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Evelyn can barely believe her eyes as her friend slows his horse to a
stop just short of the bridge.
"Good morning." He calls back, waving.
"Just wait there." She calls down to him. She hurriedly walks down
the right side of the bridge onto the tiny track, she scrambles over the
gate to access the path under the bridge and walks up to where he
has dismounted. He takes o his hat to her with a grin and she gives
him a slight curtsey in return
"I think stalking is illegal." He admonishes lightly, she takes a moment
to look o ended but then she smiles.
"Then you should stop because this is where I live not you." She
replies, pretending to turn away haughtily. He laughs and looks
around, he scratches his chin thoughtfully.
"I never pictured you living on a bridge but now I am here...." He says,
looking at the crumbling structure. "Very nice."
Evelyn laughs, "I would invite you in...." She gestures to the canal,
"But as you can see I have no door."
"Shocking." Lawrence tuts. They share an amused smile at their
jesting.
"I can't believe you are in Darlington," She says. "This is such a
welcome surprise."
"I must say it is nice to see a friendly face, Newcastle was full of gru
talking people, and I confess I could hardly understand them." He
says.
"Did your business go well?" She asks, brushing her hair from her
eyes as a gust of window sweeps by them.
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"As well as can be expected, I don't think they were a big fan of Americans but I now have a port there so.." He shrugs and smiles.

"They better get used to me."

"So are you going back to London?" She says. "Becuase this road isn't the right way." "No, I am making a stop in Richmond before I return." He says. "I have a vendor there that I need to discuss with." Evelyn nods and then nervously tugs at the corner of her coat. She lightly blushes but looks into his charmingly handsome face and

asks, "Would you like to have lunch at my house?"

"I'd be delighted." He replies. "If it is not too much trouble."

"It's just me at home but the cook is excellent." She explains as she leads him to the gate. She opens it and Lawernce and his horse pass through onto the bridge and to the other side of the canal. "I am sure it will be lovely." He says, "I haven't eaten a good meal in the last few days." "Oh?" Evelyn feels lighter as she walks next to him and his horse, the

turmoil in her stomach has dissipated and her duke is far from her

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mind. "The hotel I stayed in tried to pass o what I think was rat as pork," Lawrence tells her, pulling a disgusted face. "Ewww." Evelyn wrinkles her nose and chuckles at his comical face. "I can assure you that there is no rat in my kitchen." She kicks at the ground, "Well, Lucy's kitchen." She spins to face him directly, "And there is an excellent whiskey selection." He mocks looking at his pocket watch, "At this time in the day? You

are a bad influence on me, Miss Wright."

"Evelyn." She says and he looks slightly confused.

he has to pull his horse into a fast walk to catch up.

"So, Evelyn." He smiles as he says her name.

grand but...." She shrugs delicately, "I like it."

make it exceptional."

her companion.

of.

that sits around the old building. "So much character."

"I quite agree." He says, still looking at the house.

"Yes?" She turns her head to address him and the sun glances down on her hair, making the silvery locks gleam. He smiles at her. "You look very happy today." "Well," Her foot nudges the mud, unsure how to react to the compliment, "Thank you." They reach the house and she stops just before turning into the garden.

"This is my home." She gestures to the grey farmhouse, "It's nothing

"It's beautiful," Lawrence says honestly, marvelling at the greenery

"Yes!" She says enthusiastically, "That's exactly what I think, it has so

much substance, it doesn't marble staircases or wide balconies to

"Lunch then?" She asks, "You can either put your horse in the stable

"My name is Evelyn." She says with a grin and then she skips o and

or just let him wander in the field." She points past the garden to a field that runs along the canal. "I'll tie him up by the stable if that's alright?" Lawernce strokes the animal's nose and pats his neck. The horse's dark eyes gleam and he nickers so ly. "Of course," Evelyn glances around the garden and spots a boy

leaving by the back door. "Oh Thomas!" She waves to him.

fed." She pats Lawrence's horse's neck and he nudges her.

