

**RICHMOND, LONDON****Saturday 15th March 1913**

The evening was in full swing at the awards ceremony. All the minor trophies had been handed out to grateful recipients early on, each winner permitted a minute to say their thank you's and collect their little brass camera effigies. Now it was the intermission, and while the staff set up the stage for the award that everyone had come to see, one particular table beneath the smoke-choked ceiling was the scene of an increasingly drunken conversation.

Stealing the attention of his three young companions, Norman Edwards brandished a champagne glass and waved it like a conductor as he made his closing argument. "...I'm telling you, the man who could take *that* picture would have his name immortalised for all time!" he declared to his reluctant listeners. Atop his round head, he carried a thick, brown mop encased in glistening hair cream. The room's heat was causing it to run, and some of it was trailing down his brow like a melting waxwork. Dressed in a stiff, black tie outfit that covered a round paunch, he resembled a sweating penguin.

"Uh huh," his more relaxed friend replied from behind a bottle of champagne. Throughout the monologue, he'd been admiring its label and now topped up Norman's glass as it was being swung about in an arc.

"Hey, my brother's had too much already," a tender voice complained.

Hal Drayton paused in his refilling duty and glanced at the gentle touch gracing his forearm. An engagement ring glittered before his eyes, and he looked up into the beautiful face of his fiancée. With a stern pout planted on her full lips, Jen Edwards might have fooled other men, but Hal had seen that look too many times not to miss the smirk lying behind it. With a grin of his own, he threw her a wink. "Are you sure the pair of you are twins?" he asked her, then raised his voice to address his friend. "And how, Norm, should he take that photograph while bobbing around in some bloody lifeboat in the freezing cold dark?" he asked as he set the bottle down beside a slew of empty glasses and plates.

"Where there's a will, there's a way," Norman insisted. "I mean, can you imagine seeing such a thing going down right before your eyes? A ship that *massive*? Like a steel leviathan." A head of foam escaped his glass as he held his arms out in a wide wingspan.

"I can't, actually, no," Hal told him, sitting back and squeezing Jen's hand under the table. "Besides, if me and you had been on the Titanic, we'd be nothing more than fish food right now."

"Hal," Jen warned him for a second time. Theirs wasn't exactly a conversation suitable for such a formal event, and the hall's round tables were packed close together.

"Good point, I didn't think about that," Norman nodded. "Women and children first. But chance they would have made an exception for us if they'd known the photographs were for posterity? Or better yet, they could have let us go on one of the lifeboats to take the picture, then rowed us back to the ship to help with the evacuation. We'd have gone down as heroes..." Scratching a smooth chin, he continued thinking out loud until he was stopped by the table's fourth occupant; his girlfriend, Kitty Irving.

"Talking of exploits, a little bird told me that *you* had once been interviewed by Captain Scott, Hal," she said, casting Jen a furtive smile. "Apparently you were *this* close to becoming his official photographer."

The two young ladies had both turned twenty-one, but most of their similarities ended there. Kitty was blonde and ruddy faced with an outgoing, almost clumsy personality that suited Norman down to the ground. Jen, however, was different. Hal had fallen in love the moment he'd seen her. She'd been playing a grand piano in a room too small for the

ungainly behemoth. But with all her attention focussed on sheet music, he'd been free to make a study of her from a distance. There was something about the graceful curve of her neck and her slightly upturned button nose that had kept him transfixed for what had felt like an age, yet had only been a few seconds. And the way her fingers had danced over the keys...he still smiled just thinking of it.

"I thought I'd managed to keep that one under wraps?" he now pondered, darting his betrothed a sly look.

"That's right, the North Pole expedition!" Norman exclaimed. "That's another missed opportunity!"

"A missed opportunity to get myself killed?" Hal snorted. He rotated the sweating champagne bottle on its base. "Besides, it was the *South Pole* expedition that Scott led. And the Norwegians got there first."

"Even so, the man who could take *that* picture would have his name immortalised for all time-"

Kitty sat forward to cut her boyfriend off before he could start up again. "What kind of man was he? Captain Scott?"

Three pairs of eyes crawled over Hal, and a frown that didn't suit him broke across his forehead. His so-called interview with the famous Captain Robert Falcon Scott had lasted less than fifteen minutes inside a poky office surrounded by crates of cured provisions. Yet a limitless enthusiasm and keen intellect had turned the polar explorer into a magnet for the young photographer. "He was...driven. I would say he was quietly driven."

"What happened? Did he turn you down?"

