

Chapter 32

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The night of the academy awards, Rex and I sat next to each other, holding hands, allowing everyone a glimpse of the romantic marriage we were peddling around town. We both smiled politely when we lost, clapping for the winners. I was disappointed but not surprised. It seemed a little too good to be true, the idea of Oscars for people like Rex and me, beautiful movie stars trying to prove they had substance. I got the distinct impression that a lot of people wanted us to stay in our lane. So we took it in stride and then partied the night away, the two of us drinking and dancing until the wee hours.

Celia wasn't at the awards that year, and despite the fact that I searched for her at every party Rex and I went to, I didn't lay eyes on her. Instead, Rex and I painted the town red. At the William Morris party, I found Harry and dragged him into a quiet corner, where the two of us sipped champagne and talked about how wealthy we were going to be. You should know this about the rich: they always want to get richer. It is never boring, getting your hands on more money.

When I was a child, trying to find something to eat for dinner besides the old rice and dry beans in the kitchen, I would tell myself that if I could just have a good meal every night, I'd be happy. When I was at Sunset Studios, I told myself all I wanted was a mansion. When I got the mansion, I told myself all I wanted was two houses and a team of help. Here I was, just turned twenty-five, already realizing that no amount would ever really be enough.

Rex and I went home at around five in the morning, the two of us downright drunk. As our car drove away, I searched my purse for keys to the house, and Rex stood beside me breathing his sour gin breath down my neck. "My wife can't find the keys!" Rex

said, stumbling ever so slightly. "She's trying very hard, but she can't seem to find them."

"Would you be quiet?" I said. "Do you want to wake the neighbors?"

"What are they going to do?" Rex said, even louder than before. "Kick us out of town? Is that what they will do, my precious Evelyn? Will they tell us we can't live on Blue Jay Way anymore? Will they make us move to Robin Drive? Or Oriole Lane?"

I found the keys, put them in the door, and turned the knob. The two of us fell inside. I said good night to Rex and went to my room. I took off my dress alone, without anyone there to unzip the back of it. The loneliness of my marriage hit harder in that moment than it ever had.

I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and could see, in no uncertain terms, that I was beautiful. But it didn't mean anyone loved me. I stood in my slip and looked at my brassy blond hair and my dark brown eyes and my straight, thick eyebrows. And I missed the woman who should have been my wife. I missed Celia. My mind reeled with the thought that she might be with John Braverman that very moment. I knew better than to believe any of it. But I also feared that I didn't know her the way I thought I did. Did she love him? Had she forgotten me? Tears welled in my eyes as I thought about her red hair that used to fan across my pillows.

"There, there," Rex said from behind me. I turned around to see him standing in the doorway. He had taken off his tux jacket and undone his cuff links. His shirt was half buttoned, his bow tie undone, hanging on either side of his neck. It was the very sight that millions of women across the nation would have killed for.

"I thought you went to bed," I said. "If I'd known you were up, I'd've had you help me get my dress off."

"I would have liked that."

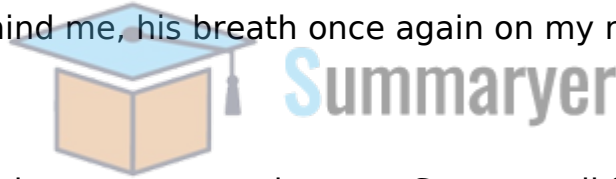
I waved him off. "What are you doing? Can't sleep?"

“Haven’t tried.”

He walked farther into the room, closer to me. “Well, try, then. It’s late. At this rate, the two of us will be asleep until evening.”

“Think about it, Evelyn,” he said. The lights streaming in through the windows lit his blond hair. His dimples glowed. “Think about what?”

“Think about what it would be like.” He moved closer to me and put his hand on my waist. He stood behind me, his breath once again on my neck. It felt good to be touched by him.



Movie stars are movie stars are movie stars. Sure, we all fade after a while. We are human, full of flaws like anyone else. But we are the chosen ones because we are extraordinary. And there is nothing an extraordinary person likes more than someone else extraordinary.

“Rex.”

“Evelyn,” he said, whispering into my ear. “Just once. Shouldn’t we?”

“No,” I said, “we shouldn’t.” But I was not wholly convinced of my answer, and thus, neither was Rex. “You should go back to your room before we both do something we’ll regret tomorrow.”

“Are you sure?” he said. “Your wish is my command, but I’d like it very much if you changed your wish.”

“I won’t change it,” I said.

“Think of it, though,” he said. He raised his hands higher up my torso, the silk of my slip the only thing between us. “Think of the way I’d feel on top of you.”

I laughed. “I will not think about that. If I think about that, we’ll both be sunk.”

