

Dial C for CAOS

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Dial C for CAOS

by [KatyaTrixie](#)

Summary

Murder, blackmail, a love affair. Someone ends up in jail, someone ends up dead, and someone ends up very rich.

Notes

The plot is very much like the movie, with wlv twists.
If you've seen the movie, don't shoot me.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

"It was thanks to Alfred Hitchcock that I understood that murder scenes should be shot like love scenes and love scenes like murder scenes."

- grace kelly

A light rap on the door of the flat, and the fiery haired woman lifted the bronze cover of the peephole, peering out towards the sunny entryway. A mane of deep raven waves met her eye, the caller having turned away after asking permission to enter.

Yanking the door open suddenly, Zelda grasped the hand of the waiting woman, pulling her swiftly inside and slamming the door shut, her finger to her lips.

"Jesus fucking Christ, Zelda!" The ebony haired woman's whisper more like a hiss as she righted herself and stared blatantly at her assailant, shock registering across her striking features. "I barely knocked just like you asked me to; why all the cloak and dagger shenanigans?"

"It's just that...well..." Zelda moved forward into her space. "Never mind, you're here now." She brushed back the loose curls around the woman's face, her hand tracing the sharp jawline, thumb lightly rubbing the pouting lower lip stained in scarlet.

Lilith took Zelda's hand, pulling them together. They hovered, eyes hooded, each one panting into the mouth of the other, tension swirling around them. Neither wanted to close the gap just yet; Zelda's free hand moving to Lilith's lower back, pulling them exponentially closer, and Lilith's sliding to the nape of Zelda's neck, holding her gently, fingers combing through the now tousled red waves. Both sighed as their lips finally met, hesitant at first, quickly becoming reacquainted with each other. The hand trapped between them crushed the lapel of the chocolate leather jacket the brunette wore, holding their bodies flush against one another.

“I’ve missed you,” the redhead moaned into her mouth. “Missed this.”

“It’s been months. Paris didn’t nearly satiate me.” Lilith’s breathy reply warmed Zelda’s cheek.

Zelda turned away then, extricating herself from the other woman’s grasp.

“It was the best I could do. You know that.”

“Oh, I wasn’t laying blame,” Lilith moved to reassure her, to take her hand and press it to her heart, but Zelda retrieved her lighter and a cigarette from the ceramic box on the mantel, facing the glowing fire as she lit the stick in her fingers. She pointed to the box in offering, Lilith shaking her head.

“I’ve told him nothing about us.” Zelda spoke into the dancing flames.

Removing her coat, Lilith draped it across the back of the couch, moving again to stand behind Zelda, hands on her shoulders, and Zelda allowed it. The black lace of her cocktail dress pressed into Lilith’s fingers as she rubbed her thumbs over the redhead’s tense shoulder blades.

“He needn’t know too much. But won’t it be awkward, acting as if we aren’t even acquainted?”

Leaning into the caress, Zelda suppressed a moan, her words breathy, almost ashamed at how far gone she already was.

“I told him we’d met in New York, at the symposium. He seemed satisfied we wouldn’t be too uncomfortable if you arrived first for the theatre this evening.” Zelda wished those nimble fingers lower, her body alive with tremors now. *He can’t find me in this state*, her mind took control where her body could not.

Turning back to face her, Zelda's eyes widened in appreciation of Lilith's plum satin dress, the hem short enough to accent her delicious legs, the neckline deep enough to reveal the curve of her breasts.

"As long as I distract myself and keep my hands busy, he won't suspect a thing. Perhaps." She allowed herself a smile. "I'm sorry, darling. I don't mean to be so pensive. But he's changed lately. He's different."

Lilith perched on the edge of the couch, the short skirt of her dress sliding perilously higher, the length of her thighs revealed. Taking a deep breath, Zelda looked away, diverting her eyes with pouring them each a tumbler of whiskey, then moving to the window as she sipped hers, alternating each sip with a drag on her cigarette.

"How do you mean, different? He sounded exactly the same to me over our last call - bored, petulant, irritated when I wouldn't agree to allow him an advance copy of my next novel. Always wanting something exclusive, something to boost his own self-importance, that Faustus." *Including you, my sweet Zelda.*

Unwilling to voice her thoughts again, Lilith drank deeply. She'd gone round and round with Zelda, begging her to leave her playboy husband who did nothing but spend her family money, playing at being a literary critic with his sometime column in The Times earning him a name in the publishing business. Cheating on Zelda time and again while she and Lilith hid out in stolen hotel rooms, leaving through the back doors in the dead of night so as not to attract attention. Zelda claimed she would never leave him; divorce just wasn't done in her family, but affairs were fine, as long as they were his. As long as her parents were still alive and held the pursestrings, she was forever chained to her loveless marriage.

After a year of clandestine meetings in cities scattered around the world disguised as girls' weekends, spa dates with her niece, and self-help seminars, Zelda was nearly out of excuses. And where did that leave Lilith? The brunette wanted nothing more than to take Zelda away from all of it to live in New York where she was based, to give up her inheritance if need be, but Zelda was unwilling to rely on Lilith's earnings as a successful crime novelist. As much as Lilith admired her strong-willed independence, another facet of their relationship had revealed itself, at least to the brunette. She found herself falling in love with Zelda. Her softness, the curve of her face when she smiled, the way she blushed when telling Lilith what she wanted in bed, only to scratch and moan like a hellcat when Lilith carried out her wishes.

“I didn’t tell you.” Zelda’s voice shook Lilith from her reverie. “My purse was stolen in Victoria Station. I’d gone to get a coffee and Faustus saw some friends he knew. He only turned away a moment and it was gone.”

“Quite an annoyance, I’m sure.” Lilith sighed as she took another sip of her drink.

“That’s not the worst of it. The bracelet you gave me was inside.” Zelda watched Lilith’s eyes for her response, for the redhead had been inconsolable at the loss of the beloved gift.

“I’ll get you another. It was an impulse purchase, a sentimental trinket.” Lilith downplayed the bracelet as a gesture of kindness when she’d given it to Zelda on her birthday, something she’d seen she felt the redhead would like. A Luckenbooth symbol, two intertwined hearts, on a simple chain, but to Lilith it meant much more, for by the time she’d purchased it she’d known Zelda had begun to steal her heart. The redhead had never reciprocated her feelings as far as Lilith could tell.

Moving to her handbag, Zelda removed several letters, handing them to Lilith as she perched beside her on the couch.

“I found my purse in the lost and found at Victoria Station, the bracelet and some money the only things missing. And then these began to arrive.”

Reading the correspondence, Lilith’s eyes widened.

“Why, this is blackmail!” Lilith was outraged as she read the demand of £5,000 for the return of the bracelet.

Zelda spun the wedding ring on her hand. “I don’t know what to do about it now.”

“Ah,” Lilith’s quiet response filled the room, and Zelda felt overcome with guilt in pulling the brunette into the melodramatic events of her life.

“Darling, I’m sorry for dragging you into this with you only being here a few days. This should be a joyous reunion and I’ve ruined it.” Zelda put her head in her hands, her shoulders slumped in defeat.

Her heart on her sleeve, Lilith reached for Zelda’s hands, looking into the tearstained face.

“None of that, my dear Zelda. I’m so very glad you told me. I want to help you any way I can. Now, have you paid any of his demands?”

Wiping her tears, Zelda replied with a heavy sigh. “I paid his first request for £1,000 but then the second letter arrived not long after. They’ll just keep coming if I pay again, won’t they?”

“I’m afraid so. And what if he makes good on his threat to tell Faustus? The bracelet could look quite benign if you phrase it just the right way. If your blackmailer sends Faustus the bracelet, we will deal with it the best way we can.” Lilith was firm in how she wanted the whole thing handled, and Zelda was nearly persuaded to give in to her. It meant something that Lilith would be by her side if need be.

“Perhaps he would think it was nothing after all anyway, maybe a gesture of friendship,” Zelda shrugged. Lilith’s heart fell at that. Maybe she had misread Zelda’s overtures as something more. Apparently all the other woman wanted was a casual affair, sex when they could find the time.

Zelda continued on about the change in her philandering husband. “He’s been so attentive lately, home every night, not playing cards with his friends at all hours. And when he does go out he doesn’t come back smelling of cheap perfume. Something has changed in him. I can’t explain it.” Faustus had never been one to stay in, preferring a night at the theatre or taking in a movie, but he’d become quite a homebody the past few months, and he demanded Zelda be right by his side. “I’ve tried to make the best of his desire to be close to me again.”

As if on cue, they both heard the turn of the deadbolt, and Lilith schooled her features into what she hoped was indifference, while Zelda flew to the door to play the doting wife.

“Hello, dear.” Faustus pecked his wife on the cheek as if she were a child. He glanced over Zelda’s head at Lilith leaning into the cushions, one hand resting on the arm of the couch, fingers digging into the padding as he moved to kiss Zelda more deeply. As they parted Zelda gave her a furtive glance.

“And Lilith Halliday, so good to see you. Happen to bring along a final draft of book one of that new series you’ve been teasing on all the American morning shows lately?”

Inwardly groaning, Lilith looked away from the awkward scene before her, Zelda’s fawning over Faustus, removing his coat and taking his briefcase, preparing him a drink and grasping at his arm til he sat down in what could only be described as his throne, the chair in the dead center of the room around which all other traffic flowed. He grinned at her, showing all his teeth like a threatening mongrel, waiting for her reply.

“What sort of a tease would I be if I gave in as easily as all that, Faustus?” She imagined her predatory smile matched his, the conversation leading into a mad circling of canine and feline, and Zelda their prey.

“A man can dream, can’t he?” He accepted the crystal tumbler from Zelda, taking a sip and setting it on the side table.

Zelda’s singsong voice interrupted their exchange. “Don’t you need to change, Faustus? We’ll need to leave soon to have an early supper before the curtain goes up.” Zelda wanted a moment more with Lilith alone, needed her reassurance that everything was fine between them.

Faustus studied the two women before him, the way Lilith held herself so stiffly, and Zelda nervously glanced back and forth between the two of them, attempting to size up the situation and act accordingly. For he knew all of Zelda’s attentions toward him were to placate him, a reciprocity for his good behavior. Lilith, however, seemed entirely uncomfortable. He was unsure now why they’d agreed to go to the theatre together.

“I can’t go with you tonight, dear, I’m sorry. My editor has requested a revision of my latest, and can’t wait for a copy tomorrow. He insists upon reading it tonight. Think you two will get on without me?”

Lilith’s shoulders relaxed, the expression on her face becoming placid, the tension seeping out of her.

Zelda moved to stand behind him, her hands on the chair, the warmth of her body cloying and close.

“Duty calls, I suppose. Lilith and I can manage well enough, but you know we’ll only talk about you,” she said, her voice full of the relief she felt at avoiding the evening ahead of her. Lilith’s eyes met hers above him.

While Zelda went to get her coat, Lilith and Faustus waited by the door.

“Do you have plans for Saturday night?” Lilith had been studying her shoes when Faustus made his inquiry, so she looked up in puzzlement.

“After the radio interviews and talk I’m giving at Harrods tomorrow evening I thought I’d relax at my hotel. Why?”

“There’s a party given by a publisher you may well be interested in printing your next series over here. I know that’s not normally your concern as your agent would handle those negotiations, but I’m sure they’d love to meet an author of your caliber in person.” Faustus laid the praise on thick, hoping she’d take the bait.

“I suppose I can make an appearance...”

“Good then, it’s all settled. I’ll pick you up around 8.”

He helped Zelda into her coat, telling her how Lilith was attending the party with him on Saturday night. She hummed in reaction, looking at Lilith out of the corner of her eye.

Faustus handed Lilith the tickets, holding up the one meant for him.

“Scalp the extra one and buy yourself something nice, ladies,” he said as he walked them to the door, hovering in the entryway as Lilith hailed them a taxi. They both climbed inside, sitting a good distance apart, and Zelda turned to wave as the car pulled away, watching Faustus lift his hand then turn away to go back inside.

Sliding over on the seat, their thighs touching, Lilith leaned closer, whispering in Zelda’s ear, “You know we’re not going to the theatre.”

Looking up at her, Zelda rubbed her lips together, swallowing audibly. “O-oh no?” she stammered.

“Unless you’d like me to watch you squirm all evening, wicked thoughts of me and you writhing around on those crisp white sheets in my very empty hotel room flowing through your mind, fantasizing about what I have on under this dress...” Her voice, low and sultry, sent shivers through Zelda again, and when she laid her warm palm on the inside of Zelda’s thigh, she whimpered her assent.

“Just let me get rid of these tickets.” She leaned forward, her hand not leaving its spot, short fingernails lightly tracing circles to keep Zelda on edge. She instructed the driver to take them by the theatre, hopping out of the taxi to find the closest scalper, returning quickly with a wad of cash she stuffed into her clutch.

“You’re all mine now,” Lilith breathed into the redhead’s ear, her possessiveness nearly sending Zelda over the edge at the thought of how Lilith wanted her. “The next few hours I’m going to watch you come undone again and again. At my hand and under my mouth.”

Barely containing the moan that threatened to escape, Zelda nodded, eyes closed, feeling an answering pulse between her legs.

The taxi passed along the tree-lined street, neither of the women noticing the shabbily dressed man as he passed in front of the car, so enraptured with each other. Slamming on the brakes, the driver cast a glance in the rear view mirror, observing how the women barely glanced up.

He shook his fist at the man who barely looked his way either. His head down, the shock of brown curly hair flying in all directions, he was headed intently back the way they had come.

Unlatching a wrought iron gate, he saw the back door just where he had been told to go, a trellis of ivy partially covering the entryway to the flat. Faustus Blackwood was waiting behind the glass, and he opened the French doors as the man approached.

“John Typhon?” He called in question and greeting.

“Yes, and you’re Mr. Ash?” Following Faustus inside, he stood beside the fine furnishings, hands in his pockets as though he was keeping himself from snatching something out of temptation. “Sorry I couldn’t bring along the car and expedite your purchase, but on such short notice there was no way possible.”

“Yes, Ash. Have a seat,” he gestured toward the couch, retrieving a photograph nailed to the wall beside the door before he faced the now nervous man.

