

CHAPTER 1

NOVEMBER 28, 1905

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

The Old North bell tolls the hour, and I realize that I'll be late. I long to break into a sprint, my voluminous skirts lifted, my legs flying along the Princeton University pathways. But just as I gather the heavy material, I hear Mama's voice: *Belle, be a lady at all times*. I sigh; a lady would never run.

I release the fabric and slow down as I weave through Princeton's leafy Gothic landscape, designed to look like Cambridge and Oxford. I know I must do nothing to draw any kind of extra attention. By the time I pass Blair Arch, my stride is quick but acceptable for a lady.

It's been five years since I left our New York City apartment for this sleepy New Jersey college town, and the quiet is still unnerving. On the weekends, I wish I could return to the energy of New York, but the sixty cents for a train ticket is outside our family's budget. So, I send money home instead.

As I duck under a crenellated tower, I moderate my pace so I won't be breathless when I arrive. *You are at Princeton University. You must take extra care working at that all-male institution. Be cautious, never do*

anything to stand out. Even though she's nearly sixty miles away, Mama insinuates herself into my thoughts.

Pushing the heavy oak door slowly to minimize its loud creak, I pad as quietly as my calfskin boots allow, across the marble foyer before I sidle into the office I share with two other librarians. The room is empty, and I exhale in relief. If sweet-natured Miss McKenna saw me arrive late, it would have been of no import, but with hood-eyed, nosy Miss Adams, I could never be certain she wouldn't mention my offense at some future time to our superior.

I remove my coat and hat, careful to smooth my rebellious curly hair back into place. Tucking my somber navy skirt beneath me, I slide onto my chair. Within minutes, the office door flies open, slamming against the wood-paneled wall, and I jump. It is my only dear friend, fellow librarian, and housemate, Gertrude Hyde. As the niece of the esteemed head of purchasing for the library, Charlotte Martins, she can breach the quiet of the library's hallowed halls without fear of repercussions. An ebullient twenty-three-year-old with ginger hair and bright eyes, no one makes me laugh as she does.

"Sorry to make you jump, dear Belle. I guess I owe you two apologies now, instead of the single one I'd intended. First, we abandoned you this morning, which undoubtedly led to your lateness," she says with a mischievous smile and a glance at the wall clock, "and now, I've given you a fright."

"Don't be silly. The fault is mine. I should have put aside that letter to my mother and walked to campus with you and Charlotte. Miss Martins, I mean," I correct myself.

Most days, Charlotte, Gertrude, and I walk together from their large family home on University Drive, where I have a room and share meals with Charlotte, Gertrude, and the rest of their family who live in the house as well. From the first, Charlotte and Gertrude have welcomed me into their home and social circles with warmth and generosity and have provided me with abundant guidance at work. I cannot imagine what my time in Princeton would have been like without them.

"Belle, why are you fussing about what to call Aunt Charlotte? There's nobody in here but you and me," Gertrude mock scolds me.

I don't say what I'm thinking. That Gertrude doesn't need to assess every single moment of every single day against societal standards to ensure her behavior passes muster. She has no need to analyze her words, her walk, her manner, but I do. Even with Gertrude, I must act with care, particularly given the heightened scrutiny in this university town, which operates as if it lies in the segregated South rather than in the supposedly more progressive North.

The distinctive clip of Miss Adams's shoes sounds in the hallway outside my office door, and Gertrude's skirt rustles as she moves to leave. She has as much fondness for my office mate as I do, and she'll skedaddle before she can get locked into a conversation.

Before she exits the office altogether, she turns back to me, whispering, "Are you still free for the philosophy lecture tonight?"

Since Woodrow Wilson assumed the presidency of Princeton University three years ago and instituted all sorts of scholastic reform, the number of lectures open to staff and members of the community has increased. While Gertrude and I revel in being included in the academic life of the campus, I loathe certain of Wilson's other decisions, such as maintaining Princeton as a whites-only university when all the other Ivy League schools have admitted colored folks. But I would never voice aloud these views.

Instead, I say, "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

The quiet of the stacks wraps around me like a soft blanket. I relax into the subdued hush of patrons turning pages and the scent of leather bindings. My long days spent in the company of medieval manuscripts and early printed books calm and delight me. Imagining the labors of the first printing press users as they memorialized the English language and broadly disseminated its literature through the meticulous work of placing the type letter by letter, transforming empty pages into beautiful text to inspire worshippers and readers,

transports me beyond the limitations of this time and place, just as Papa always believed. To him, the written word could act as an invitation to free thought and the broader world, and nowhere was that more true than in the dawn of the printed word, where—for the first time—that invitation could be made to the masses instead of a select few.

"Miss Greene." I hear a soft voice from beyond the stacks.

Two simple words, but my visitor's modulated tone and distinctive accent give him away, and anyway, I've been waiting for him.

"Good day, Mr. Morgan," I reply, turning in his direction.

Even though I'm talking softly, Miss Scott glances up from the circulation desk with a disapproving scowl. It isn't so much the volume of my speech as the pleasantness of my relationship with the fellow librarian and collection benefactor that vexes her.

While Mr. Junius Morgan is ostensibly a banker, he has generously donated dozens of ancient and medieval manuscripts to the university, which is why he also holds the titular position of associate head librarian. I'm convinced that Miss Scott thinks any sort of relationship between us—even the cordial, professional one we share—is beneath him.

A slight man, with wispy brown hair and a kindly expression behind his circular glasses, materializes. "How are you today, Miss Greene?"

"Well, sir. And yourself?" My tone is professional and reserved. He's twenty minutes later than the time we'd mentioned, and I'd begun to think he'd forgotten about our appointment. But I would never dare mention his tardiness.

"I was going to take a gander at the Virgils, as we discussed yesterday. I wonder if you'd still care to accompany me. Assuming your duties and your interest permit, of course."

Mr. Morgan, whom I think of as Junius in the privacy of my thoughts, knows that my zeal for the library's most valuable collection is nearly as intense as his own and that none of my other tasks will stand in the way of the private viewing he has promised.

We share a passion for the ancient Roman poet Virgil. The library houses fifty-two volumes of his poetry. My discussions with Junius about the dark voyages in *The Aeneid* and *The Odyssey* are some of the brightest moments in my days. While Junius admires Odysseus, I identify always with Aeneas, the Trojan refugee who desperately tries to fulfill his destiny in a world that holds no place for him. Aeneas was driven by duty, sacrificing for the good of others.

"I have cleared my schedule, sir." I smile.

"Wonderful. If you'll follow me."

My skirts swish the oak floor as I follow Junius to the small, elegant room where the Virgils are housed. I have to inhale and restrain my foot from tapping as I wait for him to fish out a heavy key ring from his pocket.

Finally, he pushes the door open to reveal the glass cases holding the precious collection of rare books. There are only about one hundred and fifty printed books of Virgil's poetry in existence. These volumes were all printed in the fifteenth century. Most of them have been donated by Junius.

I've seen these books only a few times before, while in the company of the restoration team. This is a holy moment.

Mr. Morgan's voice worms its way into the sanctity of my thoughts. "Would you care to hold my favorite?"

Junius is carrying the Sweynheym and Pannartz copy of Virgil, the rarest of all the books. German clerics Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz were two of the first users of the printing press in the fifteenth century, and the book he's proffering is one of their press's very first editions.

"May I?" I ask, incredulous at this opportunity.

"Of course." His eyes are bright behind his spectacles. I suspect it's a thrill for him to share his prize with one who cares equally about it.

I slide the proffered white gloves onto my hands. The book is heavier than I expected. I sit before its open pages. *How Papa would*

have relished this moment. I think of my father, who introduced me to the rarefied world of art and manuscripts when I was only a girl.

One day, the beauty of your mind and the beauty of art will be as one, Papa had said once.

The memory of Papa's words makes me smile as I turn the yellowed pages. I examine the hand-detailed letter *T* that marks the beginning of a page, marveling at the luster of its gold leaf. I am oblivious to Junius's presence near me until he begins talking.

"I saw my uncle last evening."

Junius doesn't need to identify who his uncle is. Everyone at the library knows he is the nephew of the infamous financier J. P. Morgan, which is exactly why I never mention him. I want Junius to understand that I appreciate him for his erudition alone.

"Ah?" I answer politely, never moving my eyes from the page.

"Yes, at the Grolier Club."

I know the club he speaks of, by reputation anyway. Founded about twenty years ago, in 1884, the private club consists of moneyed bibliophiles whose main aim is to promote the scholarship and collection of books. I would adore a peek behind the closed doors of its Romanesque town house on East Thirty-Second Street. But as a woman, I'd never be admitted, and to those men, my gender would not be my only sin.

"Were you attending an interesting lecture?" I attempt to continue making small talk.

"Actually, Miss Greene, it wasn't the lecture that was interesting." Junius's tone contains a quality unusual for him, bordering on playful.

Curious, I turn away from the Virgil. Junius's placid face, always pleasant but always serious, has cracked open wide with a smile. It is a bit disconcerting, and as I lean away a little, I wonder what on earth is going on.

"No?" I ask. "The lecture wasn't good?"

"The lecture was fine, but the most fascinating discussion of the evening was with my uncle about his personal art and manuscript collection. I advise him about it from time to time, as well as the new

library he's constructing for it right next door to his home in New York City."

"Oh, yes," I say with a small nod. "Is he considering an intriguing new acquisition?"

Junius pauses for a moment before he answers. "In a manner of speaking, I suppose he is in search of a new acquisition," he says with a knowing chuckle. "I have recommended that he interview you for his newly created post of personal librarian."

CHAPTER 2

DECEMBER 7, 1905
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

As the Broadway line trolley lurches its way uptown and nighttime New York City unfolds around me, I'm almost happy that Mr. Richardson's late-afternoon appearance in my office forced me to delay my train departure to seven o'clock. The sky is a moonless midnight blue, and yet New York City is bright and alive. I watch nattily dressed couples with linked arms saunter down the streets alongside young male students returning from the library or heading to the pubs, and newsboys calling out headlines as they try to sell their papers. Although I should be inured to the nighttime bustle after living in the city for over ten years before decamping to drowsy Princeton, the nocturnal vividness surprises me every time I return home.

Home. That word stops all of my thoughts. Is New York City really my home? I've lived here since I was eight years old, but it is the place that I remember before our relocation to New York that fills me with the warmest memories.

As the trolley chugs up Broadway, I fall back into the past, smiling at the little girl I see in my mind. I imagine my younger self on the front lawn of my family's two-story row house on T Street NW

in Washington, DC. On either side of our house lived Mama's family. Gramma Fleet to the right, who lived with Uncle James and Uncle Bellini, and to the left, Uncle Mozart, his wife, and their son. There, I always felt safe, good, even whole.

I recall a too-warm summer day where I found welcome shade in a cherished spot under the elm tree. Long ago, I'd claimed the elm as mine, and no one dared deny it to the grandchild most beloved and cosseted by Gramma, the family matriarch. On that day, I leaned back against the tree trunk and flipped open a page of my sketch pad to draw the tree's intricate web of leaves. The roots were in Gramma's front yard, but the branches stretched far across our yard toward Uncle Mozart's house. But before I had the chance to sketch more than a few lines, I heard Mama, calling me to come inside for dinner.

I ignored the summons twice before I dropped my sketch pad and pencil on the lawn and scurried inside. Even at my age—five or six back then—I knew that if Mama had to call a third time, I would have broken one of the rules that governed the behavior of the Fleet family: never were we to raise our voices, and never were we to do anything that would make any of the adults have to raise *their* voices at us. That was just one of the many tenets that we lived by. To be a Fleet was to be well educated (all of my aunts and uncles had gone to college) and hardworking (the women were all teachers and the men, all engineers). Fleets were understated in dress and presentation, connected to the community, mannerly in demeanor, and always dignified, no matter what treatment we encountered outside the bubble of our small world.

"There's my baby," Gramma said when she saw me, as always. She opened her arms and wrapped me inside her embrace. With my nose pressed against her apron, I smelled the delicious aroma of the yeast rolls that always lingered in the cloth. The way Gramma held me, I could have stayed in her arms forever.

"Now, go take your seat," she said and pointed to the table.

I sat down and relished this special time of the day, especially since Papa was home, a rarity because he was always so busy with

things that I didn't understand. Once we settled at the two tables—one that sat ten for the adults and a smaller one that I shared with my sisters, Louise and Ethel; my brother, Russell; and our cousin, Clifton, Uncle Mozart's son—Papa said grace, and then, with his glass raised high, he stood.

"To the Fleets, may you always know prosperity and peace in our little Eden. To my dearly beloved, Genevieve, who has been my constant source of strength and forgives me for my eagerness to save the world, may you always know how much I love you. To my dear children, who will never be able to understand how much they are loved, may each of you thank the good man above for his bounty and for his sometimes capricious ways."

Everyone laughed and I did, too, even though I had no idea what was so funny. But then, Papa leaned over and kissed Mama, which he did at any and every opportunity. I giggled and covered my eyes, even though the way they held hands and kissed made me feel warm all over.

A rumble of the trolley jolts me out of my reveries, and I sigh. Almost two decades have passed since that time, and though we returned occasionally for holidays in the beginning, it has been ten years since our last visit. Now, my only connection to Washington, DC, is the birthday cards we all receive from Gramma Fleet and an occasional letter from Uncle Mozart. Mama's brother used to visit us when we first moved to New York. He and Papa were good friends, and Mozart had even introduced my parents. But he hasn't made the journey in a long time, and all I have now are my memories. Although these recollections are old and a little blurry around the edges, I cherish each day that I remember, and I know DC will always be home.

The streetcar jerks, and I glance out of the window. This is my stop. After I disembark from the trolley, I still have to walk four blocks to my family's apartment as the winter wind whirls and wraps around me. With the temperature hovering around freezing, a carriage from Grand Central Station would have been welcome, but

given the unplanned nature of this trip, the family finances cannot accommodate it.

I try to pick up my pace, but my satchel, packed with my finest gray work dress and my newest lace-up shoes, the ones with the heels, is heavy. Turning off Broadway onto West 113th Street and working with frozen fingertips, I try to unlock the front door to the brownstone bearing the number 507. But when the lock doesn't click, I realize that it is broken again and the key isn't necessary. I wish that we could move someplace where everything worked.

Inside, I rub my gloved hands together, then start up the stairs to the first-floor landing. A single globe-shaped light fixture dangles above me; at least the broken light has been replaced. Mercifully, the key slides into the doorknob with ease, and I slip into my family's apartment.

This is where Mama and my siblings moved over two years ago when my older brother, Russell, started an engineering graduate program at Columbia University. Before that, my family lived farther downtown in the West Nineties in a pleasant middle-class neighborhood chock-full of carpenters, police officers, bookkeepers, and shopkeepers, if they were men, and seamstresses, clerks, and teachers, if they were women, mostly of German, Irish, and Scandinavian descent. This new neighborhood brims with students, professors, and workers of all backgrounds that service the university, and we were able to find an apartment in one of the least expensive buildings that is a mere three blocks away from Columbia. There, my brother pursues multiple graduate degrees in mining, electrical engineering, and steam engineering, an endeavor that will bolster the economic wherewithal of my entire family. We are unreasonably proud of him.

I expect the apartment to be dark, with the two bedroom doors shut for the evening and Russell asleep on the sofa, since they all have to rise early: Louise and Ethel for their work as teachers, Russell for his classes, and my youngest sister, Theodora, for her own school day. Instead, I find Mama sitting in the parlor, in her rocking chair next to a tiny table lamp. She looks like nothing less than a bouquet of

hothouse flowers, perfectly arranged, with her ankles crossed and her hands folded and resting on her lap. Like a flower, her features are delicate and lovely: high cheekbones, a straight, narrow nose of which I've always been jealous, and rosebud-shaped lips. Only the streaks of gray in her dark brown hair hint at her fifty years of age. As usual, she wears her embroidered silk robe, a gift to her from Papa from before I was born.

"Evening, Mama," I whisper. I don't want to waken Russell.

Her hazel eyes flutter open, and it takes a moment for her to register my presence. "Ah, Belle Marion," she answers sleepily, though her voice is as low as mine, "you're finally home."

I must have awoken Mama from the deepest of sleeps for her to call me by my first and middle name, the name often used in my childhood. She has forbidden anyone in our family to use Marion since I moved to Princeton. I must *be* Belle da Costa Greene, she is wont to remind me.

I give her a gentle kiss on her cheek. "You shouldn't have waited up for me, Mama. It's late." I glance at my brother, though he hasn't stirred.

"Not too late to greet my daughter." Mama pulls out her pocket watch and says, "My goodness, it's after eleven o'clock. I hate to think of you out alone on the city streets at this hour."

"I had hoped to arrive earlier. On that five o'clock train. But I had to finish an assignment before I could leave."

"I'm just happy to see your beautiful face now, Belle. You've got a big day tomorrow." Even in the low light, her eyes glimmer. It's an important day for my entire family. What benefits one of us, benefits us all.

Mama stands, and I follow her across the room to the kitchen. As quietly as she can, she pulls back a chair from the table, and I squeeze into one next to her. Even with just the two of us, the kitchen is crowded. The table, which seats six, is squeezed in front of a cupboard that barely fits between the icebox and the stove. The entire two-bedroom apartment feels crammed. It is too small for the five of

them, but it is all we can afford. My sisters' teacher's salaries and the little bit that Mama earns offering hourly violin lessons to schoolchildren is just enough to cover the bills and pay for Russell's education. I send home what I can, but because I have to pay my own room and board in Princeton, it isn't much.

"So." Mama is all seriousness. "Tell me about your preparations for the interview."

I'd been so happy to see Mama, but now I am annoyed. Her question and tone imply I may not have properly readied myself. Even though I publicly subtract several years from my age, I am, in fact, twenty-six years old with a successful professional career—despite the fact that librarians don't make as much as teachers—and yet Mama insists on speaking to me as if I were nineteen. But we were raised in the language of respect, and I would not consider expressing my irritation.

"Junius—" I correct myself. "Mr. Morgan." Mama wouldn't approve of the familiar use of his name. "Mr. Morgan, the younger, has helped, of course. He's given me a list of Mr. Morgan's collection, and I've done research on his artwork, books, and artifacts, with an eye not only to cataloging it properly but also to cohesively adding to it. And I've been studying the architectural drawings of the new library, so I can offer suggestions as to how he might display and store his collection."

"Good, good, I'm glad to hear you're prepared to discuss his new building and holdings. Assuming he doesn't find that presumptuous, of course, since he hasn't hired you yet. But that's not all he's going to ask you. You know that, Belle," Mama says. Her normally slight Southern lilt intensifies, a signal that she's in earnest.

"What do you mean?"

"What are you going to tell this Mr. J. P. Morgan when he asks you about your education? He has his pick of librarians, most of whom hold mightily impressive degrees, I'm guessing. You're going to have to prove yourself." Mama's right eyebrow lifts as it always does when she's anxious or skeptical.

I hate to admit it, but Mama has an uncanny ability to point out a

key item I've overlooked. I hadn't considered how best to present my formal instruction, because no specific education is required to become a librarian, and no one has asked me about my schooling in the five years I've worked at Princeton. "I did attend Teachers' College."

"Are you applying for a teacher's position?" Mama folds her arms as if she's the one interviewing me.

"No, of course not." I struggle to hide my irritation, knowing she's preparing me for every eventuality, but her tone reminds me of the conversations we had six years ago. Mama argued that I should take the same safe path that my demure sisters Louise and Ethel had taken. *You need a career like teaching that you can pick up at any time, no matter what setbacks you face*, she had said. But when a classmate mentioned that there was an opening at the Princeton University Library, I couldn't be dissuaded from interviewing for it. After I got the job, Mama was far more conciliatory.

"So if you're not applying for a teacher's position, what might you say instead?"

My mind is blank, but then an idea comes to me. "I know exactly what I'll say—my time at Princeton has been the best education in the world."

Mama laughs in delight, then presses her fingers against her lips as Russell stirs on the sofa. "Well, if that isn't threading the needle, I don't know what is," she whispers. "That's just about perfect. And since the young Mr. Morgan will be there, he'll love the mention of his alma mater and sing your praises all the more to his uncle."

We nod at each other, then Mama's brow furrows again. "What if he asks you about your teachers and your training at Princeton? Your 'education,' as you've described it? After all, it is a college for men."

I am on safe territory again. "I'll describe the extensive training I was given by Mr. Richardson, the head librarian. And the instruction from Miss Charlotte Martins, the librarian in charge of the purchasing department. And of course, there is always my apprenticeship in the New York Public Library system and my bibliography course at

Amherst College's Fletcher Summer Library School, if he really presses."

"Excellent, darling." She lets out a sigh that sounds almost like a low whistle. "Imagine. The opportunity to work directly for Mr. J. P. Morgan. He's the most important man in New York, maybe the country." She shakes her head in disbelief, and I think that after Mama's interrogation, my interview with Mr. Morgan might seem easy.

Before she opens her mouth to speak again, I know what she's going to say. "This is precisely why we chose this path," she begins as if, once again, she has to not only explain but convince me as well. "A colored girl named Belle Marion Greener would never have been considered for a job with Mr. J. P. Morgan. Only a white girl called Belle da Costa Greene would have that opportunity."

Her words make the past wash over me, and I am no longer a grown woman but a seventeen-year-old girl. It was early evening, and I could smell the warm baking bread and the chicken stew. We'd moved from DC about ten years earlier when Papa got his new job at the Grant Monument Association, and I'd learned to enjoy the city, especially our apartment on West Ninety-Ninth Street, right around the corner from Central Park. My brother and sisters and I were thrilled when we moved into the expansive space. With four bedrooms stemming off a long corridor that poured into the living room on one side and the kitchen and dining room on the other, the house felt as big as the park.

That night I was sitting at the kitchen table helping Teddy with her homework when we were interrupted by the sounds of shouting. I assumed the noise came from our loud next-door neighbors, a salesman and his wife and their five young towheaded boys, who were often raucous.

"I should have known this was your goal. From the beginning, I should have realized this was what you wanted." My father's voice boomed. "From the moment you chose this neighborhood and misled the landlord to get this apartment, I should have known."

"Everything I've done, I've done for our children and for you and me." My mother's voice, normally a cultivated note just above a whisper, was almost as loud as my father's.

It was shocking to hear them this way. Of course, I'd noticed that with each passing year, there were fewer loving gazes, less hand-holding, and an absence of stolen kisses. The tension between my parents had mounted, but I assumed it was because my father was often away fundraising for the Grant Monument Association and giving speeches in support of equal rights. But I'd never heard them raise their voices. Fleets didn't yell.

I froze. Until Teddy shifted in her chair. When I glanced across the table, my ten-year-old sister was shaking. She rested her elbows on the table and covered her ears. I gave her a quick hug and then made my way across the hall to the dining room so I could hear my parents more clearly.

"Next, it was the children's schools," my father continued. "You only wanted them in all-white schools."

"Because I want the best for them," she cried.

"No, Genevieve, this was all about you. This is the life you've always wanted."

"How can you say that to me?" Her voice quivered with distress. "This is not what I've wanted. This is what I had to do. I am a Fleet; I'm proud of my heritage."

My father's laughter was bitter. "Your heritage! Ah yes, you are a daughter of the great Fleets, while I am just the lowly grandson of a slave. You married a Greener, a man far below your station in life."

"Richard, please don't say that. You know how much I love you."

"Do you?"

"Yes, I do. And I know you love me. That's why I want you to understand. You're accusing me of walking away from who I am, and that's not what I'm doing."

"Yes, you are." I heard the rustling of papers, and then my father shouted, "The evidence is right here. You reported our race to the census workers as white."

My father was furious, but I didn't understand his anger. What difference did it make how Mama had reported us to the census since our skin was as fair as everyone who lived in our neighborhood? And we were quite a bit fairer than the newly arrived immigrants I'd seen in lower Manhattan, those of Italian and Mediterranean descent who were presumed to be white, although a low sort of white. I was sure that Papa didn't want us to live in the neighborhoods where the colored folks were crammed together—the Five Points, Greenwich Village, the Tenderloin, or Harlem. The conditions in some of those crime-infested tenements were notoriously unsanitary, disease broke out with regularity, and some places didn't even have toilets or running water.

So what was the harm in reporting ourselves as white, when we lived as whites? But then, the issue had never been discussed, at least not among the children. I'd learned long ago, among my many etiquette lessons as a Fleet, that race, like politics and religion, was never to be discussed in public and only very rarely in private.

Mama's words were muffled. I could not discern anything clearly until Papa spoke again.

"How can you not understand that this has enormous ramifications, Genevieve? You have made official our status as whites. After all the work I've done to advocate for the equal rights of black and colored people. After how hard I've argued in courts and in newspapers and journals and on stages that all citizens should be treated the same—whether they are black, white, or colored. That we should not be defined by how many drops of African blood run in our veins, but by our character and our deeds. That we should not be ashamed of our heritage and we all, blacks and coloreds alike, should unify in our fight against prejudice. Your act goes against everything I stand for and everything I've worked for—"

I heard the sound of sputtering, but was that my father? How could a man renowned for his oratory skills—the Richard Greener, first colored graduate of Harvard, former professor at the University of South Carolina, and former dean of Howard University School of

Law, who gave speeches all around the country—be now, it seemed, rendered speechless?

"I am doing what's best for all of us, Richard, don't you understand? Especially here in New York. This city is not like our protected neighborhood at home. And even there, the laws are changing. DC is no longer safe. Here, assimilating will give our children the best opportunities." Her voice was calm and clear now, as if no oratorical maneuver or logical presentation could sway her.

"Assimilating? That's not what you're doing. You're not just trying to fit in—to provide a better education for your children and cleaner accommodations for your family—you're trying to *be* white!" I had never heard my father so angry. "Do you realize what you're doing is the reason why my fellow activists are avoiding me? Do you understand your actions are the reasons why the Republican Party's Western Colored Bureau in Chicago is second-guessing their decision to hire me to cover the campaign to elect McKinley as president? Rumors are flying that because I live in a white neighborhood and have been working exclusively with white people on the Grant Monument Association that I'm trying to cross the color line. They think I've become cozy with the whites and abandoned my own people. If anyone ever got wind of the fact that you listed us as white in a census document, they would consider me a traitor, and no one would hire me or have me speak or write on issues of race ever again. And *that* is my life's work, Genevieve."

"Family should always come first, Richard. Me. Your children. We should be paramount," Mama replied, her own voice rising.

"When will you realize we are part of a larger family, Genevieve?" His voice was nearly a howl. "The colored community? You should have the same pride in that as you have in being a Fleet. You should understand how important it is to raise up that family alongside our own."

Papa, so fair that folks often mistook him for white no matter his words and actions to the contrary, must have composed himself, because his tone was more regulated, though his voice was still raised,

when he continued. "Reporting yourself and our children as white is like turning your back on your own people. Turning your back on yourself." There was a long pause before he spoke again, but when he did, it was barely above a whisper. "And turning your back on me, most of all."

A sob escaped my mother's lips. "The fight for equality is over, Richard. You lost it. *We* lost it fifteen years ago when the Supreme Court overturned the Civil Rights Act that would have given all black and colored people the equal rights we deserve. Yet you continue to think something is going to change for the better. But the time for hope is past; things are only going to get worse. There is only black and white—nothing in between—and they will always be separate, but never equal. Segregation will take care of that."

There was resignation in Papa's voice. "That may be true, Genevieve, but that does not mean we should surrender. We need to keep fighting, and to keep proving what we are capable of."

"I disagree. It *is* time to surrender. The forces that are against equality are too great to overcome. But we have an advantage. We have our fair skin, Richard. It is a gift that God has given to us."

"You think our pale skin is a gift from God?" Papa's fury was evident. "Don't you ever think about the reason we are light-colored? Does the violence that white men perpetrated upon our ancestors never cross your mind?"

I gasped at his words. Of course, I knew about such matters, but no one dared speak them aloud in our house.

But Mama's reply was every bit as firm as her initial pronouncement. "In this country, as colored people, we have to use every advantage. Our pale complexions give us a choice." She paused before announcing, "I choose white for the children and myself. I can't make that choice for you, Richard, but please. Please make this choice with me. Make it for us. For us and our children."

In the quiet, their tension seeped from the living room, floated into the kitchen, and rested over me.

I held my breath until I heard the sound of heavy footsteps echo-

ing through the hallway as Papa passed by the dining room in a blur of motion. He was like a smear of gray and black and ivory, his clothes indistinguishable from his skin. The front door opened with a squeak and then slammed shut, leaving me with an overwhelming sense of confusion, anger, and childlike longing that has never really left me.

With that act, the deed was done. I would no longer be called Belle Marion Greener, proud daughter of Richard Greener, a lawyer, an advocate for equality, and a member of the talented tenth, and of Genevieve Fleet Greener, part of the elite Washington, DC, community of free people of color. No. Shortly thereafter, I accepted my mother's decision as if it were my own and I became the white woman known as Belle da Costa Greene.

CHAPTER 3

DECEMBER 8, 1905

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Is that a Rembrandt?" I ask Junius, my foot hovering over an exquisite framed etching.

The luminous golden portrait of a grizzled old man sits atop a stack of books, one of many scattered around the intricately inlaid marble floor underneath the rotunda. I have to step over it to follow Junius across the grand entryway. Junius had told me that Mr. Morgan had over one hundred and fifty Rembrandt etchings in his collection, purchased in 1900 from a single collector, Theodore Irwin, but this couldn't possibly be one of them. No one would leave a priceless piece of art sitting on the floor.

Junius examines the etching. Then he guffaws, a sound I would never have believed could emanate from the mild-mannered antiquarian. "I believe it is, Miss Greene. Only Uncle Pierpont would toss a Rembrandt on the floor like it was yesterday's newspaper." Junius takes every opportunity to refer to Mr. Morgan as the familiar Uncle Pierpont; indeed, he may be the only person in the world who calls the titan of industry by the name he prefers—Pierpont—instead of the nickname J. P.

We'd entered Mr. Morgan's new library through a set of impos-

sibly ornate bronze doors on Thirty-Sixth Street. I'd been overwhelmed by the lavishness of the entryway rotunda. The walls and the marble floor were modeled after the Vatican gardens, according to Junius, and they burst with color from varying shades of marble and lapis lazuli. Paintings of classical figures, urns, and acanthus foliage decorate the blue-and-white-stucco ceiling that vaults up three gilded stories to a rotunda, although a ladder still stands in one uncompleted corner. Even unfinished, the entryway to the Pierpont Morgan Library, as it will be known, is breathtaking.

A voice like thunder echoes throughout the rotunda, ricocheting from pillar to pillar as if lightning seeking an object to strike. I jump, and I wonder from where the sound is coming. Three closed doors lead off the entryway—to the east, west, and north.

Junius glances over at me. "Not to worry, Miss Greene. It's only Uncle Pierpont."

But I do worry. The financier and steel, railroad, and electrical-power magnate is reported to be mercurial, and I'd hoped to find him in good spirits for my interview. As the roar continues, I realize that it originates from behind the western door, Mr. Morgan's study, I believe, and it certainly isn't the sound of a man in a fine mood.

"How many times have I told you?" the voice booms. "I don't want to see any papers about U.S. Steel while I'm here at the library."

There is a mumbling, words that I cannot discern from another man, before the thunderous voice vibrates again.

"Unless I specifically ask for them, those documents are to be kept at my Wall Street office."

As we wait for the tirade to end, I wonder if I even want to continue this interview. I cannot imagine working for a man who speaks to anyone this way. At last the door opens and out slinks a tall bald man who doesn't look in our direction. I hardly notice him, though, overwhelmed as I am by my first glimpse of Mr. Morgan's gorgeous two-story study.

