

SEQUEL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

*They've found love
... but will they
keep it?*



THE DAVENPORTS

MORE THAN THIS

KRYSTAL MARQUIS

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DIAL BOOKS

OceanofPDF.com

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CONTENTS

Dedication

Chicago, 1910: Summer

Chapter 1: Ruby

Chapter 2: Olivia

Chapter 3: Amy-Rose

Chapter 4: Helen

Chapter 5: Ruby

Chapter 6: Olivia

Chapter 7: Amy-Rose

Chapter 8: Helen

Chapter 9: Ruby

Chapter 10: Olivia

Chapter 11: Amy-Rose

Chapter 12: Helen

Chapter 13: Ruby

Chapter 14: Olivia

Chapter 15: Amy-Rose

Chapter 16: Helen

Chapter 17: Ruby

Chapter 18: Olivia

Chapter 19: Amy-Rose

Chapter 20: Helen

Chapter 21: Ruby

Chapter 22: Olivia

Chapter 23: Amy-Rose

[Chapter 24: Helen](#)
[Chapter 25: Ruby](#)
[Chapter 26: Olivia](#)
[Chapter 27: Amy-Rose](#)
[Chapter 28: Helen](#)
[Chapter 29: Ruby](#)
[Chapter 30: Olivia](#)
[Chapter 31: Amy-Rose](#)
[Chapter 32: Helen](#)
[Chapter 33: Ruby](#)
[Chapter 34: Olivia](#)
[Chapter 35: Amy-Rose](#)
[Chapter 36: Helen](#)
[Chapter 37: Ruby](#)
[Chapter 38: Olivia](#)
[Chapter 39: Amy-Rose](#)
[Chapter 40: Helen](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)
[*About the Author*](#)

[*OceanofPDF.com*](#)

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CHICAGO, 1910



SUMMER

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CHAPTER 1

Ruby

Ruby Tremaine stretched up on her toes to get a better look at the crowd. She clasped her signature necklace in her hand and hummed to the music played by the band in the corner of the Tremaines' famous garden. Behind it, the maze entertained her guests, the soft sound of the fountain at the center filling the space between songs. The patio served as a dance floor, shaded by the large tent raised to shield them from the hot summer sun. Though the current heat wave was one for the record books, it was a nice day, if a little humid. *And all the parents are getting along*, she thought.

Harrison Barton slid to her side, slipping his arm around her and curling her body into his.

"Harrison!" she exclaimed, surprised, a little breathless.

"What?" he asked, face bright. "Everyone's here to celebrate our engagement. I think they *know* we dance." He moved her to the music, and she slipped into rhythm, holding his gaze, his eyes a pale brown like coffee with rich, rich cream, and fringed with green. It had been three weeks since the masquerade ball the Davenports had thrown for her father's campaign. The black-tie affair was certainly a night to remember. Attended by the city's elite, wealthy and influential white and Black scions of business and politics had rubbed elbows, offered their dedication and dollars, and toasted her father's ambition to become Chicago's first Black mayor.

It was all anyone had talked about for weeks before and after. The night was etched in Ruby's mind too, though for other reasons—Harrison's face when he realized their coupling had begun as a scheme, the look in his eyes. It still haunted her. And yet, incredibly, Harrison was her *fiancé*!

"Your father is calling you," she said to him.

He twirled her. His energy was infectious and dispelled her awful memories of that night, filling her instead with a joy that spread like sunshine.

He pulled her close and gave her a quick peck on her cheek. "I'll be back in a moment," he said, before walking to where his family stood.

Ah! She loved the sound of it. *Fiancé*. His laugh floated over to her. The sound of her family, the chatter of her friends—all of them gathered around to celebrate her. It made Ruby's face hurt from smiling. She was going to savor every moment of this party. For a few hours, she could avoid the disappointed looks from her parents, masked now for their guests, and simply exist, a happy bride-to-be.

"It's beautiful," said Olivia.

Ruby turned to her best friend, the elder of the two Davenport sisters, and took the glass of champagne Olivia offered. Olivia's yellow gown offset her rich brown skin, and the warmth in her almond-shaped eyes deepened now with the reassuring look she gave Ruby.

"It is, isn't it?" Ruby took in the fresh-cut flowers cascading from three-foot vases. The linen-covered tables held delicate rose arrangements of fragrant petals ranging from dark red to white, with every shade of pink between. Ruby's parents had swallowed their pride and allowed Harrison to help pay for the decorations and the staff, who now waited on the one hundred or so guests. She took a quick sip of champagne and let the chilled, fizzy drink melt through her like an ice cube in hot tea.

Mr. Barton, Harrison's father, was easy to spot, not just because he was one of the few white gentlemen, but because he stood a foot taller than most of the men there. He and Harrison were the same height and both quick to smile. Mr. Barton's hair showed streaks of white, his eyes a watery gray. Harrison's brother was nearly as tall, his skin the same shade as Harrison's,

and eyes a deep brown like their mother's. Mrs. Barton, too, was tall. Her hair had been woven into an intricate braid on the crown of her head. She stood straight-backed and smiled easily. The lines at the corners of her eyes suggested a life of laughter.

"I fear my sister has frightened Harrison's back to her mother's skirts," said Olivia.

Sure enough, the youngest Barton sibling stood at her mother's elbow, looking like Anna Barton's miniature double, their mahogany skin smooth and glistening in the heat. "What has Helen done?" Ruby laughed.

"I only attempted to warn her of the perils of parties like this, and the cunning of gentleman suitors." Helen Davenport appeared at Ruby's other side, staring fiercely at the entrance of the maze.

Ruby considered the decisions that had brought her to this moment. She'd played Harrison Barton and John Davenport off each other to win John's affections. Her plan had been flawless—except that she'd fallen for *Harrison* in the course of it. The plan had not worked, thankfully. Though the memory of the ruse left her feeling sour. "*Gentlewomen* can be just as cunning," Ruby said now.

Helen chewed her lip. Her focus dropped to the sweating glass of sweet tea in her hand. Ruby gave the younger Davenport sister a comforting squeeze around the waist.

"If only we could see what was around the bend," Olivia said. "You'll recall that I entertained a fake courtship, trying to appease Mama and Daddy."

Helen smiled ruefully. Ruby let out a sigh. "I know better than most," she said, "what one will do to please one's parents."

Ruby saw Olivia's gaze drift to where Ruby's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine, stood, her father, large and imposing, and her mother, who looked like she could easily pass for Ruby's sister. "Have things improved at all?" Olivia asked.

"No," Ruby huffed. "They're overly polite to Harrison and his family. Well, most of the time. And when it's just the four of us, the silence is heavy enough to crush us all."

“When the next set of campaign results are announced,” Olivia said, “it’ll smooth things over. The group I meet with are very enthusiastic about your father’s chances and”—she paused, a firm set to her lips—“to have a Black mayor would do wonders for the change we’re trying to champion. Just look at all Mr. Armstrong has done in Boley, Oklahoma.”

“You’ve never been to Boley, Oklahoma,” Ruby and Helen said at the same time.

“Neither have you,” Olivia replied, ignoring her sister and bumping Ruby with her hip. “It’s thriving under the care of a Black mayor, so much so that its reputation precedes it.”

Ruby looked at her parents, lifting her chin. “I certainly hope you’re right.” She smoothed the front of her dress, a pink so pale, it appeared white against her russet-brown skin. She’d chosen it especially for this occasion. Harrison Barton, whom she loved, was smart, caring, and understanding. Her scheming hadn’t scared him off. He’d seen the real her despite it. And Ruby wasn’t about to let anything stand in the way of this day or her happiness. “I’m to marry the love of my life,” she murmured. The wedding date had been set for late August, two months from now.

Olivia nearly squealed. “I can’t wait to start the real planning,” she said over Helen’s noncommittal grunt.

Ruby blinked, realizing she’d spoken aloud, and smiled.

“How is Harrison? Does he have any preferences?” Olivia asked.

“He’s taking everything in stride. He wants something small—an intimate affair.” Ruby’s smile grew. “Here he comes now.”

Olivia laughed. “I’m so happy for you, my friend, though I wonder if he knows how much thought you’ve *already* put into the day.” She squeezed Ruby’s hand.

“I think that’s an understatement,” said Helen into her glass of sweet tea.

Olivia threw her sister a look before turning her smile back to Ruby.

When they were younger, Ruby and Olivia had spent afternoons planning their wedding days. They would be grand affairs, attended by Chicago’s elite. Ruby had imagined Olivet Baptist Church filled to bursting, and a reception that kept her the envy of every girl for the rest of the season.

“Your gown will have a train as long as the aisle,” Olivia recited now, “flowers spilling over the pews—”

“As if I walked through a sunlit meadow,” finished Ruby with a smile. On her father’s arm, she would shine—so beautiful, her mother would need to keep a handkerchief pressed to tear-streaked cheeks.

“Yes!” Olivia sighed. “All eyes on you.”

Perhaps Olivia was still right. But *Ruby*’s eyes would be on Harrison. He stopped beside her now and leaned in to place a soft kiss along Ruby’s jaw. She felt the heat from his touch blossom and blaze a trail down her neck. The sunshine filling her turned molten and delicious. She shivered despite the heat.

Harrison nodded to Olivia and Helen, eyes smiling. “Hello, Miss Davenport. Miss Davenport. I heard you played an important part in ensuring this day went smoothly. Thank you.”

“Yes, well, most of the details were decided ahead of time,” Olivia said, giving Ruby a knowing look.

“Hush!” Ruby teased, pulling out her fan and whipping up the air around her. Her mother and Mrs. Barton were making their way over now, and were nearly upon them before Ruby had time to compose herself.

“I’m going to get some cake,” Helen announced, having heard their wedding dreams countless times.

“Harrison,” Olivia started, pulling her gaze from her sister, “will you continue with the summer league? We know how you enjoy playing.”

“I’ve retired from baseball.” He looked at Ruby. “I’ve found a more enjoyable pastime, but I do like watching the occasional game. The Leland Giants look impressive this year. Rube Foster sure knows how to put a team together...” He trailed off, grinning at the politely blank look on Olivia’s face. Ruby tried to contain her giggle, turning to bring her mother and Anna Barton into the conversation.

“You will make a lovely bride,” said Mrs. Tremaine, stepping into the conversation as if with two left feet. Her fan was the same shade of dove-gray as her dress.

“Indeed,” said Mrs. Barton, “a beautiful bride.” She smiled at Ruby in a warm but guarded way that made Ruby’s stomach flip.

“Thank you,” Ruby said. She hugged her soon-to-be mother-in-law, welcoming the smell of powder and freesia.

“I’m looking forward to getting to know you better,” Mrs. Barton continued. “All of you. I understand that now is a hectic time in the Tremaine household, but a dinner is in order.”

“If things go according to plan, Mr. Tremaine will be far busier than he is now,” Mrs. Tremaine said, standing straighter, her attempt to soften her words with a smile dampened by the arch of her brows. She ignored Ruby’s stare.

“Of course, we will all soon be family,” Ruby said, closing her fan. She placed her free hand gently on Mrs. Barton’s forearm and said, “We always make time for family.” Ruby eyed her mother, who eventually nodded a response.

Ruby sensed Harrison shift beside her and wished they could vanish into a quiet corner. *Maybe we should elope?* she thought. *Disappear into marital bliss.* A girl could dream.

Mrs. Barton reached for Harrison’s tie and adjusted it. “We could host it at your house,” she said to him.

Ruby had only been in the foyer of Harrison’s town house, but she knew it to be smaller than her parents’ home. And she could see this was not lost on her mother either. Mrs. Tremaine was about to step in when the band changed pace and played a jaunty tune.

“Shall we?” Harrison asked, holding his hand out to her.

Before Ruby could answer, Olivia had plucked the champagne flute from Ruby’s hand and begun asking Mrs. Barton about her trip from South Carolina.

“Excuse us,” Harrison said to their mothers, and whisked Ruby to the center of the patio that doubled as a dance floor. He spun her around, her skirt swaying at her ankles. The music was loud and joyous.

“Thank you,” she said.

He held her close. “No need to thank me. We’re in this together.”

“Do you think they’ll ever get along?”

“Eventually. I hope.” He pulled back enough to see her face and studied her expression. “Hey, you and me.”

“Yes.” Ruby nodded. “You and me.” She dropped her head to his shoulder, and even though the song was fast, they swayed to a rhythm all their own.

When the song finished, they made their way back to the refreshments.

“Barton!”

Ruby and Harrison turned.

Striding toward them was a tall, handsome gentleman with neat waves in his hair and an impeccably tailored suit. Its light color complemented his umber-brown skin. He had brown eyes that sparkled and a grin that suggested he was always on the make, looking for the next young lady to charm. Harrison embraced the newcomer, laughing as the young man loudly clapped his back.

“I’m so glad you’re here,” said Harrison. “I wasn’t sure you’d make the long journey.”

“And miss your prenuptials party? You’re the brother I never had. The trouble we could have caused if the cards fell differently. Still.” He lowered his gaze as it passed over Ruby and shook his head. “Ain’t no way I was missing this.” He pressed a handkerchief to his brow. “There’s no better way to end the summer than with a wedding.”

“Thank you, my friend.” Harrison turned to Ruby, his hand reaching for hers. “Ruby, this is—”

“Carter, Edgar Carter. I am Barton’s oldest friend, and keeper of all his secrets.”

Ruby eyed her fiancé. “Keeper of secrets, you say?” The two men laughed, a sweet harmony. “I think we should set aside some time to talk, Mr. Carter.”

“Just Carter, if you don’t mind, Miss Tremaine. All my friends call me Carter.”

Ruby hesitated. An encouraging look from Harrison settled her nerves. “All right, Carter.”

Carter took Ruby's hand and pressed the back of it to his lips. "Pleasure to make your acquaintance. And once my sister is done catching up with her new friends, I'd be happy to introduce you to her as well."

Harrison straightened and looked around the garden. "Odette is here?"

"I am."

Behind them stood a young woman, as beautiful as her brother was handsome. Her catlike eyes and tiny bow of a mouth captured Ruby's attention, and her brown skin seemed to glow from within. Odette Carter wore an empire-waist dress, a shade darker than Ruby's. Its lace hem was dangerously short, and she pulled at the long string of pearls layered around her bare neck. It was daring and borderline scandalous. And Ruby loved it. Unfortunately, Odette was flanked by Bertha Wallace and Agatha Leary. Agatha had pursued not only John Davenport but also Harrison last spring. Ruby held her composure and refocused on Odette, surprised to find the young woman's eyes on her.

With her fingers still tangled in her pearls, Odette said, "You must be the bride!" Then she threw her arms wide and embraced Ruby, enveloping her in a cloud of perfume. "Let's be friends."

Agatha and Bertha whispered to each other, their smiles wide. Ruby felt the hairs on the back of her neck rise.

Odette pulled back and held Ruby at arm's length. "Love your dress!" Beside Ruby, Harrison laughed at something Carter had said.

"Thank you," Ruby replied, pulling her gaze from Carter and the other two women.

Harrison beamed. "Ruby has quite the eye." He slipped his hand into hers, threading their fingers together and gently pulling her to his side. His presence smoothed the sliver of unease that had pricked her. She looked from him to the new quartet and back to her groom.

Her fiancé.

Her future.

CHAPTER 2

Olivia

Olivia Elise Davenport, smile wide, watched her best friend greet the other guests. The centerpieces were shades of red roses—splashes of Ruby’s signature color everywhere. She will be someone’s *wife*! Olivia shook her head. This was the desired outcome after all they’d learned from their mothers and governesses. Of course, it had been their parents’ wish that the Tremaines and *Davenports* be united through marriage. And at one time, it had been Olivia’s too. But to see the joy radiating from her friend—and to know her own heart too—Olivia understood that such things did not come from planning or plotting.

Her own course had been unexpected, yes, but Olivia knew her day would come. Just not yet.

From her spot under the tent, among the blooming pink flowers and neatly trimmed hedges, she watched the couple and allowed an image of Washington DeWight to fill her mind. His strong jaw, honey-colored eyes, and high cheekbones. She was transported back to their evening on the restaurant rooftop, not long before he left Chicago. The air had been filled with the savory steam of food cooking below, and music from a nearby bar wafted on the crisp spring breeze. As the sun set, it filled the Chicago skyline with bright oranges and golds. He’d held her close, his cheek pressed against hers, as they’d danced to the faint rhythm. She recalled the heat that had bloomed under the palm of his hand, splayed across her back.

Her memory painted a clear picture, and his letters—the passion in them, each one ending with some declaration of his affection for her—convinced her the distance between them only existed in the physical sense. He signed them, *Until we dance again, WDW*, which always made her smile, recalling their first dance together—the glint in his eye, his mischief. How much their relationship had changed since they’d first met. She wondered if he kept her own letters.

“So strange,” said Helen.

Olivia gasped. “Don’t frighten me like that. Helen! How are you so quiet? I thought you went to get cake.”

“The table is too crowded,” Helen said, eyeing their parents, who had gathered around the desserts. Then her face split into a grin. “I’m quite like a cat. How else do you think I sneak off to the garage undetected?”

Olivia snorted. They both knew she’d been caught more than once.

Helen’s eyes flitted across the spectacle. “To think—this was almost you, Livy. Good thing you have such discerning taste.” She pretended to ignore Olivia’s look. “Though I expect Mama and Daddy would have turned your engagement party into a circus.” She sipped her sweet tea.

Olivia stared at the sweating glass, her own throat dry. It was still hot, even as the sun lowered. And the crowd was large, consisting of Chicago’s prominent families, all of them known to Mr. Tremaine in his efforts to run for mayor, and to the Davenports in their efforts to support him. All these people—at what might have been her wedding.

Olivia agreed with her sister about the circus part, but said, “I think they would have held mine at Freeport if I’d asked. In the ballroom. Maybe made it a more intimate affair.”

“And forgo your own long-planned spectacle?” Helen handed Olivia her cold glass of tea. Olivia took a sip, grateful, and handed it back.

The idea of her childhood dreams made Olivia smile.

She glanced at her sister quickly. At one point she and Helen had shared an affection for the same gentleman—Jacob Lawrence, he of the neat mustache and London family fortune. Or so he’d led them to believe. Olivia’s engagement to him had been expected, but she had moved on from

Mr. Lawrence before the truth came out. She'd found the right person for her in Washington DeWight. The outspoken Southern lawyer surprised her, challenged her, from their very first meeting at Samson House when he'd passionately addressed the crowd. It was there that she'd begun working with Chicago's growing group of civil rights activists. But like she'd told Washington in her letters, she hadn't quite mustered the courage to take the stage as he did. For now, she followed the lead of others, and volunteered when she could at the community center. It was something.

Just not enough.

"Are you planning to leave now that Ruby is getting married? To join Mr. DeWight in Washington, DC?" Helen's eyes had softened, but her gaze was steady.

Olivia took in her sister, who looked so much like their father—same proud nose and perceptive brown eyes. "No, not yet. He's only just arrived in Philadelphia, and my reasons for staying are still my reasons. Chicago is our home. There's so much work to be done and I want to be a part of it." Though Chicago was not segregated like the South, there were spaces where the color line was evident, where citizens' prejudice bled into her everyday life. *Like when simply shopping for fabric.*

"Life can't be just about work, Livy. What about love?"

The question from her sister surprised Olivia, with Helen's own heart so recently broken.

Olivia thought about this city that had given her parents a second chance, the opportunity for her and her siblings to thrive—the booming downtown, the arts and culture. "Who said my decision wasn't for love?"

Before Helen could respond, Olivia saw John detach himself from a rowdy group of friends, his bearing serious. Gone were his easy smile and the dimple that set girls' hearts fluttering. "I'm ready to leave," he told his sisters. He shoved his hands in his pockets. His eyes searched the garden, looking for someone they all knew was not there.

"Thank goodness," said Helen, tipping back the last of her sweet tea.

"Don't you think *you* should stay?" he teased.

"If you leave me here, John, I'll—"

“This is a party!” Olivia interrupted. “You *are* allowed to enjoy yourselves. You’re both being rude.”

John held up his hands. “How am I being rude?”

Helen smirked and answered first. “Because you’re an eligible young man who hasn’t danced with a single girl here. All the mamas in the room are having fits!”

“My sincerest apologies to all the mamas, but I need to get out of here and back to the garage.” He looked toward the door.

Though they would not admit it, Olivia knew her brother and sister were throwing themselves into their interests instead of their feelings. A family trait, it would seem.

“And the sooner the better. Livy, enjoy yourself. Don’t forget to dance with your *date*.”

They all looked to Everett Stone, a Davenport Carriage Company lawyer, who now spoke with their parents at the desserts table. Olivia felt her face pinch. She wasn’t sure if Mr. Stone himself knew the strings her parents attempted to pull behind the scenes. His face was sharp, square angles—a chiseled sculpture of a young man who garnered almost as much attention in public as she did. And that was the last thing she wanted—more attention. But the challenge in her siblings’ eyes felt like a pebble in her shoe.

“You’re right,” said Olivia, smoothing her features and her pale yellow dress. “It would be *rude* not to.” With a pointed look to her brother, she walked to where Mr. Stone stood. He wore wire-framed eyeglasses and tracked her movements with a curious gaze under thick, powerful brows. Despite Mr. Everett Stone’s quiet appeal and striking good looks, her parents’ attempt at matchmaking hindered Olivia’s plans: Not only was she not enticed—and her mother knew it—but she’d thought she’d have more time to volunteer at the community center. Now she found herself at square one—entertaining in the family parlor under her mother’s watchful gaze, which fell on her now.

Olivia felt rather than saw Mr. Stone rustle beside her. His arm brushed hers, warm and solid. She caught a whiff of mint. It was a calm and

soothing scent. Despite her parents' relaxed demeanor, goose bumps rose on Olivia's arms. Nearly as soon as Mr. Lawrence's letter had arrived for her family, excusing himself for the rest of the summer for an emergency back home in London, Everett Stone had appeared at the place setting next to hers at the Davenport dinner table.

Olivia suspected her mother took her choice to stay in Chicago as a sign that she and the Alabama lawyer, Mr. DeWight, were through, as thoroughly as she and Mr. Lawrence were through. But to Olivia, Washington's train pulling away was not the end of their story. She didn't know what the future held for them but...she knew her day would come, and she hoped when it did, it would be with Washington DeWight.

She folded her arms against her chest now, seeing the way her parents studied her and her new suitor. The first thing she'd noticed that initial evening at dinner was how deliberately Mr. Stone held his knife and fork. She later realized that he did everything this way. He was not impulsive or animated. He was a lawyer, like Washington; unlike Washington, he was a lawyer for the carriage company and other Black small business owners. Worthy work. But compared to Mr. DeWight, *The complete opposite*, she thought.

She again pictured Washington, his disarming smile, smooth laugh, that Southern lilt that kept her and everyone entranced. Crowds had flocked to Samson House or the steps of the courthouse to hear him speak, and to stand at his side to demonstrate their allegiance in discontent. Olivia had been one of them. In the days after he'd left, she had been inundated with letters from other activists who'd stayed in the city rather than traveling with Mr. DeWight to Philadelphia, and then on to Washington, DC. They had asked the same question she did: *What's next?*

Now, just as she settled beside her mother, Mr. Stone offered his hand. "Would you like to dance, Miss Davenport?" She glanced at her parents, who did a poor job at looking engrossed in conversation.

"I'd like that." She tried to sound convincing as she took his warm hand awkwardly in hers. They joined the other couples, including Ruby and Mr. Barton. Mr. Stone put a hand on her back and drew her into the gentle

cloud of mint that enveloped him. His touch was light as he moved them smoothly over the uneven surface of the patio.

“Do you enjoy parties like this?”

“Yes,” said Olivia. “I know some find them frivolous, but I do enjoy them.” She followed Mr. Stone’s gaze, which traveled around the space and settled back on her parents, her mother laughing at something her father must have said. When their eyes met again, the corners of Mr. Stone’s perked up before focusing on where their hands met.

“This is my first at this level of”—he paused—“grandeur? It was kind of the Tremaines to invite me.” Out the corner of her eye, Olivia saw him nod, as if to himself. “I wouldn’t call it frivolous if it allows two people to find a moment of peace and happiness.” He chuckled. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say your mother blushed when your father kissed her hand earlier.”

Olivia couldn’t help but smile. She had observed more than a few such moments over the years. When they thought no one was watching, her parents were more affectionate. *Maybe they’re just trying to ensure I have the same?* she thought, though the idea didn’t ease her mind, not given her present company.

“I think it’s wonderful,” Mr. Stone said, “that you are surrounded by close friends and family.”

“I do count myself lucky.” Speaking of, John and Helen were nowhere to be seen—not that Olivia needed them to witness her “fun.”

Stop being so stiff, she chided herself. Olivia forced herself to relax to the music and follow Mr. Stone’s lead. He seamlessly transitioned them from the slower number to the faster-paced song that followed. He was lighter on his feet than she’d imagined. For a moment, she lost track of the people around them and the warm night air that made her dress cling to her back. She let her thoughts fade and enjoyed the rhythm. When her heel caught a gap in the brick patio, Olivia stumbled, her world tilted—and came to a sudden stop.

Mr. Stone held her firmly in midair. His right hand splayed across her ribs while his other encircled her waist from behind. Olivia tilted her head up to see his brow furrowed above the brim of his wire-frame eyeglasses.

Her lips parted slightly, his touch sending an unexpected jolt down her spine.

“Miss Davenport?” His grip was firm and steady. Over his shoulder, she saw her parents studying this interaction. “Are you all right?” he asked. He lifted her, too high. Her toes grazed the ground.

“Yes,” she said. “You may put me down.”

He released her quickly. “Forgive me,” he said. He withdrew until only their hands touched, his still warm and assuring. He cleared his throat. “Are you enjoying the celebration?”

She nodded. “I am very happy for Ruby.” Olivia felt her mind clear. She stood straighter and stiffer, glancing up at Mr. Stone, allowing him to tuck her hand into the crook of his arm and escort her to her parents. The mint and leather scent of him mixed with the vibrant scent of the centerpieces that floated on the summer breeze. Together they made a pleasant combination.

“I very much enjoyed our dance,” he said, turning to her. He still held her hand, nestled in the crook of his elbow. He looked at her steadily.

Olivia straightened and, somewhat abruptly, slid her hand away. “Yes, a lovely dance. Thank you, Mr. Stone.” She saw Ruby speaking to Agatha Leary and Bertha Wallace, plus an unfamiliar set—friends of Harrison’s, no doubt. “If you’ll excuse me,” she said, ignoring the disappointment that alit briefly on Mr. Stone’s face as she turned and made her way to the bride-to-be.

• • •

Pulling up the moonlit, tree-lined drive to Freeport always swayed Olivia into a sense of calm. The rest of the party had passed without incident, Olivia having decided to avoid the crowd after all, and make a temporary home of a settee under the starlight. Her feet ached from dancing. All she wanted now was to soak them in salts and fall into bed.

John’s automobile was parked at the bottom of the porch stairs. He and Helen had traveled home together, arriving well before Olivia and their

parents.

As the carriage rolled to a stop, Mr. Davenport shook his head. "I don't understand why he leaves that thing all over the place like an overgrown toy." He closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his proud nose. Then, bracing himself with his cane, he exited the carriage and extended his hand to his wife. Olivia descended quickly after them, and relaxed as she approached the grand staircase of Freeport Manor's wraparound porch and ornate entrance.

Home, at last.

"Olivia," her mother called from inside. "A word before you go to bed."

Unable to stand the throbbing in her toes, she kicked off her shoes, relishing the cool polished parquet beneath her feet, and followed her parents to the library.

"I think you should sit, dear."

"Is this about missing the charity luncheon? I promised my afternoon to Mrs. Woodard." A friend of the reverend, Mrs. Woodard organized many of the community events. She and her mother were members of some of the same social clubs, and both placed a good deal of importance on charitable work.

"It's not that," said Mrs. Davenport.

Dread tingled along Olivia's scalp. Her mother only called her "dear" when unpleasant news was on the horizon. Mr. Davenport walked to one of the high-backed chairs beside the empty fireplace. He held on to his knee, his other hand braced on his cane to lower himself to the seat. Olivia sank into the chair opposite. Her eyes found her mother, now standing at her father's side. They looked like a portrait.

Mr. Davenport cleared his throat. "We understand, Olivia, that Mr. Lawrence left quite an impression on you before he departed for London. He is an intelligent, sophisticated young man." Her father's words came out deliberately and...reluctantly, Olivia thought. She studied him. She had long since abandoned thoughts of Jacob Lawrence, of course, as her feelings for Mr. DeWight had grown. But her father didn't know any of that. Brief eye contact with her mother confirmed it. Mrs. Davenport had

not shared her daughter's wishes—nor her previous plan—to leave with Washington DeWight the night of the campaign party three weeks ago.

“With him out of the picture,” continued Mr. Davenport, “we would like you to refocus.”

“Daddy,” she said, shocked.

Mrs. Davenport took a step closer to Olivia. “Hope visits us in many forms. So does happiness. We couldn't help see the chemistry between you and Mr. Stone this evening. He has expressed an interest in getting to know you better. And,” she said, raising her voice slightly, silencing Olivia's protests, “we think this is the best match for you.”

“Match? But I—thought I would get to choose.” Hadn't she found her match in Mr. DeWight? Hadn't she told her mother that very thing? Hadn't this pairing been just a temporary show to keep up appearances?

“Olivia,” her mother continued, “Everett Stone is a very eligible bachelor, and after the broken engagement with Mr. Lawrence, we don't see”—here her mother gave her a pointed look—“another option. Mr. Stone will make a kind and caring husband.”

Olivia did. She saw another option. But he was in Philadelphia, en route to the nation's capital.

“No,” she said, shaking her head. Her vision was suddenly blurry. Her nose stung. She would not entertain the idea of another engagement, not with a person she didn't want.

“You must marry. Someone,” her father said.

“No,” Olivia said, a desperate ring to her voice.

“Be reasonable,” said her mother.

“I am *always* reasonable.” Olivia stood. She felt her fists shaking at her sides. She turned and, to her own astonishment, left the library without another word.

I said no. When have I ever said no? Olivia couldn't remember a time when she had so openly defied her parents.

She stumbled through the dimly lit halls, her feet taking her to her room, her mind elsewhere. She wasn't sure how much time passed. Vaguely, she remembered her siblings poking their heads through her cracked door,

brows furrowed, faces there, then retreating. At some point, she'd settled at her desk. Now with a trembling hand, she pulled a fresh sheet of paper from under Washington's letters in her desk. She stared at the blank sheet. The last thing she wanted was to make him worry. Or distract him from his work. From deep inside the desk, she retrieved her journal and used the silk ribbon to reveal a fresh page.

I cannot believe this is happening again.

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CHAPTER 3

Amy-Rose

The motorcar came to a violent halt at 127 and 129 West 53rd Street. Amy-Rose Shepherd readjusted the hat on her head as the driver stepped out to assist Mrs. Davis. Rising above them, the buildings of New York City's Tenderloin reminded her of home. These brownstones that made up Marshall Hotel beat at the center of business and culture in NYC, where Black and white folk mingled to enjoy music, drinks, and the exchange of ideas. Every street corner in the Tenderloin felt like Great Central Market, with crowds of people, motorcars, and carriages. Her mentor insisted *this* was where Amy-Rose would get the most support for her hair care business.

Since arriving in New York from Chicago, they had dined with sophisticated entrepreneurs while listening to Black musicians play soulfully to mixed crowds. She'd attended the theater. She'd walked the sun-dappled paths of Central Park. And she'd visited an array of vendors who could provide her the raw materials to create her product line. All of it brought her one step closer to her dreams.

Amy-Rose took the driver's hand now and exited the automobile. Heat rose from the pavement. She felt a line of perspiration slide down her back. Today she had to be in top form. It was her biggest chance yet to secure the capital she'd need to progress forward with her salon. She stared up at the building before her, picking at a loose thread near the wrist of her glove.

“My dear, relax.” Mrs. Davis placed her own gloved hand on Amy-Rose’s arm.

Amy-Rose offered her mentor a shaky smile. Mrs. Davis had been nothing but kind to her—generous beyond measure. In Chicago, the business-savvy widow had noticed Amy-Rose’s talent for styling hair, and had taken an interest in the young woman’s dream and drive to sell her hair care creations. Only a few weeks ago, Amy-Rose had traveled halfway across the country in luxury at her mentor’s side. Mrs. Maude Davis was one of the wealthiest Black women in Chicago. She’d been widowed three times, and had used whatever money that was left to her to make smart investments into the city’s South Side. Investments that proved fruitful. For their journey east, Mrs. Davis had bought out an entire train car for her and her staff, a feat Amy-Rose suspected required some bribing. Oh, but she did enjoy watching the country fly by from the window!

It had also given her more than enough time to think about what—and whom—she had left behind. She’d rushed out so quickly, she’d only time to write one letter. To John Davenport. There on the train, Amy-Rose had felt a sharp pinch in her chest thinking of him. They’d spent hours at Freeport talking about their futures, their dreams. She knew her feelings for John, ones she kept close, were reciprocated. She knew he loved her too. She didn’t need to open the parcel he’d sent or any of his letters to know that. But in the end, it hadn’t been enough.

She’d sat up straighter on the train then, remembering that John was not the only person who loved her. She’d written to Helen, to Olivia and Jessie and Mrs. Davenport, of course, once things had settled. Their letters in return had kept her grounded. They eased the feeling that she had run away from her problems rather than strode, dignified, into her future. *Can’t both be true?* She’d *had* to move on. She’d had to put some distance between her and the loss of the Chicago storefront she had worked so hard for, and her dreams of John Davenport at her side.

“Do not tell me you are thinking of that young man again.” Mrs. Davis frowned now from beneath her truly wonderfully extravagant hat. “We do not have time to wallow, Miss Shepherd. Look around you and drink this

in.” Mrs. Davis’s shoulders rose and fell with a deep, satisfied breath. “The time we are given is limited.”

She was right. Amy-Rose breathed deep and closed her eyes. When she exhaled, she’d returned to the present. The Black-owned hotel before them was only a few blocks from Mrs. Davis’s Manhattan apartment. It would not have done to walk, though. They’d had to arrive in style so as to impress possible investors. Amy-Rose had been outfitted in the latest fashions while living with her new benefactor in an opulent brownstone where *she* now had staff that waited on *her*! Today, the exaggerated shape of her jacket accentuated her waist and, when buttoned over the straight skirt, it made her feel polished and powerful.

“Miss Shepherd, are you getting cold feet?”

“Not at all,” Amy-Rose said, and meant it.

“Good,” said Mrs. Davis. “We have people to meet and product to sell.” She picked up her skirt with her free hand and gestured to the hotel with her ivory-laced parasol. The same color of her dress and hat, the pale shade made Mrs. Davis appear all the more genteel. Even her slight misstep forward appeared graceful. *People forget, delicate flowers have thorns*, she’d told Amy-Rose over tea one afternoon. *And roses can draw blood*.

Amy-Rose puffed up her chest and followed her patroness.

Two stoic men, dressed in black livery despite the oppressive heat, opened the doors to the hotel’s paneled foyer. It was like walking into a dream. Her heels clacked against the polished marble. White columns stretched up to the high ceiling. Large oil paintings in meticulously carved wood frames hung below the soft white light of golden sconces. Music wafted from down the hall, and one of Mrs. Davis’s maids stepped on her heel. “Ouch!” Amy-Rose hadn’t realized she’d stopped walking, causing the girl to crash into her.

“Apologies, miss,” said the maid, who looked no older than Amy-Rose herself, maybe eighteen or nineteen. The young woman’s hair was braided away from her face, revealing a clear, slightly perspiring terra-cotta complexion, and secured in a bun at the nape of her neck. In her left hand, she gripped the handle of the small cart of Amy-Rose’s hair products.

“It’s all right, Sandra.” Amy-Rose pulled on the strings of her handbag, fighting the urge to take the cart herself and send the girl down the street for a cool drink. But now the young woman’s eyes were bright, focused on something over Amy-Rose’s shoulder.

A group of Black women, dressed in the year’s most popular silhouettes, had just strolled past them. Their hair was neatly pressed and swept up. Loose, manipulated curls framed their faces. They walked with a speed Amy-Rose had come to associate with New Yorkers. The shortened hemlines of their skirts swayed well above their glossy brown ankles. Amy-Rose admired them for a moment.

Then she stood straighter. With her chin up, she made eye contact with each person who looked her way as she walked to the exhibition hall. Amy-Rose refused to let anyone, or anything, prevent her from making the best of this opportunity. She belonged here. The puffy sleeves that hindered her from completing menial tasks proved it.

“Miss, should I go on ahead and prepare your table?”

“No!” Amy-Rose’s voice escaped, much louder than she intended. “No,” she repeated, more ladylike. “Thank you, Sandra, but I’d like to do it myself.”

Excitement thrummed through her veins. Amy-Rose grew highly aware of her surroundings. Women from all over the city and as far as New Haven, Connecticut, had gathered in the ballroom of the hotel to view the wares of several female business owners. Handmade leather goods were displayed alongside hats and elaborate fascinators. The scents of cosmetic creams and ointments mixed with the fruity tang of jarred jams and citrusy perfumes. Rainbows of silk added a splash of color under the warm gaslight chandeliers above.

Beyond the fabric vendors were the pastry chefs. Cakes and truffles arranged on tiered platters made Amy-Rose’s mouth water. As did the breads that sat on beds of parchment. The women on either side of Amy-Rose’s own space displayed grass baskets and beaded necklaces. It was time for her to show her own wares.

Across the crisp white linen of the table, Amy-Rose staged the jars she had stayed up every night preparing. She had pored over the notes in her book and tried new extracts from the imported fruits Mrs. Davis had been able to procure. The most difficult to obtain had been the hibiscus leaves her mother had used in Amy-Rose's hair when she was a child in Saint Lucia. The smell always brought memories of her mother closer—getting her hair washed over the kitchen sink, her mother's strong hands massaging her scalp with a roughness that made her wince but would be so welcome again if only it were possible. Memories like this fueled Amy-Rose. She would succeed. And now she had the hibiscus spread to prove it.

"My, do these really work?" A woman about Mrs. Davenport's age sidled up to the table with a gaggle of women behind her. She lifted a jar of pressing cream and eyed it suspiciously. Her gaze seared Amy-Rose. "This gonna make my hair look like yours?" The women behind her laughed. The ladies of New York's influential Black society had made their way through the banquet hall. While setting up, Amy-Rose had tracked their progress through the room, buying up wares and sending their parcels ahead with the staff. They were the wives of prominent leaders, the growing middle and upper classes and entertainers Amy-Rose hoped to persuade to support her. And thanks to the strings Mrs. Davis had pulled, her booth was set in a prime location with heavy foot traffic.

Now Amy-Rose faced their scrutiny. She resisted the urge to touch her own brown curls, which hung down the middle of her back, secured with a tortoiseshell barrette. Her mixed heritage produced a unique texture that she could not bottle, and it sometimes prompted equally unpredictable reactions from strangers. Her freckled, medium complexion and hazel eyes had made her stand out in Freeport, but here, as in downtown Chicago, she marveled at the diversity around her.

"What about it, miss? This gonna make my hair like yours?"

Amy-Rose smiled her best smile, the way she'd seen Olivia do in the shops downtown, or when Amy-Rose herself had walked to Binga Bank to deposit her savings for her now lost storefront. "It won't," she said honestly.

“This is exclusively made to protect the hair before applying a hot comb. It reduces damage to the strands from the heat.”

The woman huffed. She placed the jar back on the table and took a step back.

“But,” Amy-Rose said, “if I were to style your hair, I would use...” She let her voice trail off as she considered her spread of products.

“And what makes you think you can *style* my hair?” The other woman cut in.

“Ma’am, I am a professional.” Amy-Rose knew the woman meant to challenge her. She felt rather than saw the other women follow their captain’s lead, now scrutinizing Amy-Rose’s wares. “This,” she finished. She presented the woman with a leave-in oil. “This product will hydrate your natural texture. Combs will glide through your strands and make styling much easier. Over time, you’ll see that your hair will be healthier and shinier.”

“Are you saying my hair looks brittle?”

Amy-Rose blushed. The woman fisted her hands on her hips, a haughty tilt to her brow. Amy-Rose knew that her next decision would make or break her. The other women hung on their leader’s every word. They would look to her before making any purchase. This woman’s opinion mattered—and it was just what she needed to get more people on board. “I’m suggesting,” Amy-Rose said, “that you take great pride in your hair. It’s your crown, and you would have it be as polished as possible.”

Then she held her breath. *Did I go too far?*

The woman threw a meaningful look over her shoulder to her friends. When she turned back, Amy-Rose thought she would faint from the anticipation.

“I’ll take three.”

Amy-Rose quietly exhaled. “Of course.”

After that, women flocked to her table. They peppered her with questions and requests for advice. She chatted with other vendors. Each sale was confirmation she had what it took to get this business off the ground.

She thought of her mother, the ache of her loss, soothed by the promise of all she was on her way toward achieving.

By the end of the trade show, Amy-Rose's feet were so swollen, she thought they might burst out of her shoes. And she felt wonderful. The table was empty except for a few sample jars, and she had pages and pages of orders. Orders! She could hardly believe it. She stood taller and smiled to herself, feeling a flutter in her chest. This was what she had dreamed of. *John would be happy for me.* Amy-Rose was caught off guard whenever thoughts of John slipped into her mind. She wanted to tell him her good news, to have him by her side in this moment.

No, she reminded herself. *This moment is yours. You worked hard for this.* She straightened and focused on Sandra taking another order. A whistle came from over her shoulder.

Amy-Rose turned and found a young man, maybe a year or two older than she was, rubbing his chin. He picked up a sample jar of a deep conditioner and smelled the contents. It was one of her favorites. Figs and aloe.

"You are going to be a very rich woman," he said. He placed the jar back on the table and hooked a thumb in his belt.

"Excuse me?"

"I watched you. You're a natural. Clear-voiced. Passionate. And you have an in-depth knowledge of the product."

"I made them myself. They're my recipes." Amy-Rose's smile faded at the way his face changed. "What? You don't believe me?"

"Oh no, I believe you. It's just," he said, and cleared his throat, "these old birds will clean you out if you're making each of these yourself. Unless you have a small outfit in an attic somewhere?"

Amy-Rose thought of her attic room at Freeport Manor, the room she once shared with her mother. It was miles away. Now she worked out of the study and kitchen in Mrs. Davis's brownstone. But it was just until she was established. She hoped one day to need a bigger facility. "I don't, yet, but I will have what I need."

His lip twitched and he tipped his hat to her. "I'm sure you will."

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CHAPTER 4

Helen

A family meeting.

The last time one of these was called at Freeport, their parents had announced the plans for Olivia's *big* party, her official introduction into society last year.

Her own day was one Helen Marie Davenport had been dreading all year.

All her *life*.

Helen had thought that, what with Olivia's failed attempt to find a husband this or last spring, her older sister would still be the focus of her parents' attention, and Helen's own debut would be postponed. She remembered Olivia's debut year. There were endless parties and luncheons and picnics. Smiling and dancing. Corsets and boots that pinched toes. *Is that what's in store for me?*

But with her eighteenth birthday rapidly approaching, it was only a matter of time. And now Olivia, who was rarely late, was holding up the proceedings in the morning room.

Helen sat on the pale brocade couch beside John, who stared at the toe of his polished shoe. When she had first come downstairs, she hadn't expected to see him and her father—most days, John and Mr. Davenport left early for the company offices downtown.

Opposite Helen and her brother, her parents sat in twin wingback chairs and were caught up in quiet conversation. Helen had prepared the tea and arranged the service just so. It was her end of the bargain in exchange for getting to spend her afternoon reading up on the stock cars used in automobile racing.

Mrs. Milford, her etiquette tutor, sat in a chair set back from the rest, where she could observe. Her dark hair, streaked with gray, was secured tightly at the nape of her neck, which made her face appear long. Her black dress was a drop of ink in the Davenports' bright morning room. Helen was about to yell for her sister—Mrs. Milford or her parents would just have to understand—when the door swung open and Olivia, quite uncharacteristically, burst through.

“Finally,” said John, taking the words from Helen’s own mouth. Sophie, their mother’s terrier, barked from her bed in the corner.

Olivia apologized and sat quickly. She swallowed hard and brushed the hair that had escaped from her hat away from her face while pulling loose the ribbon that secured it. Helen noticed how, even when rushed and flustered, her sister’s movements were graceful. Olivia removed the hat in one fluid motion.

Helen closed the book she held on the gauzy green pillow she’d made of her skirts and eyed her sister. “What were you up to?”

“A union meeting,” she whispered. “The garment workers are on strike. And I’m only a few minutes late.” Olivia looked from Helen to their brother, as if for confirmation of this fact. John and Olivia took after their mother in looks, with their dark, almond-shaped eyes, but John had a dimple to die for, according to the many young ladies who nearly fainted in his wake. Now he raised his eyebrows at Olivia. She shrugged, her expression pinched.

The sudden arrival of Mr. Stone gave Helen pause. He, John, and her father had spent hours in the study recently and in the offices downtown, discussing the future of the business. To hear John tell it, all Mr. Stone did was stand silently as John tried to convince their father of the merits of a horseless carriage option to bring the company into the new century.

So, this was not about a party.

Helen broke the silence. "She's here now. Tell us."

Mr. Davenport cleared his throat, sparing Mr. Stone a quick glance. The look he gave John was longer, heavier.

"I will be traveling abroad," he said finally. He adjusted his cane in front of him. The weight of his slouch pushed his shoulders up to his ears.

Helen wasn't sure she heard correctly. Her father never traveled. He said he'd done enough as a young man, though they knew he used the word *travel* to shelter them from the details of his harrowing journey to safety. William Davenport had escaped enslavement as a teen, using his skills as a blacksmith to make a name for himself. His brother, still lost to him, had caused the distraction that ensured his safety. Mr. Davenport had waited as long as he dared before traveling north, as far as he could. With a young woman from Boston, born free but poor, he had built a business that changed their lives and provided for their family, presumably for generations to come.

The Davenport children stared at their parents, who rarely left the county, much less the state. Were they all taking a trip?

"Where?" John leaned forward in his seat.

"London."

Helen placed the book on the armrest and stood. "*London? As in England?*" she and Olivia said together.

"Yes." Her father looked amused. "I have been invited to attend a conference for Negro businessmen and entrepreneurs abroad." He cleared his throat. Helen watched Olivia's eyes slide to their mother, who looked at William Davenport with such pride and tenderness and something she couldn't quite describe. Her father lifted a hand from his cane and patted his wife's hands where they held his elbow.

"That's terrific news," said Olivia.

Yes, the best news. They won't be able to throw me a party if we're abroad! And I'll be able to see foreign automobiles. Helen couldn't believe her luck.

“Marvelous!” She hopped up and threw her arms around her father’s neck. “Daddy, that’s great!”

She took her seat again and looked at John, now sitting straight-backed. His face had a guarded expression. Some of her excitement abated.

John stood and offered his hand. “Congratulations, sir,” he said. His smile was restrained. With Amy-Rose’s sudden departure, John had become withdrawn and serious, overly formal with their parents, and especially with their father. John’s affections for Amy-Rose had been...*not* well-received by their father, and her absence seemed to strengthen John’s resolve to excel in business. Helen knew Amy-Rose was never far from his mind, though. His actions, his letters to her, his diligence in forwarding her post—especially the mysterious letter for Amy-Rose from her family in Georgia—all were proof. But he hadn’t said a word about any of it to Helen or their sister in weeks, and he’d clammed up when she’d asked. Lately, he seemed more moody than ever.

Perhaps London, and some distance from Chicago, would do him good.

Jacob Lawrence was in London. The thought was sudden. It filled Helen, and left a sour taste in her mouth. *Surely, it’s a large enough city.* Helen thought about the Jacob Lawrence who had made her laugh, who’d seemed to not only accept her eccentric interests but to love her all the more for them. She had begun to hope for the future he symbolized. Until, that is, he had tossed pebbles at the window, drew her outside, and confessed to lying to her and her entire family. He wasn’t who he had seemed to be. Now she questioned every exchange they’d ever had. How much did her family’s wealth play into his feelings for her? Olivia knew everything. And John. But not their parents. The elation she felt for her father’s news dimmed even more.

But when Helen looked back at her father, she saw the mist in his eyes. She saw the pride in himself and the hard work he and their mother had done. It was being acknowledged with this invitation abroad, and that should be celebrated. Pride had been encouraged in the Davenport household. As had empathy. The Davenport children were not meant to feel

small or less than, and they should always lend a hand where needed. Progress was not achieved alone.

Mrs. Davenport leaned into her husband now as Helen and her siblings gathered around, peppering them with questions. Helen pushed her apprehension about Jacob Lawrence away. She hadn't ever been interested in love before he came around. She could be like that again.

Everett Stone remained standing silently by the door, shifting his weight occasionally from one foot to the other. He exchanged a look with John she could not decipher. John noticed her watching, a crease between his brows.

Mr. Davenport patted his wife's hand again, a small smile on his face. "I'll be leaving in a week's time."

Helen whipped her head to him. Olivia too.

"Do you mean to go without us?" Olivia turned to their mother, who nodded. "Even without you?"

Helen felt her heart plunge.

"It's only for a few weeks," said Mr. Davenport.

"You can't be serious," Helen said, gathering her voice, unsure if this plummeting feeling was due to being far from her father, as far as ever from Jacob Lawrence, missing out on London, or not getting to see foreign cars. "We don't get to go anywhere fun!" she cried, deciding to keep it simple. "Oh, why can't you take us with you?"

"Helen," their mother said. "It will be a great honor and opportunity for your father."

Emmeline Davenport turned to her husband and squeezed his arm, smiling. "He will be representing Davenport Carriage Company. All your father's—"

"Emmie."

Mrs. Davenport's dimple deepened.. "All *our* hard work will be recognized," she said. "There is plenty for you both to do here." Their mother turned her attention to Helen and her siblings.

"Sounds like an excuse to ditch us," Helen grumbled.

Olivia cut her a look.

Helen shrank into her seat, a mutinous twist to her mouth. *But oh...* A new thought began taking shape.

Mrs. Davenport looked again at Olivia, who was now rolling up the edges of her hat. “Your father’s attendance at this conference will benefit many people and influence many more.” There seemed something pointed in this comment, Helen thought.

“And who will manage the business while you’re away?” John said now, looking at their father intently. Her brother’s passion for the business could melt the paint off a carriage—or off a car, more like, if John had his way. It rivaled only Helen’s own. And he had asked the *most* important question—one that locked in with Helen’s new idea like a wrench to a bolt. She looked to her father.

“You will lead in my absence,” he said to John. “Mr. Stone,” he said, gesturing to the young man, “as you know, handles our contracts at his uncle’s firm. He’ll be able to assist you in whatever you might need concerning our finances and legal obligations. Our carriages set the standard of luxury—”

“Daddy, it’s not like John will undo that in a week or two,” Helen said.

John narrowed his eyes at his sister.

Mr. Davenport started again. “Our carriages set the standard of luxury, and the board and I will resume talks about automobiles on my return.”

John and Helen exchanged a quick look. She’d seen the paperwork that showed Davenport buggy sales were declining. Fast. John had shown them to her himself. Her wheels were spinning now, churning out the possibilities of what this trip—her father’s absence—could mean.

“I would only be continuing in my role as adviser.” Mr. Stone held his hands up, his eyes looking at each of the young Davenports before settling on Olivia.

John sat back in his seat, a dazed look on his face.

“And, Helen,” Emmeline Davenport said, interrupting her daughter’s thoughts, “you have your lessons with Mrs. Milford. And there is a grand ball to plan.”

“What?!” Helen stood. John gripped her wrist and shook his head once. *Not now*, his eyes said. She pulled her hand free and closed her mouth, sitting. “Sorry.” She crossed her legs at her ankles and folded her hands in her lap. She and Mrs. Milford had found a way to balance her interests with her parents’ expectations, she reminded herself. There was no reason to overreact.

Yet.

Demure was not a word used to describe Helen Davenport, but she was going to do a great imitation of it just now. “What about Olivia?” she asked.

“What *about* me?” Her sister stared at her.

“Couldn’t we spend a little more time trying to find someone for *her* to marry first?”

Olivia gasped. Helen ignored her—and the twinge of guilt she felt at her own remark.

“There’s no need to wait for Olivia,” said Mrs. Davenport. “You can at least enjoy meeting the young men of your set, Helen.”

“I’ve already met them,” Helen said. They had come through their door and sat at their table hoping to capture *Olivia*’s heart.

But it was no use. Her mother had that look in her eye. Helen was trapped. The thought of having to smile and dance for anyone and everyone felt unbearable. The one person with whom she could have imagined it, enjoyed it even—well, look how that had ended. It took everything Helen had now to remain calm. To not let her secret heartbreak show.

The rest of the family meeting passed in a fog. Helen barely registered the plans that were being made around her. Instead, she tried to focus on the fact that her father would be gone and John would be in charge. And with her brother making decisions, people like Malcolm, the mechanic always trying to edge Helen out of the garage, would have no way to prevent her from taking her rightful place.

All she and John had to do was come up with a plan to *prove* to their father, once and for all, that she was just as capable of supporting the family business as her brother.

And so, after the meeting, Helen stopped in the kitchen just long enough to grab a crêpe from the counter and a word with her brother. She was hot under her collar.

“No need to get worked up.” John had already taken off his jacket and vest. His tie was a discarded lump on the table.

“I don’t understand how you *aren’t*,” she said around a mouthful of pastry.

“Helen—”

“No, you’re getting your chance to run the business, only weeks after Daddy gave you that ultimatum.” She swallowed her bite. “Maybe he’s giving you an opening—” Helen paused when she saw her brother’s expression. It was her father’s words that had pushed her friend away. That, and Amy-Rose’s belief that a relationship between her and John would hinder them both from achieving their dreams. “Maybe this is your chance to prove yourself,” she finished.

John looked away. Helen wondered if she pushed too far. When he spoke, his voice was firm. “I can’t think about that right now.”

Helen pressed her lips together. “Then what *can* you think about?”

“This is a perfect opportunity to develop our own engine,” said John.

Helen’s eyes snapped wide. “This is the perfect opportunity to roll out our own automobile,” she said, grabbing another crêpe from the plate. She eyed him. “I think we should contact Ransom Swift.”

John paused, his own pastry inches from his mouth. “Swift? To do what?”

“Race.” Helen took a bite and reached for the periodicals brought in from their father’s study once he was done. She shuffled through the magazines and pulled out the *Chicago Record-Herald*. Baseball box scores. Negro League updates. Then there it was—the photograph of a young Black man standing on the hood of a stock car. She handed the newspaper to John. “We need someone to be the face of the company. It’s not going to be Daddy and it can’t be me.”

“I didn’t know Swift was back on the tracks.” John lifted the paper and opened it with a snap. “Now, *that* is a man who knows his way around a

car.” He began to read the article she had all but memorized already. “Wait, can’t *I* be the face of the company?” He grinned, and Helen gave him a pointed look.

“You,” she said, “have a hard time making it through a party. Swift is used to the spotlight, getting his picture taken, and won’t dodge the mamas and their marriageable daughters. Also, he’s a famous race car driver.” She tapped the image of Ransom Swift. “That’s who we need.”

“Helen,” said John a moment later, exasperated. Helen grunted and took a step back, having migrated close enough to read alongside him. He finished and set down the paper, placing his hand over it. “Hiring a race car driver for an automobile that doesn’t exist yet would be a waste of time and resources.”

“But—”

“This is our moment to prove we’re capable, responsible.” He looked at her. “We can’t yank on the reins as soon as they’re handed to us.”

“Oh, can’t you be reasonable! I’m thinking about how we keep us in the driver’s seat.”

“And the surest way to do that is to get Daddy and the board to agree that our idea is the best one.” John frowned at the text on the page. “Convincing Daddy will be a unique challenge.”

He picked up the paper again. Helen let him read as long as she could. “Ransom Swift can’t be his real name, can it?” she said.

John shrugged. “If it isn’t, it’s quite the stage name.” He cleared his throat and read aloud, “ ‘A quickly rising star, Ransom Swift has reemerged on the racing scene after a disgraceful exit from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway last May, where the Chevrolet brothers won. Swift’s next race date has not been announced, but the prize money offered for the American Grand Prize Race in Savannah, Georgia, would be the one to watch.’ ”

The article went on to describe the young man’s rise to fame and success, his enormous flameout due to being excluded from the Vanderbilt Cup Race, and his reemergence now, primed for a comeback. Despite the grainy newsprint, Swift’s smile jumped from the page. A self-made man

with a defeat in his past, a resurgence in the works, and a passion for fine vehicles and hard work.

If she and John were to take the Davenport Carriage Company into the age of the automobile, Ransom Swift could be the key.

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CHAPTER 5

Ruby

Tonight was the night.

The ballroom of The Blackstone was filled to bursting. The columns and intricate molding of the recently built hotel were inspired by classical designs and made Ruby feel like she had been transported back in time. The gold leaf in the ceiling glowed bright, and the chandeliers bathed the ballroom in radiant warmth. Red, white, and blue banners decorated the small stage built the night before. Framed posters featuring her father's face reclined in their shoulder-height easels—the same images that had been circulating in the papers and had hung in store windows for months. They seemed to watch her every gesture now as she made her way about the room, thanking her father's supporters for their donations or hard work.

Gathered around high-top tables, Chicago's elite and a few of the city's working-class leaders drank signature cocktails and regaled each other with stories of Mr. Tremaine's goodwill as they awaited the election results.

"He stands with the men in the railroad union."

"He backs Black-owned businesses."

"I heard he and Dr. Dan are looking to increase funding for Provident Hospital."

Ruby looked to where Dr. Daniel Hale Williams stood with the older gentlemen. As one of the first doctors to perform open-heart surgery successfully, he inspired many other aspiring Black doctors and nurses to

apply for Provident's training program, it was true. His endorsement was highly sought after. Ruby smiled. The doctor's continued support was a good sign.

Their voices grew as the night rolled on. The air buzzed with alcohol and anticipation.

Ruby grinned. *I didn't know Papa could throw such a party!* She was happy to see Arthur and Anna Barton advance through the room with a charming ease, though she noticed Harrison's younger sister kept her distance from Helen. She was not surprised to spot Edgar "Just Carter" Carter and his sister, Odette, mingling with some of the younger guests. The sibling pair seemed to be everywhere Ruby turned since their appearance at her engagement party the other week. Odette had been singled out by Mrs. Johnson, a known gossip, as a new face. Now the younger Carter escorted the influential matron from the refreshments table back to her seat, speaking with their heads close together, save for the laughs they exchanged. Odette appeared as attentive as her brother was forward. The young people in Ruby's set welcomed them with enthusiasm—Odette, especially. Her charm was magnetic.

Tonight, Ruby's father would discover the strength of his own magnetism. He'd know the results of this election. His work, his family's sacrifice—they would see if it was all worth it.

Ruby held her namesake necklace and bent her head toward Harrison. "I can't wait for this all to be over and for things to return to normal."

"Normal?" Harrison rubbed small circles on her back. "Your father—your family—may become more famous than you can imagine. The first Black mayor of Chicago." He shook his head. "This could be the beginning of a *new* normal, but not the old one."

Ruby lifted her chin. Harrison was right. Her father could make history. He could make the changes they all wanted for their city. Her family would be well-respected. People would think twice before whispering about their dwindled finances, their diminished home. It wouldn't matter whom she chose to marry, or how she spent her time. She wouldn't need to endure the curious glances thrown at her even as people sung her father's praises.

She smoothed the front of her lavender dress. The bodice hugged her curves, and the pleats and ruffles added a whimsical touch that she rarely indulged. Yes, the silhouette turned heads, but the overall look was wholesome and endearing and everything a mayor's daughter should be. Her hair was smoothed down and pinned behind her ears. The curls released from the rollers that afternoon were glossy and soft. Margaret, the maid she and her mother shared, was so excited about tonight's events that she'd made a rose-shaped barrette from the remnant fabric of the dress—but only after grumbling over Ruby's rough sketches, her vision for the final garment. One could never tell that Ruby's whole outfit was repurposed from clothing she already owned.