“I’ve brought along the documents you asked for. But, as I stated on the phone, the asking price won’t change.” Typhon seated himself after removing his trench coat, laying it across the back of a chair.

Faustus poured them both a snifter of cognac, handing one off to the man who propped his arm along the back of the couch, leaning in slightly and allowing the stranger to get a good look at him.

“Do I know you?” Typhon asked as Faustus sipped his drink. “There’s something vaguely familiar about you.”

“Weren’t you at Cambridge?” Faustus replies, his head cocked slightly to the side as if attempting to conjure a memory.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I was.”

“And here at our reunion too.” He reached for the photograph, holding it up into the light so Typhon could see the two of them seated at the same table. “There you are, smoking a cigar.”

Typhon looked puzzled for a moment, then snapped his fingers.

“No wonder I couldn’t make the connection, you’re not Ash, you’re Blackwood, Faustus Blackwood. Why Ash?”

Faustus leveled him with a glare. “And you’re not Typhon, either. Why not Morningstar, your true last name?”

Now exposed, Lucifer raised his eyebrows, sighing loudly.

“It seemed that Morningstar had outlived its usefulness after all that business in school with the missing money from the club treasury. I needed a fresh start.” He looked down at his lap, ashamed or so it seemed.

“And you pinned it on poor Alfred. He never lived it down either.”

“Poor Alfred never could tell a decent lie. They found the account book in his back garden.” Morningstar lit a cigarette, blowing a cloud of smoke between the two of them.

“But the money wasn’t there. What do you do nowadays?” Faustus asked genuinely.

Humming in reply, Lucifer poured himself another drink from the bottle left on the table before him. "I make my living in property, estate sales mostly. Do you still write? I remember you were quite the journalist at school."

"I took a year after graduation and wrote what I thought to be the greatest novel of our time, but no one else felt as I did. So I took up critiquing the work of others. You may have seen my column in The Times."

Looking around him, Lucifer chuckled. "A twice monthly column pays quite well."

"Gives me some pocket money. My wife has family money and we live comfortably, otherwise I wouldn't have nearly a thousand pounds to spend on your car."

Grinning, Lucifer slyly said, "Some of us have to work for a living, although I'd like to marry for money, like you did."

"No, my good man, she married an author."

"But you don't write, you critique. And it's still a good marriage?"

"She nearly left me a while back." Faustus grabbed a cloth from the bar and began wiping off the bottle, carefully placing back on the shelf. "I had gone abroad, following a writer my editor found fascinating on a book tour and when I returned it seemed my wife didn't love me anymore. Phone calls stopped when I entered the room, mail I normally collected when I came home was suddenly sorted on the desk in the evenings. And her interest in self-help and spa time increased dramatically. She wanted to try out every spa on the continent."

Lucifer watched as Faustus paced, interested in his story but curious as to why he was on the receiving end of this tale.

“We had a fight. I was leaving again; a book tour across Ireland coincided with our anniversary and she was angry. The phone rang then, and she was suddenly fine with me going, so I went. Only I drove around the block, doubling back and following her as she ran out of the house. She took a taxi downtown, and I followed her to an apartment in Chelsea. A woman greeted her at the door, and by the way they kissed this wasn’t their first encounter.”

Moving to refill his glass, Faustus handed him a pair of gloves.

“Would you mind wearing these if you pour yourself another?” Faustus moved around the room, wiping off the areas Lucifer had touched.

He donned them, refilling his glass and nodding for Faustus to continue.

“I came back home and took a walk. My mind swirled with the idea of her leaving me, with the thought that I’d have to earn my own living. Confusion turned to rage, and I went to a pub to drown my sorrows. As I sat in the corner, I thought about several ways I could kill them both. We’d recently signed new wills in case of an accident while I travelled, and her investments would go to me. But that would look much too suspicious. Then I saw something that made me stop and change direction.”

“Yes?” Morningstar inquired.

“I came home afterwards and she was sitting on the couch, waiting for me it seemed. Instead of going on that book tour, I decided to dedicate my time to taking care of her, to being the husband she wanted me to be. Above reproach.”

Faustus opened a drawer in the bar with the cloth over his hand, laying it carefully inside, closing it with his hip.

“She was very careful with her pocketbook after that, and I desperately wanted to know what she was hiding. So I found out. The bracelet the woman gave her was interesting, and strangely sentimental.”

“You stole it?” Lucifer asked incredulously.

“I did, and I wrote her several letters offering to sell it back to her.” Reaching into his jacket pocket, he removed his wallet, an envelope inside falling on the floor.

Politely, Lucifer leaned down to get it for him, and handing it back, he shook it. “Is the bracelet inside?”

“Why, yes. I kept it. And I think that scared them enough to stop seeing each other. She’s been the doting wife for months now.”

Lighting another cigarette, Lucifer shook his head.

“Why are you sharing all this with me?”

“Because, old friend, I considered killing my wife and her lover and I would’ve done it if I hadn’t seen the one person in that pub that changed my mind.”

“Who?”

“You. And when I saw you everything from school came back to me. The accusations over the money and how you’d left so quickly after being discovered. So I followed you. You became my pet project.”

Eyes widening, Lucifer sunk down lower into the couch.

“I found out you’d been court-martialed after the war and spent a year in jail. You’ve gone through quite a few name changes, skipped out on your rent multiple times, and instead of dealing in property, you seem to deal in wheedling rich women out of their money. In the last few months alone you’ve changed names and ladies twice. And whose car were you trying to sell, the American car you’ve brought documents for tonight? A Mrs. Van Horn?”

“Mrs. Van Horn knows about that,” he sulked. “She gave me the car.”

“And now I’ve got all this information, all this knowledge. I’m almost tempted to turn you over to the police with what I know, but where’s the fun in that?”

Scowling, the man lowered his now clouded face. He hadn’t covered his tracks as well as he’d thought.

“So what do you want then? You wouldn’t have called me here and told me this story if you hadn’t a plan.”

Nodding, Faustus moved to the desk, removing a wad of cash and tossing it at Lucifer.

“I’ll take that information to my grave for two favors. Two little things, and I promise you can walk away with no harm to you.”

“You have me over a barrel. I suppose I’m obliged to you. What is it you want me to do?” Lucifer was resigned to his fate.

“First, I want to know who the devil my wife is carrying on with. And second…” Faustus paused, waiting to have the man’s full attention.

“And second?”

“Second, to put it plainly, I want you to kill my cheating wife.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The murder: check

Chapter Notes

I am loving writing this nonsense so much. Thank you for commenting what you liked about the last chapter. Y'all are the best readers. <3

*lost my heart, but what of it
he is cold I agree
he can laugh, but I love it
although the laugh's on me*

bewitched, bothered and bewildered-pal joey-richard rodgers

“No, no more, Lilith. I can’t take another,” Zelda whined as she rolled away from the woman, pushing herself up to sit back against the headboard. Lilith sat up too, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, looking quite satisfied with herself.

“What was that, five?” She grinned like the cat who’d gotten the canary.

“Must you boast?” Zelda rolled her eyes as she lit a cigarette, handing it off to Lilith as she lit another off the tip. She laughed in spite of herself. “And it was four.”

“You lost count after the second one, darling.” She chuckled at how easily flustered Zelda became after the heat of passion, pulling at the sheet to cover herself, even as Lilith fanned her overheated body.

“Don’t hide away on my account, or are you afraid I may abscond with another orgasm from you before you run back home?”

Zelda laid the ashtray between them, and Lilith grabbed her hand before she could move it away. Sliding off the wedding ring, she tossed it in the air, catching it again and again.

“I’m going to tell Faustus about us,” Lilith finally said. “This blackmail situation you’re in is sticky. It worries me that I’ll leave you to deal with it on your own in a few days.”

“No, no, you can’t do that!” Zelda looked stricken, gently taking the ring back and sliding it onto her finger. “It’s different now, it’s better for me. He’s not the man I told you about.”

“When did all this come about?” Lilith asked as she took a drag, tapping out the cigarette. She rose from the bed, pulling a blanket around herself as she stood before the window.

“When you left for New York a few months ago, after your European book tour had ended. I came home and he was there, waiting for me. He’s been so steady, so dependable since.”

Looking out at the lights of the city, Lilith willed herself to be strong, to hold on to these burgeoning feelings, to wait for some sign from Zelda, some impression that she felt the same way. But she couldn’t push away the overwhelming need to share them....

“And what about me, Zelda? Where do I fit into your rejuvenated relationship with Faustus?”

“I-I’m not sure to be completely honest. Knowing Faustus the way you do, how possessive he can be. What can I do?” Stubbing out her cigarette, Zelda stood and began to get dressed.

“So is this goodbye?” Lilith’s voice had grown so small Zelda barely heard her.

“We’ll see each other at the talk tomorrow night. Don’t ask me to make promises I can’t keep, Lilith.”

“Yes, at Harrods. And I won’t ask anything of you, Zelda, nothing you aren’t willing to give me freely.” Zelda heard the pain in her voice, hated herself for what she was doing to Lilith.

Shaking her head, Zelda wiped at her eyes, looking now at the stiff posture of her lover silhouetted in the moonlight.

“I know this is complicated.” Zelda stood by the door, her fingers on the handle.

“But that doesn’t stop me from loving you,” Lilith managed before Zelda walked out.

In the taxi, Zelda’s mind whirled with all the implications. Could she walk away from Faustus? And what of her own feelings for Lilith; did she love her in return?

Still in a daze when she arrived home, she paid the driver and walked around through the garden, finding the French doors unlocked as she normally did.

“Faustus?” she called, but all was quiet and she assumed he had already gone to bed.

Her beagle, Tom, trotted out to greet her.

“Do you need your evening constitution, my boy?” Zelda asked, leaning down to scratch him behind his ears. “Let me find your leash.”

She followed him out through the garden, attaching the lead to his collar and unlatching the gate so they could stroll slowly down the quiet street. Allowing herself to think on the events of the day, she didn't realize she was being observed, for Lucifer had only just left the flat through the same exit as she entered.

I suppose infatuation has evolved into something stronger with Lilith, she thought, but is it love? And what if it dissolves into nothing? Where will I be then, without my family, penniless?

Her mind drifted back to boarding school, a time she hadn't allowed herself to dwell on in ages. She had found she much preferred the soft curves of her roommate to the boys who flocked around her like bees to nectar. When the dorm mother had found Zelda and the other girl locked in a heated embrace, she had called Zelda's mother at once. Horrified, the woman had arrived with her father in tow, reminding Zelda of her great aunt Gertie who had never married, hiding away in her house on the Moors, cut off from the family because of her "deviant choices".

When threatened with expulsion and time in a nearby sanitarium, the redhead had relented, promising to stay on the straight and narrow, and had followed through with her family's edicts following graduation and university. Marrying Faustus had been a power move designed by her father. He had wanted the prestige the Blackwood name carried, and Zelda had given in again, if only to please her father, trying her best to conform to what society deemed fitting. She knew of the Lavendar Scare, knew what it meant to be accused of being queer, and wasn't sure she was ready for what a relationship would entail.

Lucifer peered at her from the shadows, following her path up the tree lined street, pausing in the darkness when the dog stopped to sniff each spot til he found the perfect place to do his business. Thinking she'd almost caught him when she turned around to head back, he held his breath, so close he could reach out and stroke her red curls. But she was oblivious to any danger, so absorbed in her own thoughts. Following the exact pattern Blackwood had shown him, she re-entered the gate, leaving the latch up and sauntering behind her pup inside the flat. Standing hidden in the ivy, he moved aside the leaves, watching her turn off the desk lamp, the flat fading into darkness.

It was mid-morning when Faustus awoke, glancing over at Zelda's undisturbed side of the bed, her vanity neatly arranged, revealing she had either never come to bed or had been up for hours. His eyes narrowed at the thought. Had she managed to slip away again, to meet her anonymous lover?

She'll be neither anonymous nor her lover for much longer, he thought, and the very idea caused a smile to cross his face as he left the bedroom.

Zelda was in the garden, her dog Tom rolling in the grass. She stood behind a small table, her back to him, and as she moved aside to clip a sprig of baby's breath, he saw the silvery vase arranged with daffodils and lilacs. She'd taken a class when they'd visited Japan, and he had to admit she had an eye for it. *And it keeps her at home*, he laughed to himself, for her extensive garden supplied all the flora she could ever need.

Tom suddenly darted for the gate when he spotted the postman approaching, and Zelda slipped her clippers into her pocket, beating him to the fence to gather the dog in her arms while accepting the post with a nod. She sorted through the letters while she made her way back to the house, a look of relief crossing her face. Smirking, Faustus thought she may have been expecting more ransom demands, but he was finished with that business.

"Hello, darling," she said, pouring him a cup of coffee, bringing it to him where he was seated with *The Times* unfolded, blocking his face. "Did you sleep well?"

"Better than you, it seemed," he gestured toward the half unmade bed. Glancing up as she handed him a cup of coffee, he saw a flush rise on her cheeks.

"I-I came in very late. Lilith and I stopped off for a drink after the final curtain call and I didn't want to disturb you after I took Tom out for his walk."

"So the musical was to your liking? I suppose Richard Rodgers was up to his usual high standard." Faustus observed her closely. "Any particular tunes you found catchy?"

Zelda was thankful she'd seen a matinee of *Pal Joey*, unbeknownst to Faustus. She thought before she hummed the melody of "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered."

"Couldn't sleep and wouldn't sleep

When love came and told me, I shouldn't sleep

Bewitched, bothered and bewildered - am I"

"Can't quite get this verse out of my mind, to be honest, love. Makes me think of you, of us," she said sweetly, and his oily smile reassured her.

"What are you getting up to this afternoon?" he asked nonchalantly, his attention returned to his newspaper.

"I thought I may work on organizing those clippings of your columns into a scrapbook, perhaps some gardening. What about you?"

He took a bite of his toast, reading the classified advertisements. A car wouldn't be out of his range much longer with all those investment earnings Zelda would leave behind.

"Thought I might go into the office. Get caught up on some reading for my next review."

"Can't you do that here, keep me company?" Zelda's attempt to keep him close only served to irritate him.

"'Fraid not. Aside from the total lack of quiet here, everything I need is at my office," he folded the paper as he stood. "I'll be home in time for Halliday's talk. You haven't forgotten we have that tonight, have you?"

