

## Chapter 8

The carriage is rather silent on the way back to 104, they stop at the house they dropped William off at to inquire after his whereabouts however the kindly house mistress told them that her master and his guest had gone calling on friends in the heart of the town but that William had left a note for his sister. Lucile couldn't help saying that she knew they would develop a bond. The housemistress wishes them goodbye and says that they are welcome to visit anytime. Henrietta looks bored as she plays with the curtain tassel, uninterested in anything other than the state of her nails. Evelyn unfolds the note as the carriage starts to move again.

Dear Sister,

Jackson is such a bore, I predict that even you would detest his company however he does have connections and I have convinced him to take me to the nearest gentleman's club. I doubt I will be back anytime soon, don't wait up.

Your loving brother

William.

Evelyn resists the impulse to scoff in disgust but instead, she folds the paper and tucks it into her bag.

"Jackson has kindly taken my brother to meet some of his friends." She paraphrases. "He won't be returning to us for some time."

"How nice." Lucile says, "He must be having a smashing time."

Evelyn doesn't comment, she knows that her brother's version of a good time means endless bottles of whiskey and rum mixed with the attention of beautiful women though that latter she'd rather not think about.

Lucile takes hold of her's and Henrietta's hand. "I am so pleased you girls are here for the season." Her face shines bright with fondness and pleasure.

"As are we." Henrietta pulls her hand away with a small grimace. Evelyn squeezes her aunt's hand before releasing it. The rest of the journey is spent in complete silence. When the carriage stops in front of 104 Henrietta bounds out like a hyper bunny and rushes up the steps. Once inside Evelyn hands the butler her coat but keeps her bag.

"There's tea and luchen in the parlour if you are hungry," Juliet announces as she appears. Henrietta doesn't say a word but her eyes light up and she darts past her to the parlour.

"Thank you," Lucile says to Juliet and her aunt sweeps after her other niece.

Evelyn smiles quickly at her before heading towards the staircase.

"Not hungry miss?" Juliet calls after her. Evelyn turns around on the bottom step.

"Not right now." She excuses herself. "I may fancy something later."

Juliet looks concerned but convinced by her reason and she leaves Evelyn on the stair. She continues up the steps and walks down the corridor to her room. She smells fresh flowers and lavender the moment she walks into her room, it's already been cleaned and everything has been straightened and dusted.

She shuts the door, hurries over to her bed and takes her new book out of her bag. Sitting down on her blanket and pillows she kicks off her shoes and fingers the embossed cover, breathing in the smell of new book and ink. She opens it to the first page and reads a small synopsis about who the author is and his background. His is no different from the other writers of law books, rich and entitled. Never the less she begins the first chapter: The Beginning of the British Empire.

The words she reads do not tell stories of romance and tragedy, but of survival and involvement and she enjoys them as much as any tale of fairies and trolls. All afternoon she flicks through the dense book, fascinated by every word, every law, every loophole. At one point Juliet brings her tea and scones which she devours as she reads about a case of Mrs Mary Bailey who was sentenced to hanging after the murder of her husband in 1784. The sun streams through the window and hits the floor by her bed, the light bounces around the mirrors and reflects rainbows across the walls. Halfway through the conviction process of Mrs Bailey and John Quin, the door bangs open and Henrietta marches in.

"So this is where you have been?" She sneers. Evelyn sighs on her bed as her legs have started to feel numb but does reply. Henrietta looks disappointed that she receives no reply and continues to attract her cousin's attention with banging and crashes but Evelyn continues to read despite the constant chaos.

She looks up half an hour later at a particularly loud bang to see her cousin dressed in nothing but a sheer lace petticoat and high heels with a distressed Juliet holding up different dresses.

"No, no, no." Henrietta marches forward and snatches the purple dress from her and throws it on the floor. "Why did I ever think that this was a good fabric?"

Since Evelyn had seen her she has applied a light layer of makeup and had her hair placed into an elaborate design that leaves the back of her neck exposed.

Juliet scurries to pick up the dress. Evelyn slides a piece of paper to mark the place in her book and clambers off her bed. Time must have slipped on further than she intended as the sky outside suggests early evening as does the loud growl from her stomach. Juliet looks close to tears as Henrietta is leaning into the wardrobe and loudly professing her negative opinion from inside. Evelyn walks over to her and peaks inside too.

"I always think you look the best in this dress." She says to Henrietta as she pulls a bright gold dress out of the wardrobe and holds it up to the light. Henrietta scrunches up her face as she looks at the gown. It has silk sleeves and a lighter bodice that is detailed with swirling copper stitching. The skirt is full and made of the same material as the sleeves. Henrietta studies every inch of the dress, she looks unconvinced.

"Men wouldn't be able to keep their eyes off you in this." Evelyn continues, "And every girl will wish they had a smaller waist than you."

"That is true." Henrietta says slowly, lapping up the compliments, "But gold?"

