



## CHAPTER 1

### *Olivia*

Olivia Elise Davenport pulled a bolt of vibrant yellow silk from the display and held it to her dark complexion. She was drawn to the bright fabric nearly hidden behind the muted pastels, a shock of sunshine peeking through the clouds, and wondered if it was too bright for so early in the season. In her free hand, she held a sample of beaded lace and tried to imagine the sound it would make whispering around her ankles while she danced. *There will be a lot of dancing*, she thought.

Anticipation bubbled in her chest. The season of ball gowns and champagne had arrived at the conclusion of the Easter celebrations. Now that Olivia was out in society, it was time for her to find a husband. It was her second season, and she was ready. Ready to do her duty and make her parents proud, as she'd always done.

The only problem? It was difficult to find eligible gentlemen—born into the right family, educated, and set to inherit a large fortune—who were also Black.

Olivia took a deep breath. The yellow silk fell from her arm. She knew what her mother would say: It was too loud. Besides, she'd only come here to pick up a few finished alterations.

"May I help you?"

Olivia started at the voice over her shoulder. A shop attendant stood next to her with her hands clasped. Despite the smile on her face, her cold blue eyes betrayed a different intent.

"I was just admiring the fabric selection." Olivia turned toward the display of broad-brimmed hats, ignoring the eyes of the shop girl digging into her back. "And waiting for my friend," she added. *Where is Ruby, anyway?* It was her best friend who insisted they send the servants ahead with their parcels and browse Marshall Field's unaccompanied. And now she was nowhere to be found.

The shop girl cleared her throat. "You may pick up your mistress's orders at the service desk. I could direct you, if you've lost your way."

"I know where the service desk is, thank you," Olivia said with a tight smile, ignoring the slight. All around them, pale faces watched the exchange with increasing curiosity. Someone behind her chuckled.

She remembered her mother's words: to always rise above. Because her family *was* rare. Wealthy. Beautiful. *Black*. Ruby wore her wealth like armor, usually in the form of jewels and furs. Olivia preferred the understated air she observed in her mother.

Today, those perfect manners didn't matter. Her beauty was no shield. All the young girl before her could see was the color of Olivia's skin. She stiffened her spine, pulling herself to her full height. Olivia pointed to the largest jeweled brooch in the display in front of her. "I'd like this boxed, please. And I'd like that

hat as well. For my sister. She always gets cross when I come home without something for her," she said conspiratorially to the other patrons—though she knew full well Helen would prefer a pair of pliers to a hat. Olivia walked slowly around the room. "Those gloves." She tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Five yards of that yellow silk—"

"Excuse me—"

"Miss," Olivia provided.

The shop girl's cheeks reddened.

Good, Olivia thought, *she's realized her mistake.*

"Miss," the shop girl huffed, clearly frazzled. "Your choices are quite expensive."

"Yes, well," Olivia said, the playfulness vanishing from her tone, "I have expensive taste. You can charge it to my family's account." Her eyes cut back to the shop girl. "The name is Davenport."

There weren't many Black shoppers ordering white attendants around department stores. But Davenport, a name cultivated by her father's hard work and her mother's determination, was well known. It was powerful enough to get her father admission into most of Chicago's elite clubs, her mother on the most exclusive charity boards, and her older brother into university. Chicago may have been a beacon in the North, where many Black people thrived under laws enacted during and after the Reconstruction, but painful encounters due to the color of her skin still caught her off guard.

A second attendant, an older woman with more decorum, appeared from the crowd. "I can assist you, Miss Davenport. Eliza, you are dismissed," she said to the shop girl. Olivia recognized her as one of her mother's regular attendants. "How are you, dear?"

Olivia's anger began to settle as she watched the older woman flit around wrapping things in tissue. She knew she was being petty. Most things considered, her life was privileged. She thought about canceling the sale, asking that everything be put back, but she could still feel the eyes of the other attendant watching from afar. And pride was one of the many things Davenports had in abundance.

Finally, Ruby appeared. Olivia was relieved to see her friend, and to no longer be the only Black person in the room.

Ruby's face was flushed and her eyes glittered against her russet-brown complexion. "I heard there was a commotion over here," she said with a grin. "What happened?"

Harold, the coachman, pulled the carriage from the curb in front of Marshall Field's and into State Street traffic. It was late afternoon in the early spring, and Chicago was alive. Colonnaded restaurants shared walls with brick and glass factories churning man-made clouds into the sky. Bells from the streetcars competed with the horns of motorized cars. Men in their tweed suits rushed by newsies yelling from their corners. People of all kinds filled the streets as Olivia watched from the window of one of her family's many covered, luxury buggies, concealed by a silk-lined canopy.

"Oh, Olivia." Ruby reached for her hand. "That girl knew damn well that your dress cost more than what she makes in a month. Plain old jealousy, is what that was."

