

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

social mores and insistence on living life on her own terms—but I still felt like someone was missing. No one could fill the void but Bernard, and I counted the days until my departure.

Now I was here.

"Mademoiselle Greene," Marie, the French maid whom I hired and who had agreed to accompany me on the trip as *chaperone* in lieu of Mama, calls to me.

I turn toward the diminutive, dark-haired girl, who not only assists with dressing me on this trip and at home in the many layers of slips, chemises, corsets, stockings, and garters required every day, but also practices French with me. "Oui, Marie?" I answer, as always trying to communicate exclusively in the language in which I need to gain fluency. After all, how can I evaluate French manuscripts if I must rely on another to translate?

"Voulez-vous inspecter les bagages?"

"Non merci, Marie. Je compte sur toi," I answer. There is no need for me to inspect our trunks because I trust her. How could I not? She'd agreed to the ruse of accompanying me for the entirety of my three-week trip, when, in fact, she would be spending much of the time in Switzerland visiting her own family. Although I have not explicitly told her that I have plans requiring freedom from escorts, she understands.

Taking a final surreptitious drag on my cigarette, something that has now become a habit, I join the other first-class passengers preparing to go ashore. Alongside Marie and a steward ferrying our trunks, I walk down the gangway to the busy harborside. Steam and fog conspire to obscure the people waiting behind the red rope at the base of the gangway. And the cries of hansom cabdrivers drown out the sound of the calls from family and friends.

I search through the faces, scrutinizing the line of people behind the red barricade. There I see a melee of working-class and upper-class people and, like the last time I visited London, an astonishing range of skin shades, even rivaling the variety I see on the streets of New York. But nowhere do I see anyone who resembles Bernard. A

disturbing thought occurs to me. Is it possible that I've forgotten his face after a year and a half?

Just as this internal dialogue pauses, I see him. The fastidiously trimmed brown beard. The tiny circular glasses. The unique, brilliant gray-green gaze. He is beaming at me.

I turn to Marie. "Ah, there is my colleague, Mr. Berenson, who has agreed to take us to our hotel."

"Pourquoi vous ne parlez pas français, mademoiselle?" Marie is surprised to hear me deviate from our French.

In my excitement, I had forgotten, and now I can't be bothered. All I can think about are Bernard's words in his last missive: *My love for you is a journey that I hope will have no ending.*

Leaving Marie and the steward behind, I race to Bernard's side. Although I know it breaks every code of propriety and goes against Mr. Morgan's explicit prohibitions on this trip, I run into his waiting arms, where I am enveloped in his embrace. I know I can indulge in this behavior for a brief moment only—and even then, I can only get away with this because none of my New York compatriots are nearby—so I wiggle out of his hold and step back.

"Thank you for meeting me, Mr. Berenson," I say with a small smile.

"The pleasure is all mine, Miss Greene," he responds, not relinquishing my hand. His voice drops, and I must draw closer to hear. "I have waited for this moment for so long I'd begun to believe it would never come, Belle."

"I feel the same, Bernard," I answer in the same low tone.

"I cannot wait to show you off all over London, and then I hope you will let me introduce you to all my secret places in Italy. Just us two."

"Precisely as we wrote to each other?" I say with hope in my voice.

"Precisely."

"Then you know, from my letters, when we reach Italy and Marie takes her leave, I would like to show you my secret places as well," I whisper.

I receive the reaction I sought. The ever-confident, unflappable Bernard turns a vivid red, and he pulls me closer.

Like silly children, we stand staring at each other, with wide grins. It only ends because behind us, Marie clears her throat. A waiting steward is standing next to our four heavy trunks that must reach their destination.

Soon we find ourselves en route to my suite at Claridge's.

In the days that follow, I embark on an itinerary of Bernard's design. I delight in his guidance—it is my childhood *Venetian Painters* come to life—and emerge brimming with a new clarity about the way the international world of high-end art collecting works: the network of dealers and collectors and curators who dictate the marketplace, decide the popularity and availability of pieces, and influence the prices. Bernard gifts me with a new lens through which I see the art realm and my place in it. I feel a sense of belonging and purpose in my work with Bernard that Katrina and Evelyn feel in theirs. As we delight in art and each other, I think, *If only I could have him at my side always.*

Whether it is from the way our fingers brush as we both reach for the sugar at luncheon, or the manner in which he gently leads me through a door with his hand on my lower back, I long for more of him.

But we do not spend our time exclusively in the company of curators and dealers and experts and collectors. On the third morning, over breakfast in the hotel's restaurant, Bernard says, "I know you have a pre-auction appointment this afternoon, but I've made plans for us to have lunch today."

"I'll look forward to visiting whatever wonderful establishment you've chosen. You know that, outside of today's appointment, my time belongs to you." I pause. "And when we get to Italy, everything else will belong to you, as well."

Bernard is no longer surprised by my forwardness and matches my flirtations. When he leans toward me, I think he's coming closer to

whisper a few suggestive words, but he says, "The special plan isn't a particular restaurant. It's the company we will keep. Mary is joining us."

His words shock me. "Mary? Your wife?" As if there could be another Mary.

"She's en route to Oxford for a work assignment and she wanted to see you," he explains, as if such a meeting is utterly normal.

She wants to see me? Whatever for? It had been one thing to be in Mary's company when my desire for her husband had been only inside my head and heart, but now that our feelings are acknowledged, I feel quite differently. But how can I say no? I am the one about to embark on an affair with *her* husband.

As I inhale deeply, I think about all of the strange pairings and unusual romances I have seen in Greenwich Village with Katrina and Evelyn. I've attended parties where men dress as women; I've met a trio, a man and two women, who consider themselves wed to one another; and even outside of the Village I learned of Boston marriages.

Leaving Bernard in the restaurant, I retreat to my room. I try to distract myself with a missive to Mama, but after every word I write, my thoughts return to the lunch ahead. Finally, after having written just two sentences, I put the stationery down. Not even a conversation in French with Marie can distract me.

I'm relieved when it's time for me to consider my attire; at least this will give me something to focus on. Marie laced me into my violet gown this morning, but I decide that I should wear something more demure. I don't believe I should be bold in my clothes *and* my behavior. I select a new gray gown; it's the most conservative I've brought. Marie sets to work fastening me into its dark folds.

My heart is pounding as I walk down the wide staircase to the hotel restaurant. From the bottom step, I spot Bernard and Mary sitting at a table on the restaurant's periphery. How long have they been there talking? I feel like racing back up the stairs, but before I can act, Bernard sees me and waves.

Both of the Berensons' faces are warm and welcoming as I approach them. Mary stands and opens her arms in greeting to me. Then she offers me a kiss on both cheeks. *How strange this is.*

"It is so good to see you again, Belle," she says.

"You, too," I say, hoping that she doesn't hear the trembling in my voice.

Mary and Bernard chat as we study the menu and place our orders, but I sit stiffly and find it hard to make a meaningful contribution.

Finally, Mary turns to me. "So, you'll be leaving for Italy in a few days?" she asks, as if we were making small talk about the weather.

I nod, because I don't trust myself to speak.

She asks, "Have you ever been before?"

This time I shake my head.

She glances at her husband and smiles. "I'm sure Bernard will show you a wonderful time."

My cheeks flush, and I cannot think of a single appropriate reply. I have sat with the Vanderbilts and attended parties with the Rockefellers and the Carnegies, and I work with the famous J. P. Morgan. Yet I have never felt so out of place in my life.

Although Mary and Bernard continue with their lighthearted exchange—talking of London restaurants and upcoming auctions—their discussion happens without me, except for the occasional shake or nod of the head. I feel like a harlot. It is all I can do to remain at this table. How can I possibly be at ease with the wife of the man with whom I'm in love? The man with whom I've planned a romantic trip *à deux* in Italy.

When the restaurant clock chimes twice, I am glad to have the excuse of my appointment to take my leave. "But you've hardly eaten," Mary says, glancing at my plate.

"It was delicious, but duty calls. Thank you so much for making time for me."

Mary stands when I do and embraces me. "I'm sure we'll meet again. Maybe next time in Italy?"

I am relieved that the lunch is over. But before I reach the doors to the restaurant, I hear Bernard's voice. "Miss Greene, please wait."

I pause and turn. "Yes, Mr. Berenson?"

"I'd like to accompany you to the pre-auction meeting," he says.

I wait for him to reach me before quietly asking, "Are you certain it is acceptable to Mrs. Berenson?"

"She encouraged me to join you, Belle," he says straightforwardly. "She finds you a remarkable and lovely young woman, and she wishes me the greatest happiness with you." It has to be my look of astonishment that makes him continue. "I know this must all seem very peculiar, but our relationship—though founded on respect and a shared passion for our work—is no longer one of romantic love."

His words fill me with relief. "This may sound peculiar to you, Bernard, but I am glad to hear it. Your arrangement with your wife and the sort of relationship you seek with me suits me perfectly, as I've written to you. It just feels a bit strange to be with you in her company."

When we step into the sumptuously decorated lobby of Bonhams' auction house, the medieval expert, a square-jawed, serious fellow by the name of Mr. Taylor, awaits us. I am glad Bernard is standing next to me. I have spent several days witnessing his art acumen and how our London colleagues pander to him; this is my opportunity to show him my professional savvy and prowess.

As we pass through the lobby into a narrow hallway toward the room housing the book of hours manuscript, I am fawned over by the staff. Inside the tiny space, I am surrounded by Bernard, Mr. Taylor, and his assistants. I slide on the white gloves that an assistant holds out for me and begin to examine the manuscript. It is organized like the typical book of hours, with the pages alternating between prayers rendered in gorgeous, rounded Gothic script and exquisite miniature paintings depicting scenes from the different seasons, then thoughtful representations of the rural labors necessary for each passing month. But it is the colors as vibrant as the day they were painted nearly five hundred years ago and the genius brushwork that take my

breath away. Not surprisingly, memories of my father infiltrate my thoughts. *How Papa would adore this masterpiece and marvel at my proximity to it.*

I want this for the Pierpont Morgan Library.

"It is quite close in here," I say, fanning myself. I need to clear the room except for myself, Bernard, and Mr. Taylor. Playing upon the ever-present fear of a lady's fainting is a certain way of achieving my objective.

Mr. Taylor shoos the assistants out from the small chamber, and I return to my task. "Are you certain it's a Memling?" I ask without lifting my eyes.

Mr. Taylor chuckles as if I've made a joke. "If it was a good enough attribution for the esteemed Bernard Quaritch, I should think it is good enough for us."

By referencing Quaritch, one of the most preeminent booksellers of the last century, he hopes to silence me.

"I see the da Costa heraldry here"—I gingerly return to one of the book's first pages—"but as I'm sure you know, that page has several layers of paint, so we cannot say for certain when the coat of arms was added, and therefore we cannot attribute the royal Portuguese lineage to that emblem alone. Do you have additional provenance documentation?"

"Of—of—" Mr. Taylor struggles to get the words out. He seems unused to being challenged. "Of course, Miss Greene. Will you excuse me a moment while I retrieve those papers?"

I nod and busy myself studying a particularly charming miniature image of a man shearing sheep. *The bucolic scenes adorning the prayers are charming*, I think. As soon as I hear the door close behind him, I turn to Bernard. "Guard the door for a minute, will you?"

With a deep frown, he says, "What the devil—"

"Shhh." I tear the white glove on my right hand off and lick my index finger. Then I run it along the edge of one of the glorious painted scenes.

"Belle—" Bernard is horrified.

"If it's a forgery, then the pigment will rub off."

"But you could do dam—" he protests.

Keeping my gaze fixed on my hand, I shush him again.

I hold my index finger up to the light and rub it with my thumb. Examining my fingers, I see they are clean; no paint has rubbed off.

"Good, good," I mutter to myself.

The door swings open, and Mr. Taylor reenters with a hastily assembled sheaf of papers in his hands. "Here we go, Miss Greene." I pretend to glance at the papers as he continues with his apologies. "Please allow me to walk you through the provenance documentation. I apologize that it's not assembled in as orderly a fashion—"

I let him explain, frowning in concentration. At the end, I nod and say, "Would you accept twenty percent over the initial asking price? Right now, before the auction begins?"

Mr. Taylor gasps, and I hear a sharp intake of breath from Bernard.

The Bonhams' medieval expert stutters, "M-Miss Greene. That's not really done here. You might not realize that, being an American and all."

I stare at the man. "Really, Mr. Taylor? That isn't the sort of thing that's *done* in England? Then why was I able to preemptively negotiate Lord Amherst's Caxtons away from a London auction a year and a half ago?"

His eyes widen. "That was you?"

"That was me," I answer.

"I'd heard the rumors—we all did—but I didn't know they were true. Still, I am sorry, Miss Greene. I simply cannot breach protocol and sell it to you before the auction."

I stroll around the cramped room, circling him as if he were my prey, which, in a manner of speaking, he is. "Hmmm, I wonder how much the manuscript will fetch at auction when bidders hear gossip that it is not a Memling," I finally say.

"What do you mean? You would spread scurrilous rumors to acquire this manuscript?"

His indignation appears overdone, and in actuality, I'd anticipated

this reaction. It is my turn to express shock and dismay. I force a suitable expression upon my face. "How dare you question my integrity! I would never spread *scurrilous* rumors. I would be merely sharing the truth with my fellow bidders. This book of hours is no Memling."

"What the—" His eyes narrow, and I see that he appreciates how I've boxed him in. Yet he hasn't settled on his reaction.

"The da Costa manuscript—a provenance I would not dispute, by the way—was not painted by Hans Memling or his school in the fifteenth century. It wasn't even painted by Gerard David in the early sixteenth century. It was painted by the Flemish illustrator Simon Bening in the mid-sixteenth century. And I have documentation to substantiate that claim." I slide out the papers linking the manuscript to Bening from my bag.

Mr. Taylor responds with unintelligible sputtering.

"It doesn't bother me a bit that Bening painted the book of hours. In fact, from my perspective and that of Mr. Morgan, it's a benefit. We quite admire Bening; he was the last great Flemish illuminator, after all, and highly regarded in his day. But I cannot say the other bidders will be as pleased. Most of the bidders will be there to secure a Memling for their collection. Or a David at the very least." I pause. "I imagine it would lower the price considerably when they learn that the da Costa book of hours is actually a Bening."

"What do you want from me, Miss Greene?" Mr. Taylor has recovered, and his voice is positively glacial. All his earlier solicitousness has been replaced by cold fury.

I keep my voice bright, as if we're chatting about a particularly favorable spot of weather. "I thought I'd been perfectly clear, Mr. Taylor. Shall I repeat myself? I'd like to purchase the da Costa book of hours today for the Pierpont Morgan Library, and I am willing to pay you twenty percent over the starting auction price."

I feel power surge through me. How many women have the opportunity to exercise their intellectual prowess and financial dominance—even if it derives from another—over a man? And the bigger question, one never far from my thoughts, is how many col-

ored women have this chance? The sensation is exhilarating for so many reasons. And addictive.

We agree to terms, and Mr. Taylor excuses himself from the room to obtain the paperwork. Once we are alone, Bernard stares at me, shaking his head. "By God, that was masterful. I've never seen a negotiation handled with such murderous skill. And bloody bold," he says with a low whistle.

"If I don't take bold measures, then I won't get bold results. I'll be duped into buying a forgery, or I'll lose a valuable item to a competing bidder I've underestimated. My boldness is the reason the Pierpont Morgan Library collection is on its way to becoming unparalleled," I say without a shred of humility.

He pulls me toward the closed door, blocking the only means of ingress to or egress from the tiny chamber. Leaning me against it, he kisses me long and hard. By the time I break away, we are both breathless.

"I wish we were already in Italy," he says.

My heart is pounding, and my desire matches Bernard's. As longing surges through me, I say, "So do I."

Staring into my eyes, he whispers, "You are an extraordinary creature."

CHAPTER 23

AUGUST 18, 1910
VERONA, ITALY

We chance holding hands as we stroll down the narrow cobblestone streets of Verona. The touch of his finger on my bare palm sends shivers through me, and I thrill not only at the risk we are taking but at what the evening promises.

Bernard and I haven't dared to exhibit our feelings so openly until now. It is too dangerous. It is impossible for a man and a woman to travel together alone without raising eyebrows. The proximity of my maid Marie and the presence of colleagues delayed our intimacy while we toured the English capital, and we could not let down our guard even on the Orient Express, which carried us into Italy.

But now that we are in Verona, two hundred miles north of Florence, we can relax our vigilance. We have constructed our itinerary exclusively on these tiny out-of-the-way Italian towns so we can simply be two anonymous lovers.

I look over my shoulder and smile at Bernard. He appears lit from within in the glorious golden light of late summer. In this diffused sun, which warms but never sears in the late afternoon, its rays enlivening but never blinding, we enjoy the streets of Verona.

When we first arrived at the train station earlier in the day, Bernard suggested a carriage, saying the distance to our appointment was too far for the delicate heels of my shoes. But I insisted we walk, and I am pleased that I did. How else could I see the life of this bustling, crumbling, exquisite town firsthand? How could I inhale the pungent smell of its cheeses from the market outside the ancient, diamond-shaped city center—the Piazza delle Erbe—as well as the heady scent of incense wafting out from the numerous stone Catholic churches we pass? Without walking among the townspeople, how would I know that the locals' skin tone matches my own, supporting my claims of southern European heritage?

How else would I experience the sensation of returning home to a place I have never visited, with a man I feel I've known my whole life?

"Belle," Bernard says, pointing to a gap between two buildings, "cast your eye on the hills above the river Adige."

"By God," I exclaim as I glance across the town, which hugs the banks of the sinuous river to the nearby hills. "It's the background that Veronese and Antonello da Messina used in their paintings."

Art springs alive in the Italian town and hills. I linger at the landscape of undulating green and gold juxtaposed against ancient buildings, marveling at a sight that countless Renaissance artists strove to capture, and allow myself to be engulfed by the shimmering color. *Imagine, I think, when I was a young girl, entranced by medieval and Renaissance artwork alongside Papa, if I had known that one day I'd stand before the hills that inspired my beloved masterpieces. With the man who wrote the definitive treatise on the art so treasured by me and Papa.*

Bernard's finger trails down my arm, and I shiver. Tenderly, he says, "I hate to take you away from this sight, my love, but I must. Our appointment at the basilica awaits."

We rejoin our fingers as naturally as if we were an old couple. Strolling the remaining four blocks, we pass redbrick medieval structures interspersed by marble Renaissance buildings, set against a backdrop of crenellated castle walls. We walk in companionable silence toward

the Romanesque church that is our destination: the Basilica of San Zeno Maggiore.

Passing through the bronze doors, we step into the nave and are bathed with the multicolored light that streams through the church's thirteenth-century rose window. Our heels clatter in the empty cavernous space. When we reach the altar, Bernard gestures to the famous Mantegna triptych hanging above it.

The first time I saw the triptych by Andrea Mantegna was in the pages of Bernard's book. Although I reveled in that reproduction, it does no justice to the actual San Zeno altarpiece, with its beatific, realistically plaintive Madonna holding the Christ child on her lap, encircled by singing cherubs and flanked by saints.

"When we gaze at this painting, Belle, we are staring across time, literally watching the evolution of Renaissance artists' understanding of pictorial space. Mantegna created perspective; he inspired Leonardo." He points to a few architectural devices and figures that diminish in size in the painting's background. "On one level, you still have the flat medieval two-dimensional depiction of certain key figures. Yet he created the illusion of a three-dimensional space. The beauty of these Italian churches inspired me to convert to Roman Catholicism."

There is such joy in his voice when he glances over at me. "Oh, are you crying, my darling Belle? You are the most enchanting creature." He pulls an embroidered handkerchief from his pocket and dabs at my eyes. "The same thing happened to me when I first stood before this masterpiece. It was at that moment—years ago, when I was still a young man living hand to mouth in Florence—that I loved this painting and the Renaissance oeuvre in a way that no one had in a long time. So many artists and their work had been forgotten. I also realized that by reintroducing this obscure Renaissance artist along with other talented painters and sculptors to the modern world, I might find a lofty place among wealthy art patrons and secure a position for myself in a stratum to which I had not been born. Much as

artisans of the Renaissance had done. And much as you yourself have done. We are creatures of the Renaissance, you and I."

He takes both of my hands into his. "I believe this is one of the reasons you and I feel about each other the way we do. We are alike in many ways, some of which we don't mention." Pulling me even closer to him, he whispers, "I feel like we are having a *conversazione sacra* right now, just like the saints in the San Zeno altarpiece; what is this moment but a sacred conversation?"

The sound of someone clearing his throat interrupts us. It is the basilica's priest. He and Bernard exchange friendly greetings in Italian, and the priest gestures for us to follow him up the stairs to the altar. There, Mantegna's brushstrokes become visible, and I can envision the artist standing back to admire his work in this cacophonous space, alight with the inspiration that had been necessary to create the masterpiece.

We leave the basilica and take a carriage to our hotel. The day has been glorious but long, and we have special dinner plans. Inside the blessed coolness of the carriage, I rest my head on Bernard's shoulder, gazing at the Veronese sights that we pass. It is a moment hewn from the Renaissance itself.

The carriage comes to a rough halt in front of our hotel, where our trunks were sent earlier from the train station. Bernard steps out of the carriage first so he can help me, but as I attempt to slide across the carriage bench, something holds me in place. I look down and see that the hem of my navy-blue traveling gown is caught on a bench nail head. As I reach down to untangle it, I hear voices outside the carriage.

"Bernard! Bernard Berenson, is that you?" a heavily accented voice calls out in English. Then in French. "Monsieur Berenson?"

My head is still down as I hear Bernard reply, "Ah." His voice might sound hearty to the innocent passerby but I hear his alarm. "Imagine the odds of meeting you here in Verona, Monsieur Seligmann!" He shouts the name for my benefit.

Jacques Seligmann. No, no, no. How could we have the misfortune of running into the art dealer who knows us both so well?

As Bernard keeps Mr. Seligmann's attention, I direct the driver away from the hotel. While the carriage circles around Verona, I try to decide what to do. Bernard and I cannot be seen together in this way. The damage to my reputation, and to a lesser extent his, is incalculable.

After an hour of rambling through the Veronese streets, I ask the driver to return to the hotel. Once there, I am scared to step inside. Relief washes over me when I see Bernard rushing in my direction.

"How did you get him to leave?" I am sure Mr. Seligmann would have invited Bernard to join him and his entourage for dinner.

"I promised to visit him in his Paris gallery on my next trip to France. And consult him on a few pieces."

"I cannot believe that Jacques Seligmann, of all people, should encounter us here."

He nods. "I know, my beautiful Belle. But now we are alone again, and the night is ours. We will just dine here, at the hotel, so that we take no more chances."

I nod in agreement; all that matters is that we are finally alone. By the time we make our way upstairs, there is little room for patience. Our desire has been building for too long, hundreds of days that felt like thousands of nights, made more intense by our stay in London, where every day of forbearance felt interminable.

Bernard's lips are on mine before the door closes behind us, and to my surprise, his kiss is gentle, even soft, as if we now have those thousand nights back to explore each other. Then, as if he has spent all his gentleness on that one kiss, he sweeps me up into his arms and carries me through the sitting room and into the darkened bedroom, lit only by the gas lamp left on by the hotel staff. He lays me on the bed, pressing his body into mine, his desire apparent.

After a kiss deeper and longer than I think possible, his tongue begins a new journey, slipping to the soft space behind my ear before

tracing a long line to the base of my neck. I can barely breathe as his fingers work deftly to undo the many buttons on my dress and then unlace my corset, all the while moving his lips and tongue along my skin. Suddenly, he lifts off my chemise, and I lie bare before him. He removes his glasses, then gazes at me. In a voice thick with emotion, he says, "You are so beautiful, my Belle."

I answer by pulling his lips to mine and placing his hands on my body. His fingers travel over me, caressing my breasts, my navel, and beyond. I shiver at his touch, and I begin an exploration of my own as I help him undress. When he is bare before me, I realize that a marble sculpture of a naked man, of which I've seen many, cannot capture the tactile allure of a real man. I touch him as he had touched me, until we are both out of breath.

His eyes glassy with longing, he hovers above me, hesitating. "Are you certain, Belle?"

"Please," I whisper into his ear. "I have waited too long."

As I'd dreamed about many nights over the past year, our bodies meld, each of us surrendering to the movement and emotion until our voices rise and drown out all other sound and thought. Then he utters something, "моя любовь," before collapsing on top of me. Moments later he rolls to the side, bringing me with him and wrapping me in his arms.

We breathe heavily for several minutes before Bernard kisses me and then whispers, "Belle?"

He doesn't need to finish his question in order for me to understand what he is asking. "Yes, Bernard. You are my first."

With those words, he holds me tighter, his arms a protective cocoon from the world, and I want to rest here forever.

"I didn't know," he says, with a tinge of guilt in his tone. "I didn't even suspect."

His words make my heart hammer harder against my chest as names roll through my mind. The names of the beautiful women that he's rumored to have bedded in the past, whispers I'd heard from

society gossips during the Berensons' New York visit. How can I possibly measure up to a woman like Aline de Rothschild, also known as Lady Sassoon? How can I measure up to any of them?

He grows so quiet that I have to ask, "Did I disappoint you?"

His words come quickly. "No, my love." He kisses my forehead. "You could never do that. I just didn't know." He pulls me closer and rests my head against his chest. "You seemed a bit more—" He trails off.

Bernard doesn't need to finish. I understand. In order to take attention away from any questions about my ethnicity, I'd hidden behind my flirtatious behavior. Yet I hadn't fully considered the message that my coquettishness was sending; I'd conveyed a worldliness that was the opposite of my actual experience.

Our legs are tangled, and my thoughts are not quiet. "Bernard?" I ask.

He pulls me even closer. "It was beautiful, my love," he says, believing I seek more reassurance.

A shadow from the gas lamp's flames covers half of his face, and I ask, "It was wonderful for me, too. But—" I hesitate.

"What is it?" He strokes my hair.

"When we were making love, you said something that wasn't English. What did you say?" What I'm really asking isn't the meaning of his words but the reason he used another language in that vulnerable moment.

He presses his finger against my lips. "This is what I said." He kisses me again with even more passion than before, leaving me breathless. "That's all you need to know."

I curl into his embrace, and soon his soft snores fill the air. The gas lamp's shadows dance against the wall as I think on Bernard's words: *That's all you need to know*. I lie awake, satiated and unsettled at the same time. What language had Bernard spoken in the heat of the moment? And why wouldn't he answer my question?

These questions linger until the flame in the lamp burns out and the bedroom turns pitch-black. Who is Bernard, really? The words

he'd spoken tonight sounded like Russian. Perhaps the label Mr. Morgan spat out is the truth. Maybe Bernard is a Russian Jewish immigrant and Bernard Berenson isn't even the name to which he'd been born but a name he assumed as he fashioned a place for himself in a world to which he didn't belong. Much like Belle da Costa Greene.

What a notion, I think with amusement. With a smile on my lips, I drift off into a contented sleep in the arms of Bernard Berenson, or whoever he is.

CHAPTER 24

SEPTEMBER 23, 1910
ORVIETO, ITALY

The early-morning light streams through the open balcony doors onto the desk where I have been writing for the last hour. The light has transformed from the gray-blue of dawn to the brilliant golden sunshine of mid-morning.

"Won't you come back to bed?"

Amid the tangle of white linen sheets and the matelassé duvet lies Bernard. His eyes look naked without his glasses, and they're heavy with sleep. And desire.

"I wish I could, my love. But I must post this letter to Mr. Morgan this morning." I tease, "You've kept me so busy over these last few weeks—by day with art and by night with your affections—I've hardly had a spare minute to write him."

Bernard groans. "Surely he can wait another day." When he holds out his arms to me, I am filled with longing and yearning, buoyed by memories of last night and the many nights before that. But none of those evenings are as memorable as our first night together—my first time ever—in Verona a month ago.

"Belle?" Bernard gently calls me again.

I am tempted. More than the quaint towns, the glorious land-

scapes, and the forgotten masterworks of Italy, I have enjoyed my nights with Bernard. Not to mention the occasional morning.

But if I don't finalize this long missive and post it before noon today—a Friday—I will add three days to its delivery time because of the weekend. Mr. Morgan hasn't received a report from me for over a week. Very soon, he will begin to wonder and maybe even worry. He could telegraph one of his representatives and set him on my trail.

Then Bernard says, "You know, I don't believe you've ever written me a letter half as long as that tome you're scribing to Mr. Morgan. And you get to see him almost constantly."