I follow Junius inside, my nerves momentarily forgotten as I take in the majesty of what is before me. The disorder that prevails in the

rotunda has been largely tamed here. The hints of disarray that remain—a few piles of leather-bound books seemingly destined for gaps in the deep walnut bookshelves that line the room and two Renaissance Madonnas leaning against a wall—go almost unnoticed. It's difficult to register anything but the vibrant crimson silk-covered walls. Scarlet blankets not only the walls but the velvet sofa and wing chairs, the marble rimmed windows, and even the imposing chair that presides behind Mr. Morgan's ornate desk like a throne. The room veritably pulsates with red and makes me feel woozy. Until I take in the man at the room's center, puffing a cigar.

Leaning against the edge of a fireplace so vast he could fit inside is Mr. J. P. Morgan. From beneath his heavy black brows, he stares at us with eyes as bright, piercing, and forbidding as a highly polished blade—and so intense I don't even notice his notorious bulbous nose, the focal point of countless political cartoons about him.

The two Mr. Morgans could not be more different. In other circumstances, the disparity may have been comic—the junior, so slender and average in height; the senior, barrel-chested and strikingly tall. But this situation holds no humor for me. Too much is at stake.

Junius clears his throat before he speaks. "Uncle Pierpont, it's my pleasure to introduce Miss Belle da Costa Greene." He nods toward me with a glimmer of pride.

"It's an honor, sir." I smile and gather my skirt to do the small half curtsy I'd practiced this morning as Mama lectured me on the finer points of the behavior that might be expected from me this morning. Mr. Morgan tilts his head in my direction but isn't quite ready to acknowledge me.

Instead, he turns back to Junius. "Did you have a chance to research the Rembrandt etchings that the Vanderbilts have offered to sell me?"

"I did, Uncle Pierpont."

"Well, let's hear it. I cannot promise that your research will make me want to accept their offer, but I am always willing to listen." Mr. Morgan begins pacing around his enormous study.

As the uncle and nephew discuss the merits of Mr. George Vanderbilt's print collection of 112 Rembrandt etchings, I study the senior Morgan to get my own measure of the man. No matter his reputation for brusqueness, and the shouting I'd just witnessed, Mr. Morgan is polite to Junius, even solicitous of him throughout his—to my mind—overly long recitation of his research.

"Uncle, I do believe that Rembrandt captures more of the humanity of his subjects in his etchings than in his paintings, and in that way, they are uniquely valuable and not only in monetary terms—" Junius says.

Mr. Morgan is visibly bored with his nephew's long-winded musings, and he pauses behind his desk before he turns to me. "Let's take a look at your Miss Greene, Junius." He puffs on his cigar.

Stand tall, square shoulders, glance steady, never waver outwardly. Under Mr. Morgan's gaze, I respond to Mama's directives as if she were in the room, and I return his stare. Mr. Morgan must understand that I will not be cowed. And no matter what he thinks he sees in my skin tone or my nose that is a bit broader than my siblings', he must believe I am a confident, competent white woman.

Mr. Morgan rounds his desk, and I don't speak as he pauses in front of me. He begins to circle me slowly, as if he's assessing an expensive rococo painting. I repeat Mama's words in my head and maintain a self-assured silence in the face of his inspection, understanding this is part of the test.

As if to himself, he says, "So petite."

This is a rather obvious observation. He is over a foot taller than me, with hands so wide a single one could span my waist.

When he stands in front of me again, he stares, although the corner of his mouth turns upward under his mustache as he does. "Such unusual eyes. Gray, somewhere between a smoky and silvery shade. Very compelling."

I do not respond. What would I say?

"A real beauty." Again, he speaks as if he's appraising artwork, and I'm not sure if the known philanderer is considering me as a woman or

inspecting me as a librarian. His comment does not invite a reply, so again, I say nothing. But then, he adds, "Da Costa. An unusual name."

Repeating my practiced line, I say, "It's my family name. My grandmother is Portuguese."

"Ah." He nods, but his eyes remain fixed on me. I inhale, and focus to maintain my confidence in the face of his scrutiny.

Then suddenly, he turns away. "I've heard what Junius thinks about these etchings, but I wonder about your view, Miss Greene. What do *you* think of acquiring the Vanderbilt Rembrandts?"

I exhale, grateful for the sudden shift and the opportunity to prove my expertise to Mr. J. P. Morgan.

I gather myself, draw from the extensive files in my mind. "Unlike his contemporaries, Rembrandt did all the work of the etchings for the prints himself—from incising the lines on the copper plate with various needles to submerging the plate in the necessary chemicals afterward. He thought etchings should be an important artistic medium, not simply an easy means to publicize his more expensive oil paintings, as most of his contemporaries did. From this perspective, Rembrandt's etchings are masterworks by the genius himself, with a greater range of subjects than his more famous oil paintings." I pause. "The etchings are remarkable. As the Pierpont Morgan Library will be, if I am placed in the position of librarian."

In my peripheral vision, I see Junius flinch.

Mr. Morgan drinks me in, and for a long moment, I feel as if he sees *all* of me. Then, his mustache twitches, and I see a hint of a smile beneath the shadow cast by his swollen, misshapen nose and the downward turn of his thick black mustache. For a brief moment, the suggestion of a grin and the confidence he exudes remind me of my father. Lulled by the transitory resemblance, I am about to return Mr. Morgan's expression when his face turns stormy.

I glance over at Junius, who is frozen, awaiting his uncle's judgment. I'm reminded that Junius is my ally—and, dare I say, my friend—and it is critical that I realign with him and demonstrate the affinity in our views.

"Echoing the sentiments of Mr. Morgan, if you acquire Mr. Vanderbilt's collection, you will possess the world's largest collection of Rembrandt etchings. Presented all together, they will give scholars and collectors an unprecedented opportunity to study the evolution of the great master's style and skill. It would bring a unique level of renown and attention to your collection." This last statement is brash. This is Mr. Morgan's private library, and he's never publicly indicated he intends to open his institution to scholars. But I hope to hint at what might be possible, while appealing to his pride.

The only sound in the vast two-floor study is the deafening tick of the gold clock on that enormous stone mantelpiece. What does this silence signal? Appreciation? Or, more likely, anger at my presumptuousness? Will he explode at me the way he erupted at that gentleman just before I entered his office? Before my thoughts wander too far to the other side, Mr. Morgan bellows, "Why do you think that I should hire you for my personal librarian, over all the other contenders I've interviewed, many of whom are older and more experienced than you? How will *you* make the Pierpont Morgan Library unparalleled?"

I take one step toward him. "Mr. Morgan, I am glad you pointed out that your other candidates are different from me, in experience, age, and"—I pause for emphasis—"gender. It is that exact divergence between my characteristics and everyone else's that makes me the *perfect* candidate for the Pierpont Morgan Library. My relative inexperience means that I do not arrive with any staid, old preconceptions that hamper what the Pierpont Morgan Library can become; instead, my vision and ambition for the library are limitless. My youth means that I have boundless time and undivided energy to devote to you and your collection. My passion for rare manuscripts and incunabula means that I will be relentless in acquiring the ideal items to make your collection incomparable, learning from your expertise in negotiation and the marketplace as I do so, of course. And the fact that I'm a woman means that every time I enter a room, I will have everyone's attention, which is exactly what the Pierpont Morgan Library deserves."

He nods. "And how would you make my library incomparable?" But before I can answer, he continues, "I hope acquiring Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* by the printer William Caxton is on your list of targeted accomplishments." He peers at me as if he's waiting for a reaction, and I am certain that I see a bit of a smirk on his face. "Because that Caxton is what *I* want."

"It's an extremely rare incunabulum, one of only two copies, if I'm not mistaken." Surprise fills his eyes. "But I will do everything in my power to bring that to your collection, if given the opportunity."

His smile is unmistakable now. This volume was printed in 1485 by the famous printer and publisher William Caxton, who is credited with bringing the printing press to England. Entitled *Le Morte Darthur*, it recounts the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and their quest for the mythical Holy Grail. Is the acquisition of this particular elusive book Mr. Morgan's own sacred quest?

"You are impressive, Miss Belle da Costa Greene."

Once again his eyes roam over me, but I stay focused. "Mr. Morgan, if given the chance, I will ensure that your library is unrivaled. And I will make the Pierpont Morgan Library itself the masterpiece you deserve."

CHAPTER 4

JANUARY 8, 1906
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

What on earth have I promised? I think as I climb the wide steps to the gleaming, multi-paneled bronze doors of the Pierpont Morgan Library. As I stand before them, I realize I must make good on my word. Beginning today, I have to prove to the famous *and* infamous Mr. J. P. Morgan that I can take his world-class manuscript and art collection and the breathtaking building he's constructed to house it and turn them into a place of legend. Me, a *colored* librarian.

I feel a wave of irrepressible laughter take hold of me, a blend of excitement at the prospects lying before me and the preposterousness of my promise. But I can't let it out. I force myself to think about Mama and my siblings back in the apartment. I focus on the calculations I've been doing since I received the letter from Mr. Morgan offering me the position with its salary of seventy-five dollars a month, an extravagant nine hundred dollars a year. After our monthly rent of sixty dollars, Russell's tuition, the groceries, the other bills and incidentals, and of course setting aside some money for the new clothes that I will surely need in this position, we will have just a little room to breathe between my salary and my sisters' teaching

income—forty dollars a month—for the first time since Papa left us. In fact, my salary will allow Mama to stop working as a music teacher.

But my hope isn't just for our financial situation. I anticipate that this role with J. P. Morgan will provide me with access to a higher level of society, one that will cement our status as white beyond what living and working as whites has done so far.

Composure restored and veneer of self-assurance in place, I stand on my tiptoes and knock my gloved hand on the central panel of the right door, which Junius told me was once attached to a medieval Florentine villa. Only a limp tap sounds out, hardly enough to signal a butler or maid, so I remove my glove and rap my knuckles hard on the cold metal surface.

As I wait, I wonder who will respond. Does Mr. Morgan have a colored staff? Mama's words come to me. *If you see any colored people, stand tall, don't make eye contact. If eye contact is made, only acknowledge with a nod and then turn away. And never, ever enter into a conversation.*

The door opens, and a tall, bald, dour-faced older *white* man, wearing the well-cut woolen suit of a secretary, not a butler, greets me. He scans me up and down, and then finally speaks. "You must be Miss Greene."

"I am indeed."

I'm guessing he is the man Mr. Morgan addressed on the day of my interview, but I receive neither a pleasant salutation nor an introduction, so I cannot be certain. "We've been waiting for you." His tone is curt.

Waiting for me? Am I late? Junius's most recent note said that his uncle wanted me to report at eight o'clock, and glancing at my pocket watch, I see that it is seven fifty-nine. I am precisely on time.

Following the man inside, I see the ceiling's frescoes, which had been underway on my earlier visit, are finished, and the entry shines with the gilt-trimmed ceiling paintings and the variegated red, white, and tawny marble and lapis lazuli floors and pillars. A few stacks of

books remain on the periphery, but the space appears largely complete. Has the entire library been put in order? What work will there be for me if the institution has already been organized?

"Please follow me," he instructs.

Taking his lead, I pass through the rotunda into what I assume to be the library proper. Once inside, I gasp. The sumptuous room—which seems to be as wide and as long as a ballroom—is lined with three balconied stories of floor-to-ceiling walnut bookcases, all empty and waiting for me to fill. A carved marble fireplace topped by a medieval tapestry dominates the right-hand side of the library, so large that it dwarfs the vast hearth I'd seen in Mr. Morgan's study. I assume its purpose is decorative, as no single fire could warm a chamber this immense. The ceiling glimmers with gold leaf and an intricate series of painted lunettes and spandrels, which appear to have two distinct themes: great historical figures and their muses in the lunettes, and the signs of the zodiac in the spandrels. I feel like I'm standing at the center of a jewel box.

The as-yet-unnamed gentleman clears his throat. He gestures to the wooden crates stacked in the center of the room, which I hadn't noticed before, too distracted by the dazzling periphery. "You are the expert, of course, and Mr. Morgan is a man who knows his own mind, but if I had to guess, one of your first tasks will be to catalog and organize the books inside the crates. Before you decide where they are to be shelved," he says, pointing to the vast bookshelves, "there are more crates in the vaults downstairs, because the library will only house a portion of the collection. I assume you'll rotate the treasures?" he asks, but before I can answer, he continues. "And there are crates in your office as well."

My office?

I expect the gentleman to lead me next to a small cubby with a shaky little walnut desk, but instead, he indicates a hidden closet where I can store my coat and hat. "I assume you'll want to begin working right away, Miss Greene," he says, and leaves without another word.

As the door closes, I spin around in disbelief that this magnificent chamber is my workplace. I'll have to find my little cubby later.

An open crate awaits, and I start there. Reaching for the blank cataloging notecards from my bag, I pull out the first leather-bound book. Examining the exterior, I write down on my notecard that the book has some minor cracks in the green morocco and does not bear a title. Gently opening the book to its first page, I realize that it is a rare eighteenth-century copy of *Don Quixote* in what looks like Spanish. Just sitting here on the floor, in a crate.

"My God," I say and lose myself in its ancient pages.

"I see you've found *Quixote*," a deep voice says, followed by a laugh. At least I think the sharp barking sound is a laugh. "I bought it as part of the Toovey collection in 1899. They never really understood the value of what they owned."

Startled, I look up into the blazing eyes of the towering Mr. Morgan. "Sir, my apologies. I, I started—" I stammer, but he interrupts me.

"Never apologize for intellectual curiosity or the appreciation of fine art, Miss Greene."

"Yes, sir," I say, and I have to stop myself from a curtsy. What am I doing? Where is my confident demeanor? I've already decided that Mr. Morgan needs to be kept on his toes with a mix of light deference and engaging banter. I'll have to find ways to achieve that tone as I craft an entirely new sort of relationship with this man, one perhaps he's never had—especially with a woman.

"I see that King introduced you to the library." His pride is evident and well deserved. "I apologize for him if he was brusque. My business secretary is a jealous sort and doesn't like the notion that you and the library might steal me from him and our business commitments."

"That would never be my intention, sir." I venture a small tease. "At least not at first."

Do I see a return smile?

"Of course not, Miss Greene," he says. Then he definitely smiles. "Still, it might be a natural upshot of our time together."

Do I hear the hint of innuendo in his words? *Stop*, I think, *you are simply reading his reputation into his tone.*

"I bet King didn't show you to your office, did he?"

"No, although he did mention it."

"That sounds like him. He's such an old curmudgeon. If he didn't have such a head for numbers, I would have fired him long ago." He pauses, never taking his eyes off me. "Well, not to worry, once we are settled, you will not have to see King every day. He'll float between my business offices and the library depending on where I need him. We will have our own full staff here, of course, two maids, a serving girl for meals and drinks if necessary, and security guards to protect the collection; in time, you'll have your own assistant."

I try to keep my expression calm, as if I'd expected to have my own assistant all along. "That sounds wonderful, sir. No less than your collection deserves."

He pivots and leaves the room. I understand that I'm meant to follow. Scurrying after him, I catch up as he exits through the library, back out into the rotunda, and through the door next to his study. When I reach his side, he asks, "So do you like our McKim, Mead, and White design? Lucky that we worked with McKim instead of White, isn't it?" He glances at me, and his right eyebrow is raised like a question mark. I surmise this is another test.

But it's not a challenge to pass it. McKim, Mead & White has been the focus of every recent news story. The famous architect, the crazed millionaire, the famous actress. It had every element of scandal a journalist would desire. Stanford White, the architect who was famous for creating the Washington Square Arch, was dead. Harry Thaw, the crazed ex-husband of the beautiful Evelyn Nesbit, shot three bullets into him in Madison Square Garden. Of course, Junius hadn't told me the name of the architectural firm who designed the Pierpont Morgan Library. I am sure Junius thinks that the facts of the Stanford White murder trial are unseemly for a woman's ears. Apparently, Mr. Morgan holds no such view on women's delicacy.

"It is fortunate indeed that you worked with Mr. McKim," I reply without a beat.

He nods, sweeps into the center of the room, and pivots back toward me, staring at me again with his sharp eyes. A little unnerved, I turn away from his gaze and focus my attention on the walnut-lined two-story chamber. Nine exquisite Renaissance-style paintings of the Greek gods and goddesses are set into a gilded stucco ceiling. An Italianate stone fireplace, complete with ornamental cherubs, presides over the enormous room.

"This is *my* office?" The question slips out, and I wish I could swallow back the words. The audacious librarian I presented to him at my interview would not be surprised by the bestowal of this office.

A full-blown grin appears on his face, the corners of which extend past the reach of his mustache.

"Do you think it will be acceptable?"

I regain command of myself. "Mr. Morgan, I believe this will be the perfect base from which to launch the inimitable Pierpont Morgan Library."

CHAPTER 5

JANUARY 8, 1906
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I feel like skipping up the flight of stairs to my family's apartment, hardly aware that I am shivering from my chilly walk from the trolley. True, the hour is late, well past the six or seven o'clock I thought I'd return home. Yes, I'd stayed at the Pierpont Morgan Library after everyone left for the day, except the security guard assigned to protect the library's treasures every evening. Even so, I'm not tired. The very notion of sitting on my velvet chair behind that expansive carved-walnut desk—directing the priceless manuscript and art collection of Mr. J. P. Morgan—fills me with an irrepressible lightness and energy.

I can hardly wait to tell Mama and my siblings every detail of my first day.

After my usual fumble with the key, I push open the door, expecting to find Russell at the kitchen table studying for one engineering exam or another, or to discover Louise and Ethel on the sofa preparing their lesson plans for the next morning.

However, the entry and parlor are pitch-black, with not even a glint of light from the kitchen or bedrooms. I'm disappointed; I cannot believe Mama and my siblings aren't waiting to hear about my day.

Then, a gaslight illuminates, and the cry of "surprise" sounds out. Mama, Louise, Ethel, Russell, and Teddy are standing behind the dining room table, gathered around a store-bought cake, a rare treat.

Squeals of delight and congratulations fill my ears as a tangle of arms wraps around me. The air is festive as my siblings speak one on top of the other, their enthusiasm bubbling over like champagne.

"What was he like?"

"Is he as scary as his photos in the newspaper?"

"What does his nose look like?"

I laugh, so happy that I can relax in the refuge of my family and celebrate my excitement, something I've had to refrain from all day.

"Does he really have all of that money?"

"Did you see any of his money?"

"Hold on," I say. "First, let's start with what is he like." As Louise doles out slices of the cake and we settle into seats, I try to do an impression of Mr. Morgan's booming voice and unsettling gaze. It's terrible, of course, but good enough to make my siblings laugh.

Then I turn to the Pierpont Morgan Library. Now, they are quiet, and with wide eyes, they gobble down the details as quickly as they devour the sugary cake. Neither can satiate them quite enough, but despite their appetite to know everything, I withhold certain salient particulars.

Never would I want them to know that my excitement has been tempered by anxiety. All day I had to quiet the voice inside my head filled with insecurities about my readiness for this task and my ability to work with a man as volatile and mercurial as Mr. Morgan.

I don't want to share my fears with them, as they've already plotted out how their lives might change based on the money I will be adding to our household. I must carry that burden of consternation alone.

"Will you be too fancy to share a bedroom with me and Mama now?" Teddy half-whispers. Although she smiles, I see the seriousness of the question in her eyes.

In some ways, I've missed the space and independence I enjoyed in Princeton, as well as my friendships with Gertrude and Charlotte,

with whom I enjoyed a strong intellectual connection as well as so much laughter. But one of the pleasures of returning to a shared bedroom in a cramped New York City apartment is the proximity I now have to my little sister. Of all of my siblings, I've always been closest to Teddy. Seven years older, I was the one who helped Mama feed, change, and dress the newborn when she first came home. To me, she was a live doll, and I would hold her, sing to her, and watch her sleep for hours. And our closeness has not diminished over the years.

"Don't be silly, Teddy," I say. "You didn't see me come home in a crown, did you?"

"No, of course not." She giggles. Her skin is as pale as the vanilla frosting on the cake. Not so the rest of us; Louise and Ethel can reasonably be described as fair, but not Russell or me.

"I'm still the same old me." I giggle with her.

It is only then that I notice how quiet Mama has been as the rest of us indulged in cake and chatter. She's the one who usually has the most questions, but tonight, she only has one. She wipes the corners of her mouth before she asks, "You're still *Belle*?"

"Yes, I'm still *Belle*." I wish Mama hadn't asked that question, because now everything has shifted: my siblings' eyes, their energy, the entire mood of this celebration. Even the air feels heavier with the burden that always comes with a reference, however oblique, to the passing we must all do.

The laughter is gone as my brother and sisters avert their eyes and instead study the pieces of cake in front of them. Except for the sound of forks scraping the last crumbs from our plates, the kitchen remains silent.

I feel my siblings' frustration and their sympathy, especially from Louise and Ethel. All of my siblings, even Teddy to some extent, know that although we all live in this world that doesn't belong to us, no one bears the brunt of that decision more than me.

I stare at each of my siblings in turn: Louise and Ethel, such hardworking teachers, a matched set of pretty, compliant, and other-

wise invisible girls, so skilled are they in the art of blending in. Russell, my determined, bright, soon-to-be-an-engineer brother, with his slightly darker good looks mirroring my own complexion and features, although these prove less of a hindrance to overcome for him as a man than me as a woman. And then Teddy, the fairest of us all, quite literally, and baby to everyone. All of us, under the ever-proper, ever-watchful, always lovely Mama.

She is the gatekeeper, the one who transformed us, although I wear the scars of the greatest conversion. The extent of the transformation in my sisters' lives has been nothing more than the simple dropping of the *r* from our last name. But the change from Greener to Greene has been much more involved for me. Like Russell, I had to add the Portuguese da Costa to my last name—after dropping Marion—because the ties that bind us to Africa are plainer in the shade of our olive complexions. So Mama invented a Portuguese grandmother for us in order to deflect suspicion and obviate any need for further examination. But I have to do even more—operate seamlessly in a rarefied white world.

Yet, the color of my skin isn't why Mama asks if I'm "still *Belle*." It isn't why she stares at me as though I'm the weakest link to our whiteness, despite the fact that I move within that world better than anyone and my new position could lift us into an unassailable echelon within that realm. Her concern stems from the fact that I'm the most like our father—headstrong and bold. Although I've never questioned my mother outright about her decision, she can see my doubts and uncertainty about the world we've chosen to live in. Most importantly, she can feel the longing I still have for my father.

And I'm certain today reminds her of another surprise party, when we all gathered around a much larger table in a much grander apartment for a celebration like this.

Blow out the candles," Louise, Ethel, Teddy, and Russell shouted around the kitchen table, after they'd scared me senseless wishing me

happy birthday. As my siblings jumped and chanted, I tingled with excitement. The ten candles flickered, and the flames colored the air gold.

"Blow them out," my siblings continued chanting.

They hungered for the momentous birthday event, but I wanted to linger, to count the candles, make my wish, and with a long breath, blow out every candle. I finally acquiesced, only because the candle wax was dripping onto my favorite icing. In the split second of darkness before Mama lit the gaslight again, my sisters and brother clapped, but no one applauded louder than my father.

"What did you wish for?" Russell asked.

"She can't tell you that. It's a big secret," Papa teased my brother. Then, he wrapped his arms around me and pulled me into a hug. "I can't believe you're ten years old, my Belle Marion."

I giggled as I always did when Papa showed me special attention.

"Richard!" I heard the reprimand in my mother's tone. She didn't like it when Papa made such a fuss over me.

A flash of anger crossed over Papa's handsome face at yet another admonishment from Mama, but then he reared his head back and laughed. It was a hearty guffaw that made all of us—except for my mother—laugh harder, even though we weren't sure what he found so funny. Finally, he said, "Oh, Genevieve, let's celebrate our Belle's birthday. Our beautiful girl who has such a lovely face and a lovely mind and one day will be the belle of the ball."

My siblings clapped while I beamed beneath the attention and approval of my father. "It's time to open your cards and gifts," he declared as everyone enjoyed their cake.

He handed me an envelope first, and I grew excited when I saw it was from Gramma Fleet. She'd sent me a card for my birthday for the last two years, and I knew there would be a dollar inside. Already I was thinking about what toy I could buy at the Schwarz Toy Bazaar.

Next Papa handed me a present wrapped in beautiful blue paper. As I peeled off the corner, I saw that it was a book, but I didn't com-

prehend its magnificence until I fully removed the paper: *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* by Bernard Berenson. I inhaled as I turned the pages; the book was as exquisite as the paintings Papa and I studied on weekends when we went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Papa had a way of revealing the meaning of a painting and the life of the painter who created it, and when I listened closely, I felt as though I were traveling back in time to the moment of its inception.

Without Mama's watchful eye, I learned more about my father as well as the art we viewed on those museum trips. I heard stories about his attendance at Phillips Academy and then Harvard University, where he'd been part of an experiment that opened the door for other colored students of the Ivy League school. I watched him chuckle as he told me tales about rowing down the Charles River with his friend Oliver Wendell Holmes. But I saw sadness in his eyes, too, because I knew that most of his youth had been spent hustling for money and opportunities after his father—a free black born to former slaves—left the family for the gold mines of the west. If he ever discussed such topics at home, particularly about his writing and speaking alongside other equal-rights advocates like the famous Frederick Douglass, Mama would shoo us children away to our rooms, as if she didn't want our young ears to be defiled with the business of the country.

"Thank you, Papa." I closed the book, then wrapped my arms around his neck.

Papa smiled. "We will read this book together. I know that some of the paintings are actually at the Metropolitan. Belle, I want you to remember this author. Mr. Berenson is *the* expert on Italian art."

I nodded and opened the cover once again. On the inside page there was an inscription: "For my beloved Belle Marion on her tenth birthday. One day, the beauty of your mind and the beauty of this art will be as one. All my love, Papa."

"It seems like such an advanced book for a child," Mama said,

looking over our shoulders at the volume. I closed it quickly; I didn't want her to see the inscription. My present was controversial enough.

My father shook his head. "Not this child." He pinched my nose, making me giggle. "Our Belle Marion is going to be an art scholar or a historian one day. She has the knack for appreciating and understanding art, especially the history of art, and this book is just the beginning for her."

I nodded because if Papa thought I should become an art scholar or historian, then so be it.

But my smile faded when I glanced up at Mama's frustrated face. "Why are you filling her head with this, Richard? Belle Marion will not be any kind of art scholar. She's a colored girl. She needs to focus on a proper career, like teaching. She will become a teacher." She announced this as if the matter had been discussed and resolved.

"Oh, no, Genevieve." Again, he shook his head. "Wait and see what our Belle is going to do." He winked at me, then said, "Now, who wants some more cake?"

My sisters and brother are staring at me, undoubtedly wondering if I will continue to share stories of Mr. Morgan. But I have nothing more for them tonight.

It has been eight years since we became the six Greenes, yet the absence of the seventh one has stayed with me every day, and in this moment I miss my father more than usual. When I glance at Mama with her arms folded and her lips pressed together, I yearn for Papa even more. I want him here not only to protect me from the scolding eye of Mama but to celebrate. After all, it was Papa who made this prediction and who laid the groundwork for me to become Belle da Costa Greene, personal librarian to Mr. J. P. Morgan.

Balancing the books in my hands, I close the bedroom door behind me, then tiptoe past Russell sleeping on the sofa. I settle at the

kitchen table and pull out a book from the teetering stack. Turning to the marked place in my lesson, I spread *The Latin Primer* wide. While Mr. Morgan has not made it a part of my job responsibilities, I've taken it upon myself to learn Latin, among other languages, because many of the texts that I'll be acquiring for the library are written in these languages. In order to assess their authenticity, I need to know what I am reading. So tonight will be my first lesson.

But before I begin studying, I hear the door to the bedroom that I share with Mama and Teddy open. I am surprised as Mama approaches me; I thought she was asleep when I left the room. Her face is scrubbed, her hair is pulled into a long braid that ends at the center of her back, and she's wearing only her sky-blue ankle-length nightgown. It is unusual to see Mama dressed in her nightclothes without her embroidered dressing gown on top. She hardly ever leaves the bedroom without it.

I smile, but Mama's lips are pressed tight; her expression hasn't changed from earlier tonight. "I wanted you to see this," she whispers.

I take the envelope from her hand, but before I can ask any questions, Mama turns away from me. With her head high and her shoulders back, she returns to the bedroom. I glance down at the letter addressed to Mama, and right away, I recognize Uncle Mozart's handwriting. I am surprised, because while I know Uncle Mozart writes separate letters to Mama as well as me and my siblings, never before have we shared our letters.

Slipping the paper from the envelope, I begin to read.

My Dearest Genevieve:

I suppose I should start this letter as usual, with all of the news of our family and how all is well at home. But the news I must deliver is pressing. I wanted you to hear about Richard from me and no one else. I believe I told you that President McKinley, before he was assassinated, appointed Richard to a diplomatic position in India. Richard didn't go because of the bubonic plague, but since then, Richard was transferred to

Vladivostok, which I think you know. But what you don't know is what's happened in Russia, Genevieve. Richard has taken a Japanese woman as his common-law wife and together, they have two children . . .

My hands and my lips are trembling as I place the letter on the table without reading the rest. Papa is married? Living in Russia? With children? How can this be? In all of his letters to me, Uncle Mozart never mentioned Papa's overseas appointments, although it seems he kept Mama abreast of some of Papa's developments. I guess Uncle Mozart couldn't be silent about this, though, because he wanted to protect Mama from the blow of finding out from someone else.

Now I understand Mama's sadness tonight and why she questioned me as she did. I turn to the bedroom and wonder what Mama is doing behind that closed door. Is she sharing her sorrow with her pillow, sobbing quietly so that she doesn't awaken Teddy?

My eyes burn with tears as I remember Mama and Papa together, holding hands and stealing kisses. Even though eight years have passed, I know Mama still loves Papa; I have always believed that is why she never pushed for a divorce. Perhaps there was a part of her that held that door open, one that is now forever closed.

Pushing myself up from my chair, I want to run to Mama and hold her. But then I slowly lower myself back down. I know my mother. While she wanted me to be aware of this news, she will not want to discuss it. I am meant to bury this information deep within myself, as I have with so many other things. I suspect she will share this news with no one but me.

I wipe away a tear that has trickled down my cheek and stare at the books before me. These lessons are even more imperative now. Tonight, Mama made clear that there is no longer even a shred of hope that I can return to being Belle Marion Greener, not that I ever seriously believed I could. The well-being of this family now depends

upon my rising up and fully claiming Belle da Costa Greene as my own.

Lifting *The Latin Primer*, I pause when Russell stirs on the couch, then I quietly open the pages when my brother settles down. The news of my father has exhausted me, but I cannot rest. Before, I had a desire to be successful, but now, it can no longer be a simple desire; success must be my commitment.

CHAPTER 6

MAY 24, 1906

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Miss Greene." Mr. Morgan's voice makes its way across his study, through the rotunda, and into my office. By the time his bellow fully reverberates in my ears, I've already smoothed down my hair, straightened my new jade-green dress, and grabbed my paper and fountain pen. I've learned to calculate, almost to the second, when I will be summoned.

There's no trick to it, really. Mr. Morgan's call for me is always preceded by the distinctive scrape of his chair pushing back from his desk, a slow, thoughtful graze of that lion's paw walnut foot on the marble floor. The noise resounds throughout the entire building, giving me enough time to separate from the mountain of work on my desk and prepare for whatever Mr. Morgan might need. If I were so inclined, I could even make my way through the rotunda and appear at his door just before he actually yelled for me, as if I were some sort of vaudevillian illusionist, but I won't. Even though my success rises and falls on his whim, it wouldn't do to appear too eager. Instead, I rise in anticipation, and wait until I hear my name; then will I materialize in front of him.

"Miss Greene!" he shouts again, before he realizes I'm standing against the doorframe to his office.