Olivia attempted a smile and refolded her hands in her lap. Her friend was right, but there was more to it. That girl had looked at Olivia as if she were a thief. A pretender. Less than.

Olivia would never get used to that look.

Beside her, Ruby examined the fox-fur trim on a pair of gloves Olivia purchased during her shopping spree. “Keep them,” Olivia said, catching her best friend’s eye. One less thing to remind her.

Ruby pulled on the gloves and cupped her face, preening. Then she wiggled her brows and stuck out her tongue until Olivia gave her a real smile and the two collapsed into a fit of giggles.

Harold stopped the carriage at the intersection. Straight would take them to the North Side, where Chicago’s wealthiest and most affluent residents lived. It was where the Davenports called home.

“Oh! By the way,” Ruby said, “did I imagine it or did Helen come out of your garage covered head to toe in grease the other day?” She stifled a laugh.

Olivia rolled her eyes. Her younger sister was determined to be as unmarriageable as possible. “She should be more careful. If Daddy sees her, he’ll have a fit.”

As children, Olivia and Helen had been close. Together with their maid Amy-Rose, and later Ruby, they turned the grounds of their family estate into their very own kingdom. They spent hours in the gardens, evading their governess. When the time came for Olivia to make her societal debut last spring, she decided to do away with childish things, hoping Helen would follow her example. Instead, Helen seemed to be barreling in the other direction.

As Harold guided the carriage through the gates of Freeport Manor, Olivia couldn’t imagine a more beautiful welcome after a long day. The Davenport mansion stood at the edge of one of Chicago’s most elite neighborhoods, where their estate dwarfed those around them. When Olivia was younger, she thought it was

because of her family's money. Later, she realized it was because no one wanted to buy property that bordered a Black family's estate. The grounds included several acres for gardens, stables, and fields for the horses to roam. The newest addition was a garage for the repair of Davenport carriages and the automobiles John collected.

The Davenport Carriage Company was a leap of faith her father had taken years ago. As a very young man, he had escaped enslavement and made the treacherous journey north, where Black folks had a chance at something like freedom. He dreamed of creating a horse-drawn carriage so luxurious, it would be more than a means of travel. And he succeeded. Shortly after being laughed out of the garage where he worked, William Davenport took his savings and a few disgruntled employees and began his own business. It thrived, and in time his carriages became the most sought-after in the world.

But now, with automobiles competing for space on city streets, John had started to pressure their father to update with the times.

"Look." Ruby pointed to the phaeton near the garage. "Is that one of yours?"

The phaeton was spartan in design. Matte black with thin spindly wheels and no driver, the opposite of the Davenport models with their velvet-tufted seating, thick sturdy tires for a smooth ride, and a finish so lacquered, one could see their reflection above the gold-leaf Davenport crest emblazoned on the back.

Olivia straightened up and gathered her skirts. "Probably one of John's projects. Though, I don't see why he'd bring it here. Ever since he came home with his automobile, it's been all he and Helen talk about."

“Will John be at dinner tonight?” Ruby asked, feigning nonchalance.

Olivia rolled her eyes. Her best friend was terrible at hiding her interest in her brother. “He does have to eat,” she teased.

Olivia descended the steps of the carriage and looked up at Freeport, the only place she’d ever called home. The three-story Victorian was painted a pale blue with steep, gabled roofs and a pair of turrets. The wood railing of the wide porch had been carved with an ivy pattern so lifelike, the leaves appeared to flutter in the breeze. Large oak doors opened before them, revealing a grand staircase that snaked up the side of the foyer, brightly lit by the late afternoon sun filtering through the stained-glass cupola above.

Edward, the butler, waited patiently for their hats and gloves. “You’re late for tea, miss,” he whispered.

“Tea?” she asked. Her mother hadn’t said anything about tea. Olivia tugged at the ribbon below her chin and gave Ruby a confused look.

The girls quickly made their way over the polished hardwood floors and past the gilt-framed mirrors toward the sitting room. Olivia held her breath, her brow furrowed, as she opened the door. “I’m sorry I’m . . .”

Her apology faded when she caught sight of a handsome stranger sitting across from her parents. His camel-colored tweed suit wrapped his smooth dark skin.

“Oh, and here she is now.” Emmeline Davenport rose from the couch, the skirt of her gown falling gracefully around her. She stood impeccably straight, whether from the stays of her corset or sheer determination, Olivia could not tell. Mrs. Davenport cut



a quick look at her daughter with the expressive almond-shaped eyes they shared and gently turned her guest from Mr. Davenport and the tea service. "This is our daughter Olivia. Darling, this is Mr. Lawrence."