"It goes perfectly with your hair and this particular dress rests so nicely on your shoulders showing how nice a neck you have," Evelyn says smoothly, she glances at Juliet for support.

"And only the best can wear gold." She says not missing a beat.

"Of course, you are quite right." Henrietta says, snapping her fingers together, "And my new pearls will look gorgeous with this."

Evelyn nods and helps Juliet to slide the dress over Henrietta's head. It flows to the floor, barely scraping it thanks to her heels.

"Thank you." Juliet mouths to Evelyn as she fastens the dress and tightens the corset. Evelyn nods in response and takes the shiny pearls from the vanity placing them around her cousin's throat.

"You look, beautiful miss," Juliet says turning her to see her reflection in the mirror. Evelyn has to admit that her cousin does look very desirable, all dressed up and happy. The joyful smile and flushed cheeks make her entire complexion glow.

"I do." She agrees, twirling. She smiles widely, "I am so excited!"

She twirls some more and watches her skirt swish with her every step, she starts pretending to dance with someone and waltzes around the room, humming to herself.

"Miss Evelyn, would you like help with your hair?" Juliet asks before Evelyn can sneak back to her book.

"You better hurry up," Henrietta says, stopping her dancing and smoothing out her gown.

Evelyn sighs and turns to her wardrobe. Juliet walks over and opens both doors. An array of dresses are hung up. Their light spring colours are far from suitable for a London ball however they will be ideal to not draw attention to one's self and that is exactly what Evelyn plans to do. There was a time where Evelyn's five wardrobes held dresses of bright and fantastic colours, a new one added every week.

"You can't wear an old dress," Henrietta says outraged, her stained lips pouting. She spins to her wardrobe.

"Here." She picks out the purple dress and hands it to Juliet. "Purple is more your colour than mine."

"Are you sure?" Evelyn asks, aware of how possessive she can be of her precious dresses.

"I'll be getting a whole new wardrobe soon, plus I cannot arrive at my first party with you looking like the help," Henrietta says primly. "I am going downstairs."

She dances from the room, unable to contain her enthusiasm. Evelyn looks at Juliet who has an equally puzzled expression on her face. She slowly begins to take off her dress and slip the purple one over her underclothes. The bright satin falls around her in a deeply layered skirt, the dress is a little too small for her and the hem falls just above the bottom of her ankles. Juliet struggles to tie the corset but when she does it highlights Evelyn's smooth curves, the neckline is a lot deeper than Evelyn is comfortable with as it shows the top of her pale chest but the deep colour contrasts and compliments her pale skin. The white lace around the neckline and cuffs adds a slightly feminine look to the seductive dress. She struggles to turn in the big dress to see her reflection. The girl staring back at her is everything she once was. A beautiful confident lady in an eye-catching dress. Juliet fiddles with Evelyn's bun and her long blonde hair spills around her shoulders in wavy locks. Without speaking Juliet begins to work on the hair, pinning up certain sections until Evelyn's hair is up in a high braided updo with several strands in thick curls falling down her back like a waterfall.

"Put these on." She hands her a pair of white heels with crystals. Evelyn slips them on and has to hold onto Henrietta's bedpost to prevent falling over.

"Do you have a necklace that will match? Or a pair of earrings?" Juliet asks.

"I have something," Evelyn replies, she totters over to her trunk and searches inside. She stands up with a silver beaded necklace that she ties snugly around the base of her neck.

"Miss Henrietta is going to regret letting you wear that dress," Juliet says looking at her admiringly.

"I'll be regretting this when I can't breathe all night. Her waist must be tiny." Evelyn laughs slightly as she places her hands on her waist.

"Thank you for helping me, Juliet."

The maid just smiles and nods. Evelyn walks to the door, the muscle memory of many nights in heels coming back to her. She waves goodbye to Juliet and hurries down the stairs. She almost trips several times in her haste but she manages to grab onto the bannister in time. At the bottom of the stairs, she sighs in relief. The clock in the hall shows that she is just in time. She catches her reflection in the mirror and grimaces, the only thing missing is a little makeup and she looks like an older version of herself four years ago.

"Don't you look gorgeous!" Lucile says as she comes out of the parlour. Henrietta follows her and raises her eyebrows in approval and surprise when she sees Evelyn.

"Thank you, aunt." Evelyn says, "You do too."

Lucile wears a pale cream dress with pink roses and a rose crown in her hair. "You are both going to the belles of the balls." She says happily. Henrietta, for once, is silent.

"Ah." Lucile notices the butler and walks towards the door. "Come on ladies, our carriage awaits. Evelyn steps towards the door.

"You look nice," Henrietta mutters as she passes her, wrapping a black cloak around her shoulders.

"You too," Evelyn calls after her. Her heart threatens to leap into her mouth as she pauses at the door frame. She clears her head and takes the white cloak from the butler before heading outside.