"Yes, sir," I answer, knowing that—as always—he will look up at me with a startled expression, marveling at my quick arrival on his literal doorstep. The repetition of his reaction after these months in his employ amuses me. What I find less amusing is the toll each encounter with Mr. Morgan takes on me, as I attempt to strike the correct demeanor for every interaction and ready myself for the increasing array of tasks he demands. Whether I'm required to catalog and organize his treasures, advise on purchases, retrieve art and books on loan to various institutions, deal with requests to visit the collection, meet with dealers visiting Mr. Morgan, or correspond with those dealers afterward, it seems as though my responsibilities grow alongside his appreciation of me. I had believed that my years of hiding my true identity in plain sight—with all the attendant vigilance and self-modulation to ensure I blend—would prepare me for whatever changing demands Mr. Morgan might have, and to a certain extent, they have. But the quick-witted, talented, capricious Mr. Morgan is unlike anyone I have ever met, as are his needs.

He composes himself and barks out, "Have you made any progress on that damned Caxton yet?" Before I can respond, he continues, "When will you bring that to my collection?!"

Along with all of his other demands, Mr. Morgan questions me periodically about the Caxton *Le Morte D'Arthur*. While I know he truly longs for this elusive item, I also sense—because his inquiry usually emerges when he's irritated with me about something—that he brandishes it about as a means of reminding me who is in control by drawing my attention to this unfulfilled task.

"I continue to make inquiries of all the major incunabula collectors and museums to try and ascertain its location," I say, then add, "If it indeed still exists, I will find it."

From the curl of his lip and the narrowing of his eyes, I can tell he is not pleased, but at least he moves on and asks, "Have the boxes

arrived from the Lenox Library?" Before he built the Pierpont Morgan Library, Mr. Morgan loaned much of his art and book collection to museums around the world, as a means of storage, among other things. Now, I have the unenviable task of retrieving some of those objects, arranging for their safe return to the library, and then finding them a home here or elsewhere.

"I'm told they'll be here tomorrow, Mr. Morgan."

He lets out a dispirited snort that bears an uncanny resemblance to a horse's whinny, and says, "Is it really so much to ask people to return your belongings in a timely fashion?" Pointing to the sole spare corner of his bookshelves, he continues, "There is a large gap there I'd like you to fill with the books I loaned to the Lenox Library. I have a—" He pauses. "Special friend visiting here tomorrow, and I'd like my study to look picture-perfect."

I don't need to know the identity of his special friend, as I've learned these particular "friends" are interchangeable and the friendships short-lived. He has a few "special friends"—currently, his mistresses consist of two wives of prominent New York businessmen, as well as the widow of an English financier—and I have grown used to their rotating presence at the library. This urgency to make his study appear even more flawless suggests a new paramour may be on the scene, and I wonder if there is truth to the rumor I read in the gossip columns about a competition between Mr. Morgan and Diamond Jim Brady for the famous actress and singer Lillian Russell. I may even break my rule on not telling Mama about Mr. Morgan's female visitors if the famous Miss Russell should pop into the library.

"What time is your appointment, Mr. Morgan? The head librarian tells me that the engravings were so delicate that they necessitated specially constructed boxes for shipment, but even still, they should arrive tomorrow morning."

"She should be here around—"

The word "Papa" reverberates in the entryway, interrupting him. Silencing him, really, as the voice belongs to his youngest child, his thirty-two-year-old unmarried daughter, Anne.

Mr. Morgan's affairs are not exactly secret—occasionally he even recruits a reluctant Anne to travel with him and his mistress as cover—but open discussion of his relationships is discouraged. Discretion is the order of the day, so I know this part of the conversation will end for now.

"Papa!" Anne calls to her father again.

"In the study!" he yells back.

While Mrs. Morgan rarely makes an appearance at the library even though it is quite literally situated next door to her home, the four Morgan children are a different matter. Alongside their sister Anne, the beautiful Juliet and the favorite, Louisa, both married, can be found underfoot with regularity. But it is the son who visits almost daily when his father is at the library. John Pierpont Jr., who prefers the nickname Jack, is beginning to take control of the family business and consults frequently with his father. On the odd occasion I happen to overhear their exchanges, I find myself wincing at their strained relationship—Jack always deferential and Mr. Morgan always domineering and often judgmental.

Although Juliet, Louisa, and Jack have come to accept me and my access to their father as critical to his work as an art and book collector, and have proven to be quite pleasant, Anne is tolerant but not welcoming of her father's female librarian, even after these months of proving myself useful to Mr. Morgan. Her coldness has surprised me, given what I've learned of her efforts to support other women. She is part owner of the Villa Trianon near Versailles to assist in promoting the interior decorating career of her friend Elsie de Wolfe. She helped organize the very first social club for women in New York City, the Colony Club, and lately, she's developed an interest in supporting female workers of various industries and the cause of women's suffrage. Perhaps her exposure to her father's infidelity makes her chary of most women in his orbit, or perhaps she's jealous that another woman besides her occupies so much of her father's time during the day.

Anne steps into the study, her black eyebrows, so like her father's

in color and thickness, rising and her dark eyes blazing. The first word that came to mind when I met Anne, just days after starting at the library, was "sturdy." She is a tall woman with broad shoulders and wide hips, yet somehow she manages to make even the most expensive fashions look stately. Today, for example, she is wearing a high-collared white blouse with puffy sleeves and a black skirt slightly nipped at her waist that likely cost more than my monthly salary, and still the ensemble appears rather drab on her. And yet none of her matronliness detracts from her formidable nature.

"Ah, you are with Miss Greene," she says to her father as a means of greeting me. "Am I interrupting?" She draws out the final word, opening it to any number of interpretations.

"We are discussing the matter of the Lenox Library loan, but you are always welcome, as you know," Mr. Morgan says, his tone cautious yet solicitous. Of all his children, Anne is the one he treats with the most care; her political sensibilities have begun to border on the liberal, even unorthodox, and thus they contradict Mr. Morgan's view.

I sense his fear that she might break with the family, and he is desperate to keep her close.

She smiles at her father, although the light around her dims when she glances at me. "Mama was wondering if you were joining us for luncheon with the Vanderbilts, and if so, if you'd like to return to the house with me."

He glances at the clock on his mantelpiece. "I believe I told your mother over breakfast that I'd be attending the luncheon. But the Vanderbilts won't arrive for over an hour, Anne."

In the silence that follows, I know Mr. Morgan is waiting for an explanation about why he should arrive an hour early for a luncheon party. However, Anne stands her ground, unwilling to explain; I've learned that they are similar in their stubbornness and strong personalities, among other things. I wonder if this silence is because of me. Does Mr. Morgan understand the unspoken request? Whether it pertains to his professional or personal realm, I often feel as though

I'm stepping midstream into his world, without an understanding of the origins or nuances of the exchanges I witness.

He sighs, a leaden sound that makes the room feel heavy. "I'll join you at the appointed hour for lunch, but not before." Gesturing to me, he says, "Miss Greene and I have business to tend to before I socialize."

"Business?" she says in a tone that challenges his words. When he adds nothing, her eyes narrow. "As you wish, Papa."

His refusal has injured her in some manner. She prepares to leave, but before she passes through the study door, she says, in an unmistakably caustic tone, "I wouldn't want to keep you from your precious Miss Greene."

She exits, and for a long moment we are quiet as we listen to the sound of Anne's heels echoing across the rotunda. Just as I begin to wonder whether I should retire to my office, he says with a sigh, "Read to me, Miss Greene."

This is not a new request, although it is not one I anticipated when I undertook the position. I walk over to a small pile of books assembled on top of a shelf. "What would you like to hear today, sir?"

The first time he'd asked that I read to him, I was taken aback. The nearly seventy-year-old financier is perfectly capable of reading to himself, and librarians typically do not read aloud to their patrons, unless they are children. However, I'd obliged, reading from one of his Bibles, on that day the story of Joseph, the man who'd gone from prison to a prince. It had soothed him, and he now entreats this of me regularly, often having me read aloud to him from either the Bible—typically a rare incunabulum—or one of the books he's considering for purchase.

"Let's have the Bible. Perhaps the Jonah story?"

While I'm tempted to select the early thirteenth-century Moralized Bible, a sumptuous, gilt-illuminated work, I know it will not contain the story he seeks. So I pick out a relatively innocuous eighteenth-century Bible—a focal point in anyone else's collection, but not here—and settle into the chair facing his desk.

As I read the ancient tale of the man who refuses his calling to be a prophet and consequently faces a fierce storm from a vengeful god, Mr. Morgan's eyes flutter and close. I continue, regardless of whether he's awake, until I finish the narrative of Jonah's survival inside the belly of a whale and his ultimate acceptance of his role.

There are a few silent seconds before Mr. Morgan utters, "Some days I feel I might only survive my family if a whale swallows me whole." If I were anyone else, the mention of his family could be an opening, a reason for me to ask about the undercurrent between him and Anne today, but I would never. I must content myself with speculation.

His eyes suddenly fly open. "That's a lovely dress."

"Thank you," I say, pleased that he noticed. Managing my salary carefully, I have been able to add a couple of dresses to my wardrobe, and today I'm wearing what the salesgirl at B. Altman's told me was a princess gown with a bolero waist, apparently one of the latest new designs for the spring.

When I first began working in my position and Mr. Morgan complimented my appearance, I wasn't sure how to take his words, and thoughts of his reputation always ran through my mind. But as time passes, I have come to understand that Mr. Morgan sees me through a paternal lens, in part at least.

"You have quite a sense of style." I smile because his tone conveys a better mood. "If only Anne would consent to go shopping with you."

This is not the first time that Mr. Morgan has suggested that Anne and I socialize in some way. But it is apparent to me that Anne and I are not destined to be friends.

Mr. Morgan switches topics again. "We have half an hour before I leave. Tell me what you think of this manuscript from Leo Olschki."

From the belly of the whale to women's clothing to the Florentine publisher and dealer. This sharp shift from one subject to another is one of his most constant qualities, and I've had to adapt.

A few days ago Mr. Olschki's assistant delivered an extremely rare copy of Cicero's *De Oratore* from 1468, printed by Pannartz and Sweyn-

heim no less, for Mr. Morgan's potential acquisition. I'd examined the volume and was thrilled to have the exquisitely typeset and illustrated book to myself for a long study. I also spent considerable time assessing the accompanying letter setting forth the dealer's price.

"Well, both the binding and the interior pages are in excellent condition. A Pannartz and Sweynheim is nothing to sniff at, of course, and it would certainly round out that part of your collection," I say with the borrowed confidence that has come from the months that I've been with the self-possessed Mr. Morgan, who has made my status as his *white* librarian secure by never questioning my heritage—with either overt queries or subtle glances. So I am confident to a point, yes. But comfortable, never.

"True enough." He nods appreciatively.

"Your nephew donated a fine example of a Pannartz and Sweynheim book to Princeton, of course, which has garnered him accolades," I comment.

"Yes, yes it has. The Virgil," he says, his eyes narrowing as he watches my assessment. "You have some objection, though, Miss Greene. Don't be shy. Tell me what you think."

How well he's come to know me, I think with amusement. "Compared to the market, the price that Mr. Olschki requests is ridiculous. And insulting to you."

I carefully choose the word "insulting" because my patron prides himself on always paying asking price and never bargaining—he finds haggling to be "demeaning," so merely flagging Olschki's price as bloated would not move him. But Mr. Morgan is not a man to tolerate an insult.

He sits upright in his chair. "What do you mean?"

"Eight thousand francs?" I say. "He is only demanding that obscene amount because you are J. P. Morgan, known for your wealth and generosity. But . . ." I allow myself a slow intake of breath so my words sound calm and self-assured. "If you give me the opportunity to act as gatekeeper, he shall not have the same audacity in the future.

And you'll still get your Pannartz and Sweynheym's *De Oratore*. We will build you into a modern Medici, and not only in your bibliophilic holdings—and you'll get your Caxton."

A smile flits across his lips. I see that the idea of a young, petite librarian standing guard for the infamous hulk of a man known as J. P. Morgan humors him. But it pleases him as well, as does the comparison to the renowned Florentine Renaissance banking family.

"All right, then, Miss Greene, if you want to protect me and my collection as it grows," he chuckles to himself, then continues, "then you've got to know my enemies. You must come to the upcoming ball in four days at the Vanderbilt home. It is there that you'll find my adversaries in the form of dealers and experts and collectors alike."

At first, all I can hear is his acquiescence. This expanded role at the library is exactly what I have been aiming for. But wariness grows in equal measure to my euphoria when I realize that he has just invited me into his social realm, a sphere populated with not just his family and friends but also his adversaries. I will have to tread carefully as I enter the home of one of the richest families in America. Enemies can be especially dangerous for a colored girl named Belle Marion Greener as she crosses the threshold into the wider white world as Belle da Costa Greene.

CHAPTER 7

MAY 28, 1906

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

As I step into the vestibule of the Vanderbilt mansion, I am surrounded by women in extraordinary gowns with bodices gleaming with crystals and pearls, and men in white-tie formal wear, and I must force myself not to gape. Already I feel like a shadow, the dark presence over which the eye skims while seeking the light, and I am not even inside the ball yet.

I present my invitation to the first of the two Vanderbilt butlers, a man with chestnut hair dressed in a white waistcoat, who squints and peers at me as if his deep brown eyes have special lenses. His stare makes me tense, and I scroll through my mind for Mama's instructions: *Stand tall, square shoulders, glance steady, never waver*. I believe I am meeting all of her expectations, but clearly something is wrong.

The butler's eyes stay on mine as I hand him the gilt-edged, embossed card. My heart pounds as his gaze shifts from me to the invitation.

Be cautious, never do anything to stand out.

Have I done something? Or is this the moment I brace myself for almost daily, the moment when my secret will be revealed? I wait for

the question and prepare myself for the righteous indignation I will give him in response.

"You've come alone?"

I blink, then I breathe. He isn't concerned about the color of my skin. But my relief is swept away when he repeats his question.

"Yes," I say, not pleased that my voice sounds hesitant. What is behind his question? What have I done wrong?

He shakes his head with clear disapproval, but then he motions for me to enter. I rush in, away from his silent reproach. I can almost feel whispers trailing behind me as he shares my indiscretion with the other butler. At least the whispers are about my social ineptitude and nothing more.

Only once I'm inside the great hall do I feel safe from the butler's glare. Why didn't Mr. Morgan tell me that I'd need an escort? What else do I not know? From a passing waiter, I accept a crystal flute of champagne, hoping this will calm my feelings of inadequacy. But while the golden effervescent liquid helps me ease into the room, I am now faced with trying to mingle with people I do not know whose stations in life soar above mine. Can I make a leap so fine and wide?

I wonder what glitters more, the ladies with their gemstones or the gilt-framed medieval masterpieces on the walls. I have never before been in the presence of such luminance—animate or inanimate—not even in the Pierpont Morgan Library.

I stop myself from glancing down at the gown that Mama, Teddy, and I spent hours modifying. I wonder why I had bothered insisting on adding intricate lace cap sleeves to this old emerald silk dress, even arguing with Mama that the sleeves were fashionable and not inappropriately garish. These sleeves that I fought for look positively dowdy in this room with gowns cut so low that the ladies' décolletage serves as another form of adornment. At least Teddy had the genius idea for me to wear a tall feathered hat. It definitely rescues my outfit a bit and gives me confidence.

Where, I wonder, do these peacocks live by day? Or do they strip off

their feathers and wander the streets unadorned and unrecognized? That thought makes me chuckle, and I hold up my glass as another waiter fills my flute with more champagne. How could I have ever thought I'd have a gown worthy of a Vanderbilt ball? No finery I have ever owned—or likely will ever own—could be deserving of this event. Not unless I suddenly stumbled onto great wealth and spent a goodly portion of it on clothing. The best I can hope for tonight is invisibility, which seems to be happening anyway, since no one has yet spoken to me.

For a moment, I imagine what Papa would think of this night, and then I pause and take a deep breath. It's been months since I read Uncle Mozart's letter to Mama, and my anger and sadness remain. But at the same time, my love for my father hasn't waned, and I still long to share this experience with him. He is the reason I'm here.

I push thoughts of my father aside and decide this is a fine time to wander through the mansion. Surrounded by dozens of couples chatting and laughing, I saunter through the grand five-story Caen stone foyer with two sweeping staircases and square footage that is larger than my family's entire apartment. Next, I enter the breath-taking solarium, which showcases the gardens. To one side, I see the first colored people here tonight, servers weaving their way through the guests, and I quickly avert my eyes. It is then that I spot Anne Morgan engrossed in a conversation with her sister Juliet. I am relieved when they glance my way.

Juliet waves, and I follow suit. She looks lovely in a frothy mauve gown encrusted with matching crystals, particularly standing next to Anne in her more severe gray gown. I smile as I move toward them. Anne glares at me before she tugs at Juliet's arm, pulling her sister in the other direction, through the enormous arched double doors.

The warmth of embarrassment surges through me as I absorb this slight. I glance over one shoulder and then the other, but there is no one among the fifty or so people in this room who has even looked my way. In this moment, I am grateful for my invisibility. As if it were my intention all along, I continue moving through the grandi-

one space, trying not to ask myself which was worse: my interaction with the butler or the snub by Anne.

I push the ostracism from my mind as I'm distracted by the wonder of this vast and luxurious house. Exiting the solarium, I enter the Vanderbilts' library, nowhere near as grand as the Pierpont Morgan Library, of course. Still, this single room is impressive with the dark English paneling, white marble carved fireplace, and floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled with thousands of books. I then float from the gallery, where portraits and landscapes hang from the purple velvet walls, to the dining room, which could likely serve thirty people at once, and finally into the marble-lined music room; each space vies with the next for the most sumptuous. It seems that the mansion's primary purpose is to telegraph not only the wealth but the assumed nobility of its owner. No great surprise given the bootstraps-like rise of the Vanderbilts from newly rich upstarts to the inner circle of New York City society—the so-called Four Hundred—who'd held a firm grip on their ranks since the seventeen hundreds.

By comparison, Mr. Morgan shows no real passion for grand real estate. His home, a lovely brownstone on the corner of Madison Avenue and Thirty-Sixth Street—which I've visited only once, when he asked me to pick up an etching inadvertently left behind—is comparatively modest by the standards of his contemporaries on Fifth Avenue. Although, of course, Mr. Morgan has his indulgences—women, his art collection, and his three-hundred-foot oceangoing ship, the *Corsair III*, which needs a crew of seventy. The Morgans live in luxury and comfort, but not showiness, which seems the order of the day with the new breed of Fifth Avenue millionaires. But then, Mr. Morgan's wealth and stature got their birth generations ago in Boston, which also explains his disdain for artwork and manuscripts with any hint of modernity.

I make my way into the two-story gilt-laden ballroom, where most of the guests have congregated, either dancing or engaged in animated conversation. The concept of a ballroom inside a home astonishes me, but I try to remain unimpressed, a difficult feat given the magnifi-

cence and massiveness of the space. White gilded chairs line the room's edge, while heavy gold brocade curtains hang from the windows, and countless chandeliers swing above us. This room, more than any other in the mansion, feels overwhelming; whether it is the lavishness of the decor or the gregariousness of the guests, I cannot say for certain. I only know that I feel utterly alone and insignificant.

Moving to the perimeter, I survey the room in search of Mr. Morgan, but it is difficult to see past the couples waltzing across the dance floor. The other guests move through this world with ease.

I decide to study the guests' mannerisms and the way in which they interact. As I examine the women, I realize that their speech is accompanied by gentle touches—the flick of a fan on a man's shoulder, or the light touch of a gloved finger on a gentleman's arm—and pointed glances, often sidelong. These women—old and young alike, available and taken—are flirting. Mama would never approve of these exchanges, but I see that, in order to fit in, I may have to adapt.

One of the women catches my stare, and I know I must move away. I make my way through the room in search of Mr. Morgan. Where is he? Did he use the invitation as a front for a rendezvous with one of his special friends? If that is the case, how am I meant to meet his enemies without formal introductions?

Suddenly, I feel as if there are eyes on me, and I turn around. I smile, expecting to see Mr. Morgan. Instead, I lock eyes with a serving-woman. It is more than her simple white-collared black dress with a full white apron that separates her from the crowd. It is her deep brown complexion that makes her stand out yet simultaneously renders her unseen to the guests.

Although my instinct tells me to turn away, I am drawn to her, and our eyes stay fixed on each other, even as I hear Mama's warning: *If you see any colored people, stand tall, don't make eye contact. If eye contact is made, only acknowledge with a nod and then turn away.*

My glance lingers too long, and in the ephemeral connection we've made, I can see that *she knows*. For the second time this evening, my heart beats wildly and I try to read what I see inside the

woman's eyes. Does my deception anger her? Will she reveal my identity to the host? To my boss? Will I lose everything I've worked toward in this single instant because I didn't heed Mama's warnings? Can I plead with her not to reveal my secret? Make her understand that this fall wouldn't be just about me but would affect everyone I love?

Those questions roll through my mind as she approaches. Then, before I decide what to do, the servingwoman grins. A broad, delighted, *proud* grin. Relief courses through me. This woman, defined by her skin, the shade of a new penny, and by the debilitating laws of segregation dividing our country and our people into two halves, seems proud that one of her own has wriggled free from the restraints still inflicted upon some, like the chains that bound our ancestors.

She nods at me. It takes a moment for me to catch my breath and nod back. She tops off my flute of champagne before she breaks our gaze and moves on to other guests. But my eyes remain with her, and I have a new understanding. With the gift of the position I now hold, I am responsible to many more than just Mama and my siblings. The world I inhabit may not know that I am colored, but there will be some, like this woman, who will discover my secret, and I wish that, in some small way, my achievements will give them hope.

As I watch her weave through the guests, seen yet unseen, without even a nod of acknowledgment, the taste of the fine sparkling wine in my mouth sours and I feel a sense of sadness, tinged with anger. Now I can think only about the serving hands that poured it. Those hands are cracked and swollen from heavy lifting and serving, while mine are covered in satin opera-length gloves. Why does she serve while I am served? Why is it that the relative whiteness of my skin has given me this chance at privilege? It seems incomprehensible, but it is thus.

These thoughts make me want to depart from this decadent place. My time would be better spent with my private studies or back at the library finalizing the catalog. I pivot away from the crowd, but just as I'm about to step over the threshold of the ballroom, I hear my name.

"Why, Miss Greene, is that you?" Behind me, a voice calls out. "It is Miss Greene, isn't it?"

I turn and face Mr. Smythson from J. Pearson & Co. He is a fine arts dealer with whom Mr. Morgan occasionally does business and oftentimes squabbles. We have met at the Pierpont Morgan Library on two occasions. "It is indeed, Mr. Smythson."

"Pleasure to see you out of the library."

"It's a pleasure to be out of the library, I don't mind saying."

His glance roams over me, and with a look of surprise upon his portly, florid face, he says, "You look lovely. Nothing at all like a librarian."

"Just because I'm a librarian doesn't mean I have to dress like one." The insouciant sentence tumbles out of my mouth before I can stop it. It is the sort of jaunty remark I might toss out to one of my sisters. But never, ever to a near stranger. I can feel Mama's disapproval.

He laughs, a deep, melodious sound that causes party patrons to glance over at us. I can almost read their faces.

Who, they wonder, is the young woman delighting Mr. Smythson?

"In this moment, you *certainly* don't look like a librarian," he says.

Lowering my eyes, I glance up at Mr. Smythson through my lashes. "Well, you know what they say."

His eyebrows rise in anticipation.

Stepping closer, I do my best imitation of the other women in the room, by touching my finger to his shoulder, tossing my head back, and saying, "Looks can be deceiving. There is certainly more to me than meets any man's eyes."

He chortles, and for the first time this evening, I feel at ease and have an epiphany. This is how I must behave in order to fit in. Mama has admonished me to be cautious and blend, but I realize now that she was wrong. In order to assimilate with this crowd, I must be bold, daring to hide my differences in plain sight.

Other men join Mr. Smythson and me, gathering around to meet the young woman who seems so delightful and share in the merriment. As I'm introduced to each one, I accept their pleasantries and

compliments in turn, retorting to the final one that "I don't doubt you've said that to every woman you know, but I like it just the same." The men erupt in laughter, and for a fleeting moment I think of Mama again. She would be appalled, but I will myself not to care. This, too, is necessary to become part of Mr. Morgan's world.

By the time I spot Mr. Morgan, quite a circle has formed around me. He's in the company of an unfamiliar woman who fits the mold of a "special friend." He notices me, and with a brief word to his friend, he leaves her in his wake and strides over, cigar dangling from his mouth. The circle around me parts before him, and I am struck anew by the palpable nature of his power as I witness him outside of the library.

"Ah, Miss Greene, I see you're conversing with several of my enemies." His glance drifts from one man to another before he settles on Mr. Smythson. "And this one in particular." Mr. Morgan's voice booms, but his tone is surprisingly pleasant.

Mr. Smythson sputters at the label. "Mr.—Mr. Morgan, I've always thought of you as a trusted friend and occasional client."

Pulling himself to his full, towering six feet two inches, Mr. Morgan arches one of his magnificent eyebrows and half-jokingly asks, "Do you try to swindle all of your 'trusted friends'?"

I see the game he is playing; Mr. Morgan knows he must maintain relations with all the key dealers to have full access to the artwork and manuscripts that come to market, but the slipperier ones need to understand that he won't tolerate exploitation. If we are to meet our goal of creating America's foremost manuscript collection—equal to Europe's finest—then we have to scoop up entire collections, and we cannot do that by alienating any key dealer. Hence, the warning wrapped in the quip.

"Swindle?" Mr. Smythson looks confused, then terrified. Lesser accusations by Mr. Morgan have ruined men.

"Oh, is this the gentleman that offered you the flawed Mozart musical manuscript?" I say coyly. As if I weren't entirely certain that it had been a Pearson's dealer who'd tried to pass off a handwritten

copy of a Mozart concerto by one of his students as the original composed by the master himself.

With a nod, Mr. Morgan says, "He's the one."

"Ah." I look at Mr. Morgan. "You needn't worry that you'll be faced with such deceit again."

"No, Miss Greene? Why is that?" he asks, as if we'd rehearsed this exchange.

I shift my gaze from Mr. Morgan to the art dealer. "Because the next time we do business with Mr. Smythson, I'll be on hand to verify the authenticity of any antiquity that comes through the doors of the Pierpont Morgan Library. And should an item that doesn't pass muster arrive—which could, of course, be through no fault of Mr. Smythson . . ." I pause, wanting the dealer to see how I have provided him with an excuse for his past reprehensible behavior. "Then we will resolve the issue before it ever reaches your desk, Mr. Morgan."

"Excellent, Miss Greene," Mr. Morgan says.

"Isn't that correct, Mr. Smythson?" I ask sweetly.

Mr. Smythson looks simultaneously concerned and relieved; he's been both accused and exonerated. "It would be my honor to do business with you again, Mr. Morgan, and, and—" He sputters again. "You as well, Miss Greene, in whatever manner you see fit."

"Good. Come, Miss Greene," Mr. Morgan says, dismissing Mr. Smythson and the others with those simple words.

I give Mr. Smythson a short nod, and then together Mr. Morgan and I walk away from the slack-jawed dealer.

"You played him very well," he says quietly.

"I simply asked myself what my employer would do, and then followed suit."

Mr. Morgan lets out a laugh that sounds like a bellowing seal. "You speak to me as no one else, Miss Greene. Not even men well above you in station. Certainly not my son."

His bright hazel eyes narrow as he assesses me in the same way he did the day of my interview. This time, though, I have no doubt that

his appraisal is of me as a woman. The music plays and guests mill around us, yet for just a split second, it all becomes silent; we are alone. I feel a shift between us. He is no longer a paternal figure; he is no longer my boss.

Instead of unease, I feel a pull—a frisson of attraction. Goose bumps rise on my arms, but then I hear the music again and I return to the ball. The moment passes, and Mr. Morgan offers me his elbow.

"Let's circulate around the ballroom," he says casually, but his voice is thick. He, too, felt that surge between us. "I have some other enemies I'd like you to meet."

CHAPTER 8

MAY 29, 1906
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The front door to the apartment opens before I can even slide my key in the lock. I nearly tumble forward, but then the steadying arm of Teddy clasps me.

"What are you doing up?" I ask, in a mock-scolding whisper. The hour must be past midnight.

"I heard your footsteps coming up the stairs"—she keeps her voice low—"and I couldn't wait until morning to hear about the party." Her excitement makes her sound like a girl, even though she's a young woman of nineteen.

I should have guessed she'd stay awake. Out of all of my siblings, Teddy is the one most interested in my life with J. P. Morgan. She reads the society pages of the city newspapers as if she were going to be tested on them; the *Ladies' Home Journal* is her study guide for how to dress. Despite my modest sleeves, her tips actually proved helpful with my dress tonight, particularly her suggestion about my hat. After what I observed this evening, I'm going to need all my sister has learned about fashion.

"Where's Russell?" I ask when I take in the empty brown sofa.

"He's out with friends from his program," Teddy says, waving her

hand as if she can wave my question away. There is only one thing she wants to discuss right now.

"Well," I begin as we sit side by side on the sofa. I pause as a yawn overtakes me. Morning is not that far away, and I wonder why the wealthy entertain on weeknights. *Silly*, I chide myself. The rich have no obligation to rise early. They can sleep until noon if they wish.

"Would you rather hear about the house or the dresses?" I ask. "They were both magnificent."

"Oh, the dresses, of course."

Even with only the gas lamps from the street for illumination, my sister's prettiness shines. Her light brown hair is straight and silky, so unlike my coarse, wavy hair, which I force into submission daily with elaborate updos and a mountain of pins. Her hair swings, framing her sweet, fair face.

"My favorite was a gown of a blue so dark it nearly appeared obsidian—" I start.

Teddy interrupts. "A black dress was your favorite?" She is horrified that a somber mourning shade should be preferred.

"You didn't let me finish. The gown was a midnight, inky blue, and all around the skirt and train were crystals and colored gemstones in the pattern of the constellations."

Teddy gasps.

I continue, "And when the woman danced, it looked like the night sky."

My sister presses her hand against her chest. I understand her reaction; I almost did the same when I saw the dress swirling on the marble ballroom floor in time to the symphony. I describe other gowns that I know Teddy will appreciate. I report the trend of jewel tones and the prevalence of crystals and pearls on the gowns' bodices.

Of the two moments that stand out from the night, I avoid any reference. I say nothing about those seconds of attraction between Mr. Morgan and me. Similarly, I make no mention of the colored servant and the impact of our connection. Teddy wouldn't under-

stand. She has inhabited Mama's white world for nearly her entire life. She was barely a year old when we left DC, and once we were in New York, we basically lived as whites even before Mama changed our names and revised our past.

Sometimes when I look at Teddy, with her light hair, alabaster skin, and pale eyes, I wonder if she knows about the violent origins of our white skin. What does she remember about Papa, or are her lessons all from Mama?

As if I summon her by thought, Mama emerges from her bedroom in a blue nightgown. Once again, she is without the silk dressing gown that Papa had given to her, the one she always used to wear. Her eyes are puffy with sleep, and her mouth hardens into a stern line seeing the two of us whispering on the sofa.

Even before Uncle Mozart's letter about Papa, Mama had to toughen herself. Being in New York is often a struggle, beyond our finances. Keeping our true identity a secret is a burden that grows heavier with time. Every day there is more to lose as the world around us becomes increasingly unaccepting. While segregation is the law of the South, the tentacles of Jim Crow have stretched into New York, too. So many policies reinforce discrimination and relegate the colored to the worst neighborhoods and to employment with the lowest pay and station. Since Papa left, we have been living on the edge, but as whites, we surely have lived a better existence than if we'd lived the truth—and that is because of Mama.

Before she can lecture us, we say, "Sorry, Mama," in unison, and then giggle at our little rebellion.

"Night, Belle," Teddy says, giving me a quick kiss and then scooting into the bedroom.

"I should get ready for bed myself," I say. "I'll tell you about the ball tomorrow."

Mama doesn't say anything, but glances at the dining room table. My stack of language texts has spilled over. Is she angry that I left my workbooks out?

"Don't you have your daily studying to do? I don't believe you had time between work and the party, and you don't want to lose the ground you've gained in your languages."