The gentleman before Olivia was not like any of the young bachelors she'd met. He towered over her, forcing her to take in the breadth of his shoulders. His hair was parted to one side and brushed flat. Not a single hair out of place. Not even in his thick mustache, which framed full lips that parted at the sight of her to reveal straight white teeth and a self-assured grin. His smooth cheeks ended in a blunt, cleft chin.

He was very handsome.

"It's lovely to meet you." Olivia extended her hand.

"It is my pleasure," he said, accepting her hand and bowing his head. His voice, which had an accent, was so deep, it sent a vibration up her arm.

Olivia watched the smile form on her father's face. Mr. Davenport's large brown eyes softened. He slid his glasses off his proud nose and placed them in the pocket of his jacket. He left his cane against the chair and met her mother at the windows across the room. They made the ultimate picture of what Olivia wanted. A perfectly matched pair.

A flutter at her side brought her attention back to their guest.

"Ruby Tremaine. I don't believe we've been acquainted," Ruby said, her hand shooting out between them. Olivia met the gentleman's eyes, a twinkle of humor at her friend's boldness passing between them.

"Jacob Lawrence. It's a pleasure to meet you as well," he said.

"Mr. Lawrence recently moved here from London," Mrs. Dav-

enport called with a smile, before returning her attention to Olivia's father.

"Oh? And what brings you to Chicago?" Olivia asked.

His eyes found Olivia's. "Looking for new opportunities."

*Indeed*, Olivia thought. "What sort of opportunities?" She could barely keep the flirtation out of her voice.

Mr. Lawrence grinned. "I'm looking to expand my shipping business beyond the British Isles. I met your father at a newsstand a few days ago and he graciously offered to make some introductions. I called to give my thanks."

Olivia felt her parents' stares from across the room and moved closer to Mr. Lawrence. "I apologize for my tardiness. If I had known you were coming, I wouldn't have kept you waiting."

Without taking his eyes off Olivia, Mr. Lawrence said, "No need to apologize. My visit was not planned. I only regret that we aren't able to spend more time together."

Olivia's heart raced.

Ruby near-shimmied her way between them. "I absolutely insist you attend my father's party this Friday."

"It's a campaign fundraiser for Mr. Tremaine's bid for mayor," Olivia's mother said, walking over. She turned to Mr. Lawrence. "The Tremaines' ballroom isn't as grand as ours, but it's sure to be a cozy, intimate gathering."

Olivia shot an apologetic glance at her best friend and said, "I have always found the Tremaines' garden to be lovely this time of year. Will it be open for exploration, Ruby?"

"Of course." Ruby sniffed. "We've spared no expense."

Mr. Davenport appeared at Mr. Lawrence's elbow. "It will be a perfect opportunity to meet Chicago's major players."

“You’re very kind. I can’t think of a better way to spend a Friday evening.” Mr. Lawrence turned to Olivia. “Will I see you there?”

Olivia felt a flutter in her stomach. The season had only just begun, and here the most eligible suitor she’d ever laid eyes on was quite literally in her drawing room. Maybe finding a husband at last would be easier than she thought.

“Of course,” she said, a smile playing across her lips. “I might even save you a dance.”

## CHAPTER 2

### *Helen*

*This looks nothing like the diagram*, Helen thought as she inspected the undercarriage of the damaged Ford Model T John towed to the garage earlier that morning. A delivery like this reminded Helen of Christmas morning: the anticipation and the suspense, each vehicle a mystery. Even though automobile repair wasn't specifically in the Davenport portfolio, John quietly accumulated the best mechanics in Chicago to help him service and modify the new horseless carriages sweeping the nation.

That roster of mechanics included Helen. She stared at the deformed entrails of his latest find, convinced that her brother gave her the wrong schematics to study. The sketches appeared simple enough, but looking at the inner workings of the automobile now was like staring at a tangled web. It didn't help that John and the other mechanics made suggestions above her head. It was only a matter of time before the twins, Isaac and Henry, began bickering. She rubbed her temple, postponing the stirring headache.

“Hand me the wrench,” John said. His hand bumped her face as he reached blindly in her direction.

She swatted his hand away and sat on the floor, dirt and oil altering the pattern already stained into a pair of John’s old overalls. “I don’t know why you won’t just let me do it. My hands are smaller than yours.”

“Fine then, you fix it.” John’s frustration barely disguised the challenge in his tone. The men around her stopped talking. Even Malcolm, who kept a scowl permanently etched on his face, took a step closer. She knew they would be watching her every move. The first time John turned a repair over to her, the whole garage erupted in protest, Malcolm loudest of all. Since then, most of the mechanics watched her with a mixture of amusement and awe. Malcolm, however, preferred to grunt from a corner about women knowing their place. About wealthy children using his workplace as their playground.

All of the men were sworn to secrecy.