"You're right," Ruby said now. "A *new* normal." She held Harrison's arm. For a moment, it felt like all eyes were on them. Then her father's campaign team was on to the next group. They flitted about the room like a swarm of birds. One gentleman ran back and forth from the courthouse, where ballots were being tallied, to provide updates. Her mother entertained the wives, sharing their family's calling for service.

She saw Olivia deep in conversation with an older woman—Mrs. Woodard, Ruby thought—and one of the maids who worked at Freeport. Hetty. Olivia appeared excited, despite her controlled manners. Ruby smiled to see her friend happy and in her element.

"We'll need to make time to do publicity with my parents every so often," Ruby continued.

Harrison slipped his arm around her waist and held her close. The tension in her back eased. "I expect as much," he said. "You know I admire what your father is trying to do. So many need a voice, a champion."

Ruby wished her parents could look past their snap judgments of Harrison, their prejudice at his mixed heritage, and see this side of him. The part of him that was wonder and regard and sensitive observation. He made her feel cherished and wanted in a way that caused the confidence she wore to be less of a shield and more a representation of her true self.

That is, until the stares coming her way took on a sharper glint. A razor's edge. The whispers, their meaning just out of reach, seemed to stick

her like pins. What had been curious looks now felt barbed.

“What’s going on?” Harrison frowned. His own confusion unsettled her, and she thought to look for her father.

Just as she did, Mr. Tremaine stood abruptly. The chair behind him fell back with a crack that drew gasps. He hastily buttoned his suit jacket closed as someone righted the chair. Ruby gripped Harrison’s arm tightly. Dread curled its fingers around her. “Something’s wrong,” she said.

Mr. Tremaine and the gentlemen around him stalked off to a private room to the side of the ballroom.

“Where is my mother?”

Harrison turned as Ruby searched the faces around them. She couldn’t find Mrs. Tremaine. Had the band started playing louder? The notes bounced off the walls and pressed against her. She flinched when the symbols crashed.

“Ruby.” Mrs. Tremaine appeared at her side and looped her arm through her daughter’s. “Come with me.” Ruby sighed with relief. She grabbed Harrison’s hand before her mother could separate them with a look or a word.

They followed her mother into the smaller room. Ruby hoped for good news—hoped her instincts had been wrong.

Inside, her father sat against a desk. He blotted his face with his silk handkerchief. He was flushed. The tie at his neck loose. Men milled around him like sharks around a wounded whale.

“What’s happened?” her mother asked.

Ruby’s throat was too dry to speak. She swallowed hard.

The men turned slowly toward the youngest among them—a court clerk, the one tasked with relaying updates from the courthouse where the ballots were counted. He coughed, wringing his hat in his hands.

Mrs. Tremaine dropped Ruby’s arm and placed her hands on her hips, which flared gorgeously in the dark blue dress she’d chosen to ensure she looked formidable. She stared down the young man like he was a wayward child. “I’d prefer not to ask twice,” she said.

The young man with the hat stood his ground. “I’m afraid it’s the worst news.” He glanced back at Mr. Tremaine, his brow furrowing. “Mr. Tremaine has lost.”

Lost?

The word sounded foreign. The tightness in Ruby’s chest returned. She wasn’t sure if she should run to her father or demand a recount. Surely this young man was mistaken. Her mother passed her in a rustle of tulle. Mrs. Tremaine placed a hand on her husband’s shoulder and pressed her forehead to his. They exchanged words in a hushed tone, and pulled apart after a moment of uncomfortable silence, their faces tense.

Mr. Tremaine asked, “Do we know why?”

The men exchanged glances. They looked even more uneasy.

“Well, out with it!” her father shouted. Ruby had rarely heard him raise his voice. Even within the last year when the stress of the campaign had stretched his nerves thin and drained the wealth he’d worked so hard to accumulate. He didn’t even shout last week when the family lawyer came through to have their assets evaluated and auctioned off so they could keep their house. The whole thing was humiliating, despite his admirable ambitions and desire to help Black progress. Ruby nearly forgot herself in the journey. It had taken everything in her to stand up to her parents and choose the man who now stood beside her.

Again, it was the young gentleman who spoke first. He cleared his throat and said, “There are a few factors. Some cite your vocal support of Black initiatives as going too far and doubt your ability to appeal to the voters of the city at large.” *Meaning white voters*, Ruby thought. “But there has also been talk. Rumors—unfounded, of course—that the virtuous Miss Tremaine and respectful Mr. Barton have been”—he cleared his throat—“intimate.”

Ruby gasped and felt Harrison stiffen at her side.

“Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine, I assure you, we have been more than proper.” Harrison, poised but with an edge of panic, licked his lips, making Ruby think of how they felt pressed against hers. But surely, that—a kiss—wasn’t enough to warrant such terrible gossip.

“It isn’t true,” she said. “Papa, Mother, you must know. This is ridiculous.”

The young man rubbed his jaw. Slowly, anger seeped into the features of the men in front of her, forcing her to step away from her parents. She knew she hadn’t been the best, most obedient daughter. But she would never commit such a transgression as this.

“If it’s not with Mr. Barton,” said her father, “then with whom?”

“With no one!” Ruby’s skin burned as if her blood boiled beneath her skin. How could her own father suggest that she would not only be unfaithful to her fiancé but sabotage the campaign? After all the misery she’d endured, she’d wanted nothing but for him to win, and they’d finally be one step closer to the life and family she knew and missed.

But before Harrison, there was John, she thought.

Mr. Tremaine’s eyes narrowed at what Ruby knew was guilt in her expression. Her father paced to the wall and back. “Everybody, out!”

The men quickly scattered from the room. Ruby started to back away too when he pointed at her. “Not you.”

“Papa—”

“Mr. Tremaine,” Harrison started.

“Mr. Barton, I’d like to speak with my daughter alone.”

Harrison kept his gaze leveled at Mr. Tremaine. “If it’s all the same to you, sir, I’d like to stay.”

Ruby stilled. Her father looked hard at Harrison, and if she didn’t know better, she’d say there was a shift in his expression. Ruby pressed her shoulder to Harrison’s. “Papa?”

Her father cut his gaze to hers. “We have let your behavior go unchecked for far too long.” Mr. Tremaine vibrated with rage, the moment of tacit acknowledgment over—this is what he really thought of her. He loomed closer. “These flirtations are not harmless fun. You stole a dress from a department store! And left your mother to answer for your recklessness and suffer the shame in your absence. Only my good name saved you from jail.” He tugged on the lapels of his jacket. His chest heaved beneath it. He stood less than a foot from them now. Behind him,

her mother stood quietly, listening. In that moment, Ruby could see what her father thought a bride and wife should be, what he thought *she* should be: obedient, dutiful, and in the background.

Ruby silenced Harrison with her eyes. He had begun to shift as if about to confront her father. It would only make things worse.

Outside the door, the party went on, the guests still unaware of the election results. The crowd laughed and danced to music that spilled into the streets. This was meant to be a celebration. Now all Ruby could think of was the mess she *hadn't*, for a change, created, though everyone seemed sure she had.

CHAPTER 6

Olivia

The floorboards creaked as Olivia paced from one end of the empty parlor room to the other. Below, the basement of Samson House was a flurry of activity. Voices and applause filtered through the gaps in the pine and rumbled up the stairs. The only thing louder was the clacking of her heels as she tried to burn off her nervous energy.

“Oh, stop!” she said to herself aloud. *You are a Davenport—comport yourself.* Olivia thought of the countless times she’d watched her mother address a group of women at a Phyllis Wheatley Club lunch—poised and capable, Mrs. Davenport rallied well-to-do Black ladies in support of young Black women and to promote books written by prominent Black voices. *This is no different.* With a shake of her skirt, she nodded to the gentleman who stood watch at the top of the stairs and, at last, made her way down. In the cramped basement auditorium, a crowd—mostly women of varying shades and ages—applauded the latest speaker now leaving the stage.

Olivia stood on the tips of her toes to see over the mass packed into Samson House’s small space. Even more had arrived since she’d slipped upstairs for a breath. Young ladies from the garment factories, domestic workers, restaurant servers—all were speaking at once. The few male attendees stood at the fringe, watching and listening. After the union leaders had taken the stage, encouraging the young women to refuse to compromise, Mrs. Woodard had stressed to the crowd that “the only way

factory conditions will change is if we women change them! And to do that, we must have the vote!” Her words were a challenge—a dare that had set the room ablaze with shouts and clapping. The young ladies reminded Olivia of her sister and Amy-Rose, who dared to forge new paths, of herself and Hetty, fierce and strong-willed.

“Mrs. Woodard,” said Olivia, joining the older woman and Hetty where they stood near the stage. “This is a wonderful turnout. How did you get so many people here?” Olivia’s heart hammered away as she again took in the many faces in the crowd.

“I didn’t. Most of these girls have been working at Hart Schaffner Marx for scraps since they were twelve years old. They got a lot of free time now, if you know what I mean,” the older woman said. “They are leading the charge.” An expression of pride spread over her features. “Like you, I’m just here to help.”

Olivia nodded. She’d read all about the cramped, sometimes dangerous spaces where women worked in the garment district. She knew one was Hart Schaffner Marx, who made suits and accessories for men—and she knew the high demand for the goods they produced.

“Again, my thanks, Miss Davenport,” Mrs. Woodard said, “for attending my dinner party last week. I know the ladies in your circle felt more comfortable opening up those pocketbooks with you there.” There was a gleam in Mrs. Woodard’s eye.

“It was absolutely my pleasure.” Olivia looked out at the women, some only girls, as Mrs. Woodard had said. The factory conditions and pay were more than reason for the workers to strike. Her worry over Washington’s absence and her parents’ meddling shrank in comparison. Even her anxiety about the speech she would give tonight faded. Olivia knew more free time for these young women meant less coin in their purses and fewer meals on their tables. She had no experience of that—no memory of a time when the carriage company was new, nor of the sacrifices it took to build it into the success that had fed and clothed them, given them Freeport, and that, now, had garnered her father international recognition.

“You look a bit peaked,” said Mrs. Woodard.

“Just...glad, but worried for these women.” Olivia turned to smile at her mentor, though the pressure in her chest had increased, a new doubt slotting in. *Why would anyone listen to me? They have everything to lose. I have nothing.* Nothing that could not be repaired with her parents’ money or action. She stole a glance at the stairs. It was far too late to change her mind and leave.

Mrs. Woodard pursed her lips. Olivia saw the urge to inquire flit across the woman’s features. She sighed, relieved, when Mrs. Woodard turned instead to bring Hetty into the conversation. “It hasn’t been this crowded since the young people came to hear Washington DeWight speak, urging action and sharing hard truths.” She sighed. “My cousin just returned from Tennessee. They’ve got two of everything down there, one for Black folk and one for white.” Mrs. Woodard looked out over the crowd. “So much change in just a few weeks. The reverend and I are doing our best. Mr. Tremaine’s loss was certainly a blow to our efforts.”

Hetty spoke into the quiet that settled among them. “They’ve been saying the mixing of the races is *unlawful*. I read in the *Defender* that everything Mr. DeWight warned is spreading across the South. I hope it doesn’t make its way north.” After a pause, she asked, “Have y’all picked a date for the march, then?” This was pretty much all Hetty could talk about since it had been suggested, and with Mr. Tremaine’s loss in the mayoral primary, there seemed even greater urgency for Black and women’s rights. *Who would speak up, if not Black women?*

“Not yet, but at the end of the summer,” Mrs. Woodard promised. Her eyes softened as they returned to Olivia. “How are the Tremaines?”

“As well as can be expected,” said Olivia, feeling a fresh surge of grief. “I still don’t understand. I had been so certain he would win.” She sighed heavily. “But it’s just a setback.” She repeated Mr. Tremaine’s words when he addressed the crowd after the announcement. She’d found Ruby at the back of the room, and both had begun to cry when they locked eyes. Olivia had noticed that, for Ruby, it was not the first time that night. Her eyes were already ringed red. Olivia held her friend tightly as she sobbed. Harrison had stood, a silent sentry, until the two young women were composed. The

entire time, all Olivia could think was how different next summer would have looked with Mr. Tremaine in office. *Just a setback*, she reminded herself firmly.

“The news was a shock to us all,” said Mrs. Woodard. “It makes securing what Black folks have built here that much harder. We were so *close* to electing our first Black mayor.”

“Has Mr. Tremaine been to any of the recent meetings?”

“He was at the gentlemen’s club a few nights ago to meet with some of the donors and our leaders.” Mrs. Woodard grasped Olivia’s hand tightly. “Patience, Miss Davenport.”

Olivia nodded. Her thoughts wandered as Mrs. Woodard and Hetty continued speaking, her eyes roaming the crowd. *There must be more we can do?* she thought, and stopped. She cast her gaze over the gathering again, and stopped. There—the face that had snagged her attention. Everett Stone.

What is he doing here?

Mr. Stone had removed his eyeglasses and placed them in the front pocket of his suit jacket. In one hand was a copy of the *Chicago Defender*.

The sight of the city’s activist paper gave her pause. Until recently, Olivia thought Everett Stone’s sole focus was the carriage company. He met frequently with her father and brother about business. He was the nephew of Mr. Howard, the company’s primary lawyer. But in addition to being part of the Davenports’ legal team, he represented Hetty and her cousin in their cases, owing to their arrest at the last march. But that newspaper...

Hetty waved him over.

“What are you doing?” Olivia whispered. She watched Mr. Stone’s face light up when he saw them. He schooled his surprise quickly, again the cool gentleman who worked for her father...and was her occasional, rather proficient dance partner. She mustered a polite smile. Her palms prickled with sweat and she reminded herself to loosen her grip on the cards in her hand, lest she crush them before her speech.

Hetty shrugged. “I told him to come. He’s my lawyer and he’s handsome. And unlike a certain other gentleman, he didn’t leave you on a

crowded train platform.”

Olivia bristled at Hetty’s words but said nothing, wondering if confiding her annoyance at her parents’ new matchmaking attempt to her friend had been ill-advised. Olivia and Hetty did not see eye to eye on the events of the night Washington boarded that train. Olivia asserted she had made a choice to stay. Hetty agreed. And argued that Washington DeWight had made a choice of his own—to leave.

Her friend opened her fan now as the young lawyer neared. “Mr. Stone, wonderful to see you,” Hetty said.

“Likewise, Miss Foster. Miss Davenport.” He turned back to Hetty, joy dispelling some of his shyness. “I have good news—the charges against you have been dismissed.”

“Really?” Hetty turned to Olivia, astonished, smiling, then back to Everett Stone. “Thank you, Mr. Stone! I cannot wait to tell my cousin.” She shook Stone’s hand and hugged Olivia hard.

“Oh, Hetty, I’m so relieved. Congratulations,” Olivia said, pulling back and squeezing her friend’s hands. She turned to Mr. Stone. “I’ve never seen you at one of these meetings before.”

Hetty laughed, then whispered conspiratorially to Mr. Stone, “Olivia forgets her manners.” Her eyes widened as she looked at Olivia. “I’m going to get a drink.” Over Mr. Stone’s shoulder, Hetty mouthed, *Be nice*.

I am nice, Olivia thought. She licked her lips, suddenly parched.

“You’re right, I haven’t been to one before. Work usually keeps me busy, but my uncle has hired another lawyer to help with the case load. So I can be more available for his higher profile clients.”

“Like the Davenport Carriage Company.”

Mr. Stone nodded. He appeared to measure his words before saying, “I’m not sure how much good I’m doing. With your father abroad, it’s unclear where I stand. Your brother and sister seem to communicate in a shorthand I can’t follow.”

Olivia crossed her arms over her chest. “Yes, I gave up trying to decipher that. But I’m proud of them, of their undertaking.” She smiled, thinking of it.

Mr. Stone's expression changed. "I hope you haven't completely given up decoding it. I'd be disappointed to be alone in the endeavor." His voice was even but his eyes shined with a keen kind of humor.

"Perhaps, I can give it another go," she said, and was rewarded with a full smile, though a brief one. "Level the playing field." She knew better than anyone how a conversation with her siblings about horseless carriages could feel like a game of keep-away.

Mr. Stone dipped his head and turned to look around the small, packed room. Olivia watched his profile as he tracked the conversations and people around them. It was as if he was studying, committing everything to memory. Again she noticed he wasn't wearing his eyeglasses. Their absence made the angles of his face stand out in a stark relief, like a statue brought to life. Made it easier to see the varying shades of brown in his irises.

Olivia cleared her throat and refocused her gaze on the crowd. "And there's no particular reason you came tonight?" she asked.

"If you mean to ask me if I'm here because I heard a certain young lady would be giving a speech, I'd be lying if I said no."

Olivia arched an eyebrow. To his credit, Mr. Stone held her gaze.

"What drew you to activism, Miss Davenport?" he asked.

She thought of Washington DeWight. She missed him, his energy, his uplifting presence. Mr. Stone replaced his eyeglasses and watched her patiently.

"There was a young gentleman who spoke here a couple of months ago," she answered. "It was inspiring."

Mr. Stone nodded. "And so, you chose to do the same." Olivia felt herself frown. "Don't misunderstand me," he said. "I think it's wonderful that you've given your time to the Cause." He sighed and looked around them. Olivia followed his gaze. Impossibly, it appeared even more people had arrived. Someone bumped her from behind, pushing her closer to Mr. Stone.

"Oh! I'm so sorry, Miss Davenport." The woman before her hiked her toddler higher on her hip. Her hair was styled close to her scalp, but the Marcel Waves were starting to fall.

“Mrs. Jennings?” Olivia recognized her as a seamstress from Marshall Field & Company. She did magnificent work.

“I’m sure it’s odd to see me out of uniform. And without a pin between my teeth, your mama being my best customer and all.” Mrs. Jennings laughed. “I also work some hours at Hart Schaffner Marx.” Her face turned sour at the name, but the expression was short lived as she reviewed the room. “Great turnout.”

Great, yes. Olivia had never spoken in front of a crowd this large, nor about something so important. Her anxiety returned, full force. The room seemed to close in on her suddenly. The stage grew massive in size. Mrs. Jennings excused herself, and Olivia found her eyes again on the stairs leading up and outside.

“Miss Davenport,” Mr. Stone said. He reached out for her. The cards holding the highlights of her speech were trapped, briefly, between their clasped hands. He said nothing, only applied a gentle, reassuring pressure until he caught her eye. She shifted her focus to his face, and the erratic beat of her heart steadied, the pace quick but measured. A flutter in her stomach. Surprise. Mr. Stone let go.

Olivia took a breath, nodded, quickly, once. “Thank you, Mr. Stone.” Their eyes locked for a moment more. Olivia pulled hers away, hands tingling. *It’s just nerves. You’re anxious.* She shook out her fingers and stared at the front of the room.

At the announcement of her name, Olivia walked to the stage. She tilted her chin up and smiled wide to the activists who parted to let her pass. Her breaths came in quick, short bursts. She fought the urge to bite her lip. *You can do this.* In her mind, lessons from her mother and governesses past rose above the chatter of the room. Olivia let her smile settle on her face. She would be the picture of calm.

The women assembled here trusted her to help them garner more support. They kept her comings and goings from their meetings out of the papers. Her questions, even when naïve, were answered with patience. And now, as her shoulders brushed against theirs, she hoped that from her place

of privilege, they did not scorn or dismiss her. *Compared to their sacrifice, what is a speech?*

At the lectern on the makeshift stage, she recognized the reverend. His round face lit up, his hand held out to her. She took it, pinching her skirt around her cards to lift the fabric and free her feet. The boards groaned as she stepped up to the stage, and turned slowly to the women and scattering of men before her.

Olivia thanked the reverend, settled the cards on the lectern, and waited for the hush to spread across the room. In the crowd, she spotted Hetty and Mrs. Woodard. And Mr. Stone, his face neutral save for the thoughtful crease between his brows. She took in this gathering of advocates from all over the city, all these women, both white and Black, old and young, working class, and with a few well-to-do women like her. Their faces were hopeful. Olivia recognized her own eagerness in their expressions, and felt a rush of gratitude and awe for the joined efforts before her.

She may have been late to the first meeting that sparked it all, but she was glad to have found her way to the Cause and to her people. Washington DeWight briefly crossed her mind. Oh, if he could see her now. A smile spread across Olivia's face. She was prepared, and ready to act.

CHAPTER 7

Amy-Rose

“Will you be needing this tomorrow, miss?” asked Sandra. The young maid, so helpful at the trade show, stood before her. Amy-Rose blinked, not sure where her mind had wandered. She turned and examined her belongings, draped over Sandra’s arm.

“No, thank you,” she said, gathering her thoughts. “I’ll wear the green dress to travel.” Amy-Rose sat on the settee in the enormous bedroom closet that once swallowed her meager belongings. In the month they’d spent here in New York, she had accumulated quite a lot at Mrs. Davis’s side. Now nearly all of it was neatly packed away in trunks and suitcases.

“I always get nervous the night before a long trip,” Sandra was saying. “New York has its appeal, but it’s not home.”

Amy-Rose nodded. They’d be returning to Mrs. Davis’s home in Chicago. *Home*. Amy-Rose wasn’t sure what that word meant anymore. To her mother, home had been a place they’d left. Once the storm had devastated their community in Saint Lucia, Clara Shepherd had scooped up a five-year-old Amy-Rose and made for the United States. Her mother had hoped to reunite with her love, only to find that he had passed away.

Then there was Freeport Manor. It was the only home Amy-Rose really knew. It was just what she and her mother had needed. There she’d found love and a family of sorts who would, later, help her through the loss of her

mother. She felt an ache knowing that she would not be returning to the Davenport estate.

But there is something bigger that awaits, she told herself.

Mrs. Davis assured Amy-Rose she would have a place to live with her upon their arrival in Chicago, but that's not what set the young woman's insides aflutter. Amy-Rose felt goose bumps rise over her skin just thinking about the progress on the salon space Mrs. Davis and she had found before they'd left. Not only would Amy-Rose be returning home, she'd be returning to live the oldest, purest part of her dream. Her *own salon*. She grinned at the thought.

Sandra closed the last latch on a trunk. "Will you be needing the kitchen tonight?"

"No," said Amy-Rose. "I'm going out tonight." Something like excitement made her pulse quicken. Standing, she took inventory of the items left to pack. Beyond the closet, in the bedroom, she recognized Helen's stationery among the letters on the mahogany secretary desk. Helen's letters spoke of the goings-on at Freeport Manor, in her own strong voice and with her flare for the dramatic. Amy-Rose was keen to see how the youngest Davenport would infiltrate the company—because Amy-Rose was certain that she would. She'd change the way things had been done, the way they'd always been done. Helen's and Olivia's letters brought her comfort. John's, however, remained unopened.

I'll respond when I have more time, she thought. Amy-Rose stood and crossed the largest room she'd ever called her own. The luxurious suite, with its delicate crown molding and muted rose wallpaper, provided solace in those first days in New York, when she'd felt most alone. It had all the comforts Amy-Rose once provided for others. And yet she'd found herself counting the days to her departure. She'd made the connections here as her mentor had suggested, and she was more than ready to use them.

The healthy windfall from her partnership with Benjamin King was too much to comprehend. He'd appeared out of thin air at the trade show and managed to "bump" into her twice later that same week. He was a smooth talker, and despite herself, she enjoyed his company. Since then, he'd

introduced her to other investors, like a matchmaker would. And boy, did they invest! She had never fathomed having quite such a sum at her disposal, and in such a short time.

“You look lovely,” said Mrs. Davis from behind her.

Seated at the vanity, Amy-Rose found the older woman’s face in its reflection. Warm, intelligent eyes smiled back at her. She turned to face Mrs. Davis where she stood in the bedroom doorway, arms folded in front of her. “Thank you,” Amy-Rose said. “I sometimes feel more out of place in these garments than in the rooms we enter.” The crisp white blouse was tucked into a powder-blue skirt. She pulled on a matching double-breasted blazer with padded shoulders. It was new and modern. *Helen will be excited to see that women’s styles in New York have completely abandoned the corset for a freer silhouette.* Her hair, which she had styled herself, was pulled into a simple bun; a few curls escaped around her temples, framing her face.

“You are a successful young businesswoman, Miss Shepherd. You must act the part.” Mrs. Davis sighed and entered the room. She dropped her hip on the edge of the vanity and pulled the young woman’s hand into hers, her expression more serious than usual. “You’d do well to make a show of your success in order to attract more. After all is said and done, *you* are the most important person to get you to where you want to go.”

Amy-Rose nodded. *It’ll be like chatting with Mr. Spencer,* she told herself. She gleaned a wealth of knowledge from him when she thought he’d be selling his storefront to her. *But your storefront was sold out from under you,* she reminded herself.

“You are starting to see all your hard work and dedication pay off.” Mrs. Davis laughed. “I remember when I saw you there in the foyer. That ugly garment bag at your feet. It was the night of the masquerade—the fundraiser at Freeport Manor.” Mrs. Davis shook her head. “When I saw you earlier that evening, you’d been so happy.”

She *had* been happy. She’d seen Mrs. Davis before stumbling across John and his father discussing how she and John would navigate a future together—or more like how they wouldn’t. “The bag wasn’t that ugly.” It

was the same garment bag she and her mother had arrived with at Freeport so many years ago. It must have had some sort of luck.

“It was.” Mrs. Davis laughed, then grew serious again. “It took a lot of courage to leave your home, my dear, but you made the right decision.”

Amy-Rose thought back to that night, to the conversation she’d overheard. The words Mr. Davenport, always so kind, had used to dismiss her, *daughter of a slave owner*. The way John had just stood there—it caused her eyes to sting now with the threat of tears. She knew she was more than that.

“Trust yourself,” Mrs. Davis said. “And try to have a little fun.” She hugged Amy-Rose and clapped her shoulder roughly—not at all like the motherly hugs Jessie offered. Mrs. Davis stood and pulled a pocket watch from the folds in her skirt. “Mr. King should be here soon. From what I’ve seen and heard, he is something of a go-getter himself.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to come with us? You’d enjoy dinner and the music.”

The older woman laughed and it rattled in her chest. Mrs. Davis drew closer and took Amy-Rose’s chin in her hand. “My dear, people aren’t as strict about that here. Go, enjoy the company of a young gentleman and all that the Tenderloin has to offer. It’s not quite so muggy now as it was earlier in the day. I’m sure the two of you will have a splendid evening. Tomorrow, back to Chicago!”

• • •

Amy-Rose stood still while Sandra helped her with the buttons at the back of her skirt. The sensation of someone else’s fingers along her spine still felt strange. She had been stopped several times from fetching things over the past month. From the moment she placed herself beside Mrs. Davis, it had been a lesson in unlearning everything she used to do. Amy-Rose had not realized how tired she was, or how much time there was in a day! She had not visited so many museums or eaten at street-side cafés. Walks in public parks became aimless wanderings with no dresses to steam or hair to press.

Her hair serums improved with the additional free time to experiment. The investors' money helped too. She was able to order rarer fruits from the Caribbean to add to her collection.

"You're all set, miss." Sandra came around to angle the cheval mirror just so. "We have something that will cover up those freckles, if you change your mind."

Amy-Rose bristled at the offer and took in her reflection. Her hand strayed up to her face where her smattering of freckles fanned out from the bridge of her nose. She'd grown fond of them and didn't see the point in covering them up. They were just as much a part of her as her long, curly hair. Before she learned to resent them, and then later accept them, her mother would count them when Amy-Rose was sad. The routine would end in tickling, Amy-Rose's giggles rising from deep within her belly. The discomfort caused in others by her ambiguous heritage often prompted such reactions as Sandra's—people assuming she'd wish to change to stand out less. *Like it would really change anything.* She took a breath and said, simply, "No. Thank you."

The maid nodded, and Amy-Rose inspected the rest of her appearance. Her cheeks looked rosy and dewy. The dark circles under her eyes, whether from grief or hard work, had faded over the past few weeks. She stood taller, bolstered by her recent success. It had been over a month since she'd left Freeport Manor. She rarely thought of John—she was too busy. At least, that's what she told herself. But as if to contradict this, her eyes fell on the still unopened parcel he'd sent. It had preceded his letters to her. Part of her wanted to know what was inside. A greater part of her wished, finally, to put that heartbreak behind her for good.

"Is the motorcar ready?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Shepherd. It's downstairs."

Amy-Rose took a measured breath and descended the main staircase. She held her head high as she made her way through the luxury around her, reminding herself she had every right to be there.

Benjamin King waited in the foyer. He wore a gray worsted-wool suit, lightweight for the summer heat, and held a straw hat with a thick black

ribbon, which he balanced on a hooked finger beneath the brim. His face split into a grin when he saw her. “Well, Miss Shepherd, you are as pretty as a picture.”

“Thank you, Mr. King,” she said, ignoring the heat rising to her face.

“It’s nice out, I thought we could walk.”

Amy-Rose dipped her head and stepped through the door he held open for her. Outside, the sun was low in the sky, the streets busy with men in suits carrying briefcases, women pushing prams, and young couples strolling arm in arm. Motorcars outnumbered horse-drawn carriages on the streets here. The sight would make Helen’s head spin and only strengthen her argument that horseless carriages were the future. The sounds of engines and horns created a symphony as they mingled with live music and snippets of pedestrian conversation from a nearby restaurant that filled the air with rich scents of sautéed peppers and roasting meat.

“The place is just around the next corner,” Mr. King said, after they’d walked in silence for a minute or two. Amy-Rose felt his eyes on her as she tried to take everything in. He stood between her and the traffic. His elbow brushed her arm, his hands hidden in his pockets, his movements languid and free. Unsure of what to do with her own hands, she let her small handbag swing from the cradle of her arm.

“This is it,” he said.

Amy-Rose looked at the small establishment in front of them, wedged between an inn and a furniture store. “Here?”

The door opened and sounds of revelry poured into the street. A white couple exited, tangled in each other’s arms, laughing. The brassy tones of a wind instrument floated in their wake. “Are you sure we can go in?” she asked.

“Of course.” He caught the door and opened it fully, revealing a portal to a bright, vibrant scene. It was a club. Inside, people stood in small groups, laughing and shouting over their drinks and the music as a band played. The bartenders mixed drinks with flourishes that looked like a dance. The waitstaff pirouetted from table to table, balancing small plates and cocktail glasses on round trays held high above their heads. The smoke

drifting along the ceiling was sweet smelling and gave the scene a dreamy haze. Oversized chairs faced the stage, and open doors led to a back patio illuminated by gas lamps, creating a romantic glow.

“Ben!” A young man, who didn’t look old enough to be out, jogged to where they stood. “Your regular table?” he asked, then winked at Amy-Rose.

“Yes, thank you. This is Amy-Rose Shepherd. The next big thing.”

“Pleasure,” the young man said, bowing slightly, and ushered them to a table where they had a clear view of the room. The crowd was a well-dressed array of mixed company. Black and white music lovers danced together in the space immediately in front of the stage. Amy-Rose’s shoulders relaxed. This was a place to let loose, to have fun.

“How is business?” asked Mr. King.

She couldn’t slow the grin spreading across her face. “Better than I’d hoped. Mrs. Davis rented booths and tables at trade shows all over New York and in Connecticut. I feel like I’ve met every Black housewife on this island and then some. Sales are great—so great that I have more than enough to lease the Chicago storefront from Mrs. Davis.” The wheels in Amy-Rose’s mind were turning. “Perhaps the unfinished space on the second floor can be converted into a manufacturing studio, if the time comes. Not only could I hire hairdressers, who can also help me make my wares, but I could save to buy the whole building from her.”

He studied her, smiling, then said, “I’d guess by the look in your eye, there’s no chance you could be convinced to stay? To become a New Yorker?” He held his arms wide. “The ’Loin is filled with music, theater, restaurants. Chicago is nice, but you know what’s better? Establishments that serve Black and white and all colors in between. What do you think?”

His question gave her pause. Amy-Rose looked around her. She spotted a young man with features close enough to hers that they could be related. He appeared at home in this place, in his own skin. She thought about the small amount of renown she’d gained in the few weeks since she’d been here. Could she abandon Chicago for New York? The Tenderloin appeared

to have just as much opportunity as Downtown Chicago, perhaps even more.

But the smile on her face faltered when she remembered the letters she received from Helen. Her newly repaired friendship with Olivia. Jessie, like a mother to her. She missed them and the Davenport household. She may have been hundreds of miles away, and this city was tempting, but what bound Amy-Rose to Chicago was strong. She smiled. “No,” she told Mr. King.

He shook his head, disappointment pulling at his expression. “A full-service salon in Chicago?”

“Yes, but I think I’ll find staff and spend most of my focus on my hair care line. Not everyone can afford to spend hours at a salon. I want to give people the option of taking care of their hair at home.” Amy-Rose smiled. “Some of my fondest memories are of sitting on the floor in front of my mother as she parted and braided my hair. Many of the formulas are her own home remedies.”

“Thus, the importance of hibiscus,” said Mr. King. His brown eyes sparkled as he looked at her. It made her skin tingle. “She must be an extraordinary woman.”

“She was,” Amy-Rose said, placing a hand on his forearm. He dropped his gaze to it. Amy-Rose pulled away, but he caught her hand, nodding as if asking her to continue. “She was lovely, and I enjoy talking about her.” Amy-Rose sighed. “She would have loved to see this.”

“Then count yourself very lucky.” He turned his hand over to grasp hers. His was warm and soft. His thumb traced circles on her skin. Amy-Rose shivered despite herself. “I’m not quite sure if my parents are proud. I think they still think of me as a kid, talking my way into free meals or admission into the Negro theaters.” He shook his head. “I was young, having fun, and chasing dreams of my own.”

Amy-Rose thought of Mr. Davenport and his children. His stoic, sometimes rigid way, his sense of how things should be. “Sometimes it’s hard for people to see you for what you are and not how you were.”

Mr. King pressed his lips together and held Amy-Rose's gaze. She could have sworn she'd seen something else in his face. When he spoke, he had to clear his throat first. "Thank you for that," he said.

As their meal went on, the two leaned closer. Mr. King reached for her often. His fingertips grazed the back of her hand, her wrist, as he spoke about the club—which he owned!

"You own this?" she asked, incredulous, when he mentioned his own hurdles securing his first loan.

Mr. King smiled wide. "I do." He leaned back in his seat and laced his fingers behind his head. "And a few others here and there." He furrowed his brows at Amy-Rose. "You don't think I get around on just my good looks, do you?"

Amy-Rose blushed and smiled back. "No," she said. "I suppose not."

Mr. King nodded and launched into an abridged account of his thoughts on the success of failure. And his many business ventures. He had an eye for that something special, he'd said. His eyes locked on Amy-Rose and she felt she had captured his full attention. She was the priority here. She barely let herself feel a twinge when John crossed her mind.

After the plates were cleared, Mr. King leaned close and wrapped a stray curl around his finger. He tucked it behind Amy-Rose's ear, making her skin tingle from scalp to toes. "I'm a New Yorker," he said, leaning back in his seat again. Amy-Rose drew a breath in the space he created. "I grew up in the house I was born in and raised right here in the Tenderloin. My parents still live here. We have lunch after Sunday service every week." His gaze dropped to the table, smiling. He seemed not to see the polished wood but some happy memory. He nodded before looking up at her. "Yeah, I'm a New Yorker." He held up two fingers to the young man who greeted them earlier. "Let's toast to our good fortune, shall we?"

Amy-Rose wanted to know what thought had brought him such joy. But the night was young and Mr. King was right—there was much to celebrate. "Let's," she agreed with a smile.

• • •

The two-person sleeper car rumbled along the track, one in a long line of cars on the 20th Century Limited train from New York to Chicago. The car smelled of wood and Mrs. Davis's citrus-based perfume. Some of their luggage was tucked neatly on the overhead shelves, and a rolling cart with their spent tea service sent delicate notes through the air with each sway of the car. Amy-Rose, Mrs. Davis, and the older woman's staff traveled overnight to get the most of their last day in New York, which had meant sleeping in and a trip to the newest modern world wonder—the Statue of Liberty.

After a marvelous final day, Amy-Rose had listened to Mrs. Davis snore peacefully in her couchette until Amy-Rose too fell asleep, lulled by the rocking of the train. When the conductor announced they were an hour from their destination, they got dressed and ready to be received in Chicago.

Ah! Amy-Rose thought. She pressed her knees to keep them from bouncing. She feared all the butterflies in the state had found residence in her chest. She didn't know what to do first when she arrived: visit her friends or the storefront.

"The renovations should be done by the time we arrive," Mrs. Davis had said not an hour ago. Now the older woman laughed. "Your skirt's turned around." She gestured at Amy-Rose, who sat at the window with her outfit askew.

"I've looked forward to this for so long," Amy-Rose confessed. She stood to adjust herself. "This past month—everything. Sometimes, I wonder if it's really happening."

Mrs. Davis tied a silk scarf at her neck, then placed her hands on either side of Amy-Rose's face. They were warm—warmer than the blood rushing to Amy-Rose's cheeks. "It is happening," she said fiercely. Her gaze bore into Amy-Rose's until the young woman's eyes began to sting with tears. "I am so proud of you, my dear."

A tear escaped and ran down Amy-Rose's face. She nodded, not trusting her voice. She sat and turned to the woman, who had become more than a

mentor, nestled in the opposite corner of the seat, her purse on her lap and her legs crossed at her ankles. Mrs. Davis believed in her. The fact made Amy-Rose sit even straighter in her seat.

She turned back to the window. Sometime later came the announcement she had been waiting for: They'd arrived in Chicago.

Amy-Rose watched the city buildings replace hours of flat plains until the train, at last, pulled into the station. "We're here, Mrs. Davis," she said. "Perhaps we should go back to the house first. See to it that all our things arrived, then head to the salon. What do you think?" She turned. "Mrs. Davis?"

The older woman had not stirred. A strange feeling replaced the giddiness Amy-Rose had felt just a moment ago. It was an old sensation—of panic, of confusion and dread.

"Mrs. Davis," she repeated. She leaned closer to the older woman. Mrs. Davis's arm was cool to the touch, a striking contrast to just an hour before. Amy-Rose shook her gently. The older woman did not wake. Panic began to swell in Amy-Rose where butterflies had swirled only moments before. "Mrs. Davis!" she said, louder. Still nothing.

This is wrong, she thought. And her voice was the only thing she had.

"Somebody, help!"

CHAPTER 8

Helen

“**D**id you at least warn Mr. Swift that you planned to ambush him?” John pulled his automobile off the gravel path and onto the grass, where other vehicles were parked in neat rows.

“We’re here to watch the race.” Helen exited his shiny black Model T. She’d gotten over his emphatic *no* when she’d asked to drive. It wasn’t the point of today. They were at the track for one reason and one reason only.

To meet Ransom Swift.

“You like *fixing* cars. You’ve never wanted to come here before.” John gave her a sideways glance. “I think Swift will spot this as a scheme from a mile away. He’ll think you’ve let your imagination run away with you.” The serious pull to John’s mouth hid his dimple.

Helen brushed off his doubt. Her plan was no scheme. It was sound. “I have a newfound interest in the sport,” she said, indulging him. *And good reason to be out of the house*, she added to herself. With their father gone to London the past week, her mother had thrown herself fully at the task of planning Helen’s party. Mrs. Davenport was even more focused than usual, and more exacting in her instructions. Helen thought maybe it was because of her own attitude—how stubborn she’d been. But both her siblings assured her it was their father’s absence.

Fortunately, Mrs. Milford, satisfied so far with Helen’s performance of “a demure debutante,” had granted her a free afternoon—though her tutor

had no idea of Helen's destination.

She felt a fleeting tightness in her chest now. This trip to the track was as much a necessary effort for the business as it was an escape from the house.

As she and John walked toward the track, there came a swell of high-pitched voices from the stands. She'd read that Ransom Swift had a lot of... *fans* who were eager to watch him drive. From the gravel path, she could see young women waving lace handkerchiefs to get his attention. They were dressed like pastries, all soft colors and flouncing frills.

Helen looked down at her plain white shirt and green skirt, cinched at her waist with a broad belt. She rolled her sleeves down to hide the oil staining her skin. Its pungent scent was still present under the rose soap she used. She inspected her nails and thought, *Well, too late now.*

"Let's go," she said, before she could second-guess herself. The heels of her shoes sank into the grass, and she wished she'd grabbed a parasol. The sun was high in the sky and the recent rains made for a very muggy afternoon.

The bleachers provided brief shade. When Helen emerged from the aisle, she spotted Ransom Swift immediately. Her stomach gave an odd lurch. She patted it vaguely. *Just hungry*, she thought. He was more attractive than he'd looked in the papers, his skin a warm medium brown that glistened slightly. Delicate curls clung to his temples, damp with sweat. It was not lost on her that half of the dozen women, preening and grinning at him, were not Black. Their eyes followed him as he made his way to the vehicles lined up at the starting point. The nine other drivers stood ready, ignored by the fans of the only Black driver on the track.

Elgin Road Race Course was a dirt loop, just a little west of the city. A playground for wealthy Chicagoans who enjoyed watching the stock cars try to outpace each other at ten miles per hour. Unlike the races through the city that started at the Field Museum, this one would not have the *Chicago Record-Herald* offering a cash reward to the winner. No, this one was just to show off.

"There's some room up there," John said, gesturing with his head.

Helen followed her brother up the steep stairs, her attention fixed on the young competitor and his red Ford on the inside of the track. He appeared trim and tall, though height was hard to decipher from this distance. His coloring was similar to Amy-Rose's, but Helen couldn't tell if the darkness about his chin was shadow or stubble. She did notice the towel tucked into the back pocket of his trousers. Helen tried not to linger on how they fit him like they were cut to his dimensions, or the pull she felt, an involuntary desire to get closer. *Can't blame that on an empty belly*, she thought. She liked that he appeared a little unpolished. Like her, rough around the edges. When he waved to the stands of about forty spectators, then slipped into his vehicle, sighs filled the air, breaking the spell. She rolled her eyes and turned to see John watching her.

"You know," John said into her ear, "I heard he's just as good a mechanic as he is a driver."

"Who?"

"Mr. Swift, Helen. The gentleman you can't seem to peel your eyes from. If I had known I was bringing you here to gawk at a driver, I'd have let you drive around the neighborhood instead."

She glanced at him. "I'm not here to *gawk*," she scoffed. "The paper never said he was a mechanic."

"Not that paper, but I asked around. Turns out he's pretty handy."

"So you've been scouting him too?" she asked, unable to hide a smug grin.

"Nice try." John rubbed his chin. "I'll admit I was curious." Helen spun on her muddy heels, ready to gloat. "But," John added, "the board is reluctant to make any major changes in Daddy's absence." He smiled ruefully. "No doubt they remember our attempt from a few weeks ago. And how Daddy turned it down. They were prepared for a pitch about automobiles, but they won't do anything until Daddy's ready." John shook his head as he took in the scene. "And he's not ready."

Her ears felt warm. She doubted it was from the sun. Since their father had left a week ago, her brother had spent all day every day at the offices downtown. She'd thought she might accompany him sometimes, develop a

plan together to make their pitch about Swift, but the investors were leery of having a woman, especially one they still saw as a child, sit in on business meetings. And there were a lot of business meetings. The thought of waiting for the right moment, then for all these men to invest in her and John's plan, to bring the company into a new stage, it sparked a nervous energy in Helen. And until now, John himself hadn't mentioned her idea since she'd first brought it up. Her fingers drummed on her arms folded across her chest.

"Let's take a break from discussing the company." He smiled and bumped her shoulder with his. "Enjoy this obligation-free afternoon?"

"I suppose," said Helen around the tiny lump of disappointment in her throat. She knew John was frustrated too with how slowly things were progressing. In the six weeks since he'd suggested the idea of starting an automobile manufacturing line to their father, he and Helen had dreamed of a Davenport engine. Helen's aspiration had multiplied in that time. Some investors eyed the whole proposal suspiciously, enthusiasm waning with each passing week that there was no change in their father's opinion. Their father was the most vocal holdout to transitioning production from the luxury buggies the Davenport Carriage Company made its name in creating to, going forward with, automobiles. Though now, thanks to Mr. Stone, she and John both knew there was a marked decrease in purchases over the last quarter. And the line that suffered the greatest loss was the most affordable of the company's carriages, which—as it happened—cost about the same as the assembly-line-produced Ford automobiles.

No, Helen did not come here to gawk. She did not come here to have fun. She came to see if racing was the big, flashy idea that would turn the tide, set them apart from their competitors just enough to get the rest of the board, and especially her father, on their side. A driver to show off their engine could make all the difference. A driver who was also a mechanic, even better. But they had to be sure of Swift first. That was smarter than taking the idea to the board prematurely—John was right about that part. "Still," she said to her brother, "I just think if we get our motorcar in the papers with a great photo and story, there will be a demand beyond the

company's loyal carriage customers that we could use to our advantage. Publicity equals money, and the board loves money."

Helen stole a glance at John. She looked for his dimple, faint in her brother's stern expression.

"If you don't stop staring at me, you're gonna miss the show." John pointed below. His dimple appeared at last, his face lit up. This is how John looked before love broke his heart. Cheers erupted around her then, and Helen turned just in time to see the motorcars jerk and pull away from the line. They did so with varying efficiency, and some were certainly louder than others. Exhaust filled the air and the smell of gasoline stung her nose. The modified stock cars jockeyed for position like a disjointed rainbow along the length of the track, but Mr. Swift captured the lead early and set the pace. She watched as they ran the course, eating up furloughs just as aggressively as the ponies she'd seen at the horse races.

But these are machines, she thought. She looked at her hands. They itched with desire to inspect the vehicles. To see what type of modifications had been made—and what she could alter to put the Davenport Carriage Company at the head of the pack. *What better way to catch the eye of potential investors and customers?* It may just work. It *had* to work.

As if on some unspoken cue, spectators leaned forward in their seats. Swift's admirers pressed up against the fence that separated the stands from the track. The dust had settled some, but the air was still gritty and charged with excitement. Yards from the finish line, Ransom Swift's motorcar jerked and began losing speed. Still, he crossed the finish line ahead of the rest. The crowd in the stands roared at his win, and the flash of camera bulbs pierced the air. Something was wrong, though. Helen leaned forward again, squinting against the sun. She knew all too well how awful it felt to have your vehicle quit on you.

"Davenport!"

Helen and John turned to see Josiah Andrews climbing over other spectators to greet them. Helen groaned as the most obnoxious of John's friends grinned at her.

“Andrews, how are you?” John asked. He made room for the other gentleman by encroaching on Helen’s space.

“Fantastic,” said Mr. Andrews, winking at Helen. He pulled a cigarette case from his pocket and offered it to her like he had at so many parties.

Helen shook her head. She remembered the feel of his sweaty palm against hers when they’d danced at the masquerade fundraiser for Mr. Tremaine. That night had been full of ups and downs. Nothing had gone as she’d hoped. Jacob Lawrence had revealed himself to be not who he seemed—not a wealthy English bachelor but, in fact, a liar.

A fortune hunter. That was what he was. Helen’s stomach clenched at the thought. Jacob had kept his true situation hidden from her, while she let herself fall for him. Helen pushed the memories away. Her eyes searched out Ransom Swift, coasting into the garage in his protesting motorcar, barely acknowledging the cheers that followed him.

Beside her, John and Mr. Andrews discussed the baseball box scores or the result of a boxing match. She didn’t care. Below, the drivers had disappeared into the garage with their vehicles. *Now what?* Her brother had gotten her this far in her plan to meet the race car driver. She could have asked him to take her down to see the motorcars. She glanced at him and Josiah Andrews. It was like she wasn’t even there. Plus, if she asked, she knew Mr. Andrews would tag along. Helen chewed the inside of her cheek.

Below, a man selling peanuts and shaved ice hollered to the crowd.

“John, I’m going to get a treat,” she said.

He followed her gaze. “Get me something too, will you?” he asked, then fell back into conversation with Andrews. Hopefully, he’d stay that way.

Helen walked, dignified, down the steps. She followed the vendor long enough to reach the first break in the bleachers. Then she ducked beneath them, her heels crunching spent peanut shells underfoot. She straightened her collar and stood tall.

You can do this.

The smells struck her first. Oil, petrol, and sweat. It was as familiar to her as the smells of the garage at Freeport. Her nerves faded. Helen marched to the red Model T she recognized as Ransom Swift’s. The driver

was nowhere to be seen, but the motor was still running, making an awful racket. A cart full of tools had been pushed alongside the driver's door. The engine itself had been exposed. She grabbed a cloth from the cart and grasped a bolt, tightening it slowly. The engine noise gradually calmed.

"Hey, what gives?" a voice shouted from below. Ransom Swift slid from under the car, lying atop a wobbly piece of plywood on wheels. His curls had been pulled away from his face with a leather string at the crown of his head. His shirtsleeves were pushed up above his elbows, and more buttons were undone at his chest than would be considered decent in mixed company. He frowned up at her. "Look, I don't know how you got in here, but you shouldn't go around touching machinery you don't understand."

"I'm not sure *what* you think I understand, but it sounded like that gasket was a projectile waiting to happen."

"Hmm," he said, sitting up. He studied her a moment, then said, "I was getting to it."

"When? After it took someone's eye out?"

Ransom Swift dropped his wrench and stood. He towered over Helen briefly, before leaning heavily on his motorcar. "And just who are you?"

"Helen Davenport, of the Davenport Carriage Company." She held out her hand. It was her best bargaining chip.

His smirk made the hair on her arms stand on end. "You're a long way from your horse and buggy, Miss Davenport." He took her hand. His was large and warm, and the calluses seemed to find the rough patches on Helen's. He turned hers over, examining her uneven nails and the scars from lessons learned.

Curiosity satisfied, he dropped her hand and looked at her expectantly.

Helen felt heat rise in her cheeks. She'd been so focused on getting here that she hadn't thought through what she'd say! Her back felt damp under the broad belt at her waist. *Oh, please!* she thought irritably as his smile widened.

Helen handed him the cloth and said, "My family's company is looking to branch out, step into the future." She looked pointedly at his vehicle.

“Motorcars are the future. What better way to introduce our debut design than as a winner on the race car circuit?”

“And with the best driver on the road behind your wheel, no less.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

Ransom licked his lips and his light eyes held Helen’s for a moment too long. *We need him.* She wasn’t about to let his flirting prevent her from showing her father just what she and the company could do.

“Listen, little miss, I have work to do.” He picked the wrench up and turned back to the exposed engine of his motorcar.

“It’s Miss Davenport,” said Helen, through her teeth. She took a breath. “We wouldn’t expect you to drive for free. You’d have enough to fix this”—she paused, peering at the exposed engine of his motorcar—“vehicle of yours.”

He frowned at her. “I can make do on my own,” he said. “Do you even have something for me to drive?” At Helen’s hesitation, he laughed. “Just what I thought.” He turned again to his work.

“Don’t worry. We can get a motorcar ready to race.”

Ransom Swift made a show of looking around the garage. “Who’s we? I only see you.” His lip twitched. “Did you come all the way out here to recruit me?”

The rest of the article came to Helen. “You’re asking a lot of questions for someone who crashed their way out of their last contract. You’re a liability, Mr. Swift. A risk. And right now, no one is bankrolling you. That’s why you’re pushing this machine to the brink. You can’t afford the work it needs.” When she finished, her breath came fast. But she held his gaze and her ground.

After a small eternity, he slapped the cloth she’d handed him over his left shoulder. “Come back when you have a real offer,” he said.

Helen, cheeks burning, gave him a stiff nod and turned to leave. She couldn’t miss the curious stares from around the garage. When she emerged into the bright afternoon, she looked up to the stands where John and Josiah Andrews were still in conversation, and exhaled.

We need a car.

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CHAPTER 9

Ruby

Harrison squeezed Ruby's hand where he'd tucked it into the crook of his arm and snuck a kiss to her temple. Ruby glanced at him. She resisted the urge to tug at her necklace. "I'm not nervous," she said with a barely concealed pout.

He chuckled. She brushed a finger across his forehead where a soft fringe of curls resisted the pomade. She marveled at its softness and the way Harrison stilled beside her, and shivered when he took her hand and placed it on his chest, over his heart, where she felt the gentle rise and fall. It calmed her. Ruby wished it was just the two of them, that they were married already, making their way to their own dining room to share a meal and the events of the day, not dogged by nasty rumors or tense dinner companions.

He gave her a knowing look. "Soon we'll be hosting our own dinner parties."

"They're sure to be livelier than this."

Harrison's mouth twitched, signaling a smile. He peeked into the uncomfortably silent room. "I don't know. They all look pretty spirited to me."

Ruby stepped through the archway and took in the people already gathered around her parents' table: Her mother and father sat at opposite ends; their guests, Harrison's parents and his two siblings filled in the

remaining space but for two seats—across the table from each other. Ruby's temper rose. She lifted her chin and looked at her parents in turn. They were troubled by the rumors, yes, but this was ridiculous. Seating her and her fiancé across the table from each other—really. They were all to be family soon! And the rumors were baseless.

This had been conceived as a celebratory dinner. The table was set with the best china, saved from the purge her parents mandated in their attempt to finance Mr. Tremaine's now failed campaign. As a result, the house was sparse of furniture, paintings, vases, and other little touches that reminded her of when their house felt like a home. She touched the necklace at her throat, remembering how it had been pawned by her parents and then recovered by Harrison in such a grand romantic gesture, it made her smile every time she felt the pendant move against her skin. Like she was smiling now, despite the circumstances.

"Please, sit," said Harrison. He pulled her chair out. Ruby lifted the skirt of the blue dress she'd had Margaret, the family maid, shorten to a more modern length. The linen fabric was breathable, perfect for the soaring temperatures, if not for the stares that met them now. Ruby wished they were dining on the back terrace. The gardens calmed her father, and today his frown was even more pronounced than usual.

"Thank you," she murmured, and watched Harrison take the empty seat across the table.

"Now that we're all seated, I think we can begin." Mrs. Tremaine nodded at Margaret. The expression on her mother's face was smooth and calm, like the surface of Lake Michigan before a storm. And it filled Ruby with a sense of dread.

"Thank you again for having us over for dinner." Mrs. Barton, sitting to Ruby's right, reached for her glass of water. "We're awfully sorry for..." She trailed off, and Ruby followed her gaze to her plate.

Mr. Tremaine looked at Harrison's mother as if challenging her, daring her to finish the statement.

Ruby cut in. "Thank you, Mrs. Barton." She kept her eyes steady on her future mother-in-law. "We are very saddened by the news, but the race was

close.” Ruby looked to her father for confirmation. He remained a solid slab of granite. The knot of dread grew in her stomach. “There will be another chance. I’m sure of it.” Ruby hoped her positivity would lighten the mood.

“Right,” said Mrs. Tremaine. It seemed like she would say more, but then Margaret returned with the first set of braized Cornish chickens.

“Thank goodness,” Ruby muttered under her breath.

The food stalled the conversation—if you could call it that. Everyone had an excuse to look everywhere but at each other, and the only sound was that of cutlery moving against fine china. Ruby drew strength from every smiling glance Harrison sent her way.

“How long do you plan to stay in Chicago?” asked Mrs. Tremaine.

It was Mr. Barton who spoke next. “Through the first week of September. With the wedding planned for the end of August, we thought it best to see the happy couple settled. We haven’t seen much of Harrison since he moved here. And of course, to learn more about the beautiful young lady he wants to marry. A surprising turn of events.”

Ruby sat straighter in her chair.

“Surprising? How so?” asked Mrs. Tremaine.

Mr. Barton looked at his plate, then to his wife, his cheeks flushed.

“We heard that you’re very popular, Ruby.” Harrison’s older brother, Jeremiah, grinned at her, as if his words weren’t a chicken let loose in a kitchen.

Ruby glanced at Harrison, who stared at his brother. His face had gone stony, so unlike the open and playful expressions she was used to. “Ruby has a big heart. She’s friendly and open to giving people a chance to show her who they are.”

Jeremiah Barton continued, unfazed. “Before Harrison, you’d had your eyes set on your friend’s brother, no?”

This is your own doing, she told herself. She tried not to fidget in her seat. “John Davenport and I grew up together,” she began before Harrison could speak. “Olivia, his sister, is my best friend. I—” She stopped. The faces around the table watched her expectantly. But what was she supposed to say? She’d told Harrison the truth the day she turned up on his doorstep

in a half-fastened, unpaid-for dress, confessing her love and asking him to give her—them—another chance. And he had.

“The Davenports are very close family friends,” her mother explained. Mrs. Tremaine dipped her head, and Ruby sat very still. “But no one knows her own heart better, and Ruby picked the best man for her,” Mrs. Tremaine finished. There was a silent beat. Ruby looked up at her, her own eyes stinging with unshed tears. For weeks, Ruby and her mother had played a silent tug-of-war. Her mother and father did not like her decision, though Harrison’s investment in the campaign and his obvious love for their daughter had softened their demeanor somewhat. The results of the campaign, the surfacing of these vile rumors—it had simply left them all reeling. The men working on her father’s campaign were surveying the community now, conducting investigations into the election results, hoping their white counterparts could get answers from the voters they polled.

Ruby hoped to find some answers of her own. Who had started the rumors? How many believed them? She was surprised and comforted to have her mother step in just now. Things between her and her parents may have been chilly in private, but perhaps they too, by now, attributed the remarks about her character to mere malicious gossip. Ruby hoped they did. Her father had not, as of yet, made any mention of his awful words to her the night of the election. She dared to look at him now. With his hands steeped under his chin, it was clear he had no intention of adding to her mother’s comment.

The two mothers at the table exchanged tight smiles now.

Ruby repressed a sigh. *This is going to be a long dinner.*

Mr. Barton turned to her father. “The results of the election are a blow, to be sure,” Harrison’s father said. “What are your plans, Mr. Tremaine?”

Ruby’s father leaned forward in his chair and said, “I mean to enjoy this meal.”

“Yes, of course, but surely, you’ve thought past that.”

“Mr. Tremaine has done a great deal for the community,” said Harrison. He turned to Ruby’s father. “Enjoying a lovely meal is well less than he deserves.”

“Harrison—” Mr. Tremaine began.

Ruby’s whole body tensed as she waited.

“That is kind of you to say.” The words came out more air than sound. They seemed distant.

Mrs. Barton placed her fork beside her plate. “The election may be in the past, but the rumors are not.” She looked at Ruby, who fought with all her might not to shrink in her seat—in her own home! “Perhaps,” Mrs. Barton continued, “the children should be more discreet until the worst of it blows over.”

“Mother,” said Harrison, the hard look he’d had for his brother now shifted to shock.

“It should only be a few weeks.” She picked up her fork again and speared a diced potato. “As long as nothing untoward happens, your plans shouldn’t change.”

“Untoward?!” Mr. Tremaine was half out of his seat. His words were directed to Harrison’s mother but his gaze was on Ruby. She shifted in her chair, gripping her fork tightly, and swallowed the ache in her throat. Things were spiraling out of control.

“Yes,” continued Mrs. Barton. She looked at her young daughter for confirmation but the girl avoided eye contact, instead choosing to readjust the napkin on her lap. Anne-Marie Barton hadn’t said a word since arriving and greeting Ruby and the Tremaines. The girl watched everyone, quietly, like a naturalist observing a rare and hostile flock of birds. “*Unfounded* rumors are like storms,” Mrs. Barton continued. “They breeze in with a fuss and disappear before you know it.”

Ruby recognized the defensive look on Harrison’s face. She had to defuse this situation. Fast. “Yes, Papa. Whoever’s spreading these awful rumors may not stop until they’re caught or get bored. We are wise to take extra care for a little while.”

Mr. Tremaine resumed his seat. The muscle above his left eye was twitching. At the other head of the table, Ruby felt her mother’s anger like the heat from a roaring fire. She released a shaky breath once her father calmly took a sip of wine.

“Mr. Barton,” her father said, his composure restored. “I hear that you sold your family plantation. Land is a form of wealth denied to many.” He paused. “I was surprised you’d do away with it.”

Mr. Barton now shifted uncomfortably. “The land had a lot of bad memories. I decided to leave with the few good ones and start anew.”

“Still, that could have passed to your children. They may have wanted land tied to the people who came before them.”