This has been a refrain on our travels. Why did I not write Bernard with the same regularity he wrote me, nearly daily?

"Well, he is my employer, and he does demand a regular accounting of my time when I am on a trip for him."

Bernard is quiet for a long moment. "I sense that you are keeping secrets from me, Belle. There is a certain reticence about you, a mystery I cannot solve even though secrecy is a language I speak. In some ways, it may well be the one in which I'm most fluent, and I suspect the same is true of you. And yet, I can't decipher you."

Why would a letter to Mr. Morgan bring Bernard to this conclusion, that I am hiding something from him? Or is he using this as an excuse to ask about gossip he's heard?

"How can you say that, Bernard?" I decide this is the best, and only, response.

No matter how close I feel to Bernard, how connected to him intellectually and emotionally, I will never divulge my secret.

I add, "With others, I always feel I am in the process of reassembling the sundry parts of myself to present the most pleasing whole, but with you, I am simply myself, complete and authentic. So you can imagine how your accusation makes me feel."

"It is j-just—" He stumbles over his words, a rarity. "You are uncommonly close to Mr. Morgan."

He sounds jealous, but perhaps he's kidding or simply backing

away from his somewhat offensive assertion. Either way, I decide on a new approach. I stand, and as I allow my lilac silk dressing gown to pool around my feet, our eyes lock.

Leaning over him, I purr, "Are you envious of Pierpont?" I press my lips against his, but he doesn't kiss me back.

When I lean away, he asks, "Is that what you call him when you're alone?"

There is not a hint of humor in this display of possessiveness. It is so unlike the controlled Bernard he exhibits in public, unlike even the more open, but still restrained, Bernard he shares with me in the privacy of the bedchamber. Oh, how alike we are.

"Of course. When it's just us two, it's Pierpont and Belle." I laugh, trying to defuse his jealousy with a bit of the truth. Mr. Morgan does indeed call me Belle, but I would not dare call him anything.

In some ways, Bernard's envy is a relief. A jealous Bernard I can handle. A suspicious Bernard, I cannot. And recently, he's given me cause to be wary. During two separate intimate moments, he made troubling observations—*your hair is so different in the morning* and *your skin gets so dark in this Italian sun*—comments that sounded more like prompts for disclosure than innocent reflections.

Each time I'd been able to deflect his comment with a little laugh and a kiss, but I suspect he isn't finished. Consequently, at the moment I'm relieved to be facing jealousy rather than an inquisition.

"Don't toy with me, Belle," Bernard says, bringing my thoughts to the present. I realize that he's deadly serious. He cannot be teased out of this mood. His feelings are too intense and raw to withstand such joviality.

"I feel about you like I've felt about no one else," he says, "and I need to know what he means to you."

I sit down on the bed and run my finger along his cheek. "Mr. Morgan is my employer only, Bernard, a man to whom I'm indebted, as he has entrusted me with great wealth and power. He has my loyalty." I kiss him long and hard, which he returns. I break away only

to tell him, "He doesn't have my heart. You must know that belongs to only you."

The edges of his lips curve into a smile, and when he kisses me back, I realize there will be no letter for Mr. Morgan today. I am lost. To Italy. To Bernard.

CHAPTER 25

SEPTEMBER 29–OCTOBER 1, 1910
VENICE, ITALY

At first, it is just my breasts, achingly tender to Bernard's touch. Then, two days later, it is abdominal pain coupled with an overwhelming wave of fatigue, just hours after awakening. I assume I've contracted an illness or eaten spoiled food, but then I try to remember the last time I had my menstrual cycle, which is usually very regular. It was over two months ago, before my arrival in Europe. I push the terrifying possibility out of my mind until I confront soft-boiled eggs at breakfast, excuse myself, and rush to the bathroom.

I am pregnant.

For a day, I keep the revelation to myself. What should I do? By the next morning, I realize I cannot answer that question. Not before I address all the other important questions first, most importantly whether there is any possibility of a life in which Bernard and I could have this baby.

I would need to give up my career; Mr. Morgan would never keep me on once he found out I am pregnant. I would have to leave my mother and siblings and New York City. Perhaps Europe's more flexible moral code and pockets of bohemian societies would be kind and

welcome us. But I would have to anticipate society's and Bernard's reaction if the child did not share my lighter coloring.

If I chose to keep this baby, I would have to confess *all* to Bernard. He would need to know that I am a colored woman and that my real name is Belle Marion Greener. And I would need him in my life; society is unkind to unmarried mothers, whether they are white, colored, or black. While I know he loves me, does he love me enough to hear this? Can he love me through this?

When I am alone in the suite, I stand before the mirror and run my fingers around the tiny mound of my belly. I imagine my midriff swollen and full, with Bernard's arms around my shoulders. And then I envision us later, with a baby boy in my arms. A boy who has Bernard's coloring and my tenacity. A boy who is charming like his father, with ambition like his mother, and who has a love of the arts like us both.

The longer I turn my situation round and round in my mind, the clearer it becomes that Bernard's involvement is necessary to keep the child. I just hope that everything Bernard has said about his love for me is the truth.

The next morning, while we lie tangled in our sheets, I whisper, "Bernard, there's something I have to tell you."

He pulls me closer. "You can tell me anything, Belle. In fact, I wish you'd tell me everything," he whispers back with emphasis.

Burying my face in his shoulder, I say, "I think I'm pregnant."

His body becomes rigid, and he recoils to the opposite side of the bed. "This cannot be happening, Belle." His eyes are on the ceiling. "We cannot have a child."

I pull myself up and face him. "Well, we are. I am sure of it."

"I assumed you were handling it."

For a moment, I wonder what he's talking about, and then I realize he means some sort of contraceptive. That remark shocks me; how would I know about that? I was raised in a strict family that never

would have contemplated premarital relations, and it isn't as if I have close girlfriends in whom I can confide. "No," I say. "I assumed you were. You are the experienced one in our relationship, after all."

In an icy voice, he says, "I told you I didn't want any children."

"You told me you never wanted to have children with Mary. You never said you were opposed to children altogether."

How can he take away this dream so quickly and heartlessly, without any heed for my feelings? I cling to my anger and disappointment, manifesting a coldness to match his. I know if I don't, I will dissolve into tears, and I cannot allow that.

When he stays silent, I continue, "But that is of no import, because I didn't plan this, Bernard. You must know that. I have my career to think about, among other things."

He abruptly sits up. "Surely *you* must understand that our situation will not allow for a child. Among other things, I am married, for God's sake, and Mary is my business partner on top of that. You're going to have to do something about your condition."

Me? Do something about *my* condition? He is every bit as responsible for this condition as I am.

I race to the bathroom. Sobbing, I lock myself in. I have told myself repeatedly that I do not want and could never have a chance at motherhood. Now that I'm pregnant, however, I feel a longing for a child.

Again, I try to calculate all the variables in this overwhelming equation. How can I make this happen on my own? Living in New York and continuing to work for Mr. Morgan is not an option. Even if my baby were fair skinned and I were able to preserve my identity as a white woman, the stigma of being an unwed mother would exclude me from the art and library world and bring shame upon my family. The downward social and financial spiral caused by my pregnancy and the consequent change in our circumstances could unmoor my mother and siblings from their white existence.

Could I return to Washington, DC, and live among my Fleet relatives in a community where my baby's complexion wouldn't mat-

ter? The dishonor of being an unmarried mother exists there as well. But even if it didn't, I have listened closely to my mother. Given the stranglehold that segregation and the white supremacists have over the South, I could not subject myself and my child to a life of suppression that is getting progressively worse.

The truth is, there is no place for me to go. As an unmarried colored woman, I would never be hired as a librarian or an art expert anywhere in America, and without Mr. Morgan's recommendation—which he would *never* provide if he found out I was pregnant by Bernard or anyone else—no one would hire me in Europe. With a child, I have no place and no one. Only Bernard's acceptance and support could have changed that, and he hasn't even bothered to come to the bathroom door to check on me.

I slide to the floor, bereft at Bernard's retreat. I grab a towel and scream into it, pummeling the cold hard tile of the bathroom floor with my free hand. What is so wrong with *my* blood that I'm not worthy of bringing a baby into this unfair world?

All I can think about are the words spoken to me more than two years ago, words I should have heeded. *You don't have the luxury of making mistakes, Miss Greene.*

CHAPTER 26

OCTOBER 12, 1910
LONDON, ENGLAND

I am torn in two by the pain. The agony of its slicing, stabbing urgency drives me mad, until I can't think and feel and be anything but the pain. The wave subsides, and I'm relieved to learn that it hasn't wholly subsumed me. In the void left in its wake, fragments of memories—or dreams, perhaps—enter my consciousness. Gazing at gilt-haloed Madonnas and saints, red-tiled roofs, and glorious sun. Laughing as we dodged friends of Mr. Morgan's in Ravenna by slipping out the back door of a trattoria. Watching sheets of rain cascading on narrow Venetian streets as the great city square before St. Peter's becomes submerged in a rising tide of water. Listening to the rhythm of Baudelaire being read aloud as I drift off to sleep underneath crisp white bedsheets in an ornate Italian bed. Strolling hand in hand in the sun-dappled light of Murano island near Venice, where men blow glass of vivid blue, red, and gold into a dizzying array of shapes, as if by magic.

What is dream, and what is real?

I hear voices, and I strain to open my eyes. A blond woman in a white dress wearing a white hat like a nun's wimple stands next to a

man in a thin white cotton coat over a standard-looking gray worsted wool suit. I narrow my eyes, but not too much. Every movement brings pain. But I wonder, *Who are these two? Where am I?*

"Miss Greene, can you hear me?" the man asks in a British accent; there is nothing Italian about this pale, thin creature. He reaches for an object that dangles around his neck. I know the name for this medical device, but the word stays lodged in the recesses of my brain, refusing to reach my lips. Ah yes, it's a stethoscope. The man must be a doctor. Am I in a hospital? Why?

I part my lips, try to speak, but all I hear is an animalistic grunt. Was that me? I wish I could search the room for more signs to guide me, but I can't even lift my head from the pillow. Still, I know I must try to make myself heard again; I must make this doctor and nurse understand that the pain has not driven away my consciousness completely. Willing my vocal cords to make an intelligible sound, I try again. But all I hear is that guttural noise. Could that really be coming from me?

I strain, attempt to move my head off the pillow, but then the world fades to black.

When I awaken, it takes only moments this time to determine where I am. And as I try to move, every limb in my body feels impossibly heavy. I try to lift my right leg, then my left, to no avail. My hands and arms are leaden; only my fingers gain any distance off the surface of the bed. But I am grateful for one thing—the pain has subsided.

"Miss Greene, it is good to see your eyes so clear and lucid this morning."

The voice comes from my right. When I turn my head, I realize it is the same nurse as before. I try to speak before the darkness comes again, but my throat and mouth are bone-dry. Finally, I'm able to croak out, "Water, please," in a voice that doesn't sound anything like my own.

"Certainly." The nurse, a model of efficiency, reaches for the glass of water sitting on the table next to me and brings it to my lips.

As I sip from the glass, I glance around the sterile hospital room, watching as the nurse stands and rings a bell. She then adds, "You had us concerned. You've been suffering from an extraordinarily high fever for two days now."

Two days? I've been in this bed, largely unconscious, for two days? What am I doing here in England? The last clear memory I have is boarding the train from Venice with Bernard's friend, Mrs. Ethel Harrison, heading for London.

Ethel Harrison. Bernard. Venice. London.

Memories flood me and fill in the blanks. I know why I am here. The recollections cause a heaving, racking sob to emanate from my throat, and a different sort of agony descends upon me. Suddenly, I'm sobbing. My tears feel hot upon my cheeks, and I cry until I cannot catch my breath.

"There, there, Miss Greene." The nurse lays a consoling hand over mine. "There is no need for you to be concerned. You're through the worst of the infection. Your fever broke not two hours ago. You'll be right as rain in no time, once you get your strength back."

How can she say that? Would I ever be "right as rain" again? After what I'd just done? After what Bernard encouraged me to do, what I agreed to?

When my cries don't stop, the nurse offers, "Should I fetch your friend for you? She's just down the hallway speaking to your doctor."

I have to pause for a moment, to recall who she's talking about. Then I nod, realizing she must mean Ethel, who is really Bernard's friend first. But after all she's done for me these past few days—here in the hospital and the travel from Italy to England before that—I suppose she's proven herself to be my loyal friend, too. My eyes feel swollen and sore, and I allow myself to rest. Just when I close my eyes, I hear the door creak and the clatter of heels—definitely not the soft pad of nurse's shoes—and my eyelids flutter open. Over me, I see Ethel's mournful brown irises staring down.

"Oh, Belle," she breathes, sounding relieved, "it's so good to see

your eyes open and a pinch of color back in your cheeks. We have been worried sick."

"We?" I do not remember anyone accompanying us to London from Venice, but that doesn't mean we didn't have another companion. My memory is operating in fits and starts.

"Bernard and I." She lowers her voice. "We are the only two who know—" She struggles for the right euphemism. "Know about your procedure, of course."

I blink at those words. "Is Bernard here?" I want more than anything in the world for him to hold my hand and tell me everything will be all right.

But will it be all right? The stain of my actions—our actions—lies heavy upon me, and I think about how it would feel to meet his eyes, knowing what we've done and wondering whether I would have agreed if my real identity had left me another choice. But regardless, he *should* be here, especially after the illness that's befallen me on the heels of the "procedure."

"No." She hesitates and glances at the floor. "He's still in Paris. He hasn't been able to make it to London." She looks up, and there is a bit more cheer in her tone when she adds, "But I've been keeping him updated by cable, and he sends his love."

I sense that Ethel, a kindly woman with a long history of friendship and loyalty to Bernard and Mary, has made up this latter mention of Bernard's affection.

Hasn't been able to make it to London or didn't want to come? If Bernard truly feels the depth of emotion for me he professed in all of his letters and in Italy, then nothing and no one could have stopped him from boarding the next ship to London to see me. Particularly since he is both the cause of my condition and the impetus for the procedure. His absence speaks volumes to me. It seems the relationship to which I felt inextricably intertwined has become unraveled. Or perhaps it was never the relationship I believed it to be.

I will have to proceed on my own. "Is everything—" I fumble for the correct word. "Taken care of?"

Ethel asks, "You mean your condition?"

I nod. No one, it seems, can bring themselves to say the word "abortion." Not even me.

"Yes." She nods. "Your condition was addressed by the procedure. They think the infection that followed might have been prompted by the 'liver pill' you took in Venice." She shakes her head. "Which didn't work."

The words "liver pill" bring a rush of fresh memories. Now I recall the terrible torrent of events that began when Bernard and I first arrived in Venice nearly two weeks ago. Once I told Bernard about the pregnancy and the options appeared narrow, he summoned the loyal Ethel, and as I sat, a specimen between them, my status was quietly discussed with a disturbing amount of expertise on both Bernard's and Ethel's parts. I agreed to the initial step, and somehow Ethel procured the abortifacient "liver pill" from a sympathetic Italian physician. While retching ensued, my "condition" remained.

The morning after I took the unsuccessful "liver pill," Bernard mentioned "the next step," a euphemism that sent sickening chills through me. At first I refused to discuss the details of what this "step" would entail; from the whispered conversations I'd overheard over the years, it seemed far more barbaric than swallowing a simple pill. Only when my silence yielded firm reminders from Bernard about what we'd agreed to—reminders that demonstrated to me his unwavering commitment to end the pregnancy—did I relent. It was then when he shared that I must travel to a special clinic in London where my "condition"—never my baby—could be permanently addressed and that Ethel, not Bernard, would accompany me on this journey. Bernard told me for the first time that he needed to be in Paris for business. *Coward*, I thought but did not say aloud.

"Belle?" Ethel interrupts my terrible recollections. "Did you hear what I said about the infection?"

"Yes," I hasten to answer, even though I hadn't been listening, "the infection was caused by the 'liver pill.'" I pause, then ask the question

that I must have answered. Even if I loathe the response. "Will Bernard be coming to London from Paris?"

Ethel hesitates. Then she draws her chair closer to my bed, and her hands form a prayer-like triangle. "Belle, I am so terribly sorry, but I just received a telegram. Bernard sends his regards, but he will not be able to come to London after all."

CHAPTER 27

OCTOBER 26, 1910
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Belle, Belle, don't leave us!" Ellen Terry cries out, gesturing for me to rejoin the group of old New York friends like Ethel and P. G. Grant and new acquaintances like Ellen, a legendary English actress with whom I'd been sharing a few glasses of champagne. But I wave her away, laughing.

"I need a breath of fresh air." The bar is crowded tonight in the first-class lounge, one of the centerpieces of the *Oceanic*. Launched in 1899, the White Star Line ocean liner is sumptuous in every detail, from the frescoed gilt dome that soars over the dining room to the masterful wood paneling and brass finishes in the staterooms—and the first-class lounge is no exception. Mr. Morgan would approve; after all, through his holding company, the International Mercantile Marine Company, he is one of the owners of the White Star Line.

"But *you* are the breath of fresh air, darling," Ellen retorts. Ellen had been standing next to me when we boarded. Soon she was introducing me to her friends and arranging for us all to meet up at the bar. After two glasses of champagne, she declared that we two were the only somewhat avant-garde souls on board and that we *must* be

inseparable for the duration of this voyage. Actresses certainly make friends easily.

Lifting the flute of champagne to which I've been holding tightly, I toast the group from afar. "I'll see you at dinner!"

I wander among the other passengers strolling on the deck. Spotting an empty corner at the railing, I claim it for my own, watching as the English shore recedes into the far distance and becomes an indistinct smudge against the darkening sky and sea. How I wish my last days with Bernard and the past weeks in London could fade from view so smoothly. All I want is to return to my old self.

Bernard. *Even the thought of his name wounds me afresh.* For weeks, as I recovered in London, we scribbled bittersweet, mournful letters to each other of what might have been. There were some letters hopeful for the future, attached to gifts of Fortuny nightgowns and Parisian perfumes. In some ways, these were the most painful. Each missive contained promises that soon he would cross the English Channel to see me.

But he never came. By the time I boarded the *Oceanic*, I was angry. I told him as much in my parting missive:

*How could you be only hours from me and yet stay away,
offering excuse after excuse? How could the man I loved—the
man to whom I'd given myself—behave in this way,
especially given the loss and suffering I'd just endured? How
could you do this to me?*

The question I didn't write, but certainly thought, was, *How could I let him?*

I push away from the railing. Only a few people still mill about. I suppose most have retired to their cabins to rest and dress for dinner. My heels clatter as I cross the wood-planked flooring, and just as I'm about to enter the hallway where my stateroom awaits, I bump into a familiar but unexpected figure. Anne Morgan.

"Anne?" I exclaim.

"Belle?" she replies.

"Now don't sound so surprised to see Belle here, Anne. You knew she'd be on board," Bessie Marbury, who stands at Anne's side, interjects. She uses her big, booming voice, one that matches the largeness of her physical presence. I've come to know and enjoy the famous theatrical and literary agent. She is a force to be reckoned with in her chosen fields. She represented Oscar Wilde's work before his death, which means she's fearless and cares little for society's scorn. Representing the brilliant plays of George Bernard Shaw is another mark in her favor. And finally, she seems inclined to like me even if Anne and Elsie de Wolfe have negative feelings about me. We give each other large genuine smiles. I note that Elsie, the rumored third in their Boston marriage, is absent, and I wonder at her whereabouts; I rarely see them separately in social settings.

Bessie gives me a warm embrace, bellowing, "Wonderful to see you, Belle."

"Lovely to see you, too, Bessie." With a cordial nod, I add, "You as well, Anne. Did you two board in Paris? Mr. Morgan mentioned that you have been at the Villa Trianon these past months."

But I hadn't known Anne was on board the very same ship as I am, headed back to New York. Mercifully, Anne has been less of a regular presence in the library due to the chasm between her and her father's political views, particularly Anne's public support for the female garment workers, a cause that enrages her father.

"That's right," Bessie answers, while Anne gives me only a luke-warm nod. "And what a glorious time it was. We ended our stay in Paris, of course."

"Ah, how was Paris?" I ask, leading the women out of the narrow hallway and onto the more spacious deck.

"Magical, as always. Divine food and even more divine theater," Bessie answers for them both. She is one of the few people whose forceful personality makes Anne seem less than commanding.

"How fortunate for you both."

"Paris wasn't part of your itinerary on this trip?" Bessie looks surprised.

"Only briefly. I spent most of my time in London meeting with curators and dealers, and then a month in Italy, assessing artwork for the library's collection. Unfortunately, I only had two days in Paris en route to Italy."

Bessie wags her finger at me, then Anne. "You'll have to convince that controlling Mr. J. P. Morgan to loosen up your schedule to accommodate more time in Paris."

Glancing at Anne, I say to Bessie, "Honestly, I have no complaints. I had a glorious time traipsing through some tiny Italian towns."

Anne finally chimes in, "Where did you go, Belle?"

While this question would be natural in a typical conversation, Anne and I do not have a history of engaging in typical conversations. Ever. This is the first time in a while that she has even acknowledged my presence. I answer cautiously, "I visited the better-known towns first, of course, like Florence and Venice. But I found the smaller locales—Verona, Ravenna, Siena, and Orvieto—to be the real gifts."

"How did you discover these towns?" Anne asks.

Anne's curiosity is uncharacteristic when it comes to me, so I choose my words with care. "I had an exceptional guide."

Anne glances at Bessie with a triumphant little smirk. "I bet you did, and I'm guessing I know who that guide was."

My stomach lurches. This is the trap she was trying to set with her seemingly innocuous questions. Of all people to know about my time with Bernard—maybe even my relationship with him—Anne would be the worst. She has already speculated about what she calls my tropical roots. What will she do if she believes she holds two secrets about me?

"Belle," Bessie says, with a disappointed glance at Anne, "what Anne is alluding to is the fact that we had dinner with Bernard Benson in Paris two nights before we boarded the *Oceanic*."

"Oh?" I decide that I will not offer up anything to them—not a

single detail and not a single emotion—that Bernard has not already given them. I am furious with Bernard that he might have shared *anything* about our time together with Anne Morgan. He knows how rocky my relationship is with her.

"And he mentioned that he gave you some advice about what towns to visit in Italy," Bessie says.

"He did." I admit this small fact, waiting to see what else will be added.

"And that, when his schedule allowed, he stopped in a couple of the towns as you toured them to share the art highlights," Bessie continues.

"He *is* the world's foremost expert on Italian Renaissance art. His guidance was very useful." I force a smile.

Anne exclaims, "He must have been more than a tour guide. It seems you broke his heart."

Despite my intention to remain calm and reserved, I blurt out, "I broke his heart? I cannot believe he said that."

Bessie shoots Anne a scolding look. "He didn't say that, Belle. Bernard hinted that he found you irresistibly alluring during the brief time you spent together and that the world seems a bit . . ." She pauses, searching for a word. "Dimmer since you left."

In a loud voice, Anne says, "I find it hard to believe that showing you around some churches and museums for a few minutes would leave him so despondent."

Bernard despondent? For a moment, I don't hear the insinuation in Anne's remark. But then her implication becomes clear.

Rather than reacting defensively, I decide to use the artifices that serve me well in the social sphere. "I cannot help it if my charms disarmed him," I say with a toss of my scarf. "There was no intentional coquetry, but men will see what they want to see."

Bessie guffaws, a decidedly unladylike sound. But then everything about Bessie is unladylike. "So true, Belle, that most men don't realize the foolishness of their views. Didn't Shakespeare say, 'A fool

thinks himself to be wise, but a wise man knows himself to be a fool?'" She shakes her head, and then says, "Anne and I tried to convince Bernard to join us on the *Oceanic*—some bracing ocean breezes and the indulgence of the ship would perk him up, we told him—but somehow he knew you'd be on board and said you wouldn't want to see him."

I doubt that Anne's invitation to Bernard to come aboard the *Oceanic* was innocent. Perhaps she planned on taking evidence of the romance back to her father, breaking our unspoken agreement to keep what we think are each other's secrets.

It is some solace that Bernard realizes how terribly he's disappointed me—and that he's suffering. It would be unfair if I were suffering alone.

"I cannot imagine what he was talking about," I reply.

"Ah well, there's no accounting for the views of men," Bessie says. "I think it's time to retire to our stateroom, don't you think, Anne?"

The two women are sharing a room? It seems that Bessie has unwittingly provided me firm evidence that Anne, Bessie, and Elsie are indeed in a Boston marriage. Such information could transform rumor into fact.

"You go on, Bessie. I am right behind you," Annie says, her eyes fixed on me. She waits until Bessie is gone to speak again. "Bessie is being diplomatic. It was clear from Bernard that you two had quite the affair. You were supposed to be in Europe for work, not for love. I wonder how my father would feel about that."

I know exactly how Mr. Morgan would feel. He would hate that I deceived him, especially when I promised the trip had nothing to do with Bernard. Hate that I allowed Bernard—of all men—to capture my attention. And hate that anyone has diverted my attention away from him.

I have no choice about what to say next. "I wonder how he would feel about you sharing a stateroom with Bessie Marbury. The space is large and opulent, but I do think there is only one bed."

Anne's jaw clenches. "You think you're so clever with your little threats, but don't forget that the tally is in my favor. I now know two of your secrets, while you only know one of mine."

I shake my head and force a laugh. "Anne, I really don't know what you are talking about. I have nothing to hide."

"I'll be watching you, Belle. My father may be blind to your wiles and deceptions, but I am not."

This threat should scare me, but strangely it emboldens me. This is the pettiness of a rich spoiled older sister who is lashing out at her treasured younger sister, the one who gets too much of Daddy's love. Anne doesn't see me as an employee but as part of the family. And by now, I feel certain that while I suffered mightily at Bernard's hand during these travels and could not hold on to him at the end, Mr. Morgan and I share an unbreakable bond. I will not let anyone or anything take that away from me.

CHAPTER 28

DECEMBER 14, 1910
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I press my fingertips against my temple, trying to stop the room from spinning. A voice says my name, and I try to focus upon it through the swirl of the chandelier lights and the bright colors of the ladies' gowns. Placing my hand on the wall behind me, I steady myself in the main vestibule of the Century Theatre, designed to resemble the Comédie-Française of Paris, where the celebration of its opening rages on all around me, and I've been raging right alongside it.

"Are you quite all right, Miss Greene?" the man with the beautiful azure eyes repeats.

Who is this man again? His name dances around the hazy periphery of my memory, but I cannot summon it up. I do know the gentleman waving at me from across the room, however. He's Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the Metropolitan Opera director, so I wave back.

The man continues to stare at me, and I know I need to say something. "I'm fine. It's just the noise in here." I hear myself speak but my words sound off. Am I slurring?

"Ah yes." He glances around the vestibule. "The acoustics in here are rather challenging for a theater, don't you think? And the con-

ductor seems a bit—manic, doesn't he?" He keeps talking, but I cannot keep my attention fixed on his words.

The space remains packed with people, although the crowd has thinned quite a bit since I arrived a few hours ago. Still, many of New York's rich and powerful remain, several of whom are benefactors of this grand theatrical project. But where is the propriety of the rich tonight? Usually, even at the most elaborate of affairs, people speak in hushed, decorous tones, all the better to hide any untoward comments or behavior. Not tonight. The voices are loud and thick with alcohol and competing with the echoing orchestral music led by a conductor who has perhaps had a little too much Burgundy.

I giggle at my own observation, until the man says my name again. "Miss Greene, I think maybe it's time for you to retire for the evening. That last glass of champagne seems to have gotten the better of you." He points to the champagne flute I'm holding.

"No, the night has just begun." I laugh, swallow the last of the bubbly, and hand the flute to a passing waiter. A colored waiter.

The waiter takes my glass and hands me another. Then, I do something I've never done in my life as a white woman—I look the colored man straight in his eyes. He holds my gaze, and I know that he sees right through me. But I do not look away, the way I always do, the way Mama has taught me to do. I hold his glance and smile as if I'm daring him to speak, daring him to tell this room filled with the best of New York's *white* society what he knows.

For the first time in my role as a white woman, I have no fear, because nothing could be worse than the way I already feel. What could be more terrible than the guilt and pain and loss I've been experiencing for the last month?

But the waiter does not speak. He gives me a simple, respectful nod, and then continues around the theater, offering champagne to the revelers.

"Miss Greene, are you certain you should have another glass?" my companion asks. "I think you may have had a bit too much already."