Helen Marie Davenport searched among the scattered tools and wiped the back of her hand against her chin. Kneeling in a puddle of oil, she felt more herself here than anywhere else. Here no one expected her to know the right things to say or be aware of the latest gossip and trends. Here she let her curiosity run wild.

John didn’t mind her constant questions. He let her speak her mind. Helen adored her older brother. They even had the same look about them, contagious smiles, and their father’s proud nose and quiet nature. And they were dreamers.

“Did you forget what a wrench looks like?” John teased.

The men laughed at his joke. Isaac reached for the diagram she’d left on the floor. An architect by trade, he’d followed his

brother to the Davenport Carriage Company after seeing an ad in the paper. "I can look these over for you, if you'd like, Helen."

That was another thing. Here, she wasn't *Miss Davenport* or *Miss Helen*. With the exception of Malcolm, who never addressed her directly, the men called her by her first name. She'd earned her place with them and they treated her like an equal for it.

Inside the garage, she was a true apprentice.

The garage wasn't as fancy as the factory where the carriages were made, but it suited their needs just fine. The outside was painted the same shade of pale blue as the manor house. Two large bay doors allowed them to work on more than one automobile at a time, especially since John's Ford was parked in the carriage house. The walls were lined with a mix of new and secondhand tools mounted above the wooden workbench that hugged the back wall as it stretched toward the small office, where she and her brother often discussed the business's future.

But before Helen could hand over the diagram, something caught her eye and suddenly the engine's secrets revealed themselves to her. She gathered the tools she needed, and the rest of the garage faded into the background. She leaned forward over the open engine, alert and breathless. This is what she was meant to do.

The men watched for a while, but in time they returned to their own work, and John's shadow fell over her. John, the first-born child and only son, was groomed to take over the family's carriage company. His easy smile and smooth manners made every lady swoon over him.

Then there was Olivia. Olivia, who always knew the right thing to say and didn't get ink on her sleeve or grease on her chin. She'd marry well and make their parents proud and continue to shop

and entertain her way through life, just as she'd spent the last year doing.

Helen closed her eyes and took a steadying breath. She missed her sister—the way she'd been. Helen intended to use her mind to do more than plan dinners and pick china.

John tugged on her ear. "Where'd you go?"

Helen shook her head. "I think you should tell Daddy about converting the business to an automobile factory. Just repairing Ford and General Motors automobiles is not the future of our company. Studebaker and Patterson are already—"

"Helen." He sighed. "We've been over this. He won't even allow us to advertise automobile *repairs*. He would never agree to a factory."

She looked up at him. "He would if you present it the right way. He may be set in his ways, but Daddy likes facts. It's a risk, I agree. But one we need to take."

"I couldn't argue it the way you do." John juggled the planetary gear between his hands. "You tallied the numbers, made the plans, figured out the budgets."

"And you predicted the trend in the market, secured a space downtown to open a larger factory, and"—she poked him in the chest—"recognized what I have to offer."

"You're right. We're a team." He massaged below his left shoulder and frowned. "I wouldn't feel right presenting your work to Daddy as my own."

Helen grunted. Her face hot and prickling from the indecision on John's face. "You know very well that Daddy would laugh me out of the room."

After making a few minor adjustments to the Model T's under-

carriage, she took the gear from her brother and fitted it into place. Her stomach clenched at the thought of voicing her secret wish—to work, officially, for the Davenport Carriage Company—to her father. John would keep her secret until she was ready, until she had the experience to *prove* to their father that she had as much to contribute to the family name as her siblings.

“I just think you’re not giving him a chance,” her brother said. “He could surprise you.”

Helen chewed her lip. What if John was right? Helen pictured herself walking into his study with her notes and numbers. She’d played her speech out in her mind so many times, she could recite it in her sleep. In her best, wildest dreams, Daddy was impressed—*proud*.

The corner of John’s mouth twitched. “You both get the same look on your face when you have an idea. You’re more alike than you realize.”

Hope swelled in Helen’s chest. Just when she thought she would float away, the garage’s side door swung open.

Amy-Rose stood in the doorway. Flour coated her sleeve and a few stray curls clung to the side of her neck. Her expressive hazel eyes were set in a medium-brown complexion spotted with freckles. Now those eyes settled on Helen.

“There you are! I swear—” Amy-Rose tripped over the threshold. “Your *mother* asked for you,” she said, clearly out of breath. “I told her you were in the bath.”

Helen didn’t believe her friend’s face could have flushed any brighter until Amy-Rose spotted John sitting on the floor beside her.

John stood first. “Thank you, Amy-Rose.” He stretched his



arms down to his sister and hauled her up. “Get inside before Mama and Daddy find you like this.”

Some days Helen wished they would, just so she wouldn't have to keep part of herself hidden from them.