Hal winced at the unsubtle barb. "I had insufficient funds to bring to his endeavour," he replied, sitting back with a sigh, "and someone made me a better offer." His fingers intertwined with Jen's, and she flashed him a diamond smile that sent his heart racing.

"You *do* know his widow is attending tonight?"

Kitty's flippanant remark made him sit up. "Lady Scott is here?"

"Three tables down. She's with an entourage."

Hal followed the direction of Kitty's nod. Through gaps between the other tables, he spied an upright woman in the company of four old, balding men with cummerbunds holding back bloated waistlines. "So I'm going to get my award in the presence of Kathleen Scott?" he mused, immediately receiving an elbow dig from Jen for his arrogance. She always tried to keep his feet on the ground.

"The recently *widowed* Kathleen Scott," Norman pointed out, and he cracked a lopsided grin. "She's a sculptor. Very good with her hands."

Even Hal rolled his eyes at that one. "Your brother has *definitely* had too much," he told Jen as she took the bottle back with an *I-told-you-so* look marring her delicate features.

Activity was growing on stage and a knot tightened in her stomach as she witnessed the first display prints being set up on giant easel stands. There were five in total, and each was veiled with a shimmering silk cover. The nominees for *Photographer of the Year*.

She twirled the engagement ring around her finger and looked to Hal beside her. Pushing a mousey fringe from his brow, he appeared the epitome of confidence. And small wonder; he already knew he'd won. The organisers had had to seek his permission to use his winning entry for their planned press releases. The moment he'd been given the news a month back, he'd sprinted to her home and lifted her breathless in his arms, right in front of her parents, making all kinds of crazy promises about their future marriage and honeymoon. He'd promised her Florence. And sunrises, endless sunrises.

A trophy was now brought out and set on a small table beside the lectern. It was the largest of the evening by far, and was in the shape of a plate camera. Its yellow lustre attracted every pair of eyes in the room, and even Hal made a nervous swallow. "You know they have a library here?" he murmured, drawing close while everyone's attention was stolen by the activity onstage. "Perhaps once we're done with this, we can seek it out. Catch-up on some...Descartes?"

Jen laughed beneath the hall's growing hubbub. "You are far more charming when you're sober, Mr Drayton," she admonished him, adjusting his bowtie. "And we're not *nearly* married yet."

"That didn't stop us last time," he grinned. "Or the time before that. Or the time before that. Or the time-"

A mischievous flash of her dusky eyes silenced him. "Let's see if you can behave yourself for the rest of this," she said, turning in her seat to sit up straight. Whether it was her intention or not, the action accentuated the buttermilk skin of her cleavage, giving Hal the perfect view just as the hall's lights dimmed.

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The venue's library was surprisingly large and filled entirely with non-fiction set in regular aisles down its length. In the corner, a grandfather clock ticked with metronomic precision close to a set of oak double doors that someone had barred with a high-backed chair. Beneath glowing lights turned down low, the place would have been deserted if not for the entwined couple at the librarian's check-in desk, panting in the afterglow of their messy union.

Jen's clawing fingers had swiped away a stack of books, and one of her shoes had come off to clatter beside a large brass trophy that Hal had placed on the floor. Sitting on the varnished surface with her skirt hiked up to her waist and a pair of knickers hanging off an ankle, she wrapped her legs around him, listening to his frantic heart through his shirt.

"I love you, Hal," she breathed.

"I love you too."

"No, I really mean it," she said, looking up into his face. "I am so proud of you. I wish...I wish your father could see you right now."

He laughed and rocked his hips where they were still connected. His trousers had fallen to his feet and goosebumps had broken out across his bare arse. "Right now? Seriously?"

She sighed. "You know what I mean. He would be as proud of you as I am. I wish...I wish I could have met him so he'd have known how much you're loved." Her face suddenly crumpled and a tear rolled down her cheek.

"Hey, hey," he soothed, raising her chin. "Where's all this coming from?"

"It's nothing, it's just...I want to capture this moment in a jar and keep it on a shelf somewhere. To remind myself of what happiness really is." She sniffed back a second tear. "I'll be such a good wife to you. And you're going to do so much good in this world, Hal Drayton."

Seeing her gazing up at him, Hal mentally framed her image like a photograph, imagining himself looking at her through a viewfinder. Her cheeks burned red as she breathed through parted lips, and he ran a thumb over them. She was more beautiful than any of his pictures could ever be. "If I do any good in this world at all, it will be as husband to you, Jennifer Edwards," he told her. Their sweaty fingers laced together and the small diamond of her engagement ring scratched his palm. "Now, I don't know about you, but I'm starting to get

cold.” Peering over the edge of the desk, he looked down at the cracked spines they’d created in the fallen books. “And poor old Descartes down there is looking a bit out of place.”