Mrs. Barton set her fork down—again. “I was one of the people tied to that land, Mr. Tremaine—shackled to it—and I want none of it now, nor do I want my children to carry that burden.” She sat straighter in her chair. “I’ve carried enough,” she said quietly. The determination in her features dared anyone to contradict her, and Ruby felt a surge of feeling for the woman. Mr. Barton reached for his wife’s hand, her fist relaxing into his open palm.

With that, Margaret reappeared with the next course. The party lapsed into another stretch of silence. By the time dessert was brought out, Ruby was ready to escape into the maze in the backyard and stay there with Harrison forever. Her mother played hostess, escorting the Bartons to the back patio, where whiskey, lemonade, and sweet tea were offered. Ruby helped serve, watching Harrison speak with his mother at the edge of the maze. He looked tense and anxious.

Mrs. Barton placed a hand on her son’s cheek, and his eyes fluttered closed. He covered her hand with his own and nodded. It took all of Ruby’s strength not to march there immediately and demand to know what was being said. If this dinner was any indication of how their engagement was to go, she feared things would only get worse from here. The wedding to take place late August was Ruby’s own personal finish line. She and Harrison could keep things together until then, couldn’t they?

“Ruby, it’s not polite to stare,” said Mrs. Tremaine.

Ruby watched until they parted, until Mrs. Barton returned to the table and accepted a tall glass of tea that had been sweating on a white napkin while she consoled her son.

Harrison still stood at the entrance to the maze. Distantly, Ruby heard her mother begin the story of what Chicago was like when she was Ruby's age. "It wasn't as crowded as it is now, nor as developed. But soon, there were far more Black and brown faces all over the city than when I first arrived."

"And I was among them—lucky enough to arrive in 1884," said Mr. Tremaine. "My parents' family were sharecroppers in Georgia, and I would travel north to sell the cotton they produced to the textile companies."

"Is this how you came to own your own textile factory?" asked Mr. Barton.

"It was. I was happy the day I was able to buy the land we'd worked from the owners and give it to my parents," said Ruby's father. "Mrs. Tremaine and I met after service at Olivet Baptist Church. She sang in the choir." Mr. Tremaine looked across the table and for a moment, all the tension from dinner disappeared. Ruby had heard this tale so many times, she could recite it by heart. *He just had to find the singer with that beautiful voice.* Then would come the tale of their long courtship, and how they eventually met the Davenports and became close friends. This was Ruby's chance.

She crossed the yard to her fiancé.

"Would you like to take a walk?" Her voice was quiet.

Harrison offered her his arm and a smile, but didn't say anything as they entered the maze.

"It came with the house," she said.

"Hmm?"

"The hedges planted and trimmed to make this maze. That is the story my mother is telling your family right now. It always follows the one about how she came to the city in the first place. That the maze came with the house, that when she saw it, she fell in love instantly."

"Is that not true?"

"No. My mother did not fall in love so easily, nor does she let her emotions guide her actions." Ruby stopped at a fork in the maze and

plucked a yellowed leaf from the sea of green. “She had these hedges planted. She wanted something that would set us apart. From others in the neighborhood. From her best friends, the Davenports. The hedge made this house, and us, special.”

“Ruby, you don’t need a house *or* a hedge to make you special.”

She laughed. “I know,” she said.

Harrison smiled. He turned and took both her hands in his. “I’m glad you know.” The way he looked at her made her heart flutter. This was a feeling she hoped to always have with him. However, the longer he looked at her, the more unsure she became.

“What is it?” she asked.

He hesitated, but kept his eyes on hers. “My family has some concerns.”

Ruby let her hands fall from his. “Like what?”

“They know of your past history with John Davenport, your flirtations with other gentlemen, and the donations I made to your father’s campaign. None of which would have been a problem if not for the more recent rumors.”

Ruby felt her eyes begin to sting. She took a step back, but Harrison scooped her hands into his again and brought her closer to him.

“I don’t care what my family says. It’s you and me. I told you because there could be...interference, and I don’t want you to be caught off guard.” He kissed her temple. “Ruby Tremaine, I want to marry you more than anything.” He cupped her face like a precious thing. His gaze felt like a caress, more gentle and intimate than the feel of his skin on hers. When his mouth met hers, she felt a rush all the way down. She arched up to meet him, to deepen their kiss. His lips parted easily. The taste of him, salty sweet, the scent of him, sage with something distinctly his own, it made her breathless. His tongue slipped past her lips, sending shivers down her body, despite the heat. She pulled him closer. One of his hands moved to the middle of her back, holding on to her, and she to him, holding on to this kiss.

When they parted, Harrison’s breaths were as ragged as her own. He smiled at her, and she could have died right there. He said, “You and me—”

“Together,” Ruby finished for him.
She wondered if it could still be that simple.
And if she and Harrison should get a maze of their own.

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CHAPTER 10

Olivia

The porch swing squeaked as Olivia pushed it back. Her riding boots had fallen over where she'd kicked them off, her feet now tucked beneath her. The journal in which she'd been drafting her next speech remained on her lap, unopened and bookmarked with newspaper clippings, as she stared down the shady drive of Freeport Manor. Leaves rustled. The air was heavy with moisture, as if a terrible rainstorm made its way toward them and they just couldn't see it for the blazing sun.

Olivia couldn't be inside, though. Her mother, in her father's absence these past two weeks, had turned the sitting room that joined Olivia's and Helen's bedrooms into the center of operations for Helen's party. Swatches and floral arrangements, china samples, and everything in between were on full and excessive display. Her warnings against Olivia's path to activism had been gentle, in contrast, but no less determined.

"I know you think this is the best way," she'd said to Olivia that morning, "and I agree your perspective and passion are worthy beyond a doubt. So, I will not stop you if this is the path you choose, but do not discount the value of our wealth and position."

Wealth and position.

The exact reasons Olivia believed the meetings and marches were all the more important for her to attend. And also why she shied away from the

stage. A weight had settled in her stomach as her mother had given her a look that was a mixture of pride and sadness.

Maybe it will be different for me? She recalled her mother's revelation weeks ago, of her and her father's failed attempt, years ago, to bring about change through demonstration. Instead, they had chosen to live by example and occupy space among the elite, to raise their children as they had. Much to Helen's chagrin.

Now Olivia found it difficult to do much more of anything than focus on the Cause. Ruby spent her time with her fiancé, Mr. Barton, and his friends and family. Helen, John, and Amy-Rose were consumed by business affairs in Chicago and New York.

And what do I do? she asked herself. With her afternoon free of engagements, Olivia had donned a divided skirt and her sturdy pair of riding boots and made her way to the stables. Chestnut, her docile mare, was the only companion that allowed her the freedom to voice her thoughts without inviting well-meaning advice. They'd roamed Freeport's acres of land, milling around the groves of red maples and white oaks her mother had planted that reminded her of Boston Common. The early afternoon had felt somewhat cooler, but there was something in the air that indicated the relief was temporary. Indeed, after returning Chestnut to her stall, feeding and brushing her down, Olivia had found herself sweating in the heat, still without inspiration, and not yet ready to return indoors.

"Miss Davenport?"

Olivia turned to see Mr. Stone step from the wide front doorway onto the porch. He placed his straw hat on his head and adjusted his eyeglasses. Behind him she noticed Edward watching, the door partly ajar to show a sliver of the foyer and the butler inside.

"Thank you, Edward," she said. He frowned but closed the door. "How can I help you, Mr. Stone?" She was tired and didn't have the energy for pleasantries.

"I wanted to congratulate you on the other night." He gestured questioningly to the seat beside her on the swing. She nodded, and he sat.

“It takes a lot of courage to stand in front of a crowd and speak from your heart.”

Olivia groaned. Mr. Stone smiled at the sound—a rare expression, Olivia noted, that utterly changed his face. But her speech. It had been an abject disaster. She’d fumbled her words, dropped her cards, and lost the attention of the crowd in minutes. It was not at all the same as talking to a tearoom of ladies about Vivian Harsh’s appointment as a junior clerk at the Chicago Public Library and what that meant to women and Black people in the city. A quick look at Mr. Stone’s still smiling face made it clear he disagreed with her assessment.

He cleared his throat, smoothed his expression, and sat straighter on the porch swing, halting its rocking. “Your points were valid and, from what I heard, well-researched. It might just take practice. Or perhaps a speech is not the best avenue by which to share your thoughts. But they *are* worth sharing. My favorite part was when you said, ‘Hope visits us in many forms.’”

Olivia smiled. “My mother used to say that to us when we were younger. She still does. It’s something her own mother used to tell her.”

“Very wise words.” He tapped the journal on her lap, his fingertips grazing her leg. The featherlight touch made the hairs on Olivia’s arm stand on end. Mr. Stone drew back. “I apologize for overstepping.”

“You didn’t,” she said quickly, then broke eye contact. He looked at her with such intensity. “You know my parents mean for us to wed?” she asked.

“I know.”

“Each other,” she added, surprised by his calm.

“I know,” he said, with a rich laugh.

First the smile, now the laugh.

“Doesn’t it make you angry?” she asked. Or worse, maybe it made him pleased.

Mr. Stone laughed again. The sound eased some of her tension. It was a nice laugh. “No. They can want that for us. *We* can make our own assessment of how we feel. Then we can respect the other’s decision. It’s not that complicated.”

Olivia studied Mr. Stone. First the smile, then the laugh, now these words. He was right, of course. Her shoulders relaxed until they settled back against the seat.

“Though,” he said slowly, deliberately, “I can’t deny that I find you to be accomplished, witty, passionate, and beautiful. If this does not develop beyond friendship, I would still be so lucky.” Mr. Stone shifted his weight, and the swing began to move gently beneath them again. While he remained as affable as always, Olivia’s pulse raced, her mouth dry. He hummed. She gathered her scattered thoughts. Her lips parted, but something about the way he sat, enjoying the scene before them, gave her pause. He didn’t expect a response, nor need one. A gentle glance from him confirmed it.

They rocked in a companionable silence, watching the sun set over the tree-lined drive. It painted the sky gold, and silhouetted the starlings that soared toward the horizon and Lake Michigan beyond.

As the last of the sun’s rays fanned across the sky, Olivia dared to ask, “And what if you were more than lucky?”

Mr. Stone smiled again. Oh, did it make her chest tight! She didn’t want this feeling at all. “I would take you out on the town, dinner, dancing. I do hope you like talking. I’d like to know you, and for you to know me. Friendship first, friends always. Even if that’s as far as it goes.”

It was a relief. She and Mr. Stone could be friends, and she and Washington DeWight could be...whatever they were.

Olivia let her eyes fall to the journal in her lap. One of Washington’s letters was stuck between the pages. His response to her last note had been delayed, and shorter than usual, with this newspaper article folded into the envelope. Beneath it was her own copy of the *Chicago Defender*, and in her a strange restlessness she could not shake. Olivia ran her fingers over the frayed edges of Washington’s clipping and thought, as she often did, of their last dinner together. How he’d held her hand as they’d watched a sunset, much like this one, from the restaurant’s rooftop. He’d been elated at the prospect of traveling to the capital. With her. Together.

“You’ve come a long way,” he’d said. She remembered—his voice had held a twinge of surprise.

“Well, I’ve had an excellent teacher.” She’d watched him puff up beside her, and smiled. “*Mrs. Woodard* has quite the following here in Chicago,” she’d added, laughing.

He’d stopped and faced her. “Oh, Mrs. Woodard?” The expression in his honey-colored eyes had warmed her insides.

“Of course, you’ve been a great help as well,” she’d conceded. She laughed again and met him halfway when he leaned in to kiss her. The thought of his lips pressed against hers, the way his arms encircled her and pulled her close, it still made her pulse quicken.

“What are you most worried about?” Everett Stone asked, cutting into her thoughts.

Olivia pulled herself back to the present. “I...have been working with the suffragists. They haven’t been able to find common ground with the union workers. One would think after the New York City garment strike and Clara Lemlich’s leadership, the importance of working together would not be a hurdle. I just—I wish we could accomplish something of that magnitude.” Olivia paused and remembered how her throat had tightened when trying to address the large groups. She’d had years of practice and preparation watching her mother do the ladies’ lunches, and she had taken those reins with ease. “The problem is, I’m speaking from a place of privilege, attempting to ask women with far less to give more of their time, their livelihoods, even their safety. When I stand on that platform, the words just...leave me. Or my conviction does.” She sighed. She was ready to change the subject.

“The same could be said of me. Some people will always compare their life to yours, exalt or hate you for it. It does not mean you should turn away from the good work that calls to you.” Mr. Stone leaned forward, elbows on his knees, and Olivia could no longer see his face. When he spoke again, his voice seemed strained. “I was raised by my uncle.”

Olivia mirrored his posture, sensing he was sharing something rare.

“My father was killed, when I was a boy. There was a robbery, and even though he was out of town when it happened, the shopkeeper’s son identified him as the thief. That was all the proof required.” Everett Stone looked over his shoulder at her, the sun’s dying rays turning the glistening brown of his eyes a brilliant bronze. “There was no one to speak for him, to argue on his behalf. My uncle was younger than I am now when he took me in. My grandmother and grandfather had passed some years before.”

Olivia swallowed against the lump in her throat.

“It’s why I pursued a career in law.”

Olivia allowed herself a moment to imagine his pain, and placed her hand on his arm. The intricate musculature under her palm jumped at her touch. He squeezed her hand. “Hetty told me,” she said, her voice raspy, “about the work *you* do. The other work, beyond”—she gestured at her home, the grounds—“ ‘the Davenports’ of it all. “You help Black people in police custody make bail and defend themselves. You give those who have been arrested a voice.”

When he didn’t respond right away, Olivia looked back to the shady drive, the branches swaying in the slight breeze, the smell of heat rising from grass and soil. Her eyes roamed over it; she breathed it in—all her father had worked so hard to build for her mother, for her, and for her siblings. She suspected if Mr. Stone was out here with her, it meant John and Helen were in the garage working, exchanging notes, hatching some new plan.

At last he said, “There is more than one way to give people their voice, to provide a space to have it heard.” He pinched the top of the article Washington had sent and tugged. “Avid readers know this.”

Johnson Wins Fight the headline declared. She’d read the article several times already. The highly anticipated boxing match had taken place on July 4 between the “Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson, a Black boxer, and Jim Jeffries, his white opponent. Though in some places interracial boxing was banned, Reno, Nevada, hosted the “Fight of the Century.” Jackson, the son of two formerly enslaved parents, had won, making him the first Black heavyweight champion of the world. Washington’s letter spoke of the riots

that had erupted across the country as a result, the torches put to successful Black communities, the unrest and protests against segregation occurring across the Southern states. His sense of urgency heightened hers.

“Doesn’t it make you angry?” Olivia tugged the other clippings free. “Look, this man was hanged, another clubbed to death—”

“Yes, and life for men that look like me, like your brother, becomes all the more dangerous. The people who do this don’t care about wealth, status, or education. The only way things will change is if we change it.” He pressed his hand over hers. “Good evening, Miss Davenport.” He stood and walked down the steps toward the horse and Davenport buggy tethered near the stables.

“Mr. Stone?” she called out. Her heart raced as he turned on the gravel drive.

“Yes, Miss Davenport?” He turned to show her his profile. His face angled down.

“Aren’t you going to ask about dinner? About that lucky day?”

He squared himself up to face her and removed his hat. “I make my own luck,” he said.

Olivia felt a smile spread across her face, felt the warmth of his gaze. Or maybe it was just the sunset blazing hot on her cheeks. Mr. Stone dipped his head then, and continued on his way. Olivia watched him climb in the buggy. The carriage bounced down the drive and disappeared between the trees, and his words replayed in her mind. Her attention returned to the article he’d tugged into view.

Now Olivia thought of Ida B. Wells and how her articles in the Memphis papers had traveled so far and wide. A woman, using her voice, to speak out about segregation and lynching, murder and violence. Her words, in print.

Olivia looked down the drive once more.

Later that night, she sat at her desk, a fresh page in her journal before her and pencil in hand.

There is more than one way.

The following morning, a card perched on the tray in the foyer:

Miss Olivia Davenport,

*Would you do me the honor of accompanying me to dinner
this Friday night?*

*In luck and friendship,
Everett Stone, Esq.*

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CHAPTER 11

Amy-Rose

The room spun slowly around Amy-Rose from her seat at station one. The salon's renovations were complete. She'd mopped up the last of the sawdust and staged her hair care line on the display shelves. Mrs. Davis had charged her personal decorator to remodel the space, with Amy-Rose's preferences in mind. Its emerald-and-gold wallpaper had a regal, feminine air. Crystal chandeliers created a dazzling effect on the hardwood floors as the summer sun poured through the large bay windows. It was welcoming—and a bit stifling despite having the front and back doors open for a cross-breeze. But cozy and ready for business.

Clara Shepherd, Amy-Rose's mother, would be dancing in the way she did that made Amy-Rose giggle. It would be a dance of joy and pride, emotions that alternated, for Amy-Rose, with the grief of the past week. The pain that accompanied thoughts of her mother were compounded now by the loss of Mrs. Davis, who didn't even get a chance to see the finished salon.

Amy-Rose stopped the chair opposite the mirror. Her eyes were puffy, the back of her throat scratchy. Mrs. Davis wouldn't want her to wallow. After a shuddering breath, she wiped her tears and grabbed her belongings, then locked up.

From across the street, Amy-Rose turned back to look at it. Her dream come true. When she had returned from New York and opened the desk in

the salon's office, she had found the deed to the property in her name. The salon was hers—the whole *building* now belonged to Amy-Rose. As elated as she was, Amy-Rose couldn't ignore the fact that Mrs. Davis had known she was ill and chose not to confide in her. She still reeled at how neatly everything for her mentor's funeral had been laid out, all of it specified in detail by Mrs. Davis ahead of time. Amy-Rose had moved through the event as though through a fog, remembering her manners, and leaning on the support of her friends and Mrs. Davis's staff as the older woman's countless friends and acquaintances paid their respects in a packed service at the Olivet Baptist Church.

The salon's grand opening would be a quiet affair in respect to Mrs. Davis. Olivia had taken on the task of spreading the word. Amy-Rose just didn't have the energy. She hoped she'd find comfort and distraction in styling the hair of her new clients. It's what her mother and Mrs. Davis would have wanted.

Finally, Amy-Rose turned and began walking to Mrs. Davis's house. She let her feet guide her, freeing her mind to wander. It had been strange living in the house alone these days, with just Mrs. Davis's staff. Now it rose up before her, grand and opulent, like Mrs. Davis herself, and Amy-Rose had to smile. She passed through the iron gate and up the limestone steps. The three-story town house had a brick face and intricate corbels flanking the rounded posts of the narrow porch. Amy-Rose let herself in and removed her hat. In the foyer was a hat she did not recognize. A purse. And a pair of gloves. *Perhaps they belong to Sandra?*

An angry sound erupted from her stomach. Amy-Rose placed her things next to the foreign items and headed straight for the kitchen.

"Hello."

Amy-Rose halted at the doorway. Her heart spasmed at the person standing at the sink. For a moment, she thought Mrs. Davis had returned. She had forgotten that the older woman, who had taken her in and shared her home and wisdom, was gone. Her mouth went dry.

"I bear a striking resemblance to my mother, or so I'm told, though they must not be right. I'm hardly that old!" The woman standing before Amy-

Rose shook her head and placed a saucer and teacup into the sink. “You must be Miss Shepherd.”

Only now did Amy-Rose notice the scent of thick, cloying perfume in the air. Finding her voice, she said, “I am, yes.” She licked her lips. “I’m sorry. You said, ‘mother’?”

“Yes, Maude Davis was my mother.” The woman—she looked to be in her early thirties—leaned back against the sink. Her skin was the same deep brown as Mrs. Davis’s. Her clothes understated—the complete opposite of Mrs. Davis’s over-the-top style. Her hair was styled straight and twisted into a coif on the crown of her head. “My name is Ruth Davis. I was her only child,” she said, eyeing their surroundings as if she were taking inventory.

“I didn’t know Mrs. Davis had any children. There are no pictures. She never—”

“Talked about me?” Miss Davis scoffed. “Yes, well, it’s been years since my mother and I spoke.” When her gaze settled back on Amy-Rose, they were cold. “What are you doing here?”

Amy-Rose frowned. “I live here.” Her voice cracked. “I *lived* here with your mother.”

Ruth Davis shook her head. “Not anymore.”

• • •

The hired carriage bounded up the drive to Freeport Manor. Amy-Rose picked at her fingernails in the light from the setting sun slanting through the open window. It was all she could do not to pull at the threads of her new dress. The trees stood sentry, as always, bowing toward the carriage, as if ushering it along, the main house growing larger through the windows. She couldn’t help leaning against the carriage door to get a better look. The familiar lines of the manor house, and the sounds—they stirred up both apprehension and comfort. The gravel path shifting under carriage wheels. The cooing of the mourning doves that nested in the roof of the stables. The

horses whinnying inside it. All of it overwhelmed her nearly to the point of tears.

“Nice set of bricks,” said the driver.

Amy-Rose pulled back and nodded. “It was home.” She attempted to quiet the butterflies in her stomach and blink back her tears. As the driver unloaded her bags, she approached the grand stairs to the wide, welcoming porch. Amy-Rose kept her eyes straight and not on the garage to her left, where he could be working. John. His possible proximity made this return so much more difficult. She stared at the carved front door. Then she stepped backward down the stairs, walking instead to the familiarity and comfort of the side entrance, her eyes glancing in the direction of the stables and garage. The gravel path shifted beneath her heels as she approached the side entrance.

The door to the kitchen swung in easily. Amy-Rose inhaled the smell of freshly baked bread. The room was warm and empty. Jessie and Ethel, whom she expected to be here, were nowhere to be seen. The counter was clear and all the pots and pans were neatly polished and put away. She ran her hand over the smooth surface of the counter and paused where she used to sit for hours, sketching her dream salon and recording all the variations of her hair care recipes. This is where her dream was born. *And now, you’re back.*

“Amy-Rose!” Olivia entered the kitchen and immediately threw her arms around Amy-Rose’s neck. Her momentum sent them swinging in a wobbly circle, skirts flaring. Olivia pulled back at last and held her by the shoulders.

“Thank you, again, Olivia,” Amy-Rose said. “Really.”

Olivia’s brow wrinkled, then she covered her face with her hands. “No thanking me! This was your home once. It can be again. If you want it to be.” Amy-Rose’s stomach flipped at her friend’s words. There was a time when they could have meant something else. Her gaze drifted to the direction of the garage as they moved through the house.

Olivia looked around. “Where are your bags? Did you come in the kitchen door?” Amy-Rose smiled sheepishly, and they walked around to see

Edward had carried the trunks and bags in from the porch. “I am so very sorry”—she hugged Amy-Rose again—“about Mrs. Davis. It was a beautiful service for an extraordinary woman. I’m here if you’d like to talk. About anything.” Her friend then did a little hop and hugged her quickly for the third time. “I can hardly wait for your grand opening.” Olivia sighed. “I’m convinced yours will be the most successful business in the city. All the gossip is already saying it’s the place to go.”

“Thank you again, for helping me organize it—” Amy-Rose stopped before the tears she felt verging could spill over. She took a breath. “Is Mrs. Davenport in?”

“This way.” Olivia tucked Amy-Rose’s hand under her arm and led her to the sitting room at the end of the hall. It was a bright room with large windows and overstuffed chairs. It’s where all the family’s guests were received. Mrs. Davenport sat on one of the love seats, embroidering, her small dog at her feet. “Olivia. Amy-Rose!” She stood, her needlepoint forgotten, to embrace Amy-Rose. The young woman stiffened. Though they’d embraced at Mrs. Davis’s funeral, the affection still caught her by surprise. Before that somber day, she couldn’t remember the last time the Davenport matriarch had held her. Was it when her mother had passed?

As children, Amy-Rose played alongside the young Davenports and Ruby. She recalled a scraped knee after a fall from a tree, a challenge initiated by Helen, that Emmeline Davenport had treated herself. She had held Amy-Rose then and commended her on her bravery. This place, this family, would always feel like home. Amy-Rose relaxed and melted into the hug. Her eyes stung anew.

Mrs. Davenport said, “Maude was a dear friend, and I imagine this has been an even deeper cut to you. I know she adored you and would have very much enjoyed seeing you open your salon, being a part of your life.” Mrs. Davenport exhaled loudly and gestured for them to sit. “Running a business is rewarding and just about as difficult as you’d think.” She studied Amy-Rose, long enough for her to start to fidget. “You’ll do a fantastic job, Amy-Rose. And I will be here for you every step to help, however I can. Maude and Clara wouldn’t want it any other way.”

For a moment, Amy-Rose was speechless, full of surprise. Olivia settled her on the love seat opposite Mrs. Davenport and sat beside her. "Thank you, Mrs. Davenport," Amy-Rose said at last. "I'm looking forward to the hard work. And I appreciate you welcoming me back into your home. I apologize for any inconvenience—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Olivia. "You are always welcome here. I told you." She turned to her mother, who nodded firmly.

"Thank you." Amy-Rose licked her lips. Her mouth felt dry, her chest tight. She had wondered what would happen if the Davenports had turned her away. She took a breath and spoke more quickly now. "I promise to be of no trouble. And I can pay for my own lodgings and any other expenses my stay might incur."

"Olivia is right," Mrs. Davenport said. "You are welcome here." She stood again and held out her hands to Amy-Rose. "Your mother found us at a time when we had few friends. The carriage business was booming, but the city was struggling. It took a lot of Mr. Davenport's and my time to build ties with the community. Your mother helped watch over our most prized accomplishments. Our children. She was a friend to me." She swiped away a tear and drew Amy-Rose close. "And a superb mother to you. We are so glad to have you back."

Amy-Rose didn't know what to say. She was grateful when Olivia handed her a handkerchief.

"Mrs. Davis will be missed," Mrs. Davenport continued. "And you may keep your money. Save it for your salon. I can't believe that woman pushed you out." She looked like she would say more but held her tongue. "Let's forget about that ugly business. You're here now and have wonderful things ahead." Mrs. Davenport smiled, the dimple that she and John shared revealing itself. Amy-Rose smiled back, finding her words again.

"I am so grateful, Mrs. Davenport, for your hospitality. I will bring my bags up to my old room."

"Edward will see to your belongings, Amy-Rose. You can stay in the blue room upstairs. You are no longer staff, dear. You're our guest and will be treated as such."

Behind her eyes, Amy-Rose felt the beginning of fresh tears. As if sensing her distress, Olivia stood and pulled her free of Mrs. Davenport. "I know some people who will be very happy to see you." With a vigor hidden beneath etiquette and lace, Olivia pulled Amy-Rose from the room. "I just saw Jessie and Ethel come with the laundry."

Amy-Rose glanced out the window and saw Hetty, a straw basket on her hip and twirling a leaf between her fingers, a stark relief framed by the golden glow of the setting sun.

"Thank you again, Mrs. Davenport," Amy-Rose said over her shoulder. She tried her best to steady her breaths as she and Olivia ran down the hall, past Mrs. Milford and her stony expression.

They burst through the swinging door to the kitchen, startling Jessie. "Child, if you were trying to send me—" Her words stopped when she saw Amy-Rose. "Ethel! Hetty!"

"Hello, Jessie," said Amy-Rose, a bit weepy. Her words came in a muffled jumble, nearly smothered in the cook's shoulder, which smelled like curry and a hint of vanilla. Amy-Rose inhaled sharply, missing the warmth of the kitchen and Jessie's eager embraces. Maybe this was still home? She sniffed and blinked away tears.

"I wasn't sure if you'd ever step foot back in this house."

Amy-Rose's face grew hot. They all knew the circumstances under which she'd left. "You can rest assured that I'm here now. I wish I could have visited sooner."

Ethel came from the door leading to the servants' stairs, with Hetty close on her heels. Her hug was gentle and reassuring. Hetty's was quick and tight. She pressed her lips into a thin line and then signaled to Olivia. The pair stepped back and began speaking together in hushed tones.

Olivia broke away to squeeze Amy-Rose's arm. "You're in great hands, but you already knew that."

Amy-Rose swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded. This was the family her mother had left to her. And they would be the ones to see her through.

• • •

With the last blouse secured in the large wardrobe, Amy-Rose looked around the room she would call hers—but only until she could get back on her feet. Her gaze fell on a few of the boxes still left to unpack. Atop them were the letters and package John had sent her while she was in New York. She approached them with caution. She picked up the package, tugged on the twine around the thick brown paper. It was heavier than she remembered. *Maybe that's just your imagination. Or maybe they hold something too heavy to carry just yet?*

Amy-Rose tucked it to her chest and thumbed through the envelopes containing John's letters. Her fingers itched to tear them open, the way they itched to pin a stubborn lock of hair that refused to curl the right way. It was her heart that held her back. With a huff, she pulled open an empty dresser drawer and shoved the bundle of letters and package inside. *Out of sight is where it belongs for now*, she thought, and studied the walls. This suite was known as the blue room for the pale-blue-and-cream paper that decorated the walls in a delicate damask pattern. The canopied bed was made with rich, dark blue linens and a duvet as thick as a cloud. She had always wondered what it would have felt like to slip between the silk sheets of this room and place her head on the cool pillows.

And she *was* nearly ready for bed. Amy-Rose grabbed the satin robe Mrs. Davis had convinced her belonged in her closet and threw it over her shoulders. She'd just get a glass of water. Amy-Rose opened her door to a silhouette in the hallway.

She recognized his profile before he even completed his turn.

John Davenport stood in the hall. He went completely still. Then he took a few steps toward her, stopping in the glow of fading light from the hall window. He was so close, she could reach out to touch him. He wore a sleeveless shirt; his work shirt was a balled-up mess in his fist. His pants sat high on his waist, loose against his long legs. She found herself surrounded by the smell of his cologne, balsam and bergamot, with the tang of oil and

sweat. It was distinct, a scent she associated with him and all the feelings she'd tried so hard to suppress these many weeks.

"Amy-Rose," he said quietly. He took a step back then. She could hear the surprise in his voice. It was the moment she'd both been dreading and hoping for all evening. Their first encounter at Mrs. Davis's funeral was a blur. Except when their skin had touched. His hand around hers when he offered his condolences had been rough and warm. At the time, all she could do was nod. Since then, she'd rehearsed what she might say a million times.

But now that she saw him, Amy-Rose forgot it all. *How can I be calm with him looking like that? With him even just standing here?* Every fiber of her felt pulled toward him. But she stood straighter. She rolled her shoulders back. After a moment, the words began to surface. Their lives were wrong for each other, she would explain. They'd rushed into things, and the heartache they'd suffered was for the best. Perhaps Mr. Davenport's practical assessment was the right one.

No.

Amy-Rose refused to accept that the one thing she could not control would be the deciding factor—the *only* factor—in how people saw her, or in how she chose to navigate the world. She was more than the *daughter of a slave owner*. Mr. Davenport knew this. And so did John.

All she had to do was open her mouth and speak it.

John pulled his hands from his pockets. He held them up, as if to pacify himself or her—she wasn't sure. She noticed his fingers, long and slender as ever. But his lips pursed. He was going to speak. She couldn't stand to hear him exhale her name like that again.

"Good night," she said quickly, and disappeared into her room before he could utter a word. Tonight, she would just have to be thirsty.

CHAPTER 12

Helen

“**W**ould you please pass the sugar?”

The younger Davenport daughter blinked her vision clear. “Did you say something?”

Mrs. Milford sighed. “Oh, it wasn’t so bad. There’s no need for you to ignore me.” She lifted up from her seat to reach the sugar.

Helen looked around. She felt like she was coming out of a daze. She and Mrs. Milford sat at their regular table at Marshall Field & Company’s busy tearoom. As Helen’s tutor, Mrs. Milford had a few weeks left to get Helen ready for her debut. Her parents would only hold off marrying her for so long, whether or *not* her sister was wed.

Ugh, Helen thought. The last thing she needed was a white stuffy dress and a series of parties thrown in her honor where a parade of *boys* she’d known her whole life, most of whom had already been dismissed as matches for Olivia, gawked at her. And to what end? So she could be stuck inside some house, away from any motorcar or carriage or personal ambition?

“Had I known that co-ed dance lessons would be so poorly received, I would have suggested them sooner,” Mrs. Milford continued.

Helen sat up. “Sooner?” Her toes ached at the memory of the morning. Not only had she had to endure Mr. Greenfield’s two left feet, but also her mother’s friend Mrs. Johnson. Olivia had warned her that the woman had

often accompanied their mother on Olivia's chaperoned dates after her debut, and that her keen eyes and loose tongue were not to be trifled with. It was Mrs. Johnson who had suggested that a choreographed dance, including both young men and women, was just the thing Helen's party needed. And her mother had *agreed*! The instructor practically floated with glee and immediately ended the lesson that morning so he could plan.

"Yes, by now you would be used to dance lessons, and as amenable," Mrs. Milford went on, "as you have been to everything else." Helen's tutor gave her a level look. Dressed in black, Mrs. Milford exuded a foreboding presence that concealed her dry humor and surprisingly advanced notions despite her primary role as etiquette expert. Having lost her husband in the Springfield Race Riot two years ago, Mrs. Milford asserted that her charges gave her purpose.

"But I know how to dance well enough, Mrs. Milford. Lessons will cut into my time working on the motorcar. We need to at least match the top speed of the Ford and Studebaker. And now there's this whole business of a performance?" She met her tutor's stern gaze, undeterred. "I've only just gotten John to show the appropriate level of enthusiasm for my idea. Now we're finally working on it, and—" She cut herself off, seeing the woman's eyebrow lift.

John loved automobiles too much not to give in to the allure of having one with the Davenport name on it—his dream as much as hers. After she'd caught him up on her conversation with Mr. Swift and endured his lecture about sneaking off to woo strange men with endorsement deals, he'd finally come around. Even as she tea'd with Mrs. Milford, John was gathering what they needed. And Helen was stuck here. She felt the urge to slouch but kept her back straight. "I just want it so badly."

"Desire is a strong emotion. We must not let it us blind us to all else." Mrs. Milford had reluctantly agreed to assist Helen in her pursuit of her own interests, saying it was far easier than searching for her hiding spots, of which there were many. It also saved Helen from more lectures. Though, even with her father abroad, time for those interests had been difficult to come by. Her mother insisted on her presence at various functions with

other well-to-do ladies. Just yesterday, they called on a young woman and her mother. The father owned the tannery where Davenport Carriage Company sourced leather for the carriage interiors. A good connection to have, she supposed, but Helen would have sooner preferred to meet the gentleman himself than to have tea with his wife and daughter.

Mrs. Milford's eyes softened in her long face. "Being patient is difficult, Miss Davenport. And I know you feel that if you don't prove now you can run the business, that it will never happen. I promise, that is not the case. You are too stubborn for that."

Helen's laugh joined Mrs. Milford's. It felt good, this release. She was grateful for the understanding her companion had for her plight, one most girls her age and status did not share. Helen wasn't ready for the version of adulthood her parents had in mind for her. And she had to admit, when she'd first seen Mrs. Milford in her somber attire and hair pulled back tightly, she'd feared the worst from this woman too. But their trips to parks and museums had piqued and sated Helen's curiosity, as had their teas and lunches and conversations. Still, Helen knew Mrs. Milford's true purpose was to prepare her to find a husband and to make her a good wife, two things she was wholly uninterested in. Especially not since...*him*.

As if reading her thoughts, Mrs. Milford said, "Cheer up. I am sure there is an eligible young man out there perfectly suited for you. This need for tinkering will pass and you will find interests in common that will unite you."

Helen suppressed an eye roll. *Tinkering*, as her tutor put it, was not an interest she would outgrow.

Mrs. Milford continued. "I know you did have a *certain* person in mind, Miss Davenport, but you're young. You have plenty to look forward to."

Helen swallowed her next words. Jacob Lawrence and his easy smile appeared in her mind. She *had* thought she'd found the young gentleman who would take her for what she was. Someone who would understand what the Davenport Carriage Company meant to her. What she could do for it. One who would love her and all her quirks and insecurities and

ambitions, finding them essential, not terrifying—things to embrace, not run from.

“Yes,” Helen said. “Perhaps I will find someone who will toss a wrench into my future—in a good way. Like, an actual wrench. But until then, I think it’s perfectly well and good to try to do as much as I can to secure a foothold in the family business.” Now Helen did slouch in her chair, making a point to not see Mrs. Milford’s disapproving glare over the low floral centerpiece. She was still slouched when she saw her mother and Olivia making their way to the table.

Helen sat up. “Hello, Mama.” She gave Olivia a look, which her sister pointedly ignored.

“Hi, darling.” Mrs. Davenport took a seat between Mrs. Milford and Helen. Olivia sat on Helen’s other side. They dropped several bags and packages tied with twine at their feet.

“What’s all this?”

“They’re decorations for your party,” said Olivia, giving Helen a wide-eyed look as she unpinned her broad hat decorated with bright red roses. Helen felt a pang of guilt, knowing she should be making more of an effort to help plan this event. “And I spotted just the dress to pull the whole theme together. I made sure I got the brightest, largest floral patterns I could find for you. Oh, and so many frills—the more frills, the better.”

“Ha, very funny, Livy.” Helen watched her sister shrug and inspect the sandwiches on the serving tower. “You *are* joking, right?”

Olivia turned to her slowly, her eyebrows arched and a wicked smile on her face. “You’ll just have to see.”

Helen’s head whipped to where Mrs. Milford covered a chuckle with her hand.

“Mama,” said Helen.

“Girls,” Mrs. Davenport said. Olivia and Helen both straightened at her tone. They were in public, in Marshall Field’s grand tearoom, where their behavior would be noted. Mrs. Davenport cleared her throat before speaking again. “We brought a few swatches of lace for you to look through

too, Helen. For your dress.” She reached for a small triangle of bread and smeared it with butter.

“But not a floral dress, right?”

Olivia, her ever-dutiful sister, stood to pour the pair a cup of tea and refresh Helen’s and Mrs. Milford’s. “You seem suddenly very interested in your dress,” she whispered.

“No,” her mother said, with the corner of her mouth twitching. “Not floral.”

Her words, though reassuring, did not ease Helen’s concerns. “Mama, I don’t think I’m ready.”

“Helen, it’s only a party.” Mrs. Davenport looked tired.

Only a party? If only it were *only* a party. That may be what it looked like to the guests, and what it felt like to her mother, but to Helen it signaled the beginning of the end. Mrs. Milford thought she was dramatic. But Helen knew better. A party to “introduce her to society” *only* meant she was available for courtship. It *only* meant that young men would feel that they had the right to invade her personal space and time. It would be *only* the end of her having any control whatsoever over her own life.

Helen looked up at the high ceilings as if they were about to fall on her. If Olivia couldn’t keep their parents from meddling in *her* love life, what chance did Helen have? Her chest tightened. The macarons she had eaten threatened to see their way back to daylight. She was a moment away from excusing herself from the table, her grip clammy around the arms of her chair, when she felt a hand on hers. *Livy*. She didn’t dare look up at her sister for fear she might cry. But the gentle pressure grounded her. Sure, Olivia teased her. She also stepped in as often as she could so that Helen could take her time.

Helen was grateful.

“I know you aren’t looking forward to being the center of attention.” Her mother watched her expectantly. “We all know there are other things you’d rather be doing.” She took a sip of her tea, then met Helen’s gaze. “This is important too.”

“I know it is. And I’m not ready,” Helen repeated. It felt good to have the words out even though the moment of silence that greeted them confirmed that the party would not be postponed.

Mrs. Davenport patted Helen’s other hand under the table. “Most people don’t get to prepare for the important events in their lives. Sometimes they don’t know they’ve lived them until they’re over. Enjoy it now before it’s too late.” With a final squeeze of Helen’s hand, her mother leaned back in her chair.

Helen retreated from the conversation. Mrs. Milford changed the subject, asking her mother and Olivia about their afternoon. Her tutor listened politely. Helen tuned them out, focusing vaguely on the cake stand, when she heard a familiar name whispered behind her. Helen glanced over her shoulder, but a column obstructed the speaker.

She tilted her chair back.

“Oh yes, I heard he’s returned from London. Jacob Lawrence, yes. And with a wife!”

The front legs of Helen’s chair crashed to earth. Her breath came in tight gasps. *Jacob Lawrence. Back. With a bride?*

“Her name is Etta James Lawrence,” drifted the speaker’s voice.

Spots clouded Helen’s vision. Before her head became too light, she again felt a pressure on her hand. Olivia held her fiercely. At her shoulder was Mrs. Milford and her mother. The older woman made it around the table with very unladylike haste. It took what was left of her strength not to blurt out what she’d just heard. Mrs. Milford and Olivia knew about the connection she and Mr. Lawrence shared. How they fell for each other this past spring despite his public courtship of Olivia and Helen’s own adamant refusal to entertain suitors. They also knew why she ended the relationship, breaking both their hearts.

Her mother had no idea.

In the corner of Helen’s vision, a group of young women walked past their table. The closest one turned and smirked at Helen over her shoulder. It was Agatha Leary, Bertha Wallace, Odette something—a new acquaintance of Ruby’s—and their friends following closely behind. The

words may not have been meant for Helen, but they cut just the same. Was this her first glimpse into the debutante scene? Helen would have laughed under any other circumstances, but her world was tilting on its axis, and the firm pressure her governess applied to her forehead with a cold cloth kept her tethered.

“Breathe,” Mrs. Milford urged.

Helen did.

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CHAPTER 13

Ruby

It was gorgeous out. Hot but not humid for a change, just beautiful. Ruby leaned back against the rough oak behind her, enjoying the breeze, wishing it was just her and Harrison still hidden in the secrecy of the Tremaines' hedge maze. Here in public, she had to settle for the brush of his arm against hers when he reached for a scone or a piece of diced fruit. The earthy-sage scent of him would drift over, fill her senses, and leave her feeling briefly light-headed. Oh, it was torture not being able to sneak the little touches they had before! Secret meetings, like the day they'd met at the museum where he'd proposed, were completely out of the question now, every bright moment edged with a public dread that made her feel jangly.

Enjoy this day, she reminded herself. Today, the Carters joined them—they were picnicking in Jackson Park, revisiting a spot from their early courtship where she knew privacy was scarce. The trees provided shade and the lake glinted in the distance. What better way to avoid anything *untoward* than to display a *demure* comportment in *plain sight* for all of Chicago to see?

“What a lovely day!” said Odette. Harrison's friend had shed her gloves and was fanning herself furiously. Unlike the linen dress Ruby was wearing, Odette's day dress was of a heavier cotton and a tighter bodice. Her brother, Carter, sat beside her watching someone's game of croquet nearby. The leisure class, as Olivia now called anyone with the means to enjoy daytime

hobbies, enjoyed chilled sweet teas under the shade of the trees, and umbrellas held aloft by their servants. They smelled of earth and the sweet jams and fresh breads they'd brought with them.

Carter frowned. "You have lighter dresses at the house," he said. "You chose that contraption to highlight your figure. And now you complain?"

"Hush!" Odette hissed. She closed her fan in one swift motion and slapped her brother's elbow. "You can't go around spilling a girl's secrets." She winked at Ruby.

"I hardly think it's a secret!" Ruby smiled. "I often find fashion the simplest form of communication." She pulled her fan from her skirt with a flourish and bashfully looked at Harrison. *Curse those rumors!* She imagined his lips briefly brushing her temple at her cheeky comment, his arms circling her waist, pulling her in—

Carter laughed, loud, making Ruby jump. His eyes found hers, full of mirth.

Harrison reached for her hand and squeezed it. "I will do well, then, to not interfere with your and Olivia's shopping days."

"You would," she said. But she felt the smile on her face freeze as she saw Mrs. Johnson, a friend of her mother's and Mrs. Davenport's, walking down the path. *This is why you came*, she chided herself. *So people would see you courting in a respectable place with other wholesome young people.*

Odette's peal of fresh laughter drew Mrs. Johnson's eyes, and the older woman waved enthusiastically. Ruby noticed other patrons of the park, their umbrellas high to protect their light complexions, whip their heads to the source of the laughter. Ruby tugged her skirt over her ankle, as if this small act of modesty might compensate for her new friend's outburst.

Mrs. Johnson, undeterred by the lack of propriety, approached the small party. "Miss Carter, how lovely to see you," she said. Odette stood and they clasped hands. The older woman broke contact to address Ruby. "And Miss Tremaine." Her eyes softened with pity.

Ruby tilted her chin higher. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Johnson. Enjoying your stroll?"

“Oh, I am.” The older woman turned to Harrison, who had stood to take her hand. “Mr. Barton, it was wonderful seeing you at the community center last night. I think we need more of the junior members of society involved in the goings-on of the city.”

Harrison dipped his head. “It was an informative experience,” he said. “I’m still quite new to Chicago.”

“I hope to see you again.” Mrs. Johnson straightened. “Oh—I see my party up ahead. Well, enjoy the weather while you can. Winter will be here before we know it.” She said her goodbyes and left.

Ruby snapped open her fan as Harrison settled again on the blanket. She turned to him, brows furrowed. “You attended the gathering for my father’s rival?”

Harrison sat straighter. “We need to get our voices heard by lawmakers, as quickly as possible. Otherwise the work your father started, the work the laborers and suffragists and Olivia are doing, might be forgotten.”

Ruby glanced at the Carters, who were now engrossed in a conversation of their own. “People question my father’s ability to lead, Harrison. How will it look if his future son-in-law is supporting the winner of his race—his competition?”

“They will think we are a family that puts the city and its people first. Your father should also be attending these events. He owns a textile factory in the city, one of the few still operating at full capacity during the strike. If they see support from his whole family, it will only strengthen his future bids for office. And put to rest any of the reservations that were brought up at the party on election night.”

Ruby scowled. But Harrison was right. She also recognized that this was not some problem she could work her way out of on her own. Ruby Tremaine was out of elaborate plans. She felt tired. What could she do but wait this one out? Though waiting was most definitely not her strong suit. Meanwhile, she endured her father’s exaggerated sighs and booming footsteps as he wordlessly displayed his disappointment in not only the election results but in her.

“I just hope my parents—our parents—come around,” she said. Her mother had made a show of coming to her defense during dinner with the Bartons. But in the weeks since, Ruby had come to understand that her mother’s position behind her father—as it was the night of the election results—remained firmly fixed.

Her stomach clenched. She knew the rumors about them—about her—had put a strain on the Barton family as well. She suspected Harrison hid the extent of it.

“I hope they do too,” he said.

Ruby looked at him, into his warm brown eyes, and counted herself lucky. She had made the right choice. This she knew. Even if her parents did not truly see all he did for her, for them. She watched his gaze touch her lips, her collarbone. She imagined it was his hand that left the resulting heat on her skin, that she had the freedom to kiss him where and when she pleased.

“Harrison is right,” Odette chimed in. “And you can ignore those awful rumors about you.”

Ruby startled, then bristled at the young lady’s interjection. She wondered how much Odette had overheard.

Odette reached over and placed a reassuring hand on Ruby’s knee. Ruby could feel the dampness of the girl’s palm through the thin linen layers of her skirts. “They are old-fashioned gossips who have outdated notions of how things should be.” Odette straightened and gestured to the group of young white people playing croquet nearby. “We are a decade into the new century, and they are clinging to society’s old, nineteenth-century ways of thinking.” She dropped her voice an octave and added, “Notions that did not include people like us when they were implemented. You don’t have to play by those rules.”

“In time, you’ll learn how I feel about rules.” Ruby’s eyes flitted again to where Harrison sat, watching her with a smile that calmed her and warmed her more than the summer sun.

“Oh, how divine!” Odette laughed over her fan. “Harrison, you’ve hit the jackpot with this one.” She turned to Ruby, dropping her voice low

again. “Now that Carter and I are to become Chicagoans, we’ll need you to tell us what’s what.”

“Odette, can’t you stop and just admire things instead of imposing on everyone we meet?”

“How am I imposing?” Odette protested. “*Harrison*,” she said, “is an old family friend. And I meant what I said—I don’t think the antiquated customs of our *elders* should dictate how we live.” She preened and looked at Ruby. “Especially to ones so fabulous.”

Ruby blushed and straightened her shoulders.

Carter grumbled under his breath. His body angled toward Harrison. “I just think you should have more tact. Mr. Tremaine’s associates sound like they wield a lot of power and influence. It’d be terrible to see that used against you, my friend,” he said. “What has your family said about the engagement?”

Ruby’s spine straightened. Harrison had shared his family’s misgivings with her, their concern that her reputation may be too much to overcome for their son, a young man trying to make his way in a new city—Harrison had only arrived in Chicago this past spring. And people’s snap judgments about his parents’ coupling...people could be leery, uncomfortable. Having seen Mr. and Mrs. Barton together, there was no doubt of the depth of their affection and their bond. The same was true for Harrison and Ruby. Harrison had said he chose her, that together, they could face anything. She remembered how he stood beside her the night of the election results, under her father’s thunderous gaze, and refused to step back.

“Ruby and I will figure it out.” He turned to her and squeezed her hand. “My parents are as thrilled as I am to welcome her into our family, Carter.”

Carter had the good sense to look embarrassed.

“Yes, we’ll figure it out.” The words sounded more forceful than Ruby felt. She fought the urge to reach for the pendant at her throat. Harrison had become accustomed to the gesture and read it as a sign of her discomfort.

“Well, this city is full of potential,” said Odette. “I’ll have to find some hobby to pass the time.”

“Hobby?” said Carter. “I’d prefer you work. I’m afraid what type of trouble you’d find through a *hobby*.”

Odette, a question on her face, turned to Ruby, who froze. Until recently, she’d spent the majority of her free time eating at Marshall Field & Company’s tearoom or shopping at Madame Chérie’s boutique with Olivia. “I have a hobby,” Ruby started. *Don’t I?* “I...have been sketching again, mostly dress ideas. Right now, my maid, Margaret, executes the patterns, sewing it all together.” Though calling her own scrawled drawings “patterns” was generous. If only she could still afford the services of Madame Chérie’s boutique.

Odette’s eyes lit up. “You’re so fashionable and brave. Forget about the rumors of you being a harlot—”

Ruby cringed at the choice of words.

“—and chase down the ones that name you the most fashionable socialite in Chicago.”

Ruby chose to focus on the other, much better part of what Odette had said. Shopping and fashion had always been passions—and talents—of Ruby’s.

Carter sat straighter. His eyes traveled from Ruby’s face to her shoes, poking from beneath her dress. “I’d even say you’d be an eye-catching model. I know I’d buy for a woman whatever you have on.”

Ruby felt heat flood her face. She broke eye contact with Carter long enough to see Harrison frown at his friend.

Carter held up his hands. “I mean no disrespect. Just admiring a beautiful lady. You must count yourself lucky, my friend.”

Harrison turned to Ruby. “I do.”

“My goodness!” said Odette. “It is not quite time for those words.”

“You didn’t let me finish. Carter, we might have to find out if that jaw of yours is made of glass if you keep looking at her like that.” There was an edge to his voice that Ruby had never heard. His hazel eyes were hard. Ruby reached for his arm and squeezed it gently until the tension released and his hand relaxed. Carter shifted opposite them. They were in public.

Mrs. Johnson was still close enough to see them. Ruby withdrew her hand, though it made her ache.

Odette clucked her tongue. “Men.”

Ruby smiled and forced a laugh. “Always spoiling for a fight.”

“Oh, Ruby, you must wear something special to the Pekin Theatre. Everyone who’s anyone will be there, so it will be the perfect opportunity to showcase your skills. Perhaps I’ll call on a buyer friend of mine,” she said, her face thoughtful. Odette began talking about her *new friend*—all her friends were new—and Ruby saw her chatter melt the tension between the two gentlemen. Like a conductor, Odette deftly redirected the conversation. As if she’d done it countless times before. While Odette spoke, Ruby wondered, *Do I have skills to share?* Helen was a talented mechanic, as unpleasant as that sounded. The younger girl’s passion and know-how were unwavering. As were Olivia’s for her Cause, as she put it. Somehow, during Ruby’s matchmaking schemes, they’d found and nurtured callings of their own.

The croquet-playing group nearby let out a sudden cheer. Ruby turned to them. They were a rainbow of pastel colors, brushed in the signature strokes of the latest Marshall Field & Company had to offer. “You would do that? You don’t mind?” she said, turning her attention back to Odette.

Odette’s eyebrows scrunched together. “Mind? Oh honey,” she said with recognition. “I insist!”

Ruby listened to Odette clap and felt her shoulders relax. She wasn’t sure when cutting up and reconfiguring dresses to hide her change in circumstances had turned into an enjoyable pastime, but she knew it had taken her mind off more troubling matters. Perhaps a new enterprise awaited her. *A distraction turned amusement.* This was the hope she was holding out for.

CHAPTER 14

Olivia

The vaulted ceilings of the Blackstone hotel created a cavernous, luxurious lobby. Olivia hadn't been here since the night of the election results, a night so busy, she hadn't properly appreciated the splendor of the newly built hotel. Now, on the arm of Mr. Stone, she took in the crystal chandeliers and lamps, the plush furniture and parquet floors as they made their way to the large dining room. The maître d' escorted her and Mr. Stone to a prime table, where she recognized men and their wives who often attended parties thrown by her parents. It was the first stop of the night Mr. Stone had planned for them. He'd picked her up in a sleek motorcar that he'd left with the hotel's valet. Her mother and Mrs. Johnson had gone ahead in a carriage and sat far enough away now to give the illusion of privacy.

Mr. Stone eased Olivia's chair under her as she sat, careful not to snag the beaded hemline of her powder-blue dress. His breath was cool against her skin. "I'm glad you agreed to dinner."

Olivia unfolded her napkin and smoothed it over her lap. "Of course," she said, remembering herself. "I'm impressed. A table at this hotel is difficult to acquire." The dining room was not quite full yet, the tables nicely spaced to offer their guests privacy. The crystal glassware shimmered in the candlelight.

“I have a few connections of my own,” he said, eyes alight. He looked dashing in a dark suit that hugged his form. The cut complemented the sharp angles of his jaw. He held up a finger.

The waiter arrived immediately. “Champagne?”

“Please,” Mr. Stone said.

The suggestion was perfect, though how could he know. Her first piece had been published! It was signed “Anonymous,” but Olivia could not stop grinning. To see her words in print? *What a marvel!* She tingled at the thought of it sitting in the mailboxes and homes of countless subscribers and newspaper readers. *Her words!* Nothing could have brought her down from such a high.

Well, almost nothing.

This morning, Edward had confirmed that there had again been no letters from Washington DeWight. Her own most recent note, sent two weeks ago, had gone unanswered. She thought he’d have at least responded to the draft of her article she’d eventually sent on to the *Defender*. She had been unsure if she should sign her name to it, and had sought his advice in her last letter.

But she was proud of what she had produced—to lend her voice, if not her name, to the Cause. It was Mr. Stone who had given her the idea that she could be this voice of many. And it was her own idea to write what she had, and to remain anonymous. The guilt she harbored about her station and how it compared to those she wished to help lingered, yes. But the life of wealth and privilege she enjoyed would not outshine what she had to say.

“Is this too much?”

Olivia pulled herself out of her musings and smiled. “No, champagne is perfect.” She pushed away the distracting thoughts. *Be in this moment.* She decided to enjoy her quiet success and the company of the handsome gentleman across from her.

“Perfect? The night has only just begun.” He lifted his glass, bubbles exploding from the surface like sparks. “I had hoped to impress you and work my way up.”

“Yes, well, I suppose the task now is to maintain it.” The flutes created a singing note as they touched.

“I am not one to shy away from a challenge.”

“Is that so?” she asked.

“I would not have survived otherwise.” He leaned forward. “I was the youngest and smallest in my schoolroom. So, when I was dared to climb to the top of the tallest tree, I did—”

“Really?” she asked.

“Yes, and never said no to a footrace.”

Olivia laughed. “And did you win?”

“Most times. I was surprisingly fast and agile for being small. My mother was always dancing—I must have inherited some coordination from her.”

Olivia thought about how light he was on his feet. “‘A two-step can save your life,’ mine likes to say, ‘or threaten it.’”

Mr. Stone laughed. “Mrs. Davenport is an intelligent woman.” His gaze went far away, twinkling. “I convinced an older boy once, I knew the secret to the smoothest two-step. He called me a liar. That afternoon, after enduring some teasing about my height, I captured a small frog by the pond where we fished. When the teacher announced ‘Show-and-tell!’ I dropped it inside the collar of his shirt when she wasn’t looking. Don’t worry,” he added quickly, “the creature escaped unscathed.”

“And the dance?”

“It was captivating. You should have seen that child move.” He laughed. “I had to sprint all the way home. I don’t think I’ve run that fast since.”

Olivia could feel the joy the memory brought him. “We took our instructions at home,” she said. She and her siblings were tutored at Freeport. “Different tutors for mathematics, writing, and reading, the classics. Then John went away for university, returning at the end of his first year to learn about the carriage business from Daddy. What was it like—to be in a schoolroom with other children?”

Mr. Stone leaned back. “I learned my letters very early, read everything within grasp. I enjoyed it”—he groaned—“save for reading aloud to the

class.” He adjusted his eyeglasses. “My voice was not quite so deep then. That footrace to safety taught me a valuable lesson—choose my battles wisely. ‘Precocious,’ is how they described me.”

“Clearly you *were* a proficient frog wrangler.”

“Indeed. And you?”

“Very little talent for frogs.”

“And for mischief?”

“I wouldn’t say I caused much, but I wasn’t above a well-planned heist to sneak treats from the kitchens. Especially before a party.”

“Having had some of Jessie’s famous desserts, I can’t fault you there, Miss Davenport.” And the way he looked at her...Olivia took a small breath.

The rest of the meal passed, full of laughter and sharing of memories. As an only child, Mr. Stone had read to pass the time during the school year. He had lived in Springfield, traveling to Chicago in summers to spend time with his other uncles and cousins until his father’s death made Chicago his permanent home.

“I imagine you had less time to be studious once you moved here.”

“My book smarts got us into enough mischief. I’d convince my uncle we were going to the library—we’d walk from his Bronzeville apartment to the public beaches.”

Olivia laughed. “You sound like Helen.”

Mr. Stone took a sip from his water glass. “I do admire her grit. Grit like that got me in as clerk in my uncle’s office after school when other kids returned south or north to the fields. Then later, it got me to university.”

Olivia smiled. “My siblings and I had to keep our pranks within the bounds of Freeport. We’d escape into the orchards when we should have been at our studies. Oh, what it must have been like to explore Chicago like that!”

“We got into a few scrapes, but we were always home by supper. And I always placed my studies ahead of fun.”

Olivia smiled. “Why am I not surprised? My mother said you graduated at a young age.”

He nodded. "I went to university year-round."

"And your mother?"

Mr. Stone hesitated. Olivia stilled, noting a subtle shift. "I asked to live with my uncle. I think it hurt my mother to see me sometimes," he said. "I look so much like my father did." He adjusted the silverware at his setting. Hurt passed quickly over his features. "It's why, at the end of my seventh summer, I stayed. I was thirteen."

The next course arrived, and Mr. Stone continued. "Here I was, in Chicago now, still a short, skinny kid among all these bigger kids. And my aunt? She's a warm person, but if you cross her—" Mr. Stone finished the sentence with a whistle, clear as a bell, but so low, only Olivia could hear.

"How'd you learn to whistle like that?" Olivia leaned forward, delighted.

Everett Stone put down his cutlery and made a show of getting settled. He straightened his tie, pushed his glasses higher on the bridge of his nose, and locked eyes with Olivia. "Lick your lips," he said. "Take a deep breath." His voice dropped lower, taking on a huskier tone. "And exhale." He demonstrated it slowly as if he were teaching a classroom of students. Did he not know the way he pursed his lips made his jawline sharpen?

"Ah," said Olivia, surprised by the breathiness of her voice. *A nice, safe topic.* That is what she needed now.

Everett Stone matched her posture. It was the most relaxed she had ever seen him. "You know, I recently took up riding again. Horses seemed so unpredictable. I'd forgotten how much I enjoyed it."

"Each has their own personality," Olivia said, "much like people. Chestnut is mild-mannered and enjoys strolling."

Mr. Stone straightened in his chair. "A champion of people *and* animals. I am very happy to have made your acquaintance, Miss Davenport."

