith's house.

Halfway through the reception, Evelyn manages to steal Henrietta away from the large crowds of well-wishers and gift-givers.

"You are a lifesaver," Henrietta says, gratefully accepting a glass of champagne, downing it and reaching for another as a butler passes with a full tray.

"Slow down." Evelyn laughs sipping her own drink. Henrietta shakes her head, glaring at something behind her cousin's head.

"If I have to hear Edith say what a surprising and unique edition I am to the family one more time I am going to scream." She says with venom, "I can't wait till you outrank her."

Evelyn chokes on the champagne and spits it out, "Shhh, no one knows yet." She places the glass on a nearby table and drags her cousin into a more secluded part of the room. "You have to keep your voice down about this."

Henrietta gives her a condescending look, "Everyone knows, it's so obvious from the way he is around you. I still don't understand why you don't wear the ring yet."

"What's so obvious?" Blackmoore asks as he approaches them.

"That you are engaged," Henrietta says. Blackmoore laughs and wraps an arm around Evelyn's shoulders.

"Yes, it's a hard one to miss." He says. Henrietta nods.

"But Evelyn still insists on keeping it a secret." She says with a disapproving look. He grimaces, looking guilty,

"I've already told my parents.... and Eliza and Jasper." He admits, "And this random couple I ran into a while I asked you."

"I can't believe you have told people!" Evelyn says, stepping away from his embrace so she can shoot him her most stern look. "We agreed only to tell Henrietta because she'd have a fit if we didn't tell her first!"

"I am sorry! I got excited." Blackmoore says, holding up his hands in surrender, "My fiancée is a pretty amazing woman."

Evelyn hushes, "It's fine."

He grins and tries to take her hand. She resists at first but then lets him.

"I hate how I can't stay annoyed at you." She says grumpily. He chuckles and squeezes her hand.

"I think you can, but you are reserving it for bigger matters." He says, "Like when I sell my house and buy us a townhouse near Greenwich Park without telling you..."

Henrietta gasps, her eyes wide. Evelyn frowns at her and turns to her fiancé.

"Are you serious?" She asks slowly. He scrunches his face up, preparing for her to explode.

"Yes."

Evelyn drops his hand and fixes him with a serious glare.

"You....bought a house near Greenwich Park without telling me?" She repeats. He nods and almost drops her in surprise as she flings herself into his arms.

"I can't believe it, thank you." She says, hugging him tightly. He hugs her back, looking relieved.

"I thought you'd be mad that I didn't talk to you about it." He says into her hair. She lets him go and straightens out her dress before too many people notice.

"No of course not." She says, "I..."

"Do you mind if I drop this in Edith's face when she tries to tell me I made a mistake picking lilies over roses for the eleventh time?" Henrietta interjects hopefully. Blackmoore chuckles at her but Evelyn frowns.

"Go find Fredrick instead and enjoy your wedding day, don't bother with her."

Henrietta looks disappointed but she nods and heads off to find her husband, snagging another glass of bubbly on the way.

"Do you know what would be entertaining?" Evelyn asks.

"Hmm?" He says, running his thumb up and down her hand.

"Introducing your mother to Edith."

"They'd kill each other." He states.

"And you have a problem with that?" Evelyn says, laughing at his expression.

"Point taken." He says.

"Any over things that may have slipped your mind that you need to tell me?" She asks, narrowing her eyes.

He frowns, thinking. "No.... oh, except that I spoke to Mathew about his house, apparently they still don't know who burnt it down."

"How curious." She says, having completely forgotten about the day that happened.

"I am confident that Detective Rawson will find the culprit,"

Blackmoore says as he looks around at the dance floor being filled by couples. "Dance with me?"

"I'll show you up." She promises, her hand hovering above his outstretched one.

"I'll risk it." He says capturing her hand and pulling her into the throng of people. "I'd risk it all for you."

Four Months Later

Evelyn waits in the entrance of the St Alfege Church. Summer has truly bloomed all around and the surrounding gardens are full of bright colour. The air, heavy with fragrance, swirls around the entranceway and brushes against her bare arms. Her fingers nervously run over the stems of the tulips in her hands. Their white petals almost seem to glow in the light of the summer's day. As she tensely paces up and down, her beaded ivory dress swirls around her in thick layers of silk fabric.

A trickle of music flows from the main part of the church and her heart beats in time to the sweet melody. She turns around when she hears the sound of frantic footsteps.

"We are here! I am here!" Henrietta hurries up the steps of the church, William and his father following close behind.

"I have it!" She announces, pausing against the doorway to smooth her dusty rose dress, a small bag swinging from her wrist.

"Thank goodness!" Evelyn sighs, her heartbeat slowing for a moment. "Where have you been? The wedding was meant to start five minutes ago!"

Henrietta reaches into her bag and pulls out a small diamond tiara. Evelyn turns around and bends her knees slightly so her cousin can place it on the nest of silvery blonde curls. Henrietta flips the veil over the tiara and straightens it around Evelyn's face.

"Perfect!" Henrietta says smiling. "You look stunning."

"I agree." Mr Wright says, leaning against the wall, a bit putted.

"Are they here?" Fredrick comes from inside the church, anxiously playing with his bow tie. "Oh good you are here, about time," He turns to Evelyn, "Are you ready?"

She looks at the smiling faces of her family and confidence fills her.

"Yes."

"I love you." Henrietta smiles, gently hugging Evelyn, careful not to crease her dress. "You look so beautiful."

"I love you too," Evelyn replies, trying not to let any tears fall from her eyes.

Fredrick smiles and extends his arm to Henrietta; she takes it and he leads her through the door and down the aisle. Evelyn takes a deep breath as she hears the guests inside the church stand.

Mr Wright holds out his arm as does William and Evelyn links with both of them, the tulips moving to one hand.

"Now remember to walk slowly father," William whispers as they line up, the beginning of the aisle in front of them.

"I do!" Mr Wright whispers back. "You need to walk faster."

"Both of you be quiet." Evelyn snaps under her breath as they begin to walk towards the altar. She concentrates on taking one step after the other, she begins to calm as she sees familiar faces in the pews. She walks past Eliza, whose baby bump is protruding greatly, and is accompanied by her uncle. She spots Mathew in the crowd, Jane next to him, both smiling widely. As she nears the altar, she sees Verity on the front row with her husband, both don't smile as she passes but they incline their heads with respect.

At the altar William and Mr Wright let go of her and step to the side. Henrietta swoops forward and takes the flowers from her. She returns to her spot next to the best man, Jasper. Evelyn's nerves prevent her from looking up until a hand appears in her sightline and she glances up to see a pair of dark dangerous eyes twinkling at her.

She slips her hand into Blackmoore's and he helps her to step up onto a small platform in front of the minister. She turns to face the duke, her dress swishing around. She looks into his face, so full of love and warmth that everything else fades away. Standing in front of him nothing else matters. The only thing that means anything is the once arrogant and coarse man who is about to pledge his devotion to her, and only her. A smile of undeniable happiness reaches her face when he takes both her hands and light caresses her knuckles.

The minister signals for everyone to be seated.

"Shall we begin?"