

Envy

Prologue

*F*OR A CERTAIN KIND OF NEW YORK GIRL, EVERY-thing must be always in its place. She keeps her jewels in her jewelry box and her laces in her lace drawer. If she walks, she wears her walking costume; if she goes to the theater, she wears her theater bonnet. In the afternoon, when she visits that friend she especially wants to see, she will know at what precise hour to find her alone and most receptive to confessions. And afterward, when she makes the obligatory stop at the home of the friend she has no real desire to call upon, she will of course arrive at a moment when that lady is known to be out. Such a girl would not be seen on the street without a hat or in mixed company without gloves. So it might have come as a surprise to any little sparrow, fluttering around in the clear air on the first springlike day of 1900, to see that none of these ladies were quite where they were supposed to be.

It was the beginning of March, and though snow had clung to the sidewalk as recently as yesterday, the evening held the far-off promise of a warm season to come. As our little

bird settled on the Italianate stone ledge of a certain Fifth Avenue matron, his tiny heart began to flutter beneath his white-feathered chest. For that lady—recently married into one of New York’s great families—was unhooking her corset in the company of a man who looked nothing like her husband. Her cheeks were flushed from the champagne she had drunk at dinner, and because she was unused to removing her clothing without the help of her maid, she found herself repeatedly subsiding into giggles and fits of hilarity. Eventually her companion crossed toward her, and began to slowly undo the ribbons himself.

But by then the little bird was off, his mottled wings spreading to catch the night breeze as he coasted south high above the avenue. He soared past the brightly lit doorways of millionaires and over the heads of their coachmen on the curb in their perpetual pose of waiting. When his talons next set down, it was on the iron rail outside the leaded panes of one of those new, stylish apartment houses for the wealthy. The light from the street reflected in the glass, but the figures within were clear enough.

The girl was known for her family’s reputation and for her family’s address and for one very grand engagement. The apartment house was farther north on the little island of Manhattan than her people had ever lived before; the man calling her away from her place by the fire was not at all like

the one whose ring she'd once worn. But the sparrow's dark eyes were already roving, and before anything more could be glimpsed, the bird had swooped down and away.

From there he looped southeast, his round tufted head twisting at the pictures framed by the windows of polite people. There was the heiress whose new wealth did nothing to prevent her from unrolling her stockings in the company of a man whom no one had ever heard of. There was the favored son of upper-class New York, who not long ago surprised everyone by ending his bachelorhood, gazing at the city's receding reflection in the Hudson River. There was his wife, whose spring wardrobe had not yet arrived from Paris and was still dressed in heavy winter velvet, without a dance partner in a very good room.

Who could blame our little bird, then, for alighting eventually on the sill of one of those old-fashioned families to whom decorum still meant something. But when he chose the sill of No. 17 Gramercy Park, well, that was still no guarantee of staid lives within. And yet, on this particular evening, Diana Holland might well have been the only girl of her set who was in fact where she was supposed to be. For there she sat in her own room, alone, her shiny and unruly curls brushed and falling down around her neck. The rosy skin of her cheeks had been carefully scrubbed, and she looked into the elaborately carved and dark-stained vanity

mirror where she had so often prepared for gay evenings out.

There was nothing gay about her appearance now. Her usually dewy, deep brown eyes had cried themselves dry and her small round mouth was twisted in despair. She blinked and blinked at her reflection, but she could not bring herself to like what she saw. She no longer approved of the girl who stared back at her, and she knew that despite the many tragedies her short life had hurled at her, she'd never been so low as this. She ached with what she had done, and the longer she sat alone, the worse the hurt became. Then she relaxed her shoulders and raised her small, defined chin. She blinked again, and resolution settled on her features.

Her gaze did not waver from the mirror as her hand felt across the table for a pair of gold-plated scissors. Once her fingers curled around the handle there was not even a second of hesitation. She brought them to her curls and began to cut. There was such volume to her hair that she needed several breathless minutes to shear it all off. It was only after it was done, when shiny brown heaps were amassed at her feet, that she pushed back her chair and broke away from her own reflection. All that was left were the dark brown roots wisping over her ears and at the nape of her neck.

Later, when the first pale touches of morning were only a promise at the edges of the sky, our sparrow, still resting

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on the eaves of the Holland home, watched as its youngest inhabitant exited by the front door. Her old coat was drawn tight to shield her from the cold, and her hat was pulled over her ears. It was too late, or too early, for any human being to note the absolute determination in her stride, but the little sparrow's black eyes followed her as she disappeared into the brand-new day.