"Not at all. I've planned a late supper for when we return."

The telephone rang suddenly, and Zelda lifted the receiver.

"Hello," Zelda answered, her hand over the mouthpiece. "It's Mother, Faustus."

Turning away from him, Zelda carried on her conversation as if it was her mother, only Lilith was on the other end.

“Good morning, Mother.” Zelda’s parents lived on an estate in West Berkshire, an hour and a half west of the city. Despite being close by, Zelda rarely visited, a fact her mother rarely let pass when they spoke by phone.

“I had no idea we’d moved on to this particular aspect of our relationship.” Lilith’s low laugh sent shivers down Zelda’s spine. “Shall I call you daddy?”

Grateful she had turned away from Faustus, Zelda closed her eyes, swallowing audibly to Lilith’s further delight.

“We’ve been very busy here, yes. Faustus keeps us quite active socially. I rarely have a night to myself.”

She heard him choke back a laugh behind her as he knew she despised visiting them at their country estate, the posh pretense wearing on her quickly. Her father was at home on a horse, riding about to hunt and examine his fence line, but her mother preferred the city.

“Did you call for a specific reason, Mother?” Zelda blinked into the sun streaming through the windows, watching Tom chase a bird.

“Well, Daddy....” Lilith murmured again, then, clearing her throat, she continued. “I wondered if you might meet me for coffee. I’m finished with my radio interviews and find myself quite free until this evening.”

“I’m not sure if that’s possible.” She turned and began to flip through the calendar on her desk. “What were those dates again?”

“Around 2, the cafe around the corner from my hotel?”

“Yes, perhaps that might be better. I’ll speak to you later. Goodbye, Mother.” Laying the receiver down, she raised her eyes to where Faustus still sat absorbed in his paper.

Glancing at her watch, Zelda said brightly, “Perhaps you should go on to the office. I don’t want to keep you from your reading.”

He raised an eyebrow behind his paper, wondering at her sudden change of heart. He knew Morningstar sat in his car by the street even now; he’d seen him when he stepped out to fetch the paper. If she were to leave, to meet up with her lover, she would be observed.

Shrugging, he stood and made for the bedroom. “Alright, if you don’t think you’ll be too lonely without me.”

“No, Tom and I will be fine here this afternoon.” She was spreading out the clippings she’d made of all his columns printed the past year, pulling out the scrapbook she’d begun marking the start of his career.

Soon he was dressed and headed out the door, a subtle wave to Lucifer down the street serving to alert him and keep the man on guard.

The man was startled ten minutes later as Zelda emerged from the flat, sunglasses obscuring her appearance, but her flaming hair left no question of her identity.

He started his car as she slid into the backseat of a taxi, following the other automobile at a distance as it meandered through the streets, coming to a stop a few buildings away from a small hotel locals frequented for their espresso bar and cafe.

Pulling to the curb, he watched as she quickly walked towards the hotel, and his eyes were drawn to the dark haired woman seated with her back to him. Zelda removed her sunglasses as she sat across from the woman, a healthy flush covering her face as she broke into a smile.

Her head covered with a scarf, the only impression he could make about the other woman was her hair, pulled into a low bun. She was small framed, but as she was seated, his view was concealed by the chair and the other patrons. He thought to drive by, but there were no other vacant spaces, so he stayed put, hoping for a glance when they got up to leave.

Zelda couldn't help but smile when she saw Lilith, the picture of stealth and intrigue.

"I feel a part of one of your mysteries, all hush-hush and covert. Why the cover up?" She seated herself, wanting desperately to take Lilith's hand, to apologize for leaving abruptly the night before.

"Didn't want to be recognized on the street. It's as much for your benefit as it is mine." Her voice held a tone of bitterness, and when she removed her sunglasses Zelda could see the dark circles below her eyes. Lilith sighed, her voice down to a whisper. "I couldn't go back to New York the way we left it yesterday. Oh, darling, I'm sorry."

"Whatever for? I should be the one apologizing," Zelda slid her hand under the tablecloth, laying it on Lilith's knee.

"I had no right to demand anything else of you, and I truly don't need anything else. We can keep on as we are if that's what you desire."

Zelda paused, her fingers suddenly wrapped in the hand Lilith slid under the table.

"I don't want to let you go, but how can we continue this way, especially knowing you want more than I can give?"

Lilith managed a small smile. "Perhaps I still believe in my powers of persuasion."

“You have managed to be quite persuasive on more than one occasion.” Zelda returned her smile with a flush on her cheeks. “All manner of pictures went through my mind on the phone with you this morning.”

Lilith’s eyes went wide at the prospect of fulfilling the fantasies she’d considered during that call as well.

“You’re positive this is what you desire? Even after all I’ve divulged about the blackmail?” Zelda’s voice shook as she tried to stand, but Lilith grabbed her hand yet again.

Lucifer sat up, watching the exchange as Zelda tried to get away only to be stopped by the other woman.

Lowering herself to her chair again, Zelda replaced her sunglasses, cutting Lilith off from seeing the emotion in her eyes.

“Yes, Zelda, and as I told you last night, even with all the complications and difficulties, nothing could stop me from loving you.” Lilith released her hand, and she stood again, moving to hail a cab.

She glanced back, and in that moment, Lilith’s ocean eyes staring into her own, her mouth tried to form the words she feared would hurt Lilith further, so she held them in her heart. *I do love you, Lilith.*

The redhead stepped into the taxi, and Lucifer watched the dark haired woman stand as if it were paining her, stumbling a bit as she entered the hotel at the entrance nearby, never facing his way.

Mrs. Van Horn was expecting him, but as he drove away Lucifer made a mental note to come by the hotel later, before he met Blackwood the following morning. Perhaps he could employ a bit of charm and sneak a look at the hotel register.

Faustus returned home to find Zelda in bed, a cool cloth over her eyes.

“A migraine,” she said simply in the darkness of the room. “Please give Lilith my regrets when you see her this evening.”

He sat through a subdued, almost dry panel of authors that night. Supposing Lilith was attempting to blend in with her British contemporaries, it was a far cry from her normal exuberant performance. When she read from her latest tome, her voice seemed flat and monotone.

“Well, Ms. Halliday, a fine event to showcase your literary talents. And you did manage to titillate us with that reading from your newest. I do hope you will send me that advance copy I asked about earlier.” Lilith couldn’t meet his smile, looking around him, surprised he attended alone.

“Looking for Zelda? She couldn’t make it tonight. Migraine.”

Nodding, Lilith turned away to speak to another attendee, but Faustus took her arm.

“Don’t forget about our party tomorrow evening. Hopefully you’ll be a smashing success. I’ll fetch you around 8.” He started to walk away, but stopped. “Why don’t you just stop by before and have a drink? We can drive together from there.”

She agreed, and he was on his way, her blue eyes burning into his back.

Pacing the small space he was allotted at the firing range the next morning, Lucifer checked his watch repeatedly, glancing up to see Faustus strolling his way.

“Blast it, man. I’ve been waiting for an hour!” Morningstar exclaimed as he entered the wooden gate.

Holding up his hand, Faustus leaned around the enclosure on either side, and, finding no one occupying the spaces, he gestured for Lucifer to continue.

“My wife wasn’t feeling well this morning, and what sort of a brute would I be if I didn’t attend to her needs?” Blackwood shrugged as he sat on the narrow bench, crossing his legs and staring off into the distance.

“A widower, that type of brute.” Lucifer’s retort had Faustus throwing back his head and laughing.

“It is a shame, isn’t it? A waste of a beautiful woman.” Leaning forward, Blackwood got down to business. “Now tell me what you learned about her lover.”

Lucifer paced as he spoke, his nervous energy palpable.

“There’s not much to tell. I followed your wife after you left, and she went to a hotel about 5 miles from your home. She met a woman outside and they sat together for a few moments. It seemed to end in a row, for your wife left looking quite upset.”

“Did you see the woman in question?”

“Unfortunately no, I found out nothing more than what you’ve already told me. She had dark hair, and perhaps a slight frame.” Lucifer threw up his hands. “I even went back to the hotel and tried to get a look at the registry, but my charms aren’t what they once were.”

Shaking his head, Faustus snorted in disgust.

“So I know no more than when I hired you.” He stood to go.

“Wait,” Lucifer grasped his arm, but Faustus shook him off. “The rest of the money?”

“Will be in a locker at Victoria Station tomorrow, as promised. Don’t worry, I’ll make good on it. No one commits murder on credit.”

He strode away, instructing Lucifer to wait five minutes before he left.

Blackwood stood stirring the pitcher of martinis later that evening, his mind focused on the garden gate, imagining Zelda strolling through it hours from now, the last walk she’d ever take.

Lilith and Zelda sat on the couch together, clippings of his columns spread out between the two of them. Having found a review of one of her own novels, Lilith read aloud animatedly, mimicking Faustus’s accent perfectly.

Interrupting the show, Faustus handed Lilith a drink and asked with a tinge of annoyance, “When will you ever finish gluing those clippings, sweetheart?”

“I suppose I’ll get around to it eventually,” Zelda found another of Lilith’s reviews and handed it over, her oral rendition sending them into gales of laughter again.

“You could write that novel you’ve always wanted and Lilith could read it in bits on the radio, just like during the war. Wouldn’t that be extraordinary?” Zelda beamed at Faustus and he turned, looking out the window again.

“Or we could team up, create a story of a literary critic who commits the perfect murder,” Lilith suggested.

“Why not the novelist who gets away with the crime of the century?” Faustus poured himself another drink, the pitcher now empty.

“I could plan the perfect murder, but never actually commit it,” Lilith confirmed.

“Why not? And how do you plan the perfect murder?” Faustus asked, his back still turned towards the ladies.

“I focus on the crime, on the criminal. I think to myself ‘What would I do next?’ and then go from there. And, truly, the perfect murder doesn’t exist. The story would go the way I’d want it to, but real life never works out like that. I’d make a mistake and never realize it until it was too late.”

Swallowing the last of his drink, Faustus looked at his wristwatch.

“Drink up, Lilith, it’s time we were on our way.” Lilith swallowed the last of her martini and handed off the glass, glancing at Zelda when Faustus’s back was turned. The redhead’s gaze softened when their eyes met.

“What are you doing tomorrow, Lilith? How about we drive to Windsor for lunch?” Zelda’s invitation brought a smile to Lilith’s face.

“Sounds fine. Not too early though, I may be nursing a hangover.” She laughed as Faustus helped her into her coat.

“What will you do tonight, darling?” Faustus asked as Zelda flipped through the newspaper.

“Thought I might go to a movie; I hate the idea of being home alone with nothing to do.”

“Nothing to do? Why, you’ve got all these clippings you can organize.” Faustus panicked as he realized she intended to go out.

“Organize boring clippings while you two go to a party?” she sulked.

“We don’t have to go.” He laid down his coat, heading for the phone. “It’s obvious you don’t want us to go. I’ll call Edwards and let him know we’re not coming.”

He began to dial, Lilith standing by the door looking for all the world like she’d rather disappear.

“Faustus, don’t be like that.” She sighed, running a hand through her hair. “I’ll do the blasted clippings then.”

“Good, see you did have something to keep you at home.” He laid down the receiver. “Lilith will you see if you can get us a taxi?” She nodded and walked out into the entryway.

Zelda gathered the paste and book, spreading out all the clippings so she could organize them.

“Faustus, taxi’s here,” Lilith called from the front steps.

He headed toward the doorway, then doubled back, calling Zelda. She came to the door, and he asked her to have his boss call him at the club if he needed him, telling her he may call about his column.

“Goodbye, dear,” he said, looking into her eyes before kissing her soundly. Lilith stared at the couple from the doorway, lip curled in disgust.

The party was in full swing when they arrived, and Lilith found the table full of representatives from the publishing company Faustus had mentioned. With a drink in her hand, she soon found them quite an enjoyable group of gentlemen, and it was obvious they wanted the rights to publish her newest novel series badly. So she allowed them to wine and dine her, flattering her all the while. Faustus was soon nowhere to be seen.

Lucifer walked up the tree lined street, stopping in front of the Blackwood flat. He quietly waited, hiding in the shadows as he had done the night before. He soon saw Zelda unlatching

the gate, shivering in the light jacket she wore when she gardened. Tom ran out in front of her, tugging on the leash.

Faustus had found a card game in a far corner of the room, and was losing miserably when he remembered the role he was meant to play in the night's events. Looking at his watch, he saw he had five minutes to spare.

Zelda doubled back at the corner, allowing Tom to find his favorite spot.

"Come on, boy, it's cold tonight, and I'm ready for bed," she murmured, concentrating on her pup and his needs. She brushed her hair back from her face, something in the shadows catching her eye, but Tom pulled her attention away, heading toward home.

The one payphone in the lobby was occupied, so Faustus paced back and forth, the time slipping away. Finally, the phone was free. He picked up the receiver, dropped in a dime, and dialed his home number.

Approaching the flat, Zelda heard the telephone ringing. She remembered what Faustus had said about his boss calling, so she hurried inside to try and catch it. Flinging the French door open, the ringing of the telephone drowned out the approach of the man behind her. She grabbed the receiver.

"Hello," she said breathlessly.

Silent on the other end, Faustus listened carefully, hoping the sounds of the party were not noticeable.

"Hello, hello?" Zelda said again, holding the receiver out from her ear.

Lucifer took his chance. Wrapping the stocking Faustus had given him around Zelda's throat, he pulled as tightly as he could. Immediately Zelda fought him, kicking and shoving at his face.

Hearing the signs of a struggle, Faustus held his breath for this was the moment he had waited for.

Forcing Zelda down on the desk, he tugged the stocking tighter, and she still pushed at his face, beginning to feel lightheaded. Something sharp pressed into her hip and she reached down, finding the clippers she'd used in the garden in her pocket. Withdrawing them, pushing her nails into the man's face as he tightened his grip, she shoved the blade of the clippers into the man's back as hard as she could. He stood, bent over almost backwards in pain and she saw his face, but she gasped for air, reaching for her throat.

Watching in horror, Zelda saw the man fall back, landing face up, burying the clippers into his spine to the hilt. He took one more gurgling breath, and then went quiet.

