

"Head high, straight back and for god's sake child, smile a little!"

I glance sideways at my mother and sigh. I raise my chin, correct my posture and curve my lips upwards into the best smile I can manage. Before entering the large ballroom, I adjust the headpiece in my curled mousey hair and detangle the sequined tassels along the bottom of my dress. My mother looks me up and down before beckoning me to follow her.

The room buzzes with anticipation as couples spin around the dance floor and the hum of happy chatter bounces from wall to wall. I stare at the glimmers of light flickering off each dress and imagine my pair of dirty overalls at home, which had been stuffed hastily under my bed, in the fear of my mother's disapproval, moments prior to her entering my bedroom.

One night, she'd said. One night to set me up with an eligible bachelor who could whisk us off to his manor and allow us whatever extravagant items we desired. I couldn't imagine anything more unpleasant than spending the rest of my life cooped up in a pristine household, sipping expensive champagne and sitting through a constant flow of early afternoon garden parties filled to the brim with seemingly upper-class house guests. However, purely for the prevention of numerous tantrums, I allowed my mother to try her luck.

As we make our way to greet the host of the party, one Edmund Elliott, I catch the eye of a rather handsome man, a fair few years older than myself, looking rather lost amongst a group of talkative banking officials. I can feel my face go red and I brush a stray piece of hair from my cheek as I notice the side of his mouth move slightly upwards to form a smile. Before I can even consider making my way across the room to him, my mother pulls me sharply to catch up with her.

"No time for dawdling," she says roughly.

"But mother-"

"No buts! Here, Mr Elliott, meet my daughter. Miss Louise-"

"Ah Miss Graham! A pleasure to meet you at last."

I look up to come face to face with an uncommonly tall man. He leans down to meet my height and the most off-putting grin forms on his face. I take a step back and raise an eyebrow.

"Not much of a talker is she, eh?" he chuckles to my mother, before turning back to me, "But she'll do!"

"I- I'm sorry?" I ask, rather taken aback by his comment.

The tall man throws his head back in laughter, "We're getting married, my dear!"

I let out a small gasp and turn to my mother in disbelief, "I'm sorry?!"

My mother laughs nervously and pulls me aside, "He's very well off, dear. If you marry Mr Elliott it will be very advantageous to both our families--"

"Excuse me? May I interrupt?"

I whip around to stare into the dazzling eyes of the man whose gaze I had caught merely moments ago.

"Oh please do" I beg as the relief of an excuse to remove myself from this situation flows through me. My mother, however, is not satisfied.

"And who might you be?" she demands.

The man smiles cheerfully, "Atticus Finch," he holds out his hand to her, "Pleased to make your acquaintance."

My mother's eyes widen in surprise and she holds out her hand, "M- Margaret Graham, you are not the Atticus Finch, are you?"

"I do believe I am ma'am," he looks at me and smiles at the confusion on my face, "I've recently been elected into state legislature."

"Oh!" I exclaim before collecting myself and holding out my hand for him to kiss, "Uh, congratulations!"

He laughs and presses his lips to my knuckles. I blush once again as I notice a sparkle in his eye as he straightens up again. My mother looks perfectly delighted at this meeting and seems completely charmed by Mr Finch's polite manner. Atticus notices her and I suddenly realise he is still holding my hands in his.

Instead of releasing it, he holds it tighter, "Miss Graham, would you care to dance?" I agree and my mother lets out a small squeal. Ignoring her, I follow Atticus to the middle of the dance floor leaving my mother to return to the company of Mr Elliott.

"Thank you so much, Mr Finch."

"You looked as though you needed saving," he smiles.

"You can say that again."

As Mr Finch twirls me across the floor in time with the upbeat jazz, I notice Mr Elliott looking seemingly disappointed while discussing something with my mother. I assume she is informing him of a recent change of plan and the likelihood of wedding bells between Atticus Finch and her daughter in the not too distant future is high.

Atticus pulls me into a dip and I realise that the jazz number has concluded and a new song has begun. He offers me his arm and leads me to a balcony overlooking a garden covered by a blanket of darkness, illuminated only by the shine of the moon.

"Everything ok?"

I return my gaze to Atticus' face "Oh! Yes, perfectly alright."

Mr Finch takes a hold of my hand and I feel sparks fly across my skin with his touch, "Tell me about yourself, Miss Graham."

"Please, you can call me Louise."

"Rather soon don't you think?"

"Not at all." I smile. Atticus chuckles.

"I'm something of a Huckleberry Finn," I say quietly.

"In what sense?"

He sounds interested so I continue, "I seek adventure."

Atticus raises an eyebrow and throws me a look of mutual respect, "I've always wanted that too."

"Then why get into government? Seems rather restricting, doesn't it?"

"It is. But it is what's best for my family," he looks at me, determination in his eyes. We're standing close now, I can feel his breath on my face.

"Is it what's best for you?" Ashamed of my abruptness, I splutter, "I'm sorry, that was far too forward."

Fire burns in Atticus' eyes, "No it's-" He pulls me closer, "It's ok."

I lean up and press my lips to his.

He bends into the kiss and as we pull away, he sighs, "I hate this life."

"Run away with me."

"Where would we go?"

"There's a small town called Maycomb, just South-West of here. My mother and I used to visit a relative of mine every summer. There are good people there, they're kind. We could be happy."

"That sounds-"

"Run away with me."