My eyes widen with surprise. I've been diligent in my studies but surely, since these lessons are my choice, I can miss one evening. "It's past midnight, Mama. I think it can wait for tonight."

"Are you certain, Belle?" It's not a question. "You told me how critical your facility with Latin, German, and French is for your position. Do you think another J. P. Morgan will come knocking on your door if you fail?"

Fail?

We lock eyes as we momentarily lock wills. Just for this evening, just this one time, I want to be simply her daughter, as precious and tenderly cared for as Teddy. Or even as steadily regarded as Louise or Ethel, who have much less far to fall should they disappoint. I want her to tell me to go into the bedroom so that I can lay my head and my burdens down.

"Come." My mother beckons me before she moves toward the dining room table.

I pause. Every night, I've sat at that table alone, studying until my eyelids drooped and begged for rest. As I follow Mama to the table, I wonder what she's doing. Until she sits in one chair, then motions for me to take the other.

Spreading out my ball gown around me like my nighttime blanket, I open my Latin textbook and turn to the chapter on subordinate clauses.

"Where should we begin?" Mama asks.

She knows nothing about Latin, but I am grateful that she will sit with me. Her tending to me may not resemble what she does for my siblings, but it is caretaking nonetheless. I know Mama really does still see me as her daughter.

CHAPTER 9

NOVEMBER 4, 1906

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

In the ten months since I've become part of Mr. Morgan's world, I have transitioned from cataloging his collection and organizing his shelves to advising on acquisitions and attending operas, dinners, parties, and balls at his behest with social luminaries and art experts alike. I've become comfortable chatting companionably with the Fricks about Renaissance painting, talking to Metropolitan Museum director Caspar Purdon Clarke about the finer details of decorative arts, taking a turn on the dance floor with John D. Rockefeller, or sitting in between the Carnegies and the Phippses at the opera. Given all this, why is it still daunting to walk across the rotunda into Mr. Morgan's office and ask him to focus on a pressing matter?

I find excuses to walk past his office, hoping to discover that he has turned his attention to the catalog I placed on his desk over two hours ago. But there it lies, still open to the page I've folded wide. I cannot think of a single urgent thing that's arisen today, and yet the catalog sits unattended while the deadline on remote bids for the Boston auction looms.

While Mr. Morgan has come to rely on me to present potential prizes for his consideration, he makes decisions at his own pace, and

frequently asks me to consult experts for second opinions. Nor can I always access art and manuscripts coming to market, because there are several dealers who won't work with me or do so only because they believe they can dupe me. Just last week Mr. Pryce wrote to Mr. Morgan complaining about "that woman in your library" when I refused to purchase a manuscript on the grounds that its condition was far poorer than he'd represented.

Mr. Morgan wrote a scathing reply in support of my assessment and referred Mr. Pryce to me for all future negotiations, but it is hardly the only such missive he has received. Even though I spend my evenings at the opera and theater and dinners with the society collectors, dealers, and curators in Mr. Morgan's circle, it isn't enough to secure an equal position in the ranks of my peers.

On this lap around the rotunda, I pause at Mr. Morgan's study. He sits on his lion's throne, as I like to call his ornate desk and chair, reading the newspaper.

The delay frustrates me, but I cannot show it. Mr. Morgan reacts poorly to nagging and wheedling. I step into the room. The *New York Daily News* does not lower. I slip into the chair opposite his desk and clear my throat.

Finally, he looks up. "What are you doing in here? I don't remember calling you into my office, Miss Greene," he snaps.

I've grown accustomed to the empty bluster of sharp comments, and do not allow them to disturb me. "Sir, have you had a chance to study the catalog?"

"I do have other matters to attend to than your lust for art, Miss Greene," he yells.

It no longer intimidates; it is simply something to be managed. "Mr. Morgan, this is *your* collection, not mine. I only want to help grow it so that it rivals the best European institutions—royal and private alike—and this acquisition is a step toward that goal. Am I wrong in assuming you share my objectives?"

I've had to say these same words to him many times, and Mr. Morgan rarely maintains his stern facade when faced with my temer-

ity. Usually he breaks into a smile, making me think of him sometimes as being all thunder and no lightning. Not that he cannot be intimidating and fierce. I've seen his rage at the parade of financiers, industry leaders, and art world principals who pass through his door—even at Jack for asking questions Mr. Morgan deems stupid. But his real fury does not manifest as a roar—it manifests as silence. An eerie, terrifying quiet that I avoid at all costs.

"Of course I share your objectives. They are my damned objectives, after all—including getting that damned Caxton *Le Morte Darthur*. Have you found it yet?"

"I am working on it, sir." I always get a queasy feeling in my stomach when he brings up that particular Caxton. Of course, securing it has been a priority since my first day, but it has proven maddeningly elusive.

"It's why I hired you, that and your impeccable eye for ancient manuscripts and medieval art." His rant slowly deflates until he settles back into his chair. Reaching for the catalog, he says, "Well, if I can't have my Caxton right now, let's look at your precious Bible."

"Shall we read the description?" I ask. I've brought my own copy of the auction catalog into his office.

He agrees with a grunt.

"Please turn to lot number sixteen," I say, waiting until he's focused upon the pertinent entry. "There you can see that the Bible was printed by the University of Cambridge's printers in 1638. It goes on to say that it was King Charles the First's own copy, and as a result, it was bound in red velvet embroidered in silver thread with the king's initials and crest, and said crest is inlaid with silver and gems. The catalog notes that it is in a perfect state of preservation. I've been tracking down the provenance of the Bible, and this seems to be the authentic copy."

"Buy it," he announces and picks up the newspaper again. For him, merely saying the words will make them happen. *How magical it is to be Mr. Morgan.*

Relief and delight wash over me. I consider the English king who

prayed for the safety of his kingdom—or perhaps for himself when he was overthrown and charged with treason—with that Bible between his palms. I imagine holding the ancient book, opening its crimson velvet cover, turning its thick pages to read the sacred words within, and allowing its history to course through my own hands. And I think about the printer who painstakingly laid out all the letters for the printing and then fashioned its exquisite binding, all in an effort to bring God closer to the king through the Bible's sacred words.

"Wonderful, Mr. Morgan. I'll fill out the paperwork and notify the auction house." I am about to rise when an interesting approach occurs to me. "Or would you rather circumvent the auction altogether and offer the seller a large preemptive bid? I could arrive at a number that is fair, but would be tempting enough, and approach the seller privately."

He asks me to repeat myself and his eyes shine. "Clever, Miss Greene. I like that tactic, and we'll use it in the future. But for this particular volume, let's use the traditional auction process."

"Yes, sir." I stand and take a deep breath, gathering my courage. "There is one way I can be certain that we will be the buyer."

"What's that?" he asks.

"I could attend the Boston auction and do the bidding myself."

He doesn't speak for a long moment.

"If you leave shortly"—he glances at the mantelpiece clock—"you could make it to Boston by nightfall."

He's giving me permission? I can't believe it. My mind whirls at the preparation I'll have to undertake. But no matter. It will be a terrific adventure and the biggest, most public imprimatur of Mr. Morgan's support to date, one that will register with all the major players in the art world. If I succeed, it has the potential to inexorably change my place in this exclusive world.

I can't help the grin plastered on my face. "Thank you, sir. I will not disappoint you. What limit would you like to place on my bidding?"

"I said I want the thing, Miss Greene," he snaps, "and that means there is no limit. Do you understand?"

No limit.

"I understand. Even still, I will not allow you to overpay should the bidding escalate beyond what I think is fair."

Chuckling, he says, "Oh, I don't worry. Except perhaps about your competition. I almost pity them." He pauses, and his tone changes. His voice is softer when he adds, "They have no idea the fierceness that lurks within your petite frame."

The intensity of his gaze makes me inhale. I've seen this expression before—at the Vanderbilt ball—and this time, there can be no mistake. His glance is filled with appreciation. But then, he clears his throat, and his tone and his words are businesslike. "Don't forget, when you are assessing the item in person, look into the eyes of the man selling it to you. You're judging the seller nearly as much as the object itself."

I nod, feeling a little unsettled at Mr. Morgan's uncharacteristic admiration. In the almost six months that have passed since the moment we shared at the Vanderbilt ball, I have done everything to maintain the professionalism between us. And Mr. Morgan has reciprocated, making me believe sometimes that I imagined our brief attraction.

Hoisting himself to a standing position, he asks, "Shall we toast to your success?" He doesn't wait for my response as he decants an amber-colored liquid from one of the crystal bottles on his side table and hands me a glass. "To Belle," he says, "a ferocious adversary who hides her strength behind a beautiful smile."

I pause, wondering if there is more coming. But his expression is back to one of being my employer, and so I raise my glass to him, but I know I did not imagine what happened this time.

"And, Belle," he says, "let us now give a toast to the both of us. To our little conspiracy. Together we are saving the past for the future. With my fortune and your gifted eye and hard work, we are rescuing and protecting the most beautiful and important treasures that his-

tory has to offer—those artifacts and manuscripts that memorialize the physical history of the book.”

I touch my glass to his. I'm too embarrassed to ask what kind of liquor he has poured, but whatever the type, I take a sip. It burns as it travels down my throat and I cough. Of course, this is the precise moment when Anne—the ubiquitous judgmental daughter, the occasional ambassador of her mother, the only one who shares her father's external steeliness—arrives at the library.

“A little early for a drink, isn't it?” she asks as she surveys the scene. Today, Anne is wearing a deep plum dress with a matching jacket and a white fur tossed over her right shoulder. Very fashionable, and still, she manages to make the outfit look matronly.

When neither her father nor I respond, she repeats her question. The condemnation in her voice is clear. I cringe. Sometimes when I am in Anne's bright, quick-witted company, I think we could have been friends. But most of the time, too much tension exists between us. I do not know if it's jealousy or simple dislike, and every effort I make to bridge the divide is met with coldness.

“Anne, don't be such a wet blanket,” Mr. Morgan scoffs. “We're just drinking to Miss Greene's triumph at the Boston auction tomorrow.” Then, he amends, “Anticipated triumph, that is,” before he takes a sip.

“You're not sending King?” she asks, and her thick eyebrows rise high on her forehead in surprise. In years past, Mr. Morgan's secretary attended auctions in his stead. “Or cousin Junius? I thought *he* was your art expert.”

Like Anne, I have wondered why Junius hasn't been summoned for more consultations or auctions, and I have worried that his marginalization would create animosity between us. Fortunately, my letters from Junius do not reflect any jealousy or sense that he's been displaced from his uncle's affections, only pride that “his protégé” is working at his uncle's side. Maybe he's relieved that he no longer has the pressure of advising Mr. Morgan with such frequency.

“It is Miss Greene's job, and she will be securing a Bible once owned by a king.” His tone makes clear he will brook no further discussion on the matter. But when he continues, he adopts the softer quality he tends to use with his youngest daughter. “It'll be perfect for the collection, don't you think, Anne? Rounds out the Gutenbergs.”

She turns away from her father and addresses me directly. “That's quite a coup, Miss Greene, standing in for my father at an auction. Your people will be delighted, no doubt, at this opportunity.”

I flinch, but only on the inside. *Strange*, I think, *for her to reference my people.* I keep my face expressionless. She has never inquired about my background before. Nor has her father for that matter. It's always seemed enough that I am here because of Junius and her father.

Keeping my expression even as my heart rate speeds up, I answer, “Yes, I am sure they will be.”

Her face is painted with innocence, an obvious effort, as she asks, “Remind me of who your people are again?”

There is no need for a reminder; she knows well we have never discussed this. Still, without hesitation, I answer. “We hail from Virginia, Miss Morgan, but my immediate family lives here in New York City.”

Anne tilts her head. “And before that?”

I say a silent prayer to a God I've largely ignored and continue with my story. “My grandmother was from Portugal, although that is about as interesting as my family heritage gets.” Then, in an attempt to make her point for her, I add, “Nothing as esteemed as your own family.” I half laugh as if I'm embarrassed by such a common heritage.

Her eyes narrow. “Really? I thought I heard something about you having tropical roots,” she says as her father walks away to get himself another drink.

Rage rises up within me. I'm not going to allow this jealous

daughter to banish me by brandishing around what she thinks she may know. "Don't believe everything you hear, Miss Morgan. I would certainly ignore any chatter about you." I meet her stare.

I would never speak aloud the rumors I heard at a recent opera. During intermission, I was sipping champagne with renowned art dealer Mr. Jacques Seligmann, one of the most important antiquarians and art dealers in Paris and New York.

When Anne passed us by, she glanced my way, but didn't speak a word. She was chatting with her two close friends, the interior designer Miss Elsie de Wolfe and the literary agent and producer Miss Bessie Marbury, who represents Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw among other luminaries. But I knew Anne was pointedly ignoring me, the way she had at the Vanderbilt ball and every other time since when I'd seen her in public.

Mr. Seligmann turned to me and whispered, "Don't let Miss Morgan's coldness bother you. Everyone knows she only has time for Elsie and Bessie, who—they say—are all in a Boston marriage together."

I laughed with him as though Boston marriages were commonplace in my world, but in truth, I'd never met a woman who was in a romantic relationship with another woman, let alone two.

"I'm not certain how such a thing works," Mr. Seligmann continued. "But they've made it abundantly clear that there's only room for those three. And those they've designated as particular friends."

I'd taken another sip of my champagne, keeping my eye on Anne, Bessie, and Elsie from across the room. The constant companionship of the three women now made sense. They'd cloaked their personal relationship behind their professional partnerships at the Villa Trianon at Versailles and the Colony Club. They were hiding in plain sight, and I knew a little about that.

That memory is in my mind as Anne and I lock eyes. She blinks first and pivots, turning to study a painting she's seen thousands of times. I take her silence as a victory.

Drink in hand, Morgan approaches us. "Enough of this banter,

Anne," he says. "Miss Greene has to get ready for her trip." Once again, he raises his glass in my direction before quaffing it down. "To your prowess," he declares as his daughter watches with a wary expression.

I sip at the liquor, and it eases my nerves. Anne may think she knows something about me and she may be awaiting my missteps, but I'm the one going to Boston tonight. And I will not let her ruin my evening—or my chance at success. Anne has built a life for herself, and I plan to do the same.

CHAPTER 10

NOVEMBER 5, 1906

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

I leap into the cold, dark waters of the auction. My fellow bidders are a white-capped sea of men in charcoal-gray and midnight-blue suits. *How best to enter these waters?* I wonder. Should I wade in with ladylike circumspection, taking the temperature as I go deeper? Or should I dive?

Be cautious, never do anything to stand out, I can hear Mama say, but I've learned how important it is to be bold.

I decide to plunge headlong.

Identifying one familiar face in the crowd of about one hundred white men, I gather my skirts in my free hand and walk across the marble entryway toward the group with whom Mr. Edwards is conversing. This gentleman, if a dealer of his shady reputation can actually be called a gentleman, has a business purchasing and selling Italian Renaissance artwork. One evening at the opera, I was introduced to him by Mr. Morgan, who privately described him as one of his key "enemies," and I marveled at the way in which a notoriously picky industrialist welcomed the dealer into his opera box as a guest despite the rumors that he'd sold forgeries.

As I approach, I think how, like the men, I dressed for this occa-

sion. While packing yesterday, I'd debated between my new jade-green gown and the more sensible pin-striped gray dress, which Mama advocated. I'd settled on the gray dress, thinking that it might bring me the same luck it had bestowed when I wore it to my interview with Mr. Morgan. But now I wonder whether the more daring gown would have better matched my purpose. I suppose it doesn't matter; these men are determined to scorn me regardless of what I wear.

The little band of five men closes ranks as I approach. They are clearly aware of my presence but are ignoring me.

"Mr. Edwards," I call out, knowing that even a cad cannot ignore the direct appeal from a lady.

Slowly, he turns toward me. "Is that you, Miss Greene?" he asks, making a show of looking down and squinting at me. As if my presence hadn't registered the moment I passed through the heavy oak doors of the auction house.

"None other," I reply with a wide smile.

Propriety leaves the group no choice but to part. But they step aside just enough to allow me a glimpse at their faces; there is not enough space for me to actually join their coterie. Among them, I recognize a dealer who works with the famous collector Isabella Stewart Gardner.

"I am surprised to see you here. I would have expected Mr. Morgan's secretary. Or perhaps his nephew?" Mr. Edwards says with a forced laugh and a knowing glance to his cadre, who join in his laughter.

"I don't know why you would have expected that." As I reach up to tuck a wayward curl back into my hat, I allow a gloved finger to graze Mr. Edwards's shoulder and give him my own forced laugh. Then, glancing at him through my eyelashes, I add, "I am his *personal* librarian, you know."

His eyebrows rise a bit, and now his chuckle is genuine. "Personal, you say? Just how personal?"

That is exactly the question I wanted him to ask. "I am *personally* responsible for making important acquisitions as well as being in

charge of his collection. I am *personally* authorized to make the decisions and purchases all on his behalf." I pause. "Entirely as I see fit."

He smiles, nods, and once again glances at his group of friends. "Sounds like a big job for a little lady."

I sigh and lower my eyes. "Yes, it is an awfully big job. And being a woman, I know that I must do my job twice as well as any man to be thought half as good." I glance up with a broad smile and add, "Lucky for me, that won't be too difficult." I laugh, then slip my vivid red scarf from around my neck and let it trail behind me sinuously as I turn away. "Have a good day, gentlemen."

A ripple passes through the men, indiscernible and inaudible but undeniable. Over my shoulder, I hear a bevy of farewells and "nice to meet you, Miss Greene's, but their voices are soon drowned out by the sound of a gong, and I am already on to my next task of choosing that all-important auction seat. I've read Mr. Morgan's volumes on the auction rules and probed my colleagues about their practices. Auction-goers have clear preferences. Some seek out seats in the front row to be seen or in the rear so their bids can only be seen by the auctioneer. Those more interested in displaying their finances and their power choose the center. I know precisely where to be.

I wait until most of the crowd has settled into their chairs, and then I walk down the aisle. Once I am certain all eyes are upon me—not difficult, given that I'm the only woman in the room—I take the last seat on the aisle in the very center row.

The auctioneer takes his post and raps his gavel on the podium. "Today, we are honored to be handling the estate of Robert Wilkinson, the esteemed collector whose passion for books and manuscripts sent him back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean every year as he sought out the rarest exemplars from both America and England. As many of you undoubtedly know, the collection of the late Mr. Wilkinson was assembled over the course of many years from private sales as well as the divestiture undertaken by famous libraries, including those of kings and queens. Mr. Wilkinson was known for his keen eye, his vast knowledge of books, and his acumen in the field,

and his heirs are loath to disband his collection. But the unfortunate circumstances of pending levies and taxes—with which most of you are intimately familiar—require it."

The auctioneer waits for an audience member to finish a ragged bout of coughing, and as we sit idle, I remember a rumor I'd heard about the auction. Supposedly, there was talk of shipping the books to England for sale given their Anglo content and provenance, but with the additional layer of customs payments, the decision was rendered to sell them here.

The gong sounds again. "We begin today with the category of rare Bibles and important works by early church fathers." A somberly dressed assistant makes his way onto the stage, displaying a wooden box, inlaid with patterns of pearls. He pauses, then lifts the lid to reveal the leather Bible that lies within. "I draw your attention to lot number one," the auctioneer says.

My Bible will not emerge for another fifteen lots, so I take this opportunity to study my fellow bidders. The ways in which the men signal their bids vary widely—from the slight lift of a hand to the circumspect wave of a rolled-up catalog—and I wonder if gestures reflect some key quality of the bidder.

A parade of sumptuous priceless volumes appears on the dais until the auctioneer finally reaches lot sixteen. "The King Charles the First Bible, certainly one of the prizes of this auction, even though, of course, Mr. Wilkinson's collection contains many valuable items. As is detailed in your catalog, this Bible was not only owned by King Charles the First in the seventeenth century, but it is also considered the finest example of its kind. Shall we open the bidding at one thousand dollars?"

I itch to raise my scarf, having decided to use it as my bid signal, but I know I must wait. My competition needs to reveal itself before I make clear my intentions. I watch as two unfamiliar men bid in hundred-dollar increments until the Bible's price reaches five thousand dollars. It is then that I raise my scarf high, a flash of crimson against the backdrop of stormy grays and blues.

"Did she just jump in at the five-thousand mark?" I hear one man whisper to another behind me.

His neighbor replies in a low tone, "Who the devil is she?"

"What is a woman doing in here anyway?"

"And an olive-skinned one at that."

I flinch but keep my focus on the auctioneer's announcement that he'll adjust the bidding to five-hundred-dollar increments. At this point one of my two opponents drops out with a quick shake of his head. But the other gentleman continues, matching me dollar for dollar. Soon we've moved past ten thousand dollars, and then, in what feels like a dream, I bid fifteen thousand dollars.

As I lower my scarf, a quiet settles on the room. I realize that my competitor has not responded. I have won.

The gavel slams down on the podium. "Lot number sixteen has been sold, to the gentleman—I mean the lady—with the red scarf in the center row." He and I exchange brief nods, and then he turns his attention to the next lot.

As prices are named and hands fly up, I stand and walk slowly down the aisle. Leaving the auction midway is not the usual protocol, but I want everyone to understand that the Pierpont Morgan Library and its librarian are singular.

CHAPTER 11

FEBRUARY 9, 1907
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The sunburst chandeliers illuminate the Metropolitan Opera House, and their light reflects off the famous gold damask stage curtains that have just been lowered. I blink as the lavish theater materializes before me at intermission, finding that I am loath to leave behind the captivating world of *Aida*.

Russell's hand is on my elbow, though, and I allow him to slide his arm through mine as we rise from our luxurious red velvet seats. We push past the curtains at the back of Mr. Morgan's box and exit into the lobby area, which is reserved for the owners of the exclusive boxes that ring the upper level of the opera house. As we walk toward a waiter holding a tray of champagne, my brother and I chat about the first and second acts.

Ever since my social blunder of having attended the Vanderbilt ball alone, I make sure that I'm accompanied, especially when I come to the opera and theater. In the past, when I wasn't with Mr. Morgan, either Louise or Ethel would accompany me. However, Mama had insisted that Russell escort me tonight.

"Please, Belle," she'd said. "Your brother is going to need a job in a few months."

"But he's not going to find one at the opera, Mama. That's not how it works."

"I don't expect him to sit down and have an interview there, but he can meet people of importance who can help him secure an engineering position once he graduates."

What Mama does not understand, and what she does not want to hear, is that the opera box attendees operate at a level so much higher than the one to which Russell aspires that a chance encounter would have little effect on his prospects. But that is not the only reason why I prefer to attend these events with my sisters. Standing next to the fairer Louise and Ethel never brings forth questions of my ancestry. It is always different when I'm with my darker-skinned brother. Yet, as I often do, I gave in to Mama.

In the lobby, I am greeted with kisses by Mrs. Hamilton and Mrs. Phipps, and several acquaintances of theirs who'd asked for introductions. In the wake of the Boston auction three months ago, the *New York Times* had seized upon the story and written an article about the pretty young librarian wielding the power of the legendary J. P. Morgan—maker of markets, banker to presidents and kings, savior of the United States economy—and the image of me captured the public's fancy. Mr. Morgan delighted in the publicity and in the incongruity between us as presented in the article. While the article was innocuous enough, it prompted gossip column mentions of my attendance at society events—linking me with men I've never met—and I am wary of the notoriety that could bring additional scrutiny. While there is little I can do about the gossip pages, I've decided to manage the public coverage by denying the dozens of requests that have come in for personal interviews.

Still, Mr. Morgan's pleasure at this public success has yielded several benefits that have offset some of my worries. He awarded me my first raise, which allowed my family to finally move to a three-bedroom apartment near Central Park, where Russell now sleeps in a proper bed in his own bedroom. And Mr. Morgan has given me greater latitude

in identifying pieces for acquisition, and I have turned this into a series of small victories, securing masterpieces and then collections in their entirety for the Pierpont Morgan Library. Although I have yet to acquire the Caxton *Le Morte Darthur*, as he likes to remind me.

The lights flicker to indicate the end of intermission, and Russell and I down the remainder of our drinks. We press through the crowd toward the box and nearly reach it, when I hear a distinctive, high-pitched voice call out, "Miss Greene? Miss Greene, is that you?"

If I had been alone, I would have ignored that call, and I make an initial attempt at escape by continuing toward the box, but as I knew he would, Russell grabs my arm.

"Belle, I think that woman is calling you," he says, in an effort to be helpful. My brother is innocent of the machinations of which the elite are capable—from petty gossip to malevolent long-laid plans of economic destruction.

I do not have time to educate Russell. All I can do is turn toward Elsie de Wolfe with a wide smile.

"I thought that was you, Miss Greene," she says with a kiss on each of my cheeks. "So lovely to see you here." With her soft hair gathered high upon her head into a loose topknot and a welcoming twinkle in her eyes, the esteemed interior decorator—the person who veritably created the profession—seems kindly, and the light, brightly colored interiors for which she's become famous would certainly suggest a blithe temperament. But I have reason to be wary. Over the past months, I've confirmed the closeness of her relationship with Anne—and what Mr. Seligmann told me, in part at least. In fact, according to several others, Elsie does live with Bessie at a Sutton Place residence in a Boston marriage that seems to involve Anne in some capacity as well, even if it's simply as a friend.

"It's a pleasure to see you, Miss de Wolfe," I say, hoping my tone doesn't sound false. I know everything about this exchange will be reported back to Anne, so my behavior must be impeccable. "I hope you've been enjoying *Aida*."

"I certainly have been," she says, and then stares directly at Russell.

Reluctantly, I make the requisite introduction. "Will you do me the honor of meeting my brother, Russell da Costa Greene?"

"It is a pleasure, Miss de Wolfe," Russell responds, then asks, "You are friends with my sister?"

I groan inside. How little Russell understands this world to assume that, because people are acquainted, they are friends. This elite realm holds many gradations and types of relationships, and only a few of them contain actual friendship.

In her offhand way, Miss de Wolfe explains. "Friends? Well . . . so, you are Belle's brother." She peers at his symmetrical features and light gray eyes. "Yes, I definitely see the resemblance."

As Russell and Miss de Wolfe exchange pleasantries focused upon his education and prospects, just as Mama would have wanted, I become increasingly uneasy. As a designer, Miss de Wolfe is famous for her keen visual sense, and I wonder what she'll see as she studies Russell and me side by side. This is the exact situation that I wanted to avoid.

"Well," I begin, already moving toward the box and hoping Russell follows my lead. "It was good to see you."

But Miss de Wolfe continues speaking, holding my brother hostage with her conversation. Russell will never step away while she holds court; lessons in etiquette prevent such transgressions from politeness.

"Yes, you are siblings. The same skin tone and your features? Interesting." From her concentrated expression, I see that the real inquiry is coming. "Where are your people from again?"

I stiffen. It's the same question Anne asked me during our last encounter. It seems Miss de Wolfe is on a fishing expedition for Mr. Morgan's daughter.

My well-trained brother automatically says, "Our grandmother is from Portugal."

"Yes," she says, her eyes holding as much doubt as her tone. "Portugal. That's what I've been told. But I would have thought you had tropical roots."

There is no doubt now; Anne and Miss de Wolfe have spoken about me. But to what end are these questions?

"I would have thought your people were from someplace more like Cuba, maybe?" Miss de Wolfe continues.

I know what she's intimating by offering Cuba for our origins. I press my hand against my chest to calm myself and pretend it's a gesture of amusement. "Cuba?" I chuckle as if I'm delighted by her words even though inside I seethe. "Oh, no. But I would certainly love to visit that country one day."

"Are you sure you have no Cuban heritage?" she says, openly doubting my words. "I've heard so many rumors."

I cut her off with a wave of my hand and more laughter, because I'm unsure how far she will go. Nor am I certain how Russell will withstand the ongoing inquiry. "Don't believe everything you hear, Miss de Wolfe."

"It can be challenging, Miss Greene, when the rumors are so persistent." She holds firm.

"Well, I am certain you—of all people—understand how stubborn rumors can be, how hard to shake. I find that can be particularly true with rumors about strong women—such as ourselves. But don't you think we owe it to other women to push aside slander and gossip about one of our own?" I do not expect an answer, but I do anticipate a reaction. "I certainly ignore the chatter I hear about you and Miss Marbury."

From the frozen expression on Elsie's face, I've achieved my goal. By appealing to her stated commitment to women's interests—while subtly hinting at the whispers about her own life—I have boxed her in. How can she persist in her persecution of me at the same time she publicly espouses support for women, especially given that she now knows I'm aware she has secrets of her own?

It's time to take my leave. "Good evening, Miss de Wolfe. Enjoy the rest of your night."

This time, I take my brother's hand and firmly lead him into the box. As the chandeliers dim for acts three and four, I whisper, "You see what she was doing, don't you?"

"I do now. Sorry."

The orchestra begins, and we sit in frozen, fitful silence. I do not need to inquire about my brother's thoughts; I know precisely what he is thinking. In some ways, we are the most similar of our siblings, particularly because our appearances don't always give us the same room to breathe as our sisters. We are on a tightrope, trying to keep our balance, and I must reconcile myself to the fact that the suspicions about me will never disappear.

CHAPTER 12

OCTOBER 1–NOVEMBER 2, 1907

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The slow pace of acquisitions that began at the Boston auction turns into a fast ride, and my successes continue to grow. Mr. Morgan and I decide that the Pierpont Morgan Library will become more than America's greatest collection of incunabula and illuminated manuscripts—a living history of the written word and printed books—worthy goal though that is. It will contain the pinnacle of objects owned or created by rulers, royals, artists, and inventors in every category. Napoleon's watch. Da Vinci's notebook. Shakespeare's folios. Catherine the Great's snuffbox. George Washington's letters. When I place the Medici jewels in the vault, I feel their legacy passing from them to Mr. Morgan and his library, advancing his evolution into a modern-day Medici, as I'd promised.

But life can change suddenly. Previously inflated items drop in price on rumors of a pending economic crash. The newspaper headlines report dire circumstances and predict worse. The New York Stock Exchange falls daily, and fear mounts about the impact on banks. I overhear conversations from Mr. Morgan's study that detail excessive stock speculation in railroads, mining, and copper; overinvestment in

ill-regulated trust companies that are teetering on the edge of solvency; bank loans backed by shaky stocks and bonds as collateral.

It seems our economy is a house of cards, but Mr. Morgan assures me that there is nothing to be concerned about. In fact, he suggests that we should keep spending despite the economy. Then he asks *me* why I think he's making this recommendation.

He has been slowly educating me in financial matters. He has shown me balance sheets and profit and loss statements and has suggested I read the business columns in the papers.

I muse on the question—which feels like a test—for a long moment. I contemplate the way he values companies and investment opportunities, and I finally say, “We should be examining not the current value of books and art, but their future worth, which we’ve assessed as enormous. And given their low price compared to their soaring futures, the artwork and manuscripts on the market present unique opportunities and excellent value. We should proceed,” I finish, awaiting his verdict.

Smiling, he says, “Ah, Miss Greene, you see that to which everyone else is blind.”

But even our opportunistic spending cannot withstand the continual downturn of the financial marketplace. By the beginning of October, the newspapers are reporting the collapse in copper shares, which takes down other stocks like dominoes. Alarm sets in when people realize that stocks serve as collateral for a large percentage of the bank and trust loans, and then the fears come true. Lines form outside banks as people empty their accounts. I see them on the way to work, and Mama and I have secreted a small carryall of cash under her bed. When Mr. Morgan decides we should forestall purchases and doesn't even ask me about his precious Caxton for weeks, I wonder if I should have Mama join her bank's line and withdraw all our savings.

The moment I step into the rotunda the morning of October 10, Mr. Morgan calls out to me. This is peculiar, since he'd been sched-

uled to leave the night before for the Episcopal Convention in Richmond, Virginia. Not to mention, I usually arrive before him.