One

MR. LELAND BOUCHARD
REQUESTS THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY
AT A BALL TO BE GIVEN IN HONOR OF
THE MEMBERS OF
THE NEW YORK AUTOMOBILIST CLUB
ON THURSDAY EVENING
FEBRUARY 8, 1900, AT NINE O'CLOCK
18 EAST 63RD STREET

“SURELY A GIRL AS LOVELY AS YOU, A GIRL WHO PERSONIFIES loveliness itself, should not be hidden away on a night like this, on a night when everyone wants to see a fine figure and starry eyes, and where yours are the starriest of all.”

Diana Holland looked up innocently from the comb-crested silk sofa in the library and met the eyes of her friend, who leaned against the polished mahogany doorframe, having characteristically used twice as many words as were strictly necessary. His name was Davis Barnard, and though he wrote his gossip column under a pseudonym, he was the only famous writer Diana knew.

Diana glanced to her left, where the eyelashes of her chaperone, Aunt Edith, were just touching down on that lady's high cheekbones. In Edith's face Diana could see the future of her own features, for the small, rounded mouth, the subtle nose, and the dark eyes perfectly spaced under a generous forehead were very like hers, albeit with the thinning and etching of age.

Edith exhaled a sleepy, contented breath, and then Diana looked back at Barnard. Over his black tuxedo-covered shoulder were the trilling sounds and electric lights of the Bouchard ball.

“You flatter me too much,” she said as she stood, adding a knowing wink for emphasis. She was terribly knowing these days.

The long black chiffon skirt of her gown trailed behind her as she approached the entrance, and she batted her fan open to modestly cover her face. She always did this when Barnard escorted her, because they discussed everyone in detail, and so it was prudent to obscure the view of her mouth from any chance lip-readers. Her hair was drawn into a bun in the back, and her curls descended diagonally on either side of her forehead toward her ears. A black leather belt marked the narrowness of her waist, and at the middle point of her princess neckline was a flower made of ivory lace petals. The gown was new, and she had paid for it herself. She glanced back once, to be sure that no one had noticed her slipping away from her chaperone, and allowed herself to be drawn across the creamy marble floor of the second-story mezzanine.

“Quite a showing,” Barnard remarked as they crossed onto the richly gleaming parquet floor of Leland Bouchard’s music room. It had been constructed with acoustics in mind, although the music room was rarely used for its titular purpose. Music rooms were for people who held musicales, and Leland

Bouchard, who had built the house for himself at twenty, from money that he had earned off his own investments, was known for never sitting still. The walls were paneled with murals, and a gigantic Kentia palm festooned with tiny lights scraped the twenty-five-foot ceiling.

Her vision swept the rectangular room with its high, vaulted ceiling and met the gaze of Isaac Phillips Buck, who quickly looked away, as though he had been watching her. He was large in every way one might imagine, and the soft fleshiness of his face made his age impossible to determine. He was Penelope Hayes's lackey, Diana knew that much, but she couldn't imagine why he would have any interest in her. Next, Diana's gaze fell on her sister's old friend Agnes Jones, who was resting on the arm of a well-kempt gentleman. She tried to make her eyes widen in a cordial manner, though she still had trouble appearing to like people she did not, which Barnard had admonished an unfortunate characteristic in both a lady of society and a peddler of secrets.

"Everyone is here," Barnard went on as they watched Teddy Cutting cross the room with Gemma Newbold, who wore a diamond tiara nestled in her reddish curls and was well known to be Mrs. Cutting's choice for her only son. There was a time when everyone had thought Teddy would marry Elizabeth Holland, but that was before she became rather publicly engaged to his best friend, and then very privately married to

her true love. Like their mother, she had been widowed; both those ladies were home together tonight. That was among the reasons her younger sister tried to be seen in her place as much as possible, though it was hardly cause for Buck to spy on her.

“Nobody doesn’t love Leland,” she replied, shaking off the feeling of Buck’s swinelike eyes on her.

“It would be difficult not to.” Barnard paused to accept a glass of champagne from a passing waiter. “Although I must confess to getting a mystery headache whenever I am in his company too long. He talks too fast, and he is always excited about everything. Me, I am never excited about anything between the hour when I wake up and five o’clock.”

Diana smiled subtly at this, for she knew what five o’clock signified to her friend; of course, she had also known him to take whiskey in his coffee at decidedly earlier hours.

“That is a very gaudy gown on Eleanor Wetmore,” Diana observed, fixing her sight on the array of custom-made dresses and painted faces before them.

Barnard paused and looked. “Indeed.”

“I would imagine she is on quite the search for a husband, now that her younger sister is engaged to Reginald Newbold. That will sting for her, to be twenty-six and a maid instead of a matron of honor at the wedding. I suppose she needs the attention any way she can get it.”