Looking over, she saw the receiver hanging off the side of the desk. Grabbing it, she sobbed into the phone.

"Please get the police, he's dead; I've killed him."

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“Zelda, listen to me very carefully. Don’t touch anything. I’ll be with you very soon. Don’t touch anything and don’t speak to anyone.” His firm, authoritative tone soothed Zelda, for she desired so much to be led, to be freed from this horror.

The blackmail: check

Chapter Notes

I've veered off just slightly from the plot to give Lilith and Zelda another scene together. I felt the original lovers from the movie had so little time together to really give them a believable love story.

Thanks again for your reception of this story. <3

—even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan’t have lied. It’s evident
the art of losing’s not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.

one art - elizabeth bishop

Zelda sat huddled against the desk, the receiver still in her hand although she wasn't aware of it. The man's lifeless body lay feet away, inertia having done its part after their scuffle. She couldn't bring herself to look at his face, for the glance she'd had when he fell was imprinted on her eyes even now. Open mouth in the throes of agony, gaping expression as if in disbelief.

"Darling, is that you?" Zelda heard Faustus's voice coming through the earpiece.

She tried to answer, but found her voice choked off by a sob.

"Zelda, what is it? What's happened?" His voice sounded his alarm.

"Faustus, is that you? Come home, come quickly," she whimpered, tears now drowning out the sound of her shock.

"Pull yourself together now, what's happened?" he shot at her, as if becoming annoyed at her inability to answer.

"There was a man," Zelda started, breaking down again before she continued. "A man attacked me. He tried to strangle me."

"Did he get away?" Faustus tried to keep the alarm from his response.

Zelda paused, pulling herself up as she grasped the edge of the desk. She would not look in the man's direction; she refused to acknowledge fully what had occurred.

“No, he’s dead. He’s dead,” Zelda wept openly now, the stocking Lucifer had used still dangling from her neck.

The receiver away from his ear, Faustus cursed. He set his jaw, gritting his teeth at the mess that had now been created. A disaster heaped upon a disaster.

“Faustus, are you there?” Zelda’s small voice shook him, and he calmed himself, his mind whirling with what to do next.

“Zelda, listen to me very carefully. Don’t touch anything. I’ll be with you very soon. Don’t touch anything and don’t speak to anyone.” His firm, authoritative tone soothed Zelda, for she desired so much to be led, to be freed from this horror.

“A-all right, I won’t touch anything, I promise, only please hurry,” she began to cry again as she answered. She gasped for breath, only to feel her windpipe seeming to close around the air she so desperately needed.

Reaching blindly for the glass door, she threw it open, stepping out into the cooling night air. The stocking wrapped round her neck fell away onto the ground, and she rubbed at her neck, carefully running her fingers over the bruises left behind in the brutal assault. Trying to hold herself up, she clung to the wall, the chilly breeze reviving her, clearing her head.

Staggering back inside, she made for the bedroom, recoiling again in shock when she passed Lucifer’s dead form on the carpet.

Faustus picked his way through the partygoers to the table where Lilith sat engaged in conversation with a group of men who hung on her every word. She stood when she saw him approaching, her eye roll directed at the table of oogling half drunks.

“Don’t get up, Lilith. It’s Zelda, she’s still not feeling too well.”

Alarm passed across her features as she grasped Faustus’s arm. “Is it serious?”

“No, no, nothing of the sort. You stay and enjoy yourself.”

Leaning over to collect her bag, Lilith began to follow him as he left.

“I’ll come along...” she ventured.

“No, it’s perfectly all right.” He threw back over his shoulder as he took his leave.

Lilith found herself unable to concentrate on the conversation as it centered around how to create the perfect dry martini, her mind full of Zelda and what circumstance had occurred to cause Faustus to leave so quickly.

Examining her neck in the bathroom mirror, Zelda cringed at the light blue and rose-hued marks now blooming across her neck, and swallowing she gasped at the pain. She hoped Faustus would hurry along, for she couldn’t bear another moment knowing a dead body lay in their flat.

In the taxi, Faustus felt his eyes darting to and fro, drifting back to the conversation they’d had mere hours before about the perfect murder. He knew how he handled things now would direct how the police found the body and what light would be shed on the guilty party.

Wishing he’d pursued the silly line of questioning with Lilith earlier, he stewed as the taxi rapidly approached his home. What would constitute a convictable reason to find a strange man dead in your flat at your wife’s hand? He knew she’d claim self-defense, and for all intents and purposes, she was defending herself. But, the real question was, why was he there in the first place? Rolling this over and over in his thoughts, he decided to let the chips fall where they may. At this point, he didn’t need Lucifer to be traced back to him in any way, plain and simple.

Hearing the door to the entryway open, Zelda waited in the bedroom, her heart still pounding a mile a minute. When Faustus slipped his key into the lock, she found herself wanting it to be Lilith instead, wanting to throw herself into the woman’s strong arms, declare her undying

love and feel safe again. But Faustus's face appeared in the doorway, a beam of light from the bedroom revealing his anger as he quickly walked to the dead man's side.

She ran to him then. "Oh, Faustus," she cried as she buried her face in his chest. "I'm so glad you're here."

"It's all right now, what happened?" he questioned.

She pushed back from her hold on him, still gripping his lapels in her fists. "He put something around my throat. It felt like a stocking."

He lifted her chin to see the light colored abrasions, fading into the red rash she'd developed from crying. His eyes drifted to the desk, the dead man, the splayed curtains.

Letting her go, he knelt before Lucifer, spying peripherally at Zelda whose bent shuddering form told him she had begun sobbing again. He looked briefly at the man's back, grimacing at the clippers protruding from their bed in his spine. Feeling in his pockets, he didn't locate anything of interest. Her gaze on him, he grabbed Lucifer's wrist as if looking for signs of life.

"Barely any blood at all. When he fell..." his voice stopped when he saw Zelda rummaging through her handbag.

"What are you doing?" he asked from his position on the floor.

"Looking for my aspirin. My headache has returned," she murmured, her hand to her forehead.

Covering the man with a blanket, Faustus reminded Zelda not to touch anything until after the police had arrived.

“Wonder why he came in here? You say he followed you, perhaps he wanted your jewelry or perhaps the silver in the armoire there.” He motioned to the large display case against the wall. Even as he spoke he postulated what he’d tell the detectives when they arrived, his tone and authority over the situation washing over him now, the small bit of confidence she needed.

“When will the police get here?” Zelda asked, rubbing her hands over her arms.

“Did you call them already?” Faustus looked up at her, moving towards the desk, still considering what he would say occurred as he gazed at the dead form on the floor.

“No,” she cried. “You told me not to speak to anyone.”

He grimaced at the body.

“Hadn’t you better call them?” she asked with a twinge of fear.

“Yes, I’ll do that now.” He dialed the operator, asking for the local constable and waited for the connection.

“Where’s Lilith?” Zelda ventured to ask. “She didn’t leave with you?”

“No, why should she have? I didn’t know what was wrong and didn’t want to ruin her evening.” He missed the disappointment in Zelda’s eyes.

The officer connected to the call then, Faustus began telling him what had transpired.

“There’s been a terrible accident. Someone’s been killed.”

“Your name, sir?”

“Blackwood.”

“And your address?”

“61 Cherrington Hill.”

The officer scribbled down his responses.

“And was it an accident?”

Faustus paused. “I-I don’t know.”

“What do you mean, sir, you don’t know? You think he might have been killed purposely?”

“I don’t know.” Looking at his disheveled wife, he heard the policeman ask if he knew who might have done it. “I’ll explain that to you when you arrive. How long will you be?”

“Let’s say 5 minutes. And don’t touch anything.”

Laying down the receiver, he watched as Zelda walked away, murmuring that she was going to dress.

“And why would you do that?”

“They’ll want to ask me questions,” Zelda sighed, running a hand through her hair. “I don’t want to be seen like this.”

“I’ll tell them everything they need to know. You can answer anything else tomorrow.”

Zelda turned to the bedroom, then, remembering a question, she faced him again. “Faustus, why did you phone me tonight?”

“What - I’m sorry, darling, I’ll tell you about that later. I’ve just thought, didn’t you say he strangled you with something?” He quickly changed the subject, still unsure how he’d explain his sudden appearance on the telephone after the murder.

Her hand subconsciously drifting to her throat, Zelda swallowed in pain. “It was a stocking, I think. Why, isn’t it on the floor?”

“No, but I expect they’ll find it.” He kissed her on the cheek and patted her back. “You go on to bed.”

As if in a daze, Zelda entered the bedroom, closing her eyes as she slid under the blankets. She jerked them open again as the blanket brushed against her neck, the eyes of the dead man staring blankly in her mind.

As soon as the bedroom door closed, Faustus began darting around the room, looking wildly for the stocking. Spying the open door, he pushed it further. Scooping up the missing nylons, he returned inside.

As he observed her mending basket, he glanced down at the ruined stocking in his hand, the one Lucifer had brought along then carelessly left round Zelda’s neck at his untimely passing. An idea began to form in his mind, a seed that grew quickly, gathering steam as he threw the stocking into the low burning embers. He doused the slow burning fabric with lighter fluid, then watched the evidence spark into flames, all traces of his plot disappearing into ashes. Grinning at his own genius, he retrieved two torn stockings from the basket, tying a knot in one and tossing it outside the still open door; the other he placed under the desk blotter, leaving a trace of it exposed.

Putting the next step of his plan in motion, he leaned over Lucifer's form, uncovering his jacket pocket and placing the envelope containing Zelda's missing bracelet inside, careful not to leave any trace of himself on the paper.

He noticed that Lucifer's shoes were covered with mud from the garden, and this seemed to contradict what he had in mind now, so he removed them, taking them to wipe off on the mat by the entry door. He placed them back on the man's feet quickly.

He stoked the fire again, stirring the ashes of the now burnt stocking, and sat beside the hearth, smoking nervously. Faustus knew he'd covered all his bases, and now all he could do was wait for the police.

Not long after the flat was swarming with flatfooted detectives, scouring the space for any clues. They'd removed Lucifer's shoes before taking the body away, a small bloodstain the only remembrance of the crime. A photographer set up a tripod to document every angle of the apartment, and Faustus tried to make himself scarce, his nerves getting the better of him.

"Tea, gentlemen?" He entered with a large silver tray, sliding it atop the desk, butting up against the desk blotter then exposing the stocking underneath even further. His efforts paid off as one detective soon declared they had found an additional stocking after locating the one outside. *Home free*, he thought.

By the next morning word of the murder had spread down their quiet street, and a small crowd gathered outside 61 Cherrington Hill. Zelda used the gawkers as an excuse to slip out the back, edging along the shadows of the garden until she quietly opened the gate, taking Tom out after Lilith had phoned, her voice desperate on the other end of the line.

She nearly passed her lover by as she sat on a bench surrounded by rose bushes. Lilith turned at the last second, her blue eyes falling on the redhead who stumbled at the sight.

"Zelda," she hissed and she jumped, Tom running to the brunette as if she was his long lost friend.

Distracting herself by greeting Tom, rubbing him behind the ears as he jumped against her legs, Lilith saw the dark circles under Zelda's swollen eyes, her pale skin still mottled with crying. She longed to gather Zelda in her arms, to repair anything and everything that had gone wrong. Zelda weakly settled on the bench beside her, the iron frame digging into the backs of her legs as she sat stiffly, her hand unconsciously drifting to her neck.

Daring to grasp the redhead's fingers, moving them away from the bruising against her fair skin, Lilith gasped as she held the now shaking hand between her two, bringing it to her lap and rubbing the soft skin under her thumbs.

"Faustus said you were ill, but this...Did he do this to you?" A line appeared between her brows, and her face hardened into a scowl.

Her free hand covering the marks, Zelda shook her head, afraid to look into her gaze as tears pricked her eyes again.

"I was attacked. He followed me in through the back gate, tried to strangle me, but I-I..." She couldn't bring herself to admit what she'd done in the glaring light of day, as if the sunshine suddenly multiplied her guilt.

"Attacked!" Lilith's voice rose a full octave in her surprise. "What?" She took Zelda's shoulders in her hands, looking at her full on. "Have you seen a doctor?"

"No, Faustus didn't think it was necessary although my throat..." Her words drifted off as she stroked her neck again.

"I'll take you to the hospital right now if you like."

Zelda's gaze stayed on her hands now resting in her lap. She spun her ring and Lilith could see her fighting the emotions that passed across her face.

“I’ve done something quite terrible.” Lilith’s blood ran cold as she spoke, unable to imagine anything worse than what she had just described. “I-I...” Zelda was unable to go on.

“You what, darling?” Lilith slid closer, glancing up and down the road, the sound of the birds and faraway traffic emboldening her to place her arm around Zelda’s shoulders, and the redhead allowed herself the comfort of her embrace.

Her answer barely audible as her head rested on Lilith’s shoulder, the brunette made out the words “killed” and “I had to”. She pulled Zelda closer, whispering words of assurance, laying a kiss to her temple as she stroked her side.

“Did he...” Now Lilith’s tears began. “Did he *touch* you?”

Zelda shook her head fiercely, “No, that he didn’t seem to be his goal. But I stabbed him as he choked me. Heaven knows what else he’d have done if he had continued.” She looked around as she realized how much time had passed. “I must get back. Faustus will be wondering where I am.”

Not wanting to let her go quite yet, Lilith held on, placing a soft kiss on her forehead.

“And how is...Faustus with all this? Did the police come, did you give them your statement?” Lilith tried to quell her anxiety, but her questions came out like an interrogation.

Fortunately Zelda found humor in her rolling tumble of words. “Oh my darling, I’m alright. Faustus seemed to think my attacker was first a thief and I foiled his plan. He gave the police my version of the story after he sent me to bed. I was so very tired, and my head throbbing with the trauma of the night. He took care of it all.”

A chill went down Lilith’s spine again as Zelda spoke, and she shuddered with anger. *Why did he keep her from the police when her version of events was crucial?*

Zelda took Lilith's quivering reaction quite differently, laying her hand on the exposed skin of Lilith's knee.

"I wish we could be together again before you return to New York," she whispered. "Maybe I can slip away once all this business is sorted out."

