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THE DAVENPORTS

KRYSTAL MARQUIS

ISBN: 9780593463338

Trim: 5½ x 8¼

On Sale: January 2023

Ages 12 & up • Grades 7 & up

384 pages

\$18.99 USA / \$25.99 CAN

Dial Books

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An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York



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an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.
Manufactured in Canada
ISBN 9780593463338

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
FRI

Design by Jennifer Kelly
Text set in Minister Light

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*To my parents for accepting that med school wasn't
going to be a thing. Your love, support, and sacrifice
gave me courage to chase this dream. —K.M.*

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

Dear Reader,

The Davenports is inspired by a forgotten history—by the instances of Black success across Midwestern U.S. cities like Chicago during the early 1900s, places then as full of progress and possibility for Black people as they were inequity and segregation. It's inspired by the story of the C.R. Patterson & Sons carriage company, founded by a proud patriarch who escaped enslavement to become a wealthy and respected entrepreneur. I wondered about his family—his daughters especially. What was life like for women in their position? I wanted *The Davenports* to hold up examples of representation I wish I'd had as a teen, to focus on four young Black women discovering the courage to pursue their dreams—and loves—at a time when Jim Crow, fear, and distrust threatened both. The young women in *The Davenports* are determined and passionate as they try to balance the expectations of their circumstances with love and happiness found in surprising, and not always approved of, places. And really, who doesn't adore a grand estate, a glamorous ball, and a juicy romance or four? I hope you love reading these young women's stories as much as I've loved writing them.

Happy reading!

Kyrala Marquis

CHICAGO, 1910

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 broach 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 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 non-chalance.

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."

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. Davenport 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 Malcom, 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 second-hand 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 St. 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 daydream 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 get the loan. 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 barber shop." 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 barber shop 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 yolk 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 shirt sleeves pushed up to his elbows. The way the muscles in his forearm 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 feeding and brushing the horses with Tommy, finding the fresh air had felt good. 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 Dav-*

enports' 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 sometime.”

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. "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."

Her mother's mouth puckered into a tight bow.

Mr. Tremaine slapped his knee and shot up from his chair. "I

had intended to announce your engagement to John Davenport at the party this Friday.”

Ruby sucked in a breath. How could he plan an announcement before a proposal?

“Darling,” Her mother stood and took Ruby’s hand, her face softening ever so slightly. “John is a good man, from a wonderful family. Your marriage to him could save *this* family. Together, the Tremaines and Davenports can be the example of what’s possible here. I do hope you are trying.” Her tone was supportive and yet her fingers were tight around Ruby’s hand.

“I am, Mother,” Ruby said, keeping her voice controlled and stepping out of her mother’s reach. How could she even ask Ruby that? Ruby had been trying with every modest smile and well-timed laugh, with every arch of her eyebrow or accidental run-in on the estate grounds. How could she explain to her parents that perhaps no matter how hard she tried, it may not work out the way they’d planned? No one asked her if she wanted to be the face of Black progress. They were gambling what they had—her future and their own—to convince a city full of people that the Tremaine family’s success could be easily replicated.

With her heart in her stomach, Ruby left the room, wondering who wanted her engagement more.

CHAPTER 5

Olivia

“Make sure you bring this right inside.”

“Yes, Mama.” Olivia’s arms ached from the weight of the basket she held. Her mother had arranged the muffins for the soup kitchen on the South Side.

Mrs. Davenport added two more muffins to the basket. “It’s important to help those with less, Olivia. Your father and I wouldn’t be where we are today without help along the way.”

Olivia straightened. “I know.” It was a beautiful afternoon, perfect for walking by the lake or a ride in an open carriage. Then her mother had asked her to make this trip downtown. Technically it was Helen’s turn, but she’d disappeared some time before breakfast. Olivia was more than a little annoyed, though she chided herself for the feeling. Of course her mother could depend on her.

“I’ll see that these get to the volunteers.”

Emmeline Davenport pressed her hand to Olivia’s cheek. It was all the encouragement she needed. The basket bounced off her hip as she left the kitchen for the stables. Just outside the door, Tommy was readying the horses.

“Miss,” he said, taking the basket and offering her a hand into the horses-drawn carriage. She settled into the soft leather with the basket beside her. Freeport Manor disappeared between the trees.