"Likewise." As soon as the word passed her lips, Olivia felt the way it rang up her spine, the truth of it. Mr. Stone was kind and funny. His resilience to overcome his childhood was admirable.

After settling the check, Mr. Stone took her hand and led her through the lobby to another hall. The music surged up to meet them. Olivia felt a need

to release the excited energy humming beneath her skin. She inhaled deeply, gathering a lungful of Mr. Stone's cologne and the mint leaves he chewed. It heightened the effects of the adrenaline coursing through her veins.

"I read your essay in the *Defender*," he said.

The heady tension Olivia felt snapped like a thread.

"Ow!" he exclaimed. They both looked to see Olivia's foot on his.

"Apologies!" she said, stepping back. She felt her heart ram against the inside of her chest. Her ears rang over the band. She swallowed. "My essay?" she asked. Her eyes darted to the couples around them.

"The one about the young woman arrested at the protest? Her cousin paid her bail and the officers still refused to release her. Any of that ring a bell?" he asked, a small smile tugging at his lips, his eyes warm.

Olivia stared at his shoulder as heat rose from her chest to her neck and up to her face. She had submitted her account of Hetty's arrest anonymously to the paper, with Hetty's permission. The words had come in fits and bursts. She had reworked each sentence several times, and when she'd accepted she could do no more, she'd sent it to Washington DeWight. After failing to hear from him, she'd taken a breath and sent it on to the *Defender*. The paper's decision came sooner than she'd expected: It would be published. *But are you sure you'd like to sign Anonymous?* the editor had asked.

Yes. And she'd resisted the urge to ask Mrs. Woodard and every person she encountered at the community center today what they thought of the piece. And here was Mr. Stone, convinced with the utmost authority that she was the author. Olivia closed her eyes and calmed her breathing.

"The author of the article had information related to Hetty's case that only someone very close to the situation could know," Mr. Stone said quietly. "They described the situation with care and compassion. Your words were mesmerizing."

Mesmerizing.

" 'Women are expected to be the keepers of the home. Is not this country our home? We must not punish those who would see it swept clean, who

would throw open the shades, expose the dark corners that need our care and attention.’ ”

When she opened her eyes, he was looking at her with a strange expression. Olivia couldn’t quite pin it down. Oh, but to hear her words read back to her...*He’d memorized them.*

They’d stopped close to the entrance of the dance hall, the music beckoning them forward. Olivia swallowed hard.

“I know you read the papers,” he said quietly. “I’ve seen them tucked under your skirts when your father enters the room. Hetty spoke nothing but your praises when we met to discuss her case. You’re well-respected. And you may think what you do goes unnoticed, but I assure you it doesn’t.” Mr. Stone lifted his hand. It hovered below her ear, as if to catch her. Olivia had a mind to lean into his touch. He moved closer, slightly, his eyes locked on hers. Olivia felt a delicious tension building in her neck and shoulders. So, when he withdrew his hand, she rocked forward, then back on her heels. Her mind had cleared of everything except a desire to feel Everett Stone’s fingers at her jaw, to breathe in the heady scent of his cologne, to let the music fade to a hum in the distance as his lips brushed hers. Instead, she settled for the gentle pressure of his hand at the small of her back and his chin at her temple as he pulled her to him, and they swayed to the music.

CHAPTER 15

Amy-Rose

The bell above the salon door was newly polished brass, just like the one in Mr. Spencer's old storefront. Those days felt like a lifetime ago, and yet so fresh in Amy-Rose's mind that her heart ached at the memory—finding the barber had sold the space to another, finding the bank had encouraged it. Now, in her renovated building, Amy-Rose felt *this* one was always meant to be hers. And tonight was her night. Outside, she knew *Clara's Beauty Salon* fanned across the window in bold lettering above the image of a crossed comb and scissors. The gas lamps on the street would paint the building in warm hues and welcome her gathering guests to see the completed salon before customers filled the seats at the sinks.

Amy-Rose massaged the back of her neck and fought the urge to tug on her hair. She'd taken her time to achieve the effortless-looking knot at the crown of her head. *She refused to be a salon owner with untidy hair!*

Oh! Salon owner. How lovely it sounded.

"It's time, miss," said Sandra. Mrs. Davis's former maid had carried out her late mistress's wishes and ensured Amy-Rose had everything she needed to make this night spectacular. Though she had no background in beauty work, Sandra had been Amy-Rose's first and most essential employee. Now Amy-Rose took one more glance around the room: gilded mirrors above each station, gaslight chandeliers above the waiting area, and the rich textured wallpaper, emerald and gold, to add depth and opulence to

the space. It was more beautiful than she could have hoped. And with Olivia's help, it was dressed gorgeously for her debut—fresh-cut roses in crystal vases, champagne service and hors d'oeuvres. A leather-bound appointment book reclined on a high-top table, with a rose-gold fountain pen poised to accommodate her first guests.

"Thank you, Sandra." With that, Amy-Rose turned back to the door. It opened with a sigh, letting in the summer breeze and cheers from friends and guests who'd answered Olivia's and Mrs. Davenport's calls and Amy-Rose's personal invitations. Her eyes looked heavenward, she breathed deeply, and returned her gaze to the crowd.

"Welcome!" Amy-Rose stepped aside and allowed the crowd that had gathered to fill the room. She greeted the Tremaines, the Andersons, Agatha Leary and her mother, along with a few working girls she knew, employed by families inhabiting the Davenports' sphere. Also, women with their daughters and friends, and a few gentlemen they'd brought along. It was far more than Amy-Rose had expected. Relief and joy swept through her.

"Congratulations!" Olivia squeezed her wrist.

Amy-Rose hugged her. "Thank you." She pulled away and looked at all her supporters, picking up jars of her samples, inhaling the rose, hibiscus, and other florals she incorporated into her treatments.

Beside her, Helen and Ruby looked around, smiles on their faces. Ruby stepped closer. "This is marvelous." She held her hand out.

Amy-Rose grasped it gratefully, happy to know that any tension over their once mutual interest in John Davenport was over. "Congratulations on your engagement, Miss Tremaine."

"Thank you," Ruby said, "and call me Ruby." She winked and excused herself to make space for Olivia and Helen's mother.

Mrs. Davenport blinked away a tear of her own before leaning in for a hug.

"Amy-Rose! This is wonderful!" said Helen, at her mother's side. Her embrace was the tightest, giving Jessie, who was next with Harold and Ethel from the Davenport household staff, staunch competition. Jessie's

tears nearly got Amy-Rose crying again. “Tommy gonna been sore he missed this.”

Amy-Rose’s childhood friend Tommy, Harold’s son, had tended the Davenports’ horses and invited her to relocate west with him earlier that spring. “He wrote me with his congratulations, Jessie. He and I will meet again. I’m happy he’s forging his own path.”

After Mrs. Milford’s greeting, Amy-Rose took a step back to admire the scene. Steadying herself, she plucked up a champagne flute and tapped it with her nails. The room quieted.

“Thank you for joining me tonight,” Amy-Rose said to her gathered guests, “for the unveiling of this long-awaited moment. I am very proud to present Clara’s Beauty Salon.” At the applause, her heart swelled. “I’d also like to say a special thanks to the Davenports and to the late Mrs. Davis. My mother would be proud of all of us. Please enjoy the refreshments, sign the appointment book, and try the samples. I am here if you have any questions.”

Mrs. Davenport raised her glass, and it occurred to Amy-Rose—perhaps if Mr. Davenport could have been here, he’d see how much she’d accomplished. But she shook the thought away. She had nothing to prove, not to anyone but herself—and she was convinced. Amy-Rose beamed, a feeling of triumph filling her chest. She raised her own glass high, nodding her thanks to Mrs. Davenport, and her guests joined her, drinking to her future success. No glass had ever tasted so sweet.

As everyone settled into their circles of conversation, Amy-Rose found herself searching the crowd for one face in particular. Though she had been trying to avoid John Davenport, she couldn’t help hoping...And before her heart could complete a disappointed dive into the pit of her stomach, she noticed a lone gentleman climbing the stairs. With his gaze focused on his feet, all she could see was the top of his hat. But Amy-Rose *knew* that hat. He’d come. *John is enough*, she thought. After the hours they’d spent on a bench at the edge of the garden at Freeport, talking about their dreams of success, she wanted to share this with him. Her grip tightened on the brass knob, the bell chiming above. The young man looked up.

“Oh—” she breathed. “Ben!” Her muscles clenched. She hoped she disguised the disappointment she felt.

“Amy-Rose,” he said. She remained speechless as he took her hand and placed a kiss on the back of it. In his free arm he held a bouquet of yellow roses. “They’re not quite as beautiful as you, but I couldn’t resist.”

“They’re gorgeous. What a—surprise! What are you doing in Chicago?”

“In town on business. I heard about Mrs. Davis when I checked in to my hotel. I’m so sorry, Amy-Rose. How are you?”

How am I? A close friend and supporter had died as she’d sat helplessly beside her. She’d lost her new home. And she’d finally realized her life-long dream of opening a salon named for her mother. It all left her breathless. “I’m taking it one day at a time and not one for granted,” Amy-Rose said at last. She accepted the roses he held out to her. “Thank you.” She recalled the last things Mrs. Davis had told her. *Trust yourself*, her mentor had said. *I am so proud of you, my dear.*

Benjamin King tipped his hat up. “My goodness! It looks like a picture.” He tucked her hand under his arm and they both stumbled as they stepped from the door in opposite directions. He laughed. “Well done.” He tugged Amy-Rose to the center of the room, where her guests chatted and admired the little touches that made the space her own: a map of Chicago framed next to one of Saint Lucia, a smaller frame at the register that held a photograph of her with her mother—one of the few she had. Before she could respond, he continued, “It’s all just as you described it would be.” He turned in a circle, appraising the space.

“Yes,” Amy-Rose said, something nagging at her. She turned to Ben. “Thank you for coming,” she said, and detached herself from him at the refreshments table. “I hope you enjoy the party.” She searched for a place for the flowers, wondering what sort of business would bring him all the way from New York to Chicago.

“Amy-Rose.”

She stilled at the voice. She would know it anywhere. It preceded the balsam and bergamot scent that followed her around Freeport Manor like

the moon follows the sun. Amy-Rose set the bouquet down on the rear counter. When she turned, she felt a jolt pass through her.

John Davenport's eyes shined as they locked onto hers. His dimple winked and was gone, teasing at the boy he'd once been, the one who'd held her heart more firmly as they'd grown. "Your salon is—" John paused, his tone filled with wonder. He finally shifted his gaze from her to the furnished salon around them. There was a satisfied smile on his face, dimple in full effect. "This is wonderful, Amy-Rose. I'm so happy for you." He took an unexpected step forward, then stopped himself. *He feels it too*, she thought. A magnetic pull.

"When I didn't see you with your mother and sisters, I thought you wouldn't come," she said.

"I wouldn't miss this for anything." He appeared shy. Time stretched, and the way he studied her face, he may as well have been tracing his fingers along her temple, her jawline, down the curve of her neck. She quelled a shiver, remembering his fingers, callous but gentle, against her cheek in the moments before his lips had last met hers, weeks ago in her attic room at Freeport. "How are you?" he asked.

"I can't begin to describe how happy I am," she whispered. *And nervous.*

Amy-Rose wasn't sure when her eyes fluttered closed, but they flew open when she felt the barest whisper of his fingertips against the back of her wrist. John said nothing, his gaze intent on her, his hand lifted toward her face, frozen in midair for an agonizing moment, before it fell to his side, and he came to stand beside her, watching the celebration, his arm so close she could feel his heat through his shirt and jacket. They stood there together, admiring the scene.

• • •

"You're procrastinating," said Hetty.

Amy-Rose stared at her face in the cheval mirror, her arms full of linens. Hetty sat on the bench at the foot of the blue-covered bed. Having worked

together as maids in the Davenport household, Amy-Rose feared that her friend would harbor some resentment at her change in circumstances. In the week and a half since she'd returned to Freeport, Amy-Rose had done what she could to avoid that—tending to her own needs, keeping her room pristine, and pressing her own dresses. But Hetty had been nothing but supportive and proud of her. Amy-Rose should have taken to heart Jessie's words when she said that the staff were more than happy to see her success.

She was far less effective at that than she was at avoiding John. Though the girls assured her she was welcome at every family dinner, she managed to find an excuse to miss more than she attended. Thankfully, during the day, John was preoccupied with tending to the family business. *The family business*. Amy-Rose aspired to grow her salon as large as the Davenport Carriage Company one day, though she recognized the wedge that same company represented for her and John.

True to character, Hetty herself had confronted Amy-Rose's strange behavior. "What do you expect us to do when you and Mr. John wed?" her friend said now, rolling her eyes and holding her arms out for the linens balled up in Amy-Rose's grasp. Then Hetty scolded her for missing meals with the family. "It's bad form since you're a lady now," she teased. "You never let your hair down."

Amy-Rose added an unnecessary number of pins to her hair. "Hetty, ladies don't wear their hair down," she said, ignoring the observation. "Mrs. Johnson will be at dinner tonight, and she is the most...*opinionated* person I've ever met."

Hetty stood and said, "Turn around. You missed a button." She dropped the linens on the bench and walked to where Amy-Rose sat.

Amy-Rose obeyed. For the third time, she considered changing. She wore a white linen blouse—the lace trim started at her shoulders and met at her navel, which she tucked into a tailored cream skirt. Maybe her colors were too white, too bright. Her curls refused to cooperate today, and the freckles appeared more noticeable than usual. *Maybe I'm ill? I feel ill. No one wants a sick person at the dinner table.* She felt herself flush, thinking of the way John's arm grazed hers at her grand opening a few nights ago.

A sudden rush of anger surprised her. She was being cowardly and stubborn. Amy-Rose glanced at the drawer where she had hidden his letters. *What did you want to tell me?* With her friend at her back, she could hardly check now. Her hands balled up at her sides. She had no reason to think that her and John's predicament had changed. But her body didn't agree when they were in the same room together. And she suspected neither did his.

"Stop," said Hetty. Then she crossed her hand over Amy-Rose's shoulders and met her gaze in the mirror. "You are a guest of the Davenports, and just as entitled to dining with the family as any other person at that table. If Mrs. Davenport's stuffy friend has a problem with that, it is in fact *her problem*. Now, if you're afraid you'll accidentally fall into the arms of a certain Mr. Davenport, then you should be very nervous. You look beautiful, and he is very dreamy. It's a potent recipe. But you know more than a thing or two about those."

Amy-Rose laughed. She turned and hugged her friend. Hetty practically pushed her out of the room before turning to tidy up. *Is this how Helen feels, dread ahead of every social engagement?*

She walked through the house, the thick Aubusson rugs swallowing her footfalls. Her nervousness grew as she entered the formal sitting room where the family, minus Mr. Davenport, gathered. Quick meals with the girls were a different affair from full family suppers, especially given tonight's guest.

Mary Johnson stood at the window with Mrs. Davenport. Mrs. Johnson was Mrs. Davenport's senior by a several years. She held her fan folded, a blue silk and white bone piece that matched her dress and fascinator. With her sharp tongue, she was known to be a fiercely loyal friend, but one with a weakness for sharing secrets. Amy-Rose couldn't hear what the two women said as they indicated the gardens. A safe topic. When the older woman's prudent gaze paused at her appearance, Amy-Rose thought to say hello, but Helen intercepted her.

"Thank goodness you're here. We need you to settle a dispute." Helen pulled her over to where John and Olivia stood.

Olivia had her hands raised and was shaking her head. “I decline to answer. I will not get in between you two.” She beamed when she saw Amy-Rose.

“Now,” Helen said, “I think the Davenport stock car should be red. John thinks it should be black. Please tell him he’s being boring and unreasonable.”

“I’m not being unreasonable. You’re being impractical and stubborn.”

Amy-Rose laughed and for a brief moment, John’s smile, bright with joy, shone on her with its full, unguarded wattage. Her pulse quickened. She inhaled deeply to reset, and found her lungs filled with his scent. Oh, did it make her feel as though she could float away. Helen elbowed her, grinning. *Had I been staring?*

“Uh,” Amy-Rose started. She shook her head clear and tried to embrace the playful mood—like when they were younger. She lifted her chin. “I’m a serious businesswoman now. I’ll have to hear your proposal.”

Helen puffed up. “Easy. Red is bold, eye-catching, which is exactly what we want. The stands will be full of potential drivers, and we want them to remember the Davenport Carriage Company sells more than just buggies.” She looked at John, a challenge on her face.

John glanced at Amy-Rose. *That dimple.* He licked his lips and turned his attention to Helen, his expression now a determined copy of his sister’s. “Red is memorable, but the everyday people in the stands aren’t our customers. Not yet. The people we want to impress are the board members. We have them, and securing a future for our employees, to think about. Daddy—when he returns. Black is sophisticated, classy. That’s what *they* want.”

They both looked at Amy-Rose expectantly. She considered their reasons, and tried to approach it the way Mrs. Davis would. “Can you create this automobile line without the board?”

Helen pouted.

“Unfortunately, no,” said John, smiling.

“You can’t sell what you don’t have,” Amy-Rose said. “But who’s to say the board members don’t want bold and eye-catching? Nothing is

guaranteed. I say, take a chance. You might be surprised where it leads you.” Amy-Rose met John’s eyes, and she felt the air between them spark.

Helen whooped beside her. The corner of Olivia’s mouth turned up slightly.

“Helen!” Mrs. Davenport exclaimed from where she stood at the window. Her statement was echoed by Mrs. Milford, who had just entered the room. The younger Miss Davenport was saved from a lecture by Hetty’s announcement that dinner was served. They followed Mrs. Davenport to the dining room. Olivia and Helen fell into a conversation about the younger’s upcoming debut. Amy-Rose only caught every other word, but Helen sounded frustrated and Olivia annoyed. She and John made up the rear of the procession, walking in silence. His nearness was a tangible thing, and Amy-Rose relished the size of the formal dining room and the fact that he took a seat near his mother, the farthest from the one she claimed for herself.

The discussion of Helen’s debut soon expanded to include the entire party at the table, much to Helen’s annoyance.

“We’ve nearly pinned down the menu. Our biggest unknown is what the guest of honor should wear,” said Mrs. Davenport pointedly but not without a note of playfulness. The Davenport matriarch’s expression changed when she caught John’s eye and then Amy-Rose’s. Was that a small smile with the arched eyebrow? Amy-Rose couldn’t quite interpret the look.

“I’m sure you’ll find the perfect dress when you least expect it,” said Amy-Rose, hoping to offer Helen some support.

Mrs. Johnson’s eyes darted to Amy-Rose. Her mouth screwed to the side as if she’d bitten a lemon. To her credit, Amy-Rose maintained her smile and posture, while trying to pinpoint what she could have done to offend the older woman.

“Of *course* it will be when I least expect it. I don’t *expect* to find dresses in my daily activities.” Helen frowned but shot Amy-Rose a smile.

“Which is why we will set a day aside to go shopping,” said Olivia, who ignored the grimace Helen made in response.

“Amy-Rose,” said Mrs. Johnson. Her tone was like a pronouncement, and everyone at the table turned to look at her.

“Yes, ma’am,” Amy-Rose said, keeping her voice steady, her hands folded under the table.

Mrs. Johnson smiled tightly. “Your salon is a roaring success.”

Amy-Rose blushed. “It’s still new. I’m so grateful for the support.” She smiled at the family. “And I’m looking forward to the future.”

“Hmm, that is true. I wonder how you came up with such an idea. A salon. A hair care line?”

“They’re mostly home remedies, things my mother did with my own hair before she passed. I have a—” Amy-Rose paused. “I have my memories to guide me. My mother’s techniques and the work I’ve done on my own, experimenting with different styles, and different ingredients to create my wares—all have inspired and guided me.”

Mrs. Johnson laughed. “I don’t imagine your mother spent much time on that hair, given its texture.” Amy-Rose placed her hands firmly on the table now. She did not suspect Mrs. Johnson’s comment was meant to be complimentary or inclusive. “And then to give rise to such an endeavor as opening a business!” the older woman continued. “Quite the busy bee.”

Amy-Rose felt her face burn. She fought to be polite, keeping her tone friendly. This woman was a friend of Mrs. Davenport’s after all. But Amy-Rose couldn’t help the sour feeling in her stomach at the woman’s several implications, one of which was that Amy-Rose did not, herself, possess the wit or inspiration to dream up her own salon and see it brought to life. She’d endured enough of that from the gentleman at the bank who had reluctantly managed her accounts before her friendship with Mrs. Davis had smoothed the way.

“I suppose this dream to open a salon came from her—my mother,” Amy-Rose said. “My mother had difficulty with my hair despite its texture. She kept it tied back. I thought she did so because it reminded her of my father.” Mrs. Johnson’s eyes widened at this mention. Clara Shepherd had rarely spoken of the man she loved. Amy-Rose had been happy to spare her that pain, and ignore her own at never having met him. Now she invoked

her mixed parentage, her voice polite but full of all the love she felt for her mother, hoping to make explicit and precious what Mrs. Johnson sought to disparage. Amy-Rose glanced at John, remembered his own father's cruel words, and under Mrs. Johnson's continued scrutiny, she made herself sit taller. "Or perhaps," Amy-Rose added evenly, "she styled my hair in such a way so as not to draw unwanted attention."

Mrs. Johnson bristled. "I only meant, how did either of you have the time with all your responsibilities here?" she said dismissively. Amy-Rose stilled to contain her ever-rising anger. "I'd think a maid in a house as fine as this would have more than enough to do without dreaming of more work!" Mrs. Johnson laughed, and though no one joined her, she carried on as if they had. "But dream you did."

Helen sat across from Amy-Rose, slack-jawed at Mrs. Johnson. For once, neither Mrs. Milford nor Mrs. Davenport rushed to correct the younger girl. Beside Helen, John's face had hardened to marble. The dimple Amy-Rose so adored had disappeared, replaced by a knot of muscle that pulsed in his cheek. Her gaze slid to his arm, where he held his fork in a lethal grip.

"Miss Shepherd, did you not hear what I said?" Mrs. Johnson asked.

Amy-Rose blinked. She pulled weary eyes from John, who looked fit to climb over the table toward Mrs. Johnson.

"Mary—" Mrs. Davenport began.

"Oh, Emmeline, I only meant that her ambitions are inspiring."

The rest of the table began to speak at once. But there was one voice that commanded silence from them all. "Mrs. Johnson, I believe you've forgotten yourself."

John's words doused the flush of embarrassment and anger Amy-Rose felt. She remembered her hard work, their late-night talks, and the endless, sleepless nights leading up to the salon's opening. She cleared her throat and turned again to the woman, choosing her words carefully. "I'm happy to be an inspiration, Mrs. Johnson," said Amy-Rose. "I am, however, just one person. I'm sure there are as many domestic workers with talents beyond the household as there are those with status and *no* talent." She

tilted her chin, hoping to slow the blood rushing to head. *So bold!* she thought. Had she not told herself to respect her hostess's other guest?

Mrs. Johnson paused, her fork halfway to her mouth. Shock and indignation warred across her features. Her glare made Amy-Rose want to shrink into her seat. Instead, she made herself sit even taller. *If I can walk into Binga Bank and manage my own finances, I can meet this old crone's prejudice with pride.*

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mrs. Johnson. Her voice was cool, and by her tone, it was clear she would say no more.

John set his cutlery down. Amy-Rose's eyes locked on his as he spoke. "You are a guest, Mrs. Johnson. And Amy-Rose is a bright young woman with many talents. She is an important person to this family."

Mrs. Davenport looked at her friend then, and nodded. It was the first time Amy-Rose had seen Mrs. Davenport truly ruffled. Before their hostess turned her attention back to her plate, Amy-Rose spotted the raised eyebrow Mrs. Davenport sent John's way.

"I meant no ill will," said Mrs. Johnson. "I have no doubt your assessment is accurate." The older woman winced as if in pain when she inclined her head toward Amy-Rose.

Is this supposed to be an apology?

The air thickened into uncomfortable silence as they returned to the meal. Amy-Rose ate Jessie's roast chicken, suddenly tasteless in her mouth, swallowing the emotions tightening her throat, her sense of victory sputtering. Helen and Olivia offered her encouraging smiles, which helped. Even Mrs. Milford appeared to offer tacit approval of Amy-Rose's rebuttal. She chanced a glance at John. He stared at the plate in front of him, chewing deliberately. His knife and fork trapped in his fists. It was the last time she allowed herself to glance in his direction. She felt the final flames of her triumph extinguish, her spirits deflating like a spent air balloon. It was encounters like this that Mr. Davenport had tried to warn his son about. It pained Amy-Rose to wonder if the elder Mr. Davenport could have been correct.

The dinner party stuck to safer topics then, with Olivia and her mother driving the conversation forward. Even Helen offered her opinion. Amy-Rose was grateful for it, and when the last of the dessert dishes were cleared, she excused herself from the post-meal brandy in the sitting room.

She took the long way to the kitchens and burst through the door, where she found Jessie polishing silver.

“Dear, aren’t you supposed to be out there, enjoying yourself?”

Amy-Rose leaned over the table, elbows bent to prop her chin in her hands. “Do you think Mr. Davenport was right? That I don’t belong in his world?”

Jessie paused and stared at Amy-Rose until the doubt she felt crumpled in on itself. Amy-Rose knew better. She was letting Mary Johnson decide what she was worth, even after she’d shown the woman, quite clearly, she was worth far more than she thought.

“You know damn well neither of those things are true.” Jessie came around the table and grasped Amy-Rose’s elbows. “Mr. Davenport carries a lot of scars. Not all of them visible to the eye. Do not let that man’s fear—or that woman’s ignorance—yes, I heard—chase away your happiness.”

CHAPTER 16

Helen

Mrs. Milford pulled loose the last few laces of Helen's corset with surprisingly lighter hands than Hetty, who was off with Olivia somewhere. Helen wondered how her sister found the energy. At least most days, Helen's escapades only took her to the garage. A few led her to the study, reviewing company records, where she was rarely disturbed. And it didn't require the trappings of a young lady's wardrobe. Her outing to the ladies' club with her mother and Mrs. Milford proved to be another cumbersome expectation of her debut.

"I don't understand the point of dressing up to go to a club and socialize with the same people you see at every event," said Helen. "They have nothing new to tell me about their lives, and I can't share details of my own pursuits." She grumbled, "Nor would they care to know."

Once the dress was loosened enough, Helen tripped out of it with far less grace than she intended.

"There is no need to rush, Miss Davenport. Your mother is having tea with—"

"Mrs. Johnson, yes, and Olivia and Hetty are at the library. I don't know why my sister can't scribble in her journal here," said Helen, hoping this would not lead to another conversation about appropriate pastimes. She did not wish to imagine what her mother's gossipy friend would think of *her*. Oh, did her blood boil just remembering how the woman had treated Amy-

Rose. And Helen doubted Mrs. Johnson was the only person in their set who held such opinions. Helen was lost in thought, realizing almost too late that Mrs. Milford was speaking.

“And the butler said Mr. Lawrence left his card. He was not expected, and you said you were not taking any visitors, so Edward did not invite him to wait.”

Helen paused where she'd begun rummaging in her closet. She was sure Mrs. Milford's tone indicated her judgment that Helen was being too hard on the gentleman. Helen ignored the tingling in her spine and the way her heart fluttered to know that Jacob Lawrence had been in the house, however briefly. She was glad to have missed him. And disappointed. *What would I have even said if he were standing in front of me now?* She knew she didn't want to listen to him describe how he'd fallen in love with someone else, or how sorry he was about how things had ended between them, or whatever string of excuses he might have.

No, thank you.

Helen stepped into the overalls she kept hidden in the back of her closet, where no one could find them and throw them out. “It was kind of him to stop by. I hope he and his family are doing well. But as you know, I've been very busy.”

Mrs. Milford eyed Helen and her clothing suspiciously, but kept her well-known opinion to herself. *They are unladylike and your hobby is unbecoming. Don't you want to practice the pianoforte?*

Never. The answer was that Helen never wanted to practice the pianoforte. She had scared off enough of Chicago's music teachers that none of them could be convinced to resume their position beside her on the bench. She couldn't hold the notes in her head. And she stumbled her way across the keys in a way that didn't occur when she was up to her elbows in an automobile. The diagrams were easier to read than sheet music. *More time for me*, she thought.

“The proper thing to do is to invite him to tea. Since you missed him today.” Mrs. Milford gave her a challenging look. Helen's protest was already on her lips but her tutor continued. “It would show there are no hard

feelings, and give you the chance to say goodbye to him once and for all. Give you some closure to move past this and look forward to your future.”

Helen didn't want to do the *proper thing*. She wanted a role in the company and a fleet of Davenport horseless carriages to sell. Yes, there was a time she'd thought there could be a particular young gentleman at her side, but this had changed. A polite tea or lunch wouldn't alter the way things had turned out. It wouldn't erase the ache in her heart at the memory of their time together. How funny he was treading mud when their carriage broke down...how her story of the birthday bicycle dismemberment had not horrified him as it would have most any other gentleman of standing. Jacob Lawrence had surprised her at every turn. And she wasn't at all sure she wanted to go through it again.

Ransom Swift raced through her mind then. He was irritating, but from what she'd learned about him, he was the best person to endorse their motorcar. She smiled at how easily he too acknowledged this otherwise frowned-upon part of her personality. Before she could get too lost in her thoughts again, there was a knock on the door.

“You may come in,” called Helen, happy for the interruption.

Amy-Rose entered wearing a mint-green ensemble. Whatever she had in mind to say appeared to flee as soon as she saw Helen. “Have you been using the honey treatment? Your hair looks dry.”

Helen stopped and looked at her friend. From the corner of her eye, she saw Mrs. Milford lean forward, also assessing her head. “I have not,” she admitted.

Amy-Rose greeted Mrs. Milford almost shyly, her cheeks taking on a pink hue. When she looked back at Helen, she sighed and sat on the edge of Helen's couch, the only area not covered in sketches and manuals. “Do you have a moment?” she asked Helen. Helen's gaze shifted to her tutor.

“I'll go see if there are any treats in the kitchen,” Mrs. Milford announced, to no one in particular, and left the room.

Once she'd gone, Helen made space for Amy-Rose beside her on the couch. “What's wrong?”

“Nothing is wrong,” Amy-Rose said, laughing nervously. Her eyes were red-rimmed and watery. “I have everything I ever wanted.”

“So why do you look so upset?” At Amy-Rose’s pointed look, Helen leaned back and said, “John.”

Amy-Rose nodded. “But it’s not just him. I miss Mrs. Davis. My mother. Sometimes I’m so happy at the salon, I can forget they’re not here for a while.”

“You haven’t forgotten them. Not in your heart. I’m sure there isn’t a day that goes by that my father doesn’t miss his brother. Our loved ones only want the best for us.” Helen sobered further, seeing her friend’s distraught expression. Clearly John had not expressed to Amy-Rose what had followed her departure. She leaned in. “John is always looking for you when he enters a room,” she said quietly. “He’s distracted because he still cares for you.” She nudged Amy-Rose’s foot with her own and gave her friend a knowing look.

Amy-Rose stared at her clasped hands. “I still care for him too, but just because your father is away, we should not disregard his wishes.”

Helen gestured to her overalls. “I do it every day.” Amy-Rose laughed and when Helen joined her, she felt enough of the tension leave her neck to be bold. “Amy-Rose, John...” But seeing Amy-Rose’s curious expression, Helen thought better of her words. John should be the one to tell her. *Why hadn’t he?* “More happened in the days after you left,” Helen said—the short version. “Things have been tense between John and Daddy, but John’s feelings for you have never wavered.” She watched hope and doubt flit across her friend’s features. Amy-Rose’s eyes searched hers for a moment.

“Thank you.”

“Of course, if there is anything else...” Helen paused.

“I do worry—I worry Miss Davis will return for the salon. That she’ll find some way.” Amy-Rose’s voice hitched on the last words.

Helen seized Amy-Rose’s hand. “Mrs. Davis thought of everything. And we are here for you.”

Amy-Rose cleared her throat. “Thank you,” she said again. Then she frowned. “What’s on your mind?”

Helen hesitated though she knew she needn't. "I know ladies in salons talk. Have you heard anything about...Jacob Lawrence?"

Her friend had the grace to keep her expression neutral when she replied. "Probably not much more than you. He returned from London with a young woman. She hasn't been in to do her hair. At least not at my place. Have you and Mr. Lawrence spoken?"

Helen shook her head. "No. He has written two letters. I didn't really read them." After Mr. Lawrence's reappearance, Helen found one letter Olivia had saved. She had torn it open with cold steady hands, preparing herself to not be swayed by his words. Her eyes skipped over the page too fast to process but she wanted to get it over and done with. He had met Etta in New York and she'd convinced him to stay in the country a while longer. There was more. But she'd read enough. Helen had crumpled the letter and added it the growing pile of Olivia's in the wastepaper basket.

A shadow passed over Amy-Rose's face just before she pulled Helen into a hug. The youngest Davenport settled her head on her friend's shoulder like she'd done when they were children. "Maybe you should read them," Amy-Rose offered. "See what he says."

Helen wondered if she should say anything about Amy-Rose's own letter, or the package John had sent her in New York City. For weeks now, Helen had been keen to know what was in the mysterious note that had arrived at Freeport the same spring morning Amy-Rose had left. *Maybe if I tell her I read mine, she'll tell me about hers.* Oh! The thought occurred to Helen: *Has she read hers?*

"Helen?" asked Amy-Rose, her voice muffled against Helen's shoulder.

Helen chewed her lip, her thoughts shifting. Maybe she should give in and ask Amy-Rose about the letter from Georgia—the one John had sent on to her in New York—but just as she'd decided it, John himself opened the bedroom door.

"Let's go—Oh—Sorry. I didn't know. Hello, Amy-Rose."

Helen watched their faces change, eyes light up. Faces too. Before her own heartbreak, Helen had teased her brother for this sort of thing. Now she only wished they'd find their way back to each other.

John addressed Helen. "I'll be outside when you're ready." With a brief glance and a nod at Amy-Rose, he withdrew and closed the door.

"I do have one confession to make," said Amy-Rose, pulling her gaze from where John had stood. She rubbed the inside of her wrist, then repositioned herself on the couch.

Helen sat up. "What sort of confession?"

Amy-Rose stared at her hands. When she looked up, her brows were furrowed. "I've decided to move out."

"Why?" Helen heard the whine in her voice when she said, "You've only just got here!"

Amy-Rose chuckled. "It's been two weeks, and I have enough saved. Mrs. Davis thought of everything. And if my appointment book is any indication, the salon will be busy over the next several months."

Her friend had only just returned to Chicago, and Helen was happy to have things be somewhat like how they were a couple of months ago.

"Helen, this is the right thing for me. I want to stand on my own merits," Amy-Rose said, poking Helen's cheek.

Isn't that what I want too? Helen could not fault Amy-Rose for wanting something so deserved. "I suppose if it's what you want, and not because of how Mrs. Johnson behaved at dinner the other night. I can't believe *I'm* the one still in etiquette class," she said. "Maybe I should lend her my copy of *The Art of Being Agreeable*."

Amy-Rose's laugh joined Helen's. They giggled until their eyes stung with tears. "You're always welcome here," said Helen.

Amy-Rose gave her a watery smile and stood. "I know. And I'm not leaving because of that woman."

"Good," said Helen, standing as well. They hugged. Everything was changing, and changing again, and Helen wasn't sure if she was ready.

Amy-Rose released her and said, "Now wish me luck. I have to break the news to Jessie."

Helen laughed despite herself. She walked with Amy-Rose to the foyer. "Good luck," she said as they parted ways, Amy-Rose heading for the stairs to the kitchen.

Helen was still smiling when she reached for the front door—the fastest way to the garage. The freedom in knowing that her mother was away emboldened her. She was whistling as she pulled open the heavy oak and skidded to a halt in the open doorway. At the bottom of the porch stairs, Mr. Lawrence paced, kicking up dust, the hems of his fine linen suit pants gray with the grit of crushed gravel. He didn't notice her at first. *I can turn around. I can sneak back in!*

Almost as if she'd spoken it aloud, his head snapped up. "Helen," he said. His eyes traveled over her like he couldn't take her in fast enough.

"Hello, Mr. Lawrence," she said, surprised at how steady her voice was. "I'm afraid I'm otherwise engaged," she said, beginning down the steps, intending to make for the garage.

"I've left my card with your man." His voice was warmer than she remembered, almost warm enough to melt her icy front. Almost. She'd forgotten, too, the way his clipped English accent moved over his vowels in pronouncing her name. She didn't know until then that you could miss the way someone said your name.

"Yes, I received a message that you had left your card." Her words still managed to come out cooler than she felt. Was it excitement or apprehension that had her on the balls of her feet? She turned now, as if to go back up to the house, wondering what the chances were that someone would come upon them, then turned again, remembering she was meant to go to the garage—

He smoothed the mustache above his full lips, lips that had once pressed to hers, that had introduced her to feelings she had thought idiotic, frivolous.

Helen cleared her throat and looked pointedly at the automobile beyond him.

"I want a chance to explain, please," he said, his voice firm, clear. As if he had not come here with, been spotted around town with, a young woman from England. As if that young woman was not said to be his wife. He had admitted as much in his letter. Helen didn't need closure. She needed to be free of this hold he had on her heart.

She descended the rest of the stairs quickly. Too late she realized she had surrendered the higher ground, inviting the cedar and spiced wine scent of his cologne to drift her way. She tried to remember what the etiquette book said about kicking someone off your doorstep. Could it be possible that such an important thing was not mentioned? Helen scrambled for the words that would make him leave. She squared her shoulders. "I'd like you to leave," she said. Her hands were fists in the large pockets of the overalls. Her nails bit into her palms as she watched her words sink in. *How can a statement be so true and so false at once?*

Jacob Lawrence seemed to vibrate slightly. She saw a protest on his lips, which parted, ready to argue. She also saw when he decided against it. When he pulled up his shoulders and said, "As you wish."

Helen turned for the garage, unable to watch him walk away from her again.

CHAPTER 17

Ruby

“Will you stop fidgeting?” Olivia whispered to Ruby. They watched the couples resolve into small groups and the band set up their instruments.

Ruby placed a fist on her hip. “I’m just happy to be able to move around. I understand that you love theater, but I’m not afraid to say that I prefer to dance while I listen to music.”

“I enjoyed the show at The Pekin,” said Olivia.

Ruby grinned. “And now we’re in one of the most popular clubs in town.” Ruby looked around the room. It was more crowded than usual. To her surprise, John had agreed to accompany his sister. The Carters arrived before them to secure a box close enough to the entertainment to enjoy the ensemble but far enough away that they could have a conversation without shouting. All of Chicago’s young people, Black and white, entered and exited the club or lined up outside to enjoy the ragtime musicians on tour from St. Louis.

“I can’t help it,” said Ruby. Eager for a distraction, she asked, “How is your brother faring with Amy-Rose in the house?”

They looked to the bar where John stood with one of the Greenfield boys. Olivia shook her head. “Helen tried to goad me into a bet on how long before they announce they’re attached.”

Ruby gasped, smiled.

“They’d have to have a real conversation first, Ruby, which will be all the more difficult once she’s moved out. I do hope they figure it out soon, one way or another, for their own sakes.”

Ruby agreed. She’d be cross if John indeed settled for someone who adored him less than Amy-Rose did. Ruby had noticed their interaction at the salon’s grand opening, however brief. It sizzled with a tension Ruby now knew all too well. She felt no resentment toward Amy-Rose. Only hope for her future happiness. She glanced down now. “How does it look? My dress?” She had chosen the ivory dress she wore at the last party her parents had hosted. It was one of her reconceived designs, one that she and Margaret had continued to work on. They’d cut large portions of it and added new panels to the skirt that Ruby felt made it more now and more *her*. The bodice hugged her curves, made her feel strong and confident. “I’ve had the hem shortened and the neckline dropped. And see here”—Ruby pointed to the seam in the skirt—“a pocket large enough to fit my entire hand.”

Olivia laughed at the twirl Ruby did in the cramped space. “You look fabulous, my friend. Oh—here comes Odette.”

Odette slid up to the box, preening, eyes on Ruby and Olivia. “My, what a pretty pair! I’m hoping to make a friendship just as strong as yours here in Chicago.” Ruby thought of how much time Odette had been spending with Agatha and Bertha. The newcomer often split the duo like the point of a spear.

“The people here are wonderful, and you’ve already got Ruby and Mr. Barton,” said Olivia.

“Thank you. I am just so sad to know that the rest of the Bartons will be leaving soon after the wedding in August.” Ruby’s gaze flitted across the room. Harrison stood a few feet away at the bar with John. “Jeremiah was here for the band’s first set but he’s left now.” Odette dropped her voice. “I think the scene was a bit too much for him.” She winked at Ruby as if they shared a joke, but the gesture left Ruby uneasy.

Then there was the mention of the wedding. She glanced at Olivia. Preparations for her nuptials had stalled. Her father’s campaign loss and the

rumors, those around his inability to garner enough votes *and* those that swirled around Ruby herself, had made them all overly cautious. Ruby was impatient. She didn't want to disappoint her parents. Still, she didn't understand how postponing her own happiness would change anything.

Eager to shift the subject, Ruby asked, "How are you settling into your new house?"

"Oh, it's grand," said Odette. "I'm so happy to be out of the hotel and somewhere I can really stretch out. And so close to Jackson Park! I can't wait to host my first dinner party. Carter and I just enjoy a good time, and I do love to host." Odette pulled a cigarette from the folds of her skirts. "Got a light?"

Ruby and Olivia shook their heads.

Odette shrugged. "I find very few young ladies here do. Back in New York, there aren't as many rules. It was a welcome relief to how stuffy South Carolina was." She observed the young ladies grouped on one side of the room, coyly eyeing the gentlemen over their fans. "Stays, long skirts, chaperones." Odette snorted. "All designed to keep us from the fun. Speaking of design," she said with a grin. "Charles!" Odette waved over a white gentleman with straight, light brown hair. His suit looked like it had just jumped from the catalog. Crisp. Bright. He sauntered over to where they stood and tipped his head as if wearing a hat.

"Good evening, Miss Carter. You look lovely," he said.

"Thank you! I'd like you to meet my friends. This is Ruby Tremaine—yes, that one—and her dear friend Olivia Davenport—that one, yes." Odette laughed at her cleverness. "Ladies, this is Charles Price."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," said Ruby. She was smarting from Odette's introduction and trying to place where'd she'd seen this man before today. As he and Odette turned to discuss the merits of the Blackstone versus an older hotel, she and Olivia exchanged small talk, and Ruby noticed Mr. Price admiring her and Olivia in a way that made Olivia stand taller, stiffer. *His face*, Ruby thought to herself, trying to recall if she knew him. "I'm sorry, but have we met before?" she finally said into a pause in their conversation. What if he already recognized her?

“Yes, very likely,” he said. “I work for Marshall Field and Company. A buyer. You may have seen me there.” He glanced over his shoulder and then turned back to Ruby. “That face you’re giving me right now, I’ve been getting it all night.” He laughed into his glass. “Soon you’ll be asking me when the next sale will be.” He leaned in and whispered, “Next weekend.”

“Do you mean the basement bargains?” Ruby knew she must look scandalized. “I would never!” she said, her temperature rising with her voice. Mr. Price released a sharp bark of laughter.

He drained his drink. “I believe I need a refill.”

Ruby glanced at Olivia, whose shoulders were beginning to relax. “Yes, interesting acquaintances,” said her friend.

“Charles was just teasing!” Odette laughed. “He must meet all kinds of people as a buyer. To be surrounded by such luxury and be at the forefront of all things fashionable.”

Ruby’s ears pricked at the word *buyer*. She thought about how she spent her days lately, alone with her maid creating designs, avoiding her parents. What would she do when she and Harrison were wed and he was at work all day? Olivia had her own pursuits. So did Helen. Amy-Rose had an entire business to run by herself. Ruby had always surrounded herself with the finest things money could buy. And now, those things were all but gone, including the money, spent to support the campaign. *But if I were to sell my designs...*

Perhaps Mr. Price was just the sort of person she needed to get on her side. Someone who, with taste and the power to tell others what to wear, could place *her* designs in front of the women who would buy them. She left Odette and Olivia to chat amongst themselves and followed the buyer to the bar. “Excuse me,” said Ruby. “Could I trouble you for a moment, Mr. Price?”

Mr. Price turned slowly. He smiled. “I assure you, talking to a beautiful woman is no trouble.”

Ruby blushed. “I have a business question.”

He frowned and stood straighter. “Not quite where I thought the conversation was going. I’m here to have fun. Not talk business.” He sighed

and tapped the side of his glass, signaling to the bartender his need for another.

“Yes, but who says fashion is only a business? I mean, so much of planning a night out depends on what one wears. It’s part of the fun. And for a young lady, it can be the most important part.”

Mr. Price faced her and set his elbow against the bar.

Ruby took this as a sign to go on. She inhaled, her plan taking shape as she formed the words. “I’ve been a staunch patron of Marshall Field and Company for years. The fabrics and offerings are exquisite but lack daring. I’d like to see more dress designs for the modern girl, the young woman looking to step out of the traditional box handed down to her by a mother raised in the last century.” She looked over at Olivia. “The young woman who is brave and who champions others.”

“And where are these dresses?” His eyes scrutinized her outfit. “I recognize *parts* of what you’re wearing. Cutting up someone’s garment and pasting it together with something else does not make you a designer.”

“I did not—paste it!” Ruby blurted. She held her breath a beat. Her temper would get her no closer to her goal.

“Listen, I make the very difficult decisions,” he went on, accepting a fresh drink from the bartender. “Our clientele is aspirational, and I choose what’s the next best thing. You have an eye,” he said. “Dresses, especially those for social outings, have more relaxed silhouettes now and shorter skirts. And you’ve reconstructed this to highlight your best features too.” He lifted a layer of her dress and inspected the stitching. It was done by Margaret under duress. A small part of Ruby felt bad for how she hovered over the maid’s shoulder, directing her hand as she attempted to follow Ruby’s sketches. Now there was a sour feeling in the pit of Ruby’s stomach as Mr. Price from Marshall Field & Company scrutinized the handiwork.

“This is hand-stitched, and not to our high standards,” he said. Then he offered a glimmer of hope. “Get someone who can sew, with a Singer. Make more dresses with *new* fabric. Then we can talk.”

Ruby watched him walk away, her hands balled into fists at her side.

“There you are,” said Harrison. He handed Ruby a champagne flute. “Was that gentleman bothering you?” he asked, tracking Mr. Price’s progress through the space. The band had started up, and open space on the dance floor became scarce. Slowly, she relaxed and replayed their conversation in her head. He hadn’t said no. He’d suggested she do better. And try again. Ruby’s hands relaxed. She tilted her chin up and touched her necklace. Bright, brilliant—just like her. She’d try again.

“No, he works in the fashion industry and just offered some advice that may prove useful.”

“Is that so,” Harrison said, looking impressed with her. He lent Ruby his arm and began to walk with her to their box. His eyes left hers only when necessary to navigate the crowd. “That was good of him. What did he suggest?”

“Hmm, that I create samples that are showcase ready.”

“Showcase ready? I have no doubt you’ll be able to create samples that are *showstoppers*.”

Ruby groaned and bumped him with her hip, smiling. Harrison’s confidence added to her own. *I can do this*, she thought. Ruby looked at him, wanting very much to turn into his embrace and kiss him firmly on the lips. As if he could read her thoughts, his own eyes softened as they skipped over her mouth. Ruby cleared her throat and asked what had kept him at the bar so long.

“I’ve been talking with some of the gentlemen involved in the newly formed organization for people like us, after the Niagara Movement disbanded.”

“Whatever you do, make sure Olivia stays clear,” John said, joining them on Ruby’s other side. “Mama’s agreed to her activism as long as Mrs. Woodard or Hetty’s with her—women’s issues and all. But a gentlemen’s group may be pushing it.” John studied the young men, engaged in heated conversation, his brows knitting together.

“Not just a gentleman’s group. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” said Harrison.

Ruby rolled her eyes at this rare display of brotherly overprotectiveness from John. She swatted him playfully before turning back to Harrison. "Their members were in support of my father's campaign. I don't understand, though," she said, coming to a halt and facing Harrison. "Are you thinking of running?" Ruby felt dread rise in her chest. All she knew was the turmoil and sacrifice her father's bid for mayor had required. And now they had little to nothing to show for it. She had wanted so much for him to win, for their family to be respected, to be affecting the type of change Olivia fought for, but she didn't know if she could go through that again.

"No," said Harrison. "I just think there are many more ways to support a community."

"You sound like Olivia," said John.

Ruby threw him a look. John raised his hands, a cocktail in each, then walked ahead of them to where his sister stood. He handed Olivia one and seamlessly joined her conversation with Odette, now flanked by Bertha and Agatha.

Ruby wasn't sure how Harrison planned to support the community more than he already did. He'd been at all her father's rallies and donated when they were in need. Her anger over his meeting with the candidate who'd defeated Mr. Tremaine had waned, but Ruby felt that, until her relationship with her parents was repaired, she wanted a break from politics. Needed it. Before she could express this, they'd returned to their table.

"So," said Olivia. "How did it go?"

"Well," she said, and filled Olivia in on her brief exchange with the buyer. Her encounter with Mr. Price lightened her mood. There would be plenty of time to revisit Harrison's newfound political aspirations. Tonight, they would enjoy an evening out.

Agatha Leary sidled up to them. Ruby studied the dress she wore. It was in the windows of the boutique downtown, Madame Chérie's, and was just the sort of dress Ruby would have purchased if she could. Agatha offered a coy smile to Harrison and said to Ruby, "I am just tickled that the two of

you have had such a relationship blossom from a foul ball. It's just fascinating how two people can fall in love."

Ruby recalled the game—she'd run onto the field that day to see how badly Harrison was hurt after being struck by the ball. *It is probably that precise behavior that has gotten you into trouble*, she thought. *Trouble and happiness.*

"It wasn't a foul ball. Just came off the bat unexpectedly." Harrison squeezed Ruby's hand gently. "Sometimes, the best things to happen to us are unpredictable."

Agatha's face pinched despite her upturned lips. "And the wedding planning. The twenty-seventh of August is soon!" she sighed. "The invitation is so beautiful. I can't wait for the ceremony. I'm sure your parents have spared no expense." Agatha's tone was light, but there was something more behind her eyes.

"Thank you," said Ruby. "Harrison, shall we dance?" She placed her glass on the edge of the table and drew her fiancé with her around the side of the dance floor. The music was lively. And the best part was that she and Harrison were in each other's arms. But around his shoulder, Ruby couldn't help notice the way Odette and Agatha watched them, hiding their words behind curved fingers and fans of lace.

CHAPTER 18

Olivia

“Do you see Ruby or Harrison?” asked Olivia, peering across the club’s dance floor.

John shook his head, smothering Olivia’s hope for a change in subject.

“Carter said I can choose whatever I want,” Odette was saying. “I’ll need your help, Agatha, to find the best. Yours too, Olivia.”

“Of course,” she said. Ruby and Harrison had disappeared among the throngs of dancing couples, and Olivia yearned to join them.

Agatha held her hand up. “Would he be against an antique rose china?”

“I think he’d prefer blue,” said Odette.

They turned to Olivia as if she held the tie-breaking vote. “I suppose it depends if it’s for tea or dinner service.” Her gaze slid to John in the hope that he would catch her look and make an excuse for them to mingle.

“Sounds like you’re with the expert,” he said. “Excuse me, ladies.”

Olivia ground her heel into the floor when he turned toward a group of boisterous gentlemen. *I wonder what Helen is up to?* She’d welcome even her sister’s sharp tongue right now. The engine prototype was nearly complete, though, and Helen spent more and more time in the study researching combustion.

“Olivia, we’re so looking forward to your sister’s party.” Agatha touched Odette’s arm lightly and said, “Their family throws fabulously themed parties.”

“Thank you. They’re my favorite to plan,” said Olivia, just as the club entrance opened, letting in a gust of cooler night air. It felt good on her neck amidst the heat inside, and after spending the day demonstrating outside City Hall in the hot summer sun with Mrs. Woodard and the suffragists.

Olivia straightened when she recognized the silhouette framed in the doorway. She could barely hold back her smile. Everett Stone took off his hat and paused at the edge of the crowd churning in front of him. He took in each face, his attention moving quickly, as if looking for something, someone. She felt herself rise up even taller, startled at her excitement to see him, a jangliness filling her. The dance floor, she noted, was a bit more relaxed than their more formal night at the Blackstone.

“Now *there* is another eligible bachelor,” said Odette.

“Don’t get your hopes up too high,” muttered Agatha.

Olivia’s stomach flipped. She ignored Agatha’s comment, clearly meant to reference the rumors of her and Mr. Stone’s approved courtship. Remembering her manners, Olivia said to Odette, by way of parting, “It was very kind of you to make the introductions to Mr. Price. I can tell Ruby is excited.” *Though I fear that there was some thinly veiled judgment in it.* She glanced back to where Mr. Stone had stood, but he was gone.

“Any friend of Harrison’s is a friend of mine,” said Odette. She cupped the ends of her hair, careful not to disturb the Marcel Waves above.

“Yes,” said Olivia, and paused, surprised by this choice of words. “But they are more than friends. They’re to be wed. I don’t think I’ve ever seen two people so smitten.” She looked at the young woman curiously. “And you, Odette?” she asked, lingering a moment longer. “What are your plans now that you and your brother have decided to stay here in Chicago?”

“Carter is getting settled, making connections.” Odette dropped her voice and sidled closer to Olivia. “I must tell you, I was at my wits’ end. Young Black men lynched for walking home at night after festivals and evening services.” Olivia flinched, having read similar reports. Douglas Lemon and Rankin Moore—just two of the many whose deaths had made the papers in recent weeks. Olivia thought about her brother, and how quickly he could be swept away in the wave of hatred that seemed to be

rolling across the country. “Makes you think twice about leaving your house, especially after dark,” Odette went on. “That’s no way to live.” For a moment, Odette’s shoulders curled inward. She worried her lip and glanced at her brother. “When Carter heard there were management positions in steel for Black folks, I decided we’d relocate. New York was fun, but here, we know someone who won’t lead us astray.” Odette stared at Harrison. “And everyone’s said Chicago is the place to be.”

There was a nagging feeling in Olivia’s stomach. The riot downstate in Springfield was close enough in time and distance to cast a dark cloud over the city of Chicago. But Odette’s words and what Olivia had read in the newspapers, Washington’s warnings about Jim Crow legislation in the South and how violence toward Black people was intensifying—it was frankly terrifying. Olivia wondered now if Washington would soon make his way back, though she had still received no new letters. “And you?” she asked Odette again, wary of the young woman’s answer.

“Black women don’t fare too much better when unrest turns violent. What happens to *us*, our concerns or wishes, rarely make the papers,” Odette added, her voice absent of its normal buoyancy. There was a fierceness in her tone that gave Olivia pause. *Isn’t this what I hope to do with my writing—give us a voice?* “But enough of that kind of talk.” Odette breathed deep and pulled back her shoulders. “I’ve got my eyes on a few things,” she said with a smile, watching Ruby and Harrison. The seriousness of the previous moment vanished. Odette was bright and vivacious again. “And Carter enjoys being united with his old friend.”

Olivia felt her brows pinch together. She couldn’t tell if Odette was being deliberately cryptic or if she’d drunk one cocktail too many. Olivia’s next question—whether or not the Carters had relations left behind—was on the tip of her tongue when she noticed Mr. Stone walking toward them. Her confession to Ruby about the young lawyer on the ride over rang in her mind. Unlike some of the other gentlemen who had removed their coats and rolled up their sleeves, Mr. Stone entered buttoned up. His glasses were tucked into the breast pocket of his jacket again and he held his hat in his hand. He was making his way straight to her.

“Hello, Miss Davenport,” he said. His eyes found hers, and he smiled with them as if he had some secret he was keeping. The fluttery feeling in her stomach intensified.

“Hello, Mr. Stone. What a pleasant surprise.” She meant it too. This night was a distraction, not only for her, but for John, both of them too caught up in their work to enjoy the long days of midsummer. “Have you met Odette Carter?”

Mr. Stone turned. “I’m not sure that I have.”

“Pleased to meet you,” said Odette. She extended her hand, palm down as if she expected him to kiss the back of it.

“How do you do, Miss Carter.” Mr. Stone took it and shifted it gently before releasing it. Olivia bit the inside of her cheek to keep her giggle at bay. She then turned to Agatha and Bertha, making less awkward introductions.

John returned from the nearby box that was filled with Andersons and Greenfields. He and Mr. Stone shook hands. “Between meetings downtown and work on the proposal, I’d think you and I have spent enough time together. Aren’t you tired of my face yet?” joked John.

“Not yet,” said Mr. Stone. His gaze slid to Olivia’s. He placed his hat on a nearby table and slid on his glasses.

John smiled. “Of course, my face isn’t the one you came to see,” he said with feigned indignation.

Olivia’s cheeks warmed. “If Helen were here, she’d remind you that not everything is about you.” She poked her brother in the chest to drive home her point.

“Don’t you just love seeing sibling dynamics,” said Odette to Agatha.

Agatha seemed to be staring at John, at the dimple that revealed itself whenever he smiled. “Mr. Davenport,” she said suddenly, “would you like to dance?”

John froze. Olivia managed to conceal her amusement at the *help me* expression on his face. But to his credit, John quickly regained his composure. He dipped his head and led Agatha Leary to the center of the

dance floor. Olivia watched her brother walk with polite deference and wondered if he'd taken her and Helen's teasing to heart.

Olivia remembered the dance she and Mr. Stone had shared at the engagement party and their time at the Blackstone. Even now, he seemed to sway subtly to the music, his movements drawing her in so thoroughly, she could already imagine his hand on her back, sending a wave of heat through her.

"Care to join me?" she heard herself say. Odette stood slightly to her left, watching Mr. Stone, and Olivia felt a pang of jealousy that surprised her. There was a restlessness in her limbs. A feeling of dread and excitement that flowed through her ever since he'd opened the door. Mr. Stone had barely reached out his hand to her when she took it. The erratic energy she felt settled into a low thrum. Her muscles eased. Mr. Stone fell into step easily beside her and the taut expression he'd worn when he'd entered morphed into something like quiet anticipation. His palm spread across Olivia's spine and he drew her closer.

"Were you lured by the promise of the St. Louis band here tonight?" asked Olivia.

Mr. Stone shook his head. "Ruby invited me. She and her maid were in the garment district where I was meeting a few clients who are on strike."

"Ruby, in the garment district? Surely Margaret could have handled the purchases...." Ruby's questions about the reconstructed dress came to Olivia's mind. *Ah*. Perhaps she was looking for a seamstress. Olivia thought then of Lucille Jennings, the Marshall Field's seamstress and garment worker who frequented the union meetings at Samson House. A dressmaker—she might be a good fit for Ruby's newfound hobby if she were interested in the work....

Olivia tilted her face up to Mr. Stone's now. She silently thanked Ruby for inviting him despite her friend's known preference for Washington DeWight. Her mind turned to Hetty, to Mr. Stone's clients beyond the Davenports—something she'd wanted to ask him. "Do you represent many people who've been unfairly treated by the law?"

Mr. Stone shook his head. “Not all the people I help have been arrested or accused of a crime. Some just need legal guidance. Not so many have formal schooling. For some, English is not their first language.... It’s a difficult world to navigate.”

“And how does your uncle feel about this extra work you take on?” she asked.

“He encourages it as long as it doesn’t interfere with the day-to-day of the firm’s business.”

“That’s wonderful. My mother approves my interest too—” she started. “Though she’s tried to convince me to lend my support using our family money and influence, investing my time in charitable events and fundraisers rather than in rallies. My father, he’s so...protective, I can’t share how deeply I’m involved.”

“Yes, I’ve met your father.” Mr. Stone’s tone was mild but his eyes held that secret smile. “And have you found your balance, Miss Davenport? Between what your mother would have you do and speaking before a packed room?” he asked. A gentle grin tugged at his lips.

“I think I have.” Beyond public speaking, she also lacked the skills of a mediator, often deferring to Mrs. Woodard to settle disputes between union workers and suffragists.

