

Chapter 13

As Evelyn strides away she can hear his hurried footsteps behind her but she refuses to turn around, she walks around the tree in the middle of the courtyard and starts down the drive. In her fury, she hasn't processed all that she said and the implications it might have.

"Wait." The Duke says tapping her on the shoulder. She whips around, throwing his hand away, her eyes glowing.

"What?"

"Where's your carriage?" He looks around the empty courtyard. "Or horse?"

"I don't have one, I walked here." She says, crossing her arms and glaring.

"You're insane!" He stares at her. She throws her hands in the air in frustration and tries to turn around but he takes hold of her arm and spins her to face him.

"Let's say I believe you, and that you were there, how do you know I didn't just shoot her with the gun in my jacket." He says, tilting his head. "This jacket..."

Evelyn scoffs at his attempt to scare her.

"Because I saw you run away and then someone stood up from behind a bush near me and dropped a pistol by the body before scarpering." Evelyn retorts.

"There was someone else there?" The grip on her shoulder tightens.

"What, do you think yourself you killed her?" She replies snarkily.

He ignores her jibe and turns to her seriously. "You saw someone drop a pistol by the body? I thought they hadn't found the weapon yet?"

Evelyn suddenly feels very guilty. "There was a pistol." She says slowly. "But...I took it."

Blackmoore lets her go and steps back in shock. "You took the pistol? Where is it now?"

"In a flower box outside my window," She answers. "Perfectly safe."

"Why the hell did you take the pistol?" He cries, grabbing a fistful of his hair in frustration.

"It was obviously being planted to frame someone, you." She defends, "There were initials on the hilt, V.B, any connection of yours?"

Blackmoore drops his arms and closes his eyes. "Victor Blackmoore, my grandfather."

"The war hero?" She asks.

"The very same arrogant bastard." He admits. "How did you even know the pistol would be to frame someone else rather than the murderer leaving a confession?"

She shoots him a condescending look. "The only murderer's that leave confessions are for crimes of passion. Lady Tremontane was shot while..." She clears her throat awkwardly, "Regardless she was shot in a seemingly deserted area in only one person's company. It's an obvious setup."

The duke seems to accept her words for the truth. "If you have taken the only evidence tying me to her murder then aren't I safe?"

Evelyn sighs. "Unfortunately the legal system has the power to prosecute based on very little and while they have nothing on you there was nobody else there who could've possibly have killed her. It wasn't me, there was someone else won't hold up in a court of law."

"Why can't you testify that you were there and that I didn't kill her?" He asks.

"My statement would never hold," She says.

"Why?" He demands.

"You don't know who I am, do you?"

"No." He eyes her suspiciously.

"My family lost all its money four years ago, it was a massive scandal so now I have no title, standing or money," Evelyn explains.

"Everyone would think you had paid me to lie, no one would take me seriously, Claude didn't even take me seriously!"

"Wait." He scratches his head, "So you have lost all of your money? There's nothing?"

"We are both social pariahs," She says.

"Why do you even want to help me?" He asks, sceptical.

"Because what's happening to you is unfair and avoidable."

"What happened to you, was it unfair and avoidable?"

"You are very perceptive, but no." Evelyn winces, "This has nothing to do with me, so do you want my help or not?"

"What do you want for it?" He says.

"Nothing."

"Rubbish, nothing is done for free."

"Maybe you are just surrounded by the wrong people." She counters. The corners of his mouth turn upwards.

"How do you plan to help?" He sighs, finally.

"Accept it and I'll tell you." Evelyn offers her hand. Blackmoore stares at her outstretched palm.

He groans and shakes it, "Fine, please help me not be hanged."

"Of course."

"So? Your plan?" He waits expectantly.

"First we need to establish your relationship with her..."

"She was my mistress." He says bluntly.

"Yes, I know that." Evelyn says irritated, "But how long were you together? Who knew about the affair?"

"It's been on and off for the past month and I think most people knew." He says thoughtfully.

"Her husband?"

"Most probably but he wasn't invited to the ball."

"He still could have gotten in." She says, "What about your friends? Do you think anyone was jealous?"

"No, my friends have their own mistresses." He says.

"Do you know of anyone who has a grudge against you?"

He gives her a patronising look, "This is London, countless people have grudges against me but not enough to kill me."

"Fine, then perhaps this isn't about you. Maybe it's someone with a strong hatred for Lady Tremontane? A past scorned lover?"