I shrug. "Usually too much of anything is bad—except cham-

pagne. Too much champagne is just right." I laugh as I take a few more sips, and when the man laughs along with me, I think how enticing he sounds.

"It's getting very late, Miss Greene. Perhaps it's a good hour for us to part?"

I raise my eyebrows, and once again, I try to remember his name. I know this man, I've seen him across auction aisles and ballrooms alike, but his name is somewhere inside this champagne glass. "Well." I lower my voice and step closer to him. "I'd go anywhere with you."

He takes my glass and extends his arm. I'm grateful because I feel dizzy. As we proceed toward the entryway, a servant races toward us with our coats, and the man helps me into my fur-edged wrap. I turn to wave to the other guests as we exit the theater, and as I step over the threshold, I trip.

"Whew!" I exclaim, clutching his arm.

"Are you all right?" he asks, looking me over. "I think you'll be fine."

"Yes, because I'm with you." The December air is chilly, but I feel warm as I hold on to him. I try to rest my head on his shoulder as we stroll toward Central Park West, but it takes too much energy for me to keep my balance.

If I cannot have any more champagne, at least I can go home with this man. I can't remember his name, but that is of little matter. All I want to do is feel something with someone else tonight so that, by morning, maybe I'll feel nothing of Bernard.

The gentleman raises his hand, and a carriage appears; it must be his own, not one for hire. With effort and his support, I step up into the luxurious interior, sliding across the upholstered bench to give him enough room to get inside. But he only nods, taps the side of the carriage to signal that he's ready for its departure, and says, "It was good to see you again, Miss Greene. Please give Pierpont my regards."

"We aren't going home together?"

His eyebrows rise. "I don't think so. You're a lady who's had a

little too much champagne, and I'm a gentleman. You'll feel better in the morning by heading directly home."

"I want to feel better tonight," I say.

Despite himself, he chuckles, "Good night, Miss Greene."

The last glass of champagne takes hold of me, and I reach for his hand. "What's wrong? Is my dark blood showing through?"

He frowns as if my words are nonsensical, and then nods to the driver. When the carriage jerks away from the curb, I lean back with a sigh, give the driver my address, and then close my eyes, trying to stop my stomach from churning. This is not how I wanted this night to end. I wanted to be with a man who could make me forget the man I can't get out of my mind.

Within minutes, I reach our apartment. As I step down onto the street, I feel the frigid temperature, and it keeps me steady on my feet. Until I try to tiptoe into the apartment, where I stumble into the entryway table, sending letters ready for posting skittering across the floor. "Damn," I mumble. Picking them up is no easy feat in the tight corset necessary for my beaded burgundy evening gown.

Even though we've moved into a more luxurious apartment, Mama still has a bedroom door that creaks. "Belle, is that you?" she whispers, pushing her graying hair out of her eyes. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Mama."

"You look like you've had too much alcohol." She glances at the mantelpiece clock. "It's after two o'clock in the morning. That is too late for an unmarried woman to be out." She risks, "And without a proper chaperone."

From the moment I stepped back into my family's apartment from the *Oceanic*, Mama has been trying to wrap the cords of convention back around me. "Mama, you know that socializing is part of my work and—"

"What happened to you in Europe, Belle?"

She's asked me this question a few times over the past several weeks, so I'm not surprised. "Nothing, Mama. Just buying art for Mr.

Morgan," I answer, trying to keep my words articulate and my stance steady despite that last glass of champagne I downed.

"Don't be smart with me, Belle." Her tone is sharp. "You've been different since you returned home. You seem . . ." She pauses, hunting for the right words. "Distracted and restless. Even reckless."

Reckless. That is how I feel because I can't tolerate a single quiet moment to overtake me. If I allow that, I will be overcome with thoughts about Bernard or, worse, my baby.

It is impossible, however, to banish Bernard since we reestablished our correspondence, just weeks after my return. It began with a one-page letter with the words *My dearest Belle, I adore you*. My heart quickened, but it was with my head that I responded, in a letter without a salutation: *Bernard, It appears you are much better at saying those words than living them*. I continued with a litany of all I'd suffered and the responsibility he bore.

Yet he continues to write, continues to profess his adoration, and while my mind demands that I remember the truth, my heart prefers to recall the year that we spent building up to those days in Italy when I discovered the power and wonder of his love.

Finally, I respond to my mother's observation, "Actually, the partygoers tonight said I looked different as well. But they said I've never looked better." I am desperately trying to keep my words clear and my voice steady; it won't do to have Mama know how drunk I am.

"Don't you dare trot out your party quips to me, Belle. They might work on those foolish society folks, but I know an attempt at deflection when I see one." Her beautiful eyes brim with judgment and anger. "Did something happen on the boat?"

On the *Oceanic*? I almost laugh aloud thinking that something unpleasant might have occurred on that bastion of fun and forgetting. My most displeasing encounter was with Anne, and after the first day, I made sure I saw her only from afar. Otherwise, I joined fully in the merriment.

"Of course not, Mama. You've been on that voyage. It's nothing but food and frolic."

She shook her head. "Something happened, Belle. On the *Oceanic* or in Europe. I know it."

Her persistence makes me pause, makes me almost want to tell her because I feel like I'm going to burst. Mama had been my confidant until my trip, and I'd believed that Bernard would become that person, that he could come to know the real me. But he has wounded me, changed me. He will never be my intimate; I don't think he can even be my friend.

I say, "A few late nights doesn't mean a thing. You're being silly, Mama." I shrug off my coat and toss it onto the sofa, where I settle. Sitting is better than standing if I'm going to continue this conversation; it'll help keep the room from spinning.

"I am not talking about the parties, Belle." Her voice is softer now. "I'm talking about your drinking at those parties. I'm talking about the late nights, every night. I'm talking about you waking up sick and tired and unfocused when you leave the apartment. I'm talking about all the risks you're taking."

For an instant, the image of the colored waiter flashes through my mind and then my words—"dark blood." What was I thinking? But I cannot admit this; I cannot alarm Mama.

"Staying out late at a party that I must attend for reasons of my work is hardly a risk." I close my eyes and massage my temples. At this point, all I want to do is go to sleep.

"Getting intoxicated at one of those parties with your so-called friends and letting slip your actual heritage is a risk none of us can afford, Belle. Being unable to perform your job at the Pierpont Morgan Library because of your nightlife affects your entire family. Can't you see that?"

The true reason for Mama's concern makes me seethe. I am thirty-one years old, and I have borne this burden of financial responsibility and my true ethnicity for my entire adult life. "When have I ever been unable to perform my job—or my duty to my family?"

She raises her eyebrows and takes in my rage. Her voice is calmer

when she asks, "Have I ever told you about the years your father and I spent in Columbia, South Carolina, when he was a professor?"

I am stunned. Not only at the quick change in her focus but that she has mentioned my father. I shake my head; of course I know that he was a professor, but I know nothing about their early years together.

She lowers herself next to me. "Your father was such a dashing man and so full of promise. When we married in 1874, I was happy to leave the comfort of my parents' home for South Carolina. It felt like a romantic adventure, traveling by train and carriage with him at my side. I had never been that far south of the Mason-Dixon Line. We wouldn't have dreamed of it before the war, when free coloreds were regularly snatched up and sold to plantations. But after the war ended, laws were passed that protected us. Your father and I were naive enough to believe that the country had really changed.

"A year before our marriage, Richard was hired as the first colored professor at the newly integrated University of South Carolina, in the state capital of Columbia." My raised eyebrows make my mother add, "Now before you get any ideas about grandeur, this capital was a dirt-road city with wooden buildings, a college, and aspirations well above its station or the state's political willingness, as it turned out. The campus itself was a touch more impressive, but only a touch.

"It had twelve expansive brick buildings that faced each other across a pretty grass lawn, all tucked away behind a seven-foot-tall brick wall. That wall made me feel a bit safer, I confess. As we rode in the carriage from the station to the campus, we received icy stares from the white Southerners, while the coloreds were almost as bad with their curious gapes."

Her face softens. "Those were heady times at first, Belle, I can admit that now. We dared to relax our guard. Your father was full professor of mental and moral philosophy, as well as a librarian. We shared an attractive duplex residence with the white chemistry professor William Main and his family."

I almost want to stop Mama right there; I have so many questions. But I say nothing, sobered and spellbound by Mama sharing these facts—a woman who never wants to revisit her history.

She continues, "It was a remarkably cordial living arrangement. Your father had a certain amount of prestige, given his Harvard background. But over time this changed. Local conservatives were furious that their white boys were . . ." She pauses for just a second, and I see that she's trying to control her anger. "Sitting next to colored ones in a classroom taught by a colored professor. Their sentiment began to foment up the chain to the state legislators. Your father couldn't ignore what was going on. He jumped into the fray. He went to meetings between faculty and state legislators. He organized church gatherings and rallies.

"It was there that he became known for his speeches on the subject of civil rights, particularly advocating for the Civil Rights Act that his friend Charles Sumner introduced just before he died."

"Papa was friends with Charles Sumner?" Mama's words stun me. How could Papa have been friends with the famous senator from Massachusetts who'd fought for the civil and voting rights for freed slaves after the war?

"Well, of course," Mama says. "Your father was friends with most of the men involved in the civil rights movement at the time. Frederick Douglass. Booker T. Washington. W. E. B. DuBois. Well, when he wasn't having disputes with them over how best to secure equality, that is."

A few weeks ago, I'd read an article about a new civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and W. E. B. DuBois was listed as one of the founders.

Her eyes are no longer on me but in the past. "Even though the Civil Rights Act that President Grant signed into law was weaker than we wanted, and even though we knew that fury over the university's integration was growing, we were still optimistic that the spirit of the act to protect all citizens in their civil and legal rights would triumph. We were still hopeful, still happy."

Mama speaks in terms of "we," as if she were involved, as if she and my father were the sort of partners I never witnessed them being in their marriage. Again, I am stunned. Of course, I knew of my father's work, and I understood that it was the reason for the demise of their marriage. But I'd always believed that Mama had been on the other side. Not that she hadn't wanted rights for colored people in America; I just thought she'd always felt it was pointless to fight, since equality would never happen against the backdrop of white supremacy.

I feel as if I'm looking at Mama with fresh, understanding eyes.

"That was also where your father fulfilled one of his lifelong dreams. He enrolled at the university's law school. And while his professional life was expanding, I became pregnant and gave birth to our first child." When she pauses for a moment, I wonder if she will say his name. "Little Horace." Mama's eyes well up with tears.

We'd heard whispers when we were young, about a child born before Louise. But the hushed conversations ended whenever we'd walk into a room. And Mama had never mentioned a baby out loud.

As I listen now, my hand moves to my belly in empathy over the lost child. I don't let it linger, though; once I realize what I'm doing, I drop my hand.

"It was as if darkness descended upon us all at once. Horace died when he was only nine months old. He was such a wee little thing, sickly from the start, and we had to bury him right there in the campus cemetery. If I hadn't already been pregnant with Louise, I might have just curled up in a ball and died. Especially with the news your father brought home every evening." Her voice is just a whisper now. "The conservative Democrats were growing more powerful in South Carolina, all over the South, really. So were the Ku Klux Klan. Colored people were being murdered at rallies. Your father's life was threatened several times. He ignored the danger and continued his speeches, particularly around voting time. The white people couldn't bear to see a proud, articulate, strong colored man among their ignorant white masses—and they certainly couldn't stand equal rights for people they considered no better than a pack of mules.

"Your father fought hard for the Republicans to stay in power in the legislature and governor's office," she says with pride, "but they lost to the Democrats, who made short work of dismantling Reconstruction. The integrated doors of the University of South Carolina closed within weeks. It was going to be turned into a small whites-only private men's college.

"As we rode out through the university gate into the city of Columbia on that last day, I saw how much every white person we passed hated us. And I felt it too . . ." She pauses, as if she needs another breath before she can continue. "As they spit in our faces and threw garbage at our backs. We were lucky we weren't lynched.

"Your father and I lived through a brief, fleeting time in history when equality might have been possible. But racism and fear rose up within white people and eradicated that possibility when they were asked to stand side by side with the colored people. It was in that moment that I could see the future clearly. Our tiny, accomplished colored community would soon be gone. The lofty postwar ideal of integration would disappear along with it. There would only be black and white, two races separated, but certainly not equally.

"I recognized this long before your father comprehended it or accepted it, Belle. I knew his work would be futile. When we moved to New York, there was only one choice, only one decision that could be made." Her gaze shifts from the distance where the past lives to my face, to the present. "Our only hope would be to live as white."

She stares at me with hard eyes. "If you do not want to tell me what happened while you were in Europe, Belle, that is your prerogative. But I need you to understand the risks you are taking and the danger in which you are placing your family. Because if the truth about your identity is revealed, and your family's along with it, we will all become colored again. And you don't want to go back to being Belle Marion Greener, I promise you that."

I am stunned into silence by my mother's story. I feel grateful that she has shared this critical part of her past with me, but I realize that this has not been about sharing her interior life with an adult daugh-

ter; this is a mother's cautionary tale. This isn't about history; this is about the future and what my world will be if I dare to fly too close to the sun. Of all the "suggestions" she's issued to me, of all the warnings she's given and I've lately resisted, this one registers.

She rises, turning her back on me as she closes her bedroom door. I sit and allow her words to sink in. Embedded in what she told me is another message: living as white is not what she wanted to do, but what she felt she *must*. She pretended to be part of a people who had threatened my father, almost run my parents out of town, raised the specter of lynching, only because she had to. She became one of them even though she'd been a proud member of one of the most prominent colored families in Washington, DC; she'd adored being a Fleet. She gave up the identity she'd loved to live among people she abhorred, *only* for the betterment of her children.

I push myself up from the sofa, steadier now as Mama's story and her revelations have sobered me. I recognize her sacrifice, and I accept the necessity of this choice for all of us. I will take heed.

CHAPTER 29

APRIL 20, 1911

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Since my conversation with my mother four months ago, I allow her mandates to guide my existence, on the surface at least. At my work-related social occasions, I monitor my drinking, and with Mr. Morgan, I am the essence of propriety. When I allow myself my small rebellions, I modify my late nights and behavior, so when I join Katrina for a few women's rights rallies or Evelyn for Greenwich Village poetry readings, I am home early and my actions are only that of a spectator. Even with the new friends in my circle—the actresses Mary Garden, Ellen Terry, and Sarah Bernhardt—I enjoy their independence and discussions of their sexuality vicariously, never revealing my own indiscretions, even the more recent ones.

Sometimes I wonder why I take any chances at all. Wouldn't it be safer to concentrate my efforts solely on the library and the social engagements necessary for that work? But I find that when I allow any moment of quiet into my life, thoughts of Bernard fill that void. Even though I read the loving letters he continues to send and I keep the gifts of artwork and gowns he continues to post, I must do whatever is required to harden my heart against him. The occasional eve-

ning of caresses at Alistair Barron's apartment or a session of kissing with Samuel Yardley in an empty box at the opera help fill any chinks in my armor that might be open for Bernard. I cannot allow myself to hope that some new version of Bernard will appear instead of the real man I know him to be.

And in the past few weeks, I've undertaken a new endeavor that has consumed me mightily, one I hope will seal my fate forever with Mr. Morgan and assuage Mama's fears for good. In this critical enterprise, mercifully, there has been no room or time for thoughts of Bernard.

"Belle!"

The sound of my name startles me from my musings. Normally, I am at Mr. Morgan's door before he even begins to yell for me, but I have scurried to his side seventeen times already today.

This morning has presented unique challenges. Three of Mr. Morgan's four mistresses are in town for the season, and he's assigned me the unpleasant task of keeping them separate when their visits overlap—which has occurred on three distinct occasions today, and it's just approaching noon. All this on the morning of one of the highest-profile auctions I will ever attend, one where I hope to procure a much-anticipated item.

"Belle!" Mr. Morgan bellows again. "I know you're in there! You are not only insulting me, but you are offending my dear guest, Lady Johnstone."

I perk up at the name. Lady Johnstone is the only one of Mr. Morgan's four mistresses that I actually respect. Sharp and intelligent, she and I have bonded over several lunches at the Colony Club. Lady Johnstone's inside knowledge of art and culture intrigues me, as my inside knowledge of Mr. Morgan intrigues her.

To ensure that I am presentable for Lady Johnstone, who is always impeccably groomed and dressed in the latest Parisian gown, I smooth my hair and rise from my desk. I've just begun to organize my notes for the Hoe auction tonight. Every person of importance in

the manuscript part of the art world is in New York for the sale of the book collection of Robert Hoe, and I have to be prepared. Yet I cannot offend Mr. Morgan or Lady Johnstone, even though much is at stake this evening.

Tonight is more than just another crucial auction for me. Tonight, I will finally be able to do what Mr. Morgan asked me to do on the day of my interview. Tonight, I am determined to take away the auction prize, the one I finally located after months and months of sleuthing. The one I tried without success to secure before the auction even began tonight—the rare William Caxton edition of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, the incunabulum Mr. Morgan has had me seeking like his own Holy Grail.

Striding into Mr. Morgan's office, I call out my greetings. "Good morning, Lady Johnstone! If I had known you were in the office, I would have raced out immediately instead of hiding in my study, pretending I couldn't hear Mr. Morgan."

We laugh at the absolute impossibility of anyone ignoring Mr. Morgan.

He says, "Can you please entertain Lady Johnstone for a moment while I meet briefly with King?"

"It would be my pleasure, sir."

He stands up from behind his desk. "Lady Johnstone, did I tell you that tonight, Belle is going to bring me my treasure?"

"Yes"—Lady Johnstone smiles—"you told me last night and again this morning."

"Did I? I must have forgotten in my excitement."

"I will do my best to win it for you, sir," I assure him. Again.

"Doing your best is wonderful, Belle, but securing me my Caxton is necessary."

When Mr. Morgan leaves the room, I smile at Lady Johnstone. "He's very excited about this Caxton. He's been waiting a long time."

She nods. "You know he doesn't want to attend the Astors' affair with me tonight, don't you? He's been making these comments about

the auction as a means to excuse himself from the Astors' and go with you instead. I've had to hold firm, and insist on his attendance."

"I would not presume to know anything about what Mr. Morgan wants to do, Lady Johnstone."

She laughs again, a melodious chiming sound. "If anyone has any certainty about Pierpont's wants and desires, it is you, Miss Greene." Despite the laughter, I hear a darker undertone in her voice. "He would much rather be at the auction with you than at this soiree with me."

"I do not know about that. But if that's true, it's only because he's been longing for this particular Caxton for years."

She begins to pace around the room, running her finger along the spines of priceless tomes, dislodging them from their carefully arranged positions. "Do you know what Pierpont said about you last night, Miss Greene?" Her tone has shifted, and she is no longer looking at me when she asks the question.

I'm not certain that I want to know, but I give her a small chuckle. "No, I cannot even imagine what he might have told you about me. Doubtless I give him many reasons for complaints."

She stops and there is not a hint of laughter about her now. "He told me you were the most important person in his life."

Her words surprise and flatter me, but still, I wave my hand in the air dismissively. I must. "He was joking, no doubt. It is only because we are about to land an important volume that I was even on his mind."

"There was no humor in his voice, Miss Greene. There was only respect and admiration."

After all these months of knowing me, does she perceive me as a rival when there is no reason? It has been years since Mr. Morgan and I shared one of those intimate moments. Long ago, we decided, without discussion, that a relationship between the two of us would never be. So why is this coming up with Lady Johnstone now? Does she sense something undetectable to me?

Before I can get an answer, the office door opens, and I jump as its ornately carved edge nearly grazes a medieval book of hours that is out of place on the shelf due to Lady Johnstone's interference. Mr. Morgan's booming voice overtakes the room. "Well, Belle. It is time for Lady Johnstone and me to depart." His voice is lower, softer, when he adds, "But I know you will do a fine job facing the jackals at the auction on your own. I will see you in the morning, and I expect to see that Caxton in your hand."

Lady Johnstone's smile has returned. For the moment, at least, she will be the most important person in John Pierpont Morgan's life.

Before the auction commences, I stop off at home to change into a more striking ensemble, a vivid sapphire Fortuny gown that Bernard sent me. Pushing him away doesn't mean I can't put his presents to good use.

This year I purchased two adjoining apartments in a doorman building on the corner of Fortieth Street and Park Avenue. It is within easy walking distance to the Pierpont Morgan Library. Each has a separate entrance, but they connect in the middle with a single door that I alone can unlock. It is my attempt at an autonomous life, the sort that Katrina and Evelyn have. I delight in decorating my side with new, light-colored, streamlined furnishings alongside the artwork Bernard has gifted to me, like the Picro della Francesca painting. On evenings that are free from social engagements, I adore reading on my own sofa amid my precious books and artwork in the quietness of my own space.

When I'm inside the parlor, I hear Mama and my siblings squabbling in their larger apartment, but I ignore their quarreling. The time for the auction is near, and I can't risk becoming embroiled in a lengthy conversation or debate. I live close because of propriety's demands, but it does not mean I must act as though we share the same space. And tonight is too important to my family's future to be weighed down by the pettiness of the present.

Once I arrive at the auction house, I am guided to an aisle seat in the third row, as I now prefer, next to Alfred Pollard, the British Museum's head of print and rare books. Alfred has become a colleague and friend since my first visit to London. We make small talk about the other auction-goers and flip through the catalog as the hundred or so chairs reserved for bidders fill up. As the lights dim and a hush settles on the crowd, my heart flutters in anticipation.

As usual, the auctioneer opens with a highlight of the sale, in this case a rare Gutenberg Bible. I'd asked Mr. Morgan about his interest in this item, but he demurred. "I have too many damned Gutenbergs." This gives me license to focus on the other bidders as the auctioneer starts the process.

I assumed that two or three of the usual players would bid for the Gutenberg, and that the Metropolitan Museum would secure it. I was incorrect. A new competitor has entered a field typically populated by well-known players.

"Who on earth is that?" I whisper to Alfred, as the bidding grows close to fifty thousand dollars, an unheard-of sum for a Gutenberg.

"I believe that's Henry Huntington."

I recognize the name. "The California railroad tycoon?"

"The same."

"Arabella's nephew?" The familial relationship to my social acquaintance, the collector Arabella Huntington, becomes clearer.

Alfred's whisper drops to a near indiscernible level. "Some say that Henry is in love with Arabella, and that he is pursuing her now that his uncle—Arabella's husband—has passed away. It is said that he believes the way to her heart is by populating her walls and shelves with masterpieces."

"The nephew in love with the aunt?" Even though I have seen quite a few unconventional pairings in my day, including me and Bernard, I am aghast.

"That's the rumor."

I eye Huntington. "If he keeps this up, he'll drive up the price of the other auction items to unnecessary levels."

"By God, I hope he stops with the Gutenberg, because if he does what you suspect, he'll price us out of the market."

Alfred and I wait and watch. My prediction proves correct. Item after item, Henry Huntington swoops in and outbids the competitors. It seems that almost every object is of interest to him, whether book or artifact, medieval or Renaissance.

By the time *my* Caxton reaches the auction stand, I am ready. Sitting upright, my neck elongated like a swan's, I face the auctioneer with an unflinching stare, and he nods in recognition before he begins.

"On the stand we have an extremely important example of rare incunabula. This volume, entitled *Le Morte Darthur*, by Thomas Malory, was printed in 1485 by the famous printer and publisher William Caxton. The book recounts the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and their quest for the mythical Holy Grail. There are no other copies, just a few single pages torn from a lost volume." He inhales, then calls out in a distinctive singsong voice, "Do I have an opening bid?"

Before I can raise my hand, the auctioneer calls out, "I have fifteen thousand dollars. Do I have sixteen thousand?"

I am astonished; no one opens the bidding at such an exorbitant level. It must be Mr. Huntington. I raise what has become my signature red scarf since the Boston auction. "Twenty thousand dollars." A gasp ripples throughout the crowd.

Mr. Huntington and I continue in this high-stakes tit for tat until all other bidders fall away, and the level reaches forty-five thousand dollars. The auctioneer resumes bidding in five-hundred-dollar increments, and we match each other. I admit I'm nervous. Mr. Morgan told me that I could spend any amount to get this prize, but I never thought I'd get close to fifty thousand dollars.

"Forty-six thousand," I bid with a flick of my scarf.

"Forty-seven thousand," Mr. Huntington replies.

"Forty-seven thousand five hundred."

The room is quiet, and for a long minute, he does not answer. "Forty-eight thousand," he finally responds.

"Fifty thousand dollars." I signal to the auctioneer and my competitor that I *will* have this item. It is not an amount that I ever expected to say, but I'm determined to secure Mr. Morgan this coveted treasure.

I wait, assuming that Mr. Huntington's fifty-one thousand dollars will arrive any second. But I continue to wait, until a small rumble sounds out across the room. His silence registers among the people.

"Sold!" the auctioneer cries out, "for fifty thousand dollars."

My heart doesn't stop racing, and I'm thankful that the Caxton was offered at the end of the auction, as I don't know how long I could have remained still while other items were sold. The position of the Caxton may have been the reason Huntington dropped out; perhaps he'd reached the last of his allotted cash for the auction. When I rise, I am bombarded by a sea of congratulations for securing one of the evening's treasures. I'm giddy with success—until I step outside.

Throngs of reporters gather on the steps of the auction house. I assume they're waiting for the victorious Mr. Huntington, who, aside from my Caxton, absolutely dominated the auction. But not a single journalist seeks the railroad tycoon. As they all call out to me, I flinch inwardly. With the exception of the *New York Times* profile that faded away with relative speed, I have avoided publicity.

"Miss Greene, Miss Greene!" Reporter after reporter yells out my name. I've been approached by newspapers before, but nothing like this.

I struggle to make out the queries, and then hold up my hand. "Gentlemen, one at a time, please."

The first reporter says, "Evening, Miss Greene. I'm Mr. George Thaw from the *New York Times*, and I want to start out by thanking you, miss. We are delighted that one of our own New Yorkers—and a beautiful young woman at that—triumphed at auction. We wouldn't

have wanted that California collector to steal all the prizes away from our city."

A cheer breaks out across the crowd as the upright mustachioed men who'd sat alongside me at the auction continue down the stairs past me, looking alarmed. Publicity is not seemly in the stodgy art world.

Their reactions convince me I should seize this opportunity no matter the risk. As always, I hide in plain sight by standing firm and speaking boldly.

"Thank you, Mr. Thaw, for your kind words. I, too, am delighted. If wealthy collectors like Mr. Huntington prevail in obtaining all available treasures for their personal collections, then they remain outside the purview of scholarly study. We can't have that. The rare book I purchased on Mr. Morgan's behalf today will not only stay in New York, but will also be available for academics at the Pierpont Morgan Library."

More cheers resound from the crowd of reporters. I feel triumphant as I stand before them, a colored woman in their white world.

CHAPTER 30

APRIL 20, 1911

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Even though it is nearly ten in the evening, I return to the library to complete some work I'd abandoned in order to attend the auction. And I want to place the long-awaited Caxton *Le Morte Darthur* on Mr. Morgan's desk so that it will be the first thing he sees when he sits on his lion's throne tomorrow morning. This is a victory for us both, although of two very different sorts.

But when I walk past the security guard into my office, Mr. Morgan is sitting at my desk, overpowering my diminutive chair with his girth.

I smile as I pause just inside the door. "I am surprised to see you here, sir."

"How could I not stop by to congratulate you, Belle? Not only did you secure the precious Caxton for me, but I hear you are the toast of the town."

How did he already hear? "I did manage to procure the Caxton."

"That's an understatement, by all accounts. You managed to grab the Caxton away from a scoundrel, who thinks he can march into my town and take all the treasures away from me."

"I am glad you're pleased."

"Pleased? That's an understatement. How many years has it been, Belle?"

"Five, Mr. Morgan."

"Is that it in your hands?"

"Yes." Beaming, I walk to his side and present it to him. While he turns the elegantly written pages and studies the decorations and illustrations, I watch and wait.

"You've done it, Belle," he exclaims. "This calls for a toast."

He rises to pour us drinks from the array of liquors I keep on my sideboard. "I understand there will be write-ups in every major newspaper tomorrow."

My goodness, how does he know that? I suppose he's got a network of informants everywhere.

"Really?" I venture a bit warily as we touch crystal glasses.

"About your triumph, yes, but also about you. The beautiful, young, brilliant librarian to Mr. J. P. Morgan who prevailed at auction and captured the Caxton. It's an American success story. That's not all," he continues, "it seems your fame will extend beyond New York. The articles about you will appear in London and Chicago."