As much as Lilith desired Zelda, as much as she wanted to see her alabaster skin against the snowy white sheets of her hotel bed, the need to protect her now, to shield her overwhelmed everything else.

She turned to face Zelda, gently removing the sunglasses she wore, shocked again at the painful eyes and splotchy bruising. Stroking her cheek, Lilith bit her own bottom lip, then glanced about as she leaned forward to chastely kiss Zelda, a soft sigh escaping the redhead.

"I'm so afraid." Zelda whispered, wrapping her hand through the loop on Tom's lead.

Lilith was at a loss for words, so she pulled Zelda into her arms as she had wanted when she first laid eyes on her. "I'll do anything you need, my love," she murmured into the auburn curls. "I promise you that."

"Thank you." She thought she may break down again at Lilith's reassurance. "You don't know what that means to me," Zelda sighed in relief.

They clung to each other, the shoulder of Lilith's jacket darkening with Zelda's tears.

"You're the very reason I can face the unknown now." She breathed in Lilith's perfume, holding her tightly as if it was the last time.

Finally Zelda pulled away, standing and straightening herself to her full height. "Back into the fray, I suppose."

“I’m in town another few days, I’ll ring you tomorrow.” Lilith grasped her hand again, feeling as though Zelda were somehow slipping away from her.

Nodding, she clucked her tongue and Tom started for home. Glancing back over her shoulder, Zelda saw Lilith wipe her eyes then raise her hand in a wave. She gave her a small smile in return.

Unbeknownst to the pair, a detective watched from an unmarked car just down the street, scribbling notes as he observed the two.

The remainder of the day passed in quiet, despite how Zelda flinched when she passed the rug Faustus had draped over the bloodstain on the carpet much to Faustus’s delight. She was on edge and high strung, jumping at every noise until she finally gave up reading after supper and went to bed.

Faustus paced about the next morning, lifting the desk blotter, sauntering over to stir the ashes in the fireplace grate. He noticed the lighter fluid, shaking the container as Zelda entered the room. She looked at him curiously as he shook the can.

“Need to replace it. Always runs out when we need it.” He found that he couldn’t meet her wide green eyes, something resembling guilt pulled at his conscience. “Oh, that reminds me, the other night the sergeant wanted to know why you didn’t phone the police immediately after it happened.”

Zelda, vexed by the question, replied quickly. “How could I? You were on the phone..?”

Throwing up his hands, he agreed. “I know, I know but...”

“And you specifically told me not to phone anyone.” She remembered.

“I might have told him a slightly different story.” He stared at the watching statue by the door.

“Why?”

“Well, I said you didn’t phone the police because you thought I’d call from the hotel.”

“And why did you say that?” She wrung her hands now, a feeling of unease coming over her.

“It seemed like the most logical explanation. If you say something different now, they may get nosy and start asking all kinds of questions.”

“So you want me to say the same thing?” Zelda jumped as the doorbell rang.

Nodding, Faustus said, “Oh that’ll be Lilith, would you let her in?”

A tall, sandy haired gentleman in a bowler hat stood waiting as she opened the door.

“Good morning, madam.”

“Oh, good morning,” Zelda’s hands began to shake as she clutched the handle.

“Mrs. Blackwood, I’m a police officer, do you mind if I come in?”

“Of course,” Zelda said as she stepped aside.

He entered, dressed in monochromatic shades of grey and pinstripes, trench coat in hand, looking about the room. Spying the throw rug, he kicked it aside, examining the blood stain.

“Excuse me, I’ll just tell my husband you’re here.” She closed her eyes, fighting the rising nausea in her throat.

Making his way to the desk, he looked at it in relation to the curtains, the French door. Slamming his hand against the receiver of the phone, he grimaced.

“Hello, I’m Faustus Blackwood,” he cordially extended his hand, exuding confidence he did not possess.

“Good morning, sir, I’m Chief Inspector Hubbard, in charge of criminal investigations in this division.”

From the bedroom, the words “criminal investigations” took Zelda’s breath. She pinched the bridge of her nose, dreadfully wanting a cigarette. Returning to the living room, she sat on the arm of the sofa, rubbing her lips together as her stomach clenched.

“I believe we gave your sergeant all the necessary information,” Faustus said, still facing the windows as the officer walked around him.

“Certainly, and I’ve read his report, only,” the man paused to look backwards. “I’d like to clear up some things, and I like to do these things first hand.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The deepest emerald eyes she'd ever seen met her own, and she nearly gasped at their directness. Her small nose led straight to lips coated in a crimson shade much too dark for her fair skin, but she pulled it off as if she were born to it. Waves of red hair in so many riotous shades it had to be natural were coaxed into a style Rita Hayworth had made famous a decade before. Lilith allowed her gaze to drift lower, taking in the sumptuous curves that put any pinup girl to shame.

A little backstory in all this back and forth police drama. :)

Chapter Notes

The twists continue.....and jail.....check

*in the magic of moonlight when i sigh, hold me close, dear
chances are you believe the stars that fill the skies are in my eyes*

- chances are - johnny mathis

Chief Inspector Hubbard made his way around the flat, pausing to stare into the embers of the fire, then looking towards Zelda who was visibly shaking. Taking note of how Faustus commanded the conversation yet completely ignored his wife's distress, he attempted to soften his approach.

“You only had a few moments with the sergeant then, Mrs. Blackwood?”

“Yes, I-” she began, but Faustus quickly interrupted her, explaining how she’d been in a state of shock.

“Nasty business you’d been in, yes.” Inspector Hubbard agreed. He faced Faustus again. “Do you mind if I look around, sir?”

“Yes, yes, the bedroom and bathroom are right this way.”

He led the Chief on a tour of the flat, pausing to flick the lights on and move out of the way, carefully remaining silent as the man jotted notes and hummed as he wrote.

“He didn’t get in through the bathroom, then?” he finally asked, more of an observation.

“No, and the kitchen has bars on the window. We assume he came in through here.” Faustus indicated the French doors.

“And I understand you weren’t present when this occurred?”

“I was at a party at the Grendin Hotel, and by odd coincidence I was phoning my wife when she was attacked.”

“So I gathered.” The inspector reached the desk. “What time was it when you phoned your wife?”

“I’m not sure, you see, my watch had stopped.”

Settling on the sofa, Zelda ventured to ask if the police knew who the man was.

“Well, we do know where he lived. There seems to be some confusion at his real name. He appeared to have several.”

Faustus paced behind the officer, attempting to look over his shoulder at the notes he’d taken. The Inspector handed Zelda two photographs of the dead man, and she stared at them.

“I’ve never seen him before.” She looked into the eyes of the man she’d killed.

“Did you get a look at him two nights ago?” Hovering in the background, Faustus’s attention was only on the officer.

“No, I never saw his face.” Zelda answered, looking to Faustus for support, but unable to catch his eye. “You see, he attacked me from behind. It was dark and I never got a look at him.”

“Well, how did you know that you’ve never seen him before if you didn’t get a look at him when he attacked you?” The Inspector pushed her.

“I don’t understand,” Zelda said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Inspector, my wife simply means that as far as she knew she never saw him before.” Faustus came to sit on the arm of the chair beside Zelda.

“Is that what you meant?” he said as she nodded. “How about you, sir? Had you ever seen him before?” He handed the photos over.

Shaking his head, Faustus replied negatively. Then, he grabbed a photo back. “He does rather look like someone I went to college with.”

“Ah,” answered the Inspector. “Was his name Typhon?”

“I don’t think so.”

“How about Morningstar?”

His eyes lighting up, Faustus nodded. “That’s it. Morningstar.”

He retrieved the frame from the wall, the same one he’d shown Lucifer the night he hired him to kill Zelda. He explained to the Chief that they’d not run in the same circles since college.

“Yes, and now I know I’ve seen him recently. I can’t think where at the moment though.” He was sure Zelda would recall seeing Lucifer across the restaurant that evening, that she’d implicate herself further by knowing him in advance.

“I’m not sure, Faustus,” she murmured, leaning into him.

Turning his attention to the events in question, the Inspector gave Zelda a comforting smile, and she was reminded suddenly of her father. “Mrs. Blackwood, would you mind showing me exactly what happened last night?”

Zelda clung to Faustus’s arm, willing him to stop this line of questioning and send the Inspector away.

“Faustus, do I have to?” she asked in a plaintive tone.

“I’m afraid so,” he said as he moved back, his arm slipping from her grasp.

Sighing in resignation, Zelda called for Tom, clipping the leash to his collar as she opened the French doors.

Her pup ran ahead of her, anxiously tugging on the lead as she made her way to the gate.

“I was coming into the gate when I heard the telephone.” Tom was confused as she made him come back inside.

“So you’d taken your dog for a walk?” She nodded at the officer’s question. “Do you always venture out so late, what with this garden at your disposal?”

“To tell you the truth I was quite bored after being alone all evening, so the walk was as much for me as it was for him.”

Tom trotted around the garden, preferring to stay on the walkway as a shower had dampened the grass.

“Do go on, Mrs. Blackwood,” he instructed, closing the doors behind them as they entered the flat.

“I’d expected the call to be Faustus’s boss, so I grabbed the receiver --” She stood with her back to the French doors.

“This doesn’t make sense, why stand there to answer the call when moving behind the desk would’ve been more logical?” The Inspector glared at her skeptically, and Zelda felt a flush crawl up her cheeks.

“I always stand here to answer the telephone,” she answered as if it were plain to see. “If I need to write something down, I can reach around the desk easily.”

He rolled his eyes, indicating that she should continue.

“I picked up the phone, then he must have followed me through the door. He put something round my neck.”

“Something, what do you mean?”

“I think it was a stocking.” She gingerly rubbed her neck at the memory.

“Go on.”

“Then he pushed down onto the desk. I distinctly remember the clippers pressing against me.”

“Where were the clippers normally kept?” He motioned towards the desk. “It seems strange you’d have those on your desk.”

“They were in the pocket of my jacket. I slipped them in my pocket earlier to chase my dog when the postman came to the gate. That night, I’d thrown my gardening jacket on to go for my walk.”

“Just a moment, you were able to open this door quickly when you heard the phone, didn’t you lock up when you left for your walk?”

“I-I honestly can’t remember. I was a bit woozy from drinking a glass of wine...”

“So you were intoxicated then?” His tone had become quite accusatory.

“Hardly, I had half a glass at most.”

“But it caused you to forget to lock up, am I correct?”

She looked at Faustus with wide eyes, imploring him to intervene.

“We normally share a glass before bed, Inspector. My wife usually needs much more to become inebriated.”

“Usually?” The man pursed his lips. “Mrs. Blackwood, why didn’t you call the police immediately when this happened?”

Walking behind the police officer while he questioned her, Faustus caught Zelda’s eye, and she answered with a downcast expression. “I was trying to get through to the police when I discovered my husband was on the line. Naturally I thought he’d call the police from the hotel before he came here.”

His lips curled into a half smile, Faustus turned away, feeling the puzzle pieces slip into place.

“Didn’t it occur to you to call a doctor then?” The officer demanded.

“No, it was obvious he was dead.” Zelda shuddered at the memory of him.

“How was it obvious? Did you feel for his pulse?”

“No, just one look at those staring eyes --” Her voice rose and she felt tears choke her throat.

“So you did see his face after all.”

“I saw his eyes!” Zelda cried. “I can’t remember his face!”

“Inspector, my wife obviously had never seen this man before, and if he didn’t follow her inside, how did he get in?” Faustus spoke up, his nonchalant voice causing Zelda’s stomach to churn.

The Chief moved to the door. “We believe he came in this way. If he’d have followed you, there would have been some evidence from your garden on his shoes, on the carpet. He came in the front way, wiping his shoes on the mat. There were fibers on his shoes from that very mat. There’s no doubt about it.”

“Perhaps he got your key when your bag was stolen from Victoria Station. That must be it,” Faustus said in confidence.

“Now just a moment, I’d like to hear about this. What sort of bag was stolen? And what was taken from it?” The man perked up at this news.

“It was my handbag. I got it back about two weeks later from the lost and found.” Zelda looked up at both men as she spoke.

“Was anything stolen?” It seemed the Chief was getting at something now. “Any papers? Letters?”

“Just the money, that’s all.” Zelda answered, lowering her eyes.

“Your key was still there when it was returned, but he could have copied it and put it back,” said Faustus, filling in the blanks for them all.

“Wasn’t that where you said you saw the dead man?” Hubbard asked.

“Yes, it was. We were sitting in the restaurant and I spotted him across the way. Remember, I said I’d seen someone from college.” Faustus confirmed his own statement, but Zelda

seemed unconvinced.

“I don’t remember.” She folded her arms around herself, sticking to her story to Faustus’s chagrin.

“He could have copied your key and then put back the original. He could have used that key to get in, lying in wait until you returned home. But he didn’t, because no key was found on him.” The Inspector gave a small smile.

Faustus cocked his head. “Seems we’re back to where we started then.”

The Inspector glanced at him narrowly as he scribbled away in his notebook.

“Not quite,” he said simply.

Knowing the Inspector knew more than he was letting on, Faustus laughed humorlessly. “How did he get in then?”

“We need to get all this on paper. I’d like you both to make a formal statement before the official inquest takes place. My office is quite close by, perhaps you both could come now?”

Interrupted by the doorbell, the Inspector turned to open the door.

“Faustus...” Lilith entered the flat, eyes darting between the three people gathered by the door.

“Inspector, this is Lilith Halliday, the author I was with at the party two nights ago.” Faustus made the introductions while Lilith surreptitiously glanced at Zelda.

“Ah, Ms. Halliday, maybe you can help us.” Removing his notebook from his breast pocket, he flipped the pages until he found what he sought. “Do you remember what time Mr. Blackwood left the party to make a phone call?”

“Yes, it was around 11:05. I know that because Mr. Blackwood’s watch had stopped and some of us compared times.”

“I see. It was around that time Mrs. Blackwood was attacked.” The Inspector began examining the fireplace then, and Faustus wanted to distract him, tried to move to his side, but Lilith cornered him.

“Did you phone Zelda before or after you phoned your boss?” Lilith asked Faustus, taking him off guard.

Hubbard returned to the conversation then, curious as to this new development. “So let me understand this. How soon after you spoke to your boss did you call your wife?”