But for now, Helen wiped her palms on her thighs and hugged her brother quickly, not sure which one of them smelled worse. Then she followed Amy-Rose, scanning the windows of the manor as she sprinted back inside.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Amy-Rose*

Amy-Rose picked up Helen's soggy towel from the bedroom floor and hung it in the adjoining bathroom. After she found Helen in the garage with John, she had quickly ushered the youngest Davenport into the bath and gotten her dressed for dinner. Now Helen was downstairs with the rest of her family while Amy-Rose tidied up. After this, she would be needed in the kitchen.

Through the next set of doors was Olivia's bedroom. The girls' rooms may have been mirror images of each other—great four-poster beds, thick Persian rugs, rich vibrant wallpaper—but that's where the similarities ended. Olivia kept her room pristine: Every object had its place. She never left discarded garments on the floor. Her books sat erect on their shelves. A few family photos dotted the fireplace mantel.

Amy-Rose had spent hours in there as a child, hosting elaborate teas with the Davenport girls and their dolls, whispering hopes and dreams late into the night when their mothers were fast asleep.

When her mother was still alive.

Amy-Rose thought back to the day she and her mother, Clara Shepherd, arrived at the long gravel drive of Freeport Manor, the biggest house she'd ever seen. Everything was large here, glittering and beautiful. Especially the family who called it home. The Davenports were the only family in Chicago that would take a maid with a child; no one else wanted the extra mouth to feed. In this new, strange place so far from home, Amy-Rose had found friends.

It had been three years since her mother had passed. Some days she could pretend that her mother was just in another room, dusting a chandelier or turning down a bed, singing French lullabies. Amy-Rose would run up to their shared bedroom and the pain of remembering her passing would force her to her knees. When the ache eventually subsided, happy memories would fill her mind. The best were the stories her mother used to tell her about Saint Lucia—the colorful birds that visited their home, the bright mangoes that grew in the yard, and the sweet smell of the bougainvillea mixing with the salty sea air. She missed the views of the mountains, Gros Piton and Petit Piton, reaching for the sky. Amy-Rose had been only five when they left the island, so she didn't remember much. Her mother's memories felt like hers.

They rarely spoke about the storm that took the rest of their family or their home. This was their new home.

A carpeted hall led into the small drawing room where the girls spent most of their time. Deserted except for the small terrier lounging on a grand silk pillow in the corner, the room was a mix of Olivia's ordered and classic style and Helen's latest interests: books about Rome and manuals about automobile engines. Even

Ruby left her mark here in the samples of perfume from Marshall Field's dotting a small rolling tray used for tea.

With a sigh, Amy-Rose descended a set of stairs to the Davenports' impressive kitchen.

"Good, you're here," a voice boomed from inside the pantry. "Take this. And this." Jessie, the head cook, dropped a carton of eggs into Amy-Rose's arms without looking to see if she was ready to catch them.

Jessie heaved a sack of flour onto a cutting board with such force, Mrs. Davenport's favorite tea service rattled on the tray. The cook set her fists on her wide hips and turned slowly toward Amy-Rose. "It don't take that long to lace that girl into a corset." She pivoted again, her broad hands shoved dishes into the sink.

Clearly, Jessie had never tried to dress Helen Davenport. "Helen needed a touch-up," Amy-Rose said. "Her hair doesn't hold the curl as long as Olivia's."

Henrietta and Ethel appeared through another passage and immediately began straightening up the kitchen. Jessie didn't spare them a glance, even when Ethel placed a hand on her shoulder. Instead she stared at Amy-Rose as if she knew the young maid's thoughts were far from the task at hand.

"I think you're helping that girl get away with mischief you have no business being involved in." Jessie sighed long and deep, softening her gruff tone. "I know you care for those girls like sisters, but mind me, they *ain't* your sisters. You need to stop dreaming of how things used to be and start thinking about how they is. The girls will be married soon." Jessie pointed to the pots piled high in the sink and the maids polishing the fine silver. "The Davenports won't need you then."

Amy-Rose edged in to wash her hands and grabbed an apron from the hook, ignoring the truth of Jessie's words. Instead, she let herself be transported to Mr. Spencer's storefront and the day she'd flip the sign from Closed to Open on the door. The day the storefront would have *her* name above the entrance, and customers waiting for her wares and trained stylists. The apron hanging from her neck wouldn't be to protect her clothes from potato peels or sauce, but hair butter and shampoo. "Who's to say I'll even be here when that happens?" she huffed. "In a few weeks' time, I aim to have enough saved in Binga Bank to lease Mr. Spencer's storefront."

Amy-Rose looked at the older woman who, for years, had hovered over her like an overbearing godmother. Telling Jessie her plans made her plans that much more real—more than a day-dream she shared with her friend Tommy. Out in the stables with him, it was a wish. Tommy was the only person who really knew of her desire to leave and strike out in business for herself. He'd gone with her to apply for a loan after securing enough for a down payment. His belief in her was almost as strong as her own.