They’d drifted to the opposite end of the dance floor now. It was quieter here. Mr. Stone bent his head to speak. She inhaled his scent and tried to ignore the warmth that had her tingling. On the carriage ride over, she had confided in Ruby how much fun she had spending time with Mr. Stone, even if it was just sitting on the porch swing.

“Could it be that Mama and Daddy Davenport have finally picked a contender?” Ruby had bounced in her seat. “Can you imagine Mr. Stone and Mr. DeWight in a ring, fighting over your heart? This is so exciting!”

“Ruby,” Olivia had said, with perhaps more firmness than was needed.

“Mr. DeWight does look like he’s been in a fight or two.” Ruby settled back in her seat, smiling dreamily. “Have you heard from him yet?”

Olivia shifted in her seat. “No, not recently. I don’t think he’s received my last letters. I’d be worried if I didn’t know that George writes Hetty and

mentions Washington in them.”

“George...?”

“Washington’s friend. He helped us escape that march.” Olivia shuddered at the memory of the spring rally that had turned deadly. They’d found out in the papers the next day that a Black gentleman was “trampled,” though eyewitness accounts stated he was beaten.

Her friend frowned. “Then maybe he hasn’t found the right words. Or is writing something long, like his earlier notes,” Ruby reassured her. She mimed scribbling and turning the page. Smiled. “A novel in verse?”

Olivia wanted to believe Ruby. She did. The first few letters Washington had written were long and musical. As the protests against segregation grew more frequent, though, their correspondence had waned. His last letter briefly recounted his arrival at the capital where he and other activists immediately joined the effort. Olivia, caught up in planning Helen’s party, attending meetings with the other activists, and her social calendar, had found herself not missing the time that passed between letters. *When did that happen?* she wondered.

“We can sit for a while if you’d prefer?” said Mr. Stone now, cutting into her thoughts.

Olivia blinked her vision clear. For a moment, she’d forgotten where she was. Now she smiled at Everett Stone. “I think I’d like some fresh air.” She began to weave her way through the crowd until they made it to the back door that opened onto a small patio. The stars were bright in the inky sky above. She was highly aware of Mr. Stone standing beside her, his presence calming and unsettling at the same time.

“It’s beautiful,” he said, his face turned skyward. Olivia watched the knot in his throat bob as he spoke. “I became somewhat of an amateur astronomer last spring.” He stood close to her, and the fluttering in Olivia’s chest grew. “All the panic around Halley’s Comet...I wanted to understand.” He laughed, and the planes of his face reorganized into something wonderful. “Don’t worry, I didn’t rush out for magic sugar pills.” He turned to Olivia, his expression comically intense. “I’m glad Flammarion’s prediction of human extinction was wrong.”

Olivia's laugh joined his. She felt a little light-headed. "I'm glad too. Jessie, our family's cook, began canning everything, and tried to convince the gardener to transplant the roses to build a bunker."

"It doesn't hurt to be prepared," he said, eyes smiling.

She turned toward the club as the music from inside changed. "I like this song."

He took a step closer, a hand halfway to where she stood. Olivia looked at the space between them and stepped into his arms. He drew her close. They swayed together to the brassy soulful notes. Olivia felt as though she were floating. She recalled how, after their night dining and dancing at the Blackstone, they'd returned to Freeport and sat on the porch together again, gazing at the stars on the clear night. Their upper arms alone had touched as they'd swayed, his smooth, calm voice pointing out the constellations. Olivia's higher one describing what she could remember from her lessons. And when they had run out of stars, the companionable silence had been enough.

The song ended, and Olivia believed she could be content with a lifetime of evenings like that one and dances like this. She wondered what it would feel like to reach up, to kiss him, to slowly remove his glasses and trace the sharp angles of his cheekbones, his jaw, as he angled his face toward hers. Would he taste of the mint leaves he chewed? Would he leave her breath cool and lips tingling? The thought surprised her, as did the smile spreading across her face.

In that moment, she realized they were the only two people in the small outdoor space. Tucked away from the door, she could...Before she lost her nerve, she rocked onto the balls of her feet and lifted her lips gently to his. There was a moment where Mr. Stone's arms stiffened around her. Then relaxed. His arms slid around her waist. When his lips parted on hers, a rush of cool air entered her lungs. The smell of him—fresh and leather and something all his own—engulfed her. They pulled apart slightly, and her eyelids fluttered open to see him, his lids heavy, eyes meeting hers, full of a desire he only now let her see. He raised his fingertips to her face. Then bent and kissed her again, his lips soft, his hands drifting to her back, hers

on his, pulling together as they deepened their kiss. They parted at last, flushed and breathless. A little shy. He offered his arm. Olivia took it, lips and fingers tingling, ears buzzing. She was parched but did not want to move from the porch, from under the protective blanket of stars.

She stared up at them, then at Mr. Stone's profile against the night sky, the elegant geometry of his face. He turned and smiled at her. Kissed her forehead. She admired this young man's goals. She liked how he seemed to see into her—to see a potential she had been running away from instead of toward. With him, she wouldn't have to choose between her home and her future.

Could it be so easy? So easy to let one dream go and let another take shape?

CHAPTER 19

Amy-Rose

The sun had started its descent when Amy-Rose locked the shop behind her. She sighed and thought of the vast tub that awaited her in the blue room at Freeport. Her arms and back ached fiercely, and she knew once a room at the boardinghouse for unwed ladies opened, she would surely miss that tub. She rounded on her heel, then stuttered to a stop. Something was missing. The Davenport carriage usually staged down the street wasn't there. Where Harold should be, perched on the coach seat with the *Record-Herald* open on his lap, a sleek black motorcar idled instead.

John Davenport leaned against the driver's-side door, his jaw tense as he stared at the spot just beyond his feet.

Amy-Rose hesitated. The unexpected sight of him— She placed a hand over her chest, sure he'd be able to hear her heart pounding from where she stood. Amy-Rose licked her lips. She'd done her best the past couple of weeks to keep her distance. But if Harold wasn't here...

She walked to John, worry hurrying her steps. "Good evening, John. Is Harold ill?" Another loss would be too much to bear.

John startled and stood up. He removed his hat. "Not at all," he said. She drew in a relieved breath. "Just a pressing matter he needed to attend to. I offered to come get you, Amy-Rose. I hope you don't mind." The tension she'd observed in him a moment ago had evaporated. Could she

hope—was it her effect on him? The thought set off a frenzy of butterflies in her belly.

Amy-Rose glanced down the street. The sun, low in the sky, cast long shadows down the pavement. “No, I don’t mind.” He walked her around and opened her door. She slid in and remembered another car ride they’d taken together. The parcels Jessie had sent her into town to fetch had been wedged between them and in the space behind. She’d pretended on that spring day that she was not the maid in his family home, but that they were just a boy and a girl out for a drive. *Perhaps tonight, that is just what we are.*

The engine roared to life. John placed his hand on the seat, his fingertips accidentally grazing hers and setting her whole body on fire. Oh, did she want to feel his fingers laced through her own! Amy-Rose turned to look out the window, hoping to hide the blush she was sure bloomed beneath her freckles.

John cleared his throat and now, with both hands on the steering wheel, pulled the motorcar away from the curb. “Busy day?” he asked.

“Yes, packaging serums for sale, fulfilling orders I received when I was in New York—that sort of thing.” She kept her hands in her lap and noticed that John had shifted closer to his door. “We’re closed to customers on Tuesdays so the stylists and I can keep up. The upstairs studio is a blessing—I don’t know how we’d make it all otherwise.”

“Sounds like a well-oiled machine,” he said. His dimple and cheerful countenance invited her to share like they once had as children, as they had this spring in his parents’ garden.

“Speaking of machines, Helen tells me you have it all. Is the car close to finished then?”

He stopped at the intersection and looked at her, his expression intense. “I don’t quite have it all,” he said meaningfully. Amy-Rose’s stomach flipped. She remembered how she’d ended up in his arms during that same spring car ride. John looked back at the road, took a breath. “The day-to-day keeps me busy. The work on the engine, the prototype—it has to be perfect,” he continued.

“Perfection is a lofty goal,” said Amy-Rose. “I’m just trying to keep up. I feared after leaving New York, orders from the connections I made there would dwindle. But I was wrong. Orders come from Newark, New Haven, Boston. There’re requests for treatments ahead of my trips this fall to road shows in Springfield, Milwaukee, Indianapolis.” She noted the incredulity in her own voice. “People have seen ads in papers and heard from friends and relatives here in Chicago that my hair care products are the real deal. Blocking a day a week in the appointment book to create stock, it was not an easy decision to make, but I don’t see another way.”

John glanced at her, eyes warm. “I wish Daddy and the board would see another way—realize that what Helen and I are doing is the real deal too. We don’t have much time to transition before the other companies leave us behind. And even though it’s Daddy and the board we have to impress, if we fail to modernize, it’ll be the men who work in the factory, the showroom, *their families*”—John wiped his face with his hand—“they’ll be the ones who take the hit. The days are too short,” he said.

“And the nights long,” she finished, thinking of all she stayed to do after she locked the salon doors. Thinking of lying in bed at Freeport, staring at the ceiling, John just down the hall.

He slowed the car for two carriages to cross and turned to her, his face serious, as if hearing her thoughts. Then he reached out and squeezed her hand, so quickly—the warmth from his palm on her skin there and gone. He broke eye contact once the street cleared.

They drove for a time. Quiet. Then John glanced at her again, smiling now, and the dimple that made her knees weak reappeared. “I think watching you thrive has hardened Helen’s resolve. Mine too.” He cleared his throat. “I’m lucky to have the carriage company waiting for me—what my father built is remarkable.”

She could not deny that. Or that John seemed to be trying to express something to her. What exactly? She could never expect John to give up his inheritance for her, especially not now, with all that was at stake for him and Helen, for the company. She would never want that. Amy-Rose tried to imagine Mr. Davenport’s journey, the hurdles that could have derailed his

progress, and the determination and bravery needed to overcome them. They had turned him into the man he was. She remembered Helen's words now—that more had transpired after Amy-Rose had left. But now, as then, Amy-Rose did not wish to linger on the possibilities. Nothing appeared to have changed between John and his father. Mr. Davenport's words about her had hurt. They would always hurt. She wished, not for the first time, that he had not felt the need to call for such a sacrifice from John—the choice to forfeit the business and his family, or to forfeit her.

John glanced at her. He said quietly, "I want it to continue to be successful and grow, but also to stand on my own, for what I believe. Make my mark. Have some part of it to call mine."

Amy-Rose looked at her clasped hands. "It's a wonderful thing, to call something your own."

He shifted next to her and Amy-Rose noticed how close they were now. "All these orders from customers in New York—what was it like?" he asked. "Being there?"

"Oh it was an adventure, to be sure. New York City is a lot like here. The streets are full of cars and horses, people! So many people. Black businesses are thriving in a neighborhood called the Tenderloin. Theaters and galleries, shops, banks, dancing halls. And the nightlife—"

"The nightlife?"

"Yes," said Amy-Rose, "mostly with Mrs. Davis. The atmosphere is more relaxed, and Black and white folks enjoy music clubs and restaurants together late into the night."

"Mrs. Davis did enjoy a party."

Amy-Rose laughed. "She did." Ah, Mrs. Davis. It felt good to talk about her. "I did also enjoy an evening out with a young gentleman I met at a trade show." John made a sound, and Amy-Rose looked over at him. "But I explained to him, my heart belonged to Chicago."

A smile broke across John's face. He glanced at her as the city moved around them, and the sun painted the streets in gold. It burnished his skin in a bronze light. He looked at her again, something shifting in his face now. "You did it, Amy-Rose," he said. His joy for her radiated from him, from

his whole being. It washed over her. The feelings they had for each other may always be there, *And, that's fine*, she thought. But this feeling was golden. "No one deserves it quite like you do." His hand lifted off the steering wheel, hovered, as if to reach for her. Then grasped the wheel once more, fingers flexing, restless. Amy-Rose felt an ache low in her body.

She closed her eyes a moment. They were near Freeport now. She took a small breath and glanced at John. "How *are* you and Helen progressing?" she asked.

John sighed. "The engine is built. Most of the frame. We're disagreeing on the exterior. But right now, our biggest problem is increasing the horsepower—the engine's output compared to a draft horse's. Daddy is due back in a couple of weeks, just in time for the *exhibition*." He shook his head. "Helen's plan has evolved into an outright race, with Ransom Swift at top billing."

Amy-Rose sat up. "But that's good news! I'm surprised she hasn't learned to drive it and enter a race herself."

"I assure you, that *did* cross her mind." His laugh traveled right through her and warmed her to her core. "You and Helen—you handle it all with grace, Amy-Rose," said John, pulling his motorcar up the long drive. "You have different...*styles*." He smiled. "But I have no doubt it's the beginning of great things for you both."

Amy-Rose felt light as air then. But with her next breath, a growing doubt crept in. "Mrs. Davis's daughter—" Amy-Rose started. "Have you heard about this? Ruth Davis? I'm afraid she'll come back, John, that she'll look for a way to kick me out of the salon, the same way she pushed me out of Mrs. Davis's house."

He touched the back of her hand. "Olivia told me. I'm sorry that happened to you, Amy-Rose. You and Mrs. Davis became very close. I didn't know about Ruth. I'd bet most would say Maude Davis cared for you as if you were her own family."

Amy-Rose felt tears welling. She certainly felt like family to her late mentor. "I had thought to pay my way to owning the salon. Now, I'll never get the chance to tell her—"

John reached for her again. This time his hand remained, warm and reassuring, between her palms. The gentle pressure of his callous fingertips kneaded her sore hands. They stayed that way until they reached Freeport. John brought his motorcar to a stop at the front of the open garage bay door, but made no move to get out, both hands now in his lap.

"I didn't know her all that well, but my gut tells me that whatever you wished to tell her, she already knew," he said.

Amy-Rose nodded. She knew this to be true. Still, she couldn't help wonder what the future would have held for the two of them had Mrs. Davis not fallen ill. Amy-Rose caught John looking at her with such tenderness, her chest tightened. Their eyes locked. She held her breath, wanting to reach for him again. Wanting to draw him to her.

John turned suddenly, opened the door, and exited the vehicle. He walked around the front and opened her door to help her out. This time his touch was firm and brief.

"Would you like to see what we've been working on?" he asked.

"Mm-hmm." She didn't quite trust her voice yet.

John led her over the gravel path and onto the smooth floor of the garage. He left her side briefly to light the gas lamps on the workbench on the far wall. After her eyes adjusted, Amy-Rose found herself in the bay; the partially assembled prototype already looked more like an automobile than he'd let on.

"She'll be beautiful when she's done," said John.

"She?" Amy-Rose watched his face change, the shyness that crept in despite his obvious excitement.

"The exhibition is in two weeks. We've been working around the clock. It has to be up to my father's standards."

It will be beautiful, she thought. The leather trim on the interior and the tufted seats bore a striking resemblance to the more expensive Davenport carriages. "And you're confident this will change your father's mind?"

John shoved his hands in his pockets. "He's set in his ways, but he is reasonable once presented with a sound argument." He lit all but one lamp.

“Then why didn’t you,” she heard herself saying. “Argue for us—that night in the garden?” The words were spoken before she could stop them. Once they were in the air, she knew how badly she needed the answer.

His brow furrowed. “I did argue. I told my father that I cared for you, Amy-Rose, that I loved you. We spoke at length about the hardship he endured when the business was first created, the doors that were closed to him.” John wiped his face with his hands. “He doesn’t want to see those doors closed again on the people he loves.”

Amy-Rose’s ears were ringing. “Would loving me close those doors?”

“Of course not,” said John quickly, taking a step toward her. “And if they did, I’m sure they’re not ones I’d want to walk through. He doesn’t see that, though.”

She had heard Mr. Davenport clearly, but she could hear the truth in John’s voice too. “He asked if you were willing give up the business. He said that he would not help if we married, and you said nothing.”

John hesitated. Amy-Rose could see him fighting to find the right words. She braced herself for what might come next. “A few hours before the party, I went into my parents’ room to borrow a pair of cuff links. Daddy’s shirt was off and I could see—” John’s voice cracked. “His back.” He stopped, deciding not to continue. He didn’t need to. Amy-Rose had heard from the other servants about the extensive scarring Mr. Davenport carried. She’d seen the poultices the physicians delivered to soften them and ease his pain. “My father is convinced that all he’s built for his family could disappear.” John put his elbows down on the build and lowered his head. Amy-Rose stepped toward him, placed her hand lightly on his back. “In the garden that night, I told him that he could not protect me from the pain and hardship there is in the world. That what I really needed was his support and guidance. When he asked me about Ruby, I told him that you, Amy-Rose, are the only person I’d choose to stand next to me. I don’t know how much you heard that night. I can only imagine what it must have felt like to walk in on that conversation. If you’d heard everything, you’d know I stood up for us. Yes, he is set in his ways, though, and ultimately, family is all that matters.”

Amy-Rose opened her mouth to say...what? What *could* she say? John leaned into her palm. "The next morning, I planned to tell him you were my choice, only to find you'd left. I ended up telling him after dinner that night." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Amy-Rose." It sent a shiver up her body that tingled down to her toes. Her resolve to keep her distance faded with his nearness. *Had he really fought for us?* The eager tenderness in his eyes told her yes.

He straightened and she felt as though she were tipping toward him. "John." His eyes fluttered closed, then opened as he scooped her to him. Their foreheads touched and Amy-Rose released a breath. John's lips found hers. It was like a wave crashing through her. His familiar scent, balsam and bergamot, sweat and salt—it filled her senses. She melted into his embrace and forgot all the reasons they couldn't belong together. All she could feel was his body pressed to hers. The pressure of his lips along her jaw, her neck, made her skin feel flushed all over. She found his mouth again and deepened the kiss. He pulled her closer in response. It felt like a dance, a give and take, cued by the subtlest of gestures. Her pulse raced. John's words replayed in her mind. He'd defended their love, chose her over his parents' match. He whispered her name against her mouth now and cradled her head in his hands. His feelings had not changed with her silence or their separation. And neither had hers.

John pulled back and looked down at her, eyes hazy and intent at once.

And then reality came crashing down. Amy-Rose shuddered. "We should stop," she said. He opened his mouth to respond. "You have enough going on with the build, and I've just—I've just opened the salon. Nothing has—the situation hasn't changed, John. Carrying on like this will only make it harder." *Harder to ignore this when your father returns and...* Amy-Rose could not complete the thought.

"I don't want to give up on us." He cupped her face in his hands. "The only thing—person—I can think about, is you. There must be a way. I'll find a way. I told him my choice. And here I am—not disowned, not cast out. There's hope." His eyes searched her face. Amy-Rose kept still, her pulse ticking. "Before you stepped back into this house, Amy-Rose, I

wondered what you were doing, *how* you were doing. Now,” he said, licking his lips, “now I have to function in this house knowing you’re down the hall. I smell you in the rooms you’ve left. I hear your laugh through the wall. You’re close enough to touch and just out of reach at the same time.” He took a step back, and another. Each made her breath hitch. “I can’t believe after everything I wrote in my letters, you won’t give this another chance?”

Her feet felt glued to the floor, her face burning hotter than a moment ago. She knew the exact moment he recognized the truth. She felt the shame—of letting his letters go unread and unanswered—pulse through her.

He shook his head slowly. “And all this while, I thought you just needed time, space.” His next words were delivered calmly. “I want a future with you. I have been so proud to watch you accomplish your dream. You know where I stand. Read the letters—you’ll see. There’s more than you may realize.” He exhaled loudly. Amy-Rose swallowed around the lump lodged in her throat. He handed a lamp to her. The look on his face pained her to see. “I have some work to do here,” he said, “but I can walk you up to the house.”

John’s words pierced her. Everything he’d said, it was everything she’d ever wanted to hear. But they’d been here before. And she’d heard his father’s words that night—*daughter of a slave owner*—words that separated her from them. Yes, Mr. Davenport was set in his ways, and yes, family was all that mattered—John had said it just now himself. But while she’d lived under this roof since she was five, Amy-Rose was not family. John felt sure he could move heaven and earth, move his father. But how could she put her faith in these two men, when they had so thoroughly broken her heart? Her trust? She couldn’t take another loss. Not one this big. Not now.

Finally finding her voice, she said, “I can make my own way.”

Amy-Rose escaped to her room. When the door clicked shut behind her, she pressed flat against it. Her heart beat in her ears and she could taste salt in the back of her throat. “Was coming here a mistake?” she whispered. There was no one to answer. Her next few breaths ached as they passed. She opened her eyes, walked slowly to the dresser, and freed the parcel

John had sent her from its hiding place. It was heavier than she remembered. Curiosity tinged with dread made her hands tremble.

The paper tore easily, the sound echoing in the quiet of the night. It was a large bundle of letters. *What is this?* All but one was tied together with twine. Amy-Rose tucked the bundle under her arm and tore open the lone envelope, pulling free a sheet of paper dated the day she'd left Freeport and covered in John's scratchy writing:

Dear Amy-Rose,

I'm sorry it took me so long to realize any future without you would be incomplete. I'm sorry for the scene you witnessed, and I regret not having had the chance to explain myself before you left. I feel lost, with no sun or compass to regain my bearings.

But I hold on to hope.

I've let my father know this today: I choose you.

The staff at Mrs. Davis's house said you accompanied her on a trip. I hope you're well and safe. I hope this note and the letters enclosed find you. The first missed you by hours. The others were delivered bound about two weeks later. They've remained just as they were received.

I hope you find what you need, and return home.

Yours always,

John.

Amy-Rose stared at the paper in her hand. If John had already explained his position to his father, that meant that all this time, he'd been waiting for her. She thought back to Mrs. Davenport's demeanor, welcoming and warm.

She remembered how closely John's mother had watched her and John interact—or not—at dinners. *Have I been waiting for Mr. Davenport to approve while they all waited for me to accept?*

It made her head spin and her stomach churn. Amy-Rose wanted to believe it was all now up to her, but she couldn't. A fairy-tale notion. And though John had stood for Amy-Rose, it was clear from what he'd said that his father had not. So nothing was different. No, she would not be the storm to tear John away from his family. And she could not endure the heartache of their rejection again. She folded his letter and placed it back into the envelope. Then she directed her attention to the others.

The first didn't match the ones in the bundle, which were worn and discolored with age and handling. The first was fresh, heavy cardstock. With neat looping script, it was sealed with a crest that she'd only seen broken. Amy-Rose's body stilled. A sudden rush of blood made her head light and the room dim. She cradled the bundle in her arms like an infant and lit the gas lamp on the desk. The chair creaked as she sat.

It was her father's seal. The one that marked the letters her mother kept from the man she'd loved. With a shaking hand, Amy-Rose traced the raised wax. Then she used a letter opener to split the top, keeping the seal intact. Adrenaline coursed through her veins. She pulled the letter free.

Dear Amy-Rose,

You may not remember me. My name is Elizabeth Cary Evans. My father was Andrew Baxter Evans. Your father too. And not a day has passed since you and your mother came to the house that I have not thought of you and how cruelly my—our—grandparents turned you away. If only my cries were not stifled, we could have known each other sooner.

Amy-Rose let the letter rest in her lap and closed her eyes. Her nose stung as tears escaped her eyes. Buried deep, a memory resurfaced. She and her mother arriving at the grand plantation in Georgia after weeks of

traveling from their storm-ravaged home in Saint Lucia. The sea had been rough, the weather terrifying as waves crashed overhead. At five years old, this event had eclipsed all others. Until she and her mother had arrived at what they thought could be their new home. A bright white house, with large windows and a porch long and wide. It was the most beautiful house she'd ever seen until they came to Freeport. They were exhausted. Clara Shepherd had carried Amy-Rose up the long drive, assuring her this was part of a grand adventure. On the porch, she'd knelt before Amy-Rose and smoothed her hair, straightened her skirt, before knocking on the door.

The floorboards had creaked. The breeze played between the branches of the willow tree. White petals fell like the snow she would soon experience here in Chicago. Clara Shepherd's hope blurred her tired features and brightened her smile. Her mother had been convinced that her love's letters were lost in the post and, later, the storm. Why else would he have not written in so long?

Amy-Rose took a deep breath now. When she was sure she could, she read on.

*I love my grandparents still, but I shall never forgive them
for the pain they caused you and your mother when my
father was too weak to speak for himself. I believe knowing
that you both were sent away, and being unable to search for
you, drained what little energy he had left. I'm sorry to say
that he passed away not a week later.*

Amy-Rose recalled the couple who answered the door, how they'd stood sentry at the threshold, their frowns and firm mouths. And the girl, a few years older than herself, pointing and yelling, "Liar!" before being carried off. Amy-Rose had always thought the girl was pointing to her and her mother, but now she wondered. Were the liars living in the girls' home? Were they this older couple standing like a fortress between Amy-Rose and this house?

Her father's death had changed her mother. Made her closed off to romantic love. The love that remained was channeled into her daughter. Amy-Rose had basked in that love.

The first sheet fluttered to the floor from Amy-Rose's weakened fingers. A sob escaped her. She pressed a hand against her mouth, and grieved for her mother and this man she never knew, for their love that was cut off and for her. The family she could have had, the love that could have surrounded her.

Her mother.

Mrs. Davis.

Her father.

So much loss.

She skimmed the page below to find that Elizabeth's own mother had died during her birth. It all was too much. Amy-Rose released another silent sob. She ached to know that she and her mother had been so close. *He'd still been alive, and they would not let us see him.* The cruelty of it felt like a hot comb to the back of her hand, the pain delayed but compounding quickly. She set the letter aside and pulled at the twine holding the other letters together. Amy-Rose instantly recognized her mother's handwriting.

These are her replies, she realized. He kept them.

The hour was late, but Amy-Rose would not rise from her desk before the sun.

CHAPTER 20

Helen

Helen passed the back of her hand across her forehead and paced the garage. The bay doors were open to let the air circulate. “Will this weather ever break?” she asked John, looking out over the hazy summer grounds of Freeport, glancing at the servants’ entrance beyond the gravel drive. No one was coming to haul her back. Yet. John held a screwdriver in his hand, tapping a beat into his palm. “John, are you listening? Actually, are you humming?”

He looked at her, seeming distracted, and didn’t answer. But his mood was lighter than it had been in weeks. *Something’s happened. I won’t forget to wheedle it out of you*, she thought, turning back to the build. She and the twins, Isaac and Henry, had spent the past week working on the body of the motorcar—the future of the Davenport Carriage Company. If she tilted her head and squinted, she could almost picture Ransom Swift behind the wheel of the finished product. But time was tight.

“There’s not much we can do about this heat,” said John at last. “We *can* get back to work. We’ll have to take the body to the factory for the final coat. But we don’t have weeks to watch paint dry. The ovens should do.” He stood with his elbow propped on the arm across his chest, rubbing his chin. “I can’t believe Daddy’s been gone over a month already.”

When the letter had arrived saying their father was detained, Mrs. Davenport fought to hold back tears. She didn’t let any of the children

read the full note he'd sent. "He's safe and that is what matters," she'd said. It was left at that. The Davenport siblings had exchanged looks but did not pry. Olivia said they should trust that their mother would let them know if there was cause to worry.

"It's closer to two months now," said Helen. "Do you think—" Her words got stuck in her throat. She was proud of the engine they'd built and the automobile taking shape. It would run once everything was in place. Still...She wanted it to stand out—to be so powerful that her talents, her instincts, could not be denied. Also she wanted to drive it! Her brother waited for her, his expression gentle. "Do you think," she continued, "that we should turn the building you bought for Amy-Rose into a workshop? Surprise Daddy when he gets home? It's not being used as anything other than a dust museum. And it's more industrial and far larger than anything Amy-Rose would use right now. And that way everything will be done, and Daddy'll just have to watch it succeed."

"Helen, I doubt that's the kind of surprise Daddy would appreciate." His exasperation was clear in his tone. "Let's start at the start. Mr. Stone and I have discussed the downward trajectory of the carriage sales with the board."

"And the possibility of changing the business model?"

"Not yet. For one thing"—he raised his eyebrows at her—"it doesn't feel right to hide your involvement. Or, for another, to bring the board in before Daddy sees this." This was a conversation they'd had more than once. "But now that the board's aware of the current sales decline, maybe they'll be open to seeing one automobile prototype. One. That's what we're working on now." He gestured with comic exaggeration to the build.

"I know," said Helen, annoyed.

"I can't hand Daddy a company in worse condition than he left it. And developing that other building will take away needed resources. Helen, we haven't even gotten approval on one prototype, let alone an entire factory. Daddy will come around. If we try to force his hand, he'll dig in his heels."

"Ugh, why do you have to be right?"

“Because I’m your big brother.” He smiled wide, but then his face softened. “This is a huge undertaking that requires time *and* planning.”

Helen groaned. She knew this. Before he’d left, their father had sat with each of them. She didn’t know what he’d told Olivia—probably “keep up the good work,” but for Helen, it was a reminder to heed her mother and Mrs. Milford. To keep focused on her studies and the plan they laid out for her. Mr. Davenport had sat with John the longest.

“All he wants to know is that I’m minding my manners and staying out of trouble.” Helen folded her arms across her chest.

“His expectations for me are not that different. With the exception that everything is run exactly how he wants it.” John sighed. “It’s been frustrating to show up every day and not have a voice.”

“At least you *get* to show up. And you do have a voice now. All I want is a seat at the table. I’d even settle for a seat in the corner of the room. For now.” Far better than preparing for her debut. There’d be no tea parties or dance lessons today. Only a brief appearance at the Greenfields’ party later tonight and her social obligation for the day would be fulfilled. She would go with her siblings—Mrs. Milford was free to spend her time off as she pleased.

John walked to where she stood and draped a damp arm over her shoulder. “Once we get this up and running, you’ll get it, Helen. They won’t have any reason to doubt that you’ve earned it. Let’s focus on that.”

“Will it be before or after you stifle me with your stench?” she said. John held her closer as she tried to free herself from his grip. His words felt like a promise. Though they lifted her mood, there was a feeling she couldn’t shake, another reason for the knots in her stomach.

Ransom Swift had agreed to visit Freeport. To see a *horseless* Davenport carriage, their very first motorcar. Helen looked at the matte black frame. The interior had been removed after the dry fit. So had the doors. The wheels were propped against the far wall. It wasn’t so much a motorcar as an elaborate metal sculpture. They had learned a lot from the Ford they’d fixed in the spring. They’d also learned there was so much more to do

before their stock car would be competitive. *I may have oversold the product*, she thought as John emptied his glass of water.

“Who’s that coming up the drive?” John asked now, squinting into the slanting light. He finally released Helen and moved toward the opening.

She also may have forgotten to tell her brother they would have a visitor. “I invited Ransom Swift to see our motorcar.”

John gestured wildly to the hodgepodge of parts strewn about. “What motorcar?”

“The one we’re building! We may not have a factory, but we have our name and two pairs of hands between us. And with Isaac and Henry involved, we can run the business how you think Daddy wants you to for now, *and* we can be ready for the inevitable. I sent Ransom Swift a note to follow up on the possibility of racing our motorcar. Turn our upcoming exhibition into a *race*. I told you this.”

“Helen”—John threw up his hands—“this automobile will run, but I’m not sure it will *race*. And since when have you been exchanging letters with Ransom Swift?”

They both turned to look as the bright red motorcar sped up the drive, gravel flying in its wake. “You can’t be serious,” John said.

Panic rose in her chest. “Can we talk about it later?” Helen walked to where John stood and held his arm. “Please?” she asked.

He glanced over her head. When he looked back at her, his mouth puckered to the side like it did when Ethel’s lemonade was too tart. “Fine.”

“Thank you!” she said. “And don’t look at me like that. All the rumors about him only involve gambling and drinking.”

“Oh great,” she heard John mumble. “Nothing too serious then.”

Helen ignored him as Mr. Swift pulled up, slid out, and strolled over to the garage, raising his hand in a wave. He’d left his jacket in his vehicle. The top two buttons of his shirt were undone, and his straw hat had left his messy mop of curls plastered to his head. “Good afternoon, Davenports,” he said by way of greeting. The sight of him made her smile—harder when she imagined how appalled Mrs. Milford would be at his manners and state of

undress. Her eyes settled on the notch at his collarbone. Its sharp edges glistened with sweat.

Gross. Stop. You're like those girls at the track. Helen threw her shoulders back and swallowed. "Nice of you to join us, Mr. Swift. I trust you had no trouble finding the address." She glanced at the clock on the workbench. He was early.

"It was easy enough," he said. The look on his face suggested he saw the way she studied him. Clearly, he was mistaking her curiosity for attraction. *Clearly.*

"Swift." John shook his hand and offered him some sweet tea from the pitcher sweating in the corner.

After a long draw, Ransom Swift's attention drifted to the state of the garage. His eyes narrowed as he took in their work. "This is the motorcar?"

John bristled and looked at Helen. With his arms crossed over his chest, his gaze bore into the side of her face as she watched Mr. Swift walk around their vehicle. She turned and widened her eyes at her brother. Where was his John Davenport charm? Or did he only save that for ladies at parties, as he deftly maneuvered out of dancing?

John's voice broke the silence. "It's the making of one," he said.

Mr. Swift nodded. He then sauntered around the engine once more. Slow and deliberate. Helen was about to speak when he stopped abruptly. "Do you have a wrench?"

"What size?" she asked, before John could answer. Swift picked one up from the bench and bent over *her* engine. Like a mother defending her young, she stepped closer. "What are you doing?"

"Checking the tension on that gasket," he said, smiling. "Don't want to create a projectile." Helen placed his glass down with a splash. She was fixing to give Mr. Swift a piece of her mind when he said, "Do you see this here?" He waited until John's head neared his and pointed to a spot Helen could not see. "This is a weak seam in these styles. If you want this to really run smoothly"—he paused and looked up at Helen—"I'd suggest you find a way to protect it better."

"And if I want it to go faster?"

Mr. Swift whistled, high and clear. “Then you’re gonna need to replace your carburetor. Upgrading to Kingston’s Five Ball ought to do it.”

“So, no changes to the dog chain or fuel intake?” Helen frowned at the engine block. A larger carburetor meant more oxygen, increased combustion. More power. *Would the Kingston fit?*

Mr. Swift grinned at her. “You’ve showed me yours. I’ll show you what I’ve done to mine.”

Helen sensed he was flirting by the way his eyes lingered over her mouth, her neck. It raised a heat in her.

John stepped in then—literally. Stepped right between them. “Listen, I read what they’ve said about your work in the papers,” he said, “and I’d thank you to slow down.”

Helen nudged her brother out of the way, her eyes fiery, she was sure. John would *not* ruin her hard work with his stubbornness.

Mr. Swift sucked in his bottom lip and nodded. “They don’t always have it right, you know.”

John’s jaw twitched. “What did they get wrong, Mr. Swift?” He handed their guest and Helen each a glass of iced tea.

Ransom Swift glanced at Helen. “It wasn’t gambling so much as borrowing more than I could pay back. It’s all settled now. And the parties—I thought they came with the profession, the lifestyle.” He shrugged. “I realized what I like more than anything is being unexpected.”

John, standing beside Helen now, scoffed, then grunted at her elbow in his side. “We can look into the Kingston tomorrow.” To Ransom Swift he said, “We planned to place the engine in and start her up. You don’t have to stay—”

“I can help,” he answered. He shoved his sleeves to his elbows. “I’ve dropped an engine or two. Not on the ground,” he added quickly. Mr. Swift pointed at the engine and, for a moment, the swaggering façade slipped and she saw a young man as enthusiastic about motorcars as she was. “I’ve been behind the wheel of a few different makes and witnessed modifications to varying degrees of success.” He shook his head and his curls swung with the motion.

“What’s it like competing in a race?” Helen asked.

“It’s the best feeling. Exhilarating and scary and”—he searched for the word—“freeing. Sometimes I forget there are other motorcars around me. When it’s over, I’m ready to do it again.”

“Let’s work *while* we talk,” said John. Mr. Swift pulled a silly face at Helen when John bent over the engine.

With a subdued giggle, Helen said, “Let me.” She slipped her hand between the dolly and the engine and checked the fittings. Mr. Swift rubbed his chin. He and John talked about his racing history, skirting around the controversies Helen had mentioned to get him here. She joined in but was mostly focused on the work. Her smaller hands proved invaluable once again, and she couldn’t resist the urge to stick her tongue out at John, eliciting laughter from them both. The three of them worked well together, despite Mr. Swift’s large head.

“That’s it. Let’s hoist the engine,” said John. He’d peeled down the top of his coveralls and tied the sleeves around his waist. Helen wished she could do the same. She wore a pair John had outgrown years ago over an old blouse. Propriety demanded she keep hers buttoned. Mrs. Milford made sure of it, occasionally popping in with cold drinks or snacks but, gratefully, *not* requiring Helen to come inside.

“Helen?” said John. She placed the glass down and took her place opposite her brother and Mr. Swift. He looked to Mr. Swift and nodded. “Whenever you’re ready.”

“Wait,” said Mr. Swift. He stood over the engine and pulled on the rope looped through and underneath the unit.

“I tied it myself,” said Helen. She folded her arms and raised her chin. “I didn’t spend all that time and energy perfecting it just to have you two drop it on the ground.”

Together, they eased the engine into place on the chassis.

“Woo!” cried Helen, tossing her hands in the air. The three of them cheered and whooped. John threw his arm over her shoulders and shook her gently. Mr. Swift approached her, arms as wide as his grin, as if to join them, but John angled her away.

Unruffled, Mr. Swift took in their work. "Well, there's that." His expression was one Helen felt often. The warmth of accomplishment. Her arms ached and her knees throbbed and she loved every moment of it.

There was a knock at the garage door. Edward stood in the doorway. "Mr. Stone is here to see you, Mr. Davenport."

John glanced at the clock on the wall. "Right! I've lost track of time." He searched around him, gathering the layers of clothing he'd discarded during their labor. Helen felt torn. She wanted to know what piece of Davenport Carriage Company business would bring Mr. Stone to the house at this hour. She also wanted some time to further convince Ransom Swift to agree to be their driver.

"We'll start cleaning up," said Helen.

"Thank you," said John. "I'll be back as soon as I can." He donned his hat before pausing at the open bay door. "I'll just be in the kitchen."

Helen rolled her eyes and led Mr. Swift past him, outside the garage and to the edge of the drive. From there, Mrs. Milford had a clearer view of them from the swing on the porch. It was better to have a disapproving tutor's eyes watching you than an annoying brother's embarrassing surge of overprotectiveness. *Where was this behavior when Olivia was out dancing late into the night with Mr. Stone?* She'd been alone with Mr. Lawrence and had survived. At least with Mr. Swift, they had something in common. "Thank you, John," she called after him. He waved without turning around.

Mr. Swift shook with the force of his laughter.

"I beg your pardon, but what is so funny?"

"A Davenport Carriage Company automobile?"

Helen paused and looked at him, chin up. "I may have just exaggerated how complete said automobile was."

"You deliberately misled me."

"We need your help!" More quietly, she added, "*I* need your help. I have always been able to figure it out, typically on my own, but this is too important. I don't want to just show off a Davenport motorcar at an exhibit. I want to compete and win. I want this showcase to be a race."

Mr. Swift grew serious for the first time since they'd met at the track however many weeks back. "Why is this so important to you?"

"Do you mean, why should I care? John's going to run the business and I'll be married soon?"

He waited.

"Because it's my story, my inheritance. Because it's my name on that door too!" Helen pointed to the buggy in the drive. The Davenport family crest shined brightly in the high summer sun, gold leaf on a black field sealed with lacquer so thick, it glistened. "I don't understand why my life and how I want to live it should be different from my brother's because I'm a girl. I'm a damned good mechanic. Always have been. At eight years old, I took apart a bicycle, and if they had let me, I'd have pieced it back together too. I've worked on Ford and Studebaker engines. Repaired a broken axel on a carriage." She paused, her chest heaving. *Does no one understand?* "All I know," she said quietly, "is that I understand how these machines work and I see the potential of this." Helen gestured to the garage behind them. She felt her resolve harden, recalling her father's words when she'd repaired the Ford that eventually stalled. That she was a pretty girl, and that she should take pride in that. But she was proud of *this*. She hoped one day, he would be too. She'd fixed the Ford again. And it hadn't stalled a second time. "I want to be seen for my talent," she said, "and not just as a *pleasing face*."

Mr. Swift seemed to consider her and her words for far longer than she would care to have endured. "It is a pleasing face. Almost." He reached out and thumbed the edge of her jaw. His touch surprised her. But her body responded immediately—electrified, a sizzling heat that settled low in her belly. He rubbed the smudge of grease from her face onto his shirtsleeve without breaking eye contact. His gaze suggested he knew exactly what she was feeling, because he was feeling it too. He cleared his throat, finally, nodded and said, "Do you know why I started racing, Miss Davenport?"

Helen tried to slow her pounding heart. Focus. She felt her brows furrow. In all the articles she'd read about Ransom Swift, not one mentioned his first race. Or, how he began. She still wasn't convinced that

his name really was *Ransom Swift*. It sounded like something from one of the penny stories sold at the country grocery store. “No,” she said, curious.

“I grew up close to a track in New York. I watched them race the ponies before I could run myself. Through the slats of the fence my uncle built.” He laughed. “I was a scrawny thing. Even tried to squeeze through a gap to get a closer look.” Helen joined his laughter as she tried to imagine it. “As soon as I could, I began working in the stables. The head man there let me ride the horses after the white customers left for the day.” Mr. Swift shoved his fists into his pockets. A smooth curl flopped down over his brow. Her hand itched to reach up and smooth it back. “Those horses were fine. Perfect to learn from. As I got older I switched from trainer to trainer. I was a natural with them. But I always wanted something more, something faster.” He looked at the bright red vehicle he drove here. So did Helen. It was a perfectly fit for him. Loud, brash, and flashy.

Then there was her curiosity. It burned within her. She wanted to know it all—how he became such a good mechanic, yes, but she was already knowledgeable there. It was racing that was entirely new. “And your first contest?”

Mr. Swift laughed and rubbed his bottom lip with his finger. “It’s a funny story. One I shouldn’t have lived to tell.”

“Really?” Helen looked at him askance.

“True.” He held his hands up, full of sham innocence.

“Well, out with it,” she urged.

He looked up at the rafters. “I was working in a garage for this family that owned more than a few race cars, they *paid* other men to drive their vehicles. I bet my employer I was a better driver than any of the men he’d hired for the job.”

“And were you?”

“Damn right I was. And I proved it.”

“How?”

“I...borrowed his race car at the next meet. The regular driver wanted a long weekend away with his sweetheart.” Ransom Swift made eye contact with Helen, his eyes playfully skipping over her features. Helen felt her

skin tingle under his gaze. She cleared her throat and he turned his attention to his automobile. “I wore a cap to cover my head, goggles to hide most of my face. I made sure to stick near the motorcar. After I’d won, it was harder to hide who I was.” He paused, his lips puckered to the side before he said, “The outcome wasn’t the fanfare I was hoping for, but it did give my employer the itch to have me race in some of the competitions for Black drivers.”

Hmm, Helen thought about the way Mr. Swift described it all. How many times had he switched jobs? Found another way to achieve his goal?

He refused to give up.

And so would she. “So, you’ll drive for us?”

He pushed his curls from his face. “I’ll drive for you.” There was something about the way he said it, and the look in his eyes, that made Helen grin.

• • •

The Greenfields’ house was on the same street as Ruby’s and shared common traits—large and sprawling, full of dark wood and marble. Tonight, one of the Greenfield boys—Helen didn’t care to know which one—celebrated a birthday, and the ballroom suffocated with friends and family. Laughter pressed in on Helen to the point she could feel her bones ache. She’d have rather been anywhere else—except perhaps at her usual social engagements.

John had insisted she come to give the garage a break and to please their mother, and now he’d wandered off. She knew he didn’t like how well she and Ransom Swift got along. He’d practically chased the driver out of the garage this afternoon. She hoped he wasn’t off brooding over Amy-Rose while she grinned painfully at the other guests. *I’d rather be watching the paint dry*, she thought.

Parties were supposed to be fun, said Olivia, who appeared to be having a grand time dancing with Mr. Stone. The Greenfields’ youngest son, Louis, was a friend of John’s and often organized the card games they played with

the other young men of their set. The dinner was uneventful, and now a slightly inebriated Josiah Andrews was teaching some of the other gentleman a new dance. It was poorly done and liable to injure someone.

Once *Mr.* Andrews discovered the spectacle, he escorted his son from the dance floor, and boredom kicked in again. Helen picked at the silk that cinched her waist. It wasn't a corset, thank goodness, but it pushed up under her ribs just the same. *How is this freer?* she wondered. She'd like to see the people who decided this was the height of fashion to spend a few hours in the contraptions they sold to women.

She was in a sour mood, yes. The night was long. Her party loomed before her, as did the race where Mr. Swift—who strangely made her pulse race *and* her blood boil—agreed to drive the Davenport automobile for both the board and her father to see. *And Daddy returns this week.* Helen pushed off the wall in the corner, not knowing what scared her more. It was all nerve-racking.

She stood on her toes, searching for a path out to the garden, spotted it, and promptly lost her balance. “Sorry,” she said to the woman in front of her.

“Helen!” Odette Carter exclaimed. Helen mustered a smile.

Beside Odette, Agatha Leary's eyes widened. “I didn't know you left the house at night.” She giggled at her own joke. Silent beside them, their friend Bertha looked down at the floor.

“Come now, Aggie,” said Odette. “That is an exaggeration. Though I do find it strange that a girl as beautiful as you, Miss Davenport, spends so much time indoors.”

“No, I think *Aggie* has the right of it.” Helen sighed, disguising her irritation at the other girl's jab. “I don't see the appeal in navigating crowded ballrooms dressed like puff pastry.” *Oops.* Heads turned at her comment. Helen hoped this remark wouldn't make its way back to her mother or Mrs. Milford. At the thought, her eyes darted to the entrance. And there, Mr. Jacob Lawrence stood at the center of a circle of guests. On his arm was a tall woman, with tawny skin and warm brown eyes. The sight of them felt like a blow to Helen. While everyone gawped at the newly arrived

couple, Helen caught Olivia's eye. Clearly Olivia had been watching Helen, and now Olivia picked up her skirt and walked with purpose toward her.

Odette sniffed at Helen's lingering comment. "Some of us like to think we're more than dessert."

"Or be thought of at all," added Agatha. Beside her, Bertha nodded solemnly.

Helen glanced at the three young women. Then stilled. They, like her, were unmarried and under similar pressure to make good matches. The truth of Agatha's words appeared to deflate some of Odette's eagerness, and it left a sour taste in Helen's mouth as she watched Jacob Lawrence and his bride laugh and talk through introductions. Helen knew she didn't fit what was expected of a young lady her age. Not like Olivia and these girls did. *But I'm still a Davenport*, thought Helen, *casting a wide shadow of my own*. As such, she would always have an advantage. It was a humbling truth, and one she should remember. "I'll leave you to it then," said Helen. She slipped between Odette and Bertha, only to be intercepted by her sister.

"Are you okay?" Olivia asked, her gaze fixed on the scene over Helen's shoulder. She looked at Helen. "Let's go home. We can slip around from the back."

"No," said Helen, watching Jacob and his bride wish the older Greenfield boy a happy birthday. "If we try to leave, all the gossips will be talking about how heartbroken *you* are. They all think he left after breaking *your* engagement." When Olivia's eyes narrowed, Helen felt her temperature rise. She fought the urge to wring her fingers. Across the room, Jacob's new bride—*Mr. Lawrence's* new bride—now tilted her smiling face up to him. He said something to her as they began to circle the room, dancing chastely to a slow number.

It was aggravating how Jacob Lawrence slipped right into Helen's world as easily as a hand into a glove. This was her space, even though she didn't understand it. Mr. Lawrence and *Etta's* grand tour ended at a group of young ladies a year or two behind Helen in debuting. She watched him excuse himself, bring his bride a refreshment, and then walk to the back of the house where Helen had spotted the door to the gardens.

Helen knew Olivia watched her from the corner of her eye. “On second thought,” Helen said, “I think I *will* get some air.” She stopped Olivia with a hand on her arm. “Alone, if you don’t mind.”

Helen didn’t wait for her sister’s response. No one knew of her loss like Olivia did—she would understand. Helen skirted the tables as she made her way to the back of the house. She pushed through a pair of heavy doors with stained-glass windows that threw a kaleidoscope of colors across a patch of lawn. She stood in its rainbow and listened to the band shift from one song into another.

Jacob Lawrence stood with his back to her. His suit was dark and somber and cut to perfection. A feeling of longing caught her by surprise. It started low in her core and rose to her chest, making it hard to breathe, making her want to be beside him.

“Hello, Helen.”

“Evening, Mr. Lawrence.”

He turned. The ember of his lit cigarette drew her attention to his mouth. *He trimmed his mustache*, she thought.

“Would you like one?” he asked.

And have Mrs. Milford smell it on my clothes? “No, thank you.” Helen lifted her chin. “I’ve quit.”

He shrugged and turned slightly, staring off into the garden. It only made Helen angry. When he next looked at her, he rocked slightly on his feet like he would approach her. She wanted him to. And didn’t at the same time. “You disappeared,” she said. “Why did you come back?” She knew she wasn’t being fair. She had asked him to leave after he’d revealed the truth.

“You don’t understand,” he said, almost resigned.

“What, that you needed financial support to reach your goals? Or that you thought you loved *me*, but really you loved my family’s wealth?” Helen took a step forward then. “Perhaps I just didn’t realize that lying was so easy for you.”

He paced in front of her, his hands in the air, stopping just before they mussed his neatly styled hair. Instead he brushed down his mustache with

one hand, turning to her abruptly. “Have you read any of my letters?” he hissed. “I tried to tell you so many times, Helen.” He seemed to wilt then, his anger spent as quickly as it had come. “Surely you don’t believe I—”

Helen stood taller. “Did you even need to go to London?”

“My uncle—he controls the business he and my father once shared—he agreed to give me a job. I wrote my father in the spring, and he was elated. It was my chance to earn what would have been my inheritance.” His gaze fell. “He’s my father, and I didn’t want to let him down. I’m sure you know what that feels like.”

Helen’s eyes narrowed. She refused to concede that she did.

“I got to New York, ticket in hand for the ship, and nothing went as planned. All I could think about was you—your brow furrowed when you’re being stubborn, or solving a problem, how determined you are, how funny. How passionately you talk about your love of automobiles and your hatred of the pianoforte. I often imagine you in one—a motorcar, not a pianoforte—driving it around the city.” There was a ghost of a smile on his lips before his expression turned serious. “I saw the way you struggled—in your family—for acceptance. I saw how, the burden so great, you never bothered to gain it from your peers.”

“I don’t need it from my peers!” Helen’s breath came fast. “I was perfectly fine before you walked into my life with your grand plans to *marry my sister*.”

“Which I did not, Miss Davenport.” The use of her formal name stung. “My life would be much simpler if I had put the money first, like you think I set out to do.” He glanced toward the doors holding back the lively din of the party. “I wasn’t look—”

“I am not what you were looking for, Mr. Lawrence. I want to be a mechanic, business-owner. Not a housewife. As far as I can tell, we are both getting what we want.”

Mr. Lawrence gestured between the two of them. “This is not what I wanted.”

“And do you think it’s what *I* wanted?” she asked.

He stood still, shoulders hunched, and a look of confusion, of hurt, passed over his features. “No, I don’t. It’s why I do not understand.”

Is this the closure Mrs. Milford said awaited me? On his face, she saw the same pain she tried to ignore, bury, deny in herself. It only made her feel sad. Her stomach twisted in a knot, but she made herself stand straighter. When she spoke, her voice was calm, steady.

“I understand,” she said. She understood more than most. There was no mistaking the love and fondness Helen had witnessed on Etta Lawrence’s face. *I understand perfectly. I hope she does too.* “Excuse me. My sister is waiting for me.”

CHAPTER 21

Ruby

“**W**hat is the meaning of this?”

Startled, Ruby looked up to see her mother standing in her bedroom doorway, fanning herself with a lace-trimmed number that matched her dress. She was the picture of monochrome styling for her generation. “I’m sorry, Mother,” Ruby said, returning to the sketch in front of her. “I didn’t see you there.”

“How could you? With the contents of your closet cast about, piled in a mountain. I’m surprised you haven’t tripped and broken your neck. What are you doing?”

“Research.” Ruby touched her namesake stone hanging from her neck. She watched her mother examine the mess she had made of her room—the scattered dress patterns, bolts of scrap fabric, shoes, parasols, ribbons. It was as if every article of clothing Ruby owned had made its way onto her bed or chaise longue, over the back of her chair, or the small ottoman next to a spent tea tray, spread across the rug. If her father’s textile factory had produced clothing instead of linens for Black hospitals and hotels, she would have raided its storerooms too. “Research for a new dress,” she added coolly. “Careful! That’s for a client.”

“A client?” Mrs. Tremaine turned to her daughter, incredulous, the skirt of her dress wedged between the chaise and the ottoman. “Ruby, you need to pick a less invasive hobby to deal with your stress. Embroidery? I know

you're behind the tattered fringe on the throw pillows." Mrs. Tremaine waded carefully over to where her daughter sat. "What clients could you possibly have?"

Ruby snorted.

"Young lady, I would remind you to remember your manners."

"Mother, there is no one around to witness your excellent parenting, why should it matter?" she said before she could catch herself.

"Ruby Tremaine."

"I'm confused," Ruby said, turning over her latest sketch. "At luncheons and parties, you are affectionate and encouraging." She felt her voice thicken as she forced out the words. "Dinner with the Bartons—weeks ago now—did you mean any of what you said?"

Mrs. Tremaine tilted her chin up, her face hard and impassive. Ruby did not know if her mother was considering her words or readying to leave.

Ruby spoke into the silence: "The wedding is still on. Harrison will pay for it. Olivia is helping me plan. You are my mother and should be involved!"

Her mother flinched at her words. "You must understand, Ruby—"

"That I am not as important as Papa's ambition? Does he love me at all?"

"He does!" Mrs. Tremaine climbed over an ottoman and snatched Ruby's hand from her chest. "I would not have you say such things of your father. He does love you. As I love you." Her mother sighed but did not loosen her grip on Ruby's wrist.

Ruby was angry with her father. Though the anger hid a more unpleasant feeling. Her heart ached at his continued distance. Before, Ruby would enter his study and read or draw quietly while he worked. Some days, they'd engage in discussions about the factory or the campaign. Ruby may not have followed it all, but the moments they shared had made her feel wanted. She had no siblings. Her cousins were too far to visit. And she couldn't spend every waking moment at Freeport, especially now that Olivia and Helen had other pursuits. She swallowed hard. "In public, we are

a happy family. I can pretend you and Papa aren't still cross with me. And you've said you don't believe the rumors."

"You know I don't."

"What about Papa? Have you tried to reason with him?"

"Of course I have!" Mrs. Tremaine said fiercely. For a moment, Ruby felt anger blaze off her mother like a fire. Her mother composed herself quickly, but feeling smoldered in her brown eyes. "He'll regain his senses in time."

But after weeks of walking on eggshells in her own home, Ruby didn't want to tiptoe anymore. "I think I have been punished enough. I don't want to live my life in constant worry of how it reflects on others. Or suffer their ire till it grounds me to dust."

Mrs. Tremaine sighed. "My dear, you are a woman. Society is unfair and unforgiving. Any indiscretion, perceived or real, can do irreparable damage to a young lady's reputation and, yes"—she paused—"to a family's. You are not naïve enough to believe otherwise." The fire gone now, Mrs. Tremaine briefly held Ruby's face in her hands. Then she lifted a ribbon off a slippery pile of dresses. "He had grand plans, your father, ideas of what this city could look like. He'd spread his work around him much like you have now," she said.

"There was a time when hearing that would have made me happy. Proud even. It would have been better coming from him."

Mrs. Tremaine stared long and hard at one sketch in particular. "You may have to accept that that day may not come, Ruby. Best that you carry on as carefully as you have."

"What about my wedding?" Ruby asked. *Will we have to pretend all is well then too?*

Her mother's shoulders sagged. Ruby forced her hands still in her lap. She waited while her mother's lips parted. Mrs. Tremaine's eyes teared up as she said, "I will be happy to see you wed." Ruby had not realized how badly she needed to hear those words until the tightness in her chest gave one final squeeze before releasing its hold. Mrs. Tremaine cleared her

throat. “Now tell me, what is the meaning of this chaos? You said that fabric is for a...client?”

“Yes, for a party,” Ruby said cautiously. “I’d like to design my own line of women’s fashion.”

Her mother looked at her intently. “You want to be like Madame Chérie? Ruby, your father and I did not work as hard as we did for you to—our friends will be talking.”

“They already are, Mother. What more can they say? That we’ve lost our fortune? That there is no money left with which to buy new clothes? That was last season’s gossip. True, I might add.” Ruby gestured to the clutter around her. “It’s more than making dresses.”

Exasperated, Mrs. Tremaine held up a hand, then began picking through the sketches strewn about the furniture. Her frown tipped from one side of her face to the other. Ruby felt hot and cold as she watched her mother peruse. “I suppose it *is* related to embroidery,” she said, her words more confident than her tone. “But it will be a hobby. No lady of your station should have a profession. It’s unseemly.”

Ruby, ready to protest, glanced at the timepiece on the mantel. She was late. “Yes, well, I have an errand to run,” she said, getting to her feet.

“Excellent, I’d love to go—”

“Actually, Mother, Margaret and I already have a plan. And a purpose.” Ruby settled her shoulders back. She wasn’t ready to have her mother’s voice in her head as she began this new endeavor, no matter how much she missed the days they spent out and about the city together.

Mrs. Tremaine’s mouth screwed to the side. “Does it have something to do with this mess?”

Ruby smoothed down the front on her dress and picked up her sketches, placing them neatly into the folder. “I will see that this is straightened out. Soon.” She left her mother to navigate her own way to the exit and hurried downstairs.

“Your hat and gloves, miss.”

“Thank you, Margaret.”

Minutes later, Ruby spotted the young lady Olivia had arranged for her to meet at Marshall Field & Company. She wore a plain dress and walked through the tearoom with her purse clutched to her chest.

“Ruby Tremaine?” she asked.

“Yes!” Ruby stood, ecstatic, and eager to not let her conversation with her mother derail her plans. “Mrs. Lucille Jennings, lovely to meet you. This is Margaret. Please, sit.”

“Miss Davenport spoke highly of you,” Mrs. Jennings said, glancing around. “She is a brave woman. I know her ultimate goal is women’s suffrage, but we garment workers appreciate her support.”

“I know it brings her purpose and joy.” Ruby sat, again inviting the woman and Margaret to do the same. Mrs. Jennings remained standing. “I would, only, employees aren’t meant to dine with customers.”

“Oh,” said Ruby, feeling her face tingle with embarrassment.

“But I’m hoping with this venture of yours, my circumstances will change?” Mrs. Jennings looked over her shoulder and, at last, sat carefully on the edge of the seat closest to Ruby.

“Yes!” Ruby beamed. “Then I shall be quick.” Ruby waved away the waitress and poured tea for the three of them. “I wholeheartedly agree. Did Miss Davenport happen to mention the business of this meeting?”

Mrs. Jennings eyed the additions on the table: milk, sugar, lemon, honey. “I appreciate your desire to hire a seamstress, and I’d like to help.” She hesitated. “I’m just afraid that Marshall Field and Company would be difficult to access. You see, I’ve tried for ages to get my own designs in, and I don’t think they’d take something made by me.”

“If it’s all the same to you,” said Ruby, “I trust Olivia Davenport.”

“Let me see what you’ve got under that arm?” said Mrs. Jennings.

Ruby grinned. Anticipation bubbled in her chest. “I have ideas for some dresses. Daring lines and elegant fabrics. They come to me, but I have no way to bring them to life.” She handed over a selection of her best sketches. Gowns that filled her dreams and the type of closet she’d have if money was no object, if she had the talent to create them with her own two hands.

Letting Mrs. Jennings study her sketches without looming over her shoulder or peppering her with questions took all the restraint Ruby could muster.

“They’re good,” Mrs. Jennings said.