"Right away Miss." Thomas takes the horse's reins and leads him

away. Evelyn turns to Lawrence and gestures for him to follow her.

"It's easier to go this way then go all the way around." She explains

silent as soon as they both step inside. Lucy's knife hovers over the

carrots and the only sound is of the thick bubbling from the pot on

opening the door and slipping down the steps. The kitchen goes

She takes him through the back garden to the door Thomas came out

The boy hurries over, holding on to his cap and bows to both her and

"Will you put this horse in the stable." She asks, "Make sure he is well-

the stove. Evelyn clears her throat, awkwardly. "This is Mr Jordan, he's my friend." Lawrence nods to everyone but he shi s uncomfortably behind her as they all stare at him.

No one says a word. The pot continues to simmer away, the smell of

"He's staying for lunch," Evelyn continues, not looking at anyone, "If

head, "Thank you." She turns and pulls Lawrence out of the kitchen

and up to the hall. As she closes the servants' entrance he lets out a

"They were very surprised." He comments, brushing his hair away

"And I thought I'd lost the ability to surprise people." Evelyn grins and

we could organise that, it would be excellent." She half nods her

rich meat wa ing around the room.

breath and chuckles.

from his eyes.

leads him into the small dining room. "Have a seat." He takes o his jacket and hangs it over the back of his chair. "Whiskey or tea?" She asks, wandering over to the cabernet. "Whiskey if you please." He replies, settling into the chair and looking around the bright room. The oak table sits directly in the middle of airy room which looks out onto the back garden, you can see a snip of the canal that trails around a corner. The plain wooden cabernets look very smart against the light wallpaper and brass candle holders.

Evelyn pours two glasses and hands him one before taking a seat. He

thanks her and takes an appreciative sip. Feeling his gaze on her she

looks down into her drink and fiddles with the rim of the glass. Maybe

"My father is travelling and my brother and cousin are remaining with

my aunt in London." She says, a sudden pang hitting her stomach.

this wasn't such a clever idea a er all.

"It must get quite lonely." He says.

head on her hands.

"My sister, Charity."

"Who's yours then?" He asks.

finding that he is falling short.

work and puts down his cup.

"You have a meeting," Claude says.

his chair, a lump settling in his throat

"I think you should go." Claude says.

"Edward Tremontane."

"I beg your pardon."

stomach.

have time..."

we rarely talk."

"Where are the rest of your family?" He questions.

"It does." She admits, "The servants are used to being out of sight per my father's instruction so I barely see anyone for hours." She sighs, "I like my own company but..." "But everyone needs that one friend." He says, finishing his drink. "What friend?" She frowns. "That one friend that you can tell anything to, even if you haven't spoken in weeks, they know your worst and your best, they tell you when you are wrong but will support you through everything."

"Who's you're one friend?" She asks, leaning forward and resting her

"How sweet, I wish it was like that with my brother." She says, "But

"I suppose it will have been my mother but she died a few years ago

so I don't really have one now, I guess," Evelyn says, smiling sadly.

"She must have been an amazing woman," Lawrence says so ly,

reaching over and comfortingly placing his hand on her elbow.

"She was." She looks into his eyes and something inside her tips

a over. An uncomfortable cough breaks their moment. They look around to see Lucy holding a large dish with Lydia behind her, holding cutlery and a plate for the guest. "Lunch is ready," Lucy says Back in London Duke Blackmoore sits in his study, a cup of tea in his hand, papers laid out upon his desk. Evelyn's arrest warrant was

retracted three days ago but he is no closer to figuring out who is the

culprit. He has spent four days working all through the day and into a

good deal of the night but without his companion to talk to he is

"Sir." Claude stands in the doorway. Blackmoore looks up from his

"Anything new?" He asks hopefully as he always does when his

Blackmoore feels the same sense of hopelessness deep in his

serving-man appears in his study but Claude shakes his head and

"Cancel it." Blackmoore instructs turning back to his papers, "I don't

"It's one of those meetings." Claude interrupts. The duke freezes in

"Will you send a note to him? There's no way I can appear at that

"I.." He clears his throat, looking up "Who's hosting?"