In the city, restaurants and shops blurred by. Soon they were on South Street’s scaled-down version of State Street, full of boutiques, markets, and Black-owned businesses, including salons, law firms, and a hospital. Before Amy-Rose began styling the Davenports’ hair, Emmeline and her daughters made a day of shopping and visiting the salon. Olivia had never seen so many people who looked like her in one place. Some were formerly enslaved people like her father. Others were born free back east like her mother. All were hoping to build a new life in a city that offered opportunities to remake oneself. Here, music seemed to be the dominant sound as brassy jazz permeated the air like fresh baked bread. Men traded information outside the barbershop as they got their shoes shined, and mothers held their children close. It excited her and, if she was being honest, made her nervous, all at the same time.

Olivia stepped out of the carriage with the basket in hand. “I’ll drop these off and be right back,” she said to Tommy over her shoulder.

Visiting the community center was always humbling. She knew her life was much different from those of the people who lined up for canned goods or a hot meal.

“Miss Olivia, nice to see you again.” Mary Booker organized the clothing and food drives and oversaw the soup kitchen.

“Hello, Miss Mary.” Olivia placed the basket on the table behind the buffet.

Mary leaned over her shoulder, her hands buried in an apron. "I bet those taste as good as they smell. Thank your mother for us."

"Of course." Happy to be rid of her small load, Olivia took in the room. The walls were unadorned, and empty chairs sat under many of the tables. She remembered how vibrant the room had been for the Easter celebration three weeks ago. The room was far less crowded than usual. "Am I late or early?" she asked.

"Neither. Everyone has someplace better to be, it seems." As Mary spoke, a young man brought his tray to the table and hurried out the door.

Olivia said goodbye and told Mary that her sister would retrieve the basket next week.

On her way out, she spotted a group of Black men and women about her age. They whispered in a corner, laughing nervously. Curiosity gnawed at her. Of course Olivia had friends—she had Ruby, and her sister, and Amy-Rose, and a few other girls with whom she could have a chat—but something about seeing this group of friends whisper and laugh stirred something in her.

Before she realized what she was doing, Olivia followed them outside and around the corner of Newbury Library. The group stopped in front of a nondescript house on a cobblestone street. The plain brick edifice was clean. The shades were drawn. She watched them disappear inside, and three more people too—a man her father's age and an older woman on the arm of a young man, who was whispering in her ear. She somehow knew that whatever was going on in there was why the center was empty—and that it was important enough to draw young and old into its darkness.

The porch stairs slanted to the right as a tall man in a too-small suit greeted her. "The meeting's downstairs. Watch your head."

She ducked under the low beam at the landing. The hushed voices below reminded her of a hummingbird, full of energy and too swift to catch. The basement was darker than the main floor, light entering through narrow windows cut high into the ceiling. Faces, all different shades of brown, took turns peeking at the other entrance near a makeshift stage. She paused when she spotted the occasional pale face among them. None were from the social circles Mr. and Mrs. Davenport kept their children closed within.

"You look a bit lost," a voice said behind her.

Olivia's hand tightened around the purse and gloves clutched to her chest. "I am not lost." She peered at the stranger under the brim of her hat, still fastened to her head. The young man lifted his chin to see over the crowd.

"Oh," he said. "You're meeting someone." He hooked his thumbs on the lapels of his jacket. His gray-striped suit was perfectly tailored, but showed some signs of wear. They were of a similar height, with her in her heeled boots, making it difficult for her to avert her gaze. His strong jaw tilted back to her, and Olivia was struck by the light honeyed color of his eyes, high cheekbones, and bright white teeth revealed by a disarming smile.

"No," she began, then stopped. He was a stranger. She didn't need to tell him anything.

"So, you *are* lost." He nodded as he examined her carefully planned outfit. "Fine dress. Polished boots. Those hands look like they've never done a hard day's work." He laughed at Olivia's open mouth and the shock written across her face. His laugh was smooth, and so full of joy, it spilled over. She almost forgot he was laughing at her expense.

"Just because my clothes are nice—"

"Nice? Miss, open your eyes."

Olivia followed his gaze. The people gathered in their second-hand shoes and ill-fitting suits knew hardships she couldn't imagine. She assumed some, like her, were one generation beyond enslavement. Mr. Davenport never really talked about his family, of the life he left behind, or what it took him to get North. It was as if his life began in Chicago when he met Emmeline Smith while working in a carriage repair shop.

