

“Evie, would you be a dear and make us some tea?”

“Yes, of course.”

As she left the study, Evie decided it would be polite to close the double doors. Although the siblings didn’t seem to care. Their conversation continued even before she had fully drawn the panels together.

“Lyra, that girl...”

“That *girl*? She’s a grown woman, Charlie. She can make her own bloody choices.”

It took everything in Evie’s power not to continue eavesdropping. The last thing she heard before scurrying to the kitchen was Lyra’s incredulous laugh. “You’ve always given me more credit than I deserve...”

Evie couldn’t prepare the tea fast enough.

She glared at the stove-top kettle.

The situation was her own personal Pandora’s box. It would be to her benefit not to hear what they were saying about her – she’d been burned multiple times by curiosity since childhood – but she had to know.

The justification she summoned was that she’d signed Lyra’s document. No matter what she heard, it would stay secret.

So once the drinks were ready, Evie deliberately lingered outside the study with her laden tray.

After her breathing stabilised, the sound came easier. The high ceiling in the adjourning room helped as well.

Charles’s voice was raised. “*This* is what you’re doing? Still? You cling to these delusions; these childish flights of fancy.”

Lyra snapped back, “What does it mean to you?”

“It’s embarrassing.”

“To you? I haven’t used my maiden name in years.”

“You’re not even a proper historian, Lyra, or an archaeologist or an anthropologist, or whatever the hell you’re trying to be. You don’t even have a degree. You’re just a rich widow filling time with an eccentric hobby.”

“Well I’m sorry the government didn’t offer me a cushy engineering job after the War.”

“You’re still that ridiculous little girl running around playing Allan Quatermain. Mother and father mollycoddled you, and look what it did to our family.”

There was a lengthy pause before Lyra murmured her response. Evie could barely hear her.

“Everything has always been my fault, hasn’t it?”

Charles didn’t register his sister’s mood shift. He spat back, “Yes. Actually.”

“And that’s why I haven’t seen my nieces in over two years?”

“That’s for other reasons.”

Whatever that meant, it was flint for Lyra’s temper.

“For God’s sake, Charlie, it’s not contagious!”

“Hmmpf.”

“You –” Her voice cracked. “You think I’d do that? What do you think I am?”

“I know exactly what you are. *Intimately*. That’s why I worry for that girl out there.”

“Give me some sodding credit. It’s not like that at all.”

“Don’t do it, Lyra. Don’t pull her in.”

Silence.

Charles needled again. “All you ever do is hurt people.”

*Right, there’d been quite enough of that.*

Evie was familiar with the razor-tipped swipes of siblings. It was her turn to save her employer.

Clearing her voice loudly, and rapping on the door for extra noticeability, the younger woman entered with the tea.