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"At the end of the day, it isn't where I came from. Maybe home is
somewhere I'm going and never have been before." Warsan Shire
11.
The deepest glory for all gentlemen, titled or otherwise, is to sire a
son. An heir. A namesake for which to pass on their legacy, to carry
the family name into the next generation, and to keep land, fortune,
and titles within the family.
But ... what if tragedy struck? What if smallpox spread through the
estate? What if fever took hold? What if he fell from a horse? What if
he ate spoiled game at suppertime and succumbed to poisoning?
The death of a son could spoil a legacy, just as much as it could spoil
a family.
And thus, someone, somewhere, had coined the term "spare". The
spare. The second son. The insurance. Should anything tragic happen
to the first, the second was there.
It was not from his own parents that Jack Beresford had first heard
himself called a spare, though it was not di icult to surmise why
onlookers viewed him in such a way.
Adam was the first, the eldest, and his parents had spent much of his
life preparing him for life as a duke. Adam was educated, drilled,
lectured, and almost married to fulfil the role he was born to play.
Jack, of course, was educated as well. Should he ever need to inherit,
he ought to know how to read and write. Though Jack was not
educated to inherit. Jack was kept, supervised by teachers, before he
could take his place in one of the few options available to mere
second sons.
Jack had been a naturally boisterous child. He had been energetic
and playful, and not the sort of quiet spare his mother had hoped for.
Jack hadn't known exactly the moment his mother had tired of him.
Perhaps she had never really warmed to him. They were very
di erent people, and Cecily Beresford liked things her way. Jack was
not a boy who could be easily moulded.
His father had been kinder though as warm as a father of his status
could be. Peregrine was not the type of man to play with his children.
But Jack had loved him, and perhaps even more so seeing as he
never really found middle ground with his mother.
Cecily had meant Jack for the church from a very early age. Jack had
soon got into the habit of doing the exact opposite of what his
mother wanted. As an adult, Jack realised, that in rebelling, it really
was the only time that Cecily paid him any attention.
Jack was clever, but reckless, and was o en the student with the best
marks and the most welts from the cane. The letters from his mother,
scolding him for being an embarrassment, had once amused him,
encouraged him to go further. But when he reached university, the
amusement waned quite quickly.
Being only two years younger than Adam, Jack did spend quite a bit
of time with him while they were at Cambridge. The di erences he
noticed between them began to really a ect him or take its toll. They
had alwaysa ected him. The letters Adam received from their
mother were full of hope and plans. Cecily spoke of his future, the
ladies she wanted him to meet, to ask when he would be home to see
Susanna.
The letters Jack received were o en short, curt, scolding him for one
thing or another.
One could only read I am so disappointed in youso many times
before it became a part of their identity. He was a disappointment,
and he had been from the moment he could talk. Jack was the spare,
and that was all he ever would be.
Second best and second place.
Rebelling, as his mother saw it, was no longer humorous to Jack. At
nineteen or twenty, a time in a young man's life when they were truly
becoming men, Jack realised that he had never really known what it
was like to feel wanted to be valued, to be loved. He had never been
held before, never been comforted by someone. He had never known
what it was to make a mistake and not be called a fool. He had never
known a place where he belonged.
And Jack had spent the next five years of his life tryingto feel
something. Oh, had he made mistakes, and oh, was he reminded and
scolded for them. He had drunk himself in oblivion on countless
occasions. He had bedded numerous women, hoping that one of
them would be able to make him feel whatever it was he'd been
craving for a quarter century.
But every day he woke up, and he still felt the same. At the core of his
being, he was just a spare.
When Jack's father had died, he had felt a kind of pain he hadn't
thought possible. And it was not a pain he could endure in that
house. Not with his mother there. Cecily had a gi when it came to
putting Jack in his place. And so, he had run away to London.
Jack had been searching for a feeling and some sort of purpose but
had found neither. He had spent the last few years drinking,
gambling, and spending time with whatever woman would pay him
attention. It was no surprise that his vicious circle of bad habits drew
him no closer to how he longed to feel.
To be certain, the only semblance realpleasure he had ever found in
his life was books. Perhaps it was because the library at Ashwood
House had o en been a sanctuary for him. His mother never seemed
to venture in there. Jack adored the written word and envied the
talent of those who had the power to take a reader to another place.
More o en than not, those places he had visited in books had been
his saving graces.
Jack had lost count of how many books he had read years ago. When
all the world was crumbling around, in a complete inferno, it was
easy to be transported to another place in a book. Especially in the
last few years, it had been necessary.
Jack truly wished he was back in London, nose deep in a book, orin a