"About two months ago," she continued when Jessie didn't reply, "I asked Mr. Spencer if he'd be interested in selling one of my deep conditioners in his barbershop." Amy-Rose felt a warmth spread through her. "They were a hit. He said they practically walked off the shelf. Since then, he's been reunited with his daughter down in Georgia. He's a grandfather and—"

Jessie brushed excess flour from the top of the cup in her hand. "Girl, get to the part about the store." She turned then, and watched Amy-Rose with misty eyes, a hand settled back on her hip. "Well, go on," she said after clearing her throat.

Amy-Rose flushed. "Mr. Spencer agreed to rent his barbershop to me so he could move South." The words came in a rush that blew all the air from her lungs. She watched the other women stop their work. Her heart raced as she took in their wide eyes and their slow turn to Jessie. The Davenports' cook and self-appointed leader of the household took her face in her hands as she walked around the butcher-block table to embrace Amy-Rose.

"Oh, your mama would be so proud!" Henrietta cried from her station at the silver cabinet.

"Hetty's right. Your mama'd be proud." Jessie patted Amy-Rose's cheek. "Now, until then, separate the yolks from the whites." Her order lacked any of its usual sternness and Amy-Rose obediently picked up a knife.

Hetty sidled up to Amy-Rose and said in what she may have thought was a whisper, "What about Mr. John?"

"He'll inherit his father's company one day." Amy-Rose chased away the image of John in the garage, his worn trousers and shirtsleeves pushed up to his elbows. The way the muscles in his forearms moved under his skin. "And I'll have mine."

Jessie turned, her face screwed up for a lecture, when something outside the window caught her eye. "What does that boy want now?"

Amy-Rose followed the cook's gaze and saw Tommy, Harold's son, waving from the garden. He had warm brown skin and wide, eager eyes such a deep, calm brown, they could set anyone at ease. After Amy-Rose's mother had died, she'd spent time watching Tommy feed and brush the horses as she feed them apples and other treats. Long rides on the grounds led to a close friendship between the two. When Amy-Rose shared her dream of one

day opening a salon for the care of Black women's hair, Tommy congratulated her as if she'd already done it. His hope buoyed her own.

"It can wait," Jessie complained, but Amy-Rose was already on her way outside.

Tommy paced along the fence, wringing a hat in his hands. There was an unusual fervor in his eyes and an energy about him that filled her with both excitement and dread. Like Amy-Rose, Tommy had grown up alongside the Davenport siblings, but he'd always respected the line that separated the help from the family. He'd never befriended John, a boy his own age, even though the Davenports' only son had spent as much time in the garage and stables as the lead coachman's only child. Tommy seemed to be the only person immune to John's endearing charm.

"I'm leaving," Tommy said by way of greeting.

Amy-Rose skidded to a stop.

Tommy barreled on. "I spoke to the conductor of the Santa Fe Railway, and he agreed to give me a reduced fare on a transcontinental headed west."

"West?" Amy-Rose said, her mind still struggling to catch up with Tommy's words. It should have come as no surprise. He'd been trying to escape Freeport ever since he was old enough to work, or "earn his keep," as his father said. Tommy vowed he would leave this place and make a fortune of his own.

"I've been talking to a member of the Chicago chapter of the National Negro Business League. He said that there's new cities growing like daises all over the country. Full of new opportunities."

"Where could you have more options than here?"

"I need to start somewhere new, where I'm not *one of the Daven-*

*ports' boys*. I'm not trading in a bridle for a shoe-shine kit when they eventually switch to horseless carriages." Tommy twisted his hat some more. It was barely recognizable. "Amy-Rose, the man offered me a job at his insurance company."

Amy-Rose was confused. "You want to sell insurance?"

He laughed. "They do more than that. They secure loans and real estate for Black entrepreneurs. It's what built the South Side." Tommy closed the distance between them and took both of Amy-Rose's hands in his. "I aim to be on the California Express in six weeks' time." He cupped her shoulders. "I wanted you to be the second person I told, after my dad, of course." He let her go and shook his head, as if surprised by his own news. "I also wanted to thank you."

"Thank me?"

"You've inspired me. I listened to your plans for a salon, watched you pepper every business owner downtown until they chased you out and onto the street." They both smiled at the memory of the dry-goods store owner, Clyde, doing just that. "You were a force to be reckoned with when you brought your savings to the bank." He laughed. "Not sure you needed me at all." Tommy looked at her with a genuine warmth that made her heart swell. "You're on your way to make everything you want a reality. And I want that. For you, and for myself."

Amy-Rose threw her arms around his neck. He smelled like hay and horses, sweat and determination. Tommy was a salve to her battered soul when she needed a friend. A good man, hard-working and proud. How could she not want the best for him?