“I actually never spoke to him. I called home to ask Zelda to look up his number in the country because I had forgotten to write it down.”

“You mean you had me running through the garden just to get you a phone number?” Zelda was incredulous.

“I had to, darling, my boss was flying to Geneva yesterday morning and I needed to remind him of something. He was at his country home and I’d forgotten to write down his number.”

The Inspector shook his head. “Wasn’t there a telephone directory in the hotel?”

“Certainly, but not with the country listings. Regardless of all that, I never called once I heard what had happened here.”

“Mmmm, well, I suppose that’s all I need for now. Mr. and Mrs. Blackwood are coming to my office to give their statements, would you give me your information in case I have further questions?” He handed his notebook to Lilith and while she wrote she felt both men’s eyes on her, Faustus in particular, as if he were seeing her for the very first time.

“Ms. Halliday, have you ever been over here before?” The Inspector turned his full attention to Lilith when Zelda went to fetch her coat.

Nodding, Lilith answered with a cursory glance at Faustus. “About a year ago, yes.”

His brows rising, Faustus set his mouth in anger. He was about to add something about his wife and a mysterious stranger she’d taken up with about the same time, but Hubbard spoke first.

“Mr. Blackwood, there’s quite a crowd out front now. Would you mind checking the back gate to see if we can make our escape that way?”

“Certainly.” And he was out the door before Hubbard made it straight to the point, to Lilith's shock.

“How much does Mr. Blackwood know about you and Mrs. Blackwood?” Lilith’s mouth fell open at his question.

“I beg your pardon?”

“A bracelet was found in the dead man’s pocket in an envelope with Mrs. Blackwood’s name on it.” Lilith took a deep breath. “And one of my men observed you two meeting yesterday on a bench down the street. He said you were quite close, “snogging” to use his words.” He used the term with obvious distaste.

Zelda returned at that moment, and asked after Faustus.

“He’s just gone out to the garden,” Lilith replied.

“Mrs. Blackwood, when you lost your handbag, did you lose a bracelet?”

“No,” Zelda answered, looking into Lilith’s pained gaze.

“Zelda, it was found on the dead man,” she said, hand to her mouth.

“I asked you that before, and you didn’t answer me truthfully,” The Inspector gritted his teeth, losing patience.

“My husband doesn’t know about us, Chief Inspector.”

“This man was blackmailing you, wasn’t he?” he continued.

“No,” Zelda looked away, her eyes filling with tears.

“Zelda, it’s no good, Faustus will have to know about us. It’s the only thing we can do.” Lilith pulled the letters from her bag then, showing the Inspector how Zelda was being blackmailed over the bracelet.

Hanging her head, Zelda stared off into the distance, her world crumbling around her.

“This is from last October, how many times have you seen this man?” The Inspector queried as he read the letter.

“I’ve never seen him,” Zelda shot back, turning her back on the pair of them, trying to gather herself. “I have no idea who he is.”

Faustus came back through the door, but stayed out of their eye line, hidden in the curtains, listening in on the conversation.

“Ms. Halliday, I’d like you to come with us as well.” Hubbard requested, putting away his notebook.

Approaching Zelda, the Inspector sighed deeply.

“Mrs. Blackwood, when you come to make your statement there will be other police officers present. I shall warn you first that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence.”

Zelda turned around to face him, her brow narrowing in understanding of what he meant. Behind the officer, Lilith brought her hand to her mouth, a gasp escaping her. She knew exactly what this meant for the police, Zelda’s statement now being entered into documents that may lead to her prosecution.

“We’ll forget about everything you’ve told me up til now, but you will have to be completely truthful going forward.” His tone more gentle now as he took in the reaction of the two women.

Hidden by the curtain, Faustus could hardly believe his good fortune. He felt satisfaction at seeing the utter dismay written across Zelda’s features.

The Inspector continued. “You say you killed this man in self-defense. We’ve only your word for that, because there were no witnesses.”

Strolling back into the room, Faustus interjected. “But I heard the whole thing, Inspector, over the telephone. And what I heard is perfectly consistent to what my wife told me.”

“You say this man came to burgle your flat, but there’s no evidence of that. There is, however, evidence he was blackmailing you.” Hubbard explained.

“Blackmail?” Faustus asked, pulling out his best acting skills.

“Yes, I’m afraid so, Faustus,” Lilith murmured. She watched as Zelda began to crumble, her eyes filling with tears. “Zelda, I’m sorry but he must know the truth.”

Zelda began to sway as if she’d faint, and Lilith ran to her side, no longer worrying about the two men who watched her strangely. She gripped the redhead around the waist, taking her hand, and reassuring her that everything would be fine.

The Inspector observed the scenario, Faustus’s detachment ironic when compared to Lilith’s attentiveness. He wondered how all of this fit together, and who would stand by Mrs. Blackwood during what would surely amount to a well-publicized trial.

Getting back to the business at hand, he presented the next item to gauge Mrs. Blackwood's reaction. “You say he followed you in through the garden, but the evidence contradicts that.”

“That door was locked. We’ve only got two keys, and I have mine.” Zelda reached into her bag and showed him her house key.

“You could have let him in.” Hubbard finished his thought then.

“Don’t you even believe I was attacked? How do you think I got these bruises on my throat?” Zelda tugged the neckline of her dress down, exposing the pale lilac markings against her skin. Clenching her fists, Lilith observed Faustus, the subtle smirk he was attempting to hide causing her eyes to narrow. *He’s somehow behind all this.*

“You could have caused those yourself,” he answered. “You say he attacked you with a stocking. There were two stockings found, one outside with two knots tied in it, and one under the desk blotter. Why would your attacker do that?”

Zelda shook her head, feeling very alone and exposed. Lilith thought she should move away now, to distance herself for she may have already caused more harm than good. She had sat in on enough of these interrogations in her own research to know when one was being considered a person of interest.

“Those stockings were yours because we found a reel of silk matching a mended portion of one those stockings in your mending basket.” He pointed to the basket by the hearth. She tore it open, finding it empty.

“Faustus, there *was* a pair of stockings here.” Zelda’s voice was ragged, torn.

He looked at her suspiciously, as if the Inspector’s tale was becoming believable, and it was her undoing.

“Come along now, Mrs.Blackwood.” Holding open the door, the Inspector waited for her to get by, closely followed by Lilith who practically held Zelda up as they walked through the garden. Faustus now stood frozen in place, his suspicions raised by Lilith’s behavior, her protective actions toward Zelda, and the description of his wife’s paramour all congealing in his mind.

“You are coming, aren’t you sir?”

Faustus replied quickly, “Why certainly I am.”

“Hmmm, I just wondered,” he answered absently, a look of curiosity on his practiced stoic facade.

When all was said and done, the police charged Zelda with the willful murder of one Lucifer Morningstar. During the harrowing questioning, Zelda had stood by her story, never wavering from the fact that she did not know the man, that he had followed her from the street, that he had attempted to strangle her.

Lilith had stayed, waiting in the busy precinct, the cacophony of noise around her drowned out by her fixation on Zelda, her thoughts consumed by what must be happening behind the doors just to her left. She'd seen the dank interview room, the peeling paint, the hard metal chair Zelda was meant to sit on for hours on end. It was all designed to elicit a confession, a means to end in what probably felt like torture to the one accused.

Hours later, the door opened, and anyone could see the toll already taken upon Zelda. She looked pale, almost gaunt, ghostly. Her eyes darted about, no doubt searching for Faustus who had made himself scarce as soon as they'd taken her away.

"Ms. Halliday," The Inspector approached her, motioning for the junior officer to bring Zelda to her side. "Would you be so kind as to accompany Mrs. Blackwood home, seeing as how her husband is not available?"

She registered the scowl crossing his face as he mentioned Faustus, the obvious disdain he felt for the man cheering Lilith somehow.

"Yes, I'll make sure she gets home safely," Lilith placed her arm around Zelda's waist and the redhead unconsciously leaned into the other woman, gripping her handbag in front of her body. "Inspector?"

He looked up as he had begun typing up what must have been Zelda's statement of fact. "Yes?"

"What happens now? I'm not completely familiar with the British judicial system." Zelda shuddered in her grasp, and Lilith felt her slipping, tightening her hold as she willed Zelda to breathe slowly, to not hyperventilate.

He raised one eyebrow, glancing back and forth between the two women, “Mrs. Blackwood will return tomorrow to surrender herself to the police. She’s agreed to that. She will then be brought before a magistrate judge to be arraigned, where it will be decided if she will be remanded or freed to return on her own honor. The trial will take place when Her Majesty’s Court can arrange their case, possibly several months from now.”

Zelda had been remanded, her freedom revoked only one day later.

The trial was put on the docket, a date two months in the future. Zelda remained behind bars, only allowed visits with her lawyer, her mail confiscated and redacted. Since the press had taken a great interest in her trial, she wasn’t allowed outside the jail for more than a few minutes at a time for photographers waiting by the fence hoping for a glance at the famed murderess.

Lilith returned home to New York; deadlines for work and engagements she’d made put off as long as she could, but she planned to return in time for the trial. She heard through contacts she had that Faustus had even been offered a book deal to write his wife’s story, and he was seriously considering the venture.

Having closed her apartment and fired off a letter to her editor expressing her great interest to return to London for the “Trial of the Century”, she soon left again, not having heard a word from or about Zelda.

The date finally arrived, and Lilith sat in the gallery, her shoulders held high as the bailiff announced the prisoner’s entrance. She watched as Zelda glanced around, her eyes darting to the front row where family normally sat, finding Faustus there alone. The brunette’s eyes finally met her luminous green ones when she hesitantly glanced further back. Lilith saw a spark in them that she hadn’t seen in a long time. She smiled and Zelda returned it, sadly looking away.

While the charges were read and formalities commenced as the prosecution prepared its questions, Lilith let herself drift in her memories, that glint in the redhead’s eye causing her to remember the first time they’d met.

It was in the bar of The New Yorker, a steamy night after a torrid day, summer in New York City being what it was. Those who found themselves sweltering in the city flocked to the few

places blessed with air conditioning, exactly why Lilith had ensconced herself at the quiet end of the bar itself, away from the entrance and live music. She had a first draft from some new up and coming author she was trying to wade through without much success when a voice commanded her attention.

“Aren’t you Lilith Halliday?”

Scowling at the interloper, slowly tabbing the page she’d attempted to read, the raven haired woman looked up.

The deepest emerald eyes she’d ever seen met her own, and she nearly gasped at their directness. Her small nose led straight to lips coated in a crimson shade much too dark for her fair skin, but she pulled it off as if she were born to it. Waves of red hair in so many riotous shades it had to be natural were coaxed into a style Rita Hayworth had made famous a decade before. Lilith allowed her gaze to drift lower, taking in the sumptuous curves that put any pinup girl to shame.

“Who’s asking?” she replied when she found her voice.

Chuckling, the woman had held out her hand, and Lilith met her halfway. “Zelda.” She had said simply, as if that was enough, but by then Lilith had been intrigued.

“I saw you come in as I sat over there,” she had indicated a table somewhere in the dark recesses of the bar. “Although, really your photograph doesn’t do you justice.” Her Mid-Atlantic accent led Lilith to believe she may be a local, especially given she was in the very same hotel bar possibly for the very same reason.

Lifting a book from her side, the redhead turned it to show the dust jacket, Lilith noticing it was her latest crime novel. She also observed the woman’s copy was full of dog-eared pages, and what appeared to be a bar napkin posing as a bookmark.

“Yes, well, I tend to avoid cameras as much as possible,” she had sighed. “But people tend to enjoy visualizing who pens the tome they’re reading.”

"I rather enjoy using my imagination, creating my own vision." She had leaned against the bar, her hip cocked at a particularly pleasing angle. "I had a thought, more like a theory." She held the book to her chest. "What if the priest had done it?"

A beat passed before Lilith realized she was talking about the book and not a cleric's assignation.

"Why him?" Lilith leaned forward, interested in where this was going.

"It was a crime of passion, two star-crossed lovers denied the happily ever after they deserved. A woman would rarely murder her lover just because she couldn't possess him, but a man, denied the....how shall I say it?....release he feels justified in having? He'd kill rather than let her be had by some other man." Lilith's eyebrows shot skyward at her forwardness, then remembered they were only discussing her book.

"Would you like to join me? I have so many questions, and you're just the person to answer them." Zelda motioned to her table, and Lilith placed the draft under arm, carrying her Scotch in her other hand, while she motioned to the bartender for a refill.

They sat for hours, discussing everything from books and politics to career goals, where they'd dreamed they would be by the time they'd reached their early forties. Lilith found her fascinating, opinionated, and smart; a rare find in anyone.

"I know they'd like to close this place down and it seems we're the only customers." Lilith glanced around at the empty bar, save the two of them. "Unless you have somewhere to be, I'd love to continue this conversation. Upstairs, in my room, that is."

"Thought you said you lived in the city." Zelda wrinkled her nose as she spoke, something Lilith found utterly endearing.

"Yes, well, it's quite a ways from here, and my publisher is magnanimous when it comes to my safety."

It wasn't until Zelda had reached for her clutch that Lilith noticed the thin gold band on her left hand. She sighed inwardly at her disappointment until Zelda took her aback.

"I don't need to rush off anywhere, and if you'll add in a bottle of that Scotch you're drinking, I'm all yours."

Lilith bit her lip, for as the night had gone on she'd found Zelda more and more attractive, and she felt a tension between them, a taut string that only seemed to pull tighter the more time they were together.

Paying the bill and grabbing the bottle by its neck, Lilith led the way. They stood on opposite sides of the elevator, making eyes at each other as the car ascended. Passengers left the car until they were left alone, Lilith having the key to the penthouse.

Amazed at the dazzling view inside the room, Zelda stood at the window while Lilith poured them each a tumbler.

"Leave the lights low so we can see the city, won't you?" Zelda asked.

Lilith sat on the bed, handing Zelda her glass as she came to join her.

"Now where were we?" Zelda asked, a diplomatic distance from Lilith, but close enough to give the brunette a generous view of her legs as she crossed them.

"I think you were telling me a story of how your father met the Queen bogged down on a dirt road in Scotland. Or was he the Scot bogged down and rescued by the Queen?" They laughed, and Lilith was enthralled again as Zelda threw back her head exposing her pale neck, the fire of her hair catching the light of the full moon.