I take a deep breath. My father has been living in Chicago. Uncle Mozart shared this with me in one of the letters he sends me every six months or so, although Papa isn't typically mentioned:

I also want to tell you about your father. I hadn't heard from him in a couple of years, but he reached out to me last week. He is writing and he lectures periodically, but he is struggling to find meaningful work as a lawyer or scholar. For reasons I do not understand, he's been ostracized by his friends in the political realm. Life in Chicago is not easy for him, but his cousins continue to do all they can to support him financially and emotionally. I know it is difficult for you to hear about his Japanese family, but they have not joined him here . . .

The thought of Papa reading a newspaper article about me is thrilling, if nerve-racking.

Mr. Morgan interrupts my thoughts. "I only wish I were younger, Belle," he says before he lifts the glass to his lips again.

I tilt my head. "Why is that? You're at the peak of health and the pinnacle of your power."

"It would give me longer with you." His eyes are sad, his tone sentimental.

I'm surprised and quickly deflect, trying to lighten the moment. "Stop teasing me."

"I'm not teasing," he says, his eyes intense and unreadable before he looks down into his crystal glass.

The office is silent as he finishes his whiskey and then returns the glass to the sideboard. When his eyes find mine again, the longing I see in them leaves me breathless. As he approaches, I do not back away, even when he is so close I can smell the whiskey on his breath.

He lifts his hand, and his fingertips trace the side of my face. "Belle"—his voice sounds thick—"I want more time at your side, to experience the world alongside you."

Then, he lowers his head toward mine, and our lips touch in a surprisingly tender but ardent kiss. When we break apart, we stare at each other, searching for answers in the other's expression. Then, his lips curl upward, releasing the tension between us.

"Oh, Belle." He takes a deep breath. "I don't know."

I am not certain how to respond, so I fall back on playfulness. "Should we?"

"Could we?" he replies. There is nothing lighthearted about his tone; he is in earnest.

Is Mr. Morgan asking whether we could be lovers? To act upon this attraction would risk everything else we are to each other. We are more than colleagues; we are partners, a joint force in the art world. In our shared passion to make the Pierpont Morgan Library the best, we are closer in some ways than friends and family. We are

parent and child. We cannot sacrifice the whole in favor of the one part that will end badly.

I chuckle nervously. "No, we shouldn't, we couldn't." For five years, I've seen women cycle in and out of their places in his world, and I care about Mr. Morgan too much to become ensnared in his harem. My position needs to remain firmly fixed.

His eyes grow stormy and I wonder if I have offended him. But then, the darkness passes, and a wry smile peeks out from beneath his mustache.

"That is exactly what I was going to say." When he leans toward me again, his lips aim for my cheek, where he bestows a chaste peck.

I exhale in relief as he leaves. But I notice that his shoulders are sagging. For the first time, he looks small. When I hear the thud of the heavy bronze doors shutting, I wonder what I've done. No one rejects Mr. Morgan. Even though we both agree that this is the right choice, should it have been him who made the final decision? Will I live to regret my words?

CHAPTER 31

JANUARY 14, 1913
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The relationship between Mr. Morgan and me has changed. Exactly when and why has this happened? Was it the kiss? Could that one act have sparked the slow burn of this shift?

When did our hours of daily banter, which alternated between pleasant and challenging, transform into disagreeable, jealous interrogations and overt cross-examinations? When did we stop discussing manuscripts, medieval artwork, and the legacy of his library and, instead, start talking about me? When did he stop asking me to read to him or play cards?

Maybe it wasn't the kiss. Perhaps it started a few months later when I became more sought after on the heels of the Caxton acquisition and the rumors grew about my supposed romantic relationships. Or was it this past April when we heard the terrible news about the *Titanic*? He was a part owner and was meant to sail on that fateful maiden voyage from England to New York. We both knew people who died among the fifteen hundred souls lost. Does all his clinging and jealousy stem from his fear that death is marching toward him, as it does for all mortals?

Hints of our former relationship tease me from time to time. For

a few resplendent weeks in December of last year the discovery of a rare cache of priceless treasures lying in a farm in Hamouli, Egypt, brought us together. When we received a letter asking whether we wanted to acquire fifty early Christian Coptic manuscripts, I knew we had to own them. They predated other Coptic Old and New Testaments by nearly two hundred years. After long days of conversation, Mr. Morgan agreed. He understood, as did I, that this assemblage of manuscripts could turn the Pierpont Morgan Library into an international center for orientalist and biblical studies.

He turned the final decision and negotiation over to me, and I acquired the manuscripts for a price of forty thousand pounds, which was significantly lower than the sixty thousand pounds they had asked. We rejoiced together. But as soon as the manuscripts arrived later that month, he turned jealous and suspicious again.

I hear him rustling papers in his office, and I tense. I have been so deep in my own thoughts that I didn't hear him return from a lengthy luncheon with Lady Johnstone, the only one of the four mistresses who remains, and even her status is tenuous.

Once a favorite of mine, she has gone from friendly to wary to downright hostile, and in light of Mr. Morgan's aberrant attitudes, I do not blame her. My only solace is that he is leaving soon for a trip to Egypt that will remove him from the Pierpont Morgan Library for a blissful few months.

"Belle!"

I march officiously into his office just moments before he bellows again. Lady Johnstone is standing next to him, her hand resting proprietarily on his shoulder. She's wearing a becoming pale pink gown with a spray of glittering diamonds around her long, elegant neck; together they look like they've dressed to have their portrait taken.

When I enter, she leans down to kiss his cheek, then says, "I'll leave you to it." She straightens herself and glares at me. "To her," she scoffs.

Once we are alone, Mr. Morgan gestures toward the chair before his desk with his cigar, but then he goes quiet for a long moment. I

position my silver pen over my tablet and ask, "Did you call me into your office to discuss the cataloging of items to be returned to the Victoria and Albert Museum?" The British tax laws have been favorably altered recently. It makes sense to bring Mr. Morgan's London collection home, and I've been overseeing that monumental process.

"Who did you lunch with today?" he suddenly barks.

He never used to ask me these kinds of questions. I existed for him alone, so he did not concern himself with my activities outside the Pierpont Morgan Library and its business. Not until that night. Not until that kiss.

Might things have been better if we'd taken that kiss further?

I answer him with the truth. "No one. I ate lunch alone."

"I find that hard to believe." After a puff on his cigar, he sends a large smoke ring in my direction. It encircles me, making me feel as if there is a noose around my neck.

"If I'm not dining with an art colleague, I eat at my desk. That is my usual habit."

He snorts in disbelief. "You expect me to buy that you did not lunch with one of your admirers? Say, William Gibbs McAdoo, president of the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad?"

"No, Mr. Morgan." I sigh. He's asked me several times about Mr. McAdoo, a gentleman who has taken an unreciprocated fancy to me. "I have never dined alone with Mr. McAdoo. In fact, I haven't laid eyes on the gentleman for over six months."

Mr. Morgan's inquiries have begun to sound like Bernard, whose tone in his letters has shifted from how much he adores me to forever accusing me of romantic entanglements. Bernard and I haven't seen each other in years, and if the rumors are to be believed, *he* is the one who is currently traipsing across Europe with his new mistress. It is ironic and painful that the only person with whom I've behaved with full licentiousness accuses me of scandalous behavior with others.

"What about that upstart young banker? The Cuban fellow, Harold Mestre?"

Another young man who has shown interest. While I'd never

admit it aloud, I'd found Mr. Mestre's attentions flattering and even allowed myself to indulge in light physical intimacy. His youth and vivacity are appealing, and I'd even feigned acceptance to one of his many proposals. For a brief time, I'd imagined that marriage, and even children, might be possible with the olive-skinned stockbroker, whose skin tone mirrored my own. But that elusive link I feel with Bernard is absent with Harold, and anyway, what would happen to my family if I ceased working as Mr. Morgan's personal librarian—to their lifestyles, their expenses, and their tie to their white lives?

"No, Mr. Morgan. I did not have lunch with Mr. Mestre."

He puffs on his cigar but doesn't send any more smoke rings my way. "I suppose I should be appeased by the fact that many of your lovers are in Europe."

Now I have many lovers in Europe? When he has not authorized a trip to Europe for years? "What are you talking about?"

This reference, however, to European men is a new tactic. "I hear that Charles Read of the British Museum is quite taken with you. He calls you his 'Little Belle,' apparently."

How could he think I would ever be interested in Mr. Read, who'd been supportive of Mr. Morgan's decision to remove his art and book collection from England against public outcry over the treasures leaving the country? The lovely Englishman might fancy me, but the idea of us as a couple is laughable. "Mr. Read is not, nor has he ever been, of romantic interest to me."

He puffs on his cigar again. "So, there is no truth to the rumors that you're in love with Mr. Bernard Berenson either?" He gives a half smile. It's the same smirk he doles out to the competitors he's quashed.

This is the first time Mr. Morgan has mentioned Bernard in a very long time. Without blinking an eye, I say, "Mr. Berenson and I are acquainted with each other, as you know from the visit he and his wife made here. But I have not seen him for several years." I hope my voice sounds steady.

"Then why does that particular rumor surface over and over?"

Recognizing that it is time to fend off his onslaught, I parry with a touch of humor. "I've also heard the rumor that I'm your illegitimate daughter several times, but that doesn't mean it deserves more credence than if I'd only heard it once."

But Mr. Morgan is unmoved.

Centering himself behind the desk, he stares at me for a moment before he says, "If you are planning on deserting me—to marry or for any other reason—then you should know that will be the last day I set eyes on you. And it will certainly be the last penny I spend on you."

From my earliest days as the Morgan librarian, I have always been "his" Belle. But this is not any kind of loving possession; this is a threat, one that has both financial and emotional impact.

I understand how much Mr. Morgan has done for me. After six years, he has more than tripled my already high salary. I earn as much as some doctors, which has afforded me and my family a fine life. I need to reassure him I'll remain at his side for however long the seventy-five-year-old tycoon has left to live. But it is time for more than reassurance; we need to speak plainly.

"What happened to us, Mr. Morgan?" I attempt to keep my voice steady. "You lay out what you will do if I desert you, but most of the time, it feels like you don't want me around anymore. Is it because I—" I stop before I ask him about the night of the Caxton auction.

He glares at me, his expression as hard as his heart has been toward me. "What were you going to say, Belle?" His question is a challenge, as if he dares me to ask about the kiss. Did he take my words that night as a rejection? Does he not understand that it is because I genuinely care for him that I wanted to preserve what we had?

When I stay silent, Mr. Morgan says, "You are the one who is thinking about leaving me." Then, his voice becomes self-pitying. "Have you given no thought to how much I've given you? How much you mean to me?"

"How can you not understand how much you mean to me? How

much this"—I gesture around the room—"institution that we are building together means to me? You of all people, you see me in the library and in your office from eight o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock every night, and sometimes long after that. So how can you possibly think that I am here for any reason other than what we create together? And how can you think I would ever consider leaving?"

I think I've convinced him, but then he says, "If you leave me, I will write you out of my will."

For Mr. Morgan to threaten me with the specter of his will—an inclusion that has loomed on the horizon for many years through regular hints and innuendos, though I've asked him for nothing—is despotic. Is that all he thinks of me? After what I just said? Is that all he thinks of my commitment to our work and his legacy?

"Perhaps you've begun to believe those god-awful profiles on you in the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Daily Tribune*—that you're the perfect society girl and serious scholar rolled together. But you"—he bangs his fist on his desk, exhibiting an anger toward me I've never seen before—"are *my* personal librarian. I made you into who you are today. You are nothing without my bankroll, and don't you forget it."

Fury rises within me. How dare he? I've always acknowledged Mr. Morgan for the chance he took on hiring me and the trust he's placed in me. I've thanked him for what he's done. But I have done my part, too. I have worked long and studied hard. Day after day, I've done his bidding to build this institution. For him to assert that the entirety of my success and that of the Pierpont Morgan Library is attributable to his money alone is appalling. I am both furious and deeply hurt. And something much, much more. Embedded in Mr. Morgan's words is an unconscionable sentiment that I can no longer ignore.

"You cannot treat me like something you have bought and paid for." My voice quivers as I speak. "Like one of your manuscripts. Or—" The rest of the words hover on the tip of my tongue, begging to be released. *Or a slave*, I think over and over.

Yes, I have lived my adult life as a white woman, but when I lay

my head down at night I am as colored as the first enslaved African men and women who landed in this country three hundred years ago. After all my father has done to fight for equality, after all my mother has given up to ensure that I had the best opportunities, I will not permit myself to be spoken to as if I am owned. Not by Mr. Morgan, not by anyone.

His eyes narrow. "Why not? The way I see it, I already own you."

Even though I'm shaking, even though I want to scream, even though my heart pleads for me to cry out, I rise slowly and stand before him calmly. "You can buy a great many items and objects with your gold, Mr. Morgan, but you cannot buy me."

Then, for the first time, I walk out of his study without being dismissed. I am still shaking when I return to my office, fighting tears that I will not shed. He spoke to me as if he were the master and I was the—I stop my thoughts there. I cannot allow myself to think the unthinkable.

CHAPTER 32

APRIL 1 AND 10, 1913
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I accept the telegram from the delivery boy, and for a moment, I'm tempted to leave it on the pile of correspondence on which it's been placed while I tend to an urgent negotiation. But then I remember the telegram I'd received only five days before, informing me that Mr. Morgan had contracted an illness while traveling in Cairo and had been taken to a hospital in Rome for additional treatment. Even though I'd been told he was expected to fully recover, I feel pulled to open the telegram. What if it contains news about his health?

I reach for the letter opener, and slice open the envelope. Squinting at the nearly illegible scrawl on the telegram, I read:

*Mr. J. P. Morgan died in Rome on March 31, 1913.
Arrangements are being made to bring him home.*

The telegram drifts from my hands to the floor, and my tears are instant. How can this be? Through my watery eyes, the unimaginable words stare up at me from the crimson-red carpet.

"He cannot be gone," I whisper.

We were everything to each other. I'd known that, but now that he is gone, I feel the truth of it as I haven't before. For him, I was the daughter and son he never had, the confidant he'd always sought, the business and art partner who'd boldly advocated for his goals, and the lover he'd dreamed about but held in abeyance. For me, he was the father I'd lost, the companion with whom I could discuss the day's minutiae, the business mentor who'd supported me beyond my wildest dreams, and the lover for whom I longed but could never have.

I swipe my tears away. I must stop. Much will be required of me in the days ahead, and the Morgan family must not think me unfit for the tasks. I must honor Mr. Morgan as I know he'd want and tend to dear Junius, who will mourn him as much as I do. But soon, the time will come for me to face alone the unthinkable—living in this world without him.

A few days later, I am standing beside Mr. Morgan's family and friends and colleagues. The sun shines on the harbor, catching the tips of the waves in a playful dance. But the air is bitter cold and the wind brisk, unusual for April. This is the chatter on everyone's lips, a distraction that unifies all of us who have gathered. I listen to the refrain but don't chime in. My grief has broken me.

A horn blasts across the harbor. The *France* is finally approaching after an hour delay, fulfilling its final mission for its once-powerful owner. It is bringing him home, to the city he reigned over like royalty, to the Pierpont Morgan Library, where he had found his intellectual and spiritual home.

As the *France* inches closer, I am lost in my own thoughts, completely unable to fathom a life without Mr. Morgan at the center. Joyful memories of him flash through my mind. Sitting in his office and reading his favorite Bible stories to him. Surveying the guests at a party, deciding which of our "enemies" to dismantle next. Witness-

ing the pride on his face when I strode through the library with the Caxton *Le Morte Darthur* in my hands.

Remembering that last night leads me to wonder again, how could he leave me with the terrible fight between us left unresolved? Months of travel have passed without any reference to it in our letters, and now, we can never speak again. I will never be able to give him my apology, and I will never hear his.

The weight of that is crushing me. I work to console myself. Death is always a harsh taskmaster, and it serves no one for me to succumb to despair. In that moment, I resolve to bury the memory of our last conversation forever. Mr. Morgan gave me so much that I treasure, and I have always known that he treasured me. It can only diminish his life to remember the angry, despairing man he became in the last months of his life.

Making that decision is a great relief. It allows me to remain strong at the sight of the ornate casket being carried down the gangway and loaded into the waiting horse-drawn hearse. Mr. Morgan's body is being transported to the Pierpont Morgan Library, where it will lie in state.

Once it is out of our sight, we release a collective sigh. Jack then turns to me. "Belle, I'd like you to ride with us in the family carriage to our home."

Anne's eyes widen. "The occasion is for family only, Jack," she interjects.

If I'd thought that her disdain for me would lift now that her father is gone, I was wrong. Anne, it seems, will continue to battle me for a place in her family—and perhaps even in her family institutions.

"What is Belle *but* family, Anne? She spent more time with Father in these past years than anyone else, and he always insisted that she attend every family function, even the small ones," Jack says.

"Father isn't here anymore, Jack, in case you hadn't noticed."

I watch as he winces.

"Jack," I say, "it is really no trouble. I have my own carriage here,

and I'd planned to have it take me directly to the library anyway. I don't have much time to prepare before we open the doors to the public tomorrow, and I want to be at the library when your father arrives today." The viewing of John Pierpont Morgan must be commensurate with his stature as an important American figure.

"Why don't I ride with you, Belle?" Jack offers.

"I don't want to take you away from your family, today of all days," I say with a glance at Anne.

"Nonsense. You are family, too, and the carriage can take me to my house directly after it drops you at the library."

"That would be lovely. I'd welcome the company." I see the loathing in Anne's eyes as Jack climbs into the carriage alongside me. I can almost hear her vowing that she will not allow another Morgan man to get tangled in my web.

She needn't worry that I'll take Jack away from her. Jack has many admirable qualities—a strong marriage and family life, as well as patience, among others—and these will keep him from the sort of unique intimacy that Mr. Morgan and I experienced. But there's another distinction that no one would suspect. The famously ruthless financier operated his collection out of a pure love of art and beauty, while Jack plans on managing it based on value. I am worried that Jack plans to dismantle his father's legacy.

But Jack and I do not discuss these issues now. The loss sits between us like a third person in the carriage, heavy and dark, and impenetrable. The carriage lurches as we pass brownstones, office buildings, bustling sidewalks, and crowded streets as if it were a typical day in New York City. Without thinking, I say aloud, "It seems impossible that all this can exist—that New York can continue on as normal—without him. He *was* this city."

"Belle," Jack says, his voice thick. Turning toward him, I see that his eyes glisten with tears. "We will make sure that he lives on in this world. You and I."

Once at the library, I wait on the steps for the hearse. As Mr. Morgan

is brought inside, I keep my focus on preparing the rotunda with wreaths of red and white roses. I stay awake until nearly dawn, ensuring that every detail is perfect inside this magnificent, gleaming institution that we created together.

Returning home only to bathe and change into a fresh black dress, I am ready when the mourners line up to pay their respects. At ten o'clock, they enter, and for hours, hundreds of people pour into the library, slowly circling the rotunda and the casket to say farewell to the legendary tycoon. Mama, my sisters, and my brother are among them, as all have benefited tremendously from Mr. Morgan's largesse. Thousands more will be honoring him across the country, with flags flying at half-mast and Wall Street closing for the day. I survive two days of public viewing by saving my sorrow, knowing that when I lock up the library at seven o'clock in the evening on the second day, my grief will come.

When I finally close the fortress-like bronze doors and face the casket, it is just me and Mr. Morgan. I have even dismissed the security guard so that I can be alone. I stand at the foot of the coffin, close my eyes, and place my hand on the polished wood. The words from our last conversation seep into my mind, and I want to say, *I'm sorry*, but I shake my head and push that away.

Instead, I rush into Mr. Morgan's office and gather his Bonham Norton Bible, turning to the last verse I read to him, months before in a rare tranquil moment between us. It hadn't been one of his favorite biblical stories, but a passage he particularly admired. And as I review the words, I find them to be strangely appropriate for this moment.

I take a breath, and as if Mr. Morgan were sitting in front of me on his lion's throne, I begin: "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me." Reading the entire twenty-eight verses of the scripture, I gingerly close the Bible when I reach the end. I bow my head and allow my grief to fill the rotunda, praying silently and sobbing to myself. I hope the words give him solace, wherever he is.

Tomorrow, Mr. Morgan will be honored in a fifty-carriage procession including not only family but also government officials and distinguished citizens, and there will likely be thousands of citizens lining the sidewalks to watch the mournful parade pass. But tonight, it is just us two—as we have always been, and as I would always like us to be.

CHAPTER 33

AUGUST 14 AND SEPTEMBER 8, 1913
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

This is my summer of mourning. I move through my days in the library pretending that Mr. Morgan's office is not as empty as I feel. When Jack starts to appear at the library, I catch glimpses of him at his father's desk, and it unsettles me. The physical resemblance tricks me momentarily into thinking Mr. Morgan has returned, but then I remember and realize—no one else can truly fill his lion's throne.

Compartmentalizing my sadness, I try to forge a relationship with Jack beyond the familial one I've shared for years. It is challenging, and I try to mask my despair and address the list of inventorying and valuation tasks he's assigned me; I need him to know that he can rely on me. Although he finds the occasional painting or manuscript compelling—the Gutenbergs in particular—I know he doesn't connect with the art in the same way that Mr. Morgan did. Rising financier that he is, he thinks of the collection as a set of assets. His father's mission for the library—my mission as well—was not based upon economics; it was based on a passion for art and the desire to create a collection unchallenged in breadth and importance among

European and American institutions. How will I keep the Pierpont Morgan Library's holdings intact in the face of Jack's inclination to parcel the items off and sell them in chunks to the highest bidders? Is this what will become of Mr. Morgan's legacy? And me?

By August, I'm so fraught with nerves and grief I allow myself a respite while my mother and siblings retreat to the Adirondacks once again. I accept the invitation of one of Evelyn's friends to spend two weeks on the North Shore of Long Island, possible only because Jack and his family are away. Nancy opens her parents' estate to us, and seven of us—including myself and Evelyn—have our own rooms in the ten-bedroom mansion. In this beautiful, sprawling, gray-shingled manor overlooking the bay, the women read, draw, and paint, and I spend the bulk of my days writing in my journal, exploring my thoughts, and trying to adjust to a new world, one without the existence of J. P. Morgan. Perhaps one without a role at the Pierpont Morgan Library.

Occasionally, I study the letters that Bernard continues to send, which have increased in number since the death of Mr. Morgan. After his initial expression of sincere condolences, he has returned to declaring his adoration for me: *I cherish you, my dear Belle, and wish for the day when I will hold you in my arms again.* His sentiments do little to move me; though I still long for the man I believed Bernard to be, I have no desire to be with the man he truly is. I wonder if I'll ever find again the sort of connection that I shared with either Bernard or Mr. Morgan, however fleeting.

Days of solitude thinking about Mr. Morgan and my future leave me feeling wistful and troubled, and the evenings of revelry with the other women staying at Nancy's house are a much-needed balm. We gather inside in front of the large stone fireplace on comfortable sofas, playing bridge and chatting and laughing until the sky becomes midnight blue. One night after several glasses of wine, Nancy tells the sorrowful story of her great-great-aunt Estelle, who'd died in this house one hundred years earlier, and we agree that we can feel her

presence. From that night onward, we each call out to her when we retire for bed: "Good night, Estelle." I am the only one who also whispers, "Good night, Mr. Morgan."

On my return to New York, I discover that neither my grief nor my worries have lessened over my sunny holiday. When Jack returns a few weeks later, I hope that an onslaught of work will help dislodge or soften my sadness and concerns. But within the week, Jack summons me to his office in a tone so serious I become quietly panicked. Did he decide on his summer travels to sell off the library collection and dismiss me along with it? What will become of me—and my family—in the wake of Mr. Morgan's death and Jack's very different perspective on art and manuscripts?

Jack gestures for me to enter but does not speak as I settle into my usual chair. I try not to think about how strange it looks to see Jack behind the desk. He puts on his spectacles, then carefully unfolds a document and holds it up to the lamp on his desk. I am immobile as I await his verdict.

Jack flips from one page to the next, finally clearing his throat and saying, "Belle, I've asked you into my office to discuss my father's will."

The will?

"I'm certain you won't be surprised that my father specified that the Pierpont Morgan Library and all its contents pass to me."

I'd assumed as much, even though no one said so explicitly. "I'm not surprised in the least. Your father always believed you were his natural successor at the library." I pause. "He often spoke to me about how he was certain that you'd bring the library the international acclaim it deserved."

"Did he?" His eyebrows rise in surprise.

I nod, feeling little remorse at my exaggeration.

"That's nice to hear, Belle. As I'm sure you know, my father and I did not always have the . . ." Here he hesitates, fumbling for the cor-

rect word. "Smoothest of relationships. Although I respected him greatly and loved him dearly."

"He felt the same way about you," I say, and we smile at each other. It must have been—and still must be—so exhausting to be the son of the great J. P. Morgan. It was hard enough just being his librarian.

He signals that we are returning to the business at hand. The will. Flipping to another page, Jack says, "There are two provisions that specifically address you."

"Me? Two?" I am surprised. Although Mr. Morgan made references to his will from time to time—usually in a threatening fashion—I never had a sense that I'd actually receive anything of consequence from him.

"Yes, the first provision specifically directs me to maintain your employment for a term of at least a year." He glances up. "My father didn't need to spell that out, Belle. I had every intention of keeping you on."

"Thank you." I look down at my carefully folded hands in my lap. I don't want Jack to see that my eyes well with tears of happiness and relief at the two messages Mr. Morgan has sent me through his will. First, even after our argument, Mr. Morgan trusted and forgave me enough to make this provision for me in his will. Second, I can see that he wanted me to guide Jack to the goal we'd shared; Mr. Morgan knew I'd need this time to convince Jack of the importance of the collection itself and the significance of keeping it together with me at the helm.

He pauses. "There is a second provision, a financial one. You have been left the largest personal bequest aside from the family members." I hold my breath, not daring to imagine an amount. "My father wanted you to have the sum of fifty thousand dollars."

"Fifty thousand dollars?" I am stunned. It is close to fifty times what the average person earns in a year. It is an inordinate amount of money, and the sum will provide my family and me with financial security for life. Most of all, it was a warm and generous act. Mr. Morgan could have inserted all sorts of codicils to ensure that I'd

take care of the library just as he would have wanted or that I would only receive the money upon a host of contingencies. But instead, he has given me the freedom to live the life I choose.

"It is much deserved, Belle," Jack says, and I don't bother to hold back my tears.

My step feels light as I walk home. I have new hope and purpose that I haven't felt since Mr. Morgan died. I burst through the door connecting my apartment with my family's. I was not expected, but I know they'll make time for me and utter no snide words about my absence. Mama, Teddy, Louise and her husband, and Ethel and her husband are gathered around the dining table, and they all greet me with warm hugs.

It has been so long since I sat down to a meal with my family. My siblings have married and built careers and lives quite different from my own. Russell, who'd returned from Florida, is an engineer in New Jersey, where he and his wife have a home. While my sisters are still both teachers, Louise's husband is looking for a job as a speech therapist, and Ethel's husband is searching for a job to do just about anything.

Teddy is just months away from getting her teaching degree and has grown more confident, even as she has become more enchanting in appearance. Given that both of my brothers-in-law are out of work, everyone lives here in the apartment until their situation changes. It is a good arrangement; the men fuss over Mama, which she enjoys, although there's nothing she'd enjoy more than the security of her sons-in-law's employment. Even though she doesn't say it, I know she doesn't like the family being so fully dependent on me.

As Mama places a high pile of chicken and potatoes on my plate, I pull up a chair and say, "I have some news."

"What's that?" Mama asks as she continues to serve my sisters.

"Mr. Morgan provided for me in his will."

At first, they all stop and stare at me. Then, all at once, my sisters

and Mama begin talking. Among their voices, I'm able to discern Mama's question. "He included you in his will?" She sounds as astonished as I felt.

"What do you guess his gift might be?" I ask, looking between my mother and my sisters.

"He would leave you what you love," Mama says. "A Renaissance manuscript." She nods definitively.

"No!" Teddy jumps in. "I think he left you three Worth gowns and jewels to go with them."

"That's what I was thinking," Louise chimes in.

I chuckle at their guesses, knowing that my sisters hope for gowns and jewels so they might get my castoffs.

