

Chapter 11 – Talk of Marriage

Despite the change in his responsibilities, Eldritch still made a point of being at Camille’s door at mid-day, so he could walk her to the warehouse and back again. Meeker never said a word against it, and some of the other men ribbed Eldritch about it, but all joking seemed tinged with envy. On the day following the encounter with Champion and his men, Eldritch walked with Camille through the winter cold. She pressed close to him, something he always found endearing, but today his mind was not on their conversation.

“Such dreadful weather!” Camille was saying, as they walked through the chilly streets. “My heart goes out to you who must drive carts all day. It must be unbearable.”

“It is cold,” Eldritch said. Camille waited for him to continue with that thought, but he trailed off into a moody silence.

“Is something wrong?” she asked, and Eldritch looked quickly at her, a bit guiltily.

“Nothing is wrong,” he said. “It is nothing.”

“For nothing, it has you wrapped deeply in your thoughts,” Camille said. “Do you not trust me?”

“I do,” Eldritch said.

“If so, I wish you would tell me what troubles you. Of all the people I know, you are the one that I would least like to have secrets between.” Eldritch sighed.

“Last night I was visited by my past,” he said. “Men who I never thought I would see again. They asked for my help, but I refused.”

“It does not seem like you to refuse to help someone,” Camille said.

“It was difficult,” Eldritch said. “But when I came to London, I vowed to never return to that part of my life. Now it has returned to me, and seems it will haunt me yet.” Camille looked thoughtful, and they walked a block in silence.

“When we went to see the spirit in the church,” she said, “Did that break your vow?” Eldritch started to answer, then stammered, perplexed.

“It was... We merely viewed the specter,” he said. “Which I had already gone to see on my own accord. Do not think it a violation of my promise to myself.”

“Good,” Camille said. “I know I often make demands, and I would not have my wishes force you to do something you would not willingly do. I learned when I was young that I could make Father agree to my pleas, and I fear I use those skills on you unfairly.” Eldritch laughed.

“You are persuasive,” he admitted. “But you have not caused me to break a sworn oath.”

“I’m glad,” Camille said, and paused only for the briefest moment. “Do you ever think of marriage?” To his credit, Eldritch accepted this change of track gracefully.

“Sometimes,” he said. “William and I spoke of it last night.”

“I see,” Camille said. “You two are not a traditional couple, but if such a marriage would make you happy...” Once again, Eldritch laughed, and looked at Camille. She was smiling, but he could sense the serious question that still went unanswered. Eldritch stopped walking and turned to face her.

“Camille,” he said, “I am not good at speaking my heart. I believe I have told you that I have never met a woman like you. The first time I saw you, I was struck by how beautiful you are. Beyond that, I could sense that life burned like a fire within you, you were no mere flower, but a wild and vibrant creature. I asked your father for employment merely so I could be certain of seeing you again. Since then, you have been the greatest joy in my life. You are my first thought when I wake up, and the last before I fall asleep at night. I can hardly wait each morning until I am allowed to see you, and I treasure each moment we are together. The only grace to my afternoons are the memories of our time that day. I have indeed thought of marriage. I do know that there is no other woman in this world that I would want to be married to, and I would only wish to make you happy. I have wondered whether your father would give his blessings on such a union, for I know he had hoped you would marry a man of wealth or power. I wonder whether I could be a worthy husband for you. I wonder whether it is the right time for such a thing, and if it is even the right thing for us to do. I even wonder whether you would wait until I had answers to these questions, or if I did ask for your hand in marriage, whether you would accept.”

“Oh, Eldritch,” Camille said, clasping his hand. “I cannot answer all of your concerns, but I can say that I will wait for you. I cannot imagine any other man who seems more right for me. And if it will make the task any easier...” she smiled up at him, her eyes bright and filled with joy.

“If you are ever to ask me to marry you, the answer will be yes.”

Despite the cold, the two felt warm and cheery as they walked the rest of the way to the warehouse. Their happy mood might have been spoiled if they had been aware of the small, winged creature that hovered over them, observing.