Good? Ruby saw how she looked at them, measured eagerness, her head tilting as if trying to gain the angles from each sheet of paper. They were certainly more than good. “Work with me and we can make them better—we can make them real. I’d love to see your own designs too.”

“My designs?” The young woman looked at Ruby incredulously.

“Yes,” said Ruby, hoping her confidence now would be enough.

Mrs. Jennings stuck out her hand. “Isn’t this how the gentlemen do it?” she asked.

Ruby shot straight up and grasped her hand before the seamstress could change her mind. “I believe so,” she said, her smile as brilliant as the stone at her throat.

CHAPTER 22

Olivia

Olivia rolled her sleeves down with trembling fingers. The last of the dishes were soaking in the large farmhouse sink for another volunteer to wash and a third to dry. With the record high temperatures all summer, there were more than the usual amount of people reporting to the community center, if only for a cooler place to eat and without baking in their own kitchens. Her face was damp and she knew she'd need to press her hair again for the week. She dried her hands on the apron that protected her favorite pink summer frock.

Mrs. Woodard held her hand out for Olivia's apron. "I do admire the help, but you ought to slow down."

She was tired, down in her bones, but Olivia said, "Oh, it's fine. I've taken a more *observant* role at Samson House, so this at least feels like I'm making an impact."

Mrs. Woodard paused to face her. "My dear, when do you sleep? You have an impact. Greater than you know, and I've seen you in the papers."

Olivia froze. For a moment, her articles in the *Defender* crossed her mind.

Mrs. Woodard continued, "You're out and about with your mama and sister." She shook her head. "You'll do no one a lick of good if you're sick."

Relief spread through her. And the older woman was right. At least Olivia's mother was fully orchestrating Helen's party now. Otherwise in

addition to everything else, Olivia would be staring at swatches, wondering which went where. But she had to admit, it felt good to be busy. She could see the appeal it had for Mr. DeWight to continually have something to look forward to, no idle time in between, not even enough to write her a note. Olivia didn't have time to dwell on it. Or on the kiss she'd shared with Mr. Stone. If she thought too long on it, she could almost taste the tingle of mint leaves on her lips.

For the thousandth time, she glanced at the clock.

"What time is he coming?" asked Mrs. Woodard, her smile warm.

"This afternoon," said Olivia, thankfully, not missing a beat. "It feels like Daddy's been gone far longer than a couple of months." Olivia thought about how much had changed in that short space of time. Her brother and sister had created something special in their new automobile. Sure, they were holding off showing her the final product until their father returned, but it was exciting just the same. And she...she had found a new passion, and possibly someone who would love her as she pursued it.

Olivia's growing affection for Mr. Stone surprised her more than anything. His subtle reactions as Helen and John disagreed on the details of their stock car or how to handle the board, the tidbits of gossip he lobbed gently into conversation at parties, how, in the midst of a crowded dance floor, his hand would spread across her back, warmth flaring, drawing her into his calm, mint-scented orbit, and their conversations on the front porch, how each small, delicious departure from his serious bearing now filled her with delight—

"Miss Davenport, are you listening?" asked Mrs. Woodard.

Olivia startled. "Yes, of course..." she said, her words trailing off as someone all too familiar walked into the room. Someone she had once loved, desperately and all-consumingly. Someone she had resigned herself to believing she might never see again. Someone she had only just begun to move on from.

Just inside the doorway stood Washington DeWight.

He wore a tan linen suit. His hat was tilted to the side and he held a rolled-up newspaper in his strong, broad hands. The *Chicago Record-*

Herald. He turned as if sensing her and their eyes locked. Words escaped her as he walked with his familiar long, confident stride to where she stood. That confidence—it had first exasperated her, then thrilled her, their once contentious relationship shifting into a romance that had fed something hungry in her and brought her closer to becoming the woman she wanted to be.

A pang of guilt twisted in her now as she realized how infrequently he'd entered her thoughts lately, today being the first in a while. As one week had turned into two and then three without a letter from him, Olivia had the vague notion Washington was working up the courage to let her down gently. Perhaps trying to keep a relationship alive over such a long distance was a naïve hope. The truth was, her ardor had waned along with his letters. The quiet thrill of Mr. Stone and the new exhilaration of writing had swept her off her feet.

"Mrs. Woodard, good afternoon," he said.

"Why, Mr. DeWight!" replied the older woman. "What a surprise! Lovely to see you again."

"And you," he said.

Mrs. Woodard grasped both his hands. "I'm so glad you are safe. We've been following the news closely. The riots..." She shook her head. "Every day more people come here for assistance, straight from the train station. Some with nary a change of clothes."

Washington nodded. "We saw it in Philadelphia. How is the reverend?"

"Oh, well. I'll let him know you asked after him."

"I have plans to see him later. Mr. Tremaine's campaign loss was a blow to our plans."

Olivia's mouth dried up as she took in this exchange. His eyes darted to her periodically. They had a heat in them that didn't convey any loss of interest on his part. In fact, the opposite. She felt slightly panicked at the realization.

"Quite a blow to us all," Mrs. Woodard said. She patted his cheek then, her expression a mixture of relief and motherly pride. "You must excuse me. I see we have some new arrivals."

Olivia and Mr. DeWight watched as Mrs. Woodard welcomed a lost-looking group of people being ushered in by another volunteer.

“Hello, Miss Davenport,” said Washington, turning to her. His voice was quiet but his face bright and open, the light, honeyed color of his eyes and his high cheekbones made more striking by his smile. The scent of pine that clung to him...Oh, it flooded her senses, confusing her with joy.

“Hello, Mr. DeWight,” she managed, her own voice raspy with the intensity of feelings resurfacing.

“Let’s head outside?” he suggested.

Mrs. Woodard made a shooping motion with her arms as they walked past her. “Go on. Thank you for coming today.” Olivia nodded and picked up her hat and purse from the chair behind the serving stations. She made her way slowly to where Washington stood, and then quickly, the fast *tap tap tap* of her heels an echo of her heartbeat.

Washington offered an arm. His other hand seemed to find hers almost the instant she settled it in the crook of his elbow. His touch was electric. The gentle pressure he applied lit a familiar spark deep down in her. The sun shone bright in the sky as they made their way to the small green space beside the community center. Harold stood from his perch atop the carriage. With a dip of her head, the older gentleman resumed his seat and pulled out a paper. She and Washington DeWight found a bench under a tree near the playground where the joyful shrieks of children filled the air. They sat, turned toward each other. Olivia didn’t know what to say. “I hadn’t expected—” she began.

“What have—” he said at the same time. He laughed and Olivia felt it tumble through her. “My apologies,” he said. “What were you going to say.”

“Only that I’m glad you’re here. I wasn’t expecting to see you. So soon. How are you?”

His face broke into a grin. “Well enough.” He pulled his jacket away by the lapel and feigned an inspection of his body before turning back to her, eyes intent. “And you?”

Olivia averted her gaze, her cheeks burning. “Well, thank you.” She felt stiff and formal. *This is Washington!* She should be able to have a conversation with him. But the lack of communication followed by his sudden reappearance...Part of her was happy to see him. It pushed against the part that was hurt and disappointed, the part that had opened up to other possibilities. She pulled herself together. There was one thing she needed to know: “Did you receive my letters?”

He exhaled deeply. “I did, and I meant to write.”

“Why didn’t you? Was it the riots?” Olivia searched his face, looking for signs of injuries. Each paper she’d read had headlines more alarming than the last. She’d spent so many hours earlier that summer checking the post, asking Edward if anything had arrived for her. “At first, I would get a letter sometimes every other day. Then, here and there. And then none at all.” She waited. Her heart raced and she worried she had pushed too far, but these questions burned in her chest. “I was so worried. I assumed the worst until Hetty received a letter from George several weeks back.”

A shadow passed over his face. “I’m sorry. I know that must have made these months apart more difficult. Toward the end of my trip, the DC group was in upheaval. There were demonstrations and violent arrests.” His voice dropped. “Every week there’s a picture of a lynching in the papers. Men are afraid to be out on the streets at night. I was caught up in all of it. Leaders from the NAACP were in and out, rallying and pushing for change. I wanted to be a part of it. I thought you’d understand that.”

Olivia was silent a moment. “I would have if I’d have known your part in it. That you were safe.” She blinked away tears, feeling remorseful he hadn’t been more on her mind these last weeks. After George’s letter, she’d known Washington was safe. She’d assumed his silence meant something else. “I do understand,” she said. She meant it. His passion was part of what she’d loved about him. His encouragement had given her the confidence to act. How could she fault him for being true to that?

“I imagine my correspondence was lost between Philadelphia and the capital, but that’s no excuse. Then when I was planning to travel back, so much time had passed, I thought it better to surprise you. I should have

come to see you straightaway. When I ran into your mother on State Street yesterday, she said you spend most of your days here. I should have come sooner, I know.”

“My mother?”

“Yes.” His brows furrowed as he glanced at his watch. “I’m so sorry to do this, Olivia. I have a late lunch with the reverend about the next meeting at Samson House,” he said. “Would you like to have dinner tomorrow night?”

Olivia hesitated. *Had I given up on us too soon?* She thought about how the distance, the silence, had changed what she thought the future held for her and Washington DeWight. But here he was, eyes intent on hers, his full lips parted and verging on that smile that always drew her in. It made her feel as if no time had passed at all. On the bench, his hand inched closer to hers, their fingertips just touching, an electric jolt. “I would, yes.” *If only to see if this is real.*

Washington’s face broke into a full grin, and the sight of it was like sunshine. He stood and kissed the back of her hand, sparking a flurry of butterflies in her chest, then deeper. “I’ll send a carriage.”

Washington placed his hat on his head. She watched him go and waved when he glanced over his shoulder. She sat in the shade, contemplating her joy at his return and her fondness for Mr. Stone. How could she contain all these feelings at once? And what Washington had said about her mother—she had known he was in the city. Had *seen* him and had not told her? There was little time to dwell on it or the state of her courtships now. Her father was due to return this afternoon. And by the way Harold was pacing, it was past time to leave.

They made the trip back to Freeport Manor in record time—Olivia wondered if everyone in the household suddenly had racing fever. Her mother was in the kitchen when she arrived. “Did you return with Harold?” Mrs. Davenport said by way of greeting.

“Yes, Mama. He’s at the stable switching out the team.” Olivia’s anger had begun to burn on the ride over, but it cooled some when she saw her mother so flustered with excitement. “Mama?”

Mrs. Davenport followed Jessie around the kitchen table, poking her nose into the steaming pots, a dangerous endeavor.

“Ma’am, we have everything under control. You go on and get Mr. Davenport at the train station. We’re fine right here,” said Jessie.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Davenport. She reached for the cook’s forearm and squeezed it. “Thank you, Jessie.” Olivia followed her out of the kitchen.

“Mama, why didn’t you tell me you spoke to Washington DeWight yesterday? Downtown?”

Her mother paused before turning to face her. Her expression was unsurprised. “My only intention, Olivia, was to protect you. And to keep this family intact. Selfish, it may be, but your father and I have already lost so much. Mr. Stone is kind, dependable, and wants to settle down here in Chicago. What does Mr. DeWight want?” Her mother’s eyebrows rose. She said no more before leaving Olivia in a cloud of her powder-scented perfume.

Olivia followed. “But you told me it was my decision.”

At the carriage, Mrs. Davenport stopped and turned to her daughter. Olivia was startled to see her mother’s eyes were watery as the woman pulled her in for a hug. Olivia returned the embrace stiffly. “One of the most important decisions we make in life is who we choose to spend it with. I know your father and I have been very vocal in who that should be.” She licked her lips while Olivia waited. “I thought Mr. DeWight had left for good. I watched you handle that belief too, with poise, and find new happiness and purpose. You deserve both.” Her mother kissed Olivia’s cheek gently and stepped up, allowing Harold to help her in.

Olivia had vowed to make her own choice. Now the endeavor had never felt so difficult.

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Olivia watched her sister pace in front of her. She sat on the front porch swing, waving a fan like a wing of a hummingbird. The simple linen blouse and skirt were cooler than the cotton dress she’d had on earlier, but they still

did little against the heat. “Helen,” she said, “could you sit still for a moment?”

“I can’t,” her sister said. “I’m happy to have Daddy back, I am. I’m just wondering if I’m the only one who’s thought about what it means.” She began listing her worries on her fingers. “Will he undo the progress John’s made with the board on the automobile? And my party *has* to happen now —”

“Helen, it was always going to happen,” said Olivia.

“And I’ll be expected to *find a husband*,” Helen continued. To John, standing at the porch rail, she said, “I doubt he’d let me continue to work in the family business.”

Olivia stood. “At least wait for him to get here before you start panicking. You’re clever. I have no doubt you’ll squirm your way out of all those obligations and into the one you want.”

“I hope you’re right.” Helen huffed.

“Can you imagine the surprise on his face when he finally sees our automobile?” John laughed. His pacing picked up where Helen’s ended. “I’m nervous, in a good way. It’ll be a relief to have him see it.”

Helen grinned, no sign now of all the listed fears. Olivia was glad. Her sister’s run-in with Mr. Lawrence at the Greenfields’ had affected her, though Helen would never admit it. And while Helen’s gaze did linger over Mr. Swift more than John liked, her sister remained focused on the completion of their stock car.

“What about you?” asked Helen. “What’s got you looking so... pinched?”

Olivia’s hand flew to her face. “I don’t look pinched.” Her siblings gave her a matching pair of unconvinced expressions. Olivia cleared her throat before saying, “Washington DeWight is back.”

“No!” said Helen. She and John closed in, coming to stand beside her.

“He is. He came by the community center today. I just about fainted. I thought I was over him. But seeing him again...” Olivia shook her head.

John propped his hip against the railing. “What about Mr. Stone?”

Olivia's shoulders fell. "That's the problem. I care for him too." The expectant eyes of her siblings were too much. She wanted time, maybe more privacy, to decide her next steps. She snapped her fan closed. "It's okay. I'll figure it out. Plus, I have my next essay to think about."

She sat again, her mind turning to the essay drafted in her room. It was her fourth piece. She wanted to highlight the relationship between the garment workers' strikes and the suffragists. She wanted to write something that would unite them all. She wished she could use a pen as well as Ida B. Wells, whose work exposed the worst of what the papers reported.

"What essay?" asked John.

Olivia looked at her siblings. "I've been anonymously publishing pieces for the *Defender*," she blurted.

Helen gasped. John froze. She waited. John and Helen had always been so sure of where they saw themselves in their futures. Working for the carriage company, designing an automobile—it was natural to them. This—her writing for a newspaper, putting into words her opinions on matters other than fashion, or the weather, or dinner service—it was beyond what she'd been brought up to believe could be in her future. It elated as much as it frightened her.

"How many have you written? What were they about?" Helen sat down beside her, her excitement buoying Olivia's own spirits. "Is that where you've been disappearing to? And why you're always late?"

"I am not always late!"

Helen pulled a face.

"I—I am sometimes delayed delivering letters to the post office."

"But why anonymously?"

"To be taken seriously, Helen. To not have our wealth and privilege detract from what I say. I researched first—many papers restrict what women can write about if their work is to be published." Her voice was steady. "I want the right to vote."

"I have no doubt we'll get it," said Helen, determination settled into her features.

“Yes, right now, the garment workers have the momentum, and that’s a good thing. But I won’t stop fighting for this cause too.” She squeezed Helen’s hand for good measure.

“I’m proud of you,” said John, settling a hand on her shoulder. It felt freeing to tell them what she’d been working on, to have their support, their regard.

She turned to her brother. “And you? Are you well, John?” Up close, he seemed wound tight.

“I kissed Amy-Rose the other night,” he said.

Olivia and Helen whipped around to face him. “What?” exclaimed Olivia. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

John shrugged. “She hadn’t read my letter—or any of the others—and we haven’t spoken since that night.” He looked at his sisters, distressed. “Why wouldn’t she have read them?”

“Don’t ask Helen. She never read her letters from Jacob Lawrence.”

“Livvy! It is not the same thing.” Helen chewed her lip. “And I did read one. Well, most of it.” Helen paused.

“Well?” asked John.

“Okay, *part* of it,” her sister confessed. “But I’m afraid I’ve been a neglectful friend. I’ve been so caught up with the build that I haven’t made more time to spend with Amy-Rose, and she’s only just down the hall. It’ll be that much harder when she moves out.”

Olivia threw Helen a look. This outburst certainly wouldn’t alleviate John’s stress. “She’ll be at dinner tonight, John. For Daddy’s return,” she said. “Speak with her then.”

“And say what?”

“Give her time,” said Helen, looking at her feet. “If she didn’t read what you wrote, your declaration of love would have completely upended your dynamic. Her heart needs recalibration.” Her eyes met Olivia’s.

“Always surprising us with your wisdom.”

“It’s not too hard. I just learn from your mistakes,” Helen quipped, giggling.

Olivia tapped her sister’s knee with her fan.

John spoke. "Amy-Rose and I...I know where she stands now. What's holding us back. There's someone else I need to speak to."

"They're here!" said Helen as the dust at the end of the drive began to swirl. A moment later, the carriage came into view. "John, I expect a full account of events later." She grabbed Olivia's hand and squeezed tightly, then tugged Olivia with her to the porch stairs. John's expression was a mix of pride, relief, and anticipation. Their father's return meant tough decisions would need to be made. Olivia thought again about Washington DeWight and Mr. Stone, but before she could dwell on her feelings, the carriage pulled around the drive and stopped at the bottom of the stairs. Helen rushed down to meet it. She stepped into their father's arms the moment his feet touched the ground.

"We've missed you!" Olivia nestled her head under her father's chin. No sooner had he released her than Helen was wedging herself back under his arm, asking him questions too quickly for him to answer. His limp was more pronounced but he was in bright spirits. The staff stood shoulder to shoulder to welcome Mr. Davenport home. Olivia noticed he relied heavily on his cane as he climbed up the stairs. He greeted each person of the household in turn, and as soon as he crossed the threshold, he inhaled deeply.

"Jessie, I can already tell you have outdone yourself."

The family cook laughed. "Only your favorites are on the menu tonight."

"Then the dining room is where we shall go."

"Sweetheart," said Mrs. Davenport, "perhaps, you should rest first."

"I have spent enough time without the company of my wife and children. There is time later for rest." He held his arm out for her to take. Not for the first time, Olivia studied her mother's face when she looked at her father. The tenderness was obvious. Olivia's resolve hardened.

She knew she'd settle for nothing less.

The pair led the way to the dining room, set for the multicourse meal Jessie had prepared.

At the rear of their small party, Amy-Rose appeared, Edward closing the front door behind her.

“You’re just in time,” Olivia said. “No need to look nervous.” She took her friend’s hand.

“I have been so stubborn, Olivia.” Amy-Rose chewed her lip. “All this time. And now”—she looked at her friend, eyes despairing—“I feel back where I began.”

Olivia frowned. “I’m not sure I understand.”

“John—he loves me—”

“Of course.” Olivia smiled, squeezing her friend’s hand. “He never stopped.”

“But he’s confident all will be well, that we can make it work, but nothing has changed, really. I read his letter, but I can’t—” Amy-Rose halted as they approached the dining room.

“You read it?” Olivia felt a rush of relief for her brother.

“I did, at last. And the ones he forwarded.” Amy-Rose smiled through teary eyes. Her words came out in a whispered rush. “I have a half sister, my father’s daughter from an earlier union that ended in tragedy. But he loved again—my mother. Me.” A small laugh escaped her lips. “Elizabeth, my sister, sent me my mother’s notes to my father.”

Olivia pulled her friend into a tight hug. “Amy-Rose, that’s wonderful.” When they broke free, Amy-Rose’s face was wet.

“Don’t worry—they’re happy tears. I have a *sister*.” She smiled. “It’s just that, with John and—and your father, what he said the night before I left—Olivia, I just can’t go through it all again.” Amy-Rose’s voice broke. Olivia followed her friend’s gaze to see John settling into his seat between Helen and their father, who took his place at the head of the table.

“Oh, Amy-Rose. Be honest with him. With John and yourself,” she said.

“I don’t want to be the reason John can’t run the business,” Amy-Rose said. “I would never—”

“You leave that to John,” said Olivia, remembering her brother’s determined expression, his words on the porch just moments ago. Amy-

Rose nodded, though looking unconvinced, and allowed Olivia to guide her to the seat beside her. Olivia watched her friend collect herself and smile.

“Good evening, Mr. Davenport. Mrs. Davenport.”

“Amy-Rose,” Olivia’s father said, “I’m so sorry about Mrs. Davis.”

“Thank you, Mr. Davenport. And I do appreciate the hospitality during my time of need. My new accommodations at the boardinghouse are more than suitable, and I’m glad for the time I was able to spend here at Freeport.” Olivia saw Amy-Rose’s eyes flick to Mrs. Davenport and then John. “And I’m glad for your safe return.”

John followed Amy-Rose’s movements as she placed her napkin on her lap. *My, he is smitten*, Olivia thought. *And so is she, if that blush is any indication*. Oh, Amy-Rose. Olivia ached for her friend. But she resisted the urge to rush in and fix things. There was repairing needed, and it would take time. But that was work John and—she hoped—her father would be able to do. Willing to do.

“Daddy, I want to hear *everything*,” said Helen.

Mr. Davenport laughed. He laughed until his eyes watered. Once he cleared his throat, he turned in his seat and locked eyes with her sister. “I arrived in Southampton,” he began. “The dock was busier than State Street during a parade.”

Helen’s elbows found their way onto the table. “Were there automobiles everywhere?” Her eyes were bright, ready to be transported to a city across the sea.

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Olivia sat in the back of a carriage as it bumped over the cobbled streets, a streetcar clanging nearby.

“You are as bad as your sister.”

Olivia’s head whipped away from the open window to face Mrs. Milford. How the older woman managed to look cool and calm in a black linen blouse and skirt when it was ninety degrees was beyond Olivia’s understanding.

With their father's return, they all had to be more careful, which meant Olivia now had a new chaperone. Harold pulled the carriage to a halt outside a small café.

"Thank you for agreeing to accompany me, Mrs. Milford," is all Olivia said in reply.

"My pleasure. Your friend Amy-Rose will be at your sister's side as she works with that new mechanic *friend of hers*." Mrs. Milford's tone expressed her skepticism. She exited the carriage first and stared at the cakes in the café window. "And I could use something sweet."

Olivia was glad to have worn her ivory linen dress and the matching hat, broad enough to shade her shoulders. She took a deep breath to settle her nerves and the hope fluttering in her chest. Once Mrs. Milford had her pastry, they walked the short distance to Jackson Park.

Washington DeWight stood from his bench as if sensing her apprehension, and walked to meet her halfway. He took one of her hands and pulled off the glove to place a gentle kiss on the back of it. "You look beautiful," he said.

"Thank you," she said. Smiling, she introduced him to Mrs. Milford, who declined to have the back of her hand kissed as well.

"I feel as though I have been running around, people pulling me every which way, since I stepped off the train." He looked out to where the sun had begun its descent. "This is much better. Chicago is a special place." They strolled down the walking path. Mrs. Milford followed at a discreet distance.

When Olivia glanced over at him, he was staring at her. *Could he be thinking of staying?* The thought delighted her. Until she thought of Mr. Stone.

Washington continued, "A lot has happened over the past two months. I suppose the silver lining is that there are far more people sharing their experiences, writing into newspapers, reporting injustice."

Excitement bloomed in Olivia's chest. "You've read my letters!"

"No," he answered, confused. "Not yet." He smiled. "But they'll arrive soon. No, I had to pick up all my papers from the newsstand so I wouldn't

miss a copy of any.”

Olivia deflated. Washington read every line of print in every paper he bought. If he’d recognized her voice in the *Defender*, he would have said so. But why should he, if even her own siblings had not? She felt such pride to see her words in print, though. To hold her essay in her hands had been better than anything else.

And she *wanted* to remain anonymous. Washington thrived on the energy of the crowd, of being the center of attention. That was not Olivia. *Which is good, no? I would not have to live in his shadow, and we’d both be able to pursue our passions.* Unless their passions took them away from each other. Olivia wasn’t quite ready for that. He’d only just returned.

“I fear I’ve missed some big news. What did you write to me?”

“Oh, the goings-on here. This and that. Mostly that I missed you.”

“I heard you’re a regular at the women’s union meetings and hold joint luncheons with Mrs. Woodard for the suffragists.”

“You’ve kept track?”

Washington blushed—a rare thing. “I asked about you when I arrived.”

Olivia laughed. “Yes, even with Helen’s party and Ruby’s wedding, I’ve managed to maintain a presence at Samson House. The women’s clubs are working toward equality on several fronts. Did you know—there was a rally as well, that I helped organize?” She knew she sounded proud. But she was proud to be proud.

“I don’t know how you find the time. They’re lucky to have you.”

Olivia dipped her chin.

“And how are the Tremaines doing?” he asked.

“As well as could be expected,” she answered, declining to get into the toll it had taken on Ruby and her relationship with her parents. “Perhaps Chicago wasn’t ready for a Black mayor. Garnering insufficient support from white voters could have been his downfall.” *Certainly it was not the rumors circling around Ruby, who sacrificed so much to see Mr. Tremaine succeed.*

Washington slowed. “Mr. Tremaine’s success would have done wonders for the city, for its Black *and* white citizens. Surely there was more that

could have been done to secure his win.”

Olivia thought about the sold paintings and jewelry, the recycled dresses, and decreased staff. “What more could they have sacrificed?”

“Sacrifice? He didn’t need to sacrifice anything. Sure, Mr. Tremaine made the rare visit to Samson House, a gathering of activists here and there, but he did not visit the poorest of the community. He did not bear witness to the struggles of those who he would represent, who would vote for him.”

“I thought he ran a brilliant campaign,” said Olivia.

Washington DeWight nodded but said, “He did not offer a plan to lift them up. If those in the poorest areas had felt he put just as much effort into their future as he did into those in his own social circle or into high-ranking politicians and activists, men who already had power, things might have ended differently.”

Olivia thought back to her time at the community center, Samson House, protests outside city hall. She had never seen much of Mr. Tremaine in those spaces. Even now, she knew from Ruby that he remained mostly locked in his study.

“I’m sorry,” said Washington. “This must be hard to hear. I know he’s like family.”

“No,” said Olivia quickly. “Well, yes, it is hard to hear. He is. Ruby is my best friend. His journey, like my father’s, is an inspiration. I know he had hoped to pave the way.”

Washington stopped and faced her. His hand came close to her chin before falling. “He still can.” His gaze held hers. The force of his passion, his conviction—it always pulled her in.

“How was the capital?” she asked, walking again, ready to change the subject but wary of what he might share.

He fell into step beside her. “DC was chaos—dangerous, but that’s how you know change is coming. You’ll see when you visit.”

“I’d love to see it for myself.” She looked out at the park around them and pictured the capital as he had described it in his letters. “Tell me more,” she said. She missed the way he wove his words together like a song, the way his Alabama drawl colored his syllables. She was content to imagine

this was what it would be like every time he returned from a trip. They rounded a corner and lost sight of Mrs. Milford—and anyone else for that matter. Washington DeWight's arm brushed hers. His cologne, pine, out of season for the trees and brush around, was delicious in its contrast. In the distance, the soulful notes of a band rang out.

His hand hovered over her back, waiting for the subtle nod she gave him. Olivia felt her stomach flutter as he pulled her to him, guiding them awkwardly to the song drifting on the breeze. He misstepped and she stumbled into him laughing.

"Now look who has two left feet," he said.

"Still you!"

Washington's shoulders relaxed, and the swaggering confidence he often displayed fell away. He held her close enough to kiss her but didn't. Instead, he matched his breathing to hers, leading her in a slow waltz that felt like a caress.

She wasn't sure how they found the alcove or who leaned in first, but the spark created from the touch of their lips traveled all the way down to her toes. She felt the corded muscles of his upper arm beneath her hand. Soon, both his arms were around her waist, hers clung to his neck. His mouth explored her own with a tenderness she'd forgotten and relished now with a shiver.

The music faded out and the reality of where they were came into focus. She pulled away. "Excuse me," she said at the same time he said, "Apologies." They stared at each other, then searched their surroundings. Smiled. They were still alone.

He offered his arm again, and they walked back the way they had come. "I'd hate to fall out of Mrs. Milford's good graces so soon."

This time, when Olivia laughed, it was breathy and soft. Her chaperone was in conversation with Mrs. Johnson and appeared to be inching away, only to have the gossip advance.

"You did leave an important development out of your account," Washington said. He paused. "Everett Stone?"

Olivia took a moment to remember what that name meant to her. Washington's heady scent and the adrenaline of their kiss had left her mind fuzzy. "Mr. Stone—he works with my father."

"I won't ask if the gossip is true. That there is something between you two, hints of a possible engagement."

Olivia coughed. "Who's speaking of an engagement?"

"Everyone." He smiled. "You and your friends are quite popular, unfortunately."

"It's far more complicated than that." The complication being that she did have feelings for Everett Stone, despite her parents' interference. His face now rose to her mind—and the quiet confidence he had about him, his smiling eyes and serious bearing, his elegance and humility, the space he gave her to be herself, and the courage to do more than she'd thought possible. With Mr. Stone, she didn't feel like she was running to catch up. The fact that he was her parents' pick still rankled—she wished they'd had nothing to do with it at all. But now a further complication: Washington DeWight was back. And there was no denying her feelings for him too.

"You're right," he said. "I'm not being fair." He cupped his hands gently around her shoulders. "I should give him a chance to prove I'm right for you." Washington DeWight straightened and his eyes sparkled. "Challenge accepted."

CHAPTER 23

Amy-Rose

Amy-Rose thanked Edward and took the stairs at Freeport Manor, following the voices from the sitting room Helen and Olivia shared. From the muffled speech, she guessed Helen had finally been captured and pressed into giving her opinions for her party. Now Amy-Rose could plan how to style Helen's hair for her debut—and perhaps hear more about the race car driver who'd turned her head. Anything to keep her mind off John and the persistent unease she felt about Ruth Davis. The woman had already kicked Amy-Rose out of Mrs. Davis's home. What if she came for Amy-Rose's salon next?

The letters, though, were a cherished distraction. The notes her parents exchanged took a couple nights to read. Some were tender and funny, a few so passionate, Amy-Rose blushed and immediately replaced them in their envelopes. In a way, she was getting to know her mother as a young woman, and meet the man that Clara Shepherd had loved until she died. Their time was so brief and full of love, Amy-Rose wondered if she might one day have a hatbox of her own of letters, thought of John, and quickly pushed the notion away.

Behind her, another set of voices rose from the stairs. She walked back to find John and the Davenport patriarch on the landing. Not sure who to look at first, she said, "Good evening, Mr. Davenport. John."

“Amy-Rose, good evening,” said the older gentleman. He leaned heavily on John. They took a step together, Mr. Davenport wincing in pain.

“Amy-Rose,” said John. His eyes lingered on her, their intensity broken by his father’s next unsteady step.

“May I help?” she asked before she could think better of it.

They both looked at her, as unsure of how to proceed as she was. William Davenport’s forehead was covered in a thin sheen of sweat. He glanced down the stairs, pride and pain warring on the features of his face.

“That would be great, thank you,” said John.

Without hesitation, Amy-Rose took Mr. Davenport’s other arm in hers and they assisted him to a chaise in the master bedroom. He dropped heavily into its tufted arms and held on to his knee.

“Daddy,” said John, sounding more like the parent than the child, “how long has it been like this?”

Mr. Davenport threw his son a look for his tone, but answered. “Since the voyage out. The moisture, the walking. It was too much.” He lifted his leg onto the chair with John’s assistance. “I’ve tried everything.”

John wiped his face with his hands. His worry made her ache to wrap her arms around him. Amy-Rose was ready to excuse herself from what was a family affair when she remembered a recipe her mother had written in her notebook. A salve for joint pain. “I may know something that could help,” she offered, hesitant. She ran through the ingredients in her mind. Yes, it could work. “John, will you boil water. Mr. Davenport, can you remove your trousers?” She stopped as her words sunk in. A fire roared beneath the surface of her skin. The gentleman before her had frozen in shock. John coughed to disguise a laugh. All three of them flinched when the door banged open.

“William, the physician can’t come until morning,” said Mrs. Davenport. Her pace slowed when she took in the trio.

John spoke into the growing silence. “Amy-Rose, you were saying?” His lip twitched as he walked past.

“It will have to be applied to your skin,” she told Mr. Davenport. “Just give me a moment.” She followed John down to the kitchen, where she

opened the cabinets with the rare herbs. *Please, Jessie, don't have thrown them out.* Her pulse quickened. She had never made medicine before. Hair tonics and serums, yes, but his would be different. Red lavender, coconut oil, nutmeg...*Mortar and pestle.* She paused at the strangled sound behind her.

John's shoulders shook as he set a pot to boil, looking like he was trying to eat his smile.

Amy-Rose buried her face in her hands. "I can't believe I told your father to take off his trousers."

John laughed outright. She felt his fingers circle her wrists as he gently pulled her hands from her face. "To his credit, my father didn't even flinch."

The laugh that escaped her was breathy and strained. "I hope he found as much humor in it as you did."

"Sometimes he surprises me."

She handed John the oil, focused now on the task. "Place this over the boiling water so it softens." His brow furrowed in concentration, as if the water would boil from him looking at it. She wondered if now was the time to bring up her mother's and sister's letters—his own too.

"I appreciate you helping," he said.

"Of course. Just because I've moved out, doesn't mean I'll stop caring."

"I know—" he started, then indicated the oil, which had turned clear.

"We need both the oil and water," she said, throwing a towel onto her shoulder and grabbing the mortar full of shredded leaves and the pestle. She took for the stairs with John's footsteps just a beat behind her own.

When they returned to the bedroom, Mrs. Davenport stood behind her husband, holding one of his hands in hers. Her eyes were puffy. Mr. Davenport had rolled up the leg of his pants above a very red and swollen knee. He had removed his jacket and tie too, and rolled up his sleeves. It was the most informal she had ever seen him. Like this, his features seemed gentler, younger, more like Helen's, though she proved to be just as strong-willed as her father.

Amy-Rose tried not to focus too long at the thin uneven scars at his collar and along his arms. Or the burn that covered the brand on his wrist.

Following her gaze, he said, "It was to mark us as their property and differentiate us from the neighboring plantations. I could no longer look at it. My brother did it after our escape, the night before we had to separate. Each year it's harder to remember his face." He studied her now. "I imagine you might feel the same way about your mother."

Amy-Rose cleared her throat. "I remember parts of her better than others. The smell of her soap. The texture of her hair. Her smile. It's all sharper in the morning."

"Yes, in that space between sleep and waking," he said.

Amy-Rose nodded. Her eyes and nose stung at his words. She met his and Mrs. Davenport's gaze in turn. They'd known her mother, welcomed them both when no one wanted to take on an extra mouth to feed that could not work. Even her role as maid hadn't felt like true work compared to the other staff, or the work the salon required.

She was aware of, but did not see, Mr. Davenport's eyes on her and John. John took her directions: More water. More oil. Together they prepared the poultice her mother had left in the pages of a notebook, memorized long ago. The crushed vegetation and coconut oil filled the air with a pungent smell. *I hope this works.*

"Here, rest your hands." John closed his hands around hers. His touch traveled from the points of gentle pressure from his fingertips to every inch of her being. Her next breath shuddered through her, and the intense expression of hope mixed with gratitude he gave her. She released her grip, not trusting her voice. She sat back on her heels, her focus attuned to the place where their knees touched and the weight of Mr. and Mrs. Davenport's presence.

Mrs. Davenport placed a pillow under his knee. With the injury now fully exposed, she took the finished paste Amy-Rose and John had made and applied it to the area. Mr. Davenport sighed with relief. Mrs. Davenport rocked onto her heels, the back of her hand pressed to her forehead.

"Here," said Amy-Rose, holding a damp towel in her outstretched hand.

“Daddy?” Helen poked her head through the gap in the door. Then she lurched through. “Livy!” she hissed.

Mr. Davenport waved them in. They moved slowly, Olivia stumbling at the sight of his swollen knee. Sensing a change to an intimate family gathering, Amy-Rose attempted to stand. John’s hand grasped hers with a fierceness that stopped her. Once the girls were settled around them, Mr. Davenport sat up. His gaze moved over her hand in John’s, and found his wife.

• • •

Amy-Rose watched from the register as the young women who’d mastered her styling techniques set about cleaning their stations. The chairs were empty, including the ones by the windows that baked in the warm summer sun of her waiting area. Word of mouth. That was how the women who waited to have their hair styled heard about Clara’s Beauty Salon. For years, the high-society women had seen the fruits of her labor in the Davenports’ coils, finger waves, presses. Now she could do all sorts of modified arrangements that celebrated the various rich textures of many women’s hair. But the heat today had everyone fleeing for cooler climates.

Amy-Rose was exhausted. A room at the boardinghouse nearby had opened and, with the help of Sandra and Harold, she’d finally made the move out on her own. Chin propped in her hand, she tried to follow the conversation around her. The stylists’ chatter reminded her of the kitchen of Freeport Manor, Jessie and Ethel bickering as they worked.

One of the hairdressers called to her. “Miss Shepherd, please tell Martha that if she keeps moving the pin tray, I’ll stick her with one.” The young woman’s threat was softened by her dimpled smile and Martha’s unapologetic shrug.

Yes, exactly like Jessie and Ethel. “I think the two of you can come to some sort of understanding without me playing umpire,” said Amy-Rose. She watched them resume their work. *Mama*, she thought to herself, *do you see this?* She sighed. Her heart ached for the years her mother must have

spent thinking that her love no longer cared for her. It was a terrible truth to carry, and Amy-Rose wondered how her sister lived with the knowledge. *Her sister*. Elizabeth had ended her letter with a hope that they could one day meet. Amy-Rose could tell she did not know Clara Shepherd had passed. And there was no way Amy-Rose could express her gratitude for the letters her mother had written to her father. She'd spent whole nights reading them, pairing them with the ones her father had sent. She had yet to reply to her half sister, though. Every attempt seemed somehow insufficient.

How could I have been so stubborn? If she had just opened the package John had sent, she would have discovered all this so much sooner. Her mind turned to the afternoon a few days ago. She did not know what to make of the events around Mr. Davenport's injured knee. It had felt, perhaps, like something had shifted...but she hadn't seen or heard from John since.

Amy-Rose was lost in her thoughts when she saw Mr. King striding up the street. He pushed through the door with a flourish, then crossed the salon space in moments, his long gait eating up the distance easily. He wore a lighter suit, and the smile on his face promised adventure. "Amy-Rose," he said, her name rolling off his tongue. "I'd like to take you out to lunch."

Amy-Rose straightened and adjusted the belt at her waist. "Mr. King—Ben," she said warmly, hoping to soften her refusal, but her stomach roared in protest. His smile widened at the use of his first name.

"Now, I think that was a yes," he said. They laughed.

"I suppose it was. I just need a moment." She walked to the back, ignoring the crumpled stationery in the waste bin—failed attempts to write to her sister. *The words will come*. She grabbed her small purse and came around the counter. Mr. King took her hand and tucked it into the crook of his arm.

"I made us reservations at the Blackstone," he said, leading her out of the salon.

Amy-Rose had heard of it. She'd never had cause to enter such a space. It was only a few blocks from where the salon was located. Her heart sped up as it came into view, faster still as they passed through the entrance. There were several open tables at this time of day, and the dining space was

quiet as a library. *This is where Olivia dines with potential husbands.* Amy-Rose looked at Ben, hoping she had not led him on since they'd parted in New York.

"I've had a great time in Chicago, but I'm afraid my time is soon up."

"Oh," said Amy-Rose. "That's too bad." She kept her smile subdued.

"Now, there's one matter that needs attention. I must say, it's rare for a salon to experience such instant success. You must be very proud."

"I am, yes," she said. Around them, crisp white linen covered the tables set with bone-white china, and gold cutlery gleamed like treasure. Diners, both Black and white, enjoyed their lunches, reminding Amy-Rose of photographs from a magazine. "Thank you," she said.

They were escorted to a table near the window where she had a perfect view of two other nearby Black-owned businesses—a pharmacy and haberdasher. To be part of the Black entrepreneurship that was flourishing in this part of the city—Binga Bank, barbers, grocers, boutiques—it made her feel proud. Honored. She felt a lightness in her chest she hadn't experienced since she'd boarded the train in New York. This was only the beginning. Yes, there was still a lot to do, but she was willing and capable. And she had plenty of support.

"How have you been?" Mr. King asked. "Is it strange being at the salon without Mrs. Davis?"

"Some days. When we left it was just a shell. It had been stripped of everything, and we'd left her designer in charge with my sketches and suggestions, some fabrics and furniture selections." Amy-Rose looked down at the napkin she'd placed in her lap. "She never got to see the finished space. Or how successful it's been."

Mr. King opened his menu. "She did the right thing ensuring it was placed in your capable hands instead of Ruth's."

"Ruth?" The mention of Mrs. Davis's estranged daughter startled Amy-Rose. "I wasn't aware that you were acquainted with Miss Davis."

Mr. King's mouth parted. "Yes, she and I met years ago when they moved to New York—before Mrs. Davis returned here to Chicago." The waiter arrived, filled their water glasses, and lingered expectantly.

His casual mention of her mentor's child made her curious, especially when Amy-Rose herself had not heard of Ruth until after Mrs. Davis's funeral. "Do you know what led to their falling out?"

Mr. King shifted in his seat. "I do." Amy-Rose waited for him to elaborate. "Mrs. Davis prides—took pride in her business mind. Ruth got into some trouble and sold some information her mother kept private, nearly ruined the Davis name."

"Oh, I had no idea. Poor Mrs. Davis."

"Mrs. Davis was far from poor."

Amy-Rose frowned. "You know what I mean. Money can come and go, but a name and how it's remembered, there's no price on that."

"Right you are," he said.

The rest of the lunch passed quickly. Mr. King was a natural storyteller, his voice smooth, his expressions animated. He spoke as if to fill the silence before it could come. He then walked her the short distance back to the salon. "You made the salon a reality, Amy-Rose. Now is not the time to stop dreaming. The hair care line...it's gold." He leaned in slightly. "Dream bigger." She noticed he was standing quite close to her when he said quietly, "I'd bet on you, Amy-Rose."

He gently cupped her chin and slowly bent his face toward hers.

"Ben!" She stepped away. Amy-Rose remembered their evening in New York City when she was fresh off the heartbreak of leaving John and her home behind. And she and John were...Well, she wasn't sure what they were, or what they would ever be, but she couldn't deny the feelings that lived always under her skin, especially now having heard his confession and read his letter. She smiled, hoping to soften her reaction. "Thank you for lunch. I hope you'll allow me to return the favor before you leave for New York."

Before Mr. King could respond, Amy-Rose turned and entered her salon.

CHAPTER 24

Helen

Helen ran lightly between the other patrons on the promenade of Garfield Park. Situated five miles west of her sister's popular haunts, it was over a hundred acres of beautifully manicured lawns and winding paths along a placid lagoon. She'd missed the twenty-minute carriage ride over with the others, but John's willingness to drive her in his motorcar made up the lost time. Plus, it was far more fun!

Her nerves practically vibrated with adrenaline—and not just at her tardiness. The Davenport Carriage Company's first automobile was complete. But not *perfect*. Still, not even John's pointed questions about how close she and Mr. Swift had grown this past week could dampen her spirits. It was agonizing to leave the car behind for its final checks and touches.

But her nervous energy served her well now—she ran on tiptoes, glancing over her shoulder at the shrinking figure of her brother.

If Mrs. Milford could see me now—running in public? Helen wouldn't be allowed outdoors until her party. With the race just over a week away and only days before her big debut, she'd had to be on her best behavior in front of her chaperone. Or at least seem that way. At the entrance of the Garfield Park Conservatory, Olivia stood in a cool blue dress with a matching hat and parasol. Helen hoped this wasn't their destination. *The*

greenhouse? The weather was marginally tolerable—she had no desire to enter a humid glass box to walk among the ferns.

Olivia pulled a face. “Where’s John?”

“Back at the automobile,” said Helen, her breathing labored.

“He was supposed to walk you here,” said Olivia. She gave Helen quick once-over and must have found her suitable. “You’re lucky Mama went ahead with Mrs. Johnson.” Olivia looked like the paper dolls cut from a magazine, all perfect and glossy. The most unladylike thing about her sister was the way she tapped her foot right now.

“Sorry I’m late! I don’t see the point in *promenading*. There are better ways to pass the time.” Helen was ready to burst from her excitement.

Olivia studied Helen suspiciously. “Socializing is the way ladies of our station build relationships with each other.”

“Parties to find husbands. Promenades to makes friends. All this performance.” Helen gestured at the park. “So much time and energy spent to get other people to accept or propose to you. How do you know if it’s genuine?” Helen thought about Bertha and Agatha, who had been out in society as long as Olivia, and about Odette who was new to town. It was so hard to make real connections.

“You’ll know it’s real when you let your true nature shine and it’s embraced,” Olivia said simply. “Or,” she added, looking at the tree-lined paths, “you can be friends from birth as Ruby and I have and know nothing else. Helen, any young man would be lucky to have you.” Olivia bumped her with her hip and smiled. “He may just need more patience than most.”

Because you are beautiful and wealthy, because you are a Davenport, Olivia did not have to add. Helen knew her sister was trying to reassure her, to encourage her. It all just seemed unfair—this social hierarchy, this scrabbling for happiness. “Do you think it’s this difficult for gentleman?”

“I suppose for some, yes.” Olivia looked at her closely. “It’s not as frivolous as you seem to think. It’s important to find good friends, good matches. And it can be fun.”

“Socializing can’t be the solution to every woman’s problem.”

“You’re right, but right now, it’s yours.” Olivia leaned in, sniffed. “At least you don’t smell like you were under an engine.”

“I wasn’t.” Helen huffed, putting her doubt aside in favor of her earlier excitement. “I watched them place the trim.” She shook her head. Isaac and Henry were putting on the final touches. They came over early this morning to see that the fuel and exhaust systems were installed and functioning, that the steering mechanisms were calibrated. They’d followed Helen’s instructions to the letter. John had said they needed to convince Daddy, and what better way than to use their father’s own design aesthetic to win him over?

Helen sank onto the first bench she saw, still mesmerized by the chrome and high gloss of the Davenport stock car. She was about to burst with glee.

Olivia noticed. “All right,” said her sister. “Go on, but keep your voice down if you want to keep it a secret.”

“Oh, Livy! You should see it! It’s absolutely gorgeous. The twins did a fantastic job. They painted the body last week and they brought the pieces to the factory. The ovens helped speed up the drying, though I would suggest not letting your skirts brush too close.” She paused for a breath. “It looks like a real automobile. It doesn’t have the Davenport emblem yet, but when it does...” Helen stomped her feet.

Her sister squeezed her hand. “I cannot *wait* to see it.” She paused. “But please sit up straight.”

“As you wish,” she sighed, resigned to the afternoon ahead.

“Better yet, stand up.”

“What?”

Olivia stood, grinning. “You have far too much energy.”

Her sister was right. Maybe a walk around the lagoon was just what Helen needed. Definitely not the greenhouse.

Their father hadn’t been to the factory yet, still holed up in Freeport’s library recovering from his journey and reviewing the ledgers. She wondered what plans he had—if any beyond pouring more money into the buggies—to address the declining revenue.

Olivia linked her arm through Helen's. They walked the public gardens where the air was lighter than in the city and the sun warm on their skin. They nodded to passersby, mostly white, a few Black, as they traveled around the lagoon. The water lapping in the breeze was calming, cooling. Just what Helen needed.

"John is worried about you and the young Mr. Swift spending so much time together."

Helen tried to pull away but Olivia held fast. "Livy," she complained. It didn't work. Her sister's gaze bore into the side of her face.

"You rarely talk about what's going on in your head. Only what takes place in that garage."

"We're building a car! Working together isn't the same as 'spending time' together. There are always other people around, and it's nearly as impossible to distract him from a motorcar as it is me."

"Good," said Olivia. "I told John as much, but I wanted to be sure. Besides, for all the rumors and adoring fans surrounding Mr. Swift, no one seems to know if he's courting anyone. Who knows how he spends his time off the track."

Helen frowned. Mr. Swift claimed his gambling and drinking days were behind him. "Well, however he spends his time is fine by me as long as the work gets done. I like him. He's fun and playful. And very nice to look at," she said, smiling. "Mr. Swift is a bit rough-and-tumble, sure. He's not preoccupied with what other people think. We have much in common. There's no harm in flirting, Olivia. I don't need John, or you, spoiling my good time. In the garage, I know exactly what I'm doing—even when I don't." The expression on Olivia's face urged her on. "I'm comfortable there, it's predictable, and I work well with the other mechanics."

"Who's to say a relationship can't be like that?"

"Certainly you seem to be! You're caving to Mama and Daddy's choice like your secret spring romance with the young activist never happened."

Olivia winced, and Helen felt immediately chastened.

"I'm just trying to see you to a match with someone who appreciates your uniqueness," Olivia said. "It's entirely different."

“How?” Helen asked more gently. She watched her sister, waiting for an answer. She knew she was being stubborn, but she couldn’t help it.

“Mr. Stone *is* their choice. And I’m giving him a chance.” She paused. “I’m also giving Mr. DeWight a chance.”

Helen was shocked. Then delighted. “Olivia Elise! I cannot believe you!”

“Hush now,” said Olivia. “It’s nothing so scandalous as that. I’m just... undecided.”

Helen smiled. Olivia, who was always so sure of her path, seemed to be struggling with what to do next. It made Helen feel a little less troubled by her doubt. As much as she enjoyed her time working on the motorcar, and the amusing tension between her and Mr. Swift, she couldn’t help the sharp tug she felt at any thought of Jacob Lawrence. The image of him in the Greenfields’ back garden rose to her mind often in the past week. Once, he had given her hope that she wouldn’t have to choose between love and involvement in her family’s business. Now—

She shook the thought away. “You and John don’t have to trouble yourselves with Mr. Swift. Once his career is back on track, and Daddy approves the transition in the company, I’m sure he’ll be on to the next big thing. Speaking of which, how was dinner with Mr. DeWight? I’d expected you to break things off officially. But now *this*.” Helen smiled delightedly.

They’d arrived back at the Fern House. The humid air inside was thick with the fragrances of soil and thousands of cycads, mosses, and ferns. Their fronds stretched toward the glass enclosure and gave one the feeling of walking through a prehistoric jungle.

“Dinner was lovely,” said Olivia. “I thought his interest waning. He’s made clear that isn’t the case.”

“But?” asked Helen, sensing there was something keeping her sister’s feelings in check.

“Mr. Stone.” Olivia looked at her. “I really like him, Helen.”

“Based on past experience, I’d say Mama and Daddy mean well, but their choices haven’t made you happy.”

“How right you are,” said Olivia, coming to a sudden halt.

Helen turned.

Jacob Lawrence stood on the path before them, Etta Lawrence to his left, a picnic basket dangling between them. He wore a beige suit and a straw hat with a feather at the brim. He stilled, as if shocked by the faulty light switch he once joked would electrocute him.

“Miss Davenport,” he said to Olivia. “Miss Davenport,” he said to Helen. His address of her sounded more like a question. “I’d like to introduce you both to Etta James Lawrence. My cousin.” He watched Helen, closely, his expression unreadable.

“*Cousin?*” Helen asked.

The woman beamed. “Lovely to meet the young women of whom Jacob speaks so highly. I was beginning to wonder if I ever would.” She threw him a glare not unlike the ones Helen sent John’s way. “My family’s just moved to America to expand our business. We ran into Jacob in New York City, ticket in hand for London. Can you believe the coincidence!”

“You didn’t get on the ship?” asked Olivia.

Helen’s ears rang with Miss Lawrence’s words. *He’d been in New York this whole time?*

“No, we talked him out of that,” said Miss Lawrence. “He stayed with us in Albany while my brother got settled. Roger, my brother, will be in charge of the operation out there. The rest of us left for Chicago. My parents are recovering from illness, otherwise they’d be here too. Lucky for us, Jacob already knows this city so well.”

Olivia beamed. “Lucky indeed. Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Miss Lawrence, and we’ll be happy to make your acquaintance here in the city.” She pinched Helen’s arm beneath hers until she offered a greeting as well. Helen could hear her sister asking questions about their journey and suggesting attractions that the city had to offer. *Miss Etta Lawrence* appeared to relax as she and Olivia spoke. Her sister had a way of doing that, putting people at ease. All Helen wanted to do was sink into the ground, and reappear in the garage, where her life made sense. She thought about the unopened letters. The gentle nudge from Amy-Rose. And yet at

the edge of her confusion and embarrassment, Helen felt a relief that left her unsteady.

Jacob Lawrence was not married.

Now, what to do with that information?

He looked at Helen. “I’m happy to be back and for the warm welcome I received”—he raised an eyebrow as he spoke these words—“though I learned recently that Etta has been mistaken for my wife.”

A nervous laugh escaped Helen. “Funny that,” she managed to say.

Amusement crept into Jacob’s features. “Could I have a word?” he said to her. Olivia paused only a moment before inviting Etta to follow along the walking path.

Helen nodded and attempted to keep her cool. A challenge, given the situation, and especially hard inside a greenhouse.

“Your cousin seems friendly,” she said, sounding stiff.

“She is,” he replied. “We’ve been close since we could crawl. Our relationship has been difficult with her father, my uncle, in control of what was once our family’s business. She and I are pushing for reconciliation. Her trip here is meant to help it along.”

“Right,” said Helen.

“I explained this all in my letters, which I realized, after the Greenfields’, must have gone unread based on your reaction.”

“That’s hardly fair considering what transpired between us.” But Helen knew that, in her pain and anger, she had missed a vital piece of information.

His expression turned serious. “I’ve wounded you, I know. I will forever regret that.” He smoothed his hand over his mustache and met her level stare.

Helen felt the lump in her throat swell.

He went on. “I would spend the rest of forever showing you that we—that I—deserve another chance. Can you not see how you injure us both now?” He stood there, waiting for her response.

What was she doing? Besides being every bit stubborn as her siblings accused her of being. “So she is your cousin? Not your...wife?”

Mr. Lawrence laughed. Her memories of his laugh paled in comparison to the real thing.

Helen looked to where Olivia and Etta had wandered. “I’d heard that she was your new bride.”

“Helen Davenport, am I to understand you have taken part in a rumor mill?”

“Of course not!” she exclaimed. “I have adopted many ladylike pastimes. Gossip isn’t one of them.”

Jacob Lawrence smiled. It contained all the admiration he professed, and the strength of it made Helen feel light-headed. She wanted desperately to return to the bliss they’d shared before it all fell apart. But she was wiser now, having watched her sister and their friends navigate their own heartbreak. Olivia’s reputation was still susceptible to scandal too. As far as their set—and their father—knew, Olivia and Jacob Lawrence were once betrothed. The situation was delicate. But still, Helen could see herself with Jacob Lawrence.

“I’ll have an invitation to my party sent to the address you left with Edward. You may bring your cousin and see that she is introduced to all the young gentleman and ladies.” She looked to where Olivia and Etta waited for them. “Perhaps, Mr. Lawrence, I’ll save you a dance.”

CHAPTER 25

Ruby

“**W**oo!” cried Odette. Her ball rolled through the wicket.

Ruby fanned herself furiously, slouching, her mallet at her feet, until a glance from Harrison’s mother had her fixing her posture. Clouds moved in the distance but they never managed to come close enough to provide shade over the Learys’ open lawn.

“Well done,” said Agatha. “My, Ruby, you do look like you’re melting. It’s much cooler under the tent.” Agatha grinned at her.

“I’d hate to miss out on all the fun,” said Ruby. She was sure it was more comfortable under the tent, but changing locations would put her in the path of parents, including her own and Mrs. and Mr. Barton.

“My brother used to play croquet all the time with Harrison’s brother, Jeremiah. It was always a good time,” said Odette.

Ruby had come to realize that Odette was always looking for a *good time*. She managed to befriend anyone who could connect her to a person with exclusive access to a dance hall, restaurant, boutique, or who shared her penchant for “fun.”

Odette waved over a waiter with a fresh bottle of champagne. The game had stalled in the heat. There was a ring toss match set up across the lawn where Jeremiah and Mr. Barton stood, bystanders watching with varying degrees of curiosity. The drinks were flowing and the music was lively from a band ensemble beneath the tent. And Agatha Leary played junior hostess.

“Refill?” asked Agatha.

Ruby held up her glass. “Lemonade is fine for me.”

“Too bad Harrison couldn’t be here,” said Odette.

“Yes,” said Ruby. “He had to work, but he said he’ll be at the race next week.”

“Working on a Saturday?” Odette shook her head. “I know I would be unable to keep my wits if I had to wait for my beau to get out of work on a weekend. Oh! How is that little venture of yours?” Odette swung her club over her shoulder. “Do tell!” she said. Her eyes were bright and her smile welcoming.

“Well,” Ruby said, “I’ve taken Mr. Price’s comments to heart—thank you again for introducing us—and with Olivia’s help, I’ve found the perfect person to help me bring my sketches to life.”

Odette squealed, drawing the attention Ruby wanted to avoid. “Shall I put my orders in now?”

Agatha pouted. “You haven’t seen what they look like, Odette.”

Carter had walked over and now held his glass high. “Well, I think this deserves a toast.”

At Odette’s encouragement, the four of them clinked their glasses together. Though Agatha’s comment stung, Ruby enjoyed their praise. She was excited. She’d begun frequenting her former haunts with new vigor, not shopping for the thrill of it, but studying style and technique, appreciating what she once took for granted, and looking for her own ways to entice the modern young lady.

Odette stood on her tiptoes. “Bertha’s arrived!” She and Agatha left Ruby and Carter to greet their friend. Freed, Ruby took to the closest table under a shaded tree where Anne-Marie, Harrison’s sister, sat. What was the alternative? Standing under a crowded tent with her parents? *No thank you.*

“Miss Barton,” she started. “Do you enjoy garden parties?”

“Yes,” replied the young girl. Anne-Marie, at twelve years, watched the party unfold before them. “There aren’t many other girls my age, but everyone has been friendly. I do wish Harrison was here too.”

Ruby nodded.

Carter joined them then, taking the open seat next to Ruby. He smiled at her and watched her openly. Ruby's face warmed. "Have I got something on my nose?" she asked.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I was simply admiring the view. My friend sure knows how to find a beautiful woman."

Ruby smiled tightly, glanced at Anne-Marie, who'd become absorbed in the pattern on her dress, and looked to where the rest of the Bartons seemed deeply involved in their game. "That's kind of you to say."

Then Ruby felt the weight of a palm on her knee.

She stood so quickly, she pushed the table forward. If not for Carter's *quick hands*, the drinks would have gone flying. She could still feel the heat of his skin through the fabric of her dress. Though heads turned, they'd already begun to look away. Music and laughter rang loudly in Ruby's ears.

"Come now, no need to make a scene. Have a seat and we'll have another game when Odette returns." He touched her wrist and Ruby flinched at the contact.

"Ruby?" Both were surprised to see Anne-Marie Barton was no longer sitting across the table but standing at her elbow. "I was hoping you would be my partner in the ring toss." Ruby grasped her suggestion like a life vest.

"I'd love to," said Ruby. "I'm no good at croquet anyway."

Carter grinned and leaned back in his seat. "Enjoy, ladies."

As they walked away, Ruby curled into herself and suppressed a shudder. "Thank you," she whispered to Anne-Marie. How could Carter be so bold? Did Odette or Harrison know of this side of him? The questions gnawed at Ruby. She pushed down the feelings of disgust and waited for the heat of his hand on her knee to dissipate.

"I don't actually need a partner," Anne-Marie confessed. "You looked distressed and I thought since we are to be sisters soon..."

"We should look after each other. Agreed." With one arm, Ruby briefly hugged Anne-Marie to her side, and they found a spot within the protective bubble of the Bartons' corner of the tent near the ring toss. Ruby played with her necklace, ignoring the prickling of the hairs on the back of her neck. She knew without looking that Carter watched her.

“Do you know how to play?” she asked Anne-Marie.

“Oh yes, we all learned. I’m quite good at it, which is why I don’t usually play. Not so much fun when you win all the time.”