"So, who's right?" Teddy asks, her eyes shining with excitement.

"None of you."

"What is it, then?" Teddy asks, tapping her foot in an impatient gesture I know all too well.

I draw out the news. "He left me—fifty thousand dollars."

My sisters scream, but Mama jumps up from the table to embrace me. "Oh, Belle," she says. "I'm so grateful that Mr. Morgan thought to take care of us."

Then Mama rejoins my sisters, and they erupt in squeals and hugs. Now, even my brothers-in-law have stood and joined in the celebration.

"With that much money, I could afford to get that pink dress at B. Altman's!" Teddy cries out.

"With that much money, you could afford a house to go with the dress!" Louise shrieks.

They clasp hands and jump up and down, while my brothers-in-law stand smiling. Mama steps back and looks on, beaming. They've come to expect me as a source of money. How comfortable they've become on the back of my work.

I sink into my chair. Not only do they express no gratitude toward me, but they also fail to acknowledge the loss that accompanies this windfall.

A single tear streams down my cheek just as Mama glances in my direction. She races to my side, kneeling by my chair. "I'm sorry, Belle. We've been thoughtless in not thanking you."

My sisters and brothers-in-law stop their celebration.

"That's not it, Mama, although a 'thanks' would be nice."

"What is it, then?"

"I miss Mr. Morgan, and I feel lost without him. Everything I have—we have—is due to him. He could be difficult and possessive, but he made me into who I am."

Mama squeezes my hand tight. "Mr. Morgan was a powerful and generous force in your life, and through you, in our family's life. But make no mistake about it, Belle. *You* made yourself into the person you've become. He gave you the opportunity, but every bit of your success belongs to you. You are Belle da Costa Greene."

CHAPTER 34

NOVEMBER 20, 1913
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

With Jack's October departure for his annual sojourn to England comes a welcome reprieve in work, particularly from the pressure to educate Jack on the value of keeping the library collection intact. But what I told my mother a few months ago is still true. I feel lost. In the wake of Mr. Morgan's death, I am awakened to what I feel is a new darkness and a growing recklessness.

I miss Mr. Morgan, and his death opens up the door to other grief in my heart that I've never let myself fully acknowledge before. Behind that door, I see Bernard and my baby alongside my father. In the space that the work reprieve grants me, I find myself longing for all of them—Mr. Morgan, Bernard, motherhood, my father—knowing that reunion can never be.

I try to assuage that longing with words. I read through Mr. Morgan's treasured Gutenbergs, looking for him in the glorious script, the vivid illustrations and decorations along the paper's edges, as well as the language of the Bible itself. I write to Bernard, trying to understand the soul of this man with whom I connected like no other and the heartbreaking decision to not have our child, while staying

distant from him to protect myself. I seek ways to connect with my father through his writing. I analyze his essay "The White Problem," which challenges and confuses me. Then I turn to writing I think would please him—*Harriet, the Moses of Her People* by Sarah Hopkins Bradford, the autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington, and from the Pierpont Morgan Library's own collection, an early edition of the poems of Phillis Wheatley, an eighteenth-century former slave who wrote beautiful but conflicted poetry about slavery.

When this isn't enough, I seek more reading to help me understand my father, his decision, and its impact on me. Nothing was more important to him than what was happening in our own country, events that I've sometimes ignored as I pursued my own individual success. I study a broad swath of the newspapers, imagining Papa's fury at President Wilson's decision to take a hammer to racial equality and authorize segregation within the federal government. I envision a smile on his face when he learned about the work of colored women like Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and the twenty-two young women from Howard University, members of a colored sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, who joined thousands of others in the Women's Suffrage Parade in Washington, DC, despite the fact that they weren't wanted. While I am impressed with the work that's being done, particularly by the colored fraternities and sororities, and feel pulled to the cause, I wonder how I can help. Living as a white woman, could I ever participate in this important work for colored people? Or should I abandon my false identity and launch into the fight for equality? I feel like there's no real place for me inside my father's world—or in the white one—and I am adrift.

As a woman, I refuse to be defined by a man," Katrina says, and I watch as the table full of women in serious, somber-colored blouses and skirts nod in agreement. An onlooker in the restaurant at the Martha Washington Hotel might think the other women look dowdy

compared to me, in my stylish teal dress and a matching scarf that has become somewhat of my signature, but in actuality, they are leading far more independent, radical lives than I am.

"Exactly," another woman responds, the one with the wiry red hair that refuses to be tamed by her bun. "Especially since most men think a true woman is a pious, submissive wife!"

"That doesn't fit any of us," Katrina says.

"Not at all. We are autonomous individuals who deserve our own political identities," the redhead continues.

Then Katrina and the other three women begin speaking together. "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men *and* women are created equal . . ."

They hold up their cordials in a toast, and although I lift my glass to join them, I feel disconnected from them. When Katrina asked me to join her and three of her friends for cordials and desserts, I jumped at the chance to quell my restless mind and seeking heart with numbing drinks and distracting conversation. I didn't expect that the discussion would drive me deeper into my own sense of isolation from the world.

When Katrina sees my expression, she whispers, "We were just reciting a part of the Declaration of Sentiments from the Seneca Falls Convention." I feel even worse. Shouldn't I have known that? *How out of touch with the critical issues of my gender and race I've allowed myself to become*, I think. My independence seems self-focused and in name only; am I just a fraud?

"Excuse me, ladies, can I offer you another drink?"

I look up at the colored waiter. I wonder if I have more in common with him than the white world in which I pretend to belong. But when I smile in empathy with him, that little bit of kindness takes him aback, and whether it's my grin or my appearance that confuses him, I can tell he's one of the few colored who do not recognize me for the imposter that I am. He's used to being a black man invisible among white people.

"M-Miss, would you like another cordial?" he stammers as Katrina

and her friends burst out in laughter at something else I don't understand.

"I would," I say to him. Then, leaning close, I say, "Thank you for your service."

He pulls away from the table, confused by my compassion. "Um, I'll get you that drink," he says, scurrying away as if my goodwill is a white person's trap. *How terribly sad*, I think.

When a white waiter returns with my drink in place of the colored man, I know that I must stop behaving so recklessly, as if I'm going to make a decision about my race right here at the Martha Washington Hotel. There must be some other way I can appease my restlessness without risking my identity. At least for tonight.

Taking a long, final sip of my drink, I get ready to say my farewells, when three young men approach our table. "May we join you?" a lanky blond man asks the table, while his two dark-haired friends wait.

Katrina hops up and squeals. "Charles, what are you doing here?" She introduces us to her brother, and the three men join our group. Even though Katrina and I knew each other during our school years, I don't recall meeting her brother.

One of the darker-haired fellows sits at the end of the table in the chair next to me, and after a long period of awkward silence in which I decide to order a third drink, I ask him about the book he's carrying.

"*The Souls of Black Folk*," he recites the title. "Have you read this?"

"By W. E. B. DuBois," I say.

"You've heard of him?"

My lies begin. "No, not really," I say as images of my father flash in my mind. Then I add, "Just a little," in case something I know slips out.

"Do you know that this man right here"—he taps the book—"was the first colored man to earn a doctorate from Harvard?"

My eyes widen. "No," I say, "I didn't know that." In this moment, I feel a surge of pride and long to tell him about the first colored man

ever to graduate from that esteemed school. But I say nothing about Papa as the young man continues on about his love for this book and his hopes for racial equality. I can't risk it.

"Reading this has given me such insight into what it's like to be black in this country. How black people must have two sets of eyes all the time, two fields of vision that are totally incongruent because they have to be mindful of how they see themselves, but that is most likely completely the opposite of how the world sees them. So it's like walking this balancing act," he goes on.

I am amazed at how this young white man has captured so much of that book and my life. As he continues talking, the words he speaks sound like my father's, and even though they are emanating from a white man's mouth, they are just as earnest. *Incredible*, I think, *men of two different colors saying the same thing*. This white man was born in a place of familial prosperity, but still yearns for equality; my father's longing stems from a place of survival. It gives me hope.

But after I finish my fourth drink something else happens—no longer do I see my father in this young man. I see and *feel* Bernard. With this thought, I realize I must leave. As I start to say my good-byes, Katrina directs the young man with whom I've been talking, "Jonathan, help Miss Greene secure a carriage home, will you?"

He escorts me through the elegant lobby outside. No carriages are in sight, so we stroll toward the park, where occasionally they form a queue. His arm slides through mine, but instead of maintaining the usual polite distance, I lean toward him as my last drink makes my head spin. He is surprised when I stand on my tiptoes to kiss him. His return kisses are sloppy and his hands clumsy, but his inexperience doesn't matter to me. I am searching for one thing—a connection, however fleeting, to anchor me.

Jonathan takes my hand and leads me to a nearby building. I wait while he unlocks the door and then we silently walk up one flight, entering a single room stacked high with books. I realize Jonathan must be a student, and I wonder about his age as I glance at the simple furnishings—a desk, a bed not much larger than a cot, and a

small round table pressed up against an icebox, a stove, and a tiny sink. In this moment, however, I don't care about his age or his decor.

When he reaches for me and starts to unbutton my dress, I try to surrender to the feeling. We lie on the bed, and I allow him to undress me. But the kisses and the caresses do not give me what I need—to fill the void with definitive *meaning*. I sit up on his bed and push him away. Without speaking another word, I slide on my undergarments and gown and leave, never even saying goodbye.

I rush into the night, finally staggering into my apartment with a throbbing head and a broken heart. I cannot remain in this restless darkness. I must find answers to the questions about who I'm going to become now that Mr. Morgan has passed away, how to be Belle da Costa Greene, maybe not authentically but completely. As I lie in my bed, I turn this conundrum round and round in my mind. Then, in an instant, I know what I must do. In order to move forward, I must go back.

CHAPTER 35

DECEMBER 4, 1913
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The hotel restaurant, filled with dozens of rectangular tables with black tablecloths and white overlays, is empty save for the *maitre d'* and an old gentleman at a table set for two. Where is he? The hour is correct; we formalized it in one of the letters we've exchanged over the last month.

But then, I look more closely at the elderly man in a charcoal-gray suit.

When he stands and in a low, melodious voice says, "Is that really you, Belle?" I recognize his voice. His curly hair and beard are now a shock of white, but his aristocratic features—the long, thin nose and finely chiseled cheekbones—they are all the same.

"Belle," he says again and stretches out his arms, as if asking for permission to embrace me. I start to shake when I am pulled into the familiar warmth of his arms. I haven't been held like this since he left.

The way Papa says my name is special; he draws it out and it sounds like the refrain of a song. To him, Belle is not simply a name but an expression of his feelings for and about me.

"Sit, my sweet girl." He takes my leather overnight satchel and pulls out a chair for me.

I slip off my coat. It is winter in Chicago, and the breeze was bitter on my walk.

As we both take a seat, we smile nervously at each other. The white linen overlay on the table stretches between us like an unnavigable ocean.

Finally, Papa speaks. "Belle, you cannot know how I've longed for this day."

Sobs overtake me. I have missed my father through the years, but it is only at this moment that I realize the pain of his absence is more than emotional, it is physical. The ache for him has been ever present, and now it rises up from inside me.

He is first to cross that ocean. Leaning across the table, he clasps my hands.

"Papa, I've missed you terribly." My face is wet, and I withdraw my hands to retrieve my handkerchief and dry my eyes and cheeks.

As if he'd been waiting for me to regain my calm, the waiter approaches. We scan the menu quickly and place our orders, a simple chicken soup for me and lamb chops for Papa. We are both eager to be alone.

"Seventeen years," Papa says and shakes his head. "I can't believe seventeen years have passed us by. I am so grateful you found me."

"Uncle Mozart has been keeping me abreast of where you've been as much as he could. He was the one who gave me your address."

"When I received your first letter, well—" Again, he shakes his head. "I've been keeping up and following you, too."

"You have?"

"Of course, and I'd always wanted this day to come, but I didn't dare hope."

"There is so much that we have to catch up on, where do we even begin?"

"Start wherever you want. I can't wait to hear everything."

I launch into a spirited recitation of what my sisters and brother have been doing. "Well, do you remember how Louise and Ethel were inseparable as kids?"

He nods.

"Nothing's changed. They have found a way to live together in an apartment—with their husbands." I decide not to mention that they're all living together in an apartment I pay for, with Mama and Teddy. No need to insert troubles into our reunion.

When Papa leans back and belly laughs, I am taken back thirty years, to the dining table where we all gathered for dinner and Papa sat at the head, entertaining us with stories that filled our home with laughter.

"So, Russell isn't there?"

"No, thank goodness," I say, and we laugh together. "He's also married, but he and his wife live in New Jersey. He's an engineer and as steady and as solid as you raised him to be."

He nods, but his smile fades and I regret my words. Russell was still a young man when Papa left; Papa had started to raise his son, but he certainly didn't finish. He didn't complete that task with any of us.

His face brightens again when I tell him about Teddy. "And then, there is Teddy. Oh, Papa, she is so lovely and will be finishing up Teachers' College soon."

He asks me for a few details, and we chat, but I don't broach Mama. And while I share my siblings' spouses' names and professions, I have omitted their ethnicity. No need to talk about race yet.

Then Papa asks me about my own career. I place my spoon down in my bowl. "Papa, there is not a day that goes by when I don't think of you. Every time I've held something in my hands, like the Sweynheym and Pannartz copy of Virgil." Papa releases a low whistle before I continue. "I've wished I could share the moment with you. One time, I even had a chance to go deep behind the walls of our favorite place—"

He interrupts excitedly. "The Metropolitan Museum?"

"You remember?"

"How can I ever forget the weekends when you and I would spend a whole day there?" The idea that those memories remain with him fills me with peace and warmth.

He continues, "Belle, you've traveled all over the world collecting these rare manuscripts, and I've loved hearing about your conquests. But I think it was that article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that made me the most proud. When you won the Caxton *Le Morte Darthur*? What a triumph!"

I smile, but say nothing. The memory of that auction is a highlight in my life, and it would have stayed that way if I hadn't returned to the office that night. But I try not to think about that and continue sharing with my father the smaller particulars about my work. He is glowing as I describe the manuscripts I handle daily and the world-class groupings I've assembled and the other glorious collections I've explored.

"What success you've had, Belle! The papers hardly capture your scholarly achievements. To be able to study and collect rare books and precious art for your life's work. It's a career I would have pursued if it had been open to me after Harvard. What a gift."

"It's a gift you gave me. *You* were the one who introduced me to the beauty of art and the importance of the printed word and its history."

"I am so pleased you were able to pursue what you loved. I just wish—" He stops and lowers his eyes.

"What, Papa?"

When he looks up, he's smiling, but the joy doesn't reach his eyes. "I wish I'd been there with you, been there for you. I wish I'd been able to stay by your side, and not end up in Russia, where I started a new—"

I know he's about to say "started a new family," but I don't want us to be distracted with talk about his Japanese family when our time is so limited. So I quickly interrupt him by saying, "No, no, Papa. There's no need for wishing. You planted the seeds for my career."

"Well, it's you that's cultivated them. It's more than any colored girl could ever dream of, and it's more opportunity than would have been available to me as a colored man."

I tense at his use of the word, glance around to make sure he wasn't overheard, but then I stop myself. There isn't another soul within earshot, and no one knows me in Chicago.

As he notices my reaction, the smile that he's worn since I arrived fades. He pushes his plate away and leans back from the table. "But that's the price, isn't it? Pretending to be someone that you're not." His tone carries no judgment. "When I saw your picture in the *New York Times*, I was so proud of you. But I was also profoundly sad. I realized that to achieve one dream, you had to forsake your core identity. Changing your name is easy. Changing your soul is impossible."

"You don't approve, do you?" I lean forward. This is what I've always wanted to know, the question I've always wanted him to answer.

He gives me a rueful chortle. "It is not a question of approval. Our society forced you to make that choice. And that is a travesty. There were no good choices for you or for your mother. It is not for me to judge the decisions you have made."

He has every right to judge. Papa is as fair as Teddy, and he could have lived our life. Instead, he sacrificed everything to live authentically as a colored man.

"Since Mr. Morgan died, I feel so lost, Papa. And I wonder if I would feel this way if I'd made a different choice." He nods in understanding. "I wonder sometimes if the sacrifice I made to have this success is worth it." It is a relief to confess my doubts out loud.

"My darling Belle." Papa reaches for my hand and squeezes it. "You are more authentic than anyone I know. You have lived the life that was meant for you; it's just that you had to do it as a white woman because of racism." He sighs. "I wish you knew about the time, a brief time, mind you, when a colored man or woman could stand tall and thrive, regardless of the shade of their skin."

"I know, Papa. Mama told me about your professorship at the University of South Carolina. Those must have been promising days. Full of hope."

His expression is wistful. "I hope it helped you to understand why I couldn't abandon the fight for equal rights. But I also want you to understand why I left."

I had made so many judgments about Mama and I'd been wrong. Now I'm glad Papa will have the chance to tell me his story.

The waiter clears our table, giving my father a few moments to collect his thoughts. Once we are alone, Papa begins. "When I walked out of that door, I wasn't sure what I was going to do, but I knew I couldn't live in two worlds. It was impossible for me to pretend to be white, to live as the father of a white family and to continue to fight for racial equality. The only way to genuinely protect my family was to continue to actively argue and battle for our rights. I wanted to give you all a brighter future."

We order dessert, and my father slips into his professorial voice. "Reconstruction made us equal. Discrimination was against the law. And the federal government protected us.

"But when the Supreme Court overturned the Civil Rights Act, segregation began its journey to legality, and there was no protection. We lost our freedom, but I didn't lose my hope. I thought we could have the ruling modified. I believed it would be a battle, but one we could win." He shakes his head. "But it's been much harder than any of us thought."

"Even though it's been difficult, you've been fighting on the right side, Papa," I reassure him. "You have so much to be proud of."

"Perhaps," he says. "But this is a political battle we're fighting, and sometimes the leaders fight among themselves. At the moment, I am bereft of my old allies. I sided with Booker T. Washington because I admired how he strategized with business owners and politicians. But the tide has turned, and Willie DuBois is now leading the movement. I admire Willie, especially his plans for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. They are intriguing. But for some reason, I make him nervous, and because of that, I've been in the wilderness, separated from the life that I know." My concerned expression must be upsetting to him, because he tries to

perk up and paints a smile on his face and adds, "But I've done some good writing here."

I nod when he mentions his paper "The White Problem," but I remain quiet. He sounds so much like the orator papa that I remember, and I don't want to interrupt.

"I argued that the problem between the colored and white races wasn't due to some kind of inherent flaw in colored men and women. It was the result of the bigotry and racism that white people had toward us. I presented proof of the heights to which colored folks could fly if untethered from racist bindings. I listed hundreds of colored men and women from the Revolutionary War through to our present day who had made astonishing strides in the arts, science, politics, business, literature, even the military.

"There was a time when your mother had the same beliefs. Early in our marriage, she was as certain as I was about those words 'all men are created equal.' However, once she stared racism in the face, that was all she could see. She couldn't see promise, she didn't have hope; she felt that primal urge to protect her children, and *that* I understand." He pauses, and I wonder if my father has his own regrets about leaving. But then he says, "I still believe. I still believe that someday there will be equality in this country. That someday there will be a new civil rights act, and a new president and Congress to enforce it. That everyone will be able to follow their dream, regardless of race. That those words about the equality of men in the Declaration of Independence will be true."

I hear his hope, although it is hard to envision this future. While I am inspired by the young women and men in colored colleges who are following in the steps of my father, my daily encounters are what influence me the most. The newspapers are still filled with reports of beatings and lynchings. I see countless colored men employed at the lowest levels as hotel workers and day laborers, as well as the colored women working as hotel cooks and dressmakers. It is honest work, but they are not treated with dignity in their positions, especially when I hear racist views being bandied about in the high-

society circles in which I travel. All of this makes it impossible for me to see what my father envisions.

I shake my head. "I wish I had your hope, Papa. I want to, but I don't." I pause, thinking how much my words are like the ones Mama said to Papa all those years ago. "That's why I'm so conflicted. I *know* this life that I've lived is false at its core, and while I yearn for another, I'm afraid because of the world we live in." I blink away the tears forming in my eyes. "I hope you're not too disappointed in me."

His voice is soft when he says, "No, Belle, I could never be disappointed in you. I'm only disappointed that, in order for you to have this life, you have to pretend to be white. I'm fighting for a time when you could have your same life *as* a colored woman."

I wipe away the tears that I can't hold back. "I find myself at a crossroads. I have the liberty to strike out on my own path. Perhaps more authentically—"

"Your own path," he repeats. "Is it the bequest Mr. Morgan left you that provides that liberty?"

The news was announced in the papers a few months ago, so I'm not surprised he knows. "In part. But I've also been considering what to do next in my career, my life."

"Are you going to leave the Pierpont Morgan Library?" He sounds surprised.

"That's what I don't know. Mr. Morgan made provisions in his will for me to stay."

"Do you still love the work? Do you feel that you're making a valuable contribution to the world? Building a legacy that will benefit more people than just yourself, your mother, and your siblings? Does your path have *meaning*?"

"Yes, in answer to all your questions. My plan is to turn the Pierpont Morgan Library from a private library into a public institution so that thousands and thousands of people will see the beauty and significance of the early written word—the importance of reading and books as a great equalizer among humankind. But I'm not living my life openly as a"—my voice drops to a whisper—"colored person.

And I'm beginning to wonder if I should be." I pause and ask Papa the question directly: "Should I come forward with the truth so I serve as an example, as you have done? As you wrote about in your paper?"

He sighs. "Belle, all I've ever wanted for my children was the opportunity to soar, no matter their heritage, and to live a life of *meaning*. That has been my fight. But in our current society with our current laws, it's enough that you succeed, that you are able to follow your passion in your work, that you leave a legacy that will benefit the multitudes—one day, even the colored multitudes. It breaks my heart to say it, but right now, I do not think you can have both."

I am astonished. This is not the guidance I expected from the man whose life has been dedicated to equal rights. When I arrived in Chicago, I believed I'd leave it with the mandate to own my ancestry, a path I'd begun to consider as a viable option for me.

"Proceed with your work and your unique mission, Belle, and continue to accomplish great things. This is not the time to change course. You are one of the most important librarians and art historians—and one of the most successful self-made women—in this country, and what's most important now is that you leave your own legacy. The one you described to me."

There are confused tears in my eyes, tears of relief and astonishment and a modicum of disappointment. I'd expected that Papa would help me open a new door; I'd imagined that with his counsel, I would reinvent myself. But he has closed the door instead. He has just given me permission to continue to thrive as Belle da Costa Greene.

"One day, Belle, we will be able to reach back through the decades and claim you as one of our own. Your accomplishments will be part of history; they'll show doubtful white people what colored people can do. Until that time, live your life proudly." He gives me a smile full of love and warmth. "I'm so proud of you."

I squeeze Papa's hand. Then, I close my eyes, savoring his words and absorbing his hope.

CHAPTER 36

DECEMBER 10 AND 22, 1913

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I will myself to stay impassive as I wait in the lobby of the Belmont Hotel. *As cool and serene as a marble statue in the Greek and Roman section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I think, and as incapable of feeling.* That's how I will look, and that is how I will feel. Cold and numb.

Then I see him. He is strolling down the grand staircase with Mary. When they approach, I reach out to her first.

"How lovely to see you again," I exclaim, as if the meeting had been arranged by the two of us.

"Belle, you look more beautiful than ever," she says, generous with her praise as always.

"As do you," I say, although this is untrue. Mary appears heavier than I last saw her, and her skin has a clammy, slightly sickly pallor. Has she been ill? Bernard hasn't mentioned it in his letters, but then he rarely discusses her.

Bernard wears an elegant, well-tailored gray suit. His eyes are as bright and intelligent as I remember, and his hair and beard are still dark and close-cut. When he draws close to me for a welcoming kiss, the heady scent of him is overwhelming.

Our meal is friendly, and we fill one another in on our travels and stories of mutual friends. I can hear myself talking comfortably in a way that my unsophisticated younger self never could. I am not the same woman as the one Bernard bedded in Italy.

When I regale them with the story of my wildest contretemps in Greenwich Village, some months ago—a rowdy night in which a strange mix of my suffragette friends, artistic companions, and I almost got into fisticuffs with a group of hooligans—Bernard practically spits as he says, "Such company is beneath you, Belle. You deserve better than a motley band of singers, musicians, artists, and activists fighting for a cause that doesn't make sense."

I directed the conversation to my Greenwich Village endeavors knowing it would antagonize him. I wanted him to see that we now inhabit utterly different orbits and have not a thing in common, that there is no reason for our paths to cross in any way other than professional.

"I think I can decide for myself what company is beneath me," I say with a pointed glance his way. Then I light a cigarette. "Anyway, don't be so narrow-minded, Bernard. Those women are carving out a new, independent life. One that doesn't require men."

Mary lets out a devilish chuckle. "How intriguing," she says.

I continue. "We are going to have to get used to new ways of thinking—in the way we conduct our lives and the way art is created as well." I hope he understands that I am sending him a message; I'm not only talking about bohemians or art the likes of which I saw in the 291 gallery.

"What do you mean?" A scowl appears on his face.

Blowing a smoke ring toward the ceiling, I say, "Surely you can read the tea leaves that nonobjective art will become mainstream. We will have to find a way to welcome modernist art on walls alongside our beloved Italian Renaissance masters. Won't you be going to the Armory Show while you're here?" The exciting—and shocking—Park Avenue show shook up the staid New York art world when it opened earlier this year. It features a thought-provoking exhibit of

impressionist, fauvist, and cubist works, including striking pieces by Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and Marcel Duchamp. The experience of seeing those utterly new perspectives on landscapes and portraiture had been just as exciting as sitting next to Teddy while we devoured the thrills and shocks of *The Last Days of Pompeii* in one of the new picture houses.

It is at this tense moment of intellectual and artistic disagreement that Bernard excuses himself. As he walks away, Mary slides her chair closer to me, and quite against her usually deafening volume, half whispers, "May I speak frankly with you, Belle?"

What can I say but yes?

"I know things ended badly when you and Bernard were last together."

I inhale, wondering how much she knows.

She continues, "But I also know you two still have feelings for each other. He sets aside hours a week to write you and eagerly reads your letters. He's been counting down the days until he saw you. And since we arrived, he's been preening for you. There is no one who can replace you. Please give him a chance, Belle. If you're not ready now, perhaps when we return from Boston next week?"

How strange to be discussing my former lover with his wife. How wrong. "I'm not certain I can do that, Mary."

"Belle, I don't think you realize the effect you had—and continue to have—on Bernard," she presses. "You managed to scale the wall around his heart that he built in his youth as a means of surviving a world filled with prejudice for people like him. It was difficult for him, a young boy from Lithuania living in Boston. I'm sure he's told you the stories."

I smile, but I do not tell her no.

She continues, "But that wall is no longer there because of you. You got to him, and when you left, he was devastated. Even once we both returned to Italy weeks later, he could neither eat nor sleep, spending hours just gazing out the window. I encouraged him to go

after you, but he said you were too upset because he didn't come to London."

Could she possibly understand just how much agony her husband subjected me to?

She continues, "He stayed in Paris because he didn't know how to handle that much emotion, but since then, Belle—"

I interrupt her. "I hardly think he's been pining for the past three years, Mary. I've heard he's been consoling himself with his new friend, Edith Wharton."

Mary winces at the mention of Edith's name, but her discomfort doesn't stop me. I add, "Along with others." I do not want Mary—or Bernard—to think me naive any longer.

"Belle, you of all people know that other women and other men"—she gives me a long stare that lets me know they, too, have read the gossip columns and heard the rumors—"can serve as a means of distracting you from your real emotions."

She clasps my hand, holding it tight in hers. "Edith doesn't mean anything to him. But you do. Promise me you'll give him a chance?"

As Bernard sleeps, I stare at him, saying a small thanks for Mary's generosity and wisdom. Not only because I am here with him now, but because these last three days have allowed me to understand Bernard and the role that I want for him in my life.

When Mary and Bernard returned to New York three days ago after a week in Boston, I allowed Bernard first to accompany me to the new Shubert Theatre, where we saw the George Bernard Shaw play *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and next to an afternoon strolling through the halls of the Metropolitan Museum. On those two occasions, I had an epiphany. I realized that I did not have to erect the barricade around myself that I'd built for my first meeting with Bernard and Mary, because I no longer had to protect myself from him. In his presence, I no longer felt the same sway of emotion and longing for

him; it had been replaced by a companionable rapport based on our shared worldview as outsiders in an insular realm, a deep respect for his intellect and artistic knowledge, and laughter.

