

Chapter 5

Evelyn wakes up in her small bed with the sun shining on her face. She slept as well as could have hoped in her current situation. She lies on her bed for a long time, simply staring at the ceiling with no desire to get up. At home, she would have gotten up, made herself some tea, maybe taken a walk in the garden then found a good book to curl up with all before the clock in the hall struck 9. Someone knocks on the door, making her sit up in bed as maid opens the door and enters with a tray of tea for both ladies. She carefully carries the tray up the step and hands Evelyn her teacup, making sure not spill a drop.

"Thank you," Evelyn says raising the cup to her lips. The girl bobs her head and walks to Henrietta's bed. She hovers by her side, unsure what to do as Henrietta remains fast asleep. She holds the tray and looks around for help.

"Just place it on the table," Evelyn says sipping her tea and relishing the taste. "She'll have it when she wakes. The girl hesitates but does as requested and places the tray on the side table. She straightens up and curtsies.

"Breakfast is at half-past nine." She whispers and then scurries out of the room with a wary backward glance. Evelyn notices too late that there is no clock in the room or on the wall. She sips her tea and leans back into her pillows, she looks outside the window and watches the maids in the courtyard hang up sheets and clothes. She places her tea by her book on the table and takes a better look around the room.

The natural light from the wide window makes the area look bigger and wider than it did last night. She hadn't noticed the patterned rose rugs underneath the beds or the small table with lilies in a golden vase. Henrietta turns in her sleep and curls herself into her duvet.

Evelyn reaches for the book on her table and flips it open with one hand, she picks her cup up in the other and begins to read as she drinks her steaming tea. Her brain absorbs the words like a thirsty man drinks water. Every law, by law and loophole, is processed by her mind and she clings to each sentence. Some might find the books of law less than stimulating but to Evelyn, they are more than just an interesting read, they are an escape from reality. A time for her to forget how her brother treats her and how unhappy she feels in her heart. However, reality always creeps back in and this time it is Henrietta's sleepy groan from the mound of covers.

More time than thought must have passed as a direct sunbeam now shines through the window creating a patch of golden sunlight on the wooden floor. Evelyn places her empty cup on the table along with her closed book. Her feet hit the cold floor and she hops to her luggage and begins to dress as quickly as possible as to avoid being dragged into helping her cousin prepare herself for the day.

any more appearance assists like last night. Once her hair is in a sensible bun with a few loose tendrils. She leans in front of the mirror and considers her appearance. Her cheeks aren't as rosy as they once were and although her skin is clear and pale, it holds no life, like a pretty china doll. Her grey eyes roam over her neat silvery blonde hair and they rest on the hollow base of her throat. The dress she wears is practical and simple with a small lace trim around the edges. She slips on a pair of white shoes with a small heel and adds only a small pair of pearl earrings to her outfit.

She leaves her room but stops as she passes her brother's room, she places her ear to the door and listens. She cannot hear anything, she pokes her head around the door and sees a body underneath a blanket which is snoring gently. She shuts the door and continues downstairs to breakfast. She passes no one of the stairs to the ground floor however she spots the maid she served her this morning, disappearing into a room to the right of the staircase, with a plate of bacon. Evelyn follows after her and enters the room. It's a small dining room with only a large long table and two cabinets of liquor and cutlery. The table is covered with a long white cotton tablecloth and laid for breakfast. Her aunt is already sitting at the head of the table tucking into a full English breakfast.

"Good morning," Evelyn says she takes the seat to the right of her aunt.

"Good morning," Lucile says as she looks up. "Margurite was just fetching me a pot of tea if you would like some?"

Margurite glances at Evelyn as she places bacon on the table and collects the empty plates and dirty cutlery.

"No thank you," Evelyn says, placing a napkin on her lap. The food in front of her all smells delicious but she only helps herself to one slice of toast and jam. She pours herself a glass of orange juice from the jug. Margurite curtsies and then leaves the aunt and niece alone to eat. Evelyn nibbles on the corner of her toast.

"How did you sleep?" Lucile asks as she sips her tea. Evelyn lowers her toast and picks up her glass.

"Well, thank you." She replies, sipping the fresh juice.

"Is Henrietta going to be joining us? And William?" Lucile asks.

"I cannot say for my brother but I can vouch that my cousin will not appear for another hour or so," Evelyn says, taking another bite of toast.

"I may have to push the breakfast times forward then." Her aunt says, thinking, "I cannot bear to spend the morning hours in bed however..."

"I don't like wasting them either," Evelyn says. Lucile smiles but it doesn't quite reach her eyes, her thumb slips over the handle of her cup as she raises it to her mouth and takes a drink. Evelyn brushes her hands on a napkin as she finishes her toast. Her aunt places her cup on her saucer and reaches across the table to quickly take her hand. Her grip is hard and punishing.

"Why did you never reply to my letter?" She asks, her eyes darting across her niece's face. Evelyn yanks her hand back and rises to her feet. She tries to walk to the door but her aunt blocks her path.

"Please let me past," Evelyn says through gritted teeth.

"Tell me why." Lucile counters. Evelyn tosses her head closes the space between them.

"Why do you care? You never cared before." She whispers, her eyes stormy. "We haven't seen each other in four years for christ sake." Lucile slaps her cheek. "Don't use his name in vain in my house!"

Evelyn fights the impulse to raise a hand to her throbbing cheek, instead, she just takes a deep breath. She knew this was coming.

