Chapter 16

"I cannot believe you're _me!_" Henrietta screeches as soon as she bursts through their bedroom door two hours later. Evelyn looks up from her sketch pad but makes no comment, her pencil continues to curve along the paper.

Henrietta throws herself onto the sofa and screams into the material, she rolls over.

"I had no one to talk to, everyone looked down on me and Edith treated me like I was nothing **_or_** I told her you weren't coming! Plus I heard some girl call me a country whore!" She moans pitifully.

"You didn't have a nice time then?" Evelyn asks, closing the pad over a drawing of the pistol.

"It was awful, why don't you ever do anything to help me?" Henrietta pouts her bottom lip wobbling. "You are the worst."

"It is a mystery," Evelyn says wryly leaning back into a more comfortable position.

"Fredrick was the only person who was nice to me." Henrietta sits up and spits curls from her mouth.

"He was there?" Evelyn's hand pauses as she sweeps hair from her eyes.

"He came in to say goodbye to his mother and ended up staying," Henrietta replies, "We talked."

"So it wasn't a complete disaster?" Evelyn asks, feeling as though there is more to this than being implied.

"No, he is a lovely man." Henrietta smiles beautifully and walks over to her mirror. She twirls in small circles, her hands outstepped on her heart. "He is the most charming man I have ever encountered, he talked to me about the most intelligent things."

"What sort of things?" Evelyn asks, leaning forward.

"The empire, the law."

"When I try to talk to you about those things you walk away," Evelyn says dryly.

Henrietta snorts, "He has a way with making everything sound interesting, you are just dull."

"Well in other news," Evelyn gets to her feet and walks over to her chest to put away her things. "A message came from the dress shop, you have two fittings tomorrow at 11."

"I can't wait to see the dresses!" Henrietta says excitedly, bouncing on the spot. "I hope they are as good as I asked for."

"I am sure they will be."

"Are you excited to see them on me?"

"I am not coming with you," Evelyn informs her.

"Why not?" Henrietta turns around in outrage.

"I am meeting an old friend for tea." Evelyn lies, facing away from her.

"Who? You don't have any friends." Henrietta sn t, checking her face in the mirror.

"My old ladies maid," Evelyn says, "You never met her."

"Oh, no one then," Henrietta says in a light voice. Evelyn whirls around to reprimand her but she has already re- the room, leaving a thick cloud of perfume in her place. Sighing to herself Evelyn sits on her bed and drums her fingers against her thighs, thinking. For once it seems as though she has encountered a problem that she cannot solve with a few hours of thinking and theories. The sense of apprehension floods through her blood and swirls around before rushing to her head. A mystery that requires more than a basic sense of intelligence seems tantalising.

The next morning Evelyn barely speaks at breakfast, she only talks when asked a direct question and survives the rest of the conversation with nods and mumbles. She waves goodbye to her cousin and aunt as they leave at 10:20 and bid Juliet a farewell when she leaves for the market. William didn't show up for breakfast and his room is silent every time Evelyn passes an ear to the door. Unable to resist she cracks the door open to find that he is dead to the world, head to the pillow.

Evelyn waits in the parlour until ten to 11 before shutting the door on 104 and stepping into the street. She walks up the main street, keeping her head low. She decided to wear one of her cloaks that has a wide hood and reaches the floor, covering her dress completely, the dark grey colour also has its advantages. She slips through the crowds, keeping her eyes to the pavement, people pay her no heed nor the familiar carriage that pulls up alongside her at 11 on the dot. The door swings open though Evelyn can't see anyone inside. She climbs in and removes her hood as she sits down. Blackmore sits opposite in a dark navy suit, cane and hat too. The carriage moves along but she doesn't speak.

"Good morning." He says. "You are on time."

"Good morning." She replies. "Why wouldn't I be on time?"

His dark eyes study her face. "I've never met a woman who understood the concept of being on time."

She half smiles, "I think we can agree that the company you meet would hardly appreciate the value of time."

"You speak your mind a lot." He glares.

"Do you have a point?" She counters.

"Are we going to talk about yesterday?"

"Why should we?" Evelyn's eyes widen slightly and her mouth twitches.

Blackmoore frowns and crosses his arms. "We aren't calling on anyone today." He says dropping the other subject.

It's Evelyn's turn to frown. "Elsie gave us so much to find out about."

"I thought if we started imposing on many influential people in a short space of time, people would become suspicious." Blackmoore explains. "Claude agrees."

"You've told Claude about what we are doing?" She says sharply. Her tone makes him narrow his eyes and his posture become rigid.

"I trust that man with my life, he is the only person I trust." He says dangerously, daring her to argue.

Evelyn thinks before choosing her words carefully, "If you have confidence in his loyalty then so do I."

"Do you trust me?" He scrutinises her blank expression.

"Not even remotely." She says without thinking. Blackmoore laughs, it's a deep velvety sound.

"You surprise me, Miss Wright." He chuckles. His infectious amusement has the corners of her mouth curling.

"How so?" She asks.

"You are refreshingly unpredictable, even if you are uncivilised."

Evelyn's mouth drops open. "I am not uncivilised!" She says.

"You poured water on me while I was sleeping, you threw my cigar in the river...shall I go on?"

"But..." She splutters, "..."

"Uncivilised," Blackmoore concludes with a grin.

"If I am uncivilised then you are a scoundrel." She says.

