

## Chapter 39

The next day Evelyn wakes up in her room in 104 and she lies there for a long time, just looking at the ceiling. The other bed in the room is empty so she alone with her thoughts. The sun is barely visible behind the clouds. She sits up in bed and opens the window. She pulls the flowerbox towards her and digs into the earth until she touches the wool of her scarf. She lies out the bundle and shakes it to remove most of the dirt before bringing inside and unfolding it. The fateful pistol stares back at her, the metal gleaming in the low light. She picks it up, feeling the weight in her hand and aims it directly at door. She closes one eye and she looks down the barrel.

The door bang open and she blinks. Henrietta waltzes in but stops dead when she sees the pistol pointing at her chest.

"What are you doing?" She asks, skipping over to her bed and flopping onto it. "Put it away."

Evelyn complies, wrapping the pistol up and shoving to the end of her bed. She crosses her legs on the bed and watches her cousin roll around on her mattress.

"Did you sleep well?" She asks.

Henrietta laughs and brushes the hair from her face. "Shouldn't I be asking you these questions?"

"What do you mean?"

"You are the focus of today, no one else," Henrietta says. Evelyn snorts and gets off her bed.

"I don't need it." She says, taking a pale lavender dress out of her wardrobe and starting to dress. Henrietta moves on bed to keep her in view.

"After what you have been through you should."

"Well you can save your concern, I am fine," Evelyn reassures, buttoning up her dress and moving towards the vanity.

Henrietta rolls her eyes, "Even if I believed that there is the still small matter of Nathaniel Blackmoore."

Evelyn pauses as she ties and pins her hair into a sleek simple bun. "Whatever do you mean?"

"Don't play coy with me," Henrietta says, getting up and prancing over to her cousin, she places her hands on her shoulders. "It's obvious he has feelings for you." She pins one of Evelyn's loose hairs into the bun and adds a white ivory comb to the hairstyle, "As do you."

"I don't know what you mean," Evelyn says, looking at her in the mirror. "And neither do you."

"Oh, don't your head ruin this." Henrietta pleads as Evelyn moves from the table to her bed, picking up a pair of ivory slippers on the way.

"It's alright to be scared of what you're feeling, but you have no excuse to not tell him how you feel."

"It's not alright!" Evelyn explodes, spinning round and dropping the shoes in her hand. "I wasn't scared when we lost our money, I wasn't afraid when I was shot at, I didn't even feel scared yesterday, nervous? Yes, but not scared."

"How can you be fine with a gun being held to your head, but telling a man who is in love with you, you love him, is scary?" Henrietta frowns, not following.

"Because in some way I had control of those other situations, they were logical. There is no logic with.... feelings and love." Evelyn picks up her shoes and slips them on.

"How can you expect things to be logical and normal after what you have gone through?" Henrietta sits down and takes Evelyn's hand. "You have beaten everyone's expectations of you. You were never just the girl who lost her money but now everyone knows that."

"Except for your mother-in-law," Evelyn adds ruefully.

"Yes but she's a cow." Henrietta states. Evelyn laughs and nods.

"She really is."

There is a knock on the door and Juliet enters.

"Good morning, I have just been informed that Master William is in a stable condition and will be awake this afternoon if you want see him. In the interim would you like anything for breakfast?"

"Actually," Henrietta says before Evelyn can speak, "Evelyn has a place to go right now, so it'll just be me for breakfast."

Juliet smiles knowingly, "We thought as much, there is a carriage waiting outside." She steps to the side and Mr Wright and Lucile poke their heads around the door, similar grins on their faces.

"What's going on?" Evelyn asks, rising to her feet.

"We just want to ensure that you get the happiness you deserve." Mr Wright says.

"That happiness being a tall, kind, generous man," Lucile adds with a wink.

"Not to mention rich and handsome." Henrietta says, everyone looks at her and she shrugs, "It adds to the recommendation."

"You are all being overzealous," Evelyn says. Lucille walks up to her and places her hands on her shoulders.

"And you are being a fool if you aren't going to tell Blackmoore you love him." She smiles and pinches her nose, "And you are no fool Evie,"

She looks into his confident, excited face and she feels herself concede. "Fine."

She takes a coat from her wardrobe and puts on.

"Remember to smile!" Mr Wright says.

"Don't be nervous." Lucile says.

"Good luck," Henrietta says. Evelyn turns to each of them.

"I love you all so much and I'll see you when I return." She says. They all call their goodbyes to her as she leaves her room and starts down the stairs. Her heart thumps against her chest as her hand travels down the bannister. Five steps from the bottom she stops.