Returning to the heat of the auditorium, the couple found it transformed from when they had sidled away. Some of the men had retired to a smoking room and most of the covered tables had been pushed to the edges, allowing the high-class attendees to mingle in small clusters. Only the five unveiled prints held in their easels were left onstage with Hal’s winning entry in the middle. The lectern and presentation table were long gone.

“There you are, where the hell have you been?”

Hal and Jen turned to see Norman threading his way towards them, practically dragging poor Kitty along.

“We’ve just been looking around the place,” Hal replied, making a show of admiring a cut glass chandelier hanging over their heads. Jen lowered her gaze and tucked a loose lock of hair behind her ear.

“Yeah, well,” said Norman, “there’s someone I want to meet and I’ll need 1913’s photographer of the year to get past her entourage.” He grabbed his friend by the elbow and made towards a tall woman surrounded by a clutch of old, portly men.

“No, we’re not harassing Lady Scott,” Hal insisted, stopping them dead.

“Oh, but I only want to-”

“If we’re going anywhere, we’re going to the bar.”

The compromise was enough to placate the pouting Norman. Throwing their two ladies an apologetic smile, Hal straightened his jacket and led his friend across the hall, his unwieldy trophy weighing him down. Jen watched after them and smiled at the height difference between her stout brother and slender fiancée. *A stove pipe and a chimney stack.*

“Come on,” said Kitty, tugging on her arm, “do you want to meet the four men your beloved beat to first place?” and without waiting for an answer, she coaxed Jen in the opposite direction their men had disappeared to.

Having ordered a second round of gin and tonic at the bar, Hal accepted another handshake and words of congratulations with lukewarm gratitude. He would have stayed in the hall and worked the room, trophy in hand and a beaming Jen on his arm. He might have even been able to get an audience with Lady Scott herself and offered his condolences. But instead he was confined to a barstool with the cause sitting right next to him getting ever more drunk.

“...fifteen horsepower, chassis lively as a colt. I’ve just had the brakes replaced. We should take her out for a spin after this.”

Norman’s open-palmed slap on the bar roused him from his thoughts. “Sorry, what?”

“My car. I drove it here with Kitty. She could go back with Jen and you can jump in with me. I’ll take us on a few twistys before dropping you off at home.”

Hal screwed up his face. “I don’t know, Norm. Haven’t you had a bit much to drink for those sort of roads? And it’s getting late already.”

“Bah! The night is young, and you’re photographer of the year...” Norman went into a half-baked rebuttal and Hal began to lose interest when a sweet tinkling noise danced in his ears.

“Wait, wait,” he said, silencing his friend. “Can you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Norman cocked his head, unable to catch the light melody above the general chatter around them.

But Hal could hear it. He knew exactly what it was. “Chopin.”

It was three years ago when he had first heard that tune. At twenty years of age, he'd been a lowly surveyor's assistant, relegated to lugging camera equipment from job to job. The task that day had been a simple one; perform a survey of Mr Edward's pasture at the edge of Brookwood village. The wealthy landowner planned to build a new stable adjacent to his country home and was facing complaints from his nearest neighbours. It all had something to do with horse racing that Hal couldn't have been less interested in. After being ordered from one end of the wildflower meadow to the other, he'd set up his camera tripod for what he hoped would be the final time when the sound of piano keys had drifted on the breeze.

Turning around, he'd peered back at the sprawling home and seen her for the first time. Framed in the rays of the summer sun, Jen had sat at a grand piano in what he took to be Mr Edwards' small drawing room.

As though sensing his eyes on her, she had cut short the music to look out at the pasture and seen him lolling on the fence, gawping at her in his stupid-looking flat cap and wool worsted trousers kept in check with bicycle clips.

He hadn't known it then, but she had complained to her father and he had been kicked off the job. Yet it was the best thing that could have happened. It had given him the boot up the arse he'd needed to strike out on his own. Scraping enough money together for an old flat-folded Kodak, he'd worked freelance for an outdoor magazine, determined to make himself worthy of Jen, even before he'd known her name.

Lost in memories, he only realised he'd left the bar when he found himself staring up at the deserted stage, aware of the blown-up black and white image that had won him first prize. Deep down, he knew it had been blind luck that had scored him the perfect shot. So much of what he had achieved these past three years had been down to luck. It had brought him into the orbit of high society this night, and it had won him Jen. How much longer might it hold out?