bottle of whiskey, rather than standing outside of the enormous walls
of his childhood home.
Adam had travelled to London several times over the last few years,
and Jack truly had enjoyed his brother's visits. It would be easy to
assume that Jack would have resented Adam, or had a cool
relationship with him, owing to the dierences in their positions, but
it was not the case. Jack greatly admired his brother, and never forgot
all the times Adam had intervened on his behalf.
Perhaps what Jack admired most about Adam was his loyalty, his
constancy. He was loyal to a fault. To Jack, to Susanna, to their
mother eventually, and to, of course, his beloved wife, Grace.
A small smile hinted at Jack's lips as the memory of marrying Adam
and Grace popped into his mind. What could have been a childish
joke was never forgotten by Adam. How on earth he had managed to
convince their parents of the match with Grace, Jack would never
know.
Adam had begged Jack to return to Ashwood, guilting him with a
miniature of their now two-year-old daughter, Perrie, whom Jack had
not yet met. Jack had tried to convince Adam to bring Perrie to
London, but a thirty-mile journey was not ideal for a girl of her age.
And so now Jack found himself ascending the steps of Ashwood
House, not knowing how on earth he would need to prepare himself
for his mother's remarks. Perhaps a stronger man could take them,
but Jack had been put down one too many times. He was certain
Cecily would know all that he had gotten up to in London. She always
knew.
The door was opened for him, and the house was abuzz with guests,
as was evidenced by the stationary carriages and carts outside the
house.
Jack had hoped to slip inside, to remain unnoticed so that he might
subtly meet with Adam and Grace, but no sooner had the thought
crossed his mind, their old butler, Cole, announced, "Lord Jack
Beresford has arrived!"
Jack practically winced and looked away from the surprised gazes of
the guests who were gathered about the house. "Cole, how are you?"
he murmured quietly.
"Well, thank you, milord. And you?" replied the butler politely.
"Loving every minute," he muttered. "Where is my brother?"
No sooner had asked the question, did a flash of blonde hair streak
towards him, and a pair of arms flew around his neck in a vice grip.
"Jack!" cried Susanna.
Jack felt his heart settle as he returned his sister's hug. It had been
June, perhaps, since Susanna had last visited him while in London for
the Season. She looked a little taller, though every bit the lady Cecily
raised her to be. Though, at two and twenty, he was surprised that
she had managed to ward o the potential husbands their mother
was no doubt throwing at her. Jack wondered for a moment just
whomwould persuade Susanna into matrimony.
"I really did not think you would come!" Susanna continued, pulling
away so that she could look up at him. She cupped his face with her
hands, feeling to make certain he was real, no doubt.
Ever since he had agreed, albeit reluctantly, Jack had not been
certain himself. It had been a constant battle to ward o the
temptation to send Adam a cancelation note.
never sat right with him. He was looking forward to meeting the
young Lady Perrie Beresford.
"I've missed you, Susanna," Jack said earnestly. "Are you well?"
"Yes, now that you are returned," she declared.
Jack did not like the finality in the word "returned". It was highly
how this day went.
"Where are Adam and Grace?" he asked.
have Perrie if you would like to see her."
confrontation for as long as possible.
"Please don't leave again."
"Susanna ..."
"Jack!"
Jack looked up in the direction that he had heard his name, and
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But Jack had a niece, a niece whom he had never met, and that had likely he would be returning to London in the morning depending on Susanna frowned and looked around. "Oh, I did see them before. I think they were in the dining room. I thinkMother and Mrs Denham Jack felt the colour drain from his cheeks. He wanted to avoid that Susanna suddenly hugged Jack again, tighter this time, as if it were possible. "Oh, Lord, it is good to have you home," she said quietly. watched as his brother walked proudly towards him, arms extended and a bright smile on his face. Adam looked every bit a duke with his fine, tailored coat and breeches, his golden pocket watch, and the very fact that people bowed and curtseyed to him as he passed. "You came!" Adam beamed as he received Jack in a hug, Susanna stepping back. "Did you doubt I would?" "Absolutely," confirmed Adam, chuckling, "but I am glad to be wrong. Welcome home." It felt oddly normalto be standing, conversing with his siblings again. In them he had allies and friends, though he knew it would be too good to be true. Twenty-five years of history told him that. "I feel odd telling you to come into your own house, but come in," urged Adam. "Grace is anxious to see you." Adam pulled Jack towards the dining room, and Jack found himself forcing smiles at the people he had once been acquainted with years ago. Some he did not know at all. The dining room itself was extravagant, laid out with every possible refreshment and treat imaginable. Poor Mrs Reynolds must have been cooking for days on end. Jack did, however, notice several of his favourite dishes on the table, and he did not think it at all a coincidence. As soon as he had stopped staring at the food, Jack realised that he had been led over to Grace. The last time Jack had seen Grace was the summer before she had given birth to Perrie, and she had not