Lilith ached to brush her fingers through that mane, to hear the woman before her moan in pleasure as she caressed her face. She moved closer, watching carefully that Zelda didn't move away.

Their conversation seemed to have stopped, both women staring at the other now, and Lilith took Zelda's glass, setting them both on the nightstand.

"Zelda," Lilith whispered, her voice laden with desire.

"Yes, Lilith?" Zelda's eyes drifted down Lilith's face until they rested on her lips.

"I'd like to kiss you." Lilith said simply, unable to keep her fingers from stroking the soft skin of the woman's cheek.

When Zelda closed her eyes, when she sighed, leaning into the hand that cupped her cheek, Lilith brushed her lips against the redhead's, gently at first, finding their way. Tilting her head, Lilith pressed her lips to Zelda's again, tasting the Scotch they'd shared. She ran her tongue over the seam of her lips, seeking entry and Zelda's tongue lapped at hers when they met. Zelda tasted divine, sweet and warm against her tongue. They deepened their kiss, lips clashing and Zelda wrapped her hand around the back of Lilith's neck, Lilith wrapping her arms around Zelda's waist, pulling her closer. It was then the kiss became slow and languid, almost as if they both realized where they were. Lilith lay one final kiss on Zelda's cheek before they pulled away.

Lilith didn't see Zelda in New York before she returned to London, and they hadn't exchanged information. She held onto that night as a delicious memory, a chance encounter that would never come again until she found herself in London at a symposium of mystery writers.

The talk was held in the main lecture hall of the university, and Lilith made her way to the stage, looking out at the crowd and spying a familiar flame haired beauty, only this time she was seated with a man. Unfortunately it was then he left her side and mounted the stairs to sit by Lilith.

“Hello, I’d know your face anywhere. Lilith Halliday?” He’d extended his hand in greeting. “I’m Faustus Blackwood and I’m here on behalf of The Times. I’m the moderator of this talk.”

Lilith nodded, making her greeting and glancing into the audience to see the shock on Zelda’s face.

“Oh, by the way, if you have time after, could I possibly introduce you to my wife? She’s read all your books and it would be a thrill for her to meet you.” Lilith nodded in agreement, and put on her best poker face.

A year passed quickly, and she’d become an acquaintance of Faustus Blackwood, moving in the same circles as she made herself a more permanent fixture in London. Then came her book tour, Zelda visiting her in city after city, their affair still quite casual until Lilith found she couldn’t leave Zelda for New York and Zelda refused to go with her.

A gavel brought Lilith back to the present, to Zelda rising from her seat. Lilith noticed how thin she had become, her pale skin having lost all its rosy glow in the glaring lights of the courtroom.

“When you pushed the clippers into the back of Lucifer Morningstar, what did you intend to do?” The barrister asked Zelda who stood in the dock.

“I intended to survive, it was him or me.” She swallowed audibly, and Lilith bit her lips to withhold the moan that almost escaped.

At the conclusion, the jury was out for twenty minutes before returning their verdict.

Zelda stood before the judge, alone again, small and frail looking, she faced him as he pronounced his verdict.

“I charge you that on the 26th of September you did willfully murder Lucifer Morningstar. Do you have anything to say in answer to this charge?”

Zelda fiercely shook her head.

“I find the prisoner, Zelda Spellman Blackwood, guilty of willful murder. You are hereby sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.”

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Zelda had audibly whimpered when the verdict was read, a sound Lilith felt reverberated throughout the echoing courtroom. The raven-haired woman had dug her fingers into the hardwood of the bench where she sat, her own pain and shock nearly rendering her unable to watch as Zelda was led away, her terrified glance back sweeping over the small space til she saw Lilith, that steely glint now faded as she cowered, and Lilith had never felt so powerless.

Chapter Notes

Well, it's done! I have thoroughly loved placing our ladies into this classic film, and they fit so nicely. thank you for faithfully reading and commenting. <3

[Mark Halliday](#): *[to Margot] Darling, I understand now, but that doesn't stop me from loving you.*

After sitting stunned, pinned to the bench, the turmoil in Lilith's mind froze her in place. The onlookers in the gallery filed out until she sat alone.

Zelda had audibly whimpered when the verdict was read, a sound Lilith felt reverberated throughout the echoing courtroom. The raven-haired woman had dug her fingers into the hardwood of the bench where she sat, her own pain and shock nearly rendering her unable to watch as Zelda was led away, her terrified glance back sweeping over the small space til she saw Lilith, that steely glint now faded as she cowered, and Lilith had never felt so powerless.

How could the jury have found her guilty? Lilith could find several ways the defense could have supplied reasonable doubt, and yet the assumption of her guilt seemed predetermined. She shook her head, making her way out of the Crown Court, a gloomy overcast sky reflecting her mood.

While she pondered her next steps at a nearby pub, a pint of stout she slowly sipped between her hands, a voice behind her drew her attention, as a small group of men huddled together a table.

"You know she was guilty; wouldn't look up and meet anyone's eye. The jury felt her shame," he took a drink before he continued, his voice raised in laughter. "And it didn't help her none that she'd taken a lover to boot."

"Ah, no man, the lass was framed, any fool could see that. Did ya see the husband? All smiles and what have you, a smug bastard if I ever saw one."

"How do you figure she was framed?" the first man asked the second.

"Because," his voice lowered, he leaned forward so far Lilith had to lean back on her barstool to catch his response. "The barrister only asked her the one question, and her own barrister didn't put up much of a fight. It was a shite trial, truly."

Not bothering to listen to the rest, Lilith had made her decision. Returning to her hotel, she rang up the owner of the flat she'd rented the year before, and finding it available, made arrangements to move in a few days. She made an appointment with Zelda's solicitor soon as

well. If there was anything Lilith could offer Zelda, it was the investigative skills sharpened through years of spinning crime yarns in her novels. The only possible way Zelda could receive a new trial would be in the discovery of new evidence which Lilith intended to uncover.

A letter arrived in the time between the abysmal court hearing and her scheduled appointment. Lilith had managed to get Zelda the address of her lodgings, and a plain envelope had been sitting in her mailbox, pretty as you please a few days later. She recognized Zelda's neat penmanship immediately and tore into it. It wasn't much more than a desperate plea mixed with thanks that Lilith was staying on, although in the postscript Zelda had declared she should move on and forget she'd ever known her. Not wanting to mire herself in despair, Lilith took it to mean she was giving permission for the brunette to proceed, to help with a new trial in any possible way.

At the appointed time, Lilith arrived at the solicitor's office and was greeted by his secretary, an ash blonde with a high ponytail, pinstripe blouse tucked into her high-waisted skirt and fire engine red lips, a cigarette dangling between them as she let her eyes drift over Lilith slowly.

Sweeping her hair away from her face, Lilith introduced herself to the young woman, dropping her bag in front of the desk. Leaning over, the dark haired woman unbuttoned her blouse to the line of her lacy undergarment, glancing up through her lashes into gawking eyes.

"I'm here to see your boss, but I'm sure you'll be much more of a help." Lilith said, her voice intimating some sort of collusion between the two. "You see, I'm in need of some information."

The girl finally spoke, tearing her eyes away from the curve of Lilith's breasts, cocking her head to the side in wonder. "Not sure what I can do for you," her lips curved into a smug smile.

In another life, another time, Lilith would have played this game to its inevitable end, a few drinks and a roll in the sheets. She thrilled on breaking in the uninitiated, as this woman obviously desired a taste of what she was offering. Licking her lips, allowing the tip of her tongue to remain at the corner of her mouth, she returned the devious grin.

Sighing, she chuckled, “Fairly certain you could do *many* things for me, my dear, only I’m in rather a hurry. I’d like a look at a casefile, a recent case that garnered some attention. I’m a mystery writer and this particular story fascinated me because of the lady murderer.”

“Ah, you mean Zelda Blackwood, of course.” She swiveled in her chair, turning to a file cabinet behind her. Retrieving a manila folder, she faced Lilith again. “Quite a high profile one around here. Not much legwork done before the trial though.”

“How do you mean?” Lilith leaned against the desk, eying the folder as if it were a prize.

“He took the police report and Mrs. Blackwood’s interview at the division police office I retrieved for him and nothing more.” The blonde woman shrugged.

“And now she’s in prison for the rest of her life.” Lilith looked down, her features etched with pain.

“You’re the lover, aren’t you?” The blonde said suddenly. “I saw you in the gallery when I ran an errand to the courthouse. You’re the mysterious paramour the prosecutor spoke of, the reason she was being blackmailed.” She held the file tightly in her grasp.

Lilith could only nod, her eyes darting around the room as she bit her lip. Perhaps she’d misread the girl’s interest earlier. She retrieved her bag, thinking to make a quick escape if needed.

“My boss was appalled, disgusted even. Honestly I think that led to his lack of care or concern on the part of Mrs. Blackwood. But I found her to be brave. She never wavered from her story, even after hours of questioning by the police. Yes, I read her file.” Lilith met her eyes, saw the compassion and maybe a bit of intrigue there. “It’s impossible to predict who you’ll fall in love with, isn’t it?”

“Indeed it is.” The brunette turned to go, thinking of how she could possibly acquire the casefile from courthouse records.

“Oh, here, just a moment,” she said as Lilith was opening the door. “We have several copies, and he won’t miss this file.”

She held out the folder, and Lilith took it from her before she changed her mind.

“Perhaps if it doesn’t work out with Mrs. Blackwood we could see each other again?”

Lilith knew her days of flirting and one off dates were over as soon as she’d met Zelda. The challenge, the hunt, the game were nothing when you had someone in your life you truly loved, even if Lilith hadn’t always been sure Zelda had returned her feelings. Her friends in New York had accused her of preparing to join a nunnery when she’d returned from her book tour, but she’d only laughed them off, thinking she’d bide her time just a while before the infatuation with the fiery beauty would wear off. The brief meetings they’d managed only fanned the flames, and soon she found she couldn’t get enough of Zelda Spellman. She couldn’t quit her if she tried now.

Smirking, Lilith rolled her eyes, letting the door close behind her.

Hurrying to her flat, Lilith hailed a taxi and resisted opening the file while she was in public. She did not want the distractions of the city to deter her from thoroughly examining its contents.

Dropping her bag onto a chair as she bolted the door, she laid the file on the breakfast table as she put on the kettle, thinking a cup of tea might settle her nerves as she read the record of Zelda’s police interview and her solicitor’s notes. The water made its way to a boil, and Lilith thought back on her conversation with the secretary. *No investigation, no further inquiries. They’d made up their minds about her guilt and that was clearly that.*

Thumbing through the paperwork, Lilith knew she had to pay Zelda a visit, had to hear the truth, because the case against her was open and closed according to the information she held in her hands now. And for all Lilith knew Faustus had planned it this way all along.

She arrived at Holloway Prison just as visiting hours had begun, and she waited, clutching her bag before submitting to be searched upon entry. Feeling humiliated when the guard ran his hands up and down her legs, frisking her while grinning widely, Lilith reminded herself that this was nothing compared to what Zelda was experiencing so she clenched her teeth, clamping her mouth shut even when he whispered ungodly things in her ear while his hand still clasped her thigh. Shoving her hands in her pockets when she was issued a visitors ID badge, she followed the small group to the waiting area until Zelda was brought from her cell.

The shuffling of feet brought Lilith's attention to the doorway, the chatter around her dying as they all witnessed the prisoners being assembled in a line, their handcuffs and shackles removed. All except Zelda, which Lilith assumed was because of her charges. Murderers didn't experience even a bit of freedom as they wandered among their visitors.

Indicating where she should sit, Lilith moved to a metal chair bolted to the floor, the guard accompanying Zelda kindly helping her to her seat. The redhead smiled up at him, and he patted her on the shoulder.

"No touching, no passing anything to the prisoner, not even food," he said loudly as he began circulating the room.

Zelda appeared even more gaunt and withdrawn than Lilith had seen her in the courtroom just weeks before. The grey uniform dress she wore swallowed her whole, her figure hidden beneath the misshapen fabric. Her hair hung in loose strands about her face, her skin pale and pinched with dark circles under her glassy emerald eyes. Lilith longed to push the hair back behind her ear, to feel the silky red locks again, so she looked around and chanced reaching up to slide the hair away from Zelda's face.

"Don't, they'll make you leave," Zelda whispered, even as she leaned into Lilith's brief touch. "I don't want you to go, my darling."

"Nor do I, love," Lilith whispered back as she drew back her hand, but not before Zelda grabbed it, squeezing briefly before she let it drop.

Knowing the time they had was precious, Lilith placed the file on the table between them. Zelda looked on it curiously, then knowingly as Lilith opened it and spread the various

documents over the space.

“You’ve been to see my lawyer,” she said simply. “How did you get the file?”

“Let’s just say you have a sympathizer working for that sad excuse for an attorney.” Lilith smiled, risking another squeeze of Zelda’s hand. “I’ve had a chance to look over the case against you, and his defense, minimal as it was.”

She continued, stating the facts as the police starkly described in their report. “One Lucifer Morningstar, stabbed at the hand of Zelda Spellman Blackwood of 61 Cherrington Hill. Stocking found outside, bound into two knots, another found under desk blotter.” Zelda listened intently until she suddenly interrupted Lilith’s recitation.

“Wait a moment, repeat that last part again.” She gripped the metal table, her knuckles white against the silver.

Lilith went on, “The victim entered the residence through the door, although no key was found on his person. No foul play is suspected in his presence, other than the accusation of blackmail which.....”

“He came in from the garden, he followed me.” Zelda was indignant. “I told the police innumerable times how he followed me.”

“That didn’t suit their case, and they must have proved he entered that way somehow.” She shuffled through the documents on the table, unable to locate any proof that Morningstar had entered the flat through the door.

“They think I let him in!” Her voice rising, Zelda’s eyes burned with anger, a flush crossing her cheeks as she realized what the police had done. “I didn’t, Lilith, I swear it happened the way I told you!”

“I believe you, darling,” the dark-haired woman whispered, confusion filling her mind now. “Where would they have gotten the idea you had let him in?”

Zelda fixed her gaze on her hands, worrying her lip between her teeth.