Now Olivia's hands drifted to the large gold buttons of her blouse. The realization that each one could probably feed someone for a week made heat prick her cheeks. The crowd pressed closer. She felt trapped between the man beside her and an older woman to her right, who left Olivia in a cloud of powder and shea butter when their shoulders collided.

"Mrs. Woodard." Olivia recognized her as a close friend of Reverend Andrews. Both were strong supporters of the community center.

The middle-aged woman gave Olivia a firm handshake before folding her arms over her chest. Her double-breasted coat was the same shade of cream as her skirt. A pearl barrette kept her voluminous coils away from her face. "Will you be joining the women's gathering?"

Olivia glanced around the room. There were indeed as many women in the crowded room as men. When her attention returned to Mrs. Woodard, the older woman's sharp gaze made Olivia's throat dry up. If *I* recognize her, *then*—

"We're pushing for the vote, you know," said a young woman on the other side of Mrs. Woodard. She wore a dress that looked

like a uniform, deep blue, with white stockings and shoes. She pushed her chin forward. "We deserve a say," she said, her eyes on the men in front of them. "Just as much as they do." Soon Olivia found herself surrounded by women discussing their work and politics. They possessed a confidence and directness she immediately liked. They were like Helen, self-assured and determined. Olivia was painfully aware of the rudely opinionated young man next to her, watching her every move from the corner of his eye.

"And what are your reasons for visiting the old Samson House?" he asked. The tenor of his voice was a startling contrast to the ladies' higher ones.

"I don't know why I'm here," she confessed. "I followed a group from the community center." She gestured to the teenagers crowded at the front of the room.

He nodded. "They're here to see a Mr. DeWight."

Olivia waited for more information. "And he is?" Her frustration was mounting. First, he implied she did not belong there. Now he was being deliberately obtuse.

"A lawyer from Alabama."

The crowd around them continued to swell and the temperature in the room increased. This was all for a lawyer?

The young stranger went on. "His articles in *The Defender* got people talking 'bout their rights and Jim Crow."

"Jim Crow?" She looked away, trying to remember the snippets she heard about of the restrictions on Black people in the southern states. She chewed her lip, embarrassed at how little she recalled.

The beginning of a smirk tugged at his mouth. Olivia had a feeling he knew just how to play those high cheekbones. "It's worse than I feared," he said. The desire to set him straight raised

her temperature, but he continued before she could respond. "It is a good thing you're here," he said, his chin pointing behind her, where Reverend Andrews appeared, brushing past them to walk onstage and step onto an overturned crate. He faced the crowd. A hush fell over the room, like the quiet that falls over a congregation before the organ bellows the opening hymn. But this was not a service Olivia was used to.

The reverend cleared his throat. "Thank you all for coming here today. I know these are trying times, dangerous times. It may seem as if a force greater than ourselves means to pull us back after each stride toward equality." Women nodded into their fans and men's jaws hardened. A few offered mumbled prayers through barely parted lips.

"But we must not lose faith." The people around Olivia responded to his words with a chorus of *Amen*. "Without further delay, Mr. Washington DeWight."

"Excuse me," said the mysterious young man, the one who had interrogated her. She watched him gently part the masses on his way to the stage.

It took her a moment to understand.

He is Mr. DeWight?

He skipped over the crate to the spot where the reverend just stood. He found Olivia in the crowd and winked at her, setting her pulse raging in her ears. She wished she could disappear, run back up the stairs. But she didn't want him to know how much he'd rattled her. She forced her feet to stay rooted to the floor and to not turn from his gaze, which seemed locked on her.

Alabama lawyer Washington DeWight spoke with a steady confidence as he described growing unemployment and restricted

access to employment and education, famine and violence that forced Black people north and west. He painted a picture so unlike the world she knew, despite insulting behavior from the occasional store clerk, that she couldn't help but question its veracity. But then she looked at the men and women beside her, the tears that lined many of their proud faces. Her stomach clenched and her breaths turned shallow.

"The Jim Crow laws of the South are spreading north." Mr. DeWight's words rang out, impassioned. The crowd jeered at the news and chattered. The reverend attempted to settle them. A small boy shoved a tattered blue pamphlet into Olivia's hands. She read the laws recently passed in Mr. DeWight's home state of Alabama. Each sentence started with *It is unlawful* in bold black letters. Each one struck down a right she'd taken for granted her entire life: Negroes prohibited from entering establishments, owning businesses, sharing public spaces with white people. The list continued onto another page.