Ruby stared at her, not sure if there was a joke hidden somewhere in her words, but Anne-Marie’s eyes were locked on the game. “If it brings you joy,” whispered Ruby, “who cares if you win all the time?”

When Anne-Marie glanced back at her, there was a hint of a smile spreading across her face. “That is one of the many reasons he loves you,” said Anne-Marie. The younger girl stepped out of the shadow of the tent and reached for a set of rings.

Hmm, Ruby thought to herself. There’s a chance we may all get along after all.

• • •

The next morning, Ruby and her mother waited outside the restaurant for Mrs. Barton and Anne-Marie. She and the younger girl had spent the rest of the Learys’ garden party together. And later, in the carriage, they’d chatted about Ruby’s design endeavors. Two days ago, Ruby had dreaded being seated at a table with their mothers staring each other down. Now she imagined it would be far more bearable with Anne-Marie at her side.

A flyer in the restaurant window caught her attention. It was the same portrait of her father that had been plastered everywhere before the election. This establishment was one her family had frequented often before they’d had to cut back to support the campaign, and Mr. Tremaine’s stoic gaze now seemed to frown at Ruby through the glass. She was surprised to see the poster still up. Most places had so thoroughly removed all evidence of his bid for mayor that she was left to wonder if their current predicament was all just a nightmare.

“Ruby, don’t slouch,” said her mother.

“Papa’s picture is still posted,” she said.

Mrs. Tremaine moved to where Ruby stood. Her eyes roamed over the grainy print of her husband. “He returns to work and his regular routine this

week. It will begin to feel more like how things used to be.”

Ruby doubted that a change in scenery alone was the answer for her father. As things stood, he’d only made brief appearances at labor meetings and charity events so as not to look like a sore loser. He’d come home in a sour mood from a debrief at Samson House with the reverend and several activists. She was poised to argue her point when the Bartons arrived.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Tremaine, Ruby,” said Mrs. Barton.

“Good afternoon,” Ruby and her mother said together. Ruby smiled at Anne-Marie.

Harrison’s sister returned the greeting and fell in step next to Ruby as they walked inside.

“I’m so glad you suggested lunch,” said Mrs. Barton.

They were seated right away. The owners were a Black couple, and after enduring their offers of condolence, the four women sat at a round table with a thick white linen tablecloth. It was a popular place for lunch with the wives of the Black upper class, hosting charity luncheons and ladies’ social club meetings. If Mrs. Barton was impressed, she didn’t show it.

“This is a favorite place of mine,” said Ruby.

“Is that so,” said Mrs. Barton. “Harrison says you have great taste.” She looked at Ruby as if she believed the opposite.

“A ladies’ outing was in order,” said Mrs. Tremaine.

“And we can discuss the wedding,” said Ruby. Anne-Marie’s confidence in their union last night had given her courage. She directed her next words at the young girl. “I’ve brought the sketches of my dress for you to see. And you can even visit to see some creations in process, if you’d like—sometime soon.”

“Ruby,” her mother said, smiling tightly. “Let’s not start with that. We haven’t even ordered yet.”

Anne-Marie spoke up. “Mrs. Tremaine, I would love to see them. I’m sure after the wedding, my parents, Jeremiah, and I will be heading back home...” Anne-Marie’s voice trailed off as the expression on their mothers’ faces changed, further dampening the atmosphere. “I do hope to get to know my future sister before then.”

Anne-Marie's intervention last night had shifted Ruby's perspective. She had thought the young girl meek, frightened by the likes of Helen Davenport and her unconventional notions of courtship and propriety. She'd been wrong.

She smiled now at Anne-Marie. "Likewise," Ruby said to her, the full realization dawning that her union with Harrison would not only bring her closer to his parents, but bring her a pair of siblings. *I'll no longer be an only child.* The thought struck her as strange. Her parents were very social and their friendship with the Davenports ensured she was surrounded with children her own age, but they couldn't always be around.

Mrs. Barton inspected the silverware. "How resourceful you are, Ruby. Such a talent in finding opportunity."

"My daughter *is* intelligent, and not one to let the good pass her by simply due to external pressure."

"And I'm sure you taught her well," said Mrs. Barton.

Ruby looked to her mother as Mrs. Barton spoke. She couldn't help but think of the story her mother shared this past spring, of the other gentlemen Mrs. Tremaine might have wed in place of Ruby's father. Someone closer in age. Ruby wondered if Anne-Marie Barton knew her mother chose security over love. It was from her mother's pragmatic decision that Ruby had confidence in her future with Harrison—she did not want what her parents had.

"As all mothers should," Mrs. Tremaine replied.

Anne-Marie caught Ruby's attention, her eyes wide with silent embarrassment. Their mothers seemed to be in a battle of wills.

When their waiter returned, Mrs. Tremaine placed an order for her and Ruby, not offering a recommendation to the Bartons. Once the waiter left, Ruby's mother unfolded her napkin and placed it on her lap. Seeing the lunch devolving into silence, Ruby took a deep breath. She needed to reset the relationship between these women like a broken bone. "I know it's crass to speak about money," she began, "but I'm sure you're aware that your son contributed to my father's campaign. And that, for *many* reasons, my father

lost. One reason, I would think, as women yourselves, you would have found not only objectionable but completely unfair.”

Mrs. Barton looked taken aback that Ruby would raise this topic. But she said, “We are, of course, aware. But in matters that involve our son, we have the right to be concerned.”

“My daughter’s reputation is beyond reproach,” said Ruby’s mother.

Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Tremaine locked eyes. Ruby waited, as did Anne-Marie, for one of them to say more. When neither did, Ruby broke the silence.

“In fact, I am strong-willed, independent, and hot-tempered,” Ruby said. “Harrison knows these things about me. And even if my reputation was not *beyond reproach*, there are plenty of gentlemen who are allowed to live their lives however indiscreetly they choose without any consequences at all. Harrison and I chose each other, and that is enough for us.”

Mrs. Tremaine squeezed Ruby’s hand under the table.

Mrs. Barton watched them stonily, her expression as unyielding as a statue.

Anne-Marie smiled. “I hope to one day have someone love me so deeply, to be as brave to love as you all are.” She looked at each of them, then down at her hands, and Ruby felt her heart squeeze.

“Yes,” said Ruby. “With love comes the strength to do great things.”

Mrs. Barton inclined her head ever so slightly. “Yes,” she said at last, very slowly. “I suppose it does take a strong woman to move through this world.”

CHAPTER 26

Olivia

With one final swoop, the last stubborn curl at Olivia's temple now lay flat on her skin. *Amy-Rose always made this look so easy*, she thought. Olivia stood back from the mirror and examined her reflection. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed. Her nervousness and frustration with her hair gave way to giddy anticipation. She admired the burnt-orange silk draped over her skin like the glow of the setting sun. The fabric felt luxurious if a little overstated for dinner. The dress was the new style, and it made Olivia feel daring. *Ankles!* She glanced at her heel and the beaded details of her shoes peeking below the hemline.

Mr. Stone will be here.

"Have you finished looking at yourself yet?" asked Helen. She slouched on the chaise, playing with a loose thread on her sleeve. Sprawled out as she was, the creases on her ivory dress were minimal. The light linen fabric was whimsical and daring for Helen's taste but befitting a debutant.

Olivia turned to her sister and pulled a face. "Yes, I have," she said. She clipped the thread on her sister's sleeve with a pair of scissors from her top drawer.

"You both look lovely," said Amy-Rose as she entered the room. Her eyes darted to where Olivia had just smoothed her hair down, as if she knew where she'd struggled.

“Thank you, Amy-Rose, so do you. I’m glad you changed your mind about attending dinner tonight.” Her friend glanced down at the yellow dress she wore. With her hair pulled away from her face and falling down her back, she appeared to stand straighter. There was something about her that seemed different. “How are you settling in at the boardinghouse?”

“It’s comfortable, and the other girls are quite nice. It’s a wonderful feeling to have something of your own, however small. And it’s so close to the salon, I can walk.”

“I’m glad,” said Helen, beating Olivia to a response. “But...you’ve read John’s letter, no? Did you not want to stay and see where it might lead?”

Olivia yelled at Helen with her eyes. Though she too was curious to know if Amy-Rose’s feelings had shifted at all since the night their father had returned, this question was bold, even for her sister.

Amy-Rose caught Olivia’s expression and laughed. But her eyes soon sobered. Olivia wondered what her friend knew. She herself was aware John had spoken again to their father since his return, but she wasn’t privy to the content or outcome. John had kept it to himself.

“It’s okay, Olivia,” said Amy-Rose, mustering another smile. “I did read his letter, Helen. And he told me he spoke with Mr. Davenport about his intentions the day I left Freeport.” Olivia noticed the slight tremor in her friend’s voice. “Despite that”—she cleared her throat—“we remain at an impasse. It is...a confusing situation for me.” She shook out her shoulders then, and said, “But there *are* the letters my half sister sent.”

Helen and Olivia exchanged a look, and Helen sat up, “It’s amazing that both your parents kept them, Amy-Rose, and that you can now can piece everything together.”

“It’s so romantic,” Olivia added. She took a seat beside Amy-Rose on the couch. “And to find a lost sibling? It is the bright spot in all this. The sunrise after a storm.”

“Lovely, Livy,” said Helen. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say you should become a writer.” She grinned.

“Ha-ha,” said Olivia. She turned back to Amy-Rose, whose gaze had fallen to her hands in her lap. “Don’t let Helen pressure you into deciding

how you feel. She's just cross about her outfit tonight."

Helen stood and tugged at her dress. "I don't understand why we need to get dressed up."

"We're celebrating Daddy's recovery." Olivia turned and smiled at Amy-Rose, grateful for her friend's role in her father's improving health.

"I'm glad I could help," Amy-Rose said. "Should I be aware of any other guests?"

"Like Mrs. Johnson?" Olivia raised her hands. "No."

Amy-Rose laughed. Then added nervously, "Or Miss Ruth Davis. One of the ladies at the salon says she's trying to sell off her mother's businesses and properties, but it's all stalled at the bank. I'll just feel better once I know she's returned to wherever she came from and the salon's ownership can't be contested. I do keep having nightmares that she shows up to dinner."

Olivia reached for her friend's hands. "The salon is safe. Mrs. Davis always planned ahead, and the deed is yours. Let Ruth Davis bully about." Olivia glanced at Helen, then back at Amy-Rose. "But speaking of surprise relations, have you finished a response to your sister?"

Amy-Rose pinched her bottom lip. "Dozens," she said. "None is right."

"I'm sure she'd love to hear from you just the same." Olivia thought of her father and his search for his brother. His disappointment when yet another report came back with no leads to his whereabouts. She stood. "Let's go down for dinner." She placed a comforting hand on Amy-Rose's shoulder, but a flutter to her left caught her attention. "My goodness, Helen, leave the bodice alone."

Helen rolled her eyes. "You and Mama just like getting dressed up."

Olivia shrugged, enjoying the way the cool fabric of her own dress felt on her skin. She walked past her sister. "You do look nice too, Helen," she said, and meant it. Helen scoffed and slipped around her to the hallway.

"Do you smell that?" asked Helen.

Amy-Rose laughed. "Jessie and Ethel wouldn't let me near—not one pot!" She looked to Olivia. "I'm looking forward to formally meeting this Mr. Stone you and Hetty are so fond of."

Olivia smiled. She could hear her parents speaking as the trio descended the stairs. She let Amy-Rose and Helen enter the sitting room before her, Amy-Rose drawing John's immediate attention. In the calm of the hallway, Olivia smoothed the imagined wrinkles from her dress. Then she entered the room.

To her surprise, the first gentleman she saw was not her father or brother. It wasn't even Mr. Stone.

"Good evening, Miss Davenport," said Washington DeWight, all charm and sass and standing next to her father. The pair nursed tumblers of amber liquid in front of the empty fireplace. An unlit cheroot cigar was pinched between her father's fingers. He seemed to think better of it and placed it on the fireplace mantel.

"Good evening," she said, looking between them both, "Mr. DeWight." Olivia felt her temperature rise. Washington offered his signature smile, a sparkle in his honey-colored eyes. He looked at home in the sitting room. The guest Olivia was expecting had not yet arrived. A glance at her mother revealed that she shared Olivia's unease.

She crossed the room to her mother's side. "Mama, what is going on?" she whispered, worry growing in the pit of her stomach.

"I don't know. I came down here and was just as surprised as you were to see him. Your father mentioned in passing that he'd invited someone to dine with us and that we would need another place setting." Mrs. Davenport's look of confusion turned to concern. She brushed Olivia's chin gently with her thumb. "We can accept an abundance of love, but can only give our heart to one," she whispered.

Olivia forced a smile. Her mother's words voiced what she feared to be true. *You can manage this*, she told herself. She clasped her hands tightly, hoping to hide her nerves, and rejoined her father and Mr. DeWight.

Mr. Davenport shifted his weight on his cane to place a kiss on her cheek. Amy-Rose's treatment had improved his gait. They expected he'd soon be back to his natural condition. "I invited Mr. DeWight to dinner. I'm interested in what he has to share about the demonstrations in the capital." He sighed. "I regret I missed the election. I'm afraid my friend has had a

difficult time of things.” He turned to Washington. “Mr. Tremaine is devastated by the results. We need to know what the next steps are. We were so close—and can’t lose hope now.”

“Of course, Mr. Davenport,” said Washington. “We must always be looking ahead. I’d suggest when his mourning period wanes, he resumes his investment in the city as if he were still running. Unwavering commitment will not only keep him in the minds of voters but, I hope, they’ll also stave off some of what I’ve seen in the South.” Washington DeWight shook his head. “I plan to make my way back to Virginia before the end of the month.”

Olivia’s head snapped up. *Make his way?* Washington DeWight traveled extensively, of course, but some part of her had expected, when he’d declared his intention to win her heart, that he would make Chicago his home base. As he and her father continued speaking, his passion, the conviction that drew her to him—it recalled for her what Ruby had said after she and Washington first met. *He never stays in one place long.*

Mr. Davenport nodded at something Washington said, and just behind him, Helen caught Olivia’s eye and signaled toward the door.

Before Olivia could think, Mr. Stone stepped through.

“Apologies for my late arrival,” he said. “I had quite the eventful trip up here.” He indeed looked bedraggled. The tops of his shoulders and thighs were wet. “I decided to ride today. The weather had other plans.” His eyes found Olivia’s and she felt her heart flutter, whether from anxiety or at her happiness in seeing him, she wasn’t sure. “Where are my manners? Good evening, everyone,” he said.

The room replied in kind and then resumed their conversations. Helen and Amy-Rose migrated to the large picture windows to watch from a safe distance. She wished she could join them. She hoped propriety would keep her courtship with both gentlemen secret and this dinner civil. Mr. Stone, a head taller than Mr. DeWight, watched her, knowingly it seemed. Olivia wondered if her vague descriptions during their conversations was the cause.

Washington DeWight turned to him. “You’re the lawyer who represents the imprisoned?” He examined Mr. Stone’s damp suit and foggy glasses.

“I am. I believe you are the lawyer of whom Olivia speaks fondly when she mentions her activism—the protest that turned violent?” Mr. Stone removed a silk handkerchief from inside his jacket to polish his lenses. His expression was friendly, but he stood straighter, taller. The shyness that usually blunted his movements was gone. This was the gentleman who stood before a judge to defend those in need.

“Olivia, I thought you decided to support the community center, with Mrs. Woodard?” said her father.

“Yes, Daddy, I volunteer at the community center.” There was no way now she could deny her greater involvement in the civil rights issues to which she gave her time. “And I’ve been assisting the women’s unions and suffragists movement. With Mrs. Woodard.”

“She and Hetty have been very vocal *and* careful,” said her mother. “Mrs. Woodard works with both groups and has taken Olivia under her tutelage.”

Mr. Davenport grumbled. “I returned to one daughter planning a coup and the other a revolution.”

“Daddy,” John began, but their father waved away his words.

“You are just as rebellious,” he said, and Olivia saw the way he watched John and Amy-Rose move in harmony. Was there a subtle change in her father’s expression? An interest? If so, it was followed by a grunt. “When are you and your sister going to show me the stock car you built?”

John, to his credit, kept his face neutral. “Tonight, after dinner. Mr. Stone, Helen, and I have a plan we’d like to formally present to the board following the exhibition race where we debut the prototype. We’re confident a Davenport automobile will not only be ready for production, but be the hottest, most desired ride in town.”

Helen beamed. “We’ve worked out the numbers. It would take some planning to cover production, but the cost should be comparable if not lower than the buggies.”

Olivia, her own turmoil forgotten for a moment, fought the urge to cheer. Instead, she, like her siblings, waited for their father to strike down this speech.

Mr. Davenport looked at each of his children in turn, his wife, Amy-Rose. “Is there anything else I should know?” Olivia started suddenly at his tone. It was almost...playful? She looked to Helen and John and saw the same confusion she felt. There was plenty more, but as if by some unspoken pact, the three of them assured their father that he was caught up on the major developments during his absence. *Could his trip to London have changed him so much?* She looked to her mother, who gripped the family dog to her chest.

“Do you mind if I remove my jacket—let it dry?” asked Mr. Stone.

“We could call Hetty—” said Mrs. Davenport.

Mr. Stone shook his head. “No need to disturb her. If it’s all right by you, I can leave it on the back of the chair.” At Mr. Davenport’s approval, he removed his jacket, revealing broad shoulders. Olivia didn’t dare let herself stare. She tugged at the sleeve of her dress. It suddenly felt hot and close in the room. She glanced around the space that seemed to be shrinking around her.

“I didn’t know you like riding, Mr. Stone,” said Mr. Davenport.

Everett Stone smiled. “It was one of my favorite activities as a child. It’s a shame I don’t have much time for it.”

“We will have to change that!” Mr. Davenport turned his warm expression toward Olivia. “I know of a young lady who quite enjoys riding.”

Olivia’s cheeks burned. She could feel two pairs of eyes on her in addition to her father’s, and it was all she could do to keep up her smile. She most certainly avoided the stares of her siblings, whom she felt grinning at her growing discomfort. *How did you think you could have avoided a situation like this?* It was one small blessing that any unpleasantness would be contained to the present company.

“I’d like a companion,” said Mr. Stone. “Riding and conversation is always enjoyable.” He nodded to Olivia. She felt heat rise to her cheeks and

pool low in her belly at the way he looked at her.

“I agree, Mr. Stone, it is wonderful,” she managed to say.

Washington DeWight watched their exchange, his brows pinched together and chin thrust forward. Olivia imagined him piecing together what Mr. Stone’s presence and her father’s demeanor meant.

“So, you are not quick to join the automobile race, Mr. Davenport?” he asked. His words were directed to her father, but his eyes didn’t leave her face.

Mr. Davenport leaned on his cane. “I think there is something to be said about a well outfitted buggy on a nice spring day. The horseless carriages are fun, of course, but a conversion like that at our factory would require a lot of work. Time. Expense.”

“But they’re not all spring days,” interjected Helen.

“That is why there are covered carriages, my dear,” said her father, sounding more like himself, to her sister’s clear disappointment.

Helen exchanged a look with John and Mr. Stone before she retreated to her corner with Amy-Rose. Olivia noted that Father hadn’t said no. That is what mattered. This small victory would have to suffice for Helen and John until the race. Then he would realize there was more going on than tinkering with an engine.

Edward entered the room. “Dinner is served.”

The family and their guests filed into the dining room and sat in the same groupings in which they’d gathered in the sitting room. Olivia sat to her father’s right. Mr. DeWight to her father’s left. Mr. Stone sat at her other side. The two men stared at each other when they weren’t studying her. Olivia kept her face open and relaxed. Under the table she kneaded her palm with her thumb. Her appetite gone, she picked at the pot roast and mashed potatoes Jessie had prepared. A hearty, flavorful meal her father enjoyed. One she liked as well.

The first half of the dinner passed slowly, with one half of the table avoiding eye contact or conversing with the other. Helen was too excited about the race to truly focus on the details of her party. John and Amy-Rose

managed to sit next to each other. Their heads bent as they whispered words too quietly for Olivia to hear.

“It’s like it says in the *Defender*,” Washington was saying, “ ‘Hope visits us in many forms.’ ”

Olivia’s attention snapped to Mr. DeWight.

Mr. Davenport set his cutlery down. He leaned back in his chair and looked at Mrs. Davenport. “Isn’t that something you said your mother told you?” he asked his wife. Her mother nodded. “Strange for it to appear in a newspaper,” he continued.

Olivia realized that they were speaking about an essay she had written about the charitable work the women’s organizations carried out to serve the poor—work that would no longer be necessary if the government provided the same assistance to its Black citizens as it did their white counterparts.

“Those who speak the truth about such things should be believed,” her father said to Mr. DeWight.

Mr. Stone agreed. “The author highlighted the benefits of clubs and fraternity and sorority in the advancement of Black people. There are many ways to approach a problem. Hope and creativity can be powerful.”

“I’m not saying that the author should not be believed,” said Washington DeWight. “I only say, use your name and stand by your word. Our detractors would only use this ‘Anonymous’ as *proof* that accounts of horrific prison conditions and the infringement of the freedom to protest are false. When there’s no person attached to such statements, where is the credibility?”

Olivia spoke, her voice hoarse and her hands still for the moment. “Isn’t the fact that it was published by the *Defender* enough?”

“No publication is immune to scrutiny, especially one produced in an apartment. No matter how great its impact.” Washington answered. “People against progress will say the accounts of injustice printed in Black papers are exaggeration. For example, take the case of the young Chicago woman who was held after her cousin posted bail. People will say, ‘If she was protesting peacefully, why was she arrested? If bail was paid, why was she

not released?’ They won’t believe the truth of what’s printed. We’re seen as different, not equal. The accounts in these essays will always be challenged if the events and the authors cannot be connected to something or someone tangible.” Washington DeWight’s voice carried across the table. Her mother gripped the arms of her chair.

“You...you do not agree with what the person who wrote that said?” asked Olivia.

Washington sighed. It was a defeated sound. Olivia fought the urge to sink into her chair. “It is not that I disagree with the sentiment. It is that I cannot condone the method.”

“I think it’s brave that the author chose to speak out. They must have chosen to remain anonymous for a reason, and we must respect that and the courage it must have taken to submit their piece at the risk of being found out,” said John.

“It is cowardice,” said Washington. “There’s nobility in what they were trying to do, but it was done from a place of fear.”

“Fear can be a powerful weapon,” said Mr. Davenport. He looked at each of his children. When his eyes settled on Olivia, she *felt* him connect the dots. It was her mother’s phrase that gave her away.

Beside Olivia, Mr. Stone’s hand clenched into a fist. “I believe judging someone so harshly when they may not be present to speak for themselves is truly cowardice,” he said.

“Well”—Washington spread his hands—“if he’d printed his name, our gracious hosts could have invited him to dinner.”

Olivia shook off her disappointment. She had hoped Washington would have felt differently about the pieces, but working in the background was not his way.

When he spoke again, it was with a measured glee directed at Mr. Stone. “And so I shall refrain from further remarks until *Anonymous* chooses to reveal himself *and* joins us at the Davenports’ table.” He held his hands up high as if in surrender. The grin he offered Olivia faded when their eyes met. His gaze then slid to Mr. Stone, and visibly cooled. Everyone else at the table shifted uncomfortably.

Does Washington suspect Mr. Stone wrote the article? Olivia was sure he knew there was something more between her and Everett Stone.

Helen coughed daintily into her napkin. “Mother, I’ve finally settled on what I want to wear for my party. I’m not wearing a veil, I’m not a bride, but a tasteful headpiece that I’ve consented to. Of course, Livy, I’d have you and Mama to see it together with the dress I’ve selected before it’s too late for adjustments.”

Olivia said, “I’d be delighted.” She mouthed *thank you*. Helen’s imperceptible nod was their mother’s cue to pepper her sister with questions. *What happened to the other dresses we bought?* And so on. Such conversation then dominated the table. John updated her father on the state of the Negro League standings. They talked about the upcoming party and the Greenfields’ party and the Giants’ box scores. They even touched on Ruby’s wedding, a much more welcome topic for Helen. Finally, as the dessert course was served, Mr. Davenport called for quiet.

“I’d like to take a moment to thank you, Amy-Rose,” he said. “You have cared for me and this family in many roles, and I am grateful you were here in my time of need.”

“Hear, hear,” chimed Helen.

Amy-Rose blushed, brighter still when she met John’s gaze.

Mr. Stone nodded and his look to Olivia was one of quiet pride. Her spine straightened, and she remembered why she chose to write, the satisfaction she felt when what she put to paper made it to print: To give voice to those who didn’t have one. And why she chose not to sign her name: To let the subjects of her articles, and not her last name, be what sparked the discourse.

Still, it stung that Washington couldn’t get past the anonymity and let the merits of the essays stand on their own. And to assume that the author was a man! That assertion made her want to disclose her identity right then.

But she didn’t dare.

Did she?

No. She’d worked hard on her essays, and valued the time people took to share with her their fears and triumphs and all the words that now lived

in print beside her grandmother's. Her name—it wasn't just *her* name. It was one she shared, one known for ingenuity and tenacity. And wealth. Known for the wealth and privilege she and her family, sitting around this table, now enjoyed.

Olivia watched as a dessert plate appeared at her setting. Tiramisu, a favorite of hers.

But she was too full of indecision to enjoy it.

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CHAPTER 27

Amy-Rose

Amy-Rose stood in front of the green letter box with the midday traffic roaring behind her. Her letter to her sister felt hot in her hand. She had struggled with what to say for a week. In the end, she decided to take Olivia's advice. Her reply would weigh more than her words. So she'd kept it short and simple: *Dear Elizabeth, you have given me a gift more precious than you know. The truth, though difficult to read, has given me courage and a new perspective. If you should ever wish to meet, it would bring me great joy. Your sister, Amy-Rose Shepherd*

Her hand shook as she wrote the last two lines. After years of perceived rejection, the offer to meet Elizabeth Evans scared her. But she realized that in the past few months, she had done a number of scary things. The letter dropped to the bottom of the box with a whisper, a weight lifted off her shoulders.

Amy-Rose squinted against the sun and readjusted her hat. She walked the short distance to the salon and pushed her way in. The bell of the door chimed and Helen Davenport sat exactly where she had left her. "If you're going to occupy the space behind my counter, you are going to work," said Amy-Rose as she handed Helen an apron and deposited the sandwiches she'd picked up from the deli.

"Do I have to wear this?" asked Helen.

“Yes, today is Tuesday. Prep day, and you will not be leaving this salon covered in”—Amy-Rose paused, sizing up the condition of Helen’s plum frock—“more stains than usual.” And just as she expected, Helen glanced down at her dress.

“It’s clean!”

“For now.” Amy-Rose smiled. Helen followed her upstairs, where two of Amy-Rose’s hairdressers were labeling jars. She enjoyed the company. She donned an apron of her own and began to pipe the caramel and banana treatment into the small glass jars. “You know,” Amy-Rose said, “your mother and Olivia will plan this whole party without you if you continue to avoid it.”

“Please, not you too. Livy and Mama are enough. I don’t want a party. I don’t need a party. They’ve planned so many of them, they don’t really need me. The only thing I want a say in is my dress, and I’ve got that sorted out. I am committed to playing my part the day of but until then...”

“So, when you show up one afternoon to a ballroom full of people, what will you do?”

“Run and hide,” her friend answered with a sigh. “At least until my birthday passes?” Helen tapped her chin and stared off. “That may be the best plan I’ve had yet.”

Amy-Rose felt herself lean back as she placed her hands on her hips. The gesture instantly made her think of Jessie, and it warmed her heart to be impersonating the cook. “Yes, and I suppose you’ll have to miss the exhibition race too.”

Helen froze. “I can’t miss the race. Daddy and the board will be there. He’s no longer calling automobiles a passing fancy.”

“Yes, but—”

Helen’s eyes brightened. “The current factory won’t be converted, at least not now. Daddy won’t have it. But the space John bought can be designed from the ground up. It’s a big open space, a blank canvas for us to arrange as we want. Though John’s been cagey about using that too.”

Amy-Rose felt her heart shudder. Her instinct told her that the space John owned but would not use was the property he’d purchased for her after

she'd lost Mr. Spencer's storefront. The same building she'd handed back to him in the midst of their heartbreak.

She shook away the thought. "One way to convince your father that you are ready for more responsibility is to accept the obligations you have now." Amy-Rose leveled a gaze at Helen. "And stop avoiding what's expected of you."

"But if everyone just accepted what was expected of them, there would be no progress." She gestured to the salon. "Your customers and stylists are proof."

It's true that Amy-Rose had achieved the unexpected. Her dream, which she'd spent hours sketching away in a notebook, had become reality—she could touch and smell, and it felt like home. The disappointment of all the setbacks faded, for a moment. They already knew her by name at Binga Bank, but now people held doors open for her at restaurants, *she* was the one called "Miss" and attended to at the boutiques downtown.

"You're right. Many people didn't expect this of me. But I did, Helen. And I didn't avoid my work or commitments along the way." She reached across the table and grasped Helen's hand. "I know you feel as if this party will change things, change you. I'm here to tell you that it won't."

"Yeah, well, you didn't have your mother in your ear talking about hemlines and...Oh, Amy-Rose."

"Don't. My mother and I had our disagreements. I was fifteen and was starting to have my own ideas of how our life should be." Again Amy-Rose imagined what it might be like to have her mother with her now, for her to see what her daughter had accomplished. Her heart ached, though it was briefer this time, as though the loss were easier to carry knowing she had made choices that would make her mother proud. And then there were the letters—proof that Clara Shepherd had experienced great love. She was sure her mother and father would have wanted that for their daughter too.

Before Amy-Rose's thoughts could slide again to John, she smiled at Helen and pinched the young woman's cheek. "Cheer up. Maybe I can pose as an anonymous suiter and sign your dance card during the waltz, and the two of us can hide in the kitchen."

Helen surprised Amy-Rose by throwing her arms around her neck. "Thank you."

"Helen," Amy-Rose said, "have you spoken to Mr. Lawrence?"

Helen withdrew, a dejected look on her face. "Briefly after Sunday service."

Amy-Rose crossed her arms over her chest. "Have you decided to give him another chance?"

Helen blushed. "I've thought about it."

"Helen," said Amy-Rose. "Avoiding communication only makes things worse. Trust me."

"You're as bad as Livy."

"Okay, fine. We won't talk about him. How about Mr. Swift?" Amy-Rose gave Helen a knowing look. She'd spotted the pair and his motorcar parked outside the garage on occasion. "You do an awful lot of laughing together, and you have such a lot in common."

Helen's face puckered.

"*And he's dreamy,*" Amy-Rose added.

Helen smiled then. "I've learned a fair amount from him. We enjoy some colorful exchanges, yes, but harmless fun." Amy-Rose lifted her eyebrows. Helen's gaze fell to the counter. "We have a great time together. I'm not looking for a relationship, though. At least not a romantic one. Do you think a young man and woman can be friends?"

Amy-Rose thought about Tommy. How close and encouraging their friendship was. She was happy to have received his letter congratulating her on the opening of the salon. But oh, how she'd have loved to see him in person. "I do," she answered. Then she thought of John, of how their attraction defied her expectations last spring and, this summer, upended the boundaries she'd created when she first left Freeport.

Helen tilted her head. "Are you thinking of John?" she asked.

At the sound of his name, Amy-Rose's body reacted. She remembered his lips on hers. His woodsy scent. Then his crawling script in the letter he'd written, where he'd said he'd chosen her. She loved him. And she knew he loved her. After sharing some of the contents of her parents' letters

with him at dinner, and revealing to him the existence of her sister, and feeling his joy at these discoveries, something had shifted between them. But so many of her walls still remained. Amy-Rose would not allow him to risk his inheritance when he was so close to achieving everything he'd wanted. And she lacked conviction when it came to Mr. Davenport's evolved opinion. He had said many kind things to her since his return. She had felt the warmth and regard in his words. But he had always been kind to her, and still able to reduce her to what he had said in the garden that night to John—*daughter of a slave owner*. A future where John did not exist beside her was unbearable to imagine, though. She didn't realize her eyes had fluttered closed until Helen let out a loud "*Whoop!*"

"Oh boy, are they right? Is John charming and irresistible?"

Amy-Rose laughed, her face warm. "I suppose so. I—I just don't know how we move forward."

Helen tapped her chin. "May I suggest, communication? A wise young woman once told me"—she looked at her wrist as if at a timepiece—"approximately three minutes ago, that 'avoiding communication only makes things worse.'"

Amy-Rose's laugh was interrupted by Sandra. Her employee placed a box on the table and said. "There's a couple peering through a window downstairs."

Amy-Rose looked at the other stylist. "Were you expecting anyone?" She shook her head. It'd been a long day. She had checked that the sign said *closed* before they'd made their way upstairs. As much as she'd hate to turn anyone away, none of them were up to taking on a client that afternoon. Amy-Rose removed her apron and descended the stairs. "I'm sorry, we're closed today," she called as she approached the door.

A couple parted when she pulled it open. "Mr. King?" The gentleman removed his hat and grinned. He ushered his companion in before him, squeezing past Amy-Rose before proper introductions could be made.

"Miss Shepherd," said Mr. King. "Congratulations again."

"My apologies. I'm not taking any clients today. Perhaps you and your friend can come back tomorrow?" Amy-Rose squinted. The woman was

looking around, and as she turned on her heel toward Amy-Rose, the face of Ruth Davis stole her breath. “Miss Davis?”

Her mentor’s daughter took in the space again, her eyes gleaming. “Quite the salon you have.”

“Yes,” said Amy-Rose. Her stomach tightened as Miss Davis walked slowly across the floor. She watched her pick up a jar, open it, breaking the seal.

“Smells delicious,” said Miss Davis, closing the jar partway and placing it on one of the vanities.

“The New York socialites love it,” added Mr. King.

“Thank you.” A shuffle of steps to her back alerted Amy-Rose to Helen’s presence. “Like I explained to Mr. King, I’m not taking any clients today. I’d be happy to schedule you for an appointment tomorrow.” Amy-Rose waited for her response. The way Ruth Davis examined the salon made Amy-Rose uneasy. This was like a scene from a nightmare.

“Why, Miss Davenport, you are a devoted friend. Helping Amy-Rose here.” Ruth Davis gestured to the apron Helen held in her hand. She dropped her voice to an audible whisper. “I know my mother supported you in your endeavor here, Miss Shepherd. If you do need an infusion of cash, I would be happy to assist—for a percentage of the ownership, of course.” She shook her head. “I’d hate to think you were struggling to bring in enough staff to maintain this beautiful place she helped you build.”

Helen’s fists clenched around the apron and her lips parted.

Amy-Rose came to stand between her friend and Miss Davis. “That is very kind of you to offer, but I’m doing just fine.” Her face felt tight with the strength of her smile. This was *her* salon and she was going to keep it. All of it.

“I do admire your tenacity,” said Miss Davis. “I hear you have a great big birthday coming up, Miss Davenport,” she said to Helen.

“Unfortunately,” said Helen, her voice tight. Her eyes were hard.

“Aw, don’t sound like that! It’s true getting older isn’t the best thing for a woman, but age has its advantages. Why, look at your girl Amy-Rose. She is a strong independent woman, *running her own salon and hair care line.*”

Miss Davis tapped a manicured nail on the counter. "Birthdays get you one day closer to freedom and the life you want."

"How did you learn of Helen's birthday?" asked Amy-Rose, carefully controlling her tone.

"It's one of the hottest tickets in town," said Benjamin King. "You're either really lucky or really smart to befriend not only the Davenports, but also the Tremaines."

"And also to befriend my mother," said Miss Davis.

"Lucky," answered Amy-Rose.

Ruth Davis nodded. "I'm afraid I'm in meetings all day tomorrow. My hair will have to wait for another day."

"That's too bad," said Amy-Rose. "Maybe some other time." Mr. King tipped his hat and had the grace to look apologetic as he escorted Miss Davis from the salon. The hairs at the nape of Amy-Rose's neck stood on end. She sensed this visit was intended to rattle her. She looked down at her shaking hands and pulled them into fists. This salon was hers, and no one would take it from her.

CHAPTER 28

Helen

Helen met Mrs. Milford's sharp gaze from where the older woman perched at the top of the bleachers. Her tutor had found the single patch of shade, and now fanned herself furiously with one hand while propping her book open with the other. "Are you sure," Mrs. Milford began, "that you would not have been more comfortable meeting this Swift character at your brother's garage as usual? Or at the offices downtown, since your father is now condoning this behavior?"

"It's a beautiful day, Mrs. Milford." Helen stood a few bleachers down from her chaperone. "You did say it's important for a young lady to get fresh air and exercise."

"Yes, however, the racetrack was not what I had in mind."

"It's full of potential," said Helen. The venue was mostly empty. The custodian moved up and down the bleachers, retrieving waste from the receptacles. "I do appreciate you coming with me."

Her companion nodded and arranged herself. Her movements were regal, out of place on a dusty track. Though her skirt was still black as ink, Mrs. Milford's blouse was a stiff and luxurious blue-gray beneath a black linen jacket. It was the first time Helen had seen her in something other than the somber shade. She imagined she would never achieve Mrs. Milford's level of grace. And she was more than content with that fact. She straightened her skirts now and made her way to the track.

Helen ducked inside the garage, savoring the break from the blazing sun. She walked to the black prototype of the Davenport horseless carriage and marveled at the work she'd done. *They'd* done, she corrected herself. She would never hear the end of it if John and Swift heard that slip. And without them and the twins, her dreams might never have been realized.

She slowed as she approached the vehicle. Ransom Swift was reaching over the closed door. The hem of his shirt had ridden up to reveal a thin strip of skin above the waistband of his pants. Helen felt an odd flip in her chest. It was not him she thought of, though, but Mr. Lawrence. The memory of their first encounter in the Tremaines' backyard came to her—these thoughts of him made her temperature rise and a place deep and low ache. She believed him when he said he loved her.

“Oh, don't say you've fallen for it too?”

“Excuse me?” she asked.

“My irresistible charm.”

Helen rolled her eyes. “I assure you. I can resist.”

“You wound me,” Mr. Swift cried, and clutched his chest. He *was* dreamy. His angular face, full lips, his sense of humor—the perfect recipe for a heartbreaker.

“I think you'll survive.”

“I hope you're not implying I've lost my touch.”

“Of course not. Do you want me to fetch a few of your adoring fans?” Helen gestured to a smattering of female spectators beyond the fencing. She wondered what it must feel like to move through the world as he did, working where and when you want. The advice Miss Davis had given her rang in her ears. Her birthday was tomorrow. So was her party. And as another year older, maybe she would have more autonomy. Livy did. *I could be openly courted by Mr. Lawrence.* It would be messy, but it could be done.

Ransom Swift's smile changed, a new look in his eye, something like acceptance. “I think I will bask in their admiration once our work here is done.” He propped his hip on the door and wiped his hands with the cloth

that had been tucked into his back pocket. "I take it your brother won't be joining us."

Helen shook her head. "No, he and Mr. Stone are putting the final touches on the proposal for Daddy."

"And you think this will work?"

"Yes. All he's ever seen are the motorcars on the street, or the broken ones John brought home. When he sees this?" Helen walked around the Davenports' first horseless carriage. It was lacquered in black and had the golden Davenport crest on the doors. It was polished to a high shine and the red leather and wood trim interior bore the same attention to detail as the most expensive carriages in the company. "What my father holds dear is the luxury and status our carriages convey. If we can show him that we can make more than a stock car, that an automobile produced by the Davenport Carriage Company could have just as much luxury—"

"He won't be able to say no."

Helen laughed. "Exactly. If this is successful, it will be a very short proposal."

He glanced over his shoulder at the engine before grinning back at her. "All you have to worry about is that party of yours."

Helen groaned. "It's tomorrow night."

"I'm aware. So, you've settled on a dress then. What?" he asked when she threw him a look. "You and your siblings talk a lot. I'm looking forward to seeing you all dolled up."

"I'm not. How will they take me seriously as a part of the company dressed like a princess instead of a partner?"

A crease appeared between his brows. "These men been on the board long?"

Helen laughed. "Yes, for as long as I can remember."

"Then some of them might remember you as a little girl, your gap-tooth smile, an awkward adolescent. My guess is that this may be the most grown they've ever seen you."

Helen's stomach flipped. She had not thought of it that way, and now she was reviewing every embarrassing moment she'd had at the gatherings

her parents hosted over the years. There were too many to count. “That eight-year-old with the bike I took apart...” she said, referring to the story about herself she’d told Ransom. “His father is on the board.”

“See?” said Ransom Swift. “You’ve got nothing to worry about with him. You can only improve his perception. People keep saying there’s a force to be reckoned with underneath all that grease. Show them.”

Helen cracked a smile. “So what if there is?”

“Hey, I didn’t say I didn’t like it.” He followed her gaze to the motorcar. “Wanna ride?”

Helen looked at him, a mop of curly hair and lean forearms and a smile. Oh, that smile...*He’ll break a lot of hearts before he settles down.* “Definitely.”

Without waiting for him to help her, she rounded the back of the vehicle and slid into the seat. The upholstery was supple leather, the smell of it amazing. Far better than any of the horse-drawn hacks or motorized cabs all over the city. She clasped her hands on her lap, resisting the urge to pick at her nails. Swift took his sweet time. He wiped down each tool and lovingly placed each one back in its place. Helen’s toes bounced in the foot well while she muttered under her breath.

“You asked me if I wanted to ride. Are you deliberately trying to drive me mad?”

“Not at all, Miss Helen.”

Helen let the familiar comfort of the Davenport carriage leather cradle her. She marveled over the difference. In front of her, an engine replaced the driver and horse she was used to. The vantage point was lower to the ground, the space, more intimate. The seat shifted at her side as Swift climbed in. He turned to her and waggled his eyebrows.

“Ready?” He grinned and shifted the automobile into gear. At first, nothing happened. Helen began to panic. *What have we done?* She couldn’t imagine a world where this didn’t work. Just before she had a complete panic attack, the automobile lurched forward out of the garage.

The sun was blinding. The wind whipped her hair around her face. She slapped a hand on top her head to save her hat and gripped the side of the

vehicle. Dust kicked up in their wake as Ransom Swift continued to accelerate. He pushed hard on the gas pedal. Helen could hear the stress on the engine increase and the way it adjusted to accommodate the load. It was everything she'd dreamed of.

"This is incredible!" she yelled.

Swift grinned wider. In no time, they completed a loop. Then another. And another. Too soon, Ransom began pointing the motorcar toward the garage. Helen felt a surge of dismay. She nudged him and gestured to pull over.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

Helen's ears were ringing and her mouth was dry. She felt as though her veins sparked with electricity. It made her bold. "My turn," she said.

A smile split Ransom's face. He had barely popped open the door before Helen slid behind the driver's wheel. She removed her hat and tucked it under her skirt. *A few wrinkles won't hurt it.* She looked into the mirror as Ransom walked around the vehicle. Then she curled her fingers over the steering wheel. She felt the purring of the engine in her whole body. Helen inhaled the pungent scents of fuel and grease, the newly stitched leather, the freshly cut grass. At last seated beside her, Ransom Swift placed a hand on hers, a signal to go, but the gearshift was already moving in her grip—as was her foot on the gas.

"Whoa!" he yelled. The motorcar lurched forward. "Gentle." Swift's hands now clung to the seat and side of his door.

"No need to overreact," she said, relishing the anticipation in her voice. She licked her lips and applied a fraction of the pressure to the pedal she had previously. The car's response was slower but steady.

"Better," said Swift, but his words drowned in the growing roar of the engine as the wind parted around them and Helen pushed the pedal harder, shifting into a higher gear. She was driving! It was more fantastic than she'd dreamed. *I did this!* Her eyes stung. Her chest was tight. A laugh burst free, carried off by the wind. Helen didn't see the surprised looks of the few others on the track, only the track itself as she completed her first stilted lap, followed by a smoother second and an utterly rapturous third.

After they finally pulled into the garage, Helen sprinted up the stands to where Mrs. Milford sat, her mentor's lips pressed into a firm line, and Helen whooped at the blue sky above. *This was going to work.*

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CHAPTER 29

Ruby

The crystal chandeliers in the Davenports' ballroom sparkled so brilliantly, Ruby practically had to squint. Dinner was delicious, as was usual for a Davenport event, and Helen's eighteenth birthday celebration was no exception. The guests had gathered in heightened anticipation to see the youngest Davenport make her debut. Dressed in their finery, they sipped champagne and pinched pastries off passing plates with white-gloved hands. It was the black-tie event of the season and the honored guest would be the last to make her way into the ballroom.

All were curious to see the lady Helen had become. Ruby, being very well-acquainted with her best friend's sister, was more interested in the gown she wore. When the ballroom doors finally opened, there was a collective gasp. Helen appeared on the arm of her father. Her grand entrance was in the white flouncing gown, with no ornaments aside from her headpiece, as was her request. She winked at Ruby, who was floating above the clouds. The dress she had designed for Helen was magnificent. Mrs. Jennings's work impeccable. Helen was the perfect young woman to model their creation. Ruby stood taller and let this feeling fill her up. After a tender dance for the debutante and her father, Helen, escorted by John, led a choreographed number with a few courting couples of their set. The youngest Davenport proved to be light on her feet, and the revelry of everyone present resumed.

Ruby had danced with several gentlemen already, including Harrison's brother, who apologized to Ruby for his behavior earlier in the summer. "I should know better and trust my brother's judgment," he said. "And my sister's. I saw how the two of you got on at the garden party. She's shy, so thank you for that." He confided in Ruby that Harrison had almost been taken in by an opportunistic young lady, and that he wanted nothing but love and happiness for his brother—the same kind of love his parents shared. Ruby accepted, willing to move on for Harrison's sake.

An opportunistic young lady, she thought, but her fiancé's arrival at her side pulled her out of her thoughts.

"Jeremiah," he said. "I trust you kept all your embarrassing childhood stories about me to yourself."

Jeremiah Barton pinched the bridge of his nose. "I knew I was forgetting something."

Ruby laughed. "He was telling me how lucky you are to have found me, and I do agree. I'd also like to hear these stories, Jeremiah."

"Maybe another time," said Harrison. His hand found the curve of her back, his fingertips a gentle caress over the slippery fabric. She looked down at the wine-colored evening dress she wore. There were cutouts at the shoulder and a loose-fitting bodice at the bust that cinched in at the waist. For Ruby, it meant her figure was on full display, though the bits were properly covered. It had all the best features of the modern styles, including the higher hemline, but it also had the best parts of older styles. It was Ruby's vision stitched to life, and she loved the way she felt in it: brave and beautiful.

She sighed. "I miss all the excitement of an extravagant ball at home. Listening to the household cleaning and polishing in preparation, the mouth-watering smells from the kitchens, Mother and Papa arguing over who changed the seating arrangements. All of it. I even miss the receiving lines and being able to see all the glamorous gowns up close."

Olivia arrived as Ruby finished reminiscing. "Hmm, I remembered a lot of yelling, stomping feet," she said.

Ruby laughed and bumped her friend with her hip. “You weren’t so bad once you learned how to dance.”

Olivia gasped, feigning surprise, before joining her. It felt good to laugh. For a moment, Ruby forgot the disappointments of these past weeks. Her mother had thawed a bit and, as predicted, her father had returned to work and his clubs. He spoke to Ruby in passing. Good mornings and evenings. Please pass the salt. While her mother labeled it as progress, it was too small and too slow for Ruby’s taste. Her parents were across the room now, entertaining the Bartons, their faces more welcoming than she’d seen but, then again, there were many pairs of eyes around for whom to perform.

Olivia gave her a knowing look. “Helen looks wonderful. And so do you! People keep stopping me to ask if I know where you got your dress. And Helen’s. They’re a hit!”

Ruby batted her eyelashes and stood taller. “I think they’re my best designs yet.” She winked. “Lucille’s—Mrs. Jennings’s attention to detail is unmatched. Marshall Field and Company has made a mistake in not capitalizing on her skills beyond tailoring and alterations. It has, however, been a challenge to find certain colors or fabrics.” She sighed. “Olivia, it has been the best of experiences.”

“Hey!” said Harrison, face alight with false indignation.

Ruby squeezed his hand. “Not including you, of course.” Olivia’s words reminded Ruby of all that she had to be proud of and excited for. “I must thank Helen again for our first order and sale! Mrs. Jennings said it was twice what she makes in a week. Hopefully she won’t have to return to that textile factory if they reopen, *and* she could leave Marshall Field’s. Oh! And Amy-Rose offered to have a mannequin displayed in her waiting room that can be seen from outside.”

“It will be a great way to attract more business!” said Olivia. “Here come some of your admirers.”

Odette approached quickly, with Agatha and Bertha in tow.

“Is this one?” Odette asked by way of greeting. “You said you would be wearing a number!”

“It is,” said Ruby. Pride coursed through her veins.

“Oh! This is wonderful.” Odette let out a squeak that had Harrison backing away in search of his friends.

“I must have one,” said Agatha. “I could use something to make my closet more...exclusive.” She dropped her voice lower. “Perhaps you could name it after me?”

Ruby beamed. This was exactly what she’d wished for. But she knew to keep the interest, she had to keep calm. “I’ll take it under consideration, Agatha.” She turned to Olivia. “Champagne?”

Olivia nodded.

“I’ll get it,” said Ruby. She floated over to the refreshments table. This time she let the eyes around her linger, hoping that their stares would turn into sales. The right kind of attention can get you far, and she hoped this would bring her name right to the office door of Mr. Price. She couldn’t wait to tell Mrs. Jennings. Excitement bubbled up in her chest, snappier than the two flutes of champagne she collected off the table.

“Ruby, you look mighty fine tonight.”

The smile on Ruby’s face froze. “Carter, good evening. Are you enjoying the party?”

“It is quite the spectacle.”

“I think it’s magical,” said Ruby, surveying the ballroom. “Have you seen Harrison? He went to find you.”

Carter shrugged and looked at her dance card at her wrist. “It appears that many of the young ladies are taken.”

“That’s not true. There are plenty of young ladies near the dessert table under the watchful eyes of their mamas, just waiting for an eligible bachelor to come along.” Ruby’s tone let him know that she did not count him among the suitors. She moved to her right.

Carter easily fell into step beside her. “It’s too bad the garden party was so crowded. We could have had some fun. I know Harrison did.”

“I had a splendid time with Anne-Marie, and what do you know of Harrison’s day?” Ruby thought back to Sunday service the morning after the Learys’ garden party. Harrison had apologized for getting caught up at work and said he wished he could have spent the day with her. It was not an

odd statement. So why did Carter allude to something more? “Carter, do not be cryptic.”

“After work, our boy had a nightcap with Odette. She left the Learys’ shortly after you did and didn’t come home until much later. Though I suppose you don’t mind, considering how chummy you are with John Davenport.”

Ruby shook her head. She didn’t understand. There was too much Carter had said. Why would Harrison have drinks with Odette? She scanned the room and saw that Harrison and Odette were still where she’d left them, chatting with Olivia.

“Don’t be so put out. My sister and Harrison dated before he moved here to Chicago. He wanted to experience big-city living.... Didn’t he tell you?” Carter asked.

Ruby’s mouth had dried up. She drained one of the champagne flutes. Blinking, she tried to clear her mind. *Harrison and Odette?*

Carter took the empty glass from her and set it down on a tray. “Chin up, Ruby. Any man would be lucky to have you.” She could smell Carter’s sharp cologne. He had led her from the edge of the ballroom to the hallway leading to the study. Now she felt the fabric of his sleeve on her shoulder. He drew closer. His lips were a breath from hers when she heard Harrison. “Ruby?” He and Odette had followed them.

Harrison’s voice unlocked her muscles and she pushed Carter away. The churning in her chest bubbled over. She glanced from Odette to Carter. “I’m not sure what game the two of you are playing, but do it somewhere else.”

The flinty gleam in Harrison’s eyes changed his whole face. Ruby took his outstretched hand and pulled him to the center of the dance floor. As the music picked up, she allowed him to draw her to him, closer than they had since the rumors began. And in defiant view of anyone who cared enough to notice. She and Harrison would be wed soon. She vowed to waste no more time and energy.

Let them talk.

CHAPTER 30

Olivia

Olivia had waited for Ruby to return with their drinks, and then it was time for her next dance: Mr. Stone, in his new tuxedo, had taken her into his arms and together, they now turned across the dance floor, enveloped in the faint scent of mint. For once, her parents let her enjoy her evening without their quiet suggestions and thinly veiled attempts at matchmaking. However, there was one gentleman waiting in the wings for his name to come up on her dance card. Until it was Washington's turn, though, Olivia would enjoy this dance with Mr. Stone.

"I think this is the biggest birthday party I've attended," said Mr. Stone.

It was a wonderful party. Lively and well-attended, despite Helen's indifference. And her sister had transformed. With the race on the horizon, Helen Marie Davenport was on a mission to be exemplary.

The Davenport motorcar was ready and waiting. Their father and the board had agreed to Helen and John's terms: View the motorcar in action and give fair consideration to the proposal. Their father promised to keep an open mind, though he still harbored doubts that the company's customers would want to abandon what they had always known.

Helen stood with their mother and father now, conversing with the Andrews family. Olivia noticed how her sister watched the entrance to the ballroom. Helen, to her credit, laughed and appeared attentive to her guests. She'd danced with the eligible young men and kept the boredom she

usually let show at these events from her expression—though Olivia did notice the faces she pulled over her shoulder at Mr. Swift. Olivia had made sure it was common knowledge that Etta Lawrence was the unattached *cousin* of Mr. Lawrence. And she held out hope that her sister would soon find happiness.

“I heard the test drive went well,” said Mr. Stone.

Olivia exhaled. “I hope for their sake it works.”

“You are part of a very determined and inventive family.” His eyes found hers, smiling their secret smile. “I doubt there’s any obstacle that a Davenport cannot overcome.”

Her cheeks warmed, and she welcomed the weight of his hand at her back.

“We are determined,” she said with a smile. When she finally spotted Jacob and Etta Lawrence, she also saw Ruby, forever in tune, approaching the pair to welcome them. Her friend threaded her arm through Etta’s and guided the young woman to the table of ladies her age. From her vantage point on the dance floor, Olivia watched Mr. Lawrence find her parents. The three of them huddled together. Her grip tightened on Mr. Stone’s when he tried to turn. And a good thing. Her mother and father both stiffened and looked to where Helen stood with Amy-Rose.

Mrs. Davenport thawed first. She was speaking, that much Olivia could tell in the gaps created by the dancers around them. Then she saw it! Jacob Lawrence approached Helen and bowed slightly before her. The expression on Helen’s face was one of cool aloofness, but Olivia could see the way her sister’s lips parted.

Olivia smiled at Mr. Stone. She’d leave her sister to her moment. “I’ve selected the topic for my next article,” she said to him.

“You’ve narrowed it down, then? Last we spoke, the options were multiplying.”

“I’m going to write about the suffragist march, about the need for women to have a say in those who govern.” *And this time, sign my name below the text.* She’d thought long and hard about what Washington had said at dinner. It wasn’t so different from how he’d challenged her when

they'd first met. It was leveraging her name. But she would go one step further than marching this time—not stop at the end of the street or the door of the charity, but up the steps of the city and state buildings where the decisions were made. Penning her name would be the start.

“I think that’s a fantastic idea.” The song ended and Mr. Stone bowed his head. His glasses slid down his nose and he reached up to adjust them.

She thought of telling him her plan now. *Or it could be a surprise.* Instead, she settled on sharing what interested her. “Later, I will write one about public defenders and the clients they represent. Oh! And the growing string of Black-owned businesses downtown.”

He laughed and held her closer. Olivia breathed him in, and wanted nothing more in that moment than to taste the mint on his breath. She looked at his mouth. When her gaze met his, she saw the desire she felt reflected in his eyes. His full lips parted as the music started again. The couple next to them bumped his shoulder, jolting them apart.

“Thank you, Mr. Stone.” She took a step backward, and glanced at her dance card. Only a short break until the next song. Then her dance with Washington was set to begin. She excused herself, reluctantly, smiling at Mr. Stone, feeling the dampness at her temples. Her fingers tingled and she searched the crowd for Ruby. She couldn’t wait to tell her best friend how well her night was going. *But first.* A little powder for her face was needed. The room off the ballroom was for guests and already occupied. Olivia knew it was rude to disappear during a party, but she would only be a few moments. *Who will notice?*

Olivia made it back to the foyer where the painting of the two boys in the field hung and the grandfather clock loomed. Just as she climbed the first step, Washington DeWight appeared from the hallway to the kitchen.

“Washington!” Her hands pressed to her chest.

“Olivia, you look...” He paused and held the lapels of his tuxedo. “Lovely.”

“Thank you,” she said. “You look very handsome yourself.”

He studied her from across the foyer like he was committing her face to memory. Then he moved, the music from the ballroom swallowing his

footfalls as each carried him closer to her. Still flustered from her dance, his nearness reignited the heat she felt. Confused but unable to pull her eyes from him, she didn't move. Not when he brushed away a lock of her hair. Or when his fingers grazed her collarbone. Not even when he glanced over his shoulder, turned back to her on the step, and tipped his head up to kiss her.

Olivia's mind went blank, floating in the pine scent of him, the familiar warmth of his mouth on hers. She knew she should stop. What she was doing was not fair. And there was the danger of being seen.

Knowing what you should do and actually doing it are two different things, she thought.

She pulled away. "Washington."

"That was inappropriate but I don't regret it. I miss you and how things were between us."

"There's something you should know." She was truly breathless now. How could she explain the fact she had feelings for him *and* Mr. Stone?

"And now your parents are beginning to see me," he continued. "I think it's just a matter of time before they realize what we can accomplish together. It's a great start that they're aware of the activism you currently do."

"Mr. Stone and I—"

He took both her hands in his. "I know. He works for your father. He's not rich like Lawrence, but I can see the appeal." He was talking about Mr. Stone as if he'd decided all of her reservations for her. "He's a safe choice, Olivia."

Though Washington was wrong about Jacob Lawrence, he was right about Mr. Stone. He *was* the safe choice. But so was Olivia. She had found a calling for which she was passionate. It was not thrill-seeking like auto-racing. It was not creative in the way of fashion or hairdressing. *Though it could be*, she realized. It was not full of travel and speeches and crowds and danger. It was not the way Washington DeWight would choose. But his way left space for little else.

She stepped down from the stair. “Washington, do you plan to stay in Chicago?”

“For a time,” he said, not pausing a moment, “then back to DC, and maybe Philadelphia again. Tulsa.”

“Then back here?”

Olivia watched his features change.

“Do you dream of buying a house, building a home, nurturing a family and a community? Watching them grow and change under your care?”

Washington’s expression lost some of its fire. “You mean, if I intend to make Chicago my home.” He looked at their clasped hands, then up at her face, his own full of sincerity and eager determination. “You can be my home, Olivia.” Her heart raced. In his face was everything she’d waited so long to see. It was better than she’d imagined. All guile and honey-coated talk stripped away. She imagined their life together, fighting for change. A campaign that would evolve but never end. His words took their time to sink in. For Olivia, home was Chicago, it was Freeport Manor and her family, her friends. But for Washington DeWight, home could never be a place. It would always be an idea. They could not share the home she’d always envisioned for her future.

Before she could respond, Mr. Stone’s voice cut through the silence. “I’ll place it right here, Mrs. Johnson,” he said, laying a fascinator on the table below the painting. Olivia turned in time to see him assisting her mother’s friend.

“Thank you, dear,” said Mrs. Johnson. She patted Mr. Stone’s arm and tottered away.

As soon as she was out of earshot, Mr. Stone turned and said, “I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised.” His face looked stricken, his gaze falling to their clasped hands, how they stood so close, perhaps close enough to disrupt the rouge on her lips, to transfer it to Washington’s.

Mr. Stone turned and began to make his way back to the party.

“Everett, wait.” Olivia rushed passed Washington. Her heart pounded in her ears. Foggily, she realized she called out to him by his first name. She had never done so before and if she was overheard... *What have I done?*

When Mr. Stone spun to face her, the hurt on his face had magnified. “Mrs. Johnson mentioned the two of us were strolling in the park together, that your chaperone let you...wander?”