"Don't worry," he said. "I'll come back to visit my father. And for your grand opening."



She laughed around the lump in her throat and pulled away. She tried to imagine Freeport—Chicago—without him. Already, the world around her seemed less bright. As if he knew what she was thinking, he brushed a finger against her cheek, catching a tear before it fell. He said, “Everyone has to leave home some-time.”

## CHAPTER 4

### *Ruby*

Ruby Tremaine loved her best friend, truly she did, but nothing highlighted the change in her circumstances more than lying on Olivia's four-poster, silk-canopied bed after a long day of shopping for items Olivia cared so little about.

Ruby's own life had been reduced to budgets and polite smiles, as Margaret, the maid she and her mother now shared, tore up her old dresses and attempted to make them look different and daring enough to pass as new purchases. Luckily, the latest trend of narrow, shorter skirts meant there was enough fabric to work with.

Ruby had tried to ignore the signs of her father's tightening grip on her purse strings, especially when the city's influential lawmakers continued to appear at dinner each week, or when her family enjoyed the view from their private box at the racetrack. But then last spring, Henry Tremaine sat his wife and daughter down in the study and told them he was running for office. "We will all have to do our part," he said.

*Our part.*

Our part felt more and more like their decisions and her consequences. Ruby still tried to focus on the positive outcome of *when* her father succeeded in his bid for mayor. She was in much better circumstances than her cousins in Georgia, who, with her father's help, recently secured ownership of the land where her uncle was a tenant farmer. The cotton they harvested supplied the raw materials for the textiles produced at the Tremaine mill and boardinghouse. But failing crops down south coupled with the financial stress of the campaign were taking their toll.

At first it was fun. New, handsome politicians to flirt with, even if she had to suffer through endless debates about wages and the overcrowding in factories.

Less than a year later, though, Ruby wasn't sure if her father was any closer to becoming Chicago's first Black mayor, much as she hated that stab of doubt. She *did* know that a summer holiday in Paris was drifting farther and farther from reach.

Of course, Ruby had intended to confide all this to her best friend several times before today, but the words always got stuck somewhere in her chest. Every purchase Olivia ordered seared a hole in Ruby's pride and forced her to bite back the poison bitterness rising in her. She'd disappear between the displays of the department store and admire the wares, telling herself the lack of pressure to purchase was a relief. At least it allowed her to sulk in private, which she seldom did around her friend.

Olivia entered from the drawing room she shared with Helen. "What have you heard of this Jacob Lawrence?" she asked. Her eyes glowed as she stared out her bedroom window.

Ruby shrugged. "You?"

Olivia shook her head. "He is something, isn't he? I'd like to know more about him, but I'm afraid showing too much interest will have Mama hovering closer than ever." She smiled. "Do you think there's a secret catalog where parents find suitable husbands?"

"If there is, I'd like a subscription." Ruby sighed, her chest tightening at the thought of John.

Olivia's delicate brows wrinkled. She must have sensed Ruby's anxiety, because she said, "We are to be true sisters soon. Once John is over the stress of impressing Daddy, I'm sure he'll make you a grand proposal."

Ruby reached instinctively to twirl the pendant at her neck, remembering too late it wasn't there. She clutched the decorative pillow in her lap instead, holding on to her friend's encouragement just as tightly. "I hope so."

Being near John made Ruby's throat dry and stomach twirl; she had loved him for as long as she could remember. Yet despite little flirtations and stolen kisses, and the clear encouragement of their families, John had yet to propose.

It worried her.

Like Olivia, Ruby was now of age. It was time to settle down and get married. And, with her family's situation growing more dire, the pressure was on to find a good match, one that would secure Ruby's wealth and position in society. John would do that, but more importantly, she had never wanted anyone but him.

Ruby looked down and realized she had unraveled the pillow's braided fringe. She tossed it aside and her hand flew up to her neck again, where her namesake gemstone once sat in the hollow of her throat. She was suddenly filled with an urgency to see John. To remind him of why they belonged together. "Let's head down-

stairs," she suggested. "We were so late this afternoon, maybe we can make up for it by being early for dinner?"

Ruby led the way, Freeport as familiar to her as her own home, not too far from here. They descended the grand staircase and followed the voices in the hall to the living room, where the rest of the family was indeed already gathered. This space, decorated in deep reds and rich golds, was where the Davenports did most of their entertaining. The person Ruby most wanted to see stood apart from the others. John positioned himself in front of the fireplace, a glass of amber liquid cradled in his hand.

*This is my chance*, Ruby thought. She walked up to the fire, her skin already prickling from the sight of him. She fixed a soft smile to her face and touched his shoulder.

"Good evening," she said, hiding her nerves behind a casual tone.

John flinched in surprise and turned to her.

She placed a hand on his wrist. "I didn't mean to startle you."