Before even removing my coat, I walk into Mr. Morgan's office. He's slumped over in his lion's chair, not enough for others to notice, but the hours I've spent with this man have made me aware of even subtle shifts in his posture, and his eyes do not have their usual hawklike gleam.

“Yes, Mr. Morgan,” I say.

He averts his gaze before responding. “Please sit down.”

Anxiety rushes through me. I already know what he's going to say, and questions overwhelm me. Will Teddy have to drop out of college? Will Mama have to return to teaching again? And what about our new apartment? We've only been there for a year. My only hope is that I will be able to find a new job, return to Princeton, perhaps.

“A friend from Boston committed suicide.”

His words stun me, but I do not speak.

“Last night,” he continues. “In San Francisco. His investment company was already on the brink of financial ruin. But the crisis sent his company plummeting over the edge. His poor wife found him with the gun.”

He shakes his head before lowering his eyes, and I know this is my signal to leave. “I'm terribly sorry, sir,” I say before heading to my own office, where I sit at my desk, trembling from the news. In part, I feel relief; I still have my job at a time when many are out of work. But I push that selfishness aside as my eyes fill with tears for a man I've never met and his family.

Although he does indeed leave for the Episcopal Convention that evening, before he goes, Mr. Morgan has had a shift in his thinking. He no longer believes this crisis will pass, and no one else does either.

Three tense weeks later, Mr. Morgan—the man who saved the gold standard in 1895, and the American economy along with it, by controlling the flow of gold in and out of the country, the man who created the world's largest steel company and first billion-dollar en-

tity by financing the merger of Andrew Carnegie's steel company with his two biggest competitors—answers the country's calls for help, and is summoned back from his convention. Once he reaches New York City by his private railroad car, he assembles a committee of young bankers to investigate and audit the various players.

By the time he strides through the heavy bronze doors of the library on the morning of November 2, he looks ten years younger than the man who left. With an invigorated step, he gives me a nod before he leads ten men into his study for a meeting that he says he hopes will end the crisis. I feel his strength and now know in my very bones this economic crisis will be solved. However, within the hour, my office door swings open wide.

I jump at the sound, surprised to see that it's Mr. Morgan. "Sir? Can I help you or your guests with anything?"

He crosses the room with uncharacteristic speed, and settles himself into the chair opposite my desk. "How I wish you could, Miss Greene."

"You know I'd do anything to help."

"How about knocking some sense into the bankers and trust men I brought into the library today?" His tone is gruff, filled with more frustration than anger.

I chuckle at the thought. "If I could, I would, sir."

"You might be the only one who could," he says with a rueful laugh. "I haven't had much luck so far."

"I don't know about that," I offer. "You managed to get the government to pledge twenty-five million dollars to help the brokerage houses, and you assisted in raising thirty million dollars to help New York City meet its expenses. Not to mention your request that the city's religious leaders preach calm in last week's Sunday services. If I may, sir, that was nothing short of brilliant. There's no doubt it slowed the liquidation of holdings in the market and the banks."

He smiles, pleased by my assessment. "Small mercies, Miss Greene. What we need is a miracle."

I am not moved by his uncertainty, and anyway, I know he needs encouragement. "You've managed miracles before, Mr. Morgan, and

I don't doubt that you will again," I say, holding his gaze. He needs to be confident in his ability to fix this catastrophe, because if he can't, who can? "What is your plan?"

He's pensive for a moment. "Well, I've had the front doors to the library locked, after having enough provisions brought in for the duration, because I told those damned financial men we aren't leaving until this matter is resolved. I put the bankers in the library and the trust men in my study, so I'll be holed up here with you until I get word they've got some proposals."

"It will be my pleasure, sir, to keep you company. If you have a few minutes now, I wouldn't mind learning the latest developments."

He leans across my desk and begins mapping out what's happened thus far, leading up to the discussions this morning. I am fascinated by his passion and his desire to do what's best for the country. Just as he finishes running through the potential scenarios, a rap sounds at my office door. I rise, opening the door to the astonished face of a silver-haired businessman.

"Um," he begins before he glances over his shoulder, then returns his eyes to me, "I was looking for Mr. Morgan?" His statement turns into a question. "I must have knocked on the wrong door."

As he backs away, I gesture for him to enter. "No, you are in the correct place. This is my office, but Mr. Morgan is here."

Stepping inside, he cannot disguise his awe. Even in the midst of disaster, my opulent two-story office has the capacity to overwhelm. "This is *your* office?" he asks, sounding incredulous that a woman—a young woman—should preside over such a grand space.

Mr. Morgan calls out, "This is my librarian, Miss Greene. And she deserves every inch of this room, for God's sake. Why are you wasting her time and mine by interrogating her?" His tone is filled with impatience. "You should be offering me a plan of action."

"We don't have one yet. Just a question."

Mr. Morgan stands and faces the man. Very quietly, very calmly, he says, "Don't come back in here until you and your damned trust men have a solution to this crisis. Do you hear me?"

"Sorry, Mr. Morgan. Sorry, Miss, Miss—" He stumbles over my name; he has clearly forgotten it.

"Her name is Miss Greene!" Mr. Morgan yells, collapsing back down onto his chair, and the man exits without asking his question.

"Bumbling idiot," he mutters.

I sit down, trying to ignore how peculiar it feels to preside behind the desk while Mr. Morgan faces me in the supplicant's chair, which can barely contain his girth. After studying him for a moment, I say, "You already know the solution, don't you? Could you simply share it with them?"

"I can say this only to you." He inches toward the edge of his chair. In a low voice, but not the near whisper of his fury, he says, "I honestly don't know what we should do. I feel the hint of an answer in the far reaches of my mind, but it hasn't taken full shape. When the bankers and the trust men begin to sketch out possible solutions, the resolution will come to me."

I nod, knowing he would have never spoken these words to anyone else. Not his son nor his daughters and certainly not his wife or any of his mistresses. Today, I am more than his librarian; I am his confidant. "I'm certain it will."

He leans back. "In the meantime, help me pass the time."

"Would you like me to read to you?" I am halfway out of my chair to fetch a volume before he stops me.

"I'm too wound up for that. Let's do this." Reaching into his pocket, he pulls out a deck of cards.

"Oh," I say with surprise.

"Do you play bridge, Miss Greene?" he asks as he shuffles the cards.

His question brings a smile to my face and a memory to my mind. "A little. I used to love watching my grandmother and her friends play bridge when I was younger in—" I stop right before I say Washington, DC, but it is already too late.

Mr. Morgan's eyes are filled with curiosity when he says, "Your grandmother? The one from Portugal?"

Did I actually just mention Gramma Fleet? My heart pounds, and I can't believe my mistake. I can only explain the slip by a combination of surprise at the cards and being far too comfortable with my employer.

Before I can respond, he continues, "For some reason, I thought your grandmother lived in Portugal. I didn't realize she was here."

"No, I mean, yes. I mean—she lives in Portugal. You are correct. It was just one time, when I was younger, and she visited." I stutter my way through an explanation.

Throughout my tenure with Mr. Morgan, I've been confident and steady handed, but the way he looks at me now tells me that I appear shaken.

After a long second, he says, "Well, you need four players for bridge, unless you do a modified version. What about bezique?"

Only when he leans forward to deal the cards, instructing me as he does, do I exhale. How could I have been so careless?

The clock strikes two, then three. By the time it chimes four bells, Mr. Morgan says, "Maybe you should read to me, Miss Greene."

From my shelf, I pick up Dickens, and begin to read aloud from *Great Expectations*. We keep on in this circular pattern of playing cards, then reading, then discussion as the clock continues its rotation, and the daylight, which shines blue through the colorful stained glass of my medieval window, turning my walls violet, transforms into the golden light of early evening and finally into the pitch black of a moonless night. Our routine is interrupted only when one of the gentlemen seeks a word with Mr. Morgan or one of the maids delivers sustenance and drinks.

After midnight, Mr. Morgan suddenly rises from the chair without a word and exits for the first time since he's entered. When he returns forty minutes later, he is beaming.

"You've solved it," I exclaim, leaping up from my chair and clutching his arm.

"I have indeed," he says, and I hear his pride. "I've found a way to bolster the frailer trusts and companies, thereby stopping the cata-

clysmic effect on the entire market if they fail. I've arranged for U.S. Steel to acquire Tennessee Coal and Iron, and that should shore up a substantial share of the faltering companies and trusts which hold its stock as collateral."

I frown. "Will that not cause a problem with the anti-trust laws?"

"Smart question, Miss Greene." His smile broadens, and his pride is now directed at me. "I got Roosevelt to agree to the deal. The federal government will not file suit."

"You did it!" Without thinking, I stand on my tiptoes and embrace the great hulk of a man.

He pulls me closer to him. "With you at my side, I feel I can do anything, Belle."

I lean away, astonished at my own misstep. Mr. Morgan and I have had these moments of attraction, but we've never touched in this way. Yet, who can deny this frisson has been building between us?

What am I doing? I cannot succumb to this man—this notorious philanderer, more than forty years older than me. I begin to pull away just as Mr. Morgan abruptly lets go. Glancing down, I berate myself for my impulsiveness, when I feel his finger under my chin.

Tilting my face toward his, it takes me a moment to look up, and I see that tender expression again, although today, there is something else in his eyes as well. It is more than an appreciation for my femininity; it is a longing. He whispers, "My romantic entanglements always end badly, and I could never stand to lose you, Belle. You mean more to me than any woman, even more than my own family most of the time. I want you at my side—as my partner, my confidant, and my librarian—until the end."

I nod because I can't speak. Only after he spins around and walks out of my office can I finally breathe.

CHAPTER 13

MARCH 20, 1908

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, AND WASHINGTON, DC

We board the train with dozens of other New York passengers bound for Washington, DC, settling ourselves in the last, unobtrusive row of the train car, where we find six empty seats near each other. Melancholy has beset my family since we received word of Gramma Fleet's passing two days ago, and for the first half hour of the ride, we sit in silence.

As I look out the window, I feel riven between the joy at my accomplishments at the Pierpont Morgan Library and my overwhelming sadness. On one hand, I'm proud of the important acquisitions I've orchestrated and the increase in the library's standing under my direction, for which Mr. Morgan has rewarded me with a second raise. And I've been pleased with the new rhythm we've found in our work in the four months since that moment in my office, the night he saved the country from financial ruin. We have never spoken about that time again, although it is settled that, no matter the attraction between us, we are best as employer and employee.

On the other hand, the pleasure I feel from my work is weighed down by this staggering loss. Despite the fact that I haven't returned to DC in over a decade, the passing of time has not lessened the con-

nection I feel to a place imbued with love and family, the tie I feel to a different sort of life. But I wonder what it will be like without Gramma, the woman whose warm embraces I can still remember as if her arms are wrapped around me.

"We should do something," Ethel finally says and pulls a deck of cards from her handbag. She shuffles them, and starts dealing cards on the table among the four seats where the five of us have squeezed in. I glance at Mama across the aisle to see if she'll frown upon this small entertainment in the midst of our mourning, but her eyes are closed and I suppose the rumble of the train has lulled her to sleep.

We take our turns silently in the beginning, until Louise whispers, "It feels strange returning to DC, doesn't it?"

"It does," Ethel echoes. "When was the last time we were back?"

"At least ten years," Russell replies.

"It's been twelve years," I say with a nod. "I was sixteen the last time we went for Christmas. We used to visit more for holidays and family get-togethers, but then we stopped going."

"Why?" Ethel asks.

How can she not know why we no longer go to Mama's home? She's only a year younger than me, but sometimes, with her obliviousness and her blind obedience to Mama, she seems much younger. I guess this is her way of coping with our life.

"Because Papa left," I answer, when no one else seems willing to chime in. "And we couldn't really afford it once he was gone. Some nights it was hard for Mama to feed the five of us, after all. Don't you remember how we struggled, before you, me, and Louise started earning salaries and before Mama's career as a music instructor got going?"

"Not really," Ethel murmurs. "I guess I try not to think about those times."

Louise says, "I remember those days. They were awful, and Mama wasn't strong like she is now. She was weepy." Tears well up in her eyes.

I decide to let the conversation end with Louise's words, although all of us, with maybe the exception of Teddy, know the real reason these trips stopped, even though money troubles certainly played a part. Once Mama made the decision that we would live as white, we no longer traveled to DC. Mama decided that, even though the Fleets were part of the upper class and living well in the district, they were still colored. We could not take the risk. Only her mother's death could warrant crossing the color barrier.

More silent seconds pass until Louise says suddenly, "I wonder where Papa is now."

"I don't care where the hell he is," Russell blurts out, his pale gray eyes flashing. He is a little too loud, telegraphing his anger at Papa. Mama stirs, and we shush him. The last thing we need is to awaken grieving Mama with a harsh statement about Papa.

My sister's question and my brother's reaction make clear that Mama shared the news of Papa's posting in Russia and his new family only with me, as I'd suspected she would. And just like Mama expected, I had buried that revelation and had no intention of bringing it up now. While I'd hidden that truth about my father deep inside, I hadn't been able to do the same with my feelings for him. I yearn for a day when I can see him, thank him, and maybe even have the chance to forgive him for leaving. Or ask him to forgive me for following this road that Mama has forged for us. But given that he lives in Russia now with a new family, I suppose that meeting will never be.

We play the next few hands, again returning to silence, keeping our focus on the game, until Teddy says, "I don't remember DC at all, and I have only a few strong memories of Papa."

We digest her remark, and I feel nothing but sadness for Teddy. Louise, Ethel, and Russell have memories of Papa that they've chosen to push aside, but Teddy's situation is different. Her absence of recollections is not by choice.

I wish Teddy had had the opportunity to know Papa better. I will always treasure my afternoons with him at the Metropolitan, study-

ing art and listening to his stories of the past. But I cannot re-create for her a lifetime of memories with him, so it is best that I say nothing to my little sister.

After the train stops in New Jersey, Philadelphia, and a couple of cities in Maryland, the whistle sounds, awakening Mama, as we pull into the station in Washington, DC. We hurriedly gather up our belongings. Russell begins to exit out of the front of the train car, but Mama stops him. She gestures to the back of the car and leads us through a rear door into another, connected car—the one for colored people. As we pass into this car, fellow passengers staring at the fair-skinned trespassers in their realm, I notice that the seats are the same size, but that is the only similarity to the white train car. There is no upholstery on the hard wooden seats; no tables are installed; the absence of luggage racks forces passengers to store their bags around their feet; and the smell emanating from the tiny bathroom—really nothing more than a bucket—makes me gag as we walk by. *How strange is the power of geography and law that we could leave New York City as white people but arrive in Washington, DC, as colored.*

Walking down the rickety steps from the train and into the station, we search for the route to the carriages for hire. Signs are posted throughout the station demarcating where colored people—such as we have just declared ourselves to be—may pass. The route takes us around the back of the train station, through the rubbish and piles of discarded coal, to an alleyway that appears to empty out onto a side street.

"Why do we have to walk here, Mama?" Teddy protests as we all pick our way through the narrow passage, littered with broken bottles, half-opened bags of trash, and a discarded shoe. "It's just filthy."

"Keep your voice down," Mama hisses. "I told you why before we even got on the train in New York. If we were to pretend to be white here and then be called out as colored, the ramifications could be fierce. What if I should run into someone I know in the train station and our situation was revealed? We could get arrested or worse. While we are here, we will be who we are. We will be colored."

Teddy's cheeks flame red. She knows about our heritage, but she neither remembers living this way nor really understands the consequences we could suffer if we were discovered to be living as white. She doesn't read the newspapers that I do every day at the Pierpont Morgan Library. She hasn't heard of the hundreds of lynchings that happen every year, including one of a college student who'd been caught passing.

We emerge from the dark passageway onto the side street near the station, blinded like moles by the bright afternoon light. A line of ramshackle carriages for hire is assembled, and we join the queue of colored folks. Russell signals a driver when we reach the front, and we load into the open carriage, jostling along the rough streets. Washington, DC, isn't recognizable to me, until our carriage pulls up to the familiar tangle of Fleet homes on T Street. Then all the strangeness falls away and I'm an eight-year-old girl again, playing in my grandmother's front yard under my favorite tree.

Quiet tears stream down my face as I exit the carriage with my carpetbag in one hand and a leather satchel in the other. I am finally home.

The door to Gramma Fleet's house opens, and Uncle Mozart exits with his arms open wide. "Welcome," he says.

Even though Uncle Mozart writes regularly, he hasn't visited New York in at least ten years. His warm smile is the same, though there is a lot more salt in the color of his hair than I remember.

He hugs Mama first, then he embraces my sisters and brother and me. Uncle Mozart takes Mama's bag, but just before he steps over the threshold into the two-story row house of our childhood, Mama asks, "Is it all right, Mozart? For us to stay here?"

Uncle Mozart's smile fades. "Genevieve, all will be well. Trust me. You have to do this."

I frown, not understanding the exchange until we step into Gramma's home. A man whom I recognize as Uncle Bellini stands at the front door, though his greeting isn't as warm as Uncle Mozart's. The burly, silver-haired man nods as Mama walks in, and though he

doesn't embrace any of us, I reach for him. His arms are stiff, and he releases me quickly. But before I can think too much about that reception, I'm inundated with the residual scent of Gramma's cooking, and the memories of gathering around her table at mealtime.

We follow Uncle Mozart into the parlor, and although much is familiar, the furniture seems worn and weathered now. But everything is still in its place: two sofas sit on opposite walls, one crimson, the other brown, and they face the round wooden parlor table. Then I see Gramma's rocking chair in front of the fireplace, and for a moment, I can almost hear it creak as she beckons me to come sit in her lap.

Then, I blink and notice the two gray-haired women sitting close on the crimson sofa, both with grim expressions and arms folded. When I recognize Aunt Adalaide and Aunt Minerva, I smile; they do not.

My mother stands in front of her sister and Uncle Mozart's wife. "Minerva, Adalaide," she says to both of them in greeting. There is a pleading in her tone, but they give her no words, only a nod of acknowledgment.

Finally, Uncle Mozart says, "Sit your bags down and rest a bit. I know it was a long train ride."

"Yes, sir, thank you," my sisters and I mutter. I can tell that my siblings feel the tension in the air.

"Yes, Genevieve." Aunt Minerva finally speaks her first words to her sister. "Sit. If that brown sofa over there isn't too dark for you."

We all freeze, and Uncle Mozart snaps, "Minerva!"

It is only at this moment that I realize what is going on. I have never considered what Mama's family thought about our decision to live as whites once Papa left. It has never occurred to me that it would anger anyone in our family. Why should it? Didn't they understand the advantages Mama was trying to give us?

"Well, what do you expect me to do, Mozart?" Aunt Minerva asks. "We just gonna sit here and ignore the fact that our own sister has turned her back on us?"

"That is not what I've done!"

Aunt Minerva raises her eyebrows in mock surprise. "It's not?"

"No," Mama cries. "I am still a Fleet."

"You don't act like one," Minerva huffs. "You won't even let Mozart come to see you when he's in New York because now you're the *Greenes*."

She says our name with disdain, but that is not what's most shocking. Is that why Uncle Mozart stopped visiting? I thought it was because he'd always come to see Papa, but he'd stopped because of Mama? Because she didn't want him to be seen with us? I think of the times when I prefer to be with Louise or Ethel, rather than Russell, because the fairer shade of their skin validates mine. Is that how Mama feels about her brother, too?

"I am proud to be a member of this family," Mama says, ignoring her sister's words.

"You don't act proud. Look at your children." Every eye turns toward us, and even though I am twenty-eight years old, I stand stiffly, as if I'm about to be scolded. "They have no idea who they are. They think they're white; they certainly don't know anything about being Fleets."

There are tears in Mama's voice when she says, "You just don't understand, Minerva. I'm a mother who was abandoned with five children."

Now I suck in air. Louise and I, and even Ethel and Russell, were hardly young when Papa left. But is that how she felt? Abandoned? My heart aches, because if Mama felt abandoned, I realize now that she was alone. Her family felt just like Papa. None of them, except for Uncle Mozart, understood, and now it seems as if they don't even want us here.

Mama continues, "I did what I had to do to give my children the best opportunities, the best life." Her sister and sister-in-law exchange long glances, which makes her say, "You don't know what it's like in New York. It's the North, but as colored, we wouldn't have had the life there that we had here."

"And as I've always said," Minerva responds, "you could have come back home. We would have welcomed you with open arms, Genevieve."

Mama sighs as if that decision has been a weight she still carries. "As I've always said, this neighborhood, this place that was created for people like us, it isn't going to last." She shakes her head. "DC is still the South, and with the way the country is moving, I expect that soon, segregation and blatant attacks on colored folks will snatch this all away."

The silence makes me want to grab our bags and run. This isn't the welcome I'd expected; this isn't what home is supposed to feel like.

Finally, Mama adds, "And without . . ." She pauses before she speaks Papa's name. Then, she straightens her shoulders and stands taller. "I've done what I know is best for my children. To be colored in America is a burden that I don't want them to have to shoulder."

Mama has spoken as eloquently as I've ever heard her. Can't her siblings understand that she is right? This part of DC has remained unscathed so far, but the vise of segregation has been tightening and oppression has been escalating. Every week I read another newspaper article about mobs of white men terrorizing colored neighborhoods, dragging black men from their homes on the word of white women who have made accusations. The Atlanta Massacre happened two years ago, but the city is still reeling and recovering from the two days of race riots that started with four allegations of rape by white women and ended with more than twenty-five colored men dead. No one is exempt from the denigration that accompanies this deep-seated racism. Even President Roosevelt faced the contempt of the Southern Democrats when he tried to welcome Booker T. Washington into the White House, an invitation that yielded threats by senators to lynch hundreds of coloreds. Segregation is really just slavery by another name, lynching is one of its proponents' weapons, and we would be subjected to segregation and threatened by lynchings if we lived as colored anywhere in this country.

Aunt Adalaide unfolds her arms with a sigh. "I don't agree with

what Genevieve has done," she says, looking around at everyone. "But all of you know, Mama Fleet wouldn't have allowed this kind of unpleasant talk in her house. She would have wanted us to come together. To support each other, even if we don't like the decisions that we've made." Pushing herself from the sofa, she walks to where my siblings and I have been standing, too afraid to move. She wraps her arms around Louise first, and then continues down the line. When she hugs me, I exhale.

"You have all grown up so beautifully," she says when she finally releases Teddy. Standing back, she takes in the sight of us all together. "Genevieve must be doing something right."

She smirks at Mama, and for the first time since she heard the news of Gramma's death, I see my mother smile.

Uncle Mozart says, "Adalaide is right. These next few days should be all about Mama and all about her family. Let's keep our focus on that. Let's focus on what we have in common and not on the differences that have pulled us apart."

When everyone nods, I am relieved. Especially when Uncle Mozart changes the subject. "Belle, I've been reading all about you. We hear that you are indispensable to Mr. J. P. Morgan himself."

"Yes, Belle," Aunt Minerva says, accepting the truce. "What's he like? Is he as heartless as all the papers make him out to be?" She motions for all of us to sit down. "Come on in here and tell us everything."

"Yes, Belle. Come in here. But I don't want to hear anything about him. I read in one of those gossip columns that you were among the guests at the Marjorie Gould and Anthony Drexel wedding. Is that true?" Before I can answer Aunt Adalaide's question, she keeps on. "The pictures I saw of that white satin gown were something else. I bet it was expensive."

"Yes." I smile. "Her gown was exquisite and expensive, but it didn't come close to the half-a-million-dollar Fifth Avenue mansion that her father gave her as a wedding gift."

My aunts fill the room with oohs and aahs, and it's as if the air has

been released from a hot-air balloon. We gather around, and I answer all of my aunts' questions. There is still some tension—the smiles are a little forced, the laughter is a bit fake, but all of the Fleets are trying. All for Gramma's sake. About a half hour later, Uncle Bellini, who hasn't spoken a word, now says, "Genevieve, there is one thing you can do that will go a long way in helping me to forgive you."

The room quiets, and Mama stiffens at her brother's words. "What is it, Bellini?"

He pauses, and I hold my breath as my uncle looks around at each of us and then says, "Do you still know how to make Mama's sweet potato pie? 'Cause it seems she only taught you, and I'm gonna need a piece of that pie before you leave."

For a few seconds, there is silence, then genuine laughter fills the room. All of the tension is gone now and for just a moment, I think, *Finally, I'm home.*

I step outside to the porch, letting the screen door slam behind me before I secure the belt on my jacket, tightening it against the chill of the March air. The street is early-morning quiet; it is just a little after seven. Having been back in New York for more than two years now after my time in Princeton, I'd forgotten about the peace that comes at this time of the day.

Behind me, a wave of laughter floats through the screen door, and I smile. Over the last three days, Mama and her siblings have come to a place of understanding, if not reconciliation. Last night, as Teddy and I slept in Gramma's bedroom, Mama and her brothers and sister sat in the parlor talking until the early hours of the morning.

I sigh. This time that we've spent here laying Gramma Fleet to rest has been bittersweet. After the initial reception, it has been good to connect once again with my aunts and uncles and cousins, whom I've loved so much, even from afar. But the bitter—my eyes fill with tears as my glance roams from the left to the right. I want to soak it all in, the three family homes, the lawns where we used to run and jump and

play. When my eyes settle on Gramma Fleet's front yard and my favorite tree, a tear seeps from the corner of my eye. I am filled with so many emotions. I've thought of this place as home for as long as I can remember, but now I know that this is likely the last time I will ever be here.

When I hear the screen door open and close behind me, I wipe my tears from my cheeks, and smile when I turn to Uncle Mozart.

"Everyone in the house was looking for you," he said. "But I knew you would be out here." He chuckles. "I'm just surprised I didn't find you sitting under that tree."

"I'm surprised you remember that."

"Of course I do. I remember everything. And one thing I remember is how close you and your dad were." I tilt my head when I look at him, surprised that he mentioned my father. "I wanted to tell you that Richard is back from Russia."

My eyes widen at that announcement.

He adds, "Genevieve told me that you know about his new family, and though I didn't think it was my news to share with you, I'm glad you do." He leans closer, and even though we're alone, he lowers his voice. "You know you were his favorite."

Together we laugh.

I say, "I'm really glad that you stay in touch with him, Uncle Mozart."

"Richard and I have been friends for a long time, way before I introduced him to Genevieve, and even though I was so mad at him for leaving my sister and you kids," he says as if I'm still ten, "I get it. It took me some time, but the desire to make America equal burns within him. He loves the United States, and because of that, he's challenging every aspect of this country to be better. By the time he's done, I have no doubt he will accomplish his goals; we will be a better nation. We will have the equality we deserve."

That makes me proud. For a moment, I think of asking Uncle Mozart for my father's whereabouts. Do I dare try to connect with him after more than ten years? But instead, I say, "Would you mind letting me know from time to time what's going on with him?"

He shakes his head. "Wouldn't mind doing that at all. I only hear from him once or twice, maybe three times a year. But I'll let you know when I do." After a long pause, he adds, "You know, he's really proud of you."

My question comes quickly. "Did he say that?"

Uncle Mozart tilts his head back and looks up, as if he can't decide how to respond. Finally, "We don't talk about Genevieve, or any of you." His voice is downcast. "That was an unspoken deal that we made. But I know your father, and I'm sure he's following you, just like we are. He's proud," he says with certainty.

Once again, I feel tears, but I'm not sad.

"We're all proud of you, Belle, but . . ." He pauses. "I want you to be careful."

"What do you mean?"

"All of you, up there in New York, you're taking a big chance."

Uncle Mozart doesn't have to explain further. I know what he means. My eyes are on my favorite tree when I say, "I understand the risks. Every morning when I wake up, I prepare myself, knowing that once I walk out that door, I'm on a stage and playing a role. And I'm careful."

"Careful?" The way he says that makes me turn to him.

"I don't think you can be careful enough, Belle. You're working for J. P. Morgan. Some people say he's one of the smartest men in the country. I don't know about that, but I know he's one of the most ruthless. What would happen if he finds out that you're colored?"

"He won't." I shake my head emphatically. "I've been very careful. But even if he were to say something, Mama has it planned out with all of us. That's why I use the name da Costa."

He smirks. "Yeah. I heard you had a Portuguese grandmother out there somewhere. I'm glad Mama never found out about that."

His words make me hesitate. That was something I hadn't considered. How would Gramma Fleet have felt about that? The ramifications of our decision to live as white spread wide.

Uncle Mozart says, "I know all about the stories you've prepared

in case someone questions your ethnicity and the precautions you've taken so that won't happen, but the stakes are high, Belle. It's one thing if Louise or Ethel is caught passing. They're teachers; they'll be fired and that will be the end of it. But with you—I'm afraid there will be a higher price to pay for your deception."

I press my lips together.

"I'm not trying to scare you, honey. I'm trying to save you by reminding you that you're playing on a level where the consequences of being outed will be much higher. Just be careful. Just remember this is J. P. Morgan you're dealing with."

After a moment, Uncle Mozart hugs me. "Let me go in there and get everyone together. We've got to leave in the next ten minutes or so, in order to make sure you have time to settle in at the station."

Uncle Mozart has left me breathless. Is the risk I'm taking too high? Of course, I've thought about the consequences, especially with a man like Mr. Morgan, but to hear my uncle voice his concern out loud makes the stakes even more real. It's too late to go back now, though. The money that I'm earning has changed our lives. We're living in a comfortable home, have more than enough money for food and to cover all of our bills, and Mama and my siblings can enjoy life a little.

Yes, the risk is high, but so is the reward. I will have to be even more careful and even more driven in my success so that our family's whiteness is unquestionable. I allow myself one final glance across the lawns before we assemble and begin our journey north—to the only home we have left.

CHAPTER 14

MAY 2, 1908

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Miss Greene—I hear my name called the moment I step over the threshold of the gallery—"I thought you'd never come."

Edward Steichen rushes toward me, and I take his outstretched hand. A lock of his dark hair flops onto his forehead, and as he brushes it away in irritation, I wonder if it gets in the way of his work as a photographer.

"Oh, Mr. Steichen, you should have known that I wouldn't miss your gallery show for the world," I say with a playful touch on his shoulder. "I would have come earlier, but I was at the Carnegies', and you know how difficult it can be to extricate oneself from a soiree with the rich and powerful. They believe *their* time is precious, but *ours* is best spent on their whims, however long—or short—that might be." I wink.

He laughs at my veiled reference to his photography session with Mr. Morgan. Five years ago, Mr. Steichen had been hired by the painter Fedor Encke to take a few pictures of Mr. Morgan in preparation for a portrait the painter was undertaking. Mr. Morgan, who

was willing to sit for a total of three minutes for two photographs only, was so delighted by Mr. Steichen's work—and his brevity—that he paid him five hundred dollars on the spot.

As Mr. Steichen recounts the story of those three minutes, I laugh, thinking how pleasant it is to chat with someone closer to my age and station than is usual for me these days. He lifts his hand almost imperceptibly, and another man appears at my side. "Miss Greene. I'd like to introduce you to my partner in the gallery, Alfred Stieglitz."

The fellow, who has a thick mustache that makes him look older than his thirty-odd years, gives me a quick bow. Steichen and Stieglitz joined forces a few years ago to create not only this gallery—dubbed 291 for its address at 291 Fifth Avenue—but also the Photo-Secessionist movement to promote photography as a fine art. Both men are committed to elevating the reputation of their craft, in which they use a variety of painterly techniques to imbue their subjects with specific moods and meanings. But recently, they decided to display the latest modern art from Europe alongside photography, and when Mr. Steichen invited me to tonight's exhibit, he promised a most scintillating show, "one I couldn't miss," he told me.

"Welcome to Two Ninety-One." My host gestures to a room crowded with guests. The walls are lined with a paper somewhere between silver and taupe and accented with matching fabric skirting the bottom half. While I assume the rather plain neutral walls were chosen to offset the art, the room seems very stark in comparison to the crimson realm of the Pierpont Morgan Library. "Tonight, we have a rare treat in store for you, Miss Greene. Two Ninety-One is proud to host the American launch of *two* very important European artists—the French sculptor Auguste Rodin and the French artist Henri Matisse."