given the circumstances." Blackmoore says quietly.

heel and leaves. Blackmoore sits back in his chair and frowns. Why should he go? Going means that he is putting more hours between seeing Everlyn again and that is something he cannot bear to do. Her frowning face appears in his mind and he slumps in his seat, he throws his pen down and groans. Despite his reservations, he finds his carriage pulling up in front of Edward Tremontane's house a few hours later. The night has fallen and carpeted the street in a thick blanket of fog. He steps out of the

carriage and straightens his jacket. He fidgets on top of the step and

group it is only a select number of people who are aware of this so he

is expecting the worst from the stepson of Phillipa's. The door opens

and Edwards stands with a cigar in hand. His eyes rake over the duke

"Edward," Blackmoore moves forward to shake the other man's

"I am well," Edward shakes his hand rather more forcefully than

Blackmoore freezes as he enters the house, "It was you that told

"She asked the questions, I just provided the answers, don't shoot

"I can't quite comprehend why she thought you had any good in you

"I couldn't care less about whether you did or not." Edward claps him

on the back. "She was a bitch, and now she is dead, a terrible choice

Blackmoore gives the man a side glare, "Always about the win for

you." He comments lightly, trying to keep his cool although his

but she was adamant that you didn't kill my stepmother," Edward

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me." Edward chuckles, shutting the door. "You already shot my

Blackmoore smiles tightly lipped, "Of course."

"I didn't," Blackmoore says automatically.

insides twist into a knot.

each other.

of agreement.

and quiet exclamations.

was my bad but an accident."

of mark though, my deepest sympathies on that."

necessary, "How's your little friend? She was quite shaken the last

in cold disdain hidden beneath cool politeness.

hand. "How are you?"

time I saw her."

Evelyn then?"

stepmother."

says.

reluctantly knocks on the door. Although he is the founder of this

"Go." Claude pronounces the letters clearly and smartly turns on his

Edward laughs and directs him to a side door, "You are the last to arrive, some thought you wouldn't show but I knew you would." He opens the door and Blackmoore is greeted by the sight of fi een or so men, laying around, smoking expensive cigars and throwing back whiskey and borban like water. Edward sashays into the room, "Look who's here gentleman, I told you he'd turn up!" Blackmoore nods to a few as they o er him a general greeting. "Finally we can start." Sir Anthony Carvill says, rolling his eyes and swallowing the last of his drink. "Actually gentleman," Blackmoore interrupts from his position by the door. "I have an announcement." The men frown and look between

"A er five years of secretly running this club I have decided that in

light of recent events to not participate as a member nor founder

"Is this because of my stepmother's death?" Edward questions,

"But when the girl killed herself you were the most insistent that the

club continues." Anthony points out and there's a general muttering

"Hey, hey, hey." Edward turns to face him, "We don't mention that, it

looking shocked. Blackmoore bows his head.

anymore," Blackmoore says clearly. The room breaks out in murmurs

Blackmoore addresses everyone firmly. "Before I step down I am banishing Edward Tremontane for breaking the secrecy act." He says. "I have information that he showed his book to an outsider and for that, he is banned." "You can't do that!" Edward cries, "I am an integral part of this club!" "Since when did you care this much?" Anthony asks, "This was always a bit of a joke to you."

"I met someone that changed my perspective on life, I buried my self-

would make everything better but it doesn't. I am a bitter man and I

can't change a lot of things but I can try to be a good person in the

Stepping out into the deep night Blackmoore takes a deep breath

and smiles, he looks around the deserted street and feels lighter than

ever before. He has closed a door on the past that kept following him

**Continue reading next part** □

future." He smiles and bows, "Goodnight gentlemen."

and without Evelyn, it would never have happened.

hatred in the enjoyment of life, I thought indulging in pleasures