Now, as I stare at him with his hair tousled, I can truly see him as if for the first time, for the flawed human that he is. A man fearful of intimacy, because he's been living behind a persona that he's created to protect himself from the ostracism he's undoubtedly felt since his youth and certainly during his adult years. Because of that, he cannot allow anyone to get close, not even me. I'd suspected this since Mr. Morgan's reference to Bernard as a Jew, a suspicion that was reinforced with the Russian words Bernard uttered during our first night together. But not until Mary mentioned the prejudices that Bernard suffered as a child because he was Lithuanian did I know for certain he wasn't the Boston-born-and-bred Brahmin that he pretends to be.

Doesn't Bernard realize that he is the only one who believes his Jewish heritage is a complete secret? Not that I can fault him for trying to hide his identity, even if the repercussions of being discovered would be less significant than they would be for me. That is a horror I can't allow myself to fully imagine.

Bernard's eyes flutter open. "Good morning," he says and then kisses me.

I enjoy the feeling of his lips on mine, but these days with Bernard have proven I'm free of his sway. I am free, although that freedom does not mean that I want to bar him from my life completely. I will invite him in and enjoy him—including his skill as a lover—on my terms.

"Can we really manage it?" I untangle myself from the bedsheets and sit up in the bed.

His eyes crinkle at the corners as he wraps his arms around me and bestows feather-like kisses on my neck. As I close my eyes and tilt my head, once again I think about how grateful I am to be in his bed.

By the time we had dinner last evening, just us two in a private room at Delmonico's, I was ready to let him seduce me with art, as

he had before. Over Burgundy and oysters and filet mignon, I allowed him to lure me in with his confession about the few modern painters he admired, Gustav Klimt among them. I permitted him to woo me with his languorous descriptions of Klimt's brushstrokes and his use of gold leaf and mosaics. And I succumbed to his seductive descriptions of how Klimt captured the erotic female form in his art.

By the time dinner ended, I was ready to return with him to his room at the Hotel Webster. There, I enjoyed his skills and charms, realizing that he understood my body and my physical needs as no one else. As I succumbed to his touch and his whispers, I felt I was returning home. But this time, even though I ended up in his bed, I knew I would never be hurt—romantically—by Bernard again.

"I think we can manage it," Bernard finally whispers in my ear. "I don't see why not." His fingertips tickle my bare back, and I shiver.

I have to shift away from him so that I can speak. "I'm not certain that any couple has successfully undertaken this challenge before."

"But we are not just any couple," he says, taking a long curl that trails down my back and wrapping it around his finger.

"I suppose that's true."

"I will write you daily so our connection stays strong, and you will write as often as the Pierpont Morgan Library allows. I enjoy those journal-like letters that you send. They make me feel as though I'm with you all day. You can talk of your modern painters, and I will confess that Mr. Klimt's work has a special appeal to me. His use of gold is almost Renaissance-like, after all." We smile together. Bernard and I have enjoyed our passionate conversations about the changing art world.

"That seems reasonable," I say. "You won't feel jealous of my work when I can't match you letter for letter?"

"I promise."

"And when we are together, we will be fully committed to one another."

"Exclusively." He springs the curl free from his finger and reaches for another.

"But when we are apart, we will be free to pursue our passions—whether they take the form of work or pleasure," I say.

"As you have insisted," he says, reminding me that he argued for a firmer commitment between us. I refused. Pointing out that expecting fidelity in romance had only caused us strife and insecurities—both private and voiced in our letters—in the past, I argued for something entirely new. And he had relented to this more flexible arrangement.

"Any other course will be doomed to failure," I maintain, as I had several times.

"And we don't want failure," he says, kissing the small of my back. "We will exist on letters and—"

"Rendezvous," I finish for him and fall back into his waiting arms.

CHAPTER 37

DECEMBER 23, 1913
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The heavy bronze doors to the library close loudly. Who could it be? I am alone here, save for the security guards, and my calendar contains no appointment for the afternoon. In fact, I'd cleared my schedule so I could prepare for Jack's return from Europe tomorrow.

Rising from my desk, I stride across my office toward the rotunda, just in time to bump into Jack. "What a pleasant surprise," I say. I'd planned to work all afternoon and evening on the outstanding items for my morning meeting with Jack, as the previous days had been spent in Bernard's company. Now I worry Jack will want to plunge directly into business matters for which I'm not fully prepared. "I didn't expect you back at the library until tomorrow morning."

"The *Oceanic* just docked, and Jessie and I knew we had to come to the library straightaway to see you." His eyes twinkle underneath his heavy, dark eyebrows. For a moment, he is the image of his father. My heart clenches at the resemblance.

I focus on the situation at hand. The Morgans needed to see me? As soon as they disembarked from their annual stint in London? The news will be either stupendous or disastrous.

"Your father used to do the same thing," I tell him, my tone bitter-sweet at the memory.

"I know," he says with a pat on my hand. He understands how hard Mr. Morgan's passing has been on me; this shared grief binds us together. "For much the same reasons that we do so today, I'm guessing."

I hear the clip of Jack's wife's delicate step across the rotunda. Her sweet face, still pretty if a little matronly after four children and over twenty years of marriage, peeks into my office, and she beams. The couple, Anglophiles to the core in their manner and interests and not only because they'd lived in London for many years, are devoted to each other. After Mr. Morgan died and Jack became a fixture at the library, I witnessed how involved Jessie was in every aspect of his life, providing him with firm and definitive guidance and support when needed. She fills the hole in his heart left by his father's judgment.

"Oh, Belle, we are so delighted to see you." Her voice bears a tiny English accent after so many months abroad, and in her deep blue traveling dress with its striking silhouette, she must be wearing the latest London fashion.

"I'm pleased to see you both. Three months away is too long," I say as we embrace.

"Were your ears burning while we were away?" Jessie asks, with a sparkle of her own in her soft aquamarine eyes.

"No more than usual."

"Your name was on everyone's lips in London."

"My name?" I am surprised. I haven't been to London for nearly three years. Surely more scintillating things have transpired in the meantime.

"Oh, yes," Jack chimes in. "All the men in the art and book world told us how highly they think of you. Curators, dealers, experts—well, they seem to be unanimous in their view that you created a marvelous collection for my father here at the library."

"How lovely to hear. You know it means the world to me that I honored your father—during his lifetime and now," I say.

"Oh, Belle, there was even one dinner in which Charles Read half threatened to steal you away from us. I do believe he'd like to bring you to England to work for him at the British Museum," Jessie exclaims.

I'm flattered that the highly esteemed keeper of the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities would express such an interest in me, even if it was just dinner party chatter.

"He wasn't the only one, Belle," Jack says, all seriousness. They glance at each other, as if they'd rehearsed this exchange and he was now prompting her next line.

Jessie's face is now somber as well. "We can't have that, can we, Jack? We must keep our Belle."

I look between the two of them, wondering what is going on.

"So I—we," he says with a meaningful glance at Jessie, "have been thinking. You've been very clear in your desire to keep the Morgan collections intact, which we understand and appreciate, as it was my father's goal as well. And while we still feel that we need to address my father's somewhat objectionable and problematic practice of keeping as much as two-thirds of the family financial capital in artwork, perhaps we don't have to divest the collection here at the library. It seems the Pierpont Morgan Library is considered to be quite important, especially in its holdings of rare books and manuscripts."

"Really?" I blurt out. Of course, I've been pleading for this for months. It only took a roomful of lofty British men to convince him that I was right.

"Yes. We will have to sell off certain portions of father's holdings, many of which were never held here at the library, some of which predated your role as librarian even."

My body tenses. Even though I don't actually own any of the objects in the library or Mr. Morgan's homes or on loan to museums, I feel a certain sense of pride and ownership about them. I say a silent prayer that the items dearest to me—those incunabula and manuscripts that together tell the history of the written word and its power

to lift humanity—can be spared the guillotine. "Which items do you have in mind?"

"I studied the inventory you prepared while we were in London, and the Chinese porcelain collection currently on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art seems like a natural first to go."

I exhale slowly, hoping my relief isn't audible. These four thousand pieces, many Ming dynasty vases among them, are indeed exquisite, but were largely a project of Mr. Morgan himself. While I wish Jack could preserve it intact for Mr. Morgan's sake, the collection is too vast for one family, even for one museum, in truth. During one trip to the museum, I had the misfortune of seeing some of the pieces packaged away in a basement storage room because even the Met didn't have the space to properly display the collection in its entirety. "That's a logical choice, sir. I believe they could fetch up to three million dollars."

His eyes widen. "Well, that amount would go a long way to pay the tax authorities."

"Any other initial thoughts?" I want to prepare myself if Jack is targeting any other item of particular value to me.

"The Fragonards?" he asks.

In 1902, Mr. Morgan had purchased Jean-Honoré Fragonard's masterpiece, *The Progress of Love*—a series of eleven painted panels, commissioned by the last mistress of Louis XIV, which celebrate the different stages of love—and created a room to house them in London. I have never seen them, and have no particular feeling about them. Consequently, I'd be relieved to see them on the sale list over some favorite treasures. "Another fine choice. I'm guessing we could get in excess of a million dollars for them."

He lets out a low whistle, and then says, with a broad smile, "Are you pleased, Belle?"

"I am overjoyed," I say, and mean it. The Pierpont Morgan Library's collection—the legacy Mr. Morgan and I created together—will remain intact. This is a key step in creating the larger meaning I discussed with Papa.

Jack and Jessie smile at my reaction, and then he says, "I'm glad to hear it. We'll maintain the core collection here. The books and the manuscripts, the treasures you deem most important."

My cheeks hurt from smiling. While I'll lament selling off any piece of artwork Mr. Morgan and I acquired together, the thought that I will be able to keep much of the library's collection feels like deliverance. "I cannot thank you—"

"Jack, Jessie! Where are you?" a familiar voice cries out, interrupting me.

"In Belle's office!" Jack calls to his sister.

With her unmistakable, plodding footsteps, Anne storms into the room. "I went over to your house to welcome you home, but I heard you came here first. Whatever for?"

She doesn't bother to greet me as she bestows lavish hugs upon her brother and sister-in-law.

"We had some good news to give Belle, and we didn't want to wait."

Anne turns to glare at me, as if she's just noticed I am also in my office. Even though her eyes are on me, she speaks to her brother. "It couldn't keep until tomorrow? You've just got off a transatlantic voyage."

Jack's smile is firmly affixed. He is pleased with his plan, and that's what he's thinking about. Selling off the art will amass the money he needs to pay taxes and keep a more liquid estate and business. Maintaining the library largely unscathed will allow him to retain the Morgan reputation in the rarefied world of collecting.

He explains to Anne that the library will survive, and my place as the guardian of the books and manuscripts as well. "We will keep Belle at the helm. It will be a fitting tribute to Father. You know what brought him the deepest pleasure was reading the voices of the past. Collecting the books, touching the letters and the documents."

Jack is right. It's that intimate conversation with the past that provided the connection between Mr. Morgan and me. Each book in the library contained a world of personalities and stories and history.

We shared an insatiable curiosity. The deeper we each read, the more we would understand about this world we live in, and the more questions we had.

I wonder if Anne is contemplating whether there is any way around her brother's decision. But she knows the will leaves this decision entirely up to Jack. Her father's bequest to her was an unfettered three million dollars and no power, but lack of authorization has never stopped Anne.

Strange that she's so quiet. Does this reticence signal a rage so intense she dare not voice it in front of her brother?

Sensing a brewing awkwardness, Jessie steps in and guides Jack away. "Well, darling, we've delivered the news. Should we return home and ready for dinner?"

"Yes, my love," he replies. Then, he turns to his sister. "Are you coming?"

"I'll be there, but I'd like a word alone with Belle first."

After a flurry of farewell embraces and expressions of gratitude, we are by ourselves. I've seen her only four times since the funeral, and on each occasion, she let me know that her father's death changed nothing. She always made her disapproval abundantly clear.

"I won't pretend that I like you, Belle," Anne begins. "I think you had my father wrapped about your little finger, and I don't like what you turned him into during his final years."

My heart is pounding, but I eke out a laugh. "Anne, I think you know that *no one* could manipulate your father. He was a force of nature, and I was simply hired to do his bidding."

It is Anne's turn to laugh. "Don't take me for a fool, Belle. Somehow you found a way to bend my father to your will, when no one else could."

I suddenly understand why Anne loathes me so much. It isn't that I'd occupied the bulk of her father's time; Anne had a busy life of her own that left little space for him, in truth. It was her conviction that I had the power to influence the great man—something she was never able to do, whether it was her fight in the movement for the woman's

right to vote or her support of the women workers striking for better factory conditions in the great Shirtwaist strike three years ago.

"But that has no bearing on what I want to tell you." Her generous bosom expands as she takes a deep breath. Clearly, whatever she needs to divulge weighs heavily upon her. "I understand you've become friends with Bessie," she says in a softer tone.

"I don't know if I would say we're friends," I answer. "We've run into each other on several occasions, and Bessie is always cordial."

"Did you know my father hated Bessie?" The switch in her tone and the direction of this conversation is surprising. She doesn't give me time to respond before she continues. "A couple of years before he died, she was up for the French Legion of Honor," Anne explains, and despite the sadness in her tone, I hear her pride. "It was for her work representing French playwrights. It was an award she clearly deserved, but my father made sure she did not receive it."

This is something I did not know.

Anne says, "It was his way of punishing her for his suspicions about me and about our relationship. He blamed her and wanted to punish me for not being the daughter he wanted. For not being Juliet or Louisa." Her devastated expression tells me more about her love for Bessie than any proclamation could have.

I am stunned by this news, but I shouldn't be. Mr. Morgan's code of morality was strict and old-fashioned, even if his behavior was not. He would never have tolerated such supposedly aberrant behavior from one of his children. It was unthinkable.

For a moment, I flash back to the day when I almost confessed about my race when I mistakenly thought that Mr. Morgan had discovered my deception. Hearing this story of Anne and Bessie makes me wonder what he would have done if he'd learned the truth and that information became public. What sort of punishment would he have exacted upon me? I know now that I would not have escaped unscathed.

I have new questions. If Mr. Morgan knew about Anne, why did she allow me to threaten her with what I thought was a secret?

She answers my questions before I can even ask them. "If you had said something to him about me and Bessie—told him that we shared a stateroom, for example—he probably would have felt he needed to take further action, not wanting the truth about me to become public. I couldn't bear for Bessie to be punished even more for my sins."

"I'm sorry, Anne. I didn't know."

Without acknowledging my apology, Anne continues, "Even though he and I did not see eye to eye, I loved my father. No matter our falling-out, no matter what he thought about me."

"He loved you, too." I feel as though I must say this to her. And it is true; he loved her in his way.

After a pause, she says, "I suppose so. He did leave me enough money to go about my life and support my causes without ever having to marry, and I am indebted to him for that."

I nod.

"Anyway, Bessie thinks I've got you all wrong. For the most part, I disagree with her, of course." Here, she gives me a half smile.

Is she teasing me, or does her smile carry a different message?

Her smile turns into a sigh. "There is one thing I do know, Belle. With the public disparity in our political and social views, I cannot keep the flame of my father's legacy alive, even if I wanted to." She pauses. "But you, with your expertise and your loyalty to his vision, you can."

My eyes widen.

She takes a deep breath before she continues, "So, I want you to know that I support you as the librarian for the Pierpont Morgan Library." And then, with a smirk, she adds, "No matter who you really are."

Even though I shouldn't ask, even though everything inside of me tells me to let it end right here, I must know. "How did you find out about me?" I ask. "Who or what gave me away?"

She pauses, and an apologetic expression appears on her usually stern face. "Until this moment, I only suspected. You just confirmed it for me."

My breath catches in my throat. What have I done? Was all of this chatter just bait so I could fall into her snare and confess my real heritage? Did she just lure me in to destroy me?

Her voice softens. "Don't worry, Belle. I know how painful it is to be judged by a construct of society that doesn't make sense and because of that, have to live with a painful secret. Neither of us has been able to live openly as our true selves, and I'm sorry for the role I played in threatening you with your hidden identity. I hope we can keep our secrets from this point on."

Although Mr. Morgan is no longer here, I suppose Anne would want to keep her private life private, just as I need to protect my own secret from an unforgiving world. Even though I have much more to lose, I smile back at her. "Yes, Anne. Our secrets are safe with each other."

CHAPTER 38

OCTOBER 14 AND DECEMBER 2, 1916
LONDON, ENGLAND

Miss Greene! Miss Greene!" the reporters call out as I walk down the gangplank to the shore.

My escort from the *Liverpool* waves them off, but they are persistent. "Miss Greene, what are you here in London to buy?" "Miss Greene, what does the Pierpont Morgan Library have its sights set on this trip?" "Miss Greene, the *Evening Sun* just declared you the most successful career woman in the world. How does that title feel?" "Miss Greene, will you be working with Mr. Morgan on his war efforts while you're here?"

Don't the London newspapers have more pressing matters than my arrival? Their country is at war in the greatest conflict the world has yet seen, one that President Wilson inexplicably refuses to enter. Surely the reporters have any number of war-related stories to cover, although it is flattering to know that my success as the head of the Pierpont Morgan Library registers on this side of the Atlantic.

A motorcar awaits on the dock to take me to Jack's city house, after which it will deliver my trunks to Claridge's, where I managed to get a suite on the strength of the Morgan name, despite the hotel room

shortage. Jack has summoned me from New York to evaluate and potentially purchase rare books, which are flooding the city during the war. And I was happy to comply, no matter the risks in transatlantic travel after the Germans torpedoed the *Lusitania* last year and no matter my mother's near hysteria over my voyaging to war-torn Europe. London offers not only immersion in its still-bustling art world but also Bernard. He has promised to travel from Paris, where he is holing up for the duration, to London to meet me. Even after our almost three years apart, warmth courses through me thinking of him again.

How different our London reunion will be, I think. In New York we'd agreed that I would have the liberty to pursue work and other men if so inclined, while he would provide me with the safe haven of his trusted advice, laughter, and affection. I believe it to be as close to a real union as I'll ever have—especially since he no longer holds any power to devastate me.

The motorcar slows as we approach Prince's Gate, where the town house Jack inherited from Mr. Morgan is located. This is one of two homes Jack and Jessie own in England, the other being the lavish Wall Hall mansion and estate in Hertfordshire, which they use for shooting and extravagant parties. I know little of the Prince's Gate town house, but it is rumored to be spectacular.

The front door opens before I can even lift the knocker on the surprisingly modest exterior. I'm underwhelmed by the facade and the entryway. But when the briskly efficient servant directs me to the drawing room, I am awestruck at the space. Here Fragonard's masterpiece, *The Progress of Love*, covers the walls, and the entire room has been decorated to pay tribute to its magnificence. I see why the paintings are so celebrated as I study each panel; I am particularly drawn in by the depiction of the final stage of love, the calm pleasure of a stable union as represented by the exchange of love letters. Do I find this painting particularly appealing because it so deftly captures the sort of relationship Bernard and I now share?

Jack finally peeks his head out from an adjoining room, and then

bounds into the room, albeit with a fraction of his prior energy. Last year, while in England, Jack was attacked by a German sympathizer who'd learned of his financial support for England and France, quite against Wilson's orders on neutrality for American citizens. While he has recovered rather well and it hasn't cowed his involvement in the war effort, I am relieved that his injuries have not dampened his ardor for the library either.

"How have I been functioning without you in London this past month?" he cries out with a laugh, after we embrace.

I laugh along with him, thinking of something I wrote Bernard about Jack: *Sometimes I wonder if I've sold him too well on the merits of the library and of yours truly. When he's in New York, he almost never departs from the library, just like his father, and my role as his partner in art and finance leaves me little time for anything else.* Of course, I never describe to Bernard the myriad ways my relationship with Jack is unlike the one that I shared with his father. Obviously, I have no paternal feelings toward him, but more importantly, although Jack and I are closer in age, no flirtation passes between us. There is no unacknowledged longing. The many complicated layers have been reduced to a simple collegial accord. Jack has no need for me to fill the void in his heart—as I had for Mr. Morgan—because Jessie is there already.

He gestures around the gilt-laden drawing room, where every fabric, every piece of furniture, and every decoration has been chosen to glorify the paintings. "What do you think of the Fragonards?"

"It's impossible to believe that these masterpieces will be removed from these walls and sold. I can't imagine that they'll soon be sailing across the Atlantic and hanging in some other mansion. They seem to belong here."

It is the melancholy in my tone that makes Jack say, "But we did agree that they could be sold without impacting our other important collections, didn't we?" He is not really inquiring but reminding me of the conclusion we'd previously reached. In fact, I've already begun

the long dance of discussions about their sale with the Duveens and a few other dealers.

I nod. True to his word, Jack has involved me in all his decision making about the future of Mr. Morgan's art and manuscript collections. Among other matters.

He signals for me to sit in the pale aqua Louis XIV chair as he lowers himself into its match. As we face each other, I think how tired he looks beneath the dark bushy eyebrows and heavy mustache. Is it the war alone that's taking this toll upon him? Is he still recovering from his injuries? Or is the dispersal of his father's belongings dredging up heavy emotions?

"The number of rare manuscripts and books on the London market is breathtaking, Belle. I cannot begin to sort through the possibilities," he says, and I observe an overeagerness, almost like greed, in his expression. People are desperate for funds in wartime. Is his desire to partake of this bounty opportunism? But how can I judge, when I am planning on reaping the spoils of war alongside him?

"That's why you have me," I say, pushing those thoughts aside.

"Indeed." He sighs. "And a relief it is."

Jack slides me a handwritten list. "These are the dealers I've already met or who have sent me letters describing attractive manuscripts and rare books."

I pick up the paper and review it. The names on the list are familiar; in fact, I've dealt with many of them in the past. I realize that I am fortunate with Jack; he feels no embarrassment in acknowledging my expertise in authenticating the provenance of and pricing these items.

"I'll set up meetings with each of them straightaway. Please be assured that I'll handle it from here," I say.

"I have absolute confidence in you."

Keeping my eyes on the list, I ask, "Should I sail to Paris after I've made my way through all that London has to offer? There might be a hidden cache of illuminated manuscripts waiting there." I think

how delicious it might be to take in the Parisian sights with Bernard, outside the purview of Jack, whose anti-Semitism, which I'm sure was passed down from his father, makes him naturally disposed against Bernard. I keep my ongoing relationship with Bernard secret from Jack as a result.

"I forbid it, Belle," he says flatly.

I'm taken aback. This little outburst is so unlike Jack's steady and predictable nature.

He notices my reaction. "Belle, I'm sorry. It's hard for you to comprehend how dire the situation is in Europe. The news we get in America is insular and self-focused, and so you wouldn't know that travel is extremely risky and inadvisable, even if you could obtain the necessary paperwork and special permits. By God, you've got to get permission from the local police to travel to the countryside from London these days."

Jack is not finished. "Listen, Belle, I want you to undertake the library's business, and the moment you're finished, sail home. Soon enough, America will be in this war, too, and I don't want you anywhere near the danger. Travel is not impossible right now, even with the war, but I think it should be considered impossible for you. You are too precious to risk."

I nod. I feel sure that Jack is right about this new reality. But if I can't go to Paris, will Bernard be able to travel to London? What will the impact of this red tape and bureaucracy be? And why hasn't Bernard forewarned me about the danger and delay? Shouldn't he be worrying about my safety as much as Jack is? Is it possible that the war has affected Paris to such an extent that Bernard couldn't have even informed me in advance?

I am tired, but I suppress my yawn. For the last six weeks, I've been out late too many nights and consumed too many glasses of fine wine. War hasn't halted the high life in London; instead, it seems to have fueled it. I simply cannot appear vulnerable in any way, even with

simple exhaustion. The Duveens will be on the lookout for any chink in my armor.

Why am I more wary of the Duveens than the dozen or so others I've met with over the past weeks? What is it about their manner and bargaining style that puts me on edge? I have no choice but to work with the ingratiating pair. They hold too many exclusives on desirable items—making it impossible to access certain objects without them—and represent too many crucial clients with huge collections for me to avoid them. Still, they leave me cold and disconcerted, no matter their reputation of exceeding cordiality.

I stare at the clock above the mantel in the parlor of my hotel suite and pace as the stylishly narrow skirt of my burgundy gown catches at my ankles. Why are the Duveen brothers late? Anger is building inside me. On some level, I recognize that it isn't the Duveens with whom I'm furious, but Bernard.

Week after week, he has offered me a litany of excuses for his failure to come to London. Train strikes and coastal military maneuvers and torpedo threats for ships crossing the canal. Although I understand there may be truth to his justifications, not everyone feels as he does. The esteemed dealer Jacques Seligmann traveled from Paris last week without incident to try to woo me into leaving the Pierpont Morgan Library and joining his business. Bernard's elusive behavior reminds me too much of his absence during my last, dark days in London. I've been a fool thinking that Bernard and I could create a singular relationship. And while he doesn't have the power to wound me any longer, he has retained the power to spark my rage.

The door knocks with an authoritative rap. As the maid opens it, I compose myself, and then calmly ask, "Do you always keep your clients waiting?"

Immediately deflated, Joseph and Henry Duveen freeze. For all their games and the web of spies they purportedly have planted in the homes of the wealthy and their rival dealers, I find them remarkably easy to unsettle. Perhaps it is because they are so very English, so very unprepared for the unexpected.

"We are terribly sorry, Belle," Henry, the elder of the brothers, rushes to apologize. "We try never to keep clients waiting."

"How about lady colleagues?" I use an impish tone to further confuse them.

"You are certainly our only lady colleague, and if a military convoy hadn't rolled down the street in front of our motorcar, we would never have been late." As he bows, Joseph takes my hand to lightly kiss it.

Does he imagine courtliness will win me over? I should think he would know better by now. "I suppose I cannot blame you for the war, can I?" I retort, and they chuckle, a little nervously to my mind. *Good, nervous is how I want them.*

I sit, nodding at the brothers to take the seats across from me. Waiting while the maid collects their hats and coats along with their drink orders, I sip at a glass of sherry to blunt my fraying nerves.

The brothers lower themselves onto the settee across from my chair, and I raise a topic I'm guessing they won't expect. They are used to the ritual of pleasantries. "The Fragonards were looking especially lovely when I saw them the other day."

The brothers give each other what they think is an unobtrusive glance. "I thought we were here today to discuss manuscripts," Joseph says.

While the Duveens have a trove of manuscripts and rare books to sell me, we both know the real prize is the commission they could make on the sale of Mr. Morgan's Fragonards and any other artistic masterpieces we choose to let them broker. If I hire them.

"All in good time." I take another sip, relaxing as the amber liquid warms me inside. "I thought we'd start with the Fragonards, since I know your real plans are to represent the Morgans in their sale. Should they decide to sell them and should I decide to hire you, that is." They need to know I understand their strategy and true goals, and I want that to factor into the prices they'll offer me for the manuscripts at their disposal.

Joseph clears his throat, and says, "Since we've decided to eschew

the formality of discussing the manuscripts first, perhaps we should also discuss the decision by Mr. Morgan the younger to sell the family collection of Chinese porcelains. We would welcome the opportunity to represent the Morgans in that sale, too."

Although I am taken aback, my face remains blank. How did the Duveens know we'd decided to sell the porcelains next? Jack has never taken to Asian art, and since they didn't complement the objects we were keeping, we'd agreed we'd find a buyer for them after the Fragonards were sold. But he hadn't told anyone, except maybe Jessie. And I hadn't told anyone—except Bernard.

At that realization, fury rises within me. How could he? I had trusted Bernard. I'd believed him to be my confidant, with whom I could safely share my worries and my secrets if not my love. After we reconnected in New York and in our subsequent long exchange of letters, I'd shared my apprehension that Jack would dismantle the library and sell the books. When Jack decided to keep the library largely intact and enlist my help in selling certain pieces of art, I'd shared my thoughts on which objects should be sold. Why would he have shared my secrets with the Duveens, of all people?

But I can't allow myself to fixate on that now. Joseph interrupts my thoughts. "You know, Belle, if you select Duveen Brothers to assist in the sale of the Fragonards or the Chinese porcelains or any other item you may wish to divest, it could be financially beneficial for you."

Joseph isn't making any sense. "What are you talking about?" I ask.

Henry takes a turn. "We would be immensely grateful to be chosen as the dealer for all of the Morgans' important sales. So grateful that we'd be happy to share our commission with you."