"Hello?"

The figure in the hallway turns around. Blackmoore stands in front of her dressed in a fine suit, a bunch of white roses in his hand.

"Good morning." He says.

"I was just coming to see you." He says stepping off the last step. "There's a carriage for me outside."

"There isn't." He smiles but then falters, "Well there is but it's mine and I need it to get home."

Evelyn laughs awkwardly, "Right." She struggles with what to say, "What are you doing here?"

"I didn't say what I wanted to yesterday, what I planned to say when I saw you again." He takes a deep breath. "I know I've hurt you, I made you doubt me, and I've lost your trust, but I endeavour to change that." He takes a step forward so that they are mere inches apart, "You've been in this 100% from the beginning, even when I was rude and arrogant towards you, but now this is over, and I don't know what to do with myself." He smiles at her, "I love you, Evelyn Wright, I want to marry you, have more adventures together and live out the rest of my life with you. I know I am not deserving of you returning my affections but if you do, I will try 100% for the rest of my life to be good enough for you."

Evelyn listens to his confession, her heart feeling lighter than air, a spark alight inside her. She blinks as he waits for her to speak.

"I don't want to...." She begins but he cuts her off.

"I understand, it was stupid of me to think..."

She grabs his elbow to stop him from leaving and forces him to look at her.

"Listen to me you fool. What I was going to say is I don't want to marry you yet." She says clearly, she looks around the hallway, hunting for the right words.

"I tried to be perfect every day of my life for everyone in it, but then you crashed into my life and suddenly I couldn't be perfect, you didn't allow me to be. You are perfect to me because you showed me that no one is perfect no matter how hard they try, you are... imperfectly perfect and I am in love with you,"

"Really?" Blackmoore asks in disbelief.

"Really." Evelyn repeats, "And I want to be your wife and spend my life with you, but I think we should try a carriage ride in the park before jumping straight into marriage."

"That's very sensible." He says, he looks down at the flowers in his hands, "You should probably have these."

She takes them with a small laugh, "Thank you, they are beautiful."

He beams and then looks shocked, "I almost forgot. I have a gift for you. Just for helping me avoid the noose not because you think I am a handsome, amazing and sweet man that you can't wait to marry." He says with a cheeky grin. He reaches into his jacket and pulls out the small black velvet box.

She tuts, "That's not quite what I said."

He chuckles and hands her the box. She places the roses on the cabinet by the coat hanger and opens the present. Her heart melts at the sight of two blue diamond earrings sitting on a black cushion.

"They are beautiful," She breathes, holding one up to have a better look.

"They were my grandmother's." Blackmoore says, "She'd want you to have them."

Evelyn places the box on the side and slips them into her ears, "I wish I could have met her."

"Me too." Blackmoore clears his throat thick with sadness. "My mother wants to meet you."

Evelyn freezes as she looks at herself in the mirror, "I thought you said she was horrible?"

"I did, but thanks to you I have reconnected with her." He explains, he thinks for a moment. "I think she'd be a good grandmother."

"As would I." A voice calls.

The couple turns around to see Lucile, Mr Wright and Henrietta all peeking around the corner on the top step. Blackmoore laughs while Evelyn blushes faintly shades of pink.

"Let's start with a carriage ride." She says firmly to everyone. "And mind your own business!" She calls to her family. They grumble but retreat from upstairs.

"I have a proposition," Blackmoore says, a dangerous smile on his handsome face. She frowns, intrigued.

"What is it?"

"My carriage is outside, it's a beautiful day, I have a beautiful woman in front of me and I would very much like her to accompany me on a carriage ride." He says, holding out his hand.

Evelyn pretends to consider his proposal until she says, "Alright then." And slips her hand into his. He escorts her to the front door and down the steps.

"Oh wait a minute." Evelyn lets go of his hand and dashes back into the house. She picks up her discarded flowers and bounces back down the steps to join the duke waiting by his carriage. He shoots her an odd look.

"No one has ever given me flowers before." She says defensively, accepting his help into the carriage. She sits down and he joins her.

"Actually, that's not true. I used to get so many flowers delivered to the house that I would give them to the servants."

"How reassuring," Blackmoore says patronisingly, shutting the door and taking the seat opposite. She rolls her eyes at his antics.

"I've just never had any from someone who matters to me." She rephrases.

"I am glad you like them." He says, putting his elbows on his knees and leaning towards her. "Now, where do you want to go?"

"I don't mind," Evelyn says, leaning forwards until their foreheads are resting against each other and their lips are centimetres apart.

"Surprise me."