“We went to talk. After outpacing Mrs. Milford, we lost our way.” Olivia did not say what happened next, but she was sure that the heat that flooded her face was enough.

“Instead of being honest, you kept this from me?”

Olivia’s heart felt like it had fallen to the ground. She and Mr. Stone had not talked about what was happening between them since that afternoon on the porch, when he had planted the seed in her mind that writing could be another way to use her voice.

“I think I have my answer,” said Mr. Stone. “We were meant to be friends first. Always.”

Olivia stood speechless. She watched his gaze travel from hers to a point just behind her. Washington had followed them. Shame burned her face.

Mr. Stone bowed his head. “Thank you for the dance, Miss Davenport. I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening.” He left then, taking with him a piece of her that she had not fully realized she’d given. Not till now. A group of guests entered the hall, and she kept her feet rooted to the floor as she carefully wiped her face. Their laughter grated. Her smile was brittle as she attempted to hide the turmoil mounting in her chest.

Washington DeWight stood beside her. “Some distance will do you good. George has decided to head back to the capital at the end of the month. Hetty can come along as your companion so your parents can rest assured that you’re well taken care of.”

As the ballroom opened before them, and the hundreds of guests gathered to celebrate her sister laughed and floated across the dance floor, Olivia knew these moments were not ones she would trade away. She knew Everett Stone was not one she would trade away. “The capital?”

“Yes, that’s where all the action is.” Washington placed her hand into the crook of his elbow and began walking them back into the party. His description of their future, filled with travel and activism, tripped off his tongue as if it were decided. There was no talk of marriage or family, of her

charitable work or her writing, which he still knew nothing about, of her family or a return to Chicago. It sounded exciting and rewarding, perhaps fulfilling. But it wasn't everything she wanted. It was a life full of adventure *and* compromise—mostly on her end, from the sound of it.

She was no more ready to leave Chicago than she had been two months ago.

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CHAPTER 31

Amy-Rose

“Are you still cross with me?” asked Amy-Rose. Helen looked at her. The scowl she tried to keep on her face melted and made Amy-Rose laugh. “It’s your birthday—I had to start with a fresh press,” Amy-Rose said. “And if you had sat still, you’d be fine.”

“You didn’t have to maim me!” Helen said. Her words had little bite but she spoke loud enough to draw some attention.

She was the belle of the ball, and Amy-Rose had to admit she enjoyed watching Helen rise to the occasion. She’d taken her time pressing Helen’s hair earlier in the evening, pulling it back to the crown of her head. “And if you’d turned in early like I’m sure Olivia told you to, you would not be so tired now.”

“Yeah, yeah,” said Helen. The younger girl leaned against Amy-Rose’s shoulder and watched the sea of people crowded into the Davenports ballroom dancing to the band. “I just wish this day hadn’t come so soon.”

Amy-Rose laughed. “You should enjoy your night.”

“As should you. Why aren’t you dancing with John? I know he’s been daft, but he tries.”

“Don’t be so harsh. He chose himself too.” Amy-Rose looked to where John stood. He was speaking with Louis Greenfield, animated and bright.

Helen snorted. “Pretty sure he’s chosen you. You are the only person in your way.”

“Helen!” Mrs. Milford scolded her young charge.

The birthday girl flinched and apologized. She began chatting with her tutor. Their words faded to a buzz, lost in the music that seemed to grow more muffled as John made his way to where they stood. Amy-Rose tried her best not to stare at him. She didn’t want her gaze to linger on the way the jacket hugged his shoulders.

Abruptly, Amy-Rose turned and started for the refreshments table. She paused to let a member of the hired party staff pass with a spent tray, and caught a glimpse of her reflection in the mirror above the mantel. Her hair curled down the middle of her back, tied with a fuchsia ribbon that matched her gown. She realized she was the same age her mother was when Clara fell in love. A secret, complicated, and beautiful love. *They were lucky enough to find each other, yet not so lucky to enjoy a life well lived*, she thought.

Mrs. Davenport, to her surprise, fell into step beside her. “I wanted to thank you for helping Helen, Amy-Rose. Not just with her hair.” Mrs. Davenport guided them to a stop at the edge of the dance floor. “I think Mr. Davenport and I see how hard she tried to be ready for this night, which would not have been possible without her friendship with you.”

“Oh.” Amy-Rose was caught off guard. “Well, Helen is dear to me, Mrs. Davenport. Like a sister. She and Olivia both. I couldn’t imagine it any other way.”

Her friend’s mother placed a gentle hand on Amy-Rose’s. “Clara was a wonderful woman, and we are grateful to have known her—and you.” Mrs. Davenport looked over at the group of young gentlemen, laughing and carrying on, John included. “We had always pictured him with a daughter of a close friend. We were wrong about which one.” With one final squeeze around Amy-Rose’s waist, Mrs. Davenport swished away. In her wake, she left Amy-Rose with a hope she had dared not nurture. When she glanced back at Mrs. and Mr. Davenport, they seemed to be caught up in an intimate exchange of their own.

Amy-Rose again found John across the room. He looked up, and his eyes seared right through her. She recalled an afternoon tangled together in

the washing under the clothesline, nights whispering their dreams under a sky full of stars, and very carefully, she held the possibility of a future morning, spent waking beside each other.

Why wasn't she dancing with him indeed.

Amy-Rose drew a breath and pulled back her shoulders. Chin level with the floor, she walked with purpose, tamping down the insecurities that rose in her as she closed the distance between them. Stopping before John, she greeted his friends, her voice steady. She turned to one in particular. "Good evening, Mr. Greenfield." She looked him in the eye, once a maid, now a businesswoman. She recalled his derision, not so long ago, and remembered to stand taller.

"Miss Shepherd," Greenie said, having the decency to look deeply uncomfortable. "Lovely to see you. You're looking...very well." The last came out in a bit of wheeze.

"Thank you, Greenie." Turning to John she said, "Mr. Davenport, would you care to dance?"

Recognition shifted across John's features. She knew then that he remembered the painful night months ago, the courage of the leap she took now, and the trust she placed in him to catch her. John took a step back, his friends restless behind him. He bowed slightly, and extended his hand to her. When he looked into her eyes, the change in him was small, a mixture of tenderness and relief, but for Amy-Rose, it was everything. She reached out to meet him. And he broke eye contact to take her satin-gloved hand.

"Miss Shepherd," he said, "it would be my honor." He kissed the back of her hand, sparking a wave of heat from her knuckles to her shoulder. She had dreamed of this moment so many times over so many days, and had pushed it down, pushed it away, just as many. John waited now, allowing her to decide. Amy-Rose had run from him before. She would not do so again. A step forward was all it took. They walked together, hands clasped between them.

"I'm glad you asked me to dance," he said.

"Why didn't you ask *me*?"

He looked at their joined hands, which he now placed on his chest, over his heart. "So you could enjoy your night. So you could choose if and when you wanted me. So you could be sure you trusted me, after everything."

She thought of the few gentlemen who'd asked her to dance tonight, the novelty of courtship she had only witnessed from the fringes before, where her only expectation was to remain invisible and to refill the champagne flutes. The ladies' couch proved to be the epicenter of gossip where the matrons congregated, and the refreshments table, guest-side, was a place of flirtation and dance card negotiations. She wanted only one person on her dance card. And no more negotiations. "Thank you for that," she said simply. She looked up at him. "And I do."

John's face broke into a dimpled smile. "Amy-Rose." His voice cracked.

"John," she said.

And that was all, for now, that they needed to say.

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CHAPTER 32

Helen

Finally, thought Helen, *the night has finally come.*
Now I can get it over with.

And yet her eyes searched the ballroom, looking for one particular face. There was that free space on her dance card, where Amy-Rose had written her cover name, the short reprieve her friend promised should she need it.

He spoke to my parents! Jacob Lawrence had arrived, and declared his intentions to Mr. and Mrs. Davenport. A conversation that was almost as brief as their first dance together. Yes, she'd danced with Mr. Lawrence when he'd first arrived. But it hardly counted as a dance, now did it? It was a fast-paced number that required them to change partners—she'd danced with practically the entire room by the time it was done. Propriety demanded she keep to her card, true to the gentlemen—her guests—who had signed their name to secure her time.

Then there was Ransom Swift, who offered his arm and some stimulating conversation. It was her birthday, and if she couldn't be in the garage tinkering, or the library reading, she could at least have a few moments alone in this sea of people to discuss horseless carriages with one of the few people who understood her.

Mr. Swift required no pleasantries and had no qualms discussing their work under crystal chandeliers while sweeping them across a parquet floor. "I really think with a few minor adjustments, it'll be ready for consumers."

“What’s wrong with my design?” she demanded.

Swift laughed. “I’m just teasing you.” He gave her the full-wattage of his smile. “Are you all business, all the time, Miss Helen? Because this is your party.” Before she could argue, Swift lifted her off her feet, holding her tight against him as he spun her briefly around. Her skirt fluttered around them and she giggled. Giggled! Sometimes she wondered if he was contrary just to provoke her.

When the song ended, some of the elation Helen felt dissipated. She and Swift broke apart, breathing fast. His eyes were bright and alert. The hint of his contagious smile tugged at the corner of his lips. “Your handsome gentleman is waiting for his second dance.”

Jacob Lawrence was indeed waiting. She spotted him now, standing in front of the glittering windows to the back garden. *What would Mrs. Milford say?* “I shouldn’t. My card is full.”

“Your dance card? Toss it.” When the next song began, Swift walked her to where Mr. Lawrence stood and promptly dumped her at the other gentleman’s feet, slipping away with a grin on his face. Helen stumbled to a halt, and Jacob’s hands caught hers.

“I shouldn’t dance with you again,” she blurted.

Jacob Lawrence laughed. “And why is that?”

“There are rules.”

“Where are these rules written?”

Helen looked up at him. “It’s in the manual of politeness.”

Mr. Lawrence tilted his head. “I doubt that’s a manual you’ve read, though I know your fondness for them.”

Helen’s mouth puckered as she realized the game they had fallen into. “I can get the book from Mrs. Milford. She knows the exact page.”

“That won’t be necessary. I think,” he said, holding out his hand, “that if we perform this forbidden waltz, she will tell us.”

Helen laughed. There was every chance Mrs. Milford would find a quiet moment to remind her of her faux pas. “Very well.” She let him lead her to the center of the dance floor where the other couples parted for her, the birthday girl, the debutante. She walked into his embrace, aware of the

many eyes on them. Unlike most of her other partners, with whom she found herself counting the steps, she floated across the floor in Jacob Lawrence's arms. The steady pressure of his hand on her back arched her into the hard plane of his body. *This is definitely not in the etiquette books.* As if reading her mind, he relaxed. A chill skittered over her skin at the loss of the direct contact. She hid her disappointment by taking in the festivities around them.

Nearby, John and Amy-Rose continued to sway in each other's arms, well within sight of her parents, who had now joined them on the dance floor. The Tremaines and the Bartons, Learys and Greenfields, Andrewses and Carters. It began to sink in that anyone who was anyone in Chicago high society was in attendance. And yet, the person she most wanted to celebrate with had found his way back to her.

"The business will come first," she said.

"I have no doubt."

"And we talk about the important things."

"And the uncomfortable ones," he added.

Helen nodded. "Good. This will be a long courtship."

Jacob Lawrence dropped his head so his temple met hers. "It will be worth the wait."

CHAPTER 33

Ruby

It was late. From the way the light slanted through the window, Ruby knew she had slept longer than she should have. She sat up and reached for the sketchpad that had fallen to the floor. When she'd returned from the Davenports, she'd felt inspired. She'd put her thoughts to paper until her eyes wouldn't stay open, and now she woke itching to begin again.

"Miss, should I tell her to go?"

"Oh!" Ruby startled. Margaret hovered over her. It must have been the maid who'd woken her. "Thank you, Margaret— Who's here?"

"Mrs. Jennings is downstairs."

Ruby's room was a mess from the preparations for Helen's party. And what wasn't for her friend's event was for her own wedding. She sprang up from the chaise and shuffled together loose sketches. *Fantastic*, she thought. *I can show Lucille what I've drawn while I fill her in on last night's reactions.* "This is perfect. Margaret, I had one with a ruffled—" Ruby fluttered her fingers around her neck. Her maid handed her the drawing, and Ruby's mind tingled at the thought of seeing it in real life. "Thank you!" She threw on a dressing gown and threw open her bedroom door.

"Our dress is a hit!" Mrs. Jennings exclaimed as Ruby came running down the stairs. She shoved the morning paper in Ruby's face. Ruby squinted at the smudged photo and then the text. In the society pages,

Agatha and Bertha praised the Davenports' party and their wonderful hosts, stating how much they enjoyed seeing the changing fashion trends, including a piece worn and designed by the daughter of a former mayoral candidate, Miss Ruby Tremaine, and the art gracefully carried by debutante Miss Helen Davenport, with design and execution assistance from Miss Tremaine's creative partner, Mrs. Lucille Jennings. Next to a photo of Helen making her grand entrance was one of Ruby, mid-spin in her dress. A coy smile lit her face as she appeared to look over her shoulder at the camera.

"Wonderful!" Ruby couldn't take her eyes off her photo. There she was in black and white—in *her own design*! "Agatha asked me if we'd make one and name it after her. The publicity would change everything, Lucille. It could be just what we need to move forward."

Mrs. Jennings scoffed. She picked up her son, now trying to crawl under the console table, and settled him on her hip. "As if we'd ever make a dress for her."

Ruby frowned. She reread Agatha's description of the night and her dress. They were glowing. "What do you mean?" Mrs. Jennings's tone dampened Ruby's joy. It was a break—one they desperately needed if the buyer from Marshall Field's was correct.

Lucille Jennings's gaze dropped to the floor. She shifted her son to her other side. "I thought you knew." Ruby stared at her until she looked up and began to speak. "Miss Leary is friends with that young woman. Odette Carter. They've been spreading tales about you." She coughed quietly and adjusted her skirt with her free hand. "They've been saying you're about town with gentlemen who are not your betrothed, including John Davenport. They whisper in the tearoom at the store, and in the fitting rooms where others can hear. They're behind what's been said about you, Ruby, what's circled back to your father."

"No," said Ruby. Her chest felt tight. She didn't want to believe that her peers were telling lies about her to anyone who'd listen. Agatha was an opportunist, for sure, and a gossip, but never spouted anything truly malicious. And Odette. Ruby had been nothing but kind to her. Agatha and Bertha had immediately welcomed the newcomer, the three of them

whispering incessantly amongst themselves. It was then that Ruby began to piece together odd coincidences. Odette and Harrison's past relationship kept secret, Odette's flirtatious looks at Ruby's fiancé, and her friendship with Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson, who traveled in her parents' social circle and had the ear of every influential woman over forty. The thought made Ruby feel ill. "If my reputation is ruined, no one would fault Harrison for backing out of our engagement. He'd be a free man, able to pursue a new potential wife."

Mrs. Jennings opened her mouth to argue but then seemed to change her mind. Ruby knew her partner had figured it out correctly. To stem the flow of misinformation, she needed to go to the source. "Thank you, Lucille, for bringing me this." She focused on the happy picture and the positive press their work had garnered. Ruby Tremaine would not be deterred. "And for waking me up. I have a very important social call to make."

• • •

Ruby pounded the knocker of the Carters' residence. "They had better be home," she mumbled. She had arrived in style, of course, except for her manners. Ruby's day dress, pale pink, had a daring flared skirt and fewer petticoats. Her fascinator, parasol, purse, and fan were bright shades of red that accented the paler hue. Margaret, who waited in the carriage, had gathered her hair at the nape of her neck and brushed flat all her stubborn curls.

The door finally swung open. It was Carter. He visored his hand over his eyes squinting. "Ruby, it's always a pleasure to see you."

She pushed past him into the sparse foyer, suppressing the *ick* she felt. "The pleasure is all mine. Is Odette available?" She noted her tone but left it unchecked. The air was thick and sharp, the walls freshly painted, the tasteful eggshell replaced by earth tones too dark to be welcoming.

"I'm right here, Ruby." Odette clipped her earrings into place. She looked fresh-faced and calm. "What a surprise to see you here."

“I understand you and Harrison have a history,” said Ruby. She wanted to pace herself, but she’d had plenty of time to stew in the carriage, and now the words came fast and neat. “I hope *you* understand, Miss Carter, that that is where your relationship with him stays. In the past. Sabotage is beneath you, and your efforts to drive Harrison and me apart will fail.” She cut her eyes to Carter and back to Odette.

The young woman frowned. She took her time in pulling on her gloves and picking up her reticule from the side table. Each movement, purposeful and unhurried, made Ruby more angry. But she knew she was not wrong. She had designed many ways to direct John Davenport into her path on numerous occasions. She was only annoyed she had not seen all this sooner. *You know now*, she thought to herself. “Starting baseless, harmful rumors not only hurt me but also my family. You are new to Chicago, so hear me. This scheme will not work.”

“Miss Tremaine,” said Odette. “Mr. Barton is a grown man, and he can choose how and with whom he spends his time without any input from the pair of us.”

“You’re right,” said Ruby. “I have nothing to worry about. You do. This is a small community. Treachery is not rewarded. There is no space for it given how quickly things can change. Chicago can be your home, but you must earn it.”

• • •

Ruby took a few deep breaths in the carriage. She had one more stop before the morning was done. She alighted at Harrison’s house and smoothed down her dress, trying not to dwell on the haughty way Odette had neither denied the accusations nor defended herself. *Not now*, she scolded herself and knocked at Harrison’s front door. She had said her piece. It was up to Odette to make her next move.

Luckily, Harrison answered, his face lighting up at the sight of her as he pulled her gently into the front hall. Ruby couldn’t help smiling back, feeling suddenly like a lovestruck schoolgirl. Their closeness at Helen’s

party the night before now made her ache for more of him. “Ruby, have I forgotten we had plans today?” They stood closer than propriety would allow, but Ruby would have gladly taken another step had she not heard the voices of his family down the hall. “Have you come to join us for lunch?” But Harrison made no move to escort her to the dining room. His face hovered just inches from hers, as if the same thoughts had crossed his mind. She tilted her face up, felt his cool breath on her cheek, knowing she was tempting fate.

The clatter of cutlery hitting the floor in the other room dispelled the fog of desire that clouded their judgment. They stepped apart.

Ruby recalled the way she’d burst through that door just two months ago, running from a dress fitting to profess her love to Harrison. “No, I just came from the Carters’. Odette was behind the rumors about me, Harrison. She had hoped to win back your heart.”

Harrison’s shoulders deflated. “I didn’t mean to keep my past relationship from you, Ruby.” He scrubbed his hands over his face, looking suddenly wretched. “The two of you had already met, and every time I thought to bring it up, something got in the way. Soon, it felt like too much time had passed. And—”

“Harrison.” She put her hand on his arm. “I just wanted you to hear it from me that I visited them this morning. I don’t want to believe Odette was the one behind the rumors about me, but she didn’t deny them.”

Harrison glanced behind him. “Step outside with me?”

Ruby nodded. She let him take her arm and together they stepped onto the brownstone stoop into the midday sun.

“Anne-Marie told me this morning what happened at the Learys’ garden party,” Harrison said. “I’m sorry for bringing this to you, for what they’ve done....” He shook his head as they walked down the front steps. “The Carters and the Bartons grew up together. One summer, Carter saved Jeremiah from drowning. We had disobeyed—things got out of hand and I almost lost my brother. And although Carter and I grew apart, I see glimpses of the boy I once knew, and I always hope, perhaps foolishly, that he’ll return.” Harrison winced as they came to a stop at Ruby’s carriage.

“Our relationship has changed. I’m not sure I’ve fully grasped what that means until now.”

Ruby’s anger simmered, Harrison’s words easing the heat of it. She knew all too well this feeling he described. He helped settle her in the carriage, and she leaned forward, looking him in the eye. “My father has not thawed in his treatment of me, Harrison. I do not feel the warmth of his love as I once did. My mother asks for patience, for trust.” Ruby took a breath. “It is for her sake alone that I continue to wait.” She put a hand to his face. “I do not want what they have.” Though his family was just inside, and the world all around them, Harrison leaned into her hand, into the closeness of the carriage, and Ruby met him there, her mouth, his, his scent and feel and the everything of him—almost more than she could bear. He pulled her to him to deepen their kiss. His neck felt hot under his collar where she held him tight.

At last she pulled back, and he pressed his lips to her forehead. “You are the only woman I’ve ever wanted to marry, Ruby Tremaine, and in a few days’ time, I’ll be able to call you my wife.”

Wife. Husband. The pair of them would value all that the other had to give. This love, she would protect fiercely.

CHAPTER 34

Olivia

As the carriage rolled down State Street, Olivia replayed her morning in her mind. It had been busy, the first part painful and necessary. Her heart hurt, though she knew it was for the best.

Hetty reached across and squeezed her hand. “You don’t have to do this today. It’s okay to take time to...” Her friend let her voice trail off before averting her eyes. Hetty had waited in the covered Davenport buggy while Olivia met with Washington DeWight at the community center.

Out of his tuxedo, he’d looked more like the gentleman she’d fallen for than he did at Helen’s birthday party. Though well cut, his tux had not been him any more than the life of a traveling activist could be her. *I had to be clear*, she told herself. *It was for both our sakes*. But the way Washington’s expression had crumpled at her explanation of this fact, and after his acknowledgment that they wanted different things, she felt a tinge of bittersweet acceptance.

The small measure of relief she felt from their parting had been instantly replaced by anxiety of what she planned to do next.

“Are you sure this is the place, miss?” asked Harold. He slowed the carriage to a halt in front of an apartment building on State Street. Olivia peeked through the window, agreeing with Harold’s skepticism.

“Yes, this is it,” said Hetty. “Do you want me to drop it off for you?” Her friend often placed her essays to the paper’s founder in a letter box

downtown, protecting Olivia's anonymity.

Olivia felt a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Too embarrassed to approach Everett Stone on his way out of her father's office yesterday, she'd locked herself in her room and continued to write.

Her latest essay was a piece about her journey to activism. She chronicled her experience from her first meeting to the most recent women's union meeting. She shared the shame she sometimes felt at her position and privilege. Her latest piece for the *Defender* was a confession. And a rallying cry. And a love letter. To her family, her friends, this city, and the men she loved.

She glanced at her flowery script and shook her head. "No, I can do it."

Hetty offered Olivia her wide grin, then pushed the carriage door open for her. "I think she's the landlady, Miss Lee. Mr. Abbott prints them in her apartment. I'll wait here." She shoved Olivia out of her seat as Harold came to her aid.

"Hetty!" she said. Olivia shook out her skirt and adjusted her hat. She inhaled deeply, checked all the pages of her essay were intact, and walked over to the woman Hetty had identified. "Excuse me, Miss Lee? I'm looking for Mr. Abbott. Do you know if he's in?" Feeling the weight of the woman's scrutiny, Olivia lifted her chin and kept her gaze steady.

After what felt like a small eternity, Miss Lee said, "You just missed him." Olivia did her best to hide her disappointment when the landlady added, "If you head inside, one of the boys will take a message for him. Second floor. The door should be open."

Olivia pushed inside the apartment building that housed the *Defender's* operations and paused, stopping herself from running up the stairs. For the first time, her work would be hand-delivered by its author. For the first time, it would be signed *Olivia Elise Davenport* and would praise the work of local activists like Mrs. Woodard, Ida B. Wells, Washington DeWight, and a quiet young lawyer, Everett Stone, who performed his service to the community without recognition. The smell of ink calmed her. Olivia wondered if a similar thing was part of the appeal Helen found in the garage.

At the second-floor landing, the door was indeed open. She walked up to the first person she saw. A Black man, chewing on a pipe, shirtsleeves rolled up, stood at a kitchen table where a printer sat. He held a piece of newsprint in one hand, a mug of coffee in the other.

“Good afternoon,” she said. “Miss Lee sent me up. I have one more submission.”

“Good afternoon, miss,” he said, and returned to his reading.

Olivia daintily cleared her throat.

He peered at her over the top of the paper. “Look—”

“This is the next in the anonymous series you’ve printed about the suffragist movement and the factory conditions. I understand they’ve been quite popular. So much so, that the young ladies concerned with the right to vote exclusively purchase this edition. I’d imagine you’d do what you can to ensure continued patronage.”

The man *hmp*hed but took the article. His eyes roamed over her submission. “Hey, this isn’t by *Anonymous*. It’s signed by that Davenport socialite.”

“Who says they’re not one in the same?” Olivia winked—winked!—and turned to leave. She descended the stairs assuredly, not too fast, though her heart pounded in her ears, and stepped out into the light. In two days’ time, her words would be in every issue of the newspaper. She knew Mr. Stone would see it. Along with everyone else. She only hoped he would read between the lines.

CHAPTER 35

Amy-Rose

“Oh! Can *I* be the one to say stop fidgeting?” asked Helen.

Amy-Rose looked at her, jaw set, and slowly folded her hands atop the table, where they sat with Olivia and Ruby in the tearoom at Marshall Field & Company.

Amy-Rose joined the young women today in “peak confectionary,” as Helen put it. Of course, Amy-Rose had been here before, but something about today felt different. This outing, planned on a Tuesday to accommodate her business hours, seemed more like a quiet introduction to society. Amy-Rose had been so focused on work and avoiding John that she had denied herself the pleasures of her independence. *We make a pretty fine quartet*, she thought.

“So here,” said Ruby, pointing to an accomplished rendering of her family’s garden, “is where the arbor will be.”

Olivia nodded. “Right. The chairs will form the aisle. Jessie will prepare the meal with the staff Harrison hired. Flowers will be delivered tomorrow. Harrison assured me he picked up his tuxedo, so all that’s left is you.” Olivia looked at Ruby with a sparkle in her eyes.

“And leave your hair to me,” said Amy-Rose. She and Ruby exchanged a warm look that a season ago neither would have thought possible. Amy-Rose sipped her tea now and, indeed, stopped fidgeting. She was fine, right here, with her friends. “And Helen? Your contribution?”

“Ummm, I will be in one of Ruby’s dresses again,” said Helen. Olivia’s eyes narrowed at her sister, who quickly added, “And I will be escorted by Mr. Lawrence.” Helen blushed as her sister cooed. “Livy,” Helen said. “Calm down.”

“I can’t help it,” she said. “I’m so happy for you.”

Amy-Rose squeezed Helen’s hand under the table. It had been a rough journey for the young Miss Davenport, but here they all were.

Helen’s smile dimmed. “What of Mr. Stone?” she asked her sister. “He was supposed to escort you.”

Now it was Olivia’s turn to shift in her seat. “We have yet to speak, but he has not given any indication he won’t attend. Let’s continue to plan as though he’ll be there.”

Ruby nodded. “He is a gentleman. I doubt he will cancel.”

With the attendees and the table arrangements settled, the conversation moved on to the menu. Amy-Rose let her mind wander. She looked forward to accompanying John to Ruby’s nuptials. After they’d danced at Helen’s party, he’d remained at her side, dancing several more numbers with her, as if making up for lost time. They’d attended the theater, followed Helen and Mr. Lawrence around the Field Museum, and dined with the Andrewses. She couldn’t count the afternoons she spent on the patio with him and his family, enjoying the high heat of the summer’s end in the shade. By the time he asked her to accompany him to the wedding, yes, was her only answer.

After lunch, the Davenports returned Amy-Rose to the salon, and she was surprised to find their father standing at her doorstep. “Mr. Davenport, you’re early.”

Mr. Davenport waved the carriage carrying his daughters on, and said, “Forgive me, Miss Shepherd. I had hoped to witness Clara’s Beauty Salon in action. It seems I have scheduled for the wrong day.”

Amy-Rose looked at her mother’s name on the window, tracing each letter with her eyes. “It’s difficult to talk during business hours,” she said. “Shall we?” She climbed the steps and ushered Mr. Davenport through the door. The inside of the salon never ceased to steal her breath. Even empty, it

vibrated with cozy, happy energy. When she turned back, she saw Mr. Davenport admiring her salon, taking the space in with a smile.

“I remember the early days,” he started. “Chaotic. And invigorating. Learning as you go, especially from your mistakes.” The corners of his eyes crinkled. “You have built a wonderful thing here.”

“I have.” Amy-Rose was proud of the work she and Mrs. Davis had done. “I’m glad you accepted my invitation. You missed the grand opening, and if you do wish to see how it looks on an average day, you are more than welcome.”

“Thank you,” he said. His expression was one she could not place. Undeterred, Amy-Rose gave him a tour of the actual salon. Upstairs, she introduced him to the stylists packing completed orders for shipment. “I’ve saved enough to begin placing ads in the papers,” she said. “I’m afraid that demand will soon outpace production.”

Mr. Davenport acknowledged her fear with a nod. “It’s a difficult balance to find.”

“I haven’t decided what my next steps ought to be, but I know for sure that I will not accept any that would result in losing part of my ownership.”

“To own something is special. To have built it yourself is...there are no words. I suppose it depends on how you want your product to be perceived, how far you want your influence to go. Adjustments can be made.” His voice dropped to a lower volume. “As long as you’re not too stubborn to see them. And as long as you’re willing to amend your errors.” Amy-Rose was sure he was talking about himself. John and Helen had said they’d need to convince him about the car, but perhaps he was more open to change than they believed.

He picked up a jar of one of the treatments, releasing the sweet smell of honey into the air. “My son wants to build wonderful things too.”

Amy-Rose’s throat tightened. Her heart raced as she braced herself for what he might say next.

Mr. Davenport locked eyes with her, his face tender. “One of the wonderful things he wants to build is a life with you.”

He paused. Amy-Rose took the opening. “He does. I didn’t, couldn’t, quite believe him when I returned, but I do now.” She thought of John’s letter and the way he carefully saw her mother’s past—her family’s past—restored to her. She saw it in the way he looked at her, dimple deepening every time his eyes found her. “I hope we will be happy together, like you and Mrs. Davenport.”

“I suspect you will be.”

As if summoned by his father’s words, John came up the stairs. “Amy-Rose,” he said with a grin. “Afternoon, ladies,” he said to the stylists. It wasn’t until he removed his hat that he saw his father. “Daddy? Pardon, I don’t mean to interrupt.”

“Not at all,” said Mr. Davenport, shifting his weight off his cane. “Miss Shepherd was kind enough to invite me over for a short tour.” He turned to her then. “I’m sorry to have missed the grand opening. Congratulations, and I’ll see you at dinner tonight.” He smiled at the honey jar once more. “Wonderful. John, I’ll be waiting in that contraption I’m sure you’ve parked outside.

Amy-Rose and John watched him leave in a mix of confusion and disbelief. When she finally found her voice, she said, “I believe your father just handed me his olive branch.”

CHAPTER 36

Helen

It was race day!

Overhead, the sun peeked through the clouds, shining on the roadway like hallelujah sunbeams in a painting. Helen attempted to cool herself with a white lace fan that matched the lace-trimmed dress she wore. The collar was as low as propriety would allow, and the skirt as high, but it did little to stave off the heat. But her discomfort was secondary. All Helen could think about today was the race. She didn't get a wink of sleep the night before. All the things that could go wrong had run laps in her mind. As had all the things that could go right. She'd been out of bed before dawn today, soaking in the tub and taking care not to ruin her hair.

The turnout now was spectacular. The stands were filled thanks to the not-so-small network of friends and family who talked up the big day to anyone who would listen. Their parents and Olivia sat with them, as did Amy-Rose, Mr. Stone, and Mrs. Milford. And the staff from Freeport had all come! In another section, she spotted the Tremaines and Bartons. John had put ads in all the papers, shouting about Ransom Swift's local Chicago race. Her brother, at her side, waved to his friends.

"See, I told you!" he said. "All automobile enthusiasts and socialites are in attendance. And I fully acknowledge your genius in recruiting Swift to our cause. Look at the crowd he's drawn." John laughed. "All the papers are out, photographers—photographing *our* car!"

Helen stared at the sea of young women crowded at the fence where Ransom Swift and several other drivers gathered. Swift's luxurious curls ruffled in the wind, and although she couldn't quite make out his face from where they stood, she could tell from his body language that he was flirting with the onlookers.

Behind him was the Davenport horseless carriage, with a new addition: a bold number three was printed on the engine cover. It was by far the prettiest stock car on the line, but Helen hoped it was also the fastest. "Why'd you pick the number three?" she asked.

"I didn't," said John.

"I did." It was her father who spoke. As Mr. Davenport took in the scene below them, Helen watched a series of emotions play over his face. The nervous excitement she felt doubled. Mr. Davenport descended one step closer to where she and John stood and said, "Three seemed like a good number. John, Helen"—he looked at Olivia—"Livy. The company is your inheritance. It seemed fitting. Plus, I heard three is a lucky number."

John smiled at her, then reached a hand out to their mother. "Mama, would you like a closer look? We can head down to the track. Amy-Rose, want to come?"

Helen and Mr. Davenport let the three of them pass. "Good luck!" Amy-Rose said to her.

"Oh—I see Ruby," said Olivia. She kissed their father on his cheek and followed her mother, brother, and friend. As she passed, she pressed her hand into Helen's. "Well done," she whispered.

The words calmed Helen. She licked her lips and put her fan away. Over the crackling loudspeaker, the announcer asked everyone to take their seats.

The race was about to start.

Helen's breath came in shallow puffs, and she couldn't tell if she felt hot or cold.

Mr. Davenport motioned her to take a seat and she followed his lead. "I admire your determination," he said. "The foresight to see this avenue and the fortitude to see it through..." He trailed off and chuckled under his breath.

“Before you say anything else, Daddy, I want you to know that working for the carriage company you built has been the only thing I’ve ever wanted for my future. I know the business inside and out, and I know motorcars, and if Amy-Rose can manage a successful business with all the obstacles in her way and earn your respect, then I deserve a chance to do so as well.”

Her father looked at her as if contemplating her words, her worth. “You engineered a new vehicle, your brother wined and dined his way to garner the support of the board, and used *my* lawyer to reallocate labor and materials,” he said, clearing his throat.

“Yes, and, I want to prove that I am more than”—she paused and steadied herself—“this.” She flared one side of her skirt and gestured to her coifed hair, the rouge on her lips. “I’d like you and the board to consider it my application for hire.”

Her father frowned. “The show hasn’t started yet.”

“Exactly. I would be remiss if I asked after a loss. Better to lock you into a deal now.”

William Davenport stared at his daughter. He studied her so long, Helen feared she had gone too far. The laugh that burst from him was loud enough to turn heads. Helen startled. Mr. Davenport’s eyes were misting, deep laugh lines appearing at their corners.

“Daddy, are you well?” she asked. Hope had begun to grow.

“Yes. Now let’s watch your hard work.”

Helen tore her eyes away from her father and back to the track where the vehicles were lined up. She spotted her sister and mother with the Tremaines and Amy-Rose, and John, who had made his way over to where the mechanics stood. Jacob Lawrence and his cousin sat with Ruby. His wink in her direction made her stomach flip.

Her father bumped her knee with his. It *was* time to see what weeks of their hard work could produce. She watched Swift climb into the number three car, her leg bouncing. Oh how she wished she could be driving it. She glanced quickly at her father. *Maybe next time.*

The gun went off and the vehicles pulled away from the line. Helen shot to her feet, unable to contain her excitement. The Davenport sped ahead but

was soon overtaken by the Ford and Stoddard-Dayton. The Studebaker and another Ford were close behind. The crowd was electric, roaring as loud as the engines. The stands shook with the jumping and stomping. Helen's voice caught in her throat when the group took a turn around a bend and disappeared. She could hear the cheers from the other groups of spectators as the cars made their way to other sections of the track. Helen waited with bated breath for them to return. Each moment seemed to stretch on forever. It was all she could do not to run to where the finish line was. As the other spectators calmed, Helen's anxiety only grew.

"Let's get a better view, shall we?" said Mr. Davenport, standing.

Helen threw her arms around her father, and the pair walked to where the barriers opened onto the track. John shook their father's hand. He threw an arm over Helen's shoulder.

This was it.

The vehicles reappeared.

The Davenport was in the lead!

Shouts among the company's mechanics rang out. A piercing whistle from her father made her laugh. Then, to his surprise, she released one of her own.

The automobiles raced by, kicking up a cloud of dust, and the crowds ran to follow. Above the fray, the flag fluttered, signaling the end of the race. Standing on the edge of the door, Ransom Swift punched the air.

"Did he win?" Helen asked.

"I think so," said John. "Look at the other drivers." The other racers exited their vehicles, exhausted and dejected.

"The winner, Ransom Swift, in the number three car for the Davenport Carriage Company!" The announcer shouted.

Helen's cheers joined her brother's. Relief and elation flooded her. They'd won! Her plan worked! John crushed her into a hug that rocked her on her heels. "Well done!" he said, and then embraced their father. He left the two of them to celebrate with the others. Helen looked back to the track, her face already hurting from her grin. Passersby congratulated them. When she turned to her father, Mr. Davenport pulled Helen close, tucking her head

under his chin so that she only caught a quick glimpse of his shinning smile and watery eyes. Under her ear she felt a rumble quite like laughter.

Mr. Davenport cleared his throat and said. "I'll discuss your application with the others on Monday."

Helen looked up at her father, the pride she felt mirrored in his eyes. At the slight tilt of his head, she returned her attention to the stock car, emblazoned with their family crest. Her inheritance.

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CHAPTER 37

Ruby

Ruby paced, resisting the urge to peek through the crack in the door. She had escaped her bedroom, where she had gotten ready *for her wedding*. Because she could hardly wait any longer. Outside in the back garden, Harrison's family, her parents, and the Davenports stood, waiting to bear witness to their union. She was in her father's study now. She felt flushed despite the gooseflesh rippling over her skin. The past week had flown by in a whirlwind of tulle, fittings, and strained interactions with her parents. But today, Harrison Barton would become her husband. From the window, she could see the arbor on the patio. The gardens were a lush green from the two days of rain that had finally broken the heat wave.

This was her day.

It was an intimate and *exclusive* affair. Just as she'd imagined.

It wasn't Olivet Baptist Church, filled to bursting, no. And the only flowers were the ones she and Olivia would carry, those pinned to the lapels of the fathers' and Harrison's suits, and those twined around the arbor. But it was intimate and exclusive just the same with a justice of the peace instead of a reverend presiding over the nuptials. Now that the day had arrived, Ruby was more than happy to celebrate with the people she loved best and who loved her back.

In a different version of events, Ruby would have been celebrating this day with all the fanfare conferred on the only child of Chicago's new

mayor. In a different version of events, she and her parents would have had everything they wanted. Ruby sighed and closed her eyes. She could almost hear the moment the organist at Olivet Baptist Church would have signaled her entrance into the grand cathedral, hundreds of breathless guests shifting in their seats to see—

“There you are!”

Ruby straightened, turning quickly and swallowing her heart.

“Your mother is asking for you.” Olivia held her antique rose skirt with one hand, reaching for Ruby with the other as if to guide a wayward child. The cap sleeves at Olivia’s shoulders fluttered in her haste.

Ruby sighed, mostly from relief that it was her best friend who’d found her sneaking and not her mother. “I just wanted to see what everyone is wearing.”

On her side of the aisle, William Davenport stood, supporting himself on his cane. Beside him was John. His pale gray suit was a lighter hue than his father’s and cut in a more modern style. He stood arm-in-arm with Amy-Rose. They whispered quietly to each other, their gazes open and shy. Amy-Rose’s cheeks looked flushed under the smattering of freckles. Just beyond them was Helen. She stood a foot from Jacob Lawrence, the pair stealing glances at each other under the watchful eye of Mrs. Milford. Helen’s movements were relaxed and buoyant. The opposite of Mr. Stone’s, whose gaze seemed to be searching for Olivia.

The Davenports were the closest Ruby had to extended family. Until now.

On the opposite side of the aisle, Harrison’s father, mother, and sister watched with teary eyes. Arthur Barton rubbed circles on the back of his wife’s hand, tucked between the palms of his own. Anna Barton’s dress was a rich green that made her deep complexion glow. She stood tall next to her husband, her hair pulled away from her face in flat twists. At that moment she smiled at her daughter, Anne-Marie, and there was something about her mouth that reminded Ruby so much of Harrison that she found herself smiling too.

Her friend followed Ruby's gaze through the window, the curtains pulled just so to hide them from sight. She noticed when Olivia stepped away to take in the room. Ruby's father kept a messy workspace, like she did. Ruby wasn't sure what drew her to this room. Maybe the view of the garden or the fact that it would be the last place her parents would look for her, but seeing Harrison prepared to meet her at the end of the aisle made her heart sing.

Olivia squeezed her fingers. "Let's not keep him waiting."

Her friend was right. Ruby and Harrison had been through more than their share of drama in the past three months and had come out the other side stronger. There he was, her fiancé, Harrison Barton, standing before the justice of the peace between his father and brother. The two of them wore dark suits, Harrison in a tuxedo, dashing as ever.

Olivia smiled. Then the door began to swing open, and Mrs. Barton poked her head around Mrs. Tremaine's shoulder. Behind them, Mrs. Davenport and Anne-Marie strained to catch a glimpse inside.

"It seems everyone out there is just about to burst with excitement," said Mrs. Barton. Anne-Marie sidled up next to her.

"Ruby," said Mrs. Tremaine, eyes warm, "your guests are waiting."

"I can't wait for Harrison to see you!" Anne-Marie said.

Ruby blushed.

"Let's finish getting you ready, yes?" Olivia said.

"Yes," she answered. She took one last look at the scene. She watched her future husband speak with her guests—*their* guests, she reminded herself—before following Olivia, Anna Barton, and Anne-Marie back to her bedroom.

Ruby's mother admired Lucille's work as she sewed an additional pearl to the veil Ruby would wear. Mrs. Tremaine's hands were delicately clasped in front of the full burgundy folds of her silk skirts. For a moment, seeing her daughter, her eyes softened. "Come, Ruby, dear."

Ruby took slow, short strides across the room. She felt herself melt under her mother's gaze.

“Is it ready, Lucille?” Ruby asked, pulling her mother’s attention back to the veil.

“Just about,” said Mrs. Jennings. The young woman grinned. Ruby ran her hands over the beautiful gown they’d created together.

Ruby hugged her new friend and turned to Mrs. Davenport, who looked just as teary-eyed as her own mother. “Congratulations, Ruby.” She clutched her purse to her chest with her free hand. Its beaded surface matched the belt that cinched her waist. Her eyes sparkled with unshed tears.

“Thank you, Mrs. Davenport.” Ruby understood her parents’ desire to unite their families. The Davenports already felt like family, though. She had let go of what could be, and was ready—had been ready for some time—to look at what *would* be. She turned to her mother, who wore a wistful smile of her own.

Mrs. Tremaine took the headpiece from Mrs. Jennings. “Ready and waiting.”

Ruby turned to Olivia, who gave her an encouraging look, and then approached her mother until the two stood within the frame of the full-length mirror. Mrs. Tremaine looked young enough to be mistaken for Ruby’s older sister, something Ruby knew her mother loved to hear on the campaign trail, though she’d never say so. She wore a dark red dress with a matching fascinator and fan, dangling from her elbow by a black satin ribbon. Beside her, Ruby took in her own reflection.

The dress was exquisite—all she had imagined, and more. The creamy white gown’s collar had a wide trim of lace that clung to her shoulders and met in a V that made her mother blush. A satin ribbon gathered the waist high. The skirt hugged her hips and pooled at her feet.

“Finished.” Mrs. Tremaine looked at Ruby’s reflection. She continued to fuss with the veil that now framed Ruby’s face. Her touch was gentle. “I remember when you and Olivia used to place my handkerchiefs over your heads and pretend they were veils.” Olivia laughed.

“They would take turns carrying each other’s invisible trains,” added Mrs. Davenport.

Mrs. Tremaine nodded. "How quickly the time passes," she said. Now both Ruby's and Olivia's mother's eyes appeared misty. Ruby reached for her mother's hand and squeezed it tight. "Don't you start," said Mrs. Tremaine. "You'll ruin your face."

"Of course," said Ruby. She blinked her vision clear and walked over to her shoes. A sigh escaped her as she slid her feet into them. She was ready. Her stomach fluttered and her fingertips tingled. "Mother—" she started, but the words wouldn't come, so Ruby simply threw her arms around her, burying her face in her mother's powdered neck.

"Ruby, enjoy this day." Mrs. Tremaine pressed her cheek to her daughter's forehead and pulled away.

Mrs. Davenport looked at the clock. "It's time." The women began to file out of the room, her mother and Mrs. Davenport each giving her a kiss on her cheek.

"Oh! Almost forgot." Olivia handed Ruby a bouquet of short-stemmed roses and baby's breath. She pressed her forehead to Ruby's. They stayed like this for a moment. Until the butterflies in Ruby's stomach settled, and all she could think about was the young man waiting for her at the end of the aisle. "I'm so happy for you."

Ruby blinked back her own tears and nodded, no longer trusting her voice. She watched Olivia pass through the door.

In the hall, Mr. Tremaine cleared his throat loudly and adjusted the red rose in his tuxedo lapel. He stopped at the sight of Ruby. Under his gaze, she fought the urge to squirm. "You look—" he started. Again, he cleared his throat and nodded. "You look beautiful." He held his arm out to her. Ruby stared at it. It was the first sign of affection he had shown her in weeks. She wanted to tell him she had designed it herself, that there were people out there who valued her skill, her perspective, her worth.

With a shaky hand, she slid her fingers into the crook of his elbow and glanced up at him. His attention had already moved on from her to where the crowd gathered outside. He may have been close in proximity, but he was far away as ever.

“Everything will work out,” he said, mostly to himself. “We’ll make Barton a true Chicagoan yet.” Mr. Tremaine nodded, satisfied. “Yes, I think he’ll do.” Ruby steeled herself. Her father, always ready to strategize, to perform. Ruby, again, just a prop.

But this was *her* show. Her wedding, and her guests. She had planned every detail with the help of her best friend and the man she loved. Perhaps one day she and her father could repair what had broken between them—what he’d broken. Ruby hoped for that. But for now, she would focus on her future and the family she would create with Harrison. It was more than this. This was just one day. And it would be more than enough.

The music changed, an usher opened the door to the patio. There was a collective gasp as every head turned to her. Light bulbs flashed and Ruby wondered briefly if she had lipstick on her teeth. *No, Olivia would have noticed.* Still, she felt hot and cold and suddenly self-conscious.

Ruby took a deep breath and found Harrison at the end of the aisle, standing under the arbor. He stood out in his tuxedo, perfectly tailored and complementary to his light brown complexion. The butterflies in her stomach fluttered like champagne bubbles racing to the surface. Harrison Barton was everything she could have hoped for. Everything—loving, kind, understanding, able to provide her with everything she could want—but one:

He was not her parents’ choice. And that was just fine.

Harrison’s eyes drank her in, every inch of her. She felt her skin heat up, her pulse quicken.

Her choice was what mattered.

“There,” Ruby said to her father, “is a man who loves me for me. And I want to be his wife.” It may have taken longer for her to realize this than Harrison would have liked, but she knew it in every inch of her being. She recalled the moment after her grand speech inside Harrison’s front door, when he’d gathered her up—stolen red dress and all—and kissed her for all he was worth. And she’d kissed him back. She fixed her eyes on him now and walked slowly, as rehearsed. Her heart thrummed. The guests blurred

from her vision. The swelling music faded. And the roaring in her ears became a sweet hum.

Around her was the support of true friends, before her the love of her life, and beyond this, the freedom to chase her own dreams.

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CHAPTER 38

Olivia

T*hat must be broken*, thought Olivia. She glanced up at the grandfather clock. Only a few minutes had passed since she last checked. Her footsteps echoed as she paced the foyer. The newspaper with her article was tucked under her arm and she chewed on a thumbnail. *Great, now you're just as uncouth as your sister.*

She flipped through the pages of the Sunday papers, splitting her time on her *Defender* essay, calling for action and forgiveness, and the society paper's coverage of Ruby's wedding. It was a beautiful—no, *magical*—event. Her friend made a gorgeous bride in a dress of her own design. Olivia attended without an escort, happy to watch her best friend's special day. She'd exchanged looks with Mr. Stone during the ceremony, though he was hard to read, after which he'd offered her and her family a brief greeting, congratulated the happy couple, and left before the reception, her chance to speak with him dashed. The reception went late into the night. It was the first relatively cool day and night in months. The rains had doused the heat, and they were able to enjoy the sunset ceremony at the Tremaines' home.

The clock chimed now, and she froze. The voices from her father's library changed tone. Inside, her father, siblings, and Mr. Stone discussed the future of Davenport Carriage Company's automobile division. She and her mother witnessed John and Helen's formal proposal to the board, and

they were, of course, outstanding. Now, her father said, the real work would begin. Most days, the four of them went downtown to the offices to work. But on days his leg was particularly stiff, Mr. Davenport held a smaller meeting at home. Later, John, Helen, and Mr. Stone would head into town.

This was an arrangement Olivia would now use to her advantage. She stilled when she heard the door creak open. It was Helen making a mad sprint for the kitchen. Her sister spotted her and stopped. After a quick glance over her shoulder, Helen said, "Good luck."

Olivia offered her a sheepish smile. She looked back toward the hallway, waiting.

The door creaked open again.

"Ugh," said Olivia.

"Nice to see you too." John pinched her cheek as he passed her. He left the front door open and skipped down the stairs to where his automobile was parked in the drive. She leaned against the doorframe. "Where are you off to?"

"Meeting Amy-Rose for dinner." He smiled and his dimple deepened. With a flourish, he hopped over the door and slammed a straw hat on his head. Olivia laughed, happy that the two of them finally decided to give their love a chance.

"Excuse me."

Olivia jumped. "Mr. Stone!" The newspapers fell to the floor. They both bent down to pick them up, and Olivia felt a sharp pain on the crown of her head.

"Ow!" said Mr. Stone.

"Sorry," they said at the same time.

"I thought Helen was the one with a hard head," she said, rubbing her scalp, laughing faintly.

"It may be a familial trait."

She looked up then to catch a ghost of a smile before it disappeared. They stared at each other. Olivia's well-rehearsed speech flitted away.

"You signed your name." He stood, adjusting his glasses, his gaze falling to the heading of the newspaper he now held. When his eyes met

hers, she felt like he saw all of her. “I think it’s your best work yet.”

“Is that all?”

He laughed. “Wasn’t that the point?”

“Yes, but...” She stopped. “I’m sorry.” She held his stare. “When I decided to stay and Mr. DeWight left, I had thought only of what I could do for the Cause, and for myself. I didn’t think I could fall in love so soon. Let alone with someone my parents had selected for me. I did not yet realize to whom my heart would truly belong. You surprised me, Mr. Stone. Though I resisted at first. And I want to give us a chance. A real one.” She took a step away from the door, clearing his path.

Everett Stone bowed his head. She waited for him to adjust his frames again, some indication that he was considering her words. “Do you want to know my favorite line. From your essay?”

Olivia didn’t trust herself to speak. Though she had written every word, she was only aware now of how he stood mere inches from her.

“ ‘What is the hope that visits us in many forms, but love returning again and again?’ ” His eyes returned to her face, caressing her brows, her jaw, her cheek with their marvelous intensity. His full lips parted. He leaned in slightly, holding her gaze. “Good evening, Miss Davenport.”

Olivia let out a breath. She returned Mr. Stone’s smile and watched him walk to his carriage. She stood there, replaying the moment in her mind. *Hope visits us in many forms.*

Hetty walked up to her side, and after a moment of companionable silence, asked, “Any news?”

Olivia turned to her friend, grinning. “Yes, the date of the next march. September twenty-second.”

CHAPTER 39

Amy-Rose

The towering edifice on the north side of Chicago cast the entire street in shadow. It was early, and steam seemed to billow from the surface of the road. In this neighborhood, white gentlemen walked briskly with their collars turned up, and the postman lingered to speak with the business owners unlocking their doors. The city was just starting to wake up. Amy-Rose left the salon in the charge of her two hairdressers.

She looked down at the letter in her hand.

Miss Amy-Rose Shepherd,

Your presence is requested at the Law Offices of Cliff and Jameson at 9 a.m. for the delivery of Mrs. Davis's last wishes as they pertain to you. She checked the address and pushed inside.

"You got an appointment?" asked the secretary at the desk.

"I received a letter."

He sighed. "Do you know *who* you're here to see?"

"No, I—"

The gentleman's attention drifted back to the book he was consulting.

Annoyed that she had left her own business to be here, Amy-Rose slapped her letter on the counter. "This is the letter that directed me here. I have a business of my own to run. Please notify the *person in charge* that I am here. I do not have all day."

The secretary read her letter and excused himself. His footsteps were lighter and faster than she would have imagined. She smiled to herself, knowing that Mrs. Davis would have approved. While waiting, Amy-Rose admired the marble entryway and the thick columns that stretched into the vaulted ceilings. The rustle of shuffling papers floated on the air, which smelled of old parchment.

“Miss Shepherd?”

Amy-Rose spun to see the secretary holding open a door to a hallway beyond. She nodded the way she’d seen Mrs. Davenport do a thousand times and walked through that open door with her chin up. She was shown to an office that had a large window overlooking the street below.

“Please, have a seat. Someone will be with you shortly.”

She waved her thanks, still watching the carriages roll by. Once the door clicked shut behind her, Amy-Rose exhaled. She tugged at the waist of her dress. It was a heavily tailored bodice—professional and expensive. It made her feel confident and capable, but it was also too tight to breathe easily. *Helen was definitely onto something*, she thought. As instructed, she took a seat and waited.

And waited.

The chair beneath Amy-Rose groaned. She’d been waiting the better part of an hour for Mrs. Davis’s lawyer to arrive. The letter said it was urgent. *Not urgent enough for him to be on time, though*. She was to meet John for lunch but now suspected she’d be late for that as well. Amy-Rose had made up her mind to pay the front desk a visit when the door swung open.

“My apologies, Miss Shepherd. I’m Mr. Rowan.” A gentleman in a gray suit bustled in, adjusting his tie. His skin was a deep brown, his hair cut short. He had dark circles under his eyes that did not dampen the brightness in his expressive brown eyes. “My wife and I are new parents.”

“Congratulations,” she said. Her next words were cut short when another gentleman entered the room. He was taller and had sandy hair and a flushed expression. Lastly, Ruth Davis entered. She wore one of her mother’s most expensive broaches on a black dress with a tight silhouette.

A fishnet veil hung from the fascinator she wore on her head. She was a caricature of grief, and it made Amy-Rose's blood boil.

"The documents you requested," said the sandy-haired man, handing a folder to Mr. Rowan, and bringing Amy-Rose's attention back to the room. He exited as clumsily as he had entered, leaving Amy-Rose wondering just what she was doing here.

Mr. Rowan watched her over the papers in his hand. "What was your relationship to the late Maude Davis, Miss Shepherd?"

"I was her traveling companion for a time. Then when I started my business, I became her protégé. She was my first investor. We remained close friends until she passed." Her voice cracked slightly at the end. She glanced at Ruth, who now occupied the chair next to her.

"Right, sorry for your loss," he said, almost like an afterthought. "I have some papers for you to sign, and then we can be underway to transition ownerships of the accounts. Unless, of course, you'd prefer to have the titles and funds consolidated to your existing accounts. At your own establishment?"

Miss Davis sat forward in her seat. "I beg your pardon."

"I don't know that I understand. What accounts?" said Amy-Rose.

Mr. Rowan set the documents in three neat piles and offered her a pen. "Mrs. Davis named Miss Shepherd the recipient of her estate, less the amounts specified for members of her staff and a trust for her daughter, you, Miss Davis. There are also instructions for donations to some charitable endeavors that will need your approval." He cleared his throat and shifted in his seat. "Miss," he said, his focus returning to Amy-Rose. "You just need to read and sign. Then it's all yours." Next to the pen, he placed a set of keys she recognized to be Mrs. Davis's personal copies to her home and automobile.

"I'm sorry. I don't understand. Are you sure?" she asked, tripping over the matter-of-fact way he informed her that she'd inherited what once belonged to her mentor.

"This is ridiculous!" Miss Davis launched from her seat and stalked over to the desk. "I am her daughter!"

“I understand this is difficult for you, but your mother was clear about her wishes. You do have a trust with a payment plan to keep you comfortable. She was in good mental health and aware when she made her decision. I cannot go against her wishes.” From his jacket pocket, he pulled a small sheet of paper and gave it to Amy-Rose. It was a handwritten letter on Mrs. Davis’s personal stationery.

Dear Amy-Rose, don’t stop chasing your dreams. I believe in you.

It was dated before she and Mrs. Davis had left on her last trip. The rest of the note listed properties in New Haven and New York that Amy-Rose would have to visit and take stock of, and do with as she pleased. She was speechless and sad and overwhelmed.

Ruth Davis read over her shoulder, letting out a screech at the end. She stormed out of the office. A trail of destruction sounded in her wake. The slam of a door made the whole room flinch. Amy-Rose’s mind raced. She couldn’t fathom the wealth Mrs. Davis had in life. And now to own it? The thought was as exhilarating as it was overwhelming. *What should I do first?* Again, Amy-Rose wished the brash widow was here to give her council. Her gaze dropped to where one of her tears had smeared the ink.

Don’t stop chasing your dreams.

• • •

Later that night, Amy-Rose sat on the steps outside the salon, grateful the heat wave had finally broken. She heard the sound of the engine before the motorcar became visible, coming to a stop at the bottom of the stairs. John climbed out and took the short stack of stairs to sit beside her. The bouquet of roses he carried dropped petals around them. “I imagined today would have been a difficult one for you,” he said, handing them to her. She rested her head on his shoulder and recounted the meeting with Mrs. Davis’s lawyer. He listened without interruption and provided his handkerchief.

“Oh, Amy-Rose,” said John when she was done. “A windfall like that is likely to make anyone a target. I’m sorry for that piece of it.” He brushed her face where it still felt damp. “The inheritance will make expanding your business easier, though I imagine you’d rather have Mrs. Davis than her things.”

Amy-Rose’s heart squeezed. “Yes,” she said. “I would.”

“When is Elizabeth due to arrive? Jessie gave me specific instructions not to return home without that information.”

Amy-Rose giggled despite herself. “At the end of September.” It couldn’t come soon enough. After so much loss, she was looking forward to adding to her family. She laced her fingers through John’s, grateful for him. Content to do this for the rest of their days.

She looked up at the building her mentor had secured for her, her mother’s name printed on the door, and knew they had given her all she needed to succeed, in life and love. She took the roses from John and inhaled deeply. “Let’s not waste any more time.”

CHAPTER 40

Helen

The week had been full of firsts. Helen attended her first board meeting with her father and John. She joined her mother at her first ladies' tea at Marshall Field & Company with other "out" young women and their mothers. She also went to a suffragist meeting with Olivia and Hetty. Helen was busier than ever, no longer sneaking into the garage in her brother's hand-me-down overalls. Ruby had gifted her with a pair of her own for her birthday, with several pockets and snaps, designed by Ruby and crafted by her business partner, Mrs. Jennings. Her gown had been something, but this garment was truly a treasure.

The biggest first of all, though, was her official courtship with Jacob Lawrence. The pair rode through Jackson Park on horses from her father's extensive stable. Ahead, Olivia and Mr. Stone served as chaperones, riding side by side and pretending not to see Helen's and Jacob's playful touches and bouts of extended eye contact.

"I bet," said Jacob, leaning toward her, "I can make it to the next beach, where your brother and Amy-Rose have set up the picnic, before you can."

She propped her elbow on the pommel. She had chosen the faster of the two horses. Not that she had planned to challenge Jacob to a race. She had only hoped. Her sister had stopped to water her own horse and would not notice their game until it was too late to stop them. Helen surveyed the clusters of people dotting the park. "On three?" she asked.

Jacob grinned. Tightened his hands on the reins and lowered himself. She laughed, yelled, "Three!" and took off at a gallop, leaving him gawking behind her. The air rushed past her ears. Her horse, a younger sibling to Olivia's chestnut mare, carried her across the lawns of the park, past the meat vendors and couples strolling on the bright summer day. Her heart pounded, and another laugh escaped when she spotted Jacob Lawrence struggling to close the gap over her shoulder. At the first hint of sand on the next beach, she pulled sharply on the reins. She felt breathless and triumphant. She had everything she wanted, and then some.

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