The Chopin melody tinkled over the heads of everyone in the hall, and he looked back to see Norman coming to join him with a gin and tonic grasped in each hand. The hair cream had finally gotten into his eyes and he was blinking away the stings as though he'd been punched on the nose. Motioning for him to follow, Hal entered a passage and came across a group crowding the entrance to what appeared to be a hastily converted drawing room. They all made way for the Photographer of the Year clutching his trophy, his eyes glazed from the evening's alcohol.

He got no further than the doorway. There he stood like some kind of dumbstruck idiot before an oracle of Delphi, watching her produce the finest music the unworthy venue had ever witnessed. She sat at an upright piano in the corner, requiring no sheet music as her fingers danced over the keys. A sad smile adorned her lips and she swayed slightly to the rhythmic flow she was creating. Everyone in the room had fallen silent, every man hoping to make eye contact with her. But Jen only had eyes for one man. And the moment she saw him, the sadness in her smile vanished, and there was nothing but joy.

It was so beautiful to Hal, he thought he might cry. If he had died right there, he was certain the music alone would have taken him to heaven. He closed his eyes and took a breath.

He didn't die.

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"Are you sure about this?" Jen looked past Hal with a worried frown. They were standing outside, lit up by the headlights of Norman's car, its cold engine ticking over. Her father's gleaming tourer was parked ahead in parallel on the kerbside, their driver drumming his



fingers on the steering wheel. He had brought the young couple to this place, but he would only be taking one of them back.

"Norm has his heart set on it," Hal replied, "and at least this way, Kitty gets home at a decent hour."

"Alright, but don't let him keep you out too long. You'll catch a cold. And tell him to keep his speed down. Remind him it's twenty miles to Brookwood and he has to drop you off first. The stations are all shut at this hour so he can't go tearing round like a madman." She buttoned his coat up for him and patted down the lapels when a shriek had them both looking back to see Kitty giggling away; Norman was planting slobbery kisses on her neck from the driver's seat.

"I'll tell him," Hal sighed. He took Jen's fingers in his hands, still in awe at the music she could produce with them. "I love you. Thank you for being with me tonight."

Something in the way he said the words made her blush. "I'll have to get used to engagements like this if I'm to be Mrs Drayton," she smiled.

They kissed, and before he could register her taste on his lips, she was calling Kitty over. Spurred into action, the driver got out and opened the door for the two ladies who bundled themselves across the back seats beneath their coats. Hal lingered on the pavement to watch Jen wave and blow him kisses through the rear window. The tourer's red lights scorched his eyes as he watched after her, breath misting before his face.

"Hal! Come on, I'm freezing!" Norm called out from behind the steering wheel of his Crossley motorcar. He honked his horn and opened the passenger door from the inside.

"There's no rush," Hal told him as he climbed in. "And your sister says it's twenty miles to Brookwood so—"

"That's alright, I've got a full tank," Norm replied, leaning back to let out a belch. Revving the engine, he took off the handbrake and they lurched forward before Hal could even close his door. The car was a cabriolet, and the soft canopy was folded down, exposing them to the full wind blast as Norman ground the gearbox into second. With a protesting bellow, the engine roared into life, taking them away from the grand hall in a squeal of tyres.

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The brass trophy sat heavy on the leather seat beside Jen. It hadn't taken much persuasion on her part for Hal to let her keep it overnight. She'd told him it was so she could look at it proper in the morning, though in reality she wanted her father to see it, so he would know she hadn't chosen the wrong man.

On her other side, Kitty wouldn't stop talking. And her brother's girlfriend was firing questions left and right like a howitzer all through their journey home.

*"Have you chosen the venue for your wedding...?"*

*"When you throw your bouquet, can you aim it at me? I want to give Norman a nudge..."*

*"How many bridesmaids will you be having?"*

*"...and just what were you two doing when you disappeared after the awards were handed out?"*

That last question Jen was keen to avoid. Including this night, her and Hal had only made love four times, or was it five? Either way, just like their previous encounters, it had left her with a pleasant ache between her legs. It was a reminder that what they had was special. She wanted it to be always special with Hal.

Mercifully, the driver made good progress on the deserted roads and Kitty was dropped off sooner rather than later. She lived not far from Brooklands Aerodrome, and watching her

bounce towards her front door, Jen fleetingly wondered whether all the early morning drones in the local skies were as annoying as she imagined them to be.

The rest of the journey she spent cradling the heavy trophy in her lap. The gloom only allowed her a partial view of the engraved plaque nailed to its wooden base, and she traced a fingertip over Hal's name. Her future husband's name. *Her* future name.