Mr. Steichen walks me around the space, in which photographs are hung alongside black-and-white drawings he identifies as Rodin's work. I know Steichen and Stieglitz hope to elevate the perception of

photography by juxtaposing it with other, already accepted forms of fine art, and while I admire the atmospheric photo images, I am more captivated by the exquisite charcoal drawings.

"With a few spare lines, Rodin somehow manages to convey movement and intention all at once," I say, marveling at the manner in which the sculptor shares so much with so little.

Mr. Steichen, who bursts with energy despite the fact that his work as a photographer must require long periods of stillness, beams at me.

"With a few words, you've managed to capture the essence of the sculptor's vision," he replies, and it is my turn to smile. "How I wish you could see one of his finished sculptures in France, in their intended locations in all their three-dimensional glory."

"Why, Mr. Steichen, are you inviting me on a naughty Parisian getaway?" I tease, and to my delight, Mr. Steichen's cheeks flame red.

"Oh, Miss Greene. I'm so, so—sorry," he stammers. "I wouldn't dare to suggest—"

I laugh. "I am only having a bit of fun, Mr. Steichen," I assure him, and then just as quickly, I turn the conversation back to the study of art. "Rodin's approach is very different than the classical and Renaissance sculptures I'm more familiar with."

The two men linger behind me, fielding questions from other gallery guests, while I study each sketch. I know they want me to admire the photographs and artwork alike, although what it might mean to have the imprimatur of the Morgan librarian, I don't know exactly.

"Shall we move on to the Matisse room?" Mr. Stieglitz asks.

As I follow him down the corridor, I notice that a couple trails behind us. They share the same studied expression, as if they are casually strolling around the gallery, but I can see that they're staying close, listening to the gallery owners as they talk about Rodin and Matisse.

When I step into the adjoining gallery room, I freeze. From the opposite wall, a single, vivid painting of a woman stares at me. In

pulsating oranges, pinks, and greens, Matisse shows a forest with a lone nude figure. The landscape jettisons the hard-won three-dimensionality rediscovered in the Renaissance to create a strangely engaging two-dimensional image rife with patterns. I am mesmerized and confused all at once, because I have never seen anything like it.

Mr. Stieglitz blurts out, "What do you think?"

"Alfred!" Mr. Steichen chastises his partner.

I laugh. "It's fine, Mr. Steichen," I say. "There's no need to stand on ceremony with me, gentlemen. As I think you should know by now."

"So? What *do* you think?" This time, it's Mr. Steichen who asks.

I turn back to the painting. "As an art expert, I feel like I should comment on the groundbreaking way Matisse approaches the very traditional subject matter of the pastoral landscape—one I've seen over and over in classical and Renaissance paintings, but . . ." I pause.

"But what?" the men say together.

I turn to them. "To answer your question, I don't believe Matisse wants me to *think*, but to *feel*."

The men give each other a relieved, hopeful glance. "It seems you understand," Mr. Steichen says.

"I do. Perhaps one day we will imbue the Pierpont Morgan Library with some of this modern feeling," I say, thinking how 291 is only a few short blocks from the Pierpont Morgan Library, but very far away in the manner in which art is perceived and valued.

"We'd like nothing more," Mr. Steichen says.

After an hour lingering in the company of Matisse's other paintings and drawings, I thank the gentlemen for their invitation and time, and take my leave. It is after nine o'clock, and normally, I would be catching the trolley or the subway home. But ever since our return from Washington, DC, I've been working even longer hours. Uncle Mozart's words have stayed with me, and though I am convinced that the precautions I've taken have been enough to protect my secret, I am equally persuaded that massive success is a safeguard as well. And

so, since I have returned from Gramma Fleet's funeral, I have worked on investigating key collections and forging relationships with important dealers so I can continue building Mr. Morgan's holdings, often not returning home until nine or ten o'clock, or later, if a social engagement requires it or I return to the office after an evening out.

Since I am just blocks from the library, I begin walking up Fifth Avenue. Even with the late hour, the streets are filled with couples strolling and friends moseying, everyone enjoying the warm spring evening.

But then, I hear, "Miss Greene, Miss Greene."

Startled, I turn to see Mr. Stieglitz calling out and running toward me. "I am," he pants, "so glad that I caught you." He presses a rectangular object in my hand.

"What is this?"

"A photograph of one of Rodin's sculptures. For one day."

I thank Mr. Stieglitz before I continue on my way, never saying aloud what I think. That "one day" will never come.

Even though I worked till after ten last night, I've been at my desk for at least two hours by the time Mr. Morgan arrives at the library. "Good morning, sir," I call out as usual.

Instead of poking his head into my office and regaling me with a vignette from the remainder of the evening at the Carnegies', from which I slipped out last night to attend the gallery event, he storms through the rotunda into his office without even a gruff greeting. He slams his door, something he's never done in the two years that I've worked with him.

What on earth is wrong?

I know better than to rush into his office. On those occasions when a business associate or an art dealer has angered him, Mr. Morgan prefers to be left alone and given time to let his fury abate.

So I return to the work piled high on my desk. Today I have to make a decision about an upcoming auction, and I turn my attention

to this as I wait for Mr. Morgan to call me into his office. But an hour passes. And then another. Mr. Morgan does not surface or even appear at my door with a query, as is his wont. Even when the security guard knocks on his door to admit a delivery, Mr. Morgan does not answer. By the time the lunch hour passes, I am nonplussed. I cannot imagine what is going on.

I have a dilemma. Mr. Morgan and I were to speak today about the auction, and I cannot really put that discussion aside. Perhaps my presence will help him work through whatever or whoever has triggered his anger, and allow him to focus on library business.

Rising, I gather my papers and straighten my wool skirt before I cut across the rotunda to his office. Just as I lift my hand to knock on the intricately carved wooden door, I pause, feeling a sudden rush of anxiety wash over me. Could the "whoever" causing his anger possibly be me?

I cannot think of a disagreement that's simmered between us recently, so I shake the unsettled feeling away and knock. "Mr. Morgan? May I have a minute of your time to discuss the Sotheby's auction?"

There is silence.

There have been times when he has bellowed a "don't come in" to King, or even to one of his children. But what if Mr. Morgan isn't answering because he cannot? What if he's hurt in some way behind this closed door? I quickly push it open.

Mr. Morgan sits behind his desk on his lion's throne, his head down as if he's engrossed in a newspaper. I exhale, not realizing until that moment that I'd been holding my breath. He's fine; he's just chosen not to respond for some inexplicable reason.

I wait for him to look up, to acknowledge me in any way, but he does not. He doesn't even admonish me for entering his office without permission. Fear begins to take hold.

"I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Morgan," I say, after a few silent seconds pass. "It was so quiet in here that I became concerned about you."

"You were?" he asks, without looking up.

I frown. "Yes, of course. You've been behind closed doors all morning and we were supposed to discuss the Sotheby's items."

In a voice so low it's nearly inaudible, he asks, "Why should I meet with *you*?"

I don't understand his question, but I do know that something's very wrong. Mr. Morgan doesn't have a problem with an art dealer or a business associate or anyone else. His problem is with *me*.

You're playing on a level where the consequences of being outed will be much higher. Just remember this is J. P. Morgan you're dealing with.

My heart pounds. Over the last months, Uncle Mozart's words have haunted me, but I've pushed his warning aside. I believed I'd taken enough precautions and erected enough safeguards, but now I feel like I'm falling headlong from a great height. Did Mr. Morgan find out?

The room is eerily quiet, and I tremble because silence is a clear signal of Mr. Morgan's fury. I stand without moving, not wanting to utter a word. My thoughts race and swirl. What can I offer to defend myself from the rage and accusations that are coming? Through the years, Mama has given me several ways to deny the truth about my race, but at this moment, I can't remember a single one.

Finally, he speaks. "I've spent the morning searching the newspapers to see if I can find another article about you."

Did he discover my deception from a newspaper? Did Anne reveal my secret to a reporter so the whole world would know—including her father? Perhaps that was her goal after all.

I cannot open my mouth. I cannot speak to offer more lies about my background or to give him excuses for lying. I know I should just confess, apologize, and beg for his forgiveness and mercy. But fear has rendered me immobile.

"I'm usually a good judge of people," he says.

He finally meets my gaze. I try to swallow the lump that has formed in my throat.

"But it seems that I've misjudged you, Miss Greene."

Miss Greene. He hasn't called me that in months.

He holds out the newspaper to me, but I do not want to even touch it, let alone read it. Maybe I should just tell him the truth and try to convince him to spare me and my family, even though I doubt any words will turn the tide of his fury. While Mr. Morgan has been kind to me, I've overheard him in conversations disparaging everyone from Jews to Italians to the new Polish immigrants. And while I've been spared any overt disdain he may have for the colored in this country, I can't assume he doesn't have the same feelings about my people as he does for so many others.

"Take this," he orders, and I obey. The paper flutters in my trembling hands. "Read what's on page seven. In the middle column."

My breathing is shallow, but I must face this situation and take my punishment. As I focus on the article, I almost cry thinking of Mama and my siblings. All of their lives will be destroyed because of me. Louise and Ethel will lose their jobs, Russell and Teddy will have to drop out of school, and Mama—I cannot allow myself to think about this any further. Not right now.

I hold my breath as I read the brief article:

Is J. P. Morgan becoming a modernist, or worse, a Photo-Secessionist? A little birdie told this reporter at an exclusive event at 291 last night that the ultra-traditional titan of industry is considering branching out from collecting the medieval and Renaissance treasures for which he's famous. Bells chimed and cash registers chimed throughout the city at the heady notion of an Henri Matisse finding its way onto the Pierpont Morgan Library walls!

I blink and resist the urge to wipe my eyes to make sure I am seeing properly. This isn't good, of course, but it isn't the article I expected. Not at all. This article—little more than a gossip column

about art rather than an exposé about my race—I *might* be able to survive.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Mr. Morgan's voice is little more than a whisper.

I feel sick at his question and his voice, but I remind myself that at least he's not asking me that question literally. "Mr. Morgan, I have no idea why this is in the newspaper. Please believe me. I did not say this."

"You were at that blasted Two Ninety-One gallery last night, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I knew that reference to 'bells' in the column was a clever allusion to you."

"Yes, sir. It likely was." No sense denying it.

"They didn't pull this story out of thin air. Where the hell did it come from, if not you?"

I think about the gallery last night and cannot imagine Mr. Steichen or Mr. Stieglitz leaking a story such as this. But the gallery was filled with other people, and any one of them could have been a reporter who twisted my words enough to write this story. Even though I never said this.

"Someone must have overheard me, and taken my words out of context. I am so sorry, sir."

He doesn't seem to hear me, or perhaps what I say in this moment doesn't matter. He needs to rail. "The Pierpont Morgan Library is a preeminent traditional institution. And I will not have even an intimation that modernist garbage will hang on its walls, do you understand?"

Instead of denying it again, I say, "Yes, sir. And I'm sorry. It was a mistake to—"

He interrupts me. "You don't have the luxury of making mistakes, Miss Greenc," he says without realizing how true his words are. "Not as long as you are my ambassador and you work for me."

Again, I say, "Yes, sir. I understand."

His eyes are dark when he peers at me. "There is something that you must never forget."

I nod.

"It is *my* name that is carved above this library's doors, not yours. And I never want to have to remind you of that again."

CHAPTER 15

DECEMBER 2-10, 1908

LONDON, ENGLAND

It seems impossible that in seven months I've gone from the 291 incident to my first transatlantic trip. I step out of the carriage, past the bustle of elegant, somberly dressed Londoners, and walk into the opulent Langham lobby, with its gilt-topped marble pillars and its towering sprays of exotic flowers more lavish even than the *Mauretania*, the beautiful ocean liner upon which Mama and I sailed from New York to London. When I spin around to see Mama's reaction, she is beaming as a bevy of bellmen descend upon her to assist with her bags. She's impressed, and that makes me smile. Despite my initial misgivings, I know I've made the right choice by inviting her to be my chaperone on this important trip.

In our suite, we collapse on our plush beds in laughter at our luck. I think how girlish my mother seems. Her face looks lighter, younger even, as the deep mourning that had settled upon her has lifted.

But the familiar Mama resurfaces in a flash as she rises and orders me to work. "Let's get your new dresses out of these trunks before they wrinkle any further."

Together, we unfold and shake out the dresses. Before the trip, I had splurged on three new gowns, knowing that if I was to impress

the English dealers, collectors, and curators, I must look the part of Mr. Morgan's representative, in these meetings more than any other.

As we hang the dresses in the armoire, I reflect on the last seven months with Mr. Morgan. I've logged countless hours at the library and amassed a trove of delightful acquisitions—never the wished-for Caxton, though—but I wasn't certain that I'd worked my way back into his good graces until he asked me to take this trip to pick up several items he'd purchased during his annual trek to London. How grateful I am to have his trust again.

Still, I am fixated on performing well here. Not only will I bring back Mr. Morgan's pieces, but he has given me license to make purchases on my own initiative. I have targeted a rare, stupendous collection of Caxtons that are to be auctioned this coming week. It does not contain *Le Morte Darthur*, but still, it will turn Mr. Morgan's Caxton collection into one of the largest in the world and, more importantly, make Mr. Morgan proud. And I plan for it to be a surprise.

Mama smooths and hangs the vivid violet dress, which I especially adore. While it bears fashionable lace trim detail, I had instructed the dressmaker to otherwise use a streamlined classical style—without any bulky layers or fussy features—making it, I hope, versatile for both work and social occasions. "I don't know why you choose these audacious colors, Belle."

"Mama, I will never blend in with my peers. Those men will always perceive me as different, as an outsider. Because I am a woman, or . . ." I trail off, then take a deep breath before I continue. "I've come to believe that the best path to success is by embracing my gender, Mama. Flaunting it even"—those words make Mama flinch—"rather than trying to hide. Then once I have their focus, I demonstrate my skills and knowledge."

Mama's expression grows alarmed. "Should you really draw so much attention to yourself, Belle?"

"It's not as if I can hide the fact that I'm a woman by wearing dowdy dresses."

"But if you invite their stares, what else might they scrutinize?"

Uncle Mozart and the scare I had with Mr. Morgan have filled me with enough anxiety; I do not need Mama to add her worries. I know I'm walking a tightrope, but what else can I do? I'm committed to this pathway. "They see the shade of my skin no matter what I'm wearing. And strange as it might sound, dressing boldly is like hiding in plain sight. Because no one can imagine that a colored girl would be so brazen."

She shakes her head. "I'll never understand your approach, Belle. But then I don't understand the fascination you and Mr. Morgan have with all of these old books. Maybe I can appreciate those illuminated manuscripts the monks labored over, but not those printed volumes—the Caxtons—that you've come to London for."

I explain to Mama that in the late fourteen hundreds, an English merchant and diplomat named William Caxton used the new printing technology invented by Johannes Gutenberg twenty years prior to make the first English-language books. "After all," I point out, "Caxton not only made available a larger range of texts to English speakers but unified the English language. His books are important for not only historical and literary significance but also linguistic."

"I guess it does make some sense, Belle. But why do you need so many of them?" she persists.

"Mama, if we can combine the sixteen Caxtons on offer at the auction with the volumes we already have, it will go far in establishing the institution's preeminence."

As soon as I make plain that my planned purchase will heighten the library's standing—and therefore my own—she understands, and asks no more questions. Nothing is more important to her than her children's success, after all.

But I don't tell her about my unorthodox plan to bring the Caxton trophies home to New York City, a scheme that requires I woo the wealthy Lord Amherst with a compelling proposition. It is a daring scheme that would trouble my rule-abiding mother. But in order to continue to build back my worth to Mr. Morgan, I must take risks I wouldn't have chanced before.

Even though Mama and I have only two hours between unpacking and my first appointment, we are determined to see something of the city. We undertake a brisk stroll on Bond and Oxford Streets to orient ourselves and get a brief taste of London; Mama and I feel giddy at the very idea that we are in Europe.

What I expected most from this trip was to be astonished by the centuries-old history that courses through its buildings and streets and rivers like blood pumping through veins. I'd readied myself for the amazement I'd experience taking in the vast art collections, layered with medieval masters and Dutch geniuses and gifted modern portraitists. I'd even planned to be awestruck by the wealth and privilege of the English capital and its citizens, understanding that no amount of time with the Morgans and the affluent of New York City could serve as an adequate preparation for the British.

But I could not have guessed London's greatest gift. Here, as I walk the streets, I don't feel the same assessment of my color that I routinely experience, and constantly anticipate, in America. Perhaps London's citizens don't have the same need to categorize us by race as they do in America.

Is this because slavery has been illegal in Great Britain for over seventy years, and thus the sort of formalized segregation we are beginning to experience in America does not exist? Or is it because the entrenched nature of the British class system means that one's status is more important than one's race? Since Mama and I look the part of well-heeled society women, will we be accorded that position automatically here, even though our skin isn't as fair as most English citizens'? I don't know the answers, but I feel a sense of relief and freedom to which I'm not accustomed.

By the time Mama and I stroll back to the Langham Hotel, I feel emboldened for my crucial meeting with Lord Amherst. Rather than gathering at his London home, where the power will tip in his favor, I organized teatime in the hotel dining room, with Mama joining us

for the first pot of tea, and then excusing herself as I order the second. Propriety dictates that a chaperone be present, at least for part of our meeting.

As Mama and I enter the dining room, we receive appreciative glances from the male guests. I imagine we make a handsome pair; I'm in my striking new violet gown, and Mama wears a complementary plum-colored tailored skirt suit with a waist-length jacket, which I purchased for her for this trip.

We follow the maitre d' to the table where Lord Amherst awaits, and I think how different Mama is here. Not only is the doleful expression of her mourning gone, but she laughs. Not only does she speak, she chats. I even heard her humming this morning, something I do not recall ever hearing her do before. And when we talk, her words aren't constantly filled with reprimands and warnings about my behavior or regrets about Gramma Fleet. I sense that, like me, Mama is enjoying the freedom London offers.

The maitre d' gestures to a table where a silver-haired, distinguished-looking gentleman is waiting for us, and I see that Lord Amherst is precisely as he'd been described to me, extremely proper in his demeanor and manners. We exchange pleasantries about our transatlantic trip and the London weather before discussing business. From the start, even in our innocuous exchanges about the auction, he is defensive about having to sell off his library. The gossips whisper that financial reasons necessitate the sale, though I have also heard that he is spending his vast fortune on Egyptian antiquities.

After I order the second pot of tea, Mama excuses herself. I sip my chamomile, and then remark, "I understand that it must be hard to part with the Caxtons."

He looks down at his empty cup. "Yes, Miss Greene. It certainly is."

"I hope you understand, Lord Amherst, that if the Pierpont Morgan Library should be the lucky purchasers of your Caxtons, they would be a treasured part of our collection."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, in fact, together with the Caxtons that the Pierpont Morgan Library already owns, they would be a centerpiece."

"Mr. Morgan is rumored to have a vast and varied collection, and it is hard to fathom that the Caxtons would be so central."

"Oh, but they would." I meet his eyes. "Lord Amherst, since I was a young girl, I've been entranced by early books. The sight of them, the smell of them, the wonderful feel of their covers and pages, and the thrill of the places to which they've traveled and the barriers they've crossed. And no early book holds as much magic for me as the Caxtons."

He holds my gaze. "What do you propose, Miss Greene?"

"Lord Amherst, I would be delighted to offer you an excellent price for the Caxtons right now before the auction even begins. And if we could reach an agreement, then you needn't put them in the auction at all. I imagine that might be easier for you."

I place the carefully worded offer I've prepared in front of him. He doesn't make a move to pick it up, and I hope I haven't made a mistake.

You don't have the luxury of making mistakes, Miss Greene.

I shake Mr. Morgan's words from my mind. I do have one more ploy to try, no doubt an audacious one, but paired with the very generous offer I just made, it might work.

"I would hate to have traveled all this way only to return home empty-handed. In fact, I might become so despondent that I would be unable to attend the auction at all," I say, my eyes downcast.

He has many objets d'art and books listed in the catalog. The refusal of the Pierpont Morgan Library would affect the ultimate amount paid for those as well. Mr. Morgan is known for bidding high on many objects, and the others at the auction will likely assume I'll do the same, thereby artificially increasing the prices.

He pauses, speechless. Suddenly he reaches across the table for the piece of paper I offered him and stands. "I'll telegraph you my

decision, here at the hotel." Then he storms out of the hotel dining room.

I sign the bill, then I retire to my hotel room. I may seem calm, but I refuse to attend the theater with Mama as we'd planned. I do not want to miss Lord Amherst's telegram. But the hours tick by without a messenger. I wait until noon the following day before deciding to keep an appointment at the Victoria and Albert Museum. There, along with Mama, in the company of an all-male cadre of scholars, dealers, and curators, I converse with fellow art realm professionals who, for once, seem interested not in my gender or the nebulous shade of my skin, but instead in my opinions.

"How do you think the painters of these portrait miniatures would feel about their images being separated from the handwritten books they were meant to illustrate?" Mr. George Durlacher, of the prominent dealer Durlacher Brothers, asks as we tour the Victoria and Albert's renowned collection of portrait miniatures.

"I think that painters knew that the portraits might be taken apart from the book itself and used for other purposes, such as making introductions to one another or as a sign of favor. A luminary like Simon Bening might not like it but must have understood it came with the territory." I gesture to a long case brimming with gorgeous miniatures. "But perhaps we might display them with their original books for context. It might be more illuminating for the visitors."

"Interesting thought," Arthur Banks Skinner, director of the museum and our tour guide, says. "You must return for a tour of the new building when it is complete this summer—the Aston Webb building. I'd welcome your thoughts on the way the portrait collection is displayed within its structure."

"I'd like nothing more. Be careful what you offer, however; I might just take you up on your invitation," I say with a flirtatious laugh. "But it wouldn't be fair to share my insights only on one side of the Atlantic, would it?"

In the days that follow, I jettison the notion of waiting for Lord Amherst's reply, and instead inform the Langham of my daily where-

abouts in case the elusive telegram arrives. My days are filled with invitations to collections and lunches and dinner parties with dealers I know only by reputation or letters—Mr. George Williamson and Mr. Joseph Fitzhenry among them—and curators like Mr. Charles Hercules Read, keeper of the British Museum's Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities. Befriending these gentlemen is a professional necessity, but they make me feel welcome in a way that New York City dealers and curators never do, and even offer insights on how to manage those "crass" art men from New York, particularly since some of the dealers have opened branches in New York. I know these men will go to any length to outbid me at auction. But they understand that I'll do the same, and we arrive at a professional camaraderie regardless.

On our second-to-last evening, the night before the auction, Mama and I dine with the gentlemen. Having received no word from Lord Amherst, I've given up hope that he will sell me the Caxtons directly; I'll have to cast my lot with the others at the auction. I conclude that I have taken my newfound confidence a few steps too far with Lord Amherst, and while I will learn from my misstep, I cannot let the failure clip my wings. And anyway, even without the Caxtons, the trip has been a success in other ways—I've procured all of Mr. Morgan's artwork to bring back to New York, and I've made all of these important connections.

I enjoy myself, watching Mama open up more tonight and charm the gentlemen with her slow, elegant drawl and manners. How enticing she must have been to my father as a young, cultured woman.

What would he think of Mama now? What would he think about me? Would he be proud of my success? Or would he lament my passing as white, feeling that I'd let down not only him but all our people?

"What are your plans for the auction tomorrow? Has your famous Mr. Morgan given you a long shopping list of items to procure?" Fitz asks, interrupting my slightly maudlin musing.

When Mr. Joseph Fitzhenry first requested I call him by the nick-

name all the dealers use for him, Mama had bristled at the idea. But as our London days progressed and she witnessed the importance of my social connections to my work—and the attendant importance of equal treatment in their ranks—she acquiesced. Indeed, she began calling them by their Christian names as well.

"Let me guess," George W. interjects. Given that we have two Georges in our group, Mr. George Durlacher and Mr. George Williamson, a consensus has been reached that we should call them George D. and George W. "Mr. Morgan wants you to secure the Mazarin Bible?"

It is an excellent guess, given Mr. Morgan's well-known predilection for collecting Gutenbergs. The Mazarin Bible to which George W. refers, printed by Gutenberg in 1450, was found in the Mazarin Library in Paris, hence the name.

"Ah, the Mazarin Bible is a treasure indeed. I wish that he sent me here to bring it back to New York. But alas, no, Mr. Morgan is satisfied with his current inventory of Gutenbergs. For the moment, anyway."

"How casually she speaks of her Gutenberg Bible collection!" George D. exclaims. The other men chuckle.

Of the 180 copies of the Gutenberg Bible printed, each different from the other, only fifty remain. The fact that Mr. Morgan owns two is legendary.

"How I wish he wanted a third," I answer.

Chatter about the auction overtakes the room, each dealer talking about his clients' or his institutions' interests. Everyone wants to know what everyone else will be bidding on, a way for each to begin to strategize, I suppose. The waiters clear the final dinner course and begin pouring coffee and tea in preparation for dessert. The *maitre d'* walks over to our table, an envelope in his hand.

"Miss Greene?" he asks.

"Yes, that's me," I answer.

"I have a telegram for you." He hands me the envelope.

"Last-minute instructions from New York?" Fitz asks, a glimmer

in his eye. I've become quite fond of the portly dealer, who is as funny as he is fierce.

I answer only with my smile and wait until he's engrossed in another conversation to slice open the envelope with a silver knife. My hands shake in anticipation, and the telegram flies out of the envelope, nearly falling on the floor before I catch it.

It is from Lord Amherst. He accepts my offer.

"Intriguing instructions?" George D. inquires.

"Something like that," I say, and have to prevent myself from beaming.

Glancing at the group to ensure they aren't listening, he drops his voice nearly to a whisper. "Will you promise me something, Miss Greene?"

"How many times have I asked you to call me Belle?" I tease him. Something about his ruddy cheeks and wiry, unkempt gray hair endears him to me. "After all, your lot has insisted that I call you by your given names."

"True enough, Belle." He struggles with the name, and I can see the familiarity doesn't sit well with the proper Englishman. "Back to that promise I was going to extract from you."

"Of course." I turn my attention to him. I only hope the request will not be of a romantic nature. While I've found that a bit of flirtation helps ease business dealings, particularly since I cannot smoke cigars and drink after-dinner brandy to establish a rapport like my colleagues can, I like this Englishman and don't want to have to reject his advances.

"Will you promise you won't bid against me for the Caxtons at the auction tomorrow?" His tone is pleading and his eyes beseeching, and if I hadn't been so ambitious and didn't have this compulsion to succeed—and if I hadn't already swept the Caxton collection out from under the auction—I might have been persuaded.

How to reply? I cannot reveal my triumph, but I've grown to respect these men, and would prefer not to lie or demur. Then suddenly, the perfect response strikes me.

"Yes, I promise not to bid against you *tomorrow*," I say, with emphasis. And it is true.

I will not break my word to Lord Amherst or this gentleman. I will be at the auction, and only there will he discover that I have no need to bid against him because I've already won the auction's prize—and, I hope, Mr. Morgan's full trust along with it.

CHAPTER 16

DECEMBER 17, 1908
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The carriage races down the crowded city streets, which seem dirtier and more ragtag after my days in London, jostling over the bumpy mix of materials that comprise its surfaces. I clutch the heavy box containing the Caxtons, knowing that I cannot risk damage to this bounty before I can show it to Mr. Morgan. I am so eager to return triumphant to the Pierpont Morgan Library, trophy in hand.

As the carriage pulls up to the library, I imagine this is how it must have felt to be a Roman emperor who paraded in triumph with overflowing carts piled high with gold and marble plunder trailing in his wake. Despite the heaviness of the Caxtons' crate, I stride up the wide stairs to the heavy bronze doors that stand guard, feeling as though my power is no longer borrowed from Mr. Morgan but my very own. I believe this prize in my hands will deliver it to me.

Before I even bang the door knocker, the bronze door opens. "It is our returning warrior!"

It is Mr. Morgan. I don't think I have ever seen him answer the door himself.

Striding into the marble foyer as if I've grown accustomed to having one of the most powerful men in America open the door for me, I say, "I come bearing gifts. The spoils of war, if you will."

"Of course! I read your telegram," he says, referring to the wire I sent him just before Mama and I boarded the *Mauretania* to return home. Mr. Morgan rubs his hands together in expectation. "Let's have a look at your prize."

We walk side by side, our heels clattering against the variegated marble. Even though I've examined the elaborate foyer ceiling hundreds of times, it catches my attention because the gilt edging around the ceiling fresco seems to gleam particularly bright and the colors look unusually vibrant. Strange how new and fresh the library seems after spending time steeped in the history-laden streets and buildings of London, and how incongruous the pristine library is against the grittiness of New York.

He gestures to a place on the floor for me to put down the box and begins to clear his desk. In seconds, I wrench off the lid and spread out the Caxtons on his desktop. "Holiday presents, if you like," I say calmly, though that is not how I feel; my victorious return has made me feel relieved and elated.

Lifting the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* Caxton, he studies the cover, and then opens to the first page. His breath catches as he examines this first example of a printed book in English.

His eyes are shining. "I feel like we should be heralding your return with a ticker tape parade."

"I'm so glad you're pleased," I answer modestly. Mr. Morgan rarely expresses delight on this scale.

"Pleased?" He laughs. "I'm thrilled by your coup." Then he arches an eyebrow at me. "Even though it's not the Caxton that I want." He smiles. "In you, I have many things, but among them is an agent capable of dealing with the most challenging of owners—an aristocrat down on his luck. Not to mention, in you, I also have an agent capable of outwitting the trickiest of dealers. Those London dealers

may seem the essence of politeness, but underneath it all, they are consummate swindlers, more masterful than any on our side of the pond."

"Maybe dealers on both sides of the pond have finally met their match."

He guffaws and asks for details of my dealings with Lord Amherst and my time with the London dealers and curators. I had, of course, written him extensively on both topics, but he wants the tales firsthand. I regale him with the story of my appointment with the Caxtons' owner, my museum visits and meals with the dealers, and my favorite moment, that final dinner in which I received the telegram and the promise I had to concoct for George D. about bidding at the auction.

"Well, this certainly explains the glowing letters I received from the dealers as you sailed home."

I froze. Was he being facetious? "They weren't angry?"

"To the contrary. They would've liked the Caxtons, of course, but they respect your prowess. How did Fitz put it?" He pauses. "Ah yes. He said that I finally have a worthy representative, who shares my skill in the art of negotiation. One that taught the old British dogs some new tricks."

We beam at each other, and when he reaches for my hand, I clasp back. "You are no mere librarian, Belle," he whispers.

I glance up at the towering figure, and when he pulls me closer, the confusion in his eyes matches my uncertainty. It has been a year since we had that moment in my office, and although I have caught him giving me lingering glances, we've neither mentioned nor shared another, similar moment. *Is he rethinking the nature of our relationship? Am I?*

My heart hammers as our lips inch closer. But then, voices echo throughout the foyer, reverberating into the study. I release his hand and step back. "Who is here?"

Taking a deep breath, he says, "I nearly forgot about them." He

clears his throat, and his authoritative tone returns, although he is speaking quietly. "It is only Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Berenson, here from Italy to visit the collection."

"They were in the library this entire time?" I ask, wondering what they might have overheard. The acoustics in the Pierpont Morgan Library are such that the sounds from one room are perceptible in another. But then, the frisson that passed between us was of a visual, physical nature, not audible.

"Yes, engrossed in the objets d'art, I hope."

Appeased, the names of the guests reappear in my mind, and I ask, "Bernard Berenson, the writer? The Italian art expert?" The book Papa had given to me on my tenth birthday, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance*, was written by an author of the same name. And through the years, another book on Florentine painters in the Renaissance period that had fueled my love of the art and books of that era was also written by a Bernard Berenson.