"My mind was somewhere else." John smiled, the full force of his gaze on her.

In a moment, she was transported back there: under the white oak trees that lined the Davenport property. Helen had challenged Ruby and Olivia to a race. Ruby's horse had thrown her from the saddle and run off into the woods. Helen and Olivia were too far ahead to see what had happened, but their brother came running.

As John had inspected her ankle, Ruby could only think of how handsome he was. How much she wanted to kiss him. Before she could lose her nerve, she leaned in.

His body had stiffened, one of his hands still encircling her ankle. Then he softened and returned the gentle pressure of her lips. A violent fluttering had erupted in her chest. Ruby had risen

onto her knees and closed the space between them. She'd shivered as his hands brushed the top of her shoulders, slid across her back, and settled at the nape of her neck, deepening their kiss.

When he'd finally pulled away, gasping for air, Ruby had almost fallen forward into his lap. His heart had thudded under her palm, and he'd smiled at her. Wordlessly, he had helped her to her feet and escorted her back to the house. It was their first kiss, and certainly not their last.

He stared at her lips now as if he was trapped in the same memory.

Ruby's face warmed, and she took another step closer.

"Do you still ride?" John asked, practically reading her mind.

"Not as often as I'd like," she replied, a smile on her lips. She did not mention that her family had sold all but two of their horses.

John took a small sip from his glass. "Weather permitting, we should arrange an afternoon ride for next week."

Ruby kept her grin demure. "I'm sure we can find the shade of an oak tree when the sun is high."

John's eyes widened, but just when she finally had his full attention Amy-Rose suddenly appeared, holding a bottle filled with the amber liquid John was drinking.

"Thank you, Amy-Rose." John extended his glass, the effects of their shared memory quickly vanishing. "And thank you for this afternoon. I know Helen can be a handful."

"No trouble at all," Amy-Rose said, casting her eyes downward. She was, as always, infuriatingly beautiful for a maid. Ruby had never seen a girl whose features, unadorned with jewels, gloss, or rouge, appeared so flawless up close.

Ruby stepped closer to John. Between him, the fire, and the

look he was giving Amy-Rose, she felt a ribbon of sweat unfurl down her back. "Come. Let's go someplace a little more private," she said to John, eager to get their conversation back on track. She cut her eyes to Amy-Rose, who nodded and walked away.

Ruby needed to remind John of what they once were and what they still could be. And that would not happen if he was staring at the maid like that.

From outside, Ruby's brick-faced home seemed empty, abandoned. Tremaine Mansion was nestled closer to the bustle of downtown Chicago. Ruby alighted the carriage in front of the grand entrance. She couldn't help but think it looked like a haunted mansion compared to Freeport. It lacked the warmth of the Davenports' home, and the family that breathed life into it.

Standing in her empty foyer, Ruby felt like a ghost, a specter who flitted silently in and out. She was glad for the darkness. It hid the changes that opened a hollow sadness in her—missing paintings, sold mementos, items that were, to her, priceless trinkets. The list was endless.

"Ruby, darling, is that you?"

She had nearly reached the landing of the staircase when her mother called from the dimly lit room down the hall. Her shoulders sagged. "Yes," she replied quietly. Her stomach rolled as she dragged her feet across the hall where a plush Aubusson runner once warmed the corridor.

Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine sat on either side of a slowly dying fire, drinking sherry. Ruby came to a stop before them as if called to the mat for some transgression.

“How was your evening?” her mother asked.

Ruby stared at the embers glowing red in the firebox. “Lovely.” She tried not to fidget; her mother despised fidgeting.

“The Davenports are well?” she pressed. Ruby looked at her mother and saw what she would look like in twenty years. Even in the low light, she could make out her regal nose and full lips. Though her figure was fuller, Mrs. Tremaine could easily be mistaken for Ruby’s sister.

“Yes.”

Mr. Tremaine placed his crystal glass on the side table with a crash. “Enough pleasantries. Did you speak with John?” Her father turned in his chair and frowned at her. He was a tall man with a rounded belly. Ten years older than his wife, his hair showed a light dusting of white at his temples, but the sharp, piercing gleam of his eyes had not dimmed a bit.

“John and I shared a moment alone after dinner,” she began. “He and I lingered in the dining room when everyone else retired next door for coffee or brandy. We laughed about some of our adventures as children—”

“Ruby,” her mother said, “you’re rambling.” Mrs. Tremaine didn’t raise her voice, but there was something in her calm, composed tone that made the hairs on Ruby’s arms rise.

“He invited me to go riding.” She took a step closer to them.

“When?” Mr. Tremaine’s voice was loud in the quiet, and made both his wife and daughter flinch.

Ruby looked between her parents, realizing that she had played this all wrong. She should have said she was still priming John to ask her the question they so dearly wanted. “We . . . haven’t decided on an exact date.”