“Think of the way we’d move together. The way we’d be slow at first and then lose control.”

“Does this work with other women?”

“I’ve never had to work this hard with other women,” he said, kissing my neck.

I could have walked away from him. I could have slapped him right across the face, and he would have taken it with a stiff upper lip and left me alone. But I wasn’t ready for this part to be over. I liked being tempted. I liked knowing I might make the wrong decision.



And it would absolutely have been the wrong decision. Because as soon as I got out of that bed, Rex would forget how badly he’d worked to get me. He’d remember only that he’d had me. And this wasn’t a typical marriage. There was too much money on the line.

I let him flick one side of my slip off. I let him run his hand underneath the neckline of it.

“Oh, what it would be to lose myself in you,” he said. “To lie underneath you and watch you writhe on top of me.”

I almost did it. I almost ripped my own slip off and threw him onto the bed. But then he said, “C’mon, baby, you know you want to.” And it became perfectly clear just how many times Rex had tried this before with countless other women.

Never let anyone make you feel ordinary.

“Get out of here,” I said, though not unkindly.

“But—”

“No buts. Go on to bed.”

“Evelyn—”

"Rex, you're drunk, and you're confusing me for one of your many girls, but I'm your wife," I said, with all obvious irony.

"Not even once?" he said. He seemed to sober up quickly, as if his hooded eyes had been part of the act. I was never really sure with him. You never knew exactly where you stood with Rex North.

"Don't try it again, Rex. It's not going to happen."

He rolled his eyes and then kissed me on the cheek. "G'night, Evelyn," he said, and then he slipped out my door just as smoothly as he'd come in.

The next day, I woke up to a ringing phone, deeply hungover and mildly confused about where I was.

"Hello?"

"Rise and shine, little bird."

"Harry, what on earth?" The sun in my eyes felt like a burn.

"After you left the Fox party last night, I had a very interesting conversation with Sam Pool."

"What was a Paramount exec doing at a Fox party?"

"Trying to find you and me," Harry said. "Well, and Rex."

"To do what?"

"To suggest that Paramount sign you and Rex to a three-picture deal."

"What?"

"They want three movies, produced by us, starring you and Rex. Sam said to name a price."

"Name a price?" Whenever I had too much to drink, I always woke up the next morning feeling as if I were underwater. Everything looked muted, sounded blurry. I needed to make sure I was following.

"What do you mean, name a price?"

"Do you want a million bucks for a picture? I heard that's what Don's getting for *The Time Before*. We could get that for you, too."

Did I want to make as much money as Don? Of course I did. I wanted to get the paycheck and mail a copy of it to him with a photo of my middle finger. But mostly I wanted the freedom to do whatever I wanted.

"No," I said. "Nope. I'm not signing some contract where they tell me what movies to be in. You and I decide what movies I do. That's it."

"You aren't listening."

"I'm listening just fine," I said, shifting my weight onto my shoulder and changing the arm that was holding the phone. I thought to myself, I'm going to go for a swim today. I should tell Luisa to heat the pool.

"We choose the movies," Harry said. "It's a blind deal. Whatever films you and Rex like Paramount wants to buy. Whatever salary we want."

"All because of *Anna Karenina*?"

"We've proven your name brings people into the theater. And if I'm being entirely clear-eyed about this, I think Sam Pool wants to screw over Ari Sullivan. I think he wants to take what Ari Sullivan threw away and make gold out of it."

"So I'm a pawn."

"Everyone's a pawn. Don't go around taking things personally now when you never have before."

"Any movies we want?"

"Anything we want."

"Have you told Rex?"

"Do you honestly think I would run a single thing by that cad before running it by you?"

"Oh, he is not a cad."

"If you had been there to talk to Joy Nathan after he broke her heart, you'd disagree."

"Harry, he's my husband."

"Evelyn, no, he's not."

"Can't you find something to like about him?"

"Oh, there's plenty to like about him. I love how much money he's made us, how much he will make us."

"Well, he's always done good by me." I told him no, and he walked out my door. Not every man would do that. Not every man had.

"That's because you both want the same thing. You, of all people, should know that you can't tell a single thing about a person's true character if you both want the same thing. That's like a dog and a cat getting along because they both want to kill the mouse."

"Well, I like him. And I want you to like him. Especially because if we sign this deal, Rex and I will have to stay married quite a bit longer than we originally thought. Which makes him my family. And you're my family. So you're both family."

"Plenty of people don't like their families."

“Oh, shut up,” I said. “Let’s get Rex on board and sign this thing, OK? Get your agents together to hammer out the deal. Let’s ask for the moon.”

“OK,” I said.

“Evelyn?” Harry said, before getting off the phone.