"The same. He's also a curator of sorts, helping guide collectors with their purchases"—he grins—"not unlike you, although you have many other talents, of course. His main patron is that irritating Isabella Stewart Gardner in Boston, where he's from, and he styles himself as the preeminent authority on Italian Renaissance art."

Mr. Morgan has had little actual exposure to Mrs. Gardner, but it was enough that she had a private art collection that people were discussing favorably. He does not like competition.

"Why is he here if his most important patron is in Boston?"

"I believe he is trying to scrounge up new business. Ostensibly, though, he and his wife are giving lectures in the region and seeing important collections."

"His wife is a writer, too?" I'm surprised to find another woman in this realm.

"No, but she has some artistic expertise about which she lectures. Damned annoying woman, though, if you ask me. No charm." He sighs. "But Anne attended a dinner with them recently and arranged for Mrs. Berenson to give a speech at the Colony Club. No surprise

she invited them to call on us and see the library. What could I say?" he asks with a slight shrug.

I am not surprised. Given the ever-growing divergence in political and social views between Anne and Mr. Morgan, he's always looking for common ground and ways to please his youngest child.

"I guess I could have raised the rumors to Anne as a means of objecting to this meeting," he says, almost to himself.

"What rumors?"

He leans closer to say, "A few years back, when we were searching for a new head of the Met"—Mr. Morgan sits on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and is involved in major decision making—"Berenson's name came up. But there was some scuttlebutt about his ties to a forger. By the time the allegations were largely disproved, the decision about the director had already been made. Maybe that explains why Berenson has been critical of a few of my purchases, the Raphael in particular. But I'm trying to put all that aside today. For Anne, Berenson would have never worked out as the head of the Met anyway," he adds.

"Why?"

His eyebrows furrow. "Because he's a Jew," he spits in a tone that I've heard from him before. "Or is rumored to be one anyway, though that is not what Berenson claims."

Inside, I sigh. Anti-Semitism is as rampant as racism against the colored in this country.

The voices escalate in volume, as does the clatter of footsteps in the foyer. A woman's voice calls out for Mr. Morgan, but he doesn't respond. Finally, a man steps into the study, full of apologies for the interruption. He is a thin, handsome man of average height, with gray-green eyes that are covered by tiny circular glasses, and a closely trimmed chestnut-colored mustache and beard. I am struck with an overwhelming, inexplicable sense of familiarity. The sensation disappears when I am distracted by the entrance of a smiling woman, larger than the man but with the same intelligent, curious mien.

Mr. Morgan takes one small step toward them, and says, "Mr. and

Mrs. Berenson, I'd like to introduce you to my personal librarian, Miss Belle da Costa Greene. She has just returned from a victorious trip to London, where she stole a cache of priceless Caxtons out from under the nose of Lord Amherst himself." His expression resembles nothing so much as that of a proud parent, and I think how wildly our relationship vacillates within the span of a few minutes.

Mrs. Berenson greets me first, and then her husband follows. "Miss Greene," he says, taking my hand, "it is truly a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Even across the Atlantic, we have heard tales of your acumen with manuscripts and your formidable skills as a negotiator."

"Your reputation precedes you as well, Mr. Berenson," I respond, delighted to meet one of my favorite authors.

Mrs. Berenson chimes in before her husband can even speak, "Oh, Bernard has developed quite the expertise in Renaissance art on both sides of the Atlantic. He's too modest to describe his successes and credentials, but I'm always delighted to share them."

Her statements sound practiced, and I wonder if this is their usual, falsely humble way of introducing Mr. Berenson's prominence into conversations. She sounds more like a business associate than a spouse.

"So I understand," I say. "But that is not the renown to which I am referring. I was actually introduced to Mr. Berenson and his prowess when I was gifted his first book as a little girl."

"You read my Venetian art book as a child?" He looks genuinely surprised.

"I did indeed."

"Well, even though that makes me feel quite old," he chuckles, "that's quite impressive, Miss Greene. Those theories and observations are rather sophisticated."

"What can I say?" I shrug. "I was precocious."

Mr. Berenson and I smile at each other, and he holds my gaze. For a moment, it feels like Mr. Berenson and I are alone, and then Mr. Morgan clears his throat.

I look away, feeling embarrassed at allowing my eyes to linger

on a married man in the presence of his wife. *How mortified Mama would be.*

A somewhat awkward silence settles onto the room, and I must change the tenor. I force a laugh and say, "Well, Mr. Berenson, it seems as though this isn't exactly an introduction. Apparently, I've known you since I was ten."

CHAPTER 17

DECEMBER 22, 1908
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I stare around the room, thinking how much fun it will be to share every detail of this affair with Teddy. A Red Party. Who could dream up an entire evening dedicated to the color red? Women wear elaborate gowns in every shade of red—vermilion, crimson, deep maroon, coral, even delicate rose—myself among them in an unusual cerise gown I bought in London. With its high-waisted, swathed bodice, squared neckline, and just enough of a train to draw attention, I feel quite striking in it.

When I first received the invitation from the well-known art dealer Joseph Duveen and his wife, I'd assumed the vast expanse of red would stop at the women's attire. How wrong I'd been. Every object in the room, from the carpet to the newly hung silk wallpaper to the furniture, the china, the flowers, and the food, is a shade of red. Even the paintings hanging on the damask garnet walls feature primary reds.

How I wish Mr. Morgan were at my side. We would laugh together over the overabundance of red, much as we occasionally chuckle over the layers of vermilion in his office. But while I wish for his companionship, I no longer need his presence or an escort; I now have my

own cadre of acquaintances with whom I can and must mingle. My own enemies, as Mr. Morgan likes to refer to them.

Archer Huntington and his mother, Arabella, wave to me, and I make my way around the periphery of the dance floor to the side of the fabulously wealthy widow of the American industrialist Collis Huntington, who pioneered western railroads. As I move, I leave a trail of stares and whispers in my wake. The guests don't think I see or hear them, but it is impossible not to *feel* their curiosity and sometimes even their disdain. Two years ago, this would have had me glancing over my shoulder or wondering what they were questioning: the dusty tint of my skin or the strangeness of my clothes?

Tonight, I still feel it, but I have no cares. With the help of Teddy's magazines, my own developed fashion sense, and a sizable budget for clothing that comes from my increased salary, I'm as well dressed as any of these peacocks, with my own unique sense of style. As for my complexion, after that scare with Mr. Morgan, I am now more confident that my secret is safe. He believes me to be white, therefore I don't care about others' conjectures. No one would dare utter a word of their suspicions and risk Mr. Morgan's ire. Only Anne has dared to challenge his verdict, but I've had no more of Anne's suppositions as of late. After all, she's a woman with secrets, and just like me, she should be careful throwing stones.

"How are you, Belle?" Mrs. Huntington asks when I reach her and Archer. Mrs. Huntington, sometimes described as the richest woman in America, is a rabid collector of paintings, antiques, rare books, and jewelry. I often face her representatives in fierce competition across the auction house floor, but we manage to shed that combative approach in social settings.

Very few are as knowledgeable about art as this still-beautiful woman in her middle years. I enjoy exchanging art world gossip with her, and we respect each other.

"Can you believe this crimson extravagance?" she asks with a scoff. Her disdain is curious as her beribboned gown may contain more shades of red than anyone else's, and from her ears to her neck

to her wrists, she is covered in rubies. Not to mention that her son's suit is a deep oxblood. "In my day, none of this display was necessary. People knew other people's worth without a show."

"Or by the art on people's walls and shelves," I add.

"Exactly," she agrees with an emphatic nod. "Your Mr. Morgan understands that."

"He does indeed."

She pivots the conversation toward a rumor she's heard about our host and his brother Henry, joint owners of Duveen Brothers, powerful, aggressive art dealers with offices in New York, London, and Paris. Gossip, it seems, has been spreading throughout the ladies' teatimes about a possible forgery that Duveen Brothers sold to a widow in Mrs. Huntington's set.

As I share my plan to continue to do business with the Duveens, but to be cautious of any possible duplicity, I see Mr. Berenson. He is deep in conversation with Joseph Duveen himself.

Only now do I realize I've been searching for him from the moment I arrived, hoping that he would be attending. He seems different than during our brief encounter at the Pierpont Morgan Library. There, he'd appeared familiar and intelligent, a fellow art lover and collector, but diminished somehow in proximity to Mr. Morgan. Here, he shines with a vividness that sets him apart even in this sea of crimson. He alone wears the traditional black-and-white evening suit, with only a red silk pocket square as his nod to this evening's theme. He's not the tallest or most handsome man in the room, but something about him captivates. Could it be all those childhood days spent in the company of his words, laid out so eloquently on the pages of his art books?

Even though I turn my attention back to Mrs. Huntington, I watch Mr. Berenson in my peripheral vision. He and Mr. Duveen are standing quite close, almost gesticulating in each other's faces. Mrs. Berenson is leaning so far in, she is nearly touching the two men in her efforts to listen.

I've been curious about the Berensons from the moment we met, and over the last few days, I've uncovered quite a bit about the couple. They've been married for eight years, since Mrs. Berenson's first husband died, although she'd been separated from him for years and it was rumored that she'd been having an affair with Bernard during the entirety of that separation, which I found intriguing. Her only children, two daughters, are from her first husband, Frank Costelloe. I also learned that Mr. Berenson, the Boston Brahmin, Harvard-educated aesthete, is not Jewish, as Mr. Morgan claimed; he is Roman Catholic.

Mrs. Huntington breaks into my thoughts. "Shall we partake of the red feast?" she asks, a glint of disapproval mixed with curiosity in her eyes. As usual, her son nods but adds little to the exchange.

We turn away from the Berensons and Duveens toward the walnut dining table, so enormous that it could seat forty people. An extraordinary repast spreads before us. However, I have no idea what to select because I cannot discern one dish from the next except by shape, and even then, it is a challenge. Every object on the table—the meats, the breads, the vegetables, the fruits—has been dyed red.

As I listen to Mrs. Huntington guess at the real nature of the scarlet foodstuffs, I feel rather than see someone draw close to me. A shiver passes through me, and before I even turn around to ascertain the newcomer's identity, I know who it is.

"A pleasure to see you again, Miss Greene. And so soon," Mr. Berenson says.

His eyes, a glimmering shade almost like grisaille, have an extraordinary effect on me, and I feel pulled into his gaze. It takes me a long beat to look away, and I answer with as blasé a tone as I can muster, "It's nice to see you as well, Mr. Berenson."

As he bows toward me, I study him. His fastidious evening suit and well-groomed, aristocratic features are background to the intensity of his intelligent eyes, and I find this disparity peculiar. In my, albeit limited, experience, patrician gentlemen are rarely deeply curi-

ous; the softness of their lives dulls the possibility of a more academic nature. The blue-blooded Mr. Morgan is an exception, and perhaps this Mr. Berenson is as well.

"You look lovely this evening. The cut of your dress is unusual, simple and yet eye-catching," he says, making an unusually astute observation about clothes for a man. Although, I suppose, Bernard Berenson is known for his uncommon eye.

I've received many compliments from many men, but none have made my cheeks warm this way. "Thank you."

"It was a delight to see you in your natural habitat," he adds, "the Pierpont Morgan Library." He says this with a grin, and if he were a single man, I would say he was flirting with me. But he is a married man, with his wife in this very room, so I'm not certain how to read his manner or his words. Even the most lascivious society men I've encountered obey the unspoken rule to remain proper in their wives' presence.

"I wasn't sure if you would be here tonight. Or your wife, of course," I say, stepping away from the dining area and taking my leave of the Huntingtons. Mr. Berenson follows me, and we stand together.

He nods. "Yes, we try to take in as many attractions as we can when we're in the States. There is so much this country has to offer, such as this madcap celebration of a single hue. I can think of many Renaissance artists who would have adored this display—Sandro Botticelli for one. He loved a deeply saturated carmine shade." He smiles at a private memory, then asks, "Have you seen the sumptuous red paint he uses in his *Primavera*?"

His smile is warm and engaging, and I can't help but grin thinking of the legendary Renaissance master Sandro Botticelli strolling through this room, gawking at the parade of red. But before I can respond that I've never seen the famous Botticelli painting in the flesh—or confess that I've never even been to Italy—Mr. Berenson changes the subject. "The Pierpont Morgan Library has amassed an impressive collection of manuscripts."

"It has been my honor to continue what Mr. Morgan started," I say with a societally expected deference that I don't really feel. I know the value I've added to the library collection.

"You don't give yourself enough credit. I am aware of the scatter-shot manner in which your patron amassed books and manuscripts before you became his personal librarian—a Gutenberg Bible here, a common Elizabeth Barrett Browning book there. You have swooped in and expanded the disparate volumes into a formidable collection that has the potential to rival the best museums." He nods as if his declaration has become fact. "It is most impressive, Miss Greene."

My cheeks must be the color of the gowns circling this room, they are so hot from his praise, so unlike the usual superficial compliments I receive. Bernard Berenson is the very man who practically reignited the current interest by collectors and museums alike in Italian Renaissance artwork. His words are high praise.

"I hope I've done justice to the treasures in my care."

He chortles. "No need for false modesty with me, Miss Greene. You've done much more than justice to the volumes you've acquired and those you've inherited in your role as librarian. You've united them so they tell a cohesive story about the importance of the written word—the Caxton purchase, in particular, was genius. When I think back to my days as a boy at the Boston Public Library, marveling at the thousands of volumes at my disposal and imagining how those books could change my life, I know that none of that would have been possible without printers like Caxton who made the written word available to the masses. The Morgan book collection—in your care—will tell that story."

I am moved by his deep comprehension of what I'm trying to accomplish, all the more so because, in this moment, his words and tone and message sound like my father's. It is an understanding of my work that I've never heard anyone articulate, not even Mr. Morgan, and I feel *seen*. His sentiment softens the criticism of my patron implicit in Mr. Berenson's compliments, statements I find strange because it would serve him well to gain Mr. Morgan's favor.

He nods in appreciation of me, and then his voice grows thick and quiet as he continues. "Mr. Morgan is fortunate to have you at his side. But you must make sure he doesn't get in your way as you turn the book collection into a scholarly masterpiece that has a critical narrative to tell not only experts but the common man, if the collection is ever made available to them. I'd hate to have him hinder you with the books as he has with the paintings."

No matter Mr. Berenson's flattery, I can no longer ignore the critique of Mr. Morgan; it is too blatant. He and I have grown even closer over the last few months, and I cannot bear to have him denounced in any way. I am the library's protector, after all, which means that I have to protect *him*. "What do you mean, Mr. Berenson?" My voice is as hard and cold as ice, and any flush of warmth left on my cheeks from Mr. Berenson's praise disappears.

My reaction to his words registers, and he says, "I didn't mean to offend. The library certainly has its masterpieces."

"Yes, it does. The luminosity of the Francesco Francia *Madonna and Child* is undeniable."

"True enough. But the Pratovecchio *Virgin and Child*? The perspective doesn't have the same expertise as other Renaissance paintings. With your eye, you could ensure that the library artwork echoes Mr. Morgan's Renaissance-inspired walls and decor. I'd love to see a Perugino or Botticelli on those red walls, so the paintings match the quality of the book collection you've assembled. You deserve to be surrounded by art equal to your talent." He pauses. "And beauty."

I am perplexed by Mr. Berenson's frank speech; most art world experts talk about Mr. Morgan in reverential tones. Since Mr. Berenson's work focuses, in large part, on giving acquisition advice to wealthy collectors, I imagine it would behoove Mr. Berenson to forge a relationship with Mr. Morgan, but his comments about the library flatter me alone. Is he trying to woo Mr. Morgan by appealing to my expertise? Or does he assume that he will never work for Mr. Morgan

because of his relationship with Mrs. Gardner, and thus is he simply trying to woo me? Regardless of Mr. Berenson's motives, he is correct about the library's paintings—even though I'd never admit that out loud—and I've often found myself having thoughts similar to those he's espousing. Somehow I feel alive in his presence, as if all things are possible.

He continues, "How I would welcome the opportunity to tour you around the countryside of Italy, to show you the true masterpieces of the Renaissance in situ—"

Just then Mrs. Berenson appears, the very moment I'd begun to imagine myself in the Italian countryside on her husband's arm. Her long-chinned face is open and eager, and she seems pleased to see me, making me feel terrible for the scene I'd just envisioned. She is wearing an elegantly cut cherry-red gown. With its high collar and long sleeves, it is a modest dress that would surely meet with Mama's approval.

"What a delight to make your acquaintance twice in the span of one week, Miss Greene." With her thick waist and booming voice, she is the polar opposite of her finer-boned, slender husband.

I smile graciously. "Yes, it certainly is. I've heard from Miss Morgan that your lecture at the Colony Club about Florentine paintings was masterful. She thinks the world of you."

Actually, I had heard nothing of the sort from Anne directly. At the library, she acts as though I'm invisible; yesterday, in fact, she stood right next to me but spoke only to Mr. Morgan. Still, I could hear her, and I'd learned she'd been quite impressed with Mrs. Berenson. So much so that she speculated it was Mrs. Berenson and not her husband who wrote his famous art books.

"You flatter me," she says with a slight flush in her cheeks. "The people of New York have been uniform in their welcome, and we are eternally appreciative. Bernard and I hail from Boston, although we now live in Italy, and we hadn't expected such a reception. It seems we are faddish at the moment."

I lift up the glass of Burgundy I'd taken from a passing waiter. "Here's to the moment." We clink glasses, all smiles and ebullience.

After a sip, Mrs. Berenson says, "We were honored that Mr. Morgan gave us copies of the catalogs of his collection."

I'd been astonished when he'd given a set to the Berensons. His catalogs, which contain details of his manuscripts and artwork, their provenance, and several reproductions, are highly sought after and rarely distributed, as with all renowned collectors who prefer to keep the particulars about their collections private. "He obviously values your opinion and scholarship," I say, rather than admitting my surprise.

"He values yours as well, and I understand why," Mr. Berenson responds.

I have to keep my eyes on Mrs. Berenson, because her husband's words and glances unsettle me. But I say, "I've worked hard to prove my worth to him."

"Well, we hope to be of service in whatever way we can, and to prove *our* worth," Mr. Berenson says, "to Mr. Morgan and to you."

"I will recommend you to Mr. Morgan," I say with a nod to him and Mrs. Berenson. The differences in their statements about Mr. Morgan make me wonder if they are of like mind in their approach about him.

"That would be lovely." Mrs. Berenson smiles at me and changes the subject. "Will we see you at the dinner hosted by Mrs. de Acosta Lydig next week?"

"I'm afraid not. Duty calls," I reply, but the truth has nothing to do with work.

Rita de Acosta Lydig, married to a banker and Wall Street broker, is a fixed part of New York City society, despite the fact that her parents are from Spain. This fact, paired with her "exotic beauty," might have made her a social outcast, except that her Spanish lineage has aristocratic ties. I avoid Mrs. de Acosta Lydig whenever possible and would never attend one of her events, although I'm always invited. I simply couldn't stand next to her and have the parallels between us—

the similar last name, the darker shade of our skin—explored with any depth. My noble ties would come up lacking, and I cannot give those who wonder about my heritage more material.

"Ah." She gives me a nod of sympathetic understanding. "I'm sure Mr. Morgan isn't an easy boss. The demands on your time must be great."

As I had with Mr. Berenson's comment about Mr. Morgan, I bristle at the implicit denunciation. "It is an honor to work for Mr. Morgan. The demands he makes are ones I'm happy to fulfill."

Realizing her misstep, Mrs. Berenson blanches. "Oh, I didn't mean to—" she begins, but before she can finish, a woman in a bloodred gown interrupts.

"Excuse me." She looks between the three of us and then settles her eyes on Bernard. "Would you mind if I borrowed your wife for a moment? There is someone I must introduce Mary to."

Mrs. Berenson is pulled away and I am left alone with Mr. Berenson. Before I can decide what to say—whether to return to the thread of the significant conversation we'd been having before his wife's arrival—he offers me a smile along with his arm, and says, "Shall we perambulate around the room and part it like Moses and the Red Sea?"

His offer makes me laugh, and I put down my glass before I accept his arm. As I slide my arm through his, a charge surges through me.

"Do you see how everyone is looking at you? You are as singular as the art you acquire." Whether he intends it or not, his lips are so close to my ear that I feel the warmth of his breath. When I turn toward him, I find that, because of his height, our faces are close, very intimate.

I have learned to flirt with ease, but my visceral and intellectual reaction to this man is robbing me of my usual banter. Is it because—for once—I feel understood? It is as if I am naked before him, without the armor of wit and humor I usually wear to these occasions. I don't allow myself to back away, but I try to wrest control of our intimate exchange and steer it back to a more usual course. "I'm sure

their eyes are on you, not me. You are visiting from Italy and are a novelty for this insular group. Do you have parties like this in Boston? Or Italy?"

He laughs, and I am not sure if that is a response to my subject change or my actual question. "Oh, no. Boston social gatherings are staid affairs, even in the exquisite home of my patron, Mrs. Isabella Stewart Gardner. And in Italy, well, its traditions and rituals are too rich with history to embrace an event like this."

I'm calmer now, having maneuvered the conversation to a safer space. "What do you make of this?" I ask, assuming—with his discriminating taste and fine eye—he'd find the vivid show of red gauche.

His eyes wander for a moment as he takes in the great wave of red cresting around us. "I quite like it. There's something liberating in the uniform wash of red, don't you think? How freeing it would be if we could all be the same color."

My breath catches in my chest. Why would he associate all of this with skin color? Does he know about me? We stop moving as his glance returns to me. He clarifies, saying, "I mean, not all of us share the same economic circumstances or the identical blue blood background, and yet here, awash in red, we are all the same. This party is a great equalizer." He sounds almost wistful. "Because of that, I quite like it."

We begin walking again, our arms still linked together, and I wonder about Mr. Berenson's words, what his phrase "a great equalizer" tells me about him. He'd mentioned his childhood days at the Boston Public Library—a clear hint at the lower economic station of his family—and perhaps the financial situation to which he'd been born preys upon him amid such lavishness. I can certainly relate to his sentiment about being an outsider.

Although I am not quite certain how to respond, I need to tread lightly and not reveal too much in my reply. Settling on an innocuous response, I say, "It can be quite overwhelming to be always in the presence of great wealth."

"Yes," he says, then looks straight at me, "but here, for a moment, we are equal."

Even though we are surrounded by chatter and music, we stay silent. I don't know what he's thinking, but my only thought is this: *I must get to know this man.*

CHAPTER 18

MARCH 24, 1909
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Belle!" I glance up from my desk to see Mr. Morgan standing at the threshold of my office. "Do you have any plans for this evening?"

I smile the way I always do when Mr. Morgan asks me this question; it happens at least once a week when he's in New York. In actuality, his question is a command to stand in his stead at an event that he's forgotten or that interferes with his private plans with a mistress. It is my job to attend.

"Where would you like me to be, Mr. Morgan?"

"At the opera."

"Which art dealer or collector would you like me to entertain?"

These events are typically quests for information about a dealer's upcoming offerings or a collector's future plans.

"Rachel Costelloe." I recognize the name, and when my smile fades, Mr. Morgan frowns. "Is something wrong?"

"No, I'm just surprised. I assumed that you wanted me to meet with someone who had something to do with the library."

"I do. Do you know who she is?"

I wonder how to answer the question without revealing too much, so I simply say, "I've never met her."

"Anne was meant to attend the opera with her tonight; Miss Costelloe is her acquaintance, after all. But Anne informed me that she has an important engagement with the Colony Club." He waves his hand in the air as if he is irritated, as if his daughter's plans matter not at all.

"So you want me to step in?"

"Yes, Miss Costelloe is the stepdaughter of Bernard Berenson, and I need some information." I knew who she was, but hadn't wanted to admit it. I worried that the knowledge could have revealed my fascination with Bernard. He adds, "I want you to see if she knows anything about the upcoming acquisitions of her stepfather's patron, Isabella Stewart Gardner."

Ah, this is all about competition. Mr. Morgan wants to be certain his private art collection is unmatched.

How strange that Mr. Morgan is the one to provide me with the opportunity to learn more about the man I've been orbiting for the last three months. At a private dinner at Delmonico's, during the intermission at a Broadway showing of *King Lear*, throughout the Hudson-Fulton exhibit of Dutch art at the Metropolitan Museum, Bernard Berenson and I exchanged stolen glances and hidden smiles. To anyone on the outside, these encounters have been nothing more than any number of opportunistic flirtations I've had with men in the art world over the past few years. Flirtation is my device, nothing of note or consequence to anyone—except, this time, for me.

Each time I've seen Mr. Berenson, I haven't been able to make sense of my desire. Not only is Mr. Berenson close to two decades older than me, but he is a married man, and for all of my flirtations, I would never become involved in such a dalliance. Yet, I yearn to spend more time with him.

Could it be that I'm attracted to his inscrutable demeanor? Or am I drawn in by the sense that we both have secrets that force us to

operate furtively—yet seamlessly—in a world that isn't our own? A world riddled with bigotry and racism. I have had no opportunity to discover the answers because his work has taken him away from New York for weeks—to Boston, Providence, and Philadelphia—consulting on such esteemed collections as Peter Widener's. I've been waiting for his return and his promise of "a special evening."

Within minutes of meeting Miss Costelloe—or Rachel, as she asks me to call her—in the lobby of the Metropolitan Opera House to see *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, I realize she knows nothing about her stepfather's business affairs. Still, the twenty-one-year-old Rachel is delightful, bubbling with her commitment to the suffrage movement. When we break for intermission, she chats about the accomplishments of women activists, even as they continue to fight for the right to vote. She is an articulate advocate for the movement, and I am amused when she tells me, "Belle, it would be so wonderful if you came to one of the meetings with me. You would be so inspiring."

"I'm not sure about that. I'm ashamed to say that I know little about the movement."

"That's okay, the movement knows all about you."

Her words astonish me. "Really? Me?"

"I don't know why you're surprised. This is about so much more than just fighting for our right to vote. How could we not know about you? You're all around the city, attending all the balls and soirees, but you're also conducting serious business in the art world. You're living a life of equality, and that's what we're fighting for. Whether it's in your work—like you—or in your personal life—like my mother, who's chosen not to conform to the traditional constraints of marriage."

"What does that mean?" I ask before I can stop myself.

"My mother is a woman before her time," Rachel explains. "She is progressive in her attitudes about work—she undertakes projects right alongside Bernard—and she is forward thinking in her attitudes about relationships. She and Bernard love each other, but they are free to pursue other romantic affairs; she doesn't believe people

should be hampered by preconceived notions and expectations. Their marriage is very cosmopolitan, wouldn't you say?" she asks with a grin.

The lights flicker, the sign that we are to return to our seats, and I am relieved. I need to be alone with my thoughts. By the time the opera reaches its conclusion, I've begun to realize what Rachel's disclosure could mean for me.

Marriage is not something that I've really considered. I've always known that, because of my heritage, a traditional relationship would not be possible for me. Not only because of my family's financial dependence but because a marriage means children, and that is something I cannot hazard. Without the fairer skin of my siblings, I could never risk bearing a child whose skin color might reveal my deception.

Perhaps Bernard's unique marriage could allow me to experience the man I desperately want to know better, without the danger that he'll expect more from me than I can give. Don't I deserve to experience the same emotions and grand passion as other women? Perhaps with Bernard, I might be able to have a taste of the type of romantic relationship most women take for granted.

The carriage jostles over the cobblestones, and my nerves jar along with it. I've been waiting for weeks for this moment with Bernard, but now that it has arrived, I am anxious. Rachel's disclosure has conjured possibilities I'd previously believed impossible for me, but tonight, all that speculating could become reality. Am I ready?

After stepping out of the carriage, I smooth my windswept hair and the skirt of my emerald wool dress before I step into the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum. Today I take no notice of the magnificent classical beaux arts entry. Normally its soaring limestone dome and arches impress me, but the vast space also perplexes me. How can two million square feet look so friendly and welcoming? But today I'm distracted as I search for Bernard.

A few visitors straggle, adjusting their hats as they ready to leave, but I don't see Bernard among them. Did I get the time wrong? Our tour is planned for after hours. We are going to have a private viewing of a recently acquired sculpture.

"Miss Greene, Miss Greene!"

I spin until a familiar face, perfectly round in shape with a distinctively curled mustache, appears at my side. "Here you are, Miss Greene. Lovely to see you again." He extends his hand without introducing himself.

I know we've met, though I cannot place him. "Wonderful to see you as well," I answer, shaking his hand, and in that instant, his name finally comes to me—Mr. Johnson.

"Follow me, if you will, Miss Greene. Mr. Berenson and our Greek statue await," he says, setting off through the diminishing crowd.

At first he ducks and weaves through them so quickly that I struggle to keep up. We leave the lingering visitors in our wake and progress down the dark hall housing ancient Greek and Roman art. Mr. Johnson continues to lead me through the warren-like hallway—until I spot a Roman sarcophagus that I know well. The coffin dates from the imperial Roman era, anywhere from the first century BC to the first century AD. Its vividly colored wood surface makes it stand out among the marble and alabaster from which most of the objects in this room are made. It isn't only the brightness of the sarcophagus that captures my attention but also the realistic portrait found on its lid. This Fayum portrait, as this rare type of ancient art is called, depicts the people of its place and time as they actually looked—dark skin, curly black hair, and deep chocolate-brown eyes—and challenges the commonly held perception that ancient Greek and Roman people were blond and blue-eyed. The Fayum portrait was a particular favorite of mine and Papa's during our visits to the Metropolitan Museum. Only here did we see people who looked like us.

"Miss Greene," Mr. Johnson calls, waking me from my reverie, and I hasten to catch up. Suddenly, we veer right into a small room

branching off the primary hall, passing by several glass cases holding pieces of ancient jewelry and pottery, until we approach a door hidden in the fabric on the wall.

"Nearly there, Miss Greene." Mr. Johnson glances over his shoulder with a grin.

Finally, he leads me into a room where we step into another world. We no longer inhabit halls with carefully curated exhibits and perfectly arranged displays of precious artifacts and artwork, but instead are standing in a sprawling half-finished storage room lined with wooden crates. It is as if we've stepped behind the curtain of a Broadway play to the ragtag mess backstage, losing the illusion in the process but gaining an understanding of how the magic is created.

There, in the center of the room, stands Bernard, staring up at a striking white alabaster sculpture of a man's torso. To my eyes, he appears just as extraordinary as the art. He turns toward me when he hears my footsteps, and I am rewarded with a beaming smile.

"Ah, Miss Greene, so glad you were able to join us."

"So glad you extended the invitation, Mr. Berenson," I reply, losing the battle to hold back an embarrassingly wide grin of my own. I am filled with such joy at just the sight of him.

Access to the inner sanctum of the Metropolitan Museum is strictly limited to insiders, usually academic sorts only. When he learned about my interest in the new statue, Bernard cashed in a favor from Mr. Johnson. Bernard understands that a behind-the-scenes glimpse at my favorite museum is far more romantic than any lavish present or dinner date might be.

"If you'll join me over here," Mr. Johnson says, taking a position at the front of the torso. "I'd like to introduce you both to the newest addition to our collection of Greek sculptures." It's only the torso of a boy, but this boy's chest thrusts out with power; it commands attention.

Mr. Johnson begins his lecture. "Look at how his torso is turned. You can see the remnants of arrows here"—he points to the right shoulder—"which indicates he was being pursued and was running

away from danger. We believe this is a depiction of one of Niobe's royal children. If you remember your mythology, Niobe bragged that she was a better mother because she had borne more children than Leto. A very angry Leto exacted revenge against Niobe by sending out her children, Apollo and Artemis, to kill Niobe's children. As I'm certain you both know, sculptures showing Niobe's children trying to escape the deadly arrows of Apollo and Artemis were often depicted through antiquity. The ancients wanted the people to know that hubris can be a deadly crime," he adds with a small smile.

"It's a lesson some modern-day folks could still use," I retort.

As the men laugh, I ask, "What date do you give this statue?"

"We estimate that it was created in Greece somewhere between 425 and 400 BC."