changed very much since then, except for the fact that she was not

and elfin in appearance, with the same eyes that Adam had once

not a housemaid's uniform and was wearing quite a few pretty

harbouring a melon under her chemise. She was still small in stature,

obsessed over. She was draped in an elegant gown that was certainly

baubles. Perhaps the only real di erence was the way in which she

carried herself. She stood with a posture of pride, something one

"Grace," uttered Adam tenderly, placing a so hand on the small of

Such a simple gesture, Jack noted, and one that a ected him. Adam

had not been free from their mother's criticism as a boy and young

man. But the di erence between them was right here. Perhaps that

was what Jack truly envied. What his brother had found with Grace.

Shewas the reason he had survived their mother's pressures. With

Grace turned around, and her blue eyes widened when she looked

upon her face. Adam saw it, too. "Jack!" she gasped. "Oh, one

upon Jack. She smiled, though not fully, and Jack could see concern

moment, please!" She held up her finger to hold him, before turning

around again, and it was then that Jack realised that Grace had been

talking to someone, someone trying to conceal herself on the fringes

Her dark hair was pulled up in a twist, though several tendrils had

come loose and were curling naturally in a charming disarray. The

skin on her heart-shaped face was pale and her full lips were the

certainly needed in a crowd of aristocracy.

her by his side, anything was possible.

of the dining room.

her back.

colour of a pink rose. Her dress was white, and suited her slender silhouette well, though he could see slight staining on the skirt, as though she had fallen, or been kneeling on the ground. But her eyes The minute he saw her eyes, Jack understood why Adam had been so obsessed with Grace's. Her eyes were beautiful Aviolet blue so unique, and yet so haunted, filled with emotion that made Jack feel on edge. Jack knew her immediately to be Claire Denham. "I need a moment," Claire murmured to her sister, hurrying out of the dining room before Grace had a chance to protest. Grace hu ed; her brows furrowed as she looked up at Adam. "She won't tell me what's wrong," she uttered. "She looks terrified! What could have happened to her?" What indeed?! a I forced myself to stay awake to get this up for you guys a day earlier! I hope you like it!! Finally Friday! I had a really big win at work this week, and my team surprised me a er school with wine. Nothing better than

having a wine on a Friday a ernoon when all the kids have gone

home;) Get you amazing colleagues who celebrate your wins! I

But circling back, I really want to advocate for my girl, Claire,

She is NAIVE! Trust me, I know. From our perspective, as 21st

fuckboys who've been messing us around for years)

century women, who could imagine falling for that? (Save for the

Girls in those days were naive. They were innocent on purpose,

count myself lucky!

before we continue.

page?!

..... stay tuned;)

Vote and comment!

with their mothers only explaining sex to them on their wedding days. They believed that men were honourable and gentlemen. They believed in the honour of marrying a compromised woman. Men were answerable to their families with regards to who they chose to marry, so it's perfectly plausible that Arthur would keep his courtship secret considering Claire has no money or property 3 Of course, he's a dick, but Claire had no reason to believe he was lying when this was a done thing. And ... sadly, who hasn't been fooled by a guy who pretended to feel something he didn't just to get something in return? Put on your 19th century naive goggles and journey on with me!

BTW - anyone notice the addition to the Ashwood series on my

Continue reading next part □