"I appreciated your concern about my future and I should have told you that then, but I could never have let my family behind." She says, her head held high, though her cheek burns. Her aunt scoots and shakes her head

"I saw how your family treated you when you lost your money." Disdain rings on that one word. "They would have let you if they had had the same choice."

"You don't think I know that?" Evelyn says bitterly. "Just because I don't reveal anything doesn't mean I don't know."

Lucile's harsh expression softens and the tension drains out of her shoulders. She places a hand on Evelyn's shoulder.

"You are such a beautiful, intelligent girl." She murmurs, warmth shining from her eyes. "I only wanted the best for you."

Evelyn doesn't speak. Her defensive walls remain in up, ready for another attack.

"Lucile!" A shrill voice shouts from the hallway. Lucile drops her hand and frowns. Evelyn rolls her eyes, it appears that the loudest person in the house is ready for her very important day to begin. Her aunt walks into the hallway, followed Evelyn who is glad that the attention is on her. Henrietta stands in front of the door, pulling on a bright yellow coat. She wears a cream dress that compliments her dark hair and she has also applied a light layer of makeup. A bag hangs from her wrist.

"There you are." She says when she spots the two women. "I am ready to go to that dress place...whatever it is called."

"Don't you want to have breakfast before we depart?" Lucile asks pleasantly, folding her hands.

"And risk losing this waistline?" Henrietta snorts, tossing her rigid curls. Lucile seems unsure what to say and Henrietta continues to get ready to leave.

"We have to wait for William before we leave anyway so you might as well eat something." Lucile points out but Henrietta ignores her and ties a bonnet under her chin. She busies herself with her appearance in the mirror and hums merrily to herself as she smooths the hair visible under the bonnet.

"I'll go wake him," Evelyn says, unable to watch her cousin prune herself for much longer.

"Thank you, dear," Lucile says, smiling.

Evelyn walks up the stairs and down the corridor till she reaches his room, again she can hear no movement from behind the door. She wastes no time with knocking and walks right in. William is lying, tangled up in his sheets, in nothing more than a pair of white shorts. Evelyn can barely conceal her disgust as she approaches and recognises the smell of stale whiskey. The stench is everywhere and it fills her nose with its harsh odour. She spots an empty glass bottle on the table. She walks across the room and opens the curtains at the window, the light spills in frantically and hits his face. He groans and turns over in protest. He has drunk enough that he hasn't registered her presence yet.

Evelyn picks the clothes he must have carelessly ripped off last night and places them on the armchair in the corner. She tidies all the mess on the floor best and turns to his bed with a grimace. Unsatisfied with the progress her brother hasn't made, she takes a tight grip on the edge of his covers and gives them a harsh tug. He tumbles on the side of the bed and hits the floor in an ungraceful sprawl. He rubs the bottom of his spine as he sits up and sees Evelyn towering over him. He offers her a cheesy smile and brushes his hair from his eyes.

"You overslept." She says, putting the covers neatly back on his bed.

"I am on holiday, you cannot oversleep on holiday." She says shakily getting to his feet.

"You can and you have." She says, "We are all waiting for you downstairs, be quick." She chucks some clean clothes at him. "And have a wash, you reek."

"Yes, mother." He says cheekily catching the clothes. Evelyn shakes her head, she looks back at the mess that is her brother as she pauses at the door.

"Hurry up."

She doesn't close it and heads to her room. William started drinking, as a teenager as all do but when the family were affected by the loss of their money he soon found he preferred the company of a cheap whiskey to his father and sister. Despite having adapted to their circumstances the abuse of drinking got worse and try as she might to help him, Evelyn has no strength to address this issue now. She has learnt to accept that the brother she grew up with and played with loves hard liquor more than her.

Odd noises from her room have her poking her head around the open door in curiosity. Juliet stands by Henrietta's trunk, pulling out dresses. She takes the top dress, unfolds it, dusts it lightly and hangs it in the wardrobe.

"Good morning," Evelyn says as she passes the maid to her bed.

"Good morning miss," Juliet replies as she pulls out another dress, sky blue with white stitching.

"Did you sleep well?" Evelyn asks as she makes her way to her trunk but when she flips it open she finds it empty.

"Miss, I put your clothes in that wardrobe." Juliet points to a new wardrobe in the corner. It is a fairly large size and is made of polished oak.

"Oh, thank you." Evelyn frowns but opens the door to find all her dresses neatly hung up and her shoes at the bottom. She turns to Juliet for an explanation.

"Miss Henrietta had me find another wardrobe for her new dresses and there were two so I thought you might like one too," Juliet informs her.

"That's very thoughtful of you." Evelyn takes an ivory coat from a hanger and wraps it around her.

"It is my job," Juliet says quietly. Evelyn pauses as she picks up her book, the sadness in her maid's voice causes a chill in her blood. Juliet continues to dust dresses oblivious to Evelyn's reaction. Evelyn shakes the feeling and slips the book into a small bag, along with a little money, she pulls it shut and nods to her before leaving. She wanders back downstairs, to where Henrietta is waiting expectantly.

"Well?" She taps her foot, her bag swinging from her wrist.

"He will be with us shortly," Evelyn replies, Henrietta groans and stops tapping her foot. Evelyn looks around, "Where is my aunt?"

"Getting changed into another of those awful dresses," Henrietta says looking intently at herself in the mirror again.

Evelyn sighs, it is going to be a long day.