Bernard and I circle the statue, catching glimpses of each other as we do. "It's really quite lovely. The craftsmanship in the torso's movement particularly," I comment, but Bernard—famous art scholar and critic, known for his insightful, occasionally biting assessments—is strangely quiet.

"I think you're quite right in your identification of the subject, Mr. Johnson," Bernard says finally. "This is likely one of Niobe's children." He pauses, placing a finger on his pursed lips. "But are you certain that it's a Greek original? That it isn't a Roman copy?"

A strange gurgling noise escapes Mr. Johnson's mouth, a cross between a laugh and a cry. "I think we'd know a Greek from a Roman statue around here, Mr. Berenson."

I stand back and watch Bernard. His question is not an unfair one. Very few Greek statues have survived, but the copies made by the ancient Romans have fared far better.

Bernard approaches the statue, bending down so he's eye level with three curious striations I'd noticed. "Do you see these light diagonal cuts along the lower torso? The chisel marks here and there?"

Mr. Johnson crosses his arms at first, refusing to draw nearer. A long minute passes before he acquiesces.

"Those are the markings of a sculpting instrument that wasn't in

use until the first century AD in Rome," he says in a voice that bears no hint of triumph. It seems to pain him to correct the attribution of this sculpture, but he knows he must.

Mr. Johnson's cheeks flame red. "I believe your specialty is Renaissance art, Mr. Berenson," he snaps. "That hardly makes you an expert in dating antiquities."

I have no wish to alienate a Met curator, but I cannot sit by and allow him to insult Bernard. "Mr. Johnson," I say. "As you undoubtedly know, Renaissance artwork was the rediscovery of classical design and art, particularly that of ancient Greek and Roman origin. In order to become expert in his field, Mr. Berenson had to become an expert in both Greek and Roman antiquities, and given that he makes his home in Italy, I am guessing that he studies ancient Greek and Roman art in situ."

"I spend a significant amount of time in Italian churches, where I have the opportunity to examine statues that were reappropriated by the church."

His last words are the ones that make Mr. Johnson's cheeks lose their fire, and as his shoulders slump, a sickly pallor takes hold. He realizes the museum has made a mistake in its acquisition. And that, given Bernard's observations and his expert status, the museum's newest treasure will not soon be viewed by the public.

The sun is setting by the time we leave the museum, turning the building's limestone facade a golden pink. The March air is refreshingly crisp after the stuffiness of the Met's storage rooms. I inhale as Bernard and I step down onto the sidewalk bordering Fifth Avenue. The street overflows with carriages of gentlemen returning home from their day's labors and couples heading out for the evening's entertainment. The clop of horses and the low murmur of passersby obviate the need for conversation at first.

In the quiet between us, I tighten my coat around me. Bernard breaks the silence. "You are quite the defender, Miss Greene. While I appreciate your efforts, I do think I could have protected my honor without you." He beams at me, and his teeth gleam in the low lamplight.

I smile back. "I've never been one to mince words or suffer fools, Mr. Berenson."

"I have noticed. I've also noticed that you continue to call me Mr. Berenson, when I thought I asked you to call me Bernard."

I counter smoothly, "And I noticed you continue to call me Miss Greene when you promised over and over again that you would call me Belle."

His bark of laughter makes my insides warm. "Touché, Belle." He grins. "How about an agreement? When we are in the company of others, we use the more socially acceptable 'miss' and 'mister.' But when it is just us two, we call each other by our given names." He pauses for just a moment, as if he wishes to make sure I hear his next words. "And I do hope there will be many times when it is just the two of us, Belle."

I nod, impossibly happy. I thought I was sure about his feelings before, but now, I have no doubt. But then I am struck by a wave of sadness. Because I know with absolute certainty that Bernard would not deign to talk to me if I were introduced to him by my actual given name. The famous art scholar and critic Bernard Berenson would never stand side by side laughing and conversing about art on the streets of New York with a colored girl.

But as he peers at me, my sadness washes away, until he says, "I'm leaving."

Leaving? Again? What does he mean? Back to Italy? I have questions, but I'm too scared to ask them. Instead, I stand still, listening to the sounds of the city as I try to tease out a single thought from the many swirling through my mind.

"I'm returning home to Italy," he explains, before I have the courage and wherewithal to ask. "In three days."

My heart sinks, but I tell myself it is for the best. Not only is he married—never mind the incomprehensible arrangement he shares with his wife—but what makes me think a few flirtations are tantamount to real emotion? Especially since his unconventional marriage allows him to pursue relationships with whomever he wishes?

As we wait for our carriages, standing so close that I inhale every breath he exhales, I cannot meet his eyes. Part of me wants to prolong this moment, and part of me wants to leave, taking my feelings with me. Bernard challenges the barricade to romantic feelings that I just recently realized I'd erected years ago, as a way to protect myself and my family from a connection I should not—in fact, cannot—forge.

"I know it's not much time, but I want to see you, Belle, before I depart." I finally meet his gaze. "Do I dare hope that you will join me for dinner, just the two of us?"

Before I answer, I think that even if he would not ask such a question of Belle Marion Greener, I am relieved and excited that he's asked Belle da Costa Greene. And even though I know many young women would blanch at the idea of dining alone with a married man, I am not most young women.

"Yes, Bernard, I will join you."

CHAPTER 19

MARCH 26, 1909
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

My hand hovers in the air, in front of the door of this suite at the Hotel Webster, an establishment only a few blocks from the library. Even though the society men and women around me regularly engage in this sort of scandalous behavior, it goes against every rule of acceptability I have been taught. I do not have the money and family name that protect them from besmirched reputations. I have responsibilities to my family; my work secures their white existence. I cannot become like Lily Bart in *House of Mirth* and allow myself to be destroyed by society's judgment. And yet, I agreed to meet Bernard.

Just this morning, as I sat at my desk at the Pierpont Morgan Library, I was plagued with doubts. Hourly encounters with Mr. Morgan, in which he solicited my opinion on a proffered manuscript and asked for my guidance on a tricky trust question, solidified those worries. How could I dream of attaining a station in life like this without Mr. Morgan? If he ever discovered my relationship with a man he barely tolerates—a relationship I am sure Mr. Morgan would perceive as a betrayal of the undivided attention and affection he believes he is owed from his personal librarian—I am certain I'd be fired and he'd

seek out someone else for the job. I had almost decided to cancel our engagement when a letter arrived for me at the library. The envelope contained a single page, with the words "For Belle" scrawled on top followed by excerpts from a poem. His words undid my resolve.

Finally, I knock on the door leading to Bernard's suite of rooms, and when he opens it, I cannot bring myself to meet his eyes, so I step inside without a word. The elegant little parlor is lined with celadon-green damask wallpaper; a pair of matching wingback chairs sits before a crackling fire. A table for two is set with a white linen tablecloth, a floral spray of local buttercups and bloodroots, a silver candelabra, two place settings of china, each with a silver dome covering the meal, and a bottle of wine, already uncorked. Bernard has arranged the intimate space both welcomingly and carefully to ensure that we will remain alone.

As I face the fire, I feel so young, so inexperienced. Then Bernard's hands are on my shoulders, and I shiver expectantly. He slides my coat off in a single movement, steps away, and hooks it on the bronze rack.

Then, he speaks the first words we share. "Shall we?" He gestures to the table.

A wave of relief passes through me that I've been directed to an activity, because I have no idea how one is meant to behave in situations such as these. *Is there a script one follows when engaging in peccadilloes?* I quickly banish the thought. I don't want to think of our encounter in base terms, because in truth, my feelings for him are soaring.

He pulls out my chair, and I sit down with shaking legs that I hope are hidden by the skirt of the deep azure silk gown I chose for the evening. When he lifts the bottle of Burgundy, I have to take a deep breath in order to hold up my glass steady enough.

I take a long sip. It warms me from the inside out, softening the nerves that have plagued me. He removes the silver domes from our plates, and we begin to eat the delicate quail, scalloped potatoes, and early asparagus he's ordered for us.

I feel suddenly shy. Intimacy, of both the physical and the emotional variety, is a place I have not visited with any man.

Sensing my discomfort, Bernard takes up the conversation. "Do you think Mr. Johnson will inform his fellow curators of the dating error of the sculpture?"

I exhale at the comfortable issue he's raised. The image of a florid Mr. Johnson explaining the attribution error to the self-important curatorial staff—who had undoubtedly called in several experts for verification—tickles my imagination, and I giggle. Bernard laughs along with me, and soon we are overtaken by tension-breaking merriment.

Easy conversation follows, and I listen as he talks about how he became enamored of Italian Renaissance paintings and drawings. This love affair, he reveals, did not occur immediately, but in stages over time.

"One captivating bust led to the next exquisitely rendered painting until I lost my heart," he says. "The rich Renaissance artwork, with its freshly hewn three-dimensionality and deep allegorical meaning, transported me away from myself and my reality to a time and place where true genius was possible, a time like and yet unlike our own. And I knew I had to help transport others in turn. That's why I first began writing. I didn't think the wealthy alone deserved to have access to this understanding." His tone is confessional. "I wanted people like me—" He stops before finishing and finally says, "I wanted people like me, who were not born with that easy connection to art and its experts, to have that access as well." Once again, he's revealing his position on the periphery of our world.

But it is his talk of art that mesmerizes me. *He is seducing me*, I realize. I allow myself to be drawn in by this slow dance. First, leaning closer to him across the table, then easing to the edge of my seat, and not long after, sitting on his lap on one of the wingback chairs before the fire. Before I even feel his lips upon mine, I breathe in his scent. His heady, musky smell, distinct from the cologne he uses to mask his natural fragrance, sends a shiver through me, and when he leans in to

kiss me, I surrender. I am twenty-nine years old and this is my first real kiss. I savor the moment and the warmth that rises within me.

Suddenly, his hands are on my back and in my hair, and when his fingers find their way to my breasts, I can barely breathe. But when his hands begin working at the row of tiny buttons on the back of my gown, I pull away.

"What is it, my love?" he asks, his voice thick with the same desire that fills me.

My heart clenches at the endearment, and I realize just how easily I could surrender to him. I will myself to remain steadfast. "I want to give myself to you"—I glance downward—"but I don't dare."

For some reason, he feels my words are an invitation, and his fingers are once again on my buttons. "If you are concerned about Mary, you needn't worry. We have an understanding."

"It isn't that, Bernard." I put a hand on his chest, and he stops. "I've already been told about that."

He raises a brow at my knowledge, and I answer his unspoken question. "Rachel."

"Ah," he says in understanding. "What then, my love? Is it that I'm not currently free to marry?"

How can I tell him that a woman like me with a life-altering deception can never marry? A relationship with Bernard, attached and yet in some ways free, beguiles in a way that nothing else ever has. And yet, I am scared. If I take this enormous risk, it must be worth the dangers.

Finally, I respond, "It isn't that, Bernard. Marriage has never been my plan." I hesitate. "It's that I—with you—I could be lost forever."

"What is wrong with that?"

"Nothing. And everything."

He groans, not out of frustration but from desire. "You cannot know the effect you are having on me, Belle. I want you for my own."

"And I want you." I speak the truth. "But I need to know your feelings are not fleeting and that, if I give myself to you, our affair will not be just another dalliance."

He takes my hand and kisses my palm, and then with his index finger he draws circles in the same place where the feeling of his lips on my hand lingers. The surge of passion that those two simple gestures cause almost breaks my will. Almost makes me lean forward and kiss him deeply.

"All right," he says. "We will wait until I prove my devotion to you, my love. You will see that my adoration is unwavering, and then we will arrange a rendezvous worthy of that emotion." He pulls me closer and kisses my forehead, then my eyelids, my cheeks, and finally my lips. I slip into the sensations arising within me, and I am almost adrift on the waves of this passion.

Then he whispers into my ear, "You are my Belle."

With his words, I am awakened to myself, and yet I know I am lost forever.

CHAPTER 20

APRIL–AUGUST 1909
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

My time with Bernard that evening, however brief, rouses something within me. I am no longer satisfied with this endless pretending, this charade of a life I lead. I've made an authentic connection, and I want more of these.

Bernard is gone but our bond remains, and I am inspired to be more myself. I dress even more audaciously in the brightest of colors; I speak boldly, saying whatever is on my mind at dinners, operas, and parties. To my surprise, the normally stiff society folks and art world luminaries find this exhilarating; it seems I'm saying aloud what they've only entertained in the privacy of their thoughts.

One evening, after a discussion of the recent economic disaster that would have been worse if Mr. Morgan hadn't intervened, several of the guests at an Astor house party lamented about all they'd lost in the stock market.

After listening to their diatribe through two glasses of Burgundy, I announced—to waves of laughter—"Too bad you've lost so much; the only thing I like about rich people is their money."

At the intermission of the season's ballet premiere, in response to a society doyenne's description of our Gutenbergs as the Pierpont

Morgan Library's greatest asset, I retorted, "The greatest treasure of the Pierpont Morgan Library is me," to a round of great guffaws.

Quips like this make me the toast of New York, and I am the recipient of the most coveted of invitations. And yet I know they talk about me behind my back, but I don't care. Gossip about my outrageous comments or my tipsy flirting or my increasingly expensive, brightly colored scarves distracts them from rumormongering about the one thing that matters—the color of my skin.

But speaking fearlessly does not yield the intimacy of connection, which is what I seek. In fact, I begin to feel like a circus performer, trotted out for the entertainment of the audience and expected to deliver a heightened act every time. Society wishes to adopt me into their ranks, not as an equal but almost as a pet, like the artists they sponsor and occasionally invite out.

This sensation is unsettling, even though I continue. I numb the discomfort by drinking too much wine. Mama notices, and she assumes the habit of waiting up for me, sometimes even hours after midnight, long after my sisters and Russell have retired.

"What are you doing, Belle?" she asks each time I stumble into the apartment. "I'm worried about you."

I wave her away as I move unsteadily on my feet until I drop onto the sofa. "Nothing. You know I need to do all this socializing for work, right? Parties and operas and theater, even intimate dinners and gatherings with the Morgan family. Isn't this what you wanted, Mama? For me to be rubbing shoulders with the Vanderbilts, the Carnegies, even the Morgans? Well, this is what it takes for me to be Belle da Costa Greene."

She gives me a hard stare before she turns away, and her quiet disapproval sounds louder than a scream. Her inquiries and condemnation continue apace until I can withstand it no longer. On the last weekend in May, I come home with a gift.

"I have a surprise," I say to my mother and siblings as we gather around the kitchen table for a late dinner. "I know how dreadful New York summers can be, so I've rented a two-bedroom lakefront cabin

in the Adirondacks for eight weeks. I'm only sorry that your new job in Florida will prevent you from enjoying it, Russell."

My sisters squeal their delight, and even my mother looks happy. "This is wonderful," Mama says. "But can you get away for that much time?"

"Oh, no," I say. "This is for all of you. I have too much work to do at the library."

Her face clouds over, and I know she's worrying about appearances—a young single woman living alone in New York. But her concerns are vanquished by her joy over the summer escape. The next few weeks are ebullient as my family prepares for their vacation from the unremitting heat and stench of the city. But no one is more delighted than I am that two hundred miles and two months will separate me from Mama's watchful eye.

The Sunday I send them off is the day Russell departs for Florida for his first engineering position; we are sad to see him go, but relieved he secured a position. When I return to the apartment from the train station, I celebrate the silence. I am alone.

Right away, I begin to plan all that I want to do over the next eight weeks. I want a life beyond work and its social obligations. I want the life that Bernard has stirred inside of me. I want something real.

The usual whirl of society events has ceased for the season, as the elite have decamped to their summer mansions and yachts. I take a trip to Princeton to see my old friends Gertrude and Charlotte, and after a fun but staid afternoon of reminiscing, on a whim I decide to contact two acquaintances from my school days at Teachers' College.

Katrina and Evelyn were as close to friends as I permitted myself during those years, but once I left for Princeton, we simply lost touch. Within a week, I receive a return note from Katrina with an audacious reply that sounds just like her. Her letter expresses her delight at my success and an invitation to meet her and Evelyn at a pub in Greenwich Village the following weekend. I haven't spent too much time in that part of the city, fast becoming known as America's bo-

hemia, filled with New Yorkers who reject traditional socialization, preferring informality instead. As I make plans to meet my friends, I can almost hear Mama say, *Belle, inviting these young ladies into your life is like inviting a thief into your home to take your most precious jewels; you know you should have kept your door locked.* But Mama's imagined objections make me all the more determined to go. Haven't I made enough sacrifices on the altar of whiteness?

When I step into the pub on Seventh Street, Katrina and Evelyn are waiting for me. I beam at the sight of petite, red-haired, green-eyed Katrina next to Evelyn, her physical opposite in height and coloring, with black hair and blue eyes. As we order dark beers, I feel almost as out of place as I did at that first Vanderbilt ball. I take a cigarette from Evelyn when she offers, and I wonder if I fit in anywhere.

The pub is deafening with the animated conversations of groups of women alongside bands of men, so we lean in close, our foreheads almost touching. "So tell me about your teaching careers," I say.

My friends glance at each other, then laugh. "Teaching careers?" they sing together.

Katrina begins, "I abandoned that three months into my stint teaching second grade at the local public school. I couldn't tolerate the children, and I wanted to make a bigger difference—a splash, even—in the world." A wide grin takes over her small face, and she says, "I'm now an officer of the Woman Suffrage Party of New York."

"Wow," I say, wondering if she knows Rachel Costelloe.

"And I gave up the schoolchildren for a paintbrush," Evelyn says. She now paints all day, mostly portraits, and sells them at various shows every weekend in Greenwich Village.

I marvel at my friends' audacity in simply walking away from paths that had been laid out for them. "What did your parents think?"

"My father understood, but my mother was furious. She always wanted me to have a position that was proper and fitting." Katrina shrugs. "But I needed to do what was really in here." She presses her hand against her chest.

"It was the same for me," Evelyn says. "I certainly don't earn the money I would have as a teacher, but I'm happy."

"Have your parents come around?" I ask.

"Well," Evelyn says. "It's gotten better since I moved out."

"Me, too," Katrina echoes.

"You don't live at home?" I don't know what I find more shocking—the idea of Katrina as a suffrage leader and Evelyn as a painter or them living on their own.

"No, I live in the Martha Washington Hotel for Women, right around the corner," Katrina says.

"The what?"

"How can you not have heard of it, Belle? It opened not even five years ago, and it's a residential hotel that can house up to five hundred businesswomen. Not only do we have our own rooms and lovely dining areas, but the hotel has its own drugstore, tailor shop, millinery, manicurist, and newspaper stand, all run by women. The entire staff is female." She sighs. "It's heaven."

"I had no idea that such a place existed," I say.

"We don't advertise, but it's known among career women. In fact, the Interurban Woman Suffrage Council, which founded the Woman Suffrage Party of New York, has its headquarters in our building. I think you'd really love it at the Martha Washington, Belle. So many like-minded women."

As she explains her work in the women's movement, I'm reminded of Rachel, of course, which starts me thinking about Bernard, and I order another beer. Katrina's enthusiasm for the movement is as great as Rachel's, and I'm impressed with these formidable women. But even though I've read about the suffrage movement, I've not had the time or the exposure to develop a position.

Katrina continues, "I hope this doesn't embarrass you, but many of the women I live and work with look to you as an example."

"I've heard that before, but I'm not sure why women think of me that way."

"You are one of the most successful career women of our day,

commanding thousands of dollars in the art world with the backing of one of the world's most powerful men. And, I'm guessing, without any pressure to marry and have children."

Her enthusiasm is infectious, and I find myself smiling. Even if she weren't so ebullient, I would be grinning at the idea of her utopian living conditions. Once I returned to New York, it had not occurred to me to reside anywhere but with my family. How free Katrina's life seems.

"Do you live there, too, Evelyn?" I ask.

"No, and I'm sure you've never heard of where I live," Evelyn says. "I have a room at the Trowmart Inn on Hudson. It's brand-new and though not as luxurious as the Martha Washington . . ." She pauses, glancing at Katrina. "It's just what I need and what I can afford."

"They both sound divine," I say, and mean it.

"I'd love for you to come to one of my shows," Evelyn says.

"And one of my rallies," Katrina joins in.

While they want to hear all about my world—especially, as Katrina puts it, "that rascal Morgan and how you manage to circumvent his notoriously philandering overtures"—I cannot stop asking about theirs. Besides living, working, and socializing on their own, they seem to be freethinking and dating often, giving me the impression that they are far more advanced than I am socially and sexually. How rich and full of purpose their lives seem, not to mention full of men of their choosing. And how bold, a description I'd previously associated with myself.

As we walk arm in arm across Washington Square Park and through the arch toward another pub, I think about the differences in our worlds. I act the part of the sophisticate and art expert among the country's wealthiest people, while Katrina risks all to bring the constitutional right to vote to *all* women, and Evelyn models a truly free existence as an artist. I feel simultaneously rudderless and inspired by these old friends.

I vow that we will see each other more frequently. Already they have shown me that life in New York City can be even freer than the

one I've been living. Perhaps I should emulate their boldness, particularly with Bernard? Or perhaps I should use that boldness to do more for equal rights—and not just the woman's right to vote—than simply serving as a secret example of what a colored girl can be? Either way, change is coming for me.

It is past midnight when I return to my apartment that night, but I feel energized and inspired by my friends who are, in their own way, changing the world. But once I settle down inside my bedroom, I savor the silence and then reach for the two letters that I've yet to read from Bernard. These minutes alone with his words—of which there are many, as he's kept his promise and writes daily—have become the best part of my day in the five months since his departure.

My Belle, my dearest, dearest Belle . . .

I pause and smile. Bernard begins every communication this way.

What have you done to me? I cannot sleep. I cannot eat. I cannot even find pleasure in the art that adorns the walls of my home, I Tatti; paintings by Giotto and Veneziano do not compare to you. In all the world, in all this time, there has been no woman who has touched me like you, my Belle . . .

His letter goes on to tell me how much he has fallen for me, even though we've only been together on a few occasions. These proclamations do not seem overwrought or trite because I share his feelings. With each letter he sends me, I fall deeper under his spell.

I write to Bernard as well, but my duties prevent me from doing this daily, so I keep a running journal of sorts and post it to him regularly. After lingering over his letter, I crawl under my covers, pen and paper in hand, and write.

Did you like the miniature portrait of myself I sent to you? I know it's no Giotto but I hope it helps you imagine me in

Greenwich Village last evening at a pub with old school friends, sipping beer and yammering away about the way they're working to shift our society. They challenge me to stretch and to become the best woman possible, to use my unique position for a larger purpose. I want to be that woman for myself, and I want to be that woman for you . . .

I pause, think of something that Bernard wrote me in his last letter, and then I continue.

Our relationship is like no other that I've ever known or expected. It may surprise you that the arrangement that you have with Mary suits me and my situation quite well. I am a modern woman with a career of my own, and you do not have to explain anything to me, my love. I am your Belle . . .

CHAPTER 21

JUNE 2, 1910

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The vibrant stained glass window in Mr. Morgan's study is open a crack, and a warm but refreshing breeze makes its way into the room. For a moment, I feel I can breathe as I sit across from Mr. Morgan with our card game of bezique spread across his desk.

The circulating air helps alleviate the stuffiness—whether it arises from the many layers of fabric, the cigar smoke wafting throughout the room, or the suffocation I feel from Mr. Morgan's mounting neediness.

I do not mind—indeed, I anticipate—the time and attention Mr. Morgan typically requires, particularly when it reflects my increased responsibilities both at the library and in society. But starting in the autumn after Bernard's return to Europe, Mr. Morgan began demanding me at his side in all aspects of his life.

It began with an "invitation" to a family birthday dinner for Jack—a surprise, as I'd never been asked to attend strictly family occasions. Initially, I thought he was simply being kind when he invited me, since I'd assisted with the planning, so I politely declined.

"You're family, Belle, but this isn't a gracious invitation. I'm *asking* you to be there."

I made an appearance because I understood what Mr. Morgan's *asking* meant—for reasons best known to himself, attending his family functions had suddenly become part of my job description. When I arrived, his family was welcoming enough, although their frowns told me my presence was as surprising to them as the invitation had been to me. This was the first of many private Morgan occasions where I didn't belong but attendance was mandatory. I became a fixture at more family birthday dinners, including those for the grandchildren, a small gathering for Louisa's anniversary, and even a harbor cruise for Anne's accomplishments with the Colony Club—and then my presence was demanded at the holidays as well.

This change has mystified me. I've wondered if he's rethinking our relationship, but never have we reverted from the professional to the personal beyond this inclusion. At every event, I've been introduced as his personal librarian, and that's how I've been treated. But what's become abundantly clear is that Mr. Morgan's need for me is growing stronger.

A shaft of blue light filters through the stained glass windows onto his desk, and with it, the breeze turns into an unexpected gust, blowing our cards off the table. I race around the vast study to gather them, and then painstakingly replace them in their original positions. Then I wait for the perfect moment.

As I play my card, I say, "I hear that a Hans Memling illuminated manuscript may be coming to market in the next few months." My tone is casual, as if I hadn't planned this comment for several days.

"You don't say," Mr. Morgan replies without looking up. He studies his cards before he makes his next play. His thoughts are with the game and not my words.

"Yes. I am excited about what it might mean for the reputation of the library to add it to our collection," I comment. Usually a reference to the library's standing makes him take notice, but he continues studying his hand.

I will not relent. "I believe that acquiring it might bring us one step closer to matching or even outdoing the British Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale."

With those words, he looks up from his cards, and I've hooked him. "You do?"

"Yes," I say with a casual nod, "it would make your illuminated manuscript collection more complete than that of either the British Museum or the Bibliothèque Nationale—and those are the only collections that can contend with yours. Not to mention I do not think there are any other illuminated manuscripts by Hans Memling. You would have the only one."

I know the notion of having the only Memling of a particular type appeals to Mr. Morgan. The master of early fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting is famous for his altarpieces, which are of religious scenes, and for his portraits of his patrons. Mr. Morgan treasures the two Memling paintings he already owns. I am telling him the truth; it would be a tremendous coup to have Memling's only illuminated manuscript. The only untruth I utter is that I'm not entirely sold on the claim that the manuscript is indeed a Memling; I think it's more likely to be a Simon Bening. But that attribution wouldn't serve my current purposes.

He picks up his cigar, and puffs. "Hmmm," he mutters. "Does this manuscript have a name?" he asks.

I blush; I'd been hoping I wouldn't have to reveal that just yet. "Colloquially, it's known as the da Costa hours, because it is a book of hours once owned by the Sá family from the royal house of Portugal. Their emblem incorporates the da Costa arms."

He roars at the manuscript's name. "That's rich, Belle. Are you certain the lure of the manuscript isn't the link to your own family name?"

Oh, the layers and secrets behind that little joke. I turn the conversation back to the matter at hand. "Remember what adding Lord Amherst's Caxtons to your preexisting Caxton collection did to the library's prominence?"

He nods.

"We could do that again. Only this time, it would compound the library's preeminence manifold."

"God, I admire your courage," he says with a guffaw. "If only the men who worked for me had half your moxie, we could run roughshod over the entire financial market. If only my son had half your fearlessness. Sometimes I think his wife, Jessie, has more . . .," he adds, then allows the sentence to trail off. He doesn't need to finish it for me to fill in the blank; I've heard his views about Jack and his wife before. I've also witnessed too many exchanges in which Mr. Morgan prods Jack to daring courses of action with the company, only to wallow in his disappointment when Jack chooses the safer road.

"So, what's your plan?" he asks.

Staying casual, I say, "I've heard rumors that the manuscript will be offered at auction in London," and then I add, almost as an afterthought, "in a few months."

"And you are thinking that a trip to London to bid for it at auction is in order?"

"You are partly correct, sir. I would like to be in London at the time of the auction, but I'd like to try the same maneuver with the da Costa hours as I did with the Caxtons—purchase it before the auction starts. I'd also like to visit Italy, not only to make some connections there but to survey several potential acquisitions that aren't formally on the market."

He nods, and I smile until he says, "Think you might find the Caxton *Le Morte D'Arthur* there?"

My smile fades as he continues, "In the four years that you've been here, you've done a wonderful job in building my collection. I only have one complaint." I inhale, knowing what he's going to say. "Where's my damned Caxton, Belle? That is what I really want. You've known that from the beginning."

"I understand, Mr. Morgan, and it is my greatest desire to secure that for you. However, I don't think I should stop building your col-

lection in the meantime." I pause. "I promise you that I will get it, but at the same time, this book will be an important addition, and the best way for me to acquire it is to go to London."

Finally, he says, "That trick with the Caxtons did indeed work." After a moment of thought, he adds, "I will grant your request for a trip to London and Italy—assuming you meet one condition."

"I will continue searching for the Caxton?"

"Do that, but that's not my condition."

It doesn't matter what Mr. Morgan wants me to do. I will do it so that I can finally see Bernard again. I have come to realize that if I'm to see him, I will have to travel to Europe. After nearly a year and a half, there has been no business opportunity for Bernard to travel to the States again. The moment has come for me to find a way to secure my journey abroad.

"Anything you want," I say, and mean it.

Perched on the end of my chair, I wait to hear Mr. Morgan's requirement for my travel. I watch him exhale a stream of cigar smoke so thick he must squint at me through it, until he says, "You must vow to me that the sole reasons for this voyage are the acquisition of this Memling and the possibility of acquiring some little-known Italian Renaissance treasures. That this trip isn't a ruse for a rendezvous with that *Jewish fellow*, Berenson."

It is only when the fog of his cigar smoke clears that I see a glimmer of a smile beneath his mustache. Finally, I breathe. Is he teasing me? Still, I'm not sure, and my pounding heart keeps me on the edge of my seat. My voice is calm and unflustered as I manage to say, "Of course I am taking this trip for the purpose of securing the Memling and other paintings that will burnish your collection's reputation."

Mr. Morgan puts down his cigar and leans forward on his desk. "Belle," his voice is soft and his tone somewhat sad as he begins, "that Jew Bernard Berenson certainly isn't worthy of you, if indeed you have him in your sights."

For a moment, Mr. Morgan sounds paternal, as if he's ringing an alarm to protect me from something. Or maybe it's more possessive-

ness than protection. Is that why he constantly mentions "Jew" when he speaks of Bernard? Does he believe he can manipulate me, deter me from him because of what he suspects is Bernard's ethnicity?

There is no way for Mr. Morgan to know that his warning means nothing to me. He is speaking to Belle da Costa Greene, but Belle Marion Greener is the woman enamored of Bernard. Through our talks, through our letters, Bernard has touched me all the way down to my soul.

"I assure you," I begin. "While I'm in Europe, I will do whatever will benefit the Pierpont Morgan Library, and I will be entirely at your disposal the way I always am."

He peers at me as if he realizes that I still have not answered his question, and then he nods. "Not that I'm concerned, of course. Because no matter who you see or what you do, you are *my* personal librarian. You must always remember that you belong to me."

CHAPTER 22

AUGUST 8-14, 1910
LONDON, ENGLAND

My cheeks ache from smiling as our ship docks in England. I cannot wait until the familiar outline of the city materializes, and as I anticipate the museum and private collections unfolding before me and the animated intellectual conversations bubbling up alongside the artwork, I grow as excited as a child on Christmas morning.

My reunion with Bernard seems interminable in coming, and not only because it has been almost a year and a half since I've laid eyes on him. The ten weeks between Mr. Morgan's permission for my journey and my actual departure passed with aching slowness.

Mr. Morgan had set sail for his usual travel on the *Corsair III*, and without him to occupy all of my time, I filled my lunch and dinner schedule with art professionals, the only people in my set left in the city after the society folks fled. Not even Mama and my sisters were available to distract me because they were ensconced in the bungalow I'd secured for them in Tuckahoe. In between, I attempted to enliven my free time with a mix of friends and acquaintances I'd met through Katrina and Evelyn—writers, artists, political figures, and dancers, including Isadora Duncan, a new friend I admired for her defiance of