

The train station sat just at the edge of Kirkney, strangely crowded at such an early hour. The gathered villagers who stood there and saw the imposing Earl and Countess of Lochmaddy instinctively backed away, even more so at the peculiar, pale gentleman hiding under his umbrella and his large, blank-eyed servitor conversing with Lord Duncan and Lady Charlotte.

The two they didn't pay attention to, a pair of sensibly dressed servants handling the effects of their employers, glanced at the scene.

"I never understood why the villagers react to the Galbraiths as they do," Wolsey said, softly shaking her head. "Don't mistake me, they're good employers— Lady Charlotte is especially kind— but half the villagers act like the Earl will swallow them whole, and the other half act as if they're... I don't know what, King Arthur come around again?"

Naughton, valet to Lord Duncan, chuckled softly. He was a study in contrast with Wolsey, tall and wiry, with an angular face and an angry look about him, yet Wolsey found him to be unfailingly polite. "You're in an old part of Scotland, Miss Wolsey. The people here are superstitious, even about their landlords."

"How long have you been with the Galbraiths? I feel like we never get a chance to talk," Wolsey asked.

"Oh, about ten years, now. Lord Duncan was still a boy when I arrived, but then, I was only a young footman in my first job. Lord Duncan took a shine to me, and when he started taking on responsibilities and was fully a man, he chose me as his valet," Naughton explained.

"So, would you say that you know the family well?" Wolsey asked.

"As well as anyone can, I suppose. Mr. Garrison and Mrs. McLeod probably know more," the valet replied with a casual air.

"If I may, Mr. Naughton, this whole business with the Hunt, Mr. Hopkins' death, and now young James' kidnapping... I need to know something." Wolsey glanced nervously towards the Galbraiths, and then lowered her voice before she continued. "I know I heard these great, terrible dogs barking and howling in the house, and when I asked Lady Charlotte about it, she did the most queer thing and *laughed*. She said she wanted to tell me a secret, but she never got a chance." She looked up to meet Naughton's eyes. "Please, do you know anything about all that?"

Naughton was silent for a moment, giving Wolsey a studied look. "I would say that I do, yes, Ms. Wolsey." He glanced over his shoulder. Duncan and Charlotte were saying their goodbyes still. He then leaned closer to Wolsey. "It's not my place to say. They will tell you, in their own time. You're not mad, though, I promise."

Wolsey furrowed her brow. "Mr. Naughton, you make me quite nervous. Isn't there anything else—?"

"Naughton!" Duncan called, his barking voice cutting off Wolsey. "Do you have my traveling bag? I can't seem to find my gloves."

The valet snapped to attention, a model of professionalism, and completely disregarding Wolsey. "Right here, sir. Given your habit of misplacing gloves, I thought I'd save us both some time and keep them out of your sight until you did need them," Naughton replied.

"Hah, how clever," Duncan replied drily as he approached. "Give me the gloves, Naughton."

"Sir." Naughton bowed his head, handing a pair to Duncan.

The noble turned to the Lady's Maid. "Wolsey, are you quite alright? You seem very far away."

She inhaled sharply, starting to squirm under Duncan's gaze. "Yes, sir— I'm sorry, sir. Only, I was thinking about poor little James. It's a horrible thing, and I'm very sad for you and Lady Charlotte."

Duncan smiled wanly. "Thank you. You're a kind soul. I'm glad you're the one tending to Charlotte." He looked to Naughton. "Come, we're about to board."

"Sir," Naughton nodded, giving Wolsey one last knowing look.

"Be safe, my darling boy," Edith cooed, cupping her son's face in her hands and kissing him on each cheek. "And you as well, dear Charlotte." She kissed her as well. "You let us know the moment you've heard anything— or if you need any help. God bless you both."

"They're off to London, Edith, not the trenches of Sevastapol." Angus growled. He held out his hand to Duncan. "Be smart, boy. Bring James back safe and whole— don't do anything stupid."