Her thoughts were filled with all sorts of possible futures when the car tyres crunched over gravel. Looking out at her large home set back behind a high-gated perimeter, she spied a downstairs bay window still bathed in soft yellow light at this late hour. Stepping out into the cold autumnal air, she realised their newly extended driveway was otherwise empty. Norman hadn't got back yet.

"So he won, then?" her father grunted when she walked through the front door and presented him with the glittering prize.

"He *earned* it, dad," she insisted with a peck on the cheek. Mr Edwards turned his nose up at the alcohol on his daughter's breath, and every craggy line on his face was briefly illuminated in stark headlights as the faithful driver parked their car out on the driveway.

For all his bluster, her father swept an admiring eye over the graceful lines on the brass, and Jen stifled a chuckle as his fingers traced the smooth ridges of the sculpted bellows. Secretly, she'd been amazed when he'd given his blessing to her and Hal's intention to wed five months ago. And he'd been unexpectedly liberal in his allowances for the happy couple. Jen suspected her mother's influence at play. She'd always liked Hal.

"Where's mum?"

"Upstairs in bed," he replied, setting the trophy down on the coffee table. "Another headache."

Another one. Nodding, she unbuttoned her coat and walked through the large room.

"Where's your brother? He's not staying out with that Kitty, is he?"

"No, I dropped her off. Norm's flaunting his car to Hal."

Swearing under his breath, her father sat down in his armchair by the fire and pretended to read a financial report from his land manager. He'd stayed up late for his daughter to return home safe. Now he'd be forced to do the same for his son.

Mumbling him a goodnight, she gave his cheek another peck and left him to his brooding. Outside the cosy front room, the rest of the house was bathed in darkness, and Jen picked her way along a passage on the way to her wing. Her very own wing in a home that was more of a mansion.

"I spoil you." The phrase was her father's favourite whenever he was overly generous with his twinned children. He'd used it repeatedly when he'd bought Norman his car, and almost constantly when he'd permitted Jen to wed. He even used it when he was being mean, which was getting rarer with every passing day. Climbing a familiar set of stairs, she came onto the floor of her bedroom suite. In a shrewd act of future-proofing, Mr Edwards had given over the home's newly built extension to his two children ten years ago. And to safeguard against potential suitors making midnight visits to his only daughter, he'd made sure to give Norman the ground floor, and Jennifer the first.

The arrangement had certainly given Hal a headache when he'd tried climbing the drainpipe up to her bedroom window. But where there's a will there's a way, and the pair had given themselves to one another in her bed just a week after their engagement had been made official. Turning up the lights and shaking off her shoes, she now sidled out of her dress and changed into a nightgown. Within a few minutes, she was brushing lengths of thick dark hair at her dresser mirror, humming a tune to herself and daydreaming about the evening's events.

In an almost violent halt, the melodious tune died on her lips. A coldness from the grave seemed to settle on her like a blanket of frost and the engraved brush fell from her hands to clatter on the floor. Without her realising, her long, dextrous fingers had gripped the dresser's edge so tight the tendons in her knuckles had strained. They now cried out in protest, but Jen wasn't listening to them. All she could hear was an authoritative rapping on the front door. Even this far into the house, she could hear it, *fee/* it through the building's fabric. She had to swallow back a lump just to breathe.

Something had happened, something bad. She knew it. During the course of the next few minutes, or it might have been hours for all her sense of time, Jen made her way to the front room. On her travels, she passed her father's study and an old playroom that had been recently converted into a more grown-up reading space. But none of that mattered. Not when she saw the stern policeman standing by the crackling fire before her seated father. Dressed in a smart uniform, he carried his helmet in the crook of his arm and a notepad in his hand.

There had been an accident. A car had come off the road and crumpled like a piece of plate tin. Her twin brother had been thrown clear, straight into the path of a stubborn tree. It's iron flesh and jagged bark had killed him instantly. And what of Hal? Her dear, beloved Hal with his mousey fringe and easy smile? He'd remained trapped in the wreckage. The poor thing hadn't had the wherewithal to get out when a ruptured fuel line had caught fire.

In that comfortable room, suffocated by the sounds of her weeping father, Jen's entire world came crashing to earth. A large piece of her didn't want to believe it was real. In fact, she felt sure she was looking down upon someone else; a poor, clueless girl who'd never suffered anything worse than a stubbed toe. That same girl now collapsed to her knees in a fit of grief, tearing at clumps of her hair and wailing to the heavens, as though God might ever deign to help her.

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