"The sentiment that the dark color of our skin is something to be feared continues to dictate policy, corrupting public places, stripping us of our only too recent freedoms!" he continued. His words sparked more and more side conversations in the audience. The woman beside her nodded as her companions began whispering amongst themselves. He shouted, "I ask that we all keep a watchful eye. The malevolent times of the recent past are still upon us." His words felt like ice water running down her back. She tucked the pamphlet into her purse as her mind struggled to imagine the ways these *laws* could impact her family, destroy everything her parents had worked so hard to build, everything her brother was set to carry forward.

Rare, is what her mother called their family. Her father had been enslaved, as had his father and mother before him and on and on. He didn't discuss his experience. Their mother preached patience, that he would share in time. The Davenport children had known only what history had been taught by their governess, leaving them to imagine the worst. Olivia remembered the moment she'd realized that every Black person she knew was touched by the horror of slavery. Sometimes Olivia felt it like a wound hidden deep under smooth skin—one that she didn't remember receiving but that ached nonetheless.

Every month or so, her father locked himself in the study with Mr. Tremaine and their contacts from the South, men who were in the business of finding lost family members. Her uncle, her father's brother, who aided in his escape, had yet to be found.

John was the first to notice that their mother filled those days with activities that kept them out of the house. Mama had been born free, but carried a weight of her own. She didn't share her burden either. Instead, she armored her children with the best things money could buy. Her mother's foresight allowed them safe passage throughout the city, seats at tables where they drew unwanted attention, but also served as an example of success in the Black community. Their excess allowed them to help others. It seemed impossible that a world in which her parents had built the Davenport Carriage Company could be dismantled.

Olivia's cheeks burned. Her chest felt tight. Was it true that everything she knew—her entire world—was being threatened by an assailant she couldn't see, one her parents hadn't fully warned her about? Did they even know? *They must.* Olivia remembered how closely her parents kept them when about town. Even when

traveling to the community center, they had a member of the staff accompany them. Oh no—how long had she been down here?

Olivia pushed her way toward the entrance as the voices around her rose.

“You’re not leaving so soon, are you?” Washington DeWight had left the stage and now caught up to her.

“I—I lost track of time. I’m late for a previous engagement,” she stammered. Her eyes darted around the room.

“What did you think of my speech?” Mr. DeWight called up the stairs after her.

“I . . . I . . .” She was unsure what to say. She both believed him entirely and emphatically did not.

“Miss Olivia!” Tommy jumped from the driver’s seat as soon as she emerged into the sunlight. A sheen of sweat covered his brow, and his cap was mangled cloth between his fingers. He glanced at Mr. DeWight and frowned. “I’m sorry to frighten you, miss, but I’ve been looking high and low for you. We have to go.”

“Yes, of course,” she replied, distracted, still feeling stunned.

Washington DeWight touched her shoulder lightly and some of the fog around Olivia’s mind cleared.

“Will you be at the next meeting? We’ve rented this space for the next few months.”

“Mr. DeWight—”

“Please, call me Washington.”

Olivia’s stomach flipped at how easily he brushed aside formality, like they were old friends. She watched Tommy open the

carriage door for her. "Mr. DeWight," she said, feeling a small flutter in her chest. "I don't think that would be for the best."

He laughed again, but this time it did not feel kind. "I understand." Mr. DeWight took her hand and helped her inside the carriage. He leaned forward. "Don't you trouble your head over these silly things." His eyes flicked to the luxurious interior of the carriage and back to her eyes. "I'm sure your mind is much too crowded with pearls and parties and all the fine things in life. You just enjoy."

With that, he shut the door and the carriage took off. Olivia watched him standing there on the sidewalk as the horses veered into the street, his insult burning her cheeks.

CHAPTER 6

Helen

Helen, still in her dressing gown, stared at her reflection in the vanity. Tonight was the Tremaines' big gala, and Amy-Rose had done her best to tame Helen's curls and pull them up to the crown of her head. She never understood the need to straighten her hair before curling it when her hair dried into tight coils all on its own. Didn't she get a say on how her hair looked? And who decided what hair was supposed to look like anyway?

All she could think of was the hours she'd spent sitting in her room when she could have been in the library or the garage. Somewhere beneath the spiderweb of bobby pins, her scalp itched, but she knew if she so much as stuck the tip of her pinkie in there, her mother would be able to tell.