"I have never pretended to be anything otherwise." He looks directly into her eyes and she has to prevent a shudder. The carriage door swings open breaking the moment. Evelyn blinks and sees Claude by the door.

"Ah, Claude!" Blackmoore jumps out of the carriage and claps the mansevant on his shoulder. He strides towards his house having her mind, a mess, from their conversation. Claude o ers his hand to her and she accepts it gracefully.

"Thank you." She says to him and he bows his head.

"Hurry up!" Blackmoore yells from the front door. She inclines her head to Claude and quickly follows Blackmoore into the house. The duke gestures for her to follow him and he leads her past the stairs and to a hidden corridor at the back of his house. At the very end of the carpeted hall is a solitary door. The hall is darkly lit and there are no other doors or paintings on the wall. He takes a small key from around his neck and slips it into the gold keyhole. It clicks. He opens the door and she follows him inside.

The room is massive. It is the shape of a cylinder with a high ceiling that slopes up to a hexagonal window. In right-hand corner there is a metal spiral staircase that twists upwards, it connects to the three levels of balconies with the back walls completely covered in books. Every inch of wall is covered in many sizes of literary works. Avend into silence by the sheer amount of books Evelyn doesn't even notice the fireplace in the opposite wall with a clawed footed desk in front and a deep red armchair. A white fur rug lies in front of the fire. Apart from the desk and chair, the only furniture is a few dark wooden tables that are laden with books and papers.

Blackmoore coughs. Evelyn snaps to face him. He raises his eyebrows at her, smug.

"What is this room?" She asks, turning in a slow circle.

"My private study." He answers taking a seat in his armchair, facing the fire. She slowly steps over to lean against the shiny wood of his desk. The glowing fire looks her in warmth. Her eyes travel over the swords and pistols mounted above the flickering flames to the seating detail on the balconies heralds.

"This is incredible." She breathes. "Why...?"

"It's the only room in my house that is impenetrable, there are only two keys to the door and there is no other entrance or exit." He says, "Claude has the other key," He answers before she can ask. "The six are unable to overhear anything that is said in here too."

Evelyn is still very overwhelmed by the entire room, her brain seems unable to process what her eyes are seeing. She is in a trance of amazement until Blackmoore breaks it by dropping a pile of books into her arms. She looks down at them and sees that they actually aren't books but journals, she looks at him questioningly.

"They are all the letters and threats I have received in the past six months. While you look through them I'll have a look through some criminal law books to find some loopholes." He says with final authority but Evelyn stops him and passes the books back.

"With the brother that studies law, I think I will look for the loopholes while you look through your own documents." She says, tilting her head, "Agreed?"

He dumps the books on the desk. "Agreed." He sits down heavily. Evelyn removes her cloak and places on a wobbly table before walking to the nearest shelf and beginning to skim through the titles.

"That's French literature." Blackmoore says not looking up from his work. "Shakespeare." He says as she moves to the next one, eyes still glued to his books.

Sighing she puts her hands on her hips, "Are you going to tell me where they are? Or am I going to have to look through every shelf to find them?"

He smirks and finally points to the first floor, directly opposite the fire. Evelyn cannot contain her excitement as she skips over to the staircase and begins to climb upwards. She moves along the balcony to the right section. As she walks she passes possession law, inheritance law and tax before she sees criminal law.

"You have more books about criminal law than I have about every type of law." She calls down to Blackmoore. He grunts in response and doesn't look up. She takes down several thick volumes and tobters down the stairs, she looks around for a chair or pe but quickly discovers that there is nothing of the sort. The books are beginning to make her arms strain. Oblivious to her struggle the duke places a letter on one of two piles and starts to read the next. Evelyn walks around the desk and kneels down on the fur rug, she places the books next to her and settles in a cross-legged position. She picks up the first book and starts to read. The words flow through her brain and the legal terms excite her as she tries to find a sneaky catch in the law terms.

Around one Claude brings them both some tea and bread that they gratefully dig into while continuing their work. At a few points, they share what they have learnt and end up arguing about it. Evelyn makes another trip up the staircase and adds to her collection on the fur rug.

The clock on the table strikes four and Evelyn shuts the book she is reading. She stands up and stretches her aching legs. She picks up all her books and places them on the side of his desk.

"My aunt and cousin will be back soon I have to go." She says to him. Blackmoore looks up and nods.

"I'll pick you up same time tomorrow." He says, then returns to his work. "Ask Claude for the carriage, my driver knows where you live."

"Right." Evelyn frowns awkwardly. When he doesn't say anything else she accepts the dismissal and leaves the room. She spots Claude polishing the ornaments in front of the window, he bows as she approaches.

"I'd be back tomorrow." She informs him.

"I look forward to it." He replies smoothly.

"The Duke said to ask you if I could use his carriage?" She says.

"Of course. Please wait here, it won't be a moment." Claude gestures to a seat before disappearing o to the side. Evelyn only has to wait for a few minutes before he reappears.

"It is waiting for you outside." He says with a smile.

She thanks him and curtseys, she is about to turn to leave but Claude's expression makes her stop.

"What is it?" She asks.

"You must wonder why the Duke has such a private study." He says.

"Of course, but I know better than to ask when it is Blatphrook." She says, confused.

"I would dislike you to think he keeps such a room for inappropriate purposes, you are the first beyond myself to have been inside."

"Then why does he have it?" She questions.

"Because what you see in society isn't real," Claude says. "I believe the same is true for you too."

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