"Seems unlikely." He says, "Everyone loves her, she was beautiful and sweet."

Evelyn laughs mirthlessly and crosses her arms.

"What?" He glares.

"Everyone might appear to love her but trust me no one actually like that sort of girl."

"What do you mean? Because she was married?" He looks clueless.

"From what I have heard, she was stunning, kind, the dream girl?"

"Yes."

"While everyone might seem to praise her every move, every girl is jealous of her and every man despises her when she doesn't bat him an eyelid. That kind of girl toys with everyone, she creates enemies behind your back."

"Phillipa was not like that." He insists.

"To you, she wasn't, because she chose you," Evelyn says hotly. Blackmoore puts his head in his hands and groans.

"How do you know this?" He spits in disbelief.

"Because I used to be her!" She shouts. Blackmoore opens his mouth but she shoots him a deadly glare and he wisely doesn't push her on the matter.

"Then what do you suggest we do?" He says.

"Talk to her husband," Evelyn replies, calming down.

"No." He says firmly and he shivers, wrapping his arms around his body. "Why did we come out here?"

"Well, one, you aren't wearing clothes suitable for this weather, two so your stomach overheats and three because the cold air is best to clear a hungover mind." Evelyn's mouth sets into a thin line.

"Touche." He smiles.

"We have to talk to him." She insists, not willing to overlook the subject.

"I refuse, he will shoot me on sight." Blackmoore's forehead creases.

"Well, he's not going to listen to me!"

"Then we should start somewhere else."

"But..." Evelyn tries.

"NO!" He cries, his deep voice carrying across the courtyard.

"FINE!" She yells back and spins away from him in anger.

"Where are we going then?" He demands, not letting her walk away.

Evelyn turns around in outrage, "I don't know, go have a wash and get properly dressed and I'll think about it!"

Duke Blackmoore hugs and then marches back to the house, she watches him go inside before retracing their path back to the front door. Back in the warmth she sits by the fire and closes her eyes, she can feel a headache coming. She pinches the bridge of her nose.

"Miss Wright?"

She looks up to see Claude with a pot of tea. He places the tray on the table in front of her.

"Tea?"

"Yes please." She lowers her hand as he pours her a cup.

"Milk? Sugar?" He offers.

"You don't have to do that." She says, reaching for a spoon.

"I insist."

"One sugar then please." She says. He places an even teaspoon of sugar into her cup and mixes it in a clockwise direction before handing it to her.

"Thank you." She takes the cup gratefully but he doesn't leave.

"I would just like to say that I am still very apprehensive about you." He tells her sternly, "However you got him up and that is more than anyone has been able to do in the last 12 hours."

Evelyn pauses with the cup halfway to her mouth.

"I'd be concerned if you weren't suspicious about my appearance but I think that you don't think he killed that woman, neither do I and I'd like to help him prove it."

"In that case, I am your humble servant." Claude bows his head.

"You're a credit to him," She says.

"Thank you, miss." He smiles but then frowns. "There's something I think you should know."

"Yes?"

"Lady Tremontane never came to this house, the duke wouldn't let her."

"She's never been here?"

Claude shakes his head. Evelyn frowns.

"That's strange, isn't it? If they were seeing each other?" She asks.

Claude gently shrugs his shoulders. "The duke is very particular."

"The duke was telling me about his grandfather, Victor Blackmoore, does he still have anything that belonged to the duke?" Evelyn sips her tea.

"There are a few things in the attic but that place hasn't been touched for years." He thinks for a moment, "There are a few things, ornaments and books but nothing else really. The rest of his things are in the duke's father's house."

"Thank you for telling me." She says, sipping her tea. "And for the tea."

Claude bows and retreats. Evelyn continues to drink her beverage for the next ten minutes, something about the entire situation is bugging her and she can't figure it out. She ponders on it until the duke walks down the stairs. The strong smell of stale liquor has vanished and he has even combed his hair. Not to her surprise his pitch black trousers, jacket and ivory shirt are ironed and crisp, courtesy of Claude she presumes. He has a long black cane in his hand with a silver top, a large top hat is perched on his head and he swings his stick as he walks. He looks as though he is preparing to meet the Queen. Evelyn can't help admit he looks dashing.

"So where are we going?" He asks, leaning against the doorway.

Evelyn stands up.

"To see Eliza Turner."