Now I'm the one who is unnerved. "Why on earth would I do that?"

He shrugs as if the answer is self-evident. "Don't you deserve to make at least a portion of what the dealers make? Especially since you are doing most of the work and not receiving a commission? As an

employee of the Morgans, you only get a salary, not a cut. And it's not like you're an actual Morgan and adding the purchase price to your coffers."

"That is unethical," I say. The Duveens want me to enter into an arrangement with them whereby I'd agree to sell all of the Morgans' artwork through them—to clients of their choosing—for a part of their sales commissions. This would mean that the Morgans would not necessarily get the highest prices for their artwork because they would all be sold to Duveen customers, rather than the highest bidders. If I did this, my loyalty would be to the Duveens, not the Morgans—something I would *never* contemplate.

"It is more common than you might think, and there are other agreements as well. In fact, your friend Mr. Berenson has a beneficial arrangement of his own. For years, he's been authenticating important Italian Renaissance paintings for us, and when we sell the piece, he receives a portion of the commission."

"No," I say, shaking my head. How could this be true? Even if he only authenticates artwork that he truly finds to be worthy, the scheme stinks of self-dealing. If the art community learned of it, the arrangement would destroy Bernard's reputation as *the* unbiased Italian Renaissance expert. I can't even contemplate the possibility that he might authenticate pieces that don't merit his attention.

"Oh, yes, Miss Greene. We have had this arrangement with Mr. Berenson for some years." Henry looks at his brother. "Although our understanding may have run its course, and we may have to cut Mr. Berenson loose. I think we all know that the Italian Renaissance business isn't what it once was—so many other sorts of artwork are gaining popularity instead—so we may not need his services any longer."

I now understand why Bernard betrayed me. He'd been in league with them for years, perhaps the entire time I've known him. And by offering them information about me and the Morgans, he was trying to prove himself valuable at a time when he'd outlived his usefulness. If he could provide them with the Morgans' plans, then perhaps they wouldn't end their lucrative arrangement with him.

Even though I feel like I might be sick, I stand up. Staring at the two swindlers playing at English gentlemen, I say, "I work only for Mr. Jack Morgan. He has my full and exclusive loyalty. Now"—I gesture toward the door—"if you will let yourselves out."

I leave the parlor and enter the study. Choking back a sob so the Duveens cannot hear it, I collapse on a chair. The true nature of my loyalty isn't the only thing made plain today in this encounter with the Duveens. I have finally seen—and allowed myself to acknowledge—the depths of Bernard's treachery. Is no one what they seem?

CHAPTER 39

DECEMBER 10, 1916
LONDON, ENGLAND

I watch my stack of trunks roll down the Claridge's hallway on a trolley, and I trail in their wake. When will I next see London? By then, how will the English capital be altered by the war? Can I wash from my memories of this once-adored city the scenes of disappointment that transpired here? At least I know I'll return to New York professionally triumphant if not personally.

My trunk overflows with rare and priceless incunabula and manuscripts. Those I cannot fit in my allotted luggage will arrive in the Morgans' bags in a few weeks. This time in London—meeting with dealers and collectors, scooping up books before they came to market, luxuriating in the last vestiges of London decadence—has been productive and enjoyable only because I refused to wallow in thoughts of Bernard once I sent my final letter to him. I know the mourning will come on board the *Liverpool*, and only there will I allow it to flow freely. Until we reach New York, that is, and then I must slip into the role I've designated for myself and inhabit it fully.

In my final, parting missive to Bernard, I'd written:

How could you take the affection I shared with you and abuse it so willingly? Refusing to come to London, not once but twice, during my time of need, and then bartering my secrets for your own gain? Was any of it ever real, Bernard? Or were our trysts always arranged for your personal profit? I thought, at least, we had an understanding and trust between us.

I am only grateful that I never shared my real secret with him. What might he have done with the knowledge that Belle da Costa Greene was born a colored girl? Held an auction? Sold the secret to the highest bidder?

Two uniformed bellmen scurry to my side. "Miss Greene, your motorcar to the harbor is loaded and waiting for you, ma'am."

Slipping the men a tip, I follow them to the idling Rolls-Royce. I wrap my fur around my shoulders, and just as I'm about to step up and inside the gleaming silver motorcar, I hear, "Belle!"

Turning, I catch sight of a man racing toward me. It is Bernard.

"Belle, don't leave!" The ever-respectable Bernard is screaming so loudly I can hear him over the street din of horse-drawn carriages, motorcars, bicycles, and motorized buses. "Please talk to me!"

Should I bother? My decisions about Bernard have already been rendered, and I do not worry that his sentiments will sway me. I did not have any desire for a grand love affair with Bernard when I set out to see him in Europe, but I did expect the behavior of a trusted friend, at least. The betrayal I received in place of trust has hardened my heart against him forever. Does he deserve even a second more of my time? No. But I decide I want to have the last word.

Instructing the driver to wait, I stride over to Bernard, where he stands forlorn on the sidewalk in front of Claridge's. His forehead is damp with sweat despite the December cold, and he is panting. I enjoy his public discomfiture and I wish one of his precious English colleagues would step outside and witness *this* Bernard.

"Have you come to answer my questions?" I ask with more calm in my voice than I feel.

"I'm sorry?" He looks perplexed.

"It's a little late for apologies, don't you think?"

"Oh, Belle." He appears crestfallen, but I doubt every emotion that flits across his face. "There aren't words for how terribly sorry I am."

"Try." No amount of effort on his part will change my mind, but I'd like to watch his efforts. At least he's not pretending that he didn't tell the Duveens my secrets, because that's one battle I don't feel like fighting.

He shakes his head. "I don't know why I told the Duveens about the Chinese porcelains. It was a mistake, a moment of weakness. But it was the only one." His face appears earnest, but I know it's willful oblivion. A reluctance on his part to acknowledge and own his culpability.

I hold back a laugh. "Do you really think you betrayed me only one time?"

His eyebrows rise. "I swear I didn't tell them any other details about the plans you and Jack have for the art collection."

"Betrayal takes many forms, although disclosing my secrets to the Duveens is certainly one. An unforgivable one."

His frown shows that he is confused, but then, his eyes widen before he asks, "Do you mean Edith Wharton? Or Natalie Barney?" He names the expat Parisian literary salon host with whom he's rumored to be involved. "We agreed we could see other people when we weren't physically together, Belle."

"Oh, I don't care about them." I wave his words and their names away with a swat of my hand. "And the fact that you do not know what I'm talking about makes me all the more certain of my decision. The particular betrayal I'm talking about is abandonment."

"Because I . . . I . . . didn't come to London?" he stammers. "If you believe that I did not come because I do not care about you, you are wrong."

"Do you mean this time? Or when you refused to come the first time, when I was horribly sick after the abortion?"

He flinches at the word, as I have done many times through the years when I think about what I did. But why should he be spared the reality of our actions? "Please don't offer any more empty rationales for your decision not to come this fall—after all, Jacques Seligmann was able to make the trip—or your refusal to do so six years ago. I know precisely why you chose to stay away."

He tries to grasp my wrist, but I pull it away. "I did not come—then and now—because I love you too much. You are the only woman who has managed to get truly close to me, and I've been afraid I'd lose everything for you. You just don't understand."

"I understand perfectly, Bernard. You've already gotten everything you wanted from me; in this case, every useful bit of information about the Morgans and their plans. And you are too self-serving and too uncaring to even be a friend, never mind a lover," I say, keeping my expression placid.

I begin to walk away from him and he grabs my arm. "Belle, I beg you to listen to me," he pleads. "You are the love of my life."

Those words make me pause, quite against my resolve. Despite all his failings and all his deceptions and his pathetic pleading, Bernard was my first, and perhaps only, love and knows how to pull at my emotions. I remind myself of who he really is—and how he can never be anything meaningful in my life—and my determination returns. I remind myself that I am free.

"Please remove your hand from my arm, Bernard," I say, but he will not let go.

As I try to jerk away from him, the Claridge's doormen witness my distress, and race to my side.

"Move away," they say, standing on either side of me. Together, they peel Bernard's fingers off me, then hold him back while I hasten to the Rolls-Royce and climb inside. I do not glance back at the scene, and instead, I ask the driver to depart.

The engine roars, but still I hear, "Belle! Belle!"

For a moment, the driver hesitates, but I say, "Please, go on."

With a nod, he drives the motorcar away from the hotel. Even though I can hear Bernard call my name, I keep my eyes fixed on the road ahead. I will not look back.

CHAPTER 40

JUNE 4, 1922

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

The stones crunch underfoot as I make my way down the long, winding path to the gravesite. Even though the sun feels as if it's smiling, the long walk through Cedar Hill Cemetery is sorrowful.

I note the familiar headstones of the Hawleys and Seymours, monuments to the venerable blue-blooded families permitted burial rights here. Several minutes pass before I see the peak of the mausoleum jutting out over the crest in the path. Only as I make my way down the small hillside does the rectangular tomb of the Morgan family come into full view.

The raised Morgan name is crisp as ever on the granite surface. However, the grass surrounding the grave is ragged, and there are no flowers marking the tomb. At first, I'm taken aback, but then, I suppose I usually visit the monument on March 31, the anniversary of Mr. Morgan's death, when the site is prepared for visitors.

But I need to visit with him today. Because this is the only suitable place to mourn the death of my father.

I settle on the stone bench across from the monument. Tears come unbidden, and I do not even try to stop from sobbing. My father died

on May 2, over a month ago, but I have only now heard the news about his fatal cerebral hemorrhage in a letter from Uncle Mozart.

Poor Papa did not even have one of his children in attendance at his funeral. The man who spent his life battling for equality—and sacrificed much for that fight, including his first family—deserved more than we gave him in the end. Did his Japanese family even know about his death?

After we left each other that day in Chicago, we promised to see each other again. I'd harbored fantasies of future afternoons with him at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but I didn't dare ask him to visit me in New York, and I'm certain that in the years that followed he never considered asking me.

Once he gave me his blessing to hold on to my white identity for a life of meaning, I suspect we both knew that we'd never see each other again. Belle da Costa Greene could never be seen with Richard Greener. The glances that I still suffered through, the rumors I still heard, would have turned into front-page news if my father and I were discovered together. Simply being in my father's presence in front of the wrong person in New York would have exposed me, my siblings, and Mama.

"I've lost you both now, Mr. Morgan. You and Papa." Saying aloud the nature of my loss yields more tears. After all, I cannot speak these words to anyone. "Mr. Morgan, I know our relationship was more complicated than that of father and daughter. Especially after that night of the Caxton auction." I stop there. As when he was alive, I do not mention the kiss we shared. "But before that night, you encouraged me like a father, supported me like a father, believed in my capabilities like a father. As a result, I owe much of what I've become as an adult to you."

I think about the words I want to say next. "But Papa knew the other side of me, the colored part I had to hide from you." I pause, because I'd like to think that Mr. Morgan can hear me, and if he can, he needs time to digest this information. He may not like it. But I must continue as if he does. "Papa knew the little colored girl I once

was. He nurtured me, and I owe just as much to him, if not more." I sniffle as the tears recede, and then I have a thought.

My last memories of church are from childhood, when the whole Fleet family would pile into carriages to attend services at the Metropolitan Baptist Church with the Reverend Robert Johnson. Our churchgoing rituals stopped once we moved to New York. But there are remnants of Sunday school lessons in my mind, and I like to believe that a beautiful hereafter awaits us after all of the turmoil on earth.

"But now, I have to navigate without either one of you to create the legacy I owe you both."

Once again, I stop and search for the right words, the specific question. Because now, I need Mr. Morgan's help and guidance. "But how can I pay my debt to you and Papa if I cannot get Jack on board? While he has been wonderful in supporting me as the head of the library and keeping our manuscript and book collection intact, he is the gatekeeper to this final decision—to make the library a public institution. If the library is kept private, how can I keep my promise to Papa to live a life of meaning, to impact larger society for good?"

I sit silently for a moment. *Perhaps I am being greedy.* Shouldn't it be enough that I've risen to become one of the most influential people in the art world and built such a magnificent collection? It certainly would be satisfactory for Katrina and her friends who've successfully advocated for the Nineteenth Amendment and the right of women to have professional careers. The height I've achieved is almost unmatched among women, and I take quiet satisfaction in that.

As I sit in front of Mr. Morgan's grave, I know that somehow, someday, I've got to bring Jack around. Is a direct appeal to Jack the right tactic? I've hinted and lightly cajoled, which yielded his agreement to allow in the occasional scholar, club, or lecturer. Yet that's still far from converting the library into a *public* institution, where outsiders can enter regularly and without specially granted permission, where regular people can revel in the magnificence and significance of the early written word. Like Papa taught me. No, the reticent

Jack recoils from bluntness; that is not the right approach, it will remind him too much of his father.

I stroll around the monument, warming myself in the sun. I wonder for the hundredth time since my meeting with Papa if he and Mr. Morgan ever met. It wasn't until after my trip to Chicago that I began to really study my father. I read more of his writings; I researched his history and his travels. I learned about the work that he and Mr. Morgan did on the Grant Monument Association in the 1890s. Papa served as secretary, and his work was his full-time paid job, while Mr. Morgan was on the board, with very few responsibilities other than fundraising. But even with that, how strange it would be if Papa and Mr. Morgan—whose lives as a colored equal-rights activist and a white tycoon, respectively, never should have intersected—had actually crossed paths? And not only in the hereafter?

The tie between parent and child is unbreakable, despite the sort of relationship they actually shared. The manner in which Papa continues to affect my life bears that out, and I imagine that it must be true of Jack as well.

And with that thought, suddenly I know what I must do.

I have been approaching this in the wrong way. I've been trying to appeal to Jack's sense of art. But that has not moved him. What I must do is appeal to the larger Morgan heritage, the dynasty that Junius Morgan established in banking and that J. P. expanded into a corporate finance empire that dominated Wall Street and industry and that Jack has now turned into a global enterprise.

"The Pierpont Morgan Library as a public institution," I say aloud, as if I'm practicing my presentation with Mr. Morgan and my father first, before I pitch it to Jack, "will continue the family custom of honoring its predecessor."

Yes, Jack will want to do this out of a sense of tradition if not emotion. In this way, by honoring his father, Jack will actually be honoring his lineage. Just as I will be honoring my own father and my own secret ancestry.

CHAPTER 41

JUNE 26, 1922

LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

YOU seem miffed at the Pierpont Morgan Library's purchase of certain guilt-laden gospels from the Earl of Leicester?" I ask, unable to keep the hint of a smile from my lips. Mr. Paul Tennant is about to step into my magnificently laid trap, right here at a party on the veranda of Winfield Hall, at the Woolworth mansion on the Gold Coast of Long Island, New York.

"It does seem that cultural treasures are leaving England more quickly than they are coming in these days, treasures that belong in England, to England. And they are exiting in the hands of Americans," Mr. Tennant says, his British accent heightening.

"You've made an interesting observation," I say, as if I'm actually considering his preposterous argument.

The men and women gathered around us—a Phipps, a Vanderbilt, and a Frick among them—nod, and Mr. Tennant nods, his hands folded in righteous indignation, along with them. As I'd hoped.

"But do England's cultural treasures really belong to England?" I ask. "Did England actually create the treasures that you are so upset to see in American hands? Are they part of *English* heritage? Let's consider your precious Elgin Marbles, for example. If I'm not mis-

taken, in the early eighteen hundreds, Lord Elgin took the statues from the Acropolis in Athens to London, and Greece has been asking for them back ever since."

Mr. Tennant's mouth opens and closes, but before he can form a single word, I say, "Would it surprise you to learn that the Earl of Leicester's precious gospel books that you're so concerned about actually came from Belgium?"

Mr. Tennant storms off, and I am left with an assemblage of surprised, but amused, fellow guests. "Oh, Belle, you always have a keen observation at the ready!" Amy Phipps Guest says with a chuckle.

"Only because I'm provided with so much material!" I reply, and the group erupts into laughter.

My yellow chiffon skirt twirls around my ankles as I spin around to have my champagne glass filled by a passing waiter and bump into Jack. "What a surprise!"

Even though Jack's two-hundred-and-fifty-acre island estate, Matinecock Point, is only a few miles down the Gold Coast of Long Island from the Woolworth mansion and he and his wife had undoubtedly received an invitation to this event, I never expected to see him. He feels comfortable only at the library or in the company of his immediate family—small talk and party banter are not his forte—and he declines to attend most social occasions. In America anyway.

"Well, the Woolworths have a prizewinning rose garden, and Jessie was determined to compare her flowers with theirs. It's a neighborhood rivalry," he says with a draw on his meerschaum pipe.

I've become so adroit at reading Jack's mannerisms over the years that I can tell by the way he fiddles with his pipe that he'd rather be at Matinecock Point, reading Rudyard Kipling or doing crossword puzzles.

"No one's roses can compare with Jessie's," I say. "Or her tulips or her daffodils for that matter."

"I assured her of that, Belle, but you know as well as I that my wife is quite the determined woman. She wouldn't listen to my protests, so here we are."

"Her tenacity is one of many reasons why I like her so much."

He nods. "You share that quality, Belle, and perhaps it's one of the many reasons I like *you* so much. The shelves of the Pierpont Morgan Library would be emptier without it." This is the closest Jack has ever come to flirtation. Unlike that of his father, this coquetry—if it even merits that label—is utterly innocent.

"Should we join Jessie in the gardens?" I ask.

"I wouldn't want to take you away from your admirers." He glances at the group keeping a place open for me in their circle.

"Nonsense." I wave my hand. "There's no one I'd rather talk to than you and Jessie."

He gestures toward the gardens. "Lead the way." We stroll around the wide veranda, past the hundred or so guests still mingling.

We chat about the extravagance of Winfield Hall, the main building on the Woolworth estate, and I realize that another, recently built structure of the Woolworths might provide me with the opportunity to have the conversation I'd planned earlier this month, when I was in the cemetery.

"I understand that the Woolworths built an astounding mausoleum for themselves at Woodlawn Cemetery. Apparently, it is modeled after an Egyptian pyramid, complete with sphinxes, pillars with hieroglyphics, and enormous bronze doors decorated with pharaohs. Quite the tribute to their family."

"You don't say," he replies, though he doesn't sound very interested.

"Do you have any ideas about how you'll honor your family?" I say, and Jack looks startled. I feel uncomfortable pressing on, but I know I must proceed with this line of argument or lose this chance. "You know, next March will be the tenth anniversary of your father's death."

He glances at me, but we don't slow our pace, making me grateful for the ease of the shorter skirts currently in fashion. Finally, he says, "It's hard to believe that much time has passed."

"I know." I sigh. "Some days, when I'm at the library, I feel like

he's still there." I'm surprised tears still burn behind my eyes after all this time. Especially since I am the one who brought up this topic as prelude to an enormous request. But then, maybe it's my own father for whom I'm crying; he has been gone for only six weeks.

He says, "I know what you mean. I feel him, too. I suppose he was always larger than life, so we shouldn't expect death to eradicate him from our existence."

"Well put." I pause, and then ask, as if just making conversation, "Have you thought of how you'd like to pay tribute to your father?"

For the first time, his steps slow. "What do you mean?"

"Your father erected the Morgan Memorial at the Wadsworth Atheneum in honor of his father, Junius. I assumed you had something similar planned." Then, I ask, "How would *you* want to be remembered?"

My question surprises him as I'd intended. Death has stretched its claws toward him in the past couple of years. Two years ago, in April, while Jack and his family were attending services at St. George's church near Stuyvesant Square, an anarchist stepped into the church, and while the ushers were taking up the offering, the man shot and killed Dr. James Markoe, the family friend and physician of the Morgans. Later, reports suggested that the intended target was Jack. Then, only five months later, a horse-drawn carriage pulled up in front of Jack's offices and set off an explosion that extended half a mile and killed thirty-eight people, including several Morgan employees. Jack's own thirty-year-old son Junius, who worked in the Morgan offices, narrowly escaped death. Jack was supposed to be in his office that day, but at the last minute had decided to stay at the library.

Jack finally says, "I haven't thought about it," but I cannot imagine that is true.

"I believe your father thought about it. I think he knew exactly how he wanted to be remembered."

"He didn't leave any instructions, Belle."

I stop walking and stare at him. "In his will, your father stated

that he wanted his collections made 'permanently available for the instruction and pleasure of the American people,' and that only 'lack of the necessary time to devote to it has as yet prevented my carrying this purpose into effect.' I didn't object when you decided it was best for the Morgan fortunes overall to sell some of your father's best items to the Fricks—like the Fragonard room or the Chinese porcelains or the Rembrandt portrait—or to donate thousands of objects to the Metropolitan Museum or the Wadsworth Atheneum. If we don't preserve the collection left—the manuscripts, books, and drawings at the library—and make them 'permanently available for the American people' as he set out, then the terms of your father's will won't be met. And he won't be remembered as he wanted."

Jack shakes his head. "I think you're reading into the will and—"

"Am I?" I dare to interrupt my employer. "Or is it convenient for you to ignore his plainly stated wishes because they took the vague written form of a request, not an outright mandate?"

His face reddens at my words, but this is a conversation that must be had. I cannot allow Mr. Morgan's legacy to go unfulfilled, not only because of Mr. Morgan but because of what my father challenged me to do. I will not let either man down.

"Jack, you know what your father wanted. It's time to let go of the Morgan as your private library. It's time to turn it into what it was meant to be—a public institution in honor of your father."

CHAPTER 42

MARCH 28, 1924
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I am sitting at my desk, where I have arranged myself before a pile of letters with a fountain pen in my hand when the reporter arrives in my office. I want to keep this conversation short, which is why I am signaling how busy I am.

I have continued to deny all press access to me, including the *Ladies' Home Journal* last month. But I have weighed this request from the *New York Times* to profile the Pierpont Morgan Library and its lady directress and deemed it worthy.

Samuel Bennett is the name of the journalist. He strides into the room, all blunderbuss and confidence. But then I see that he's little more than a boy, with the fresh, pink skin of young adulthood and a scraggly ginger mustache. I gesture for him to sit in the chair before me. How small and inconsequential he seems compared to the great man—both figurative and literal—who, from time to time, positioned himself in my guest's chair.

"Miss Greene, thank you for taking the time to meet with me." He holds his pencil above his pad in the quintessential reporter pose.

Even after all these years, I can't allow this journalist to shine his light too brightly. The world is expanding and getting smaller at the

same time. With the invention of the radio and the expansion of newspapers and magazines, I am more concerned now than I've ever been before that someone, somewhere, might learn the truth.

In this charged racial landscape, news that the head of the Pierpont Morgan Library was a forty-year-old black woman would decimate everything, would change the world for all of us. As I'd admitted long ago, Mama's concerns were right.

While the end of the war has brought great economic growth and widespread prosperity to the country, racial tensions have escalated throughout the nation. Lynchings by the Ku Klux Klan are continuing, as are race wars and massacres of colored people in cities like Tulsa, Oklahoma; Rosewood, Florida; and even my beloved Washington, DC, as Mama predicted long ago. The most terrifying part of all of this is that the federal and state governments have endorsed these mounting racist sentiments by rejecting anti-lynching bills like the Dyer Act, despite President Harding's support, and by adopting despicable legislation like Virginia's Racial Integrity Act, which prohibits interracial marriage and defines "white" as one with no trace of blood other than Caucasian. No, in this environment, I can take no unnecessary risks.

Nothing distracts like the guilt of priceless artwork. I stand and ask, "Would you like a tour?"

"That would be another great honor." He rises alongside me, and together we stroll from my office and into the lobby, but not before I point out my gleaming walnut-lined walls and richly painted paneled ceiling as well as the medieval portrait busts and porphyry urns that sit atop my mantelpiece.

Once we're in the library proper, I introduce him to the awe-inspiring thirty-foot ceiling, veritably dripping with gold leaf and paintings of historical figures and signs of the zodiac, and three floors of bookcases bursting with precious volumes. I lead him to the table and cases where I've arranged for a sampling of the library's treasures to be on display—the Gutenberg Bibles, the collection of Caxtons, as well as key portions of the Hamouli Coptic manuscripts—and as I

do, I experience the strangest sensation. I feel as though I'm leading this reporter through the path of my own life, as marked by the manuscripts I've acquired and artifacts I've secured.

Mr. Bennett exclaims at all the proper moments and seems awe-struck by the Gutenberg Bibles. But I can tell he's waiting for the perfect opportunity to spring his list of questions upon me. If I can conduct the actual interview while we are surveying the paintings and manuscripts, I believe I stand a chance at evading the more sensitive inquiries.

"You may feel free to ask your questions as we tour the library, Mr. Bennett. You needn't hold off until the end," I offer, as if motivated by courtesy and grace alone.

"That's awfully kind, Miss Greene. I am on a deadline."

I am about to launch into a description of our key acquisitions over nearly twenty years, when Mr. Bennett interjects, "What education prepared you for a position of this magnitude? Did you have formal training in these different fields? In some ways, it seems as though you were more of a curator or dealer than a librarian."

The question is logical and perfectly acceptable, but it catches me off guard. It's the exact question my mother prepared me for the night before my interview with Mr. Morgan all those years ago.

I flash him my best disarming grin, the one I've used for decades as I've practiced misdirection. "There was no better education for this incredible position than the training I received as a librarian at Princeton University in its rare books department."

As he scratches this down in his notes, I change the topic and turn his attention to the Caxton volumes on one of the viewing tables. I regale him with the colorful stories of their acquisition, well-known in art circles but new to the public. It is another tactic I've developed over the years, distracting my audience by dazzling them—whether through an outlandish remark, an outrageous dress, or a good tale.

"How has the Pierpont Morgan Library changed as its status has gone from private collection to public institution? It is a tremendous accomplishment and, of course, a great gift to the people of this

country," he adds as we stroll into what was once Mr. Morgan's study, but which has been Jack's library office for over a decade now.

"Yes, it's been described as the most meaningful cultural gift in American history." I beam every time I think about the establishment of the library as a public institution—my long-held dream come real, a legacy come to life. "Ah, you likely know, the process began when Mr. Jack Morgan very generously transitioned his ownership of the library and its holding to a board of trustees with an endowment. Then, courtesy of a special act of the New York legislature, this marvelous place became a public reference library with research purposes, and an art gallery," I explain. We go on to discuss the slate of programs I have planned for the library, as well as an upcoming exhibit of the letters and manuscripts of the founding fathers, such as George Washington, all open to the public.

I finish the tour of Mr. Morgan's study. The vibrant fifteenth- and sixteenth-century stained glass panels inserted in its tall vertical windows certainly deserve Mr. Bennett's notice, as do the inlaid walnut bookcases, the alabaster chandelier, and the stunning Renaissance triptychs and portraits by Hans Memling, Macrino d'Alba, Perugino, and Lucas Cranach, among others.

As I must, I draw his attention to the portrait of Mr. Morgan. I purposely ignore, however, a newly acquired painting that hangs near Mr. Morgan's immense walnut desk.

"May we take a photograph of you?" he asks a bit sheepishly as we finish his questions.

"I suppose," I answer, making no effort to mask my hesitation. I am no stranger to portraits. Over the years, Paul Helleu, René Piot, Laura Coombs Hills, William Rothenstein, and even Henri Matisse sketched or painted pictures of me. But those were for my personal use. Not for the public gaze.

"Do you have any particular place you prefer?" he inquires. "There's no shortage of gorgeous backdrops," he muses, and then leaves me to consider while he summons the photographer who's been waiting outside.

As he steps back into Mr. Morgan's study, I realize the perfect location for a fitting portrait. It will certainly be a risk, but it feels worthy and appropriate. Even necessary.

When the photographer arrives, I position myself as he sets up his equipment. I stand between Mr. Morgan's lion-footed desk and a portrait I recently advised Jack to purchase. This painting, entitled *Portrait of a Moor*, was painted at the end of the sixteenth century by Domenico Tintoretto's workshop and ostensibly depicts a Moorish ambassador to the Venetian court, resplendent in official garb next to a white package with wax seal, emblematic of his diplomatic role. While the brushstrokes are masterful and the portrayal breathtakingly lifelike, these are not the reasons I urged Jack to acquire it. The subject of *Portrait of a Moor* is of a darker man, a man who looks exactly like Papa. It is my homage to the two men who supported my climb to this peak, having their emblems sit side by side for the ages. Now, with this photograph, my official portrait will include the symbols of them both—Mr. Morgan's lion-footed desk and *Portrait of a Moor*.