She looked at the dress draped over the chaise behind her and sighed. It had a high waist and a skirt that fell like a column. The crystals around the neckline glistened. Helen had no interest in going to this party. She dreaded the small talk of how much she'd grown and how her piano lessons were coming.

Helen was lost in her thoughts when she heard a knock at her door.

"Come in."

William Davenport inched his way inside the doorway. Helen took in her father's stiff white shirt, stark against the midnight of his slacks and shirtwaist. She followed his gaze as it traveled around her room, which she refused to let anyone clean but herself. It was cluttered not only with books and sketches, but also discarded shoes and abandoned cups of tea and empty plates. Amy-Rose and Olivia complained about the mess. Helen argued that all the best minds lived like this. She'd read in one of her books that it fostered creativity. Now she turned slowly in her chair, wondering if her father thought she was a slob.

Once upon a time, she had been the apple of her father's eye. He would sit her on his knee as she pulled on his ears and traced his profile and asked him questions. Questions about anything—including his horses and carriages. She recalled one afternoon when her father was in a carefree and playful mood. He let each of his children drive a buggy up and down the drive. Olivia kept a slow and steady pace. John, who had driven several times before, drove with a confidence that got under Helen's skin. When it was Helen's turn, she snapped the reins and set the team barreling down the drive. The air whipped her cheeks red and snatched the hat from her head. Mr. Davenport threw his head back and laughed. "That's my girl!" he had called out.

"Helen," her father said now, removing his glasses, "shouldn't you be dressed for the party?"

"Why are people always trying to dress me?" she muttered under her breath.

Mr. Davenport leaned over her desk and tapped his cane, shifting some of the atlases she'd left out. "I had an interesting conversation with John today," he said.

"Oh?" Helen asked, curious now. She turned back toward the mirror, watching his reflection move across the room and pick up another book on her bedside table. She noticed their resemblance—the stubborn nose and large brown eyes he'd passed on to her.

"Yes. He told me he bought a Model T that didn't run. Bets have been placed on who will uncover the reason. One person is close."

A small smile tugged at the corners of her lips. She'd spent the past few days in the garage working on the engine. John shooed her away before lunch.

Mr. Davenport was standing over her now. Without a word, he placed a car manual on the vanity in front of her. "The mechanics say every morning another part is removed. And cleaned. Exceptional problem-solving skills. I wanted to congratulate the mechanic. They may be able to repair it. But none of them had the slightest idea who was behind it," he said, sending her heart into overdrive.

Helen stared at the manual, grasping for words like straws. Was he upset? But he seemed impressed . . . She took a deep breath and met his gaze in the mirror.

She faltered.

"Curious thing to bet on a person you can't even name." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Let me see your hands."

Helen's stomach fell. Reluctantly, she did as he asked. Gently, he pried one of her fists open. Even after scrubbing with a fine-tooth brush, the telltale tar peeked through the corners of her fingernails. His next breath held more disappointment than she could stand.

"It's dirt," she said, the lie a piercing betrayal to her pride. "I was in the vegetable garden with Jessie."

"I will not suffer a liar, Helen," he said sharply. "You are not to go into that garage and mingle with those ruffians."

She cast her gaze downward. "They're my friends."

Mr. Davenport grunted. "They are not your friends. They are my employees. Malcom expressed some concern—"

"Malcom!" Helen said. Indignation twisted her stomach. The ornery mechanic held fast to outdated notions. She should have known this day would come.

"The garage is no place for a lady. It is a place of work, for those who need to, and not your playground. You're a beautiful girl, and you should take pride in that. It's time for you to grow up, Helen."

Helen slouched in her chair. Her image of his approval, the broad smile he'd direct at her for her accomplishment, it drifted out of reach. "I'm not a lady. And I can be a valuable part of the company if you would just give me a chance. If I could just—"

Mr. Davenport's silence was the loudest sound Helen had ever heard, louder than her own quick breaths. The hardened look in his eyes stopped her, but fatigue returned them to their warm, deep brown. Her father pinched her chin and met her eyes. She could have sworn his were tinged with a sadness that equaled her own. "John will take care of the business."

Her father's words tore open her heart and squeezed the hope from it.

"Now, hurry up and get ready," he said. "We'll be leaving soon."

Mr. Davenport's figure blurred in Helen's vision as he left her bedroom. She pressed her palm to her lips and took a deep, shuddering breath, hearing the door click firmly shut behind her father.