“I know who gave them that idea, and so do you, Zelda.” She looked into the eyes of her lover as she glanced up. They both spoke at once. “Faustus.”

Both of them went silent, Zelda biting her thumbnail, her eyes traveling from the handcuffs on her wrists to the shackles on her ankles. Lilith shook her head, wondering exactly how much of the report before them was Faustus’s doing. *If he lied about the door, how many other lies did he tell?* She recalled a moment during the Inspector’s visit to their flat, a split second of near glee she’d spied on his face before he hid it away. She had known then he was up to something.

Zelda was turning the documents over as she skimmed them, a gasp leaving her as she read. “It didn’t happen this way. Not at all. And I would have never known that Faustus had lied unless you....” Her voice drifted off. She stared at the woman before her, seeing her in a brand new light.

“You did all this for me?” Zelda asked incredulously. It was then that visiting hours were called, their time being done. The kindly guard made his way to Zelda’s side.

Lowering her voice to a whisper again, Lilith replied, “Yes, my love. And I’d do it again.”

His hand under her arm, the officer lifted Zelda from the chair.

“I will see you soon, Zelda. I promise you that,” Lilith said firmly, and Zelda looked back over her shoulder as she was led away, a fire in her eyes now, a fire of anger and hope.

After carefully considering her options, Lilith decided to enlist Chief Inspector Hubbard on her next journey. Despite his cool intentions toward Zelda that long ago morning when Lilith

had arrived at their flat, she saw in him someone who would see the logic in her reasoning, if only to give her an audience.

He greeted her kindly when she entered his office a few days later, offering her a cup of tea which she declined. Sitting behind a battered desk, he twirled his mustache as she laid out her case.

“Don’t you think that perhaps you may be blinded by your feelings for Mrs. Blackwood? You might be looking for reasons to doubt her guilt because of some devotion to her?” He sipped from his teacup, dabbing his mouth with his handkerchief as he placed his cup on the saucer. “Mind you, I had my own apprehension as to her guilt, but seeing the evidence stacked against her....”

“But in her interview she held to her story; he stole in behind her while she answered the phone, her husband calling at the precise moment her would-be killer stalked behind her.” Lilith stood and paced the small office. “Doesn’t that strike you as a bit convenient?”

“What of her willingness to surrender, to give herself up and be arrested?” he said, his eyes following her like a tennis match.

“Did she ever admit her own guilt? No. Did she admit to killing him? Yes, certainly she killed him. Was she under duress when it occurred? Was it self-defense? Certainly. She doesn’t deserve a life sentence for the accidental killing of a man who tried to strangle her.” Lilith stopped and looked him dead on. “Perhaps she surrendered because she thought she’d receive a fair hearing, but the more I find out about this case, the more I see that her guilt was determined long before she stepped into the dock in that courtroom.”

He took a deep breath, letting it out slowly as he regarded the woman in front of him. Clearly she harbored a constancy for Mrs. Blackwood, but she had persuasiveness about her, and he had his own cards up his sleeve. He might could kill two birds with one stone if he went along with her.

The Inspector agreed to accompany her, having her go on ahead as he had to take care of some other business first. Lilith caught sight of Faustus entering his building as her taxi approached.

Lilith rang the doorbell just as he was opening his briefcase, so he quickly covered it with a blanket and let her in. She glanced around, noticing he'd been sleeping on the couch, the bedroom door closed.

"Oh, hello, Lilith," said Faustus, a look of disgust on his face.

"Faustus," she greeted him. "Have you been to see Zelda?"

"Not since the trial. She's in there for the duration, so I haven't hurried over to visit." He lit a cigarette and poured himself a drink.

"That's why I'm here. You'd do anything to have her freed, right?" He looked at her strangely.

"There's nothing else to be done now, we've done it all." He said firmly.

"I've been thinking. What if you tell them a different story now, say you remember something?" Her eyes gleamed.

"What, what are you getting at?" He was obviously irritated.

"The prosecution accused Zelda of telling one lie after another and the jury believed it." Lilith paced as she began to explain herself. "Her case hinged on a few points and if you can convince the police of your story, perhaps the tide would turn in Zelda's favor and they'll believe she wasn't lying after all."

"I'm not sure I understand your meaning. Change my story? The police aren't likely to believe me." He pondered this.

“Faustus, listen, I’ve been writing this stuff for years. I’ve figured out something for you to tell them.”

“Let’s take these points one at a time.” Lilith continued, moving to the French doors facing the garden. “First, there’s the matter of how the police think Morningstar got in. They think Zelda let him in. Suppose you tell them Zelda always left the French doors unlocked.”

“How would he know to come in that way?” Faustus countered.

“You could say you told him.” Lilith quickly responded.

“And how would I have done that? I haven’t seen Morningstar in twenty years.”

“Faustus, he’s dead, use that to our advantage. You can say anything you like about him now. You could even say you met somewhere and planned this whole thing together.” Lilith held her breath as she said this, hoping against hope Faustus would flinch.

“Planned it? Are you saying I planned for Morningstar to come here that night and blackmail her?”

“No, not at all. You wanted him to kill her.” Lilith turned her back on him as she said it.

“Kill Zelda? Whyever would I do that?”

“Because that’s what she said. He followed her in from walking her dog and tried to strangle her.” Propping herself on the desk, she crossed her arms over her body. “Don’t you see, if you support her and what she says, she could get a new trial.”

“What about your bracelet? A man doesn’t kill the person he’s trying to blackmail; that doesn’t make sense.”

Nodding, Lilith began pacing again. “That point nagged at me for a while too but I’ve got it sorted.”

Faustus cocked his head, waiting for her to continue.

“You tell them you stole her handbag yourself because you wanted to see the bracelet I’d given her, wanted to know what she was so closely guarding. And when you did see it made you furious so you decided to teach her a lesson, so you wrote those blackmail notes! Nobody can prove you didn’t do it. You could also say you never saw Morningstar at Victoria Station; you just invented that story to tie him to the bracelet. Don’t you see how easily it all fits together?” Lilith’s eyes flashed as she spoke, and how it appeared Faustus leaned into the tale she was spinning.

“But what about the bracelet, it was found in the man’s pocket.” Now Faustus grinned as it seemed he could counter her every point.

“You put it there.”

Dubiously, Faustus laughed as he replied, “And when would I have done that?”

“Before the police arrived, and you also planted the stockings at the same time,” Lilith said as she moved back to the desk.

The next question gave Lilith pause, and she bit her lip as he asked.

“But, Lilith, why should I want anybody to kill Zelda?”

“I know, Faustus, it’s tough for us to see because we both,” she looked down, hoping her performance was convincing. “We both love her.”

She moved to stand before him. “But we need a reason now, badly. She’ll never be free otherwise.”

“I don’t see how I can help you.”

“Well, let’s take a motive that’s as old as time; had Zelda made a will?”

“I suppose she had.”

“There’s your reason then, Faustus!” She said.

“But husbands and wives leave money to each other everyday without murdering each other. The police wouldn’t believe that at all. They’ll just think I’m trying to save my wife. Where’s your explanation then?”

“Isn’t that reason enough? Isn’t it worth it?” Lilith began to pace again. “They can’t hang you for a murder that never came off, the most you’d get would be a few years in prison.”

“Well thanks so much,” said Faustus with a roll of his eyes.

“A small price to pay for keeping her out of prison for life.” Lilith stated angrily.

“That’s all well and good coming from you, Lilith. She wouldn’t be in this position at all if it weren’t for you; it was her *association* with you that lost her the sympathy of the jury.” Lilith looked down again. “And how could I convince anyone that I persuaded Morningstar to do this, what could I use to talk him into it?”

“You offered him money.”

“What money?” Faustus said with disgust. “I have no money.”

“Yes, yes you do. You’d have had Zelda’s money.”

“It would’ve been months before I could touch that, the will would’ve had to have been probated and that takes time. No one commits a murder on credit. I’m afraid you’re going to have to do better than that.”

The entry door slammed shut as they looked at each other suddenly, and a knock on the door sent Lilith scrambling as she went to hide in the bedroom. She knew it was the Chief Inspector, come to play his part in this drama. Settling on the bed, she felt something slide toward her, a case of some sort. Lifting the blanket covering it, she discovered the briefcase Faustus had hidden earlier. She overheard him asking after Zelda, and then listened as he went about telling his true motivation for coming.

“There was a robbery at a factory in Leeds, a rather large sum of money in single pound notes was taken and all police divisions were asked to be on the lookout for large sums of money being spent. We were called to a local garage where you had recently settled your account, uh, six hundred pounds I do believe.” He pulled out his notebook, thumbing through til he found the page he wanted.

“Well, you see, I just happened to have cash on me so I thought I’d take care of it, simple as that.” Faustus sat on the edge of the sofa, staring up at the officer in all innocence.

“Have you only just drawn this money from your bank account, then?”

“No, did you go by my bank and inquire about it?”

“I’m afraid I did, but I didn’t want to trouble you about such a small matter. They didn’t give me any information though, their records are so closely guarded.” He took out his pipe, indicating he would like to smoke and Faustus nodded his assent. “Where did you get the money then?”

“Is that really any of your business?”

“It is if you’re receiving stolen money and I shan’t want to think that of you, but how can I know otherwise unless you tell me.”

Faustus walked behind the desk, removing his bank book, laying it out so the Chief could see his withdrawals.

“You can see I’ve withdrawn a small amount each week for a matter of months.” Faustus shrugged. “No stolen money then.”

Lilith had been turning the locks on the briefcase, searching frantically for the correct combination when suddenly both locks popped open. Lifting the lid, she found dozens of stacks of single pound notes, all neatly banded together.

She rose from the bed, carrying the case in her hands as she opened the bedroom door she’d so hastily closed.

“Inspector, I think I have the money in question here.” She laid the case on the desk, and the Inspector removed a stack, thumbing through to count it.

Faustus narrowed his eyes at Lilith as she clasped her hands behind her back so he wouldn’t see them shaking. She felt she had found the smoking gun.

“Ah, yes, here we are.” He turned to Faustus. “You see contrary to public belief we really can trace sets of bills back to their origination. The serial numbers on these notes were removed from your bank at the same time as some pound notes found on the dead man. Do you know anything about this?”

“Suppose he frequented the same bank as myself. Or he received change containing these bills after I’d paid off some debt at the same establishment? This means nothing.” Faustus shook his head.

The Inspector cocked his head in acknowledgement of both points, his hands raised.
“Circumstantial at best, if that were only fact in question here.”

It was Lilith’s turn to smile now, and she sat down, allowing the Inspector to speak.

“We found something quite odd about the dead man’s shoes. You claimed he came in through the front door, that your wife let him in.” Lilith glared at Faustus, now knowing he had fed the police a lie. “But his shoes told us otherwise.”

Faustus moved to stand by the French doors, his back to the two of them.

“You see, sir, Ms. Halliday pointed out to us a photograph we’d taken that evening as she went through our evidence. The carpet by the door leading to your garden was quite soiled. A rainstorm had occurred just before Mrs. Blackwood had gone for her nightly walk, and the ground had become muddied. Even the brick walkway was wet with several puddles, and with the cool night air the water would have stayed on your carpet for hours.” He held up the photograph, where a pair of a woman’s footprints, a dog’s prints and two large footprints were discovered.

“His shoes were clean though, there was no mud on them,” Faustus blurted out.

“Yes, that’s true, but the inside of his pants were coated in mud and very damp.” It was then the Chief smiled. “Tell me, Mr. Blackwood, how did you come to know the condition of the dead man’s shoes?”

“Why, I -- well, I did see them as I walked into the flat that evening,” Faustus stumbled, realizing in his indignation he had overstepped.

“In comforting your wife, taking care of her, calling the police, in doing all of that, you just happen to look closely at the dead man’s shoes?” the officer shook his head. “I’m afraid, sir, that we have quite a bit more to talk over. Would you accompany me down to the division office?”

Faustus's mouth dropped open.

“And I'll give you the same warning I gave your wife; anything you tell us now will be written down and possibly used as evidence against you.”

Lilith let out a breath she'd been holding since Faustus tripped himself up, thinking she should go and see Zelda, to give her this bit of hope to cling on to. She followed the men outside, climbing into her own taxi and allowing herself a moment of congratulations and pride.

Epilogue

Leaning against the chain link fence, Lilith smoked a cigarette while she waited for the outer gate to open. Her eyes were hidden behind dark sunglasses, and she wore her dark leather coat, collar pulled up against the cold.

While the new evidence was presented to Zelda's solicitor and brought before the court, Lilith used the time to sketch out her own version of this tale, only changing the characters to make none of them recognizable. She thought to ask her editor to let this one sit shelved for a while, to let the furor of the case die down before it was released. Ever the mystery writer, she wouldn't turn down the chance to write about the machinations Faustus had employed in nearly killing his wife.

Faustus's trial would begin within a week, and Lilith planned to be long gone soon after Zelda testified against him, with the flame haired woman by her side this time. The prosecutor assured her Faustus would do time for conspiracy, and she tried to be satisfied with that. *There truly is no perfect murder, but he very closely got away with it*, she thought as the gates slowly swung to the right.

And there stood Zelda. She was thinner, her hair was much longer, coiffed into a chignon at her neck, and she looked every inch the regal woman that had approached Lilith in the bar two years before, a flirtatious arch of her brow apparent even now.

“Are you my escort back to civilization, Ms. Halliday?” She swung her hips a bit more as she approached Lilith’s side.

“If you’ll have me, Mrs. Blackwood,” Lilith drawled.

“Oh yes, I’ll have you,” Zelda said playfully. “I’ll have you again and again.”

“God, yes,” Lilith shivered at the very idea.

“And it’s Spellman now. I put in for a divorce weeks ago.” Zelda said firmly.

Lilith nodded. She indicated the taxi she had waiting, and they both climbed in.

“Where to?” Lilith asked as she pulled Zelda to her side, her other hand resting on the woman’s knee, and the red-haired woman sank into her embrace, resting her head on Lilith’s shoulder.

“Anywhere with you, my love,” she murmured, making sure the driver’s eyes were on the road before she turned Lilith’s face toward hers and kissed her for all she was worth.

End Notes

I'd love to know what you think. <3

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