After thirty minutes of taking shots, the photographer finishes and packs up his bulky camera. Mr. Bennett pulls me to the side. "Miss Greene, I hope you don't mind me asking you a personal question." Before I can agree or disagree, he continues, "There have been rumors, and I wouldn't be a good journalist if I didn't ask you about them. Did you and Mr. Morgan ever have a more intimate relationship?"

His face is flushed with embarrassment, and I imagine that his superior insisted he ask the question. I know I should be irritated or offended as befits a lady, but in actuality, I'm amused.

"I apologize for asking. I know it isn't really appropriate—"

I interrupt the stuttering young man, and say with a smirk, "If I were your average librarian, I might be offended, but I've never been average at anything."

"So—" He waits for my answer.

"Suffice it to say that we tried," I answer, laughing. *How Mr. Morgan would have enjoyed my barbed response.*

He is flustered and confused, as I can see he isn't certain if my answer is a yes or a no. "Ah, okay." But he recovers quickly, and asks, "One last question, if that is all right with you, Miss Greene."

I nod my acquiescence, although I hope it conveys my lack of enthusiasm as well. That last question *should* have been the finale, and I've given as much of myself as I feel comfortable during the course of this interview.

"Can you share your personal plans with us?"

Finally, and for the first time, he has posed a question I am delighted to answer.

"For the rest of my days, I will be perfectly satisfied and honored to serve as the Pierpont Morgan Library's lady directress."

EPILOGUE

JANUARY 14, 1948

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The charred corner of a letter drifts from the flames into the hearth. Even though I know the singed edges will be hot, I grab for it in an effort to rescue it from the flames. But before my fingertips reach it, I stop myself. Why would I stop this endeavor to destroy all my records? It isn't as if saving the letters will restore the people memorialized in them. And I can allow nothing to blacken my legacy.

Can pulling Mama's messages from the flames return her to my side, where she lived her entire life until she died almost ten years ago, leaving me truly alone for the first time in my life? While we had our challenges in my early years, I released that animosity when I returned from Chicago in 1913, and my mother and I forged a closer relationship. While Papa held beautiful dreams of equality for us all, Mama saved me—and all my siblings—from the segregation and racism in America, freeing me to fulfill that early promise Papa saw in me.

Will maintaining the sole letter I have from Papa re-create him, gone over twenty-five years now, and his hopes for true freedom along with him? Would I really want the man who had given me so much

to return to this world, one that's moved away from the early promise of equality he experienced as a young man in the Reconstruction era? The America I inhabit is the antithesis of the society for which he worked, even though groups like the National Urban League, the National Council of Negro Women, and the Congress of Racial Equality have protested the laws of segregation and inequality. If he saw our segregated country and the unabashed white supremacy that continues in our midst, his heart would shatter. Even though colored and white soldiers fought side by side in the war, the black military returned home to Jim Crow laws that have kept colored people in a persistent state of social and economic inferiority. Lynchings are still common, segregation is the practice, and discrimination keeps colored people from getting better education, better employment, and better homes. The despair would be too much for Papa to bear.

Would saving the long, elegantly written letters that Bernard sent me for years from Europe restore the love we felt for each other? The girl I once was and the man I discovered him to be can never reunite and re-create that fleeting passion. No matter the unusual bond we once shared for all those years, we are too altered, too shattered, to return to those innocent days. And anyway, I needed to break the bond of that flawed love in order to soar.

Finally, I think of the man who made the greatest difference in my life. If I retrieve all of Mr. Morgan's personal letters from the fire, will it conjure him up again? While I'd give anything for another laugh or fight or heated game of bezique with him, the business realm he left behind is so changed and regulated that the titan of finance could no longer reign as he liked—without any oversight or accountability. How on earth could he survive that alteration? And what about the fear inside my heart that, if Mr. Morgan were to return, I would discover that he felt the same way about colored people as he did about Jews?

No, the preservation of these letters will do nothing to restore the people I love or animate my memories of them. Preserving my records will only serve to provide the racists of this world a reason to

destroy the legacy I've worked my whole life to build and for which I've made countless sacrifices—the only contribution that will outlast me—the Pierpont Morgan Library, my gift to the people of this world.

I push the errant letter back into the flames with the brass poker and stoke the fire again. But as I do, Papa's words surface in my mind, and a rogue wish sparks within me. What if Papa's hopes came true? What if our society could transform and evolve in the manner he dreamed about? Could there one day be a world in which we have new governmental leaders and new laws that would grant equality to all of the citizens of this country? Could our society change such that we would walk among each other, live with each other, and perhaps even love one another, no matter the color of our skin? And if that day did come to pass, would someone, someday, reach back in time to discover my story and proudly claim the real me, the colored personal librarian to J. P. Morgan whose name was Belle da Costa Greene?

Historical Note

We have endeavored to share the life and legacy of Belle da Costa Greene as accurately as possible, even though we have written a fictionalized version of Belle and her world in *The Personal Librarian*. We attempted to anchor her narrative in the available facts. Given that Belle was a fairly well-known public figure—as was J. P. Morgan and, to a lesser extent, Belle's father, Richard Greener—there was rich material upon which to draw.

Thus, the depictions of Belle herself, Richard Greener, Genevieve Fleet, J. P. Morgan, Jack Morgan, and Bernard Berenson, as well as more minor characters based upon real-life individuals, hew closely to the known details. We also strove to capture as authentically as possible the historical context in which Belle lived: her upbringing, her career as the Morgan librarian and curator, her social life in the upper echelons of Gilded Age society, her dabbling on the fringes of the bohemian and suffragist worlds—and, most importantly, we tried to imagine and portray the sacrifices and strains of her passing as white in a racist society hostile to African Americans.

Sometimes, when necessary for the pacing of the story or the narrative arc of the book, we have taken liberties with historical dates and details. For example, we refer to the scandal involving the shooting of Stanford White of the famous architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White in a chapter that takes place in January of 1906 when,

in fact, the murder took place several months later. Similarly, we referenced the wedding of New York society figures Marjorie Gould and Anthony Drexel in a scene dated March 1908 but the wedding occurred in 1910. The Armory Show took place in New York City in February and March of 1913, but we suggested it was still ongoing in December 1913. For the exhibit at the 291 gallery, we compressed the Rodin and Matisse shows into one show taking place in May of 1908 when, in fact, there were two exhibitions in 1908. In addition, we imagined certain Gilded Age parties, like the summer soiree at the Woolworths' Gold Coast mansion; while fictional, they were all modeled after other such lavish affairs. Regarding the sale of the famous series of paintings entitled *The Progress of Love* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, we have Jack Morgan considering selling them in 1913 when, in fact, Henry Clay Frick purchased them in 1915. The timing of the Pierpont Morgan Library's purchase of the painting *Portrait of a Moor*, which hung in Mr. Morgan's study, took place in 1929, not 1924, and it is only speculation on our part that the similarity between the subject and Belle's father prompted the acquisition.

From time to time, we faced gaps about the nuances of certain relationships, not uncommon when dealing with women's histories and records. Often such records weren't considered worth preserving until recently. Additionally, Belle's story was challenging because she was determined to keep the more private aspects of her life hidden. In these instances, we structured the story around the research, and in the gaps, we made logical extrapolations.

As one example, Belle's romantic relationship with Bernard Berenson is well documented; however, the intimate details of that relationship are not known. We had to make important inferences about key events, such as particulars about their courtship and affair in America and Europe, and the manner in which their status as outsiders knit them together. Certain letters and dates point to Belle having had an abortion and its long-lasting impact on her, but the details are not documented. Heidi Ardizzone, author of Belle's wonderful biography, *An Illuminated Life: Belle da Costa Greene's Journey*

from Prejudice to Privilege, and one of the few historians to look closely at her life, suggests that it did happen, and we took fictional liberties from there. Also, Bernard had a long working relationship with the Duveens, and recent scholarship points to some practices Belle might have found objectionable, so we envisioned an impact on Belle and her business dealings. We admit to taking significant creative license with regard to the rousing conclusion to Belle's relationship with Bernard. In real life, their connection lasted for decades, but we perhaps chose to end the relationship as we wished Belle had—and hope she would approve of our dramatic imaginings.

With other profound relationships in Belle's life, we made similar suppositions based on our understanding of the context and characters. For example, with J. P. Morgan, the vast amount of time he and Belle spent together has been documented by many people connected with the famous financier, as have the sorts of activities and social occasions in which they engaged and their overall closeness. But we didn't know the *full* extent of their relationship—neither its apex nor its nadir—despite the many rumors that circulated about them and the fact that Belle herself was quoted as saying, "We tried!" in response to a question about being Morgan's mistress. So we spun out a textured, complicated relationship, rife with the sexual tension we imagined *must* have been present given their personalities.

Similarly, in Belle's relationship with her father, we don't know the extent of her youthful connection to him, although there are reports about their affection for each other and their shared interests, so we envisioned what might have been. We also didn't have any confirmation of what happened in their later years, after Richard had left Belle and her family for foreign travels and another family. However, when we read in Heidi Ardizzone's biography of Belle that she took a strangely timed trip to Chicago—a trip that had no business purpose—we felt certain that she must have met with her father, who was living in Chicago then. And so we conceived of the reunion with her father that Belle so richly deserved.

Along those lines, when we learned that Anne Morgan had never

warmed to Belle as Jack Morgan and his other sisters had, we contemplated creating a challenging relationship between Anne and Belle, one in which they were each hiding secrets about their identities. The speculation around Anne's sexuality that existed even during her lifetime—fueled by her relationship with well-known lesbians Elsie de Wolfe and Elisabeth Marbury as well as her refusal to marry and her politics—influenced this decision, as did the opportunity to explore the societal pressures on both Anne and Belle to be other than their authentic selves.

We also had to consider how people of African descent would have been addressed during the early twentieth century as well as how Belle would have thought of herself. What we discovered was that the term "colored" was used prominently during the time period early in the novel—particularly with respect to people of mixed heritage—as well as "black," and then those terms evolved into references such as "Negro" as the law and perceptions changed in America. As Belle aged in the novel, we initially utilized the more era-appropriate word "Negro," but as we considered it, we felt that Belle would probably not have used the term "Negro" in thinking about herself. In addition, while these kinds of cultural issues were being addressed and changing in society, Belle was not a part of that change, and we felt that it would have been difficult for her to see herself and others like her as anything except for the term that she'd grown up using, which was "colored."

For a deep dive into any of these subjects or historical individuals, we recommend many nonfiction books and writings, including but not limited to *An Illuminated Life: Belle da Costa Greene's Journey from Prejudice to Privilege* by Heidi Ardizzone, *The House of Morgan: An American Banking Dynasty and the Rise of Modern Finance* by Ron Chernow, *Bernard Berenson: A Life in the Picture Trade* by Rachel Cohen, *Uncompromising Activist: Richard Greener* by Katherine Reynolds Chaddock, Richard Greener's own essay "The White Problem," and *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* by Henry Louis Gates Jr. We also suggest a review of the Mor-

gan Library's excellent publications as well as a tour through the incredible institution.

While we adored writing about Belle's panache in society—her witty quips and her eye-catching fashion, as well as her sometimes outrageous behavior—we also faced an enormous challenge. Given the very intentional lengths that Belle went to to destroy her letters—leaving behind only her business correspondence and her missives to Bernard (which he'd promised to destroy but failed to do and which did not discuss Belle's race)—we had a very limited record of how she *felt* about passing in the racist world in which she lived and conversations emanating from those feelings. Needless to say, she did not talk publicly about her heritage for the same reasons. Clearly, Belle did not want her real identity discovered, not a surprise given the racism of her times and her legitimate concern that if her background became widely known, her accomplishments at the Pierpont Morgan Library would be eviscerated.

So when we began writing about Belle's interior life, in particular her feelings about living as white, we entered the realm Marie often describes as the space between the pillars of the architecture formed by the facts—a space where we used a blend of research, personal experience, fiction, and logical extrapolation—to reach Belle's inner self. We also relied on Victoria's own experiences as an African American woman and her family's experiences, in particular those of her grandmother, who was fair and often passed when necessary. Drawing on this familial experience—and pairing it with research based on historical instances of passing, as documented in books such as *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* by Allyson Hobbs—we hope we did justice to Belle's struggles and brought to life the terrible injustices and pain that racism and segregation have exacted upon individuals and the United States as a whole.

Our country had a chance at racial equality in the years after the Civil War—an equality that Richard Greener and his family briefly experienced and for which he advocated his entire life—but white supremacy and segregation rose up in reaction to those efforts. We

hope that *The Personal Librarian* explores not only the incredible life and legacy of Belle da Costa Greene but also the sacrifice and suffering that the African American population has endured as a result of the horrific response to the promise of equality—then and now. More than anything, we hope *The Personal Librarian* inspires discussion about these important issues, conversations that will foster understanding, compassion, action—and ultimately change.

Marie Benedict's Author's Note

This is not my ordinary author's note. But then *The Personal Librarian* is not my usual novel. I had no idea that writing a book about Belle da Costa Greene, personal librarian to J. P. Morgan, creator of the Pierpont Morgan Library's famous manuscript collection and a woman with a life-altering secret, would change me. That in bringing Belle to life, I myself would awaken and gain a sister in the process.

I first discovered Belle years ago, when I was a different person living a different life. I was a commercial litigator in New York City, working for one of the world's largest law firms, and I was terribly unhappy. I knew I wasn't engaged in my life's purpose, and the Pierpont Morgan Library became one of my refuges during those dark days. Strolling through its jewel-box interiors, I could pretend that I was a historian or an archaeologist or an author unearthing the hidden past—the life I longed to live, rather than the life I was living.

On one of those afternoons, I found Belle. The discovery didn't emerge from an informational plaque about her role at the Pierpont Morgan Library or an exhibition about her contributions or even the display of one of her portraits; such references were not highlighted at that time. No, I learned about Belle from a passing docent, who took a few moments from her busy schedule to describe this astonishing woman and, in so doing, offered me a new lens through which to

view the Pierpont Morgan Library, its collection, the time in which it was created, and much, much more.

Belle haunted me for decades, especially once I began digging deep into her background. I learned that her father, Richard Greener, the first African American graduate of Harvard, had been a prominent advocate for equality in the decades after the Civil War, particularly for the Civil Rights Act of 1875. An act that affirmed the equality of *all* people and provided for equal treatment in public transportation and public accommodations for everyone. An act that the Supreme Court overturned in 1883 and, in so doing, undermined much of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, which banned slavery and guaranteed equal protection of the laws, respectively. As a result, Richard Greener's daughter was forced to hide her true identity. In order to become the most successful career woman of her day, she lived as a white woman. What must it have been like to be Belle da Costa Greene? I couldn't help but wonder, and I began contemplating writing a novel about her.

However, I recognized I couldn't write this story by myself. In penning previous books, I'd been able to imagine the lives of many other women with varied origins and experiences, but I knew I could not conjure Belle alone. How could I possibly conceive of what it would be like to be an African American woman in the years immediately after the Civil War—when slavery was supposedly abolished, but white supremacy, Jim Crow laws, and lynchings were actually on the rise? And how could I take that one step further and envision what it would be like when that woman tried to pass as white, especially when it had been her father's dream to fashion a world where all people could live freely while openly celebrating their heritage? Not only would such an exercise be presumptuous, but Belle deserved to have her story told by an African American author.

The years passed, and sometimes I could almost hear Belle tapping her foot, waiting impatiently as I left the legal profession and began writing about other historical women. Then one day, I started reading *Stand Your Ground* by Victoria Christopher Murray. In the

pages of this compelling, important award-winning novel about the shooting of a Black teenage boy by a white policeman—told from the perspectives of the boy's mother and the wife of the policeman—I hoped I'd found my partner.

I could not wait to meet this incredible author who had crafted such a nuanced, crucial examination of race from two very different perspectives. But I was also a little intimidated. What would Victoria be like? Would she really want to work with me on this book? After all, she had her own bevy of projects lined up as well as endless work travel, and I worried that she'd find me audacious for even attempting to tell Belle's story. Who did I think I was?

However, from our very first conversation, I felt connected to this brilliant, warm woman. We learned how alike we were in some ways, both striving oldest daughters, eager to please our parents with traditional success yet yearning for another path. Not unlike Belle. Together, I hoped we could excavate Belle from the detritus of the past and share the astonishing contributions of this critical woman, along with the history of the post-Civil War era, an era in which America attempted equality but white supremacy rose up. Luckily for me, Victoria agreed to be my writing partner, and we embarked on this mission.

Writing Belle's story with Victoria—after dreaming about it for so many years—was a joy, and I often thought about how fortunate I was in her partnership and burgeoning friendship. When we finalized our first draft and hit the send button to our wonderful editor, I thought we'd brought Belle to life, and the unjust, racist world she inhabited along with her. I thought that I'd come to fully know Victoria in the process. I didn't know that I was just beginning.

Our edited manuscript arrived along with the coronavirus and quarantine. Victoria and I had the time and the technology (thank you, Zoom!) to talk in person nearly every day, sometimes for hours a day. While these long conversations initially focused on the hard work of revising *The Personal Librarian*, they quickly shifted into a sharing of our personal experiences, both with the pandemic and with the

issues of discrimination we were exploring in the pages of our book. And when the racism always lurking in our society—since long before the days we write about here—reared its ugly head so incontrovertibly with George Floyd and Christian Cooper, and people took to the streets in protest despite the pandemic, those discussions became intense and intimate, and our friendship deepened.

Honored by her trust in me, I listened as Victoria shared her experiences with racism, the sort of daily degradations she suffers as well as the larger, bolder acts perpetrated on her. My heart clenched as she told me of her own parents' attempts to change systemic racism with their involvement in the civil rights marches of the 1960s and 1970s, and as she described the segregation that her grandparents endured during the years of Jim Crow laws, which sometimes necessitated that her fair-skinned grandmother pass as white. My heart ached as Victoria and I witnessed the horrific white supremacy running rampant in our society right before our eyes—terrifyingly similar to the incidents we discovered in our research and wrote about in the pages of our book—and I found myself growing furious on behalf of Victoria and Belle.

It wasn't only our book that changed in the editing process; I did, too. Victoria generously offered me a lens through which to see the world, and it altered me, and continues to do so. I'd always believed myself to be a proponent of equality for all, but my conversations with Victoria made clear how little I knew about the struggle and about myself. As I listened to Victoria, I realized how removed I had been, how protected by my own white privilege I really was. And how much I had to learn and how much I had to *do*. For Victoria—my partner, my friend, and my sister—and for all our shared humanity. And for Belle.

Victoria Christopher Murray's Author's Note

"What is Liza thinking?"

That was my first thought when my literary agent (who is amazing) sent me a proposal to work with another author. Collaborating wasn't new for me; I'd worked with ReShonda Tate Billingsley on six novels, and I loved writing with her far more than writing independently. So I was always open to this type of opportunity.

But this project was unusual because of the author. Marie Benedict was a *New York Times* bestselling author who'd written wonderful stories of strong women whose names had been lost inside the folds of history. I was impressed, but I couldn't figure out why a historical fiction author would want to work with a contemporary writer like me.

Because I couldn't wrap my head around that concept, it took me a while to even read the proposal. It just didn't make sense; it wasn't a fit.

And this is why reading is fundamental.

Because once I finally read *The Personal Librarian* proposal and found out who Belle was, I was fascinated for so many reasons. An African American woman helped J. P. Morgan build his massive art and manuscript collection, but no one knew she was Black? Her life, before I'd even studied more about her, seemed like the lives of so many of the grandparents and great-grandparents of my friends,

whose lighter skin was the mark of one of the most heinous acts of slavery. In my family, my grandmother (whose complexion was so light that my younger sister Cecile once asked about pictures on our mantel—"Who is that white lady?") shared her own stories of occasionally passing out of necessity or to make life easier.

I knew Belle from my own familial experiences. I knew the pain of the decision she made to leave behind her heritage, and then the fear of exposure that came with that choice. I could imagine how every day, once she walked outside her doors, she had to put on an award-winning performance, but then at night, when she returned home, took off her "costume," and laid her head down, she was still Black.

I wanted in—I wanted to be part of this project and bring Belle da Costa Greene to life.

The proposal was only the first hurdle, though. Next, I had to meet Marie. Embarking on a project like this meant that we would spend hours together. I was prepared for that, but was Marie? Would we have the chemistry to endure all the time, all the effort, all the work, that was in front of us?

Our agents set up the call for us to speak. I said, "Hello," Marie said, "Hello," . . . and that was it. I think we were two, maybe three minutes into the call before we were more than potential cowriters; we were already friends. By our third or fourth call, we were finishing each other's sentences. By the time we met in person, we were sisters.

For the next few months, we worked tirelessly, spending hours on the phone planning each chapter, bringing Belle to life. We finished writing the first draft of the manuscript, and at the end, all I could say was that the entire process was amazing for me. I loved working with Marie. She taught me so much about writing history. I became a champion researcher as I searched and searched to discover one hidden fact after another about Belle. My biggest challenge was the flowery dialogue of the early twentieth century. There were times when I just wanted one of the characters to say, "Are you kidding me, dude?"

Clearly, that wouldn't have worked, but it didn't matter. Because whenever I gave up and wrote something like that, Marie followed with what we began to call her magical historical brush. I'd write something like "That's what's up, Belle," J. P. Morgan said." And Marie would change that to "I feel like we should be heralding you with a ticker tape parade, Belle." (Okay, maybe it wasn't that bad, but it was close.)

Once we turned in our manuscript, I knew I had a friend for life. What I didn't know was what was ahead for me and Marie. I had no idea that a pandemic would leave us both stranded in our homes, revising the manuscript. I had no idea that we would spend even more hours than before together, just about every day, working on our story. I had no idea that we'd have to continue working right after we watched a man murdered in the streets of Minneapolis. I had no idea that as a disease threatened our bodies and civil unrest challenged our souls, Marie and I would bond far beyond the experience of writing together.

Our country in disarray was the background music as we, a white woman and a Black woman, talked through our emotions of what felt like our country crumbling around us. Marie checked on me every day, giving me an outlet for the outrage that burned within me, although just as many times I had to be that outlet for her. We created a safe space between us as we discussed the history of Black America, the history of white America, and the hope that one day these two Americas would converge into one.

All of those thoughts, all of those emotions, spilled into Belle's story because so much of what we were experiencing in our society as we wrote was what Belle wanted to avoid by passing as white more than one hundred years ago. She didn't want the color of her skin to be used as a weapon against her, an excuse to keep her relegated to the lowest jobs, the worst neighborhoods, with little possibility for a better life.

Writing *The Personal Librarian* has been a life-changing experience for me, and I am so grateful for this opportunity. There couldn't

have been a better time, there couldn't have been a better project, and, most importantly for me, there couldn't have been a better person to navigate through all of this with than Marie Benedict. I don't know what the writing future holds for us, but what I do know is that I have a new sister for the rest of my life. And my hope, my desire, is that everyone who reads this story will feel the emotions and experiences that we tried to pour onto these pages and they will come to love Belle da Costa Greene as much as we do.

Marie Benedict's Acknowledgments

Belle da Costa Greene captured my imagination and heart years ago, but her essential and timely story—as Victoria and I discovered and then let unfold in *The Personal Librarian*—would have remained as hidden as Belle's own identity during her lifetime without the support and championship of so many. As always, I must begin with my own personal advocate, my brilliant and generous agent, Laura Dail, without whom this book would not have been possible. I am incredibly thankful for our wonderful editor, Kate Seaver, whose desire and passion to share Belle's story was evident from the very start and who has guided this book beautifully. The amazing folks at Penguin Random House have our endless gratitude: Ivan Held, Christine Ball, Claire Zion, Jeanne-Marie Hudson, Craig Burke, Anthony Ramondo, Jin Yu, Lauren Burnstein, Dache Rogers, Natalie Sellars, Michelle Kasper, and Mary Geren.

However, without the constant and unwavering love and support of my boys—Jim, Jack, and Ben—none of this would have been possible. And without my talented and phenomenal partner, friend, and sister, Victoria Christopher Murray, *The Personal Librarian* would not have come into being at all.

Victoria Christopher Murray's Acknowledgments

This project started to come together even before I became involved. I am so grateful for my phenomenal agent, Liza Dawson, for seeing this opportunity and knowing how amazing it would be for me. And that was just the beginning. From the moment Marie and I spoke with Kate Seaver, we knew we wanted to work with her as our editor. Thank you, Kate, for believing in Belle as much as we did and for taking this journey with us. To the team at Penguin Random House, all I can say is *Wow*. When this novel was just a thought, everyone saw our vision and shared our excitement. Thank you to all: Ivan Held, Christine Ball, Claire Zion, Jeanne-Marie Hudson, Craig Burke, Anthony Ramondo, Jin Yu, Lauren Burnstein, Dache Rogers, Natalie Sellars, Michelle Kasper, and Mary Geren.

I cannot complete this without recognizing the most important people in my career—the thousands of readers who've been with me on this twenty-year journey. Thank you for being excited about *The Personal Librarian*, and I hope you come to love Belle as much as I do.

And finally, to Marie. What can I say about you? I thought I was meeting a new writing partner, but I got another sister instead. I will be forever grateful to Belle da Costa Greene for that.

The PERSONAL LIBRARIAN

Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray

While we hope you've enjoyed *The Personal Librarian* and the experience of immersing yourself in Belle's story, we also hope you agree with us that this novel contains so much that we all need to discuss. Even as we were writing it, we drafted questions for you to consider and then revisited them many, many times as the story evolved and we got to know Belle and her world more intimately. The day-to-day struggles Belle faced as an African American woman passing as a white woman in a racist world were challenging in and of themselves, but the repercussions on her emotional and personal life were every bit as important.

We understand that our readers come from different backgrounds and will see Belle's story and our questions from many perspectives. Our dream is that *The Personal Librarian* will be embraced by book clubs from the full range of those different backgrounds, and that readers will connect to Belle and learn from her experiences as we have. In addition, we think it would be wonderful if book clubs could have the transformational experience that we had when writing this book. Thus, we hope that book clubs will reach out and join together with other clubs, bringing together readers from a broad range of backgrounds, ages, and experiences to share in the discussion of Belle.

This guide is simply that, a guide that aims to spark conversations that will foster connection, action, and, hopefully, progress toward equality.

Questions for Discussion

1. How might you explain Belle's rise to such breathtaking heights in society and her profession at a time when women—especially African American women—faced such blatant discrimination and exclusion? Did Belle possess certain personality traits that yielded this incredible outcome? If so, what are they? What sorts of outside influences contributed to her ascent?
2. In some ways, Belle's parents had somewhat unique experiences or backgrounds for African American people during this time period. What kind of reaction did you have to her parents' histories? How might those histories have impacted Belle, even when she had not been told the details of her parents' pasts?
3. How did you view Belle's relationship with her mother? Do you think Belle resented her mother, or did their relationship change over the course of the book such that they came to a place of understanding? If so, what was Belle's turning point with her mother?
4. How would you describe Belle's position among her siblings? How did you feel about her relationship with them and her responsibilities to them?
5. What sort of reaction did you have to Belle's relationship with her father? Do you think Belle ever felt deserted by her father in the same way her siblings did? Why or why not?

6. What sort of pressure do you think Belle might have experienced from the rumors about her true ethnicity? Do you think J. P. Morgan heard the rumors? Do you think he knew she was passing as white and decided to ignore it, or do you think he was unaware of her heritage?
7. What do you think *really* happened romantically between Belle and J. P. Morgan? Do you agree with the portrayal in the book?
8. How would you describe the attraction between Belle and Bernard Berenson? What were the attributes that drew them together and, ultimately, forced them apart? How did you feel about their relationship—and Belle's ability to have a partner and family of her own?
9. What surprised you the most about Belle's life? About her time period?
10. How familiar were you with passing before reading this novel? Has your understanding of the reasons and sacrifices behind it altered after reading about Belle's life?
11. What sacrifices did Belle make by choosing to follow her mother's path? What advantages did she gain?
12. Before reading this book, were you familiar with the Civil Rights Act of 1875 or the efforts toward equality that occurred during Reconstruction? Did you have any understanding of what transpired in the years after Reconstruction? What might have happened in the United States in the decades that followed if the Civil Rights Act of 1875—along with the many efforts at equality that occurred during Reconstruction—had not been overturned?
13. How do the racial issues and events in the book relate to events happening today?
14. In the end, do you think Belle was happy with her choices and decisions? Do you think she would have done anything differently?