“That would make a nice item.” Barnard finished his champagne and left the glass on the magnificent carved wood mantel, which had been transported from a grand Florentine house, as Barnard himself had reported in his “Gamesome Gallant” column.

“Why don’t you write it?”

This casual offer flooded Diana with nervous anticipation; she smiled behind her fan. “All right,” she said after a moment, so as to not seem too eager.

“Don’t try to hide your smiles from me, Miss Diana Holland.” Barnard turned slightly away from her as he spoke, and motioned to a waiter for another drink. “I hope, for my own sake, that the day you realize that you were made for better things is later rather than sooner.”

They had reached the huge, classically proportioned windows that faced northward onto the street, and Diana dropped her friend’s arm for a moment to gaze down at the fallen snow reflecting the warm light from above. Behind them the voice of Leland Bouchard could be heard going into raptures about his recent purchase of a horseless carriage, an Exley, which was displayed in the first-floor vestibule so that guests could, upon their arrival, stare at its shiny modernity with covetous curiosity.

Their host was tall, with a uniquely broad forehead and wheat-colored hair that always seemed a little overgrown. “It

can cover twenty-four miles in an hour, without undue racing effort," he was saying to Mr. Gore.

"He is an investor in the Exley Motor Carriage Company," Barnard remarked, *sotto voce*, to his protégé.

Though Diana should have listened for more information, she found her attention already wandering to the street below. The lace flower on her gown rose and fell with her breath, and a delicate sensation settled across her chest. The crowd behind her, which was full of stories that the protagonists would rather not have told, and also of small deceptions certain to amuse the reading public, dimmed for her. Just a moment ago she had felt the cleverest player in a game that obsessed the whole room, but she was overcome now by the strong impulse to hide herself and the brassy sound of her famous laugh.

Down below, Henry Schoonmaker had stepped out of his coach and was lighting a cigarette as he paused by the iron gate that encircled Leland Bouchard's mansion. He was the man who had drawn out Diana's affections last season, and then pounded on them. There was much history between them, but as Diana watched him, posing there with the elbow of his smoking arm rested on his wrist, in a wide, pensive stance, she reminded herself that she felt no emotion for him. And when Henry's wife, Penelope—of the so newly grand Hayes family—arrived at her husband's side, with her fierce

blue eyes cast directly in front of her, Diana reminded herself that Henry had chosen to marry mere weeks after taking Diana's virginity.

"I'd like to know what goes on in their bedroom." Barnard smirked.

"The Schoonmakers are the envy of every young couple in the city," Diana answered mechanically, as though repeating some lesson learned by rote.

Barnard took two champagne glasses from a passing tray and handed one to Diana. She closed her eyes and took a long sip that did nothing to settle her insurgent nerves. In a moment, Henry Schoonmaker would be coming through the door.

He must not see her.

Even as Diana tried to fill her sister's role, acting the part of the good Holland daughter in the wider world, she had scrupulously avoided letting Henry catch even a glimpse of her. In the same manner, she had been careful to burn his letters—which had arrived daily since his New Year's Eve wedding to Penelope—unopened, and to smooth away any feelings the sight of his face might have lit up in her. She had thought once, not long ago, that they were destined to share a storybook romance. But she was an entirely different kind of girl now—she had had her heart broken and all of her naïveté worn off. Nothing Henry said could change her back to the

way she had been then, and certainly not if it came in so cold-blooded a form as a letter.

“Are you all right?” Barnard asked, twisting the pale gold flute in his large hand.

“Only a little tired.” Diana smiled weakly as she handed him back her nearly full glass. “I ought to be going, but I promise I will learn everything there is to know about Eleanor Wetmore’s matrimonial ambitions by Sunday at the very latest.”

Her voice rose courageously on that final word. She extended her hand for her friend to kiss, and then she moved carefully through the crowd, always keeping the central palm between her and the entryway. But she must have hesitated too long, for just as she ventured forward, the Henry Schoonmakers appeared and filled the doorway. Diana let out a little gasp and drew backward, so that the great green leaves covered her figure. She could still see enough, though. For Penelope was wearing a slash of red that might have brought to mind the butcher, were it not made of quite so precious a material.

The new Mrs. Schoonmaker made a friendly gesture across the room at the older Mrs. Schoonmaker, Henry’s stepmother, who was only twenty-six and wearing a rather daring dress herself. Then Adelaide Wetmore overtook Henry and his wife, and distracted them long enough for Diana to make

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her move. She pulled back her skirt and hurried through the throng toward the library, where she would rouse her aunt and collect their wraps. It was cold outside, and they were more than forty blocks from their own, somewhat out-of-fashion address. A chill, which Diana would have liked to believe was numbness, was settling around her chest. Still, it took everything she had not to turn and look back as she left the party behind.

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