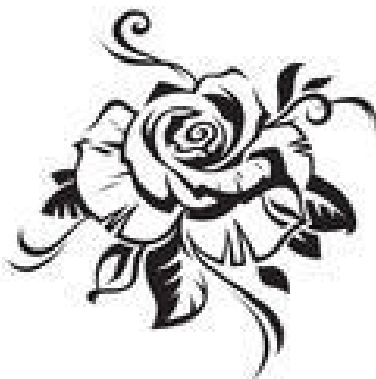


A Beautiful Scent



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Glasgow

The rain poured down, battering the busy streets of Glasgow. Skye Montgomery sat in the back of a black Daimler, watching the blurred lights of the city go by. She was deeply worried. Her father had fallen ill last month, and the doctors were skeptical of his recovery. If he were to pass away, the Montgomery fortune would pass to her elder brother, James, and lord knows how he would gamble it away.

“You aight ma’am?” came Alaister’s voice from the front of the car. Alaister’s family had been loyal servants of the Montgomerys for as long as anyone could remember. His grandfather served Skye’s grandmother, his father her father, and now he served her.

“Oh, I’m alright. It’s father and James that I worry for.” Skye sighed.

“Don’t worry ma’am. I’m sure e’rything ‘ll turn out just fine.” He replied, in what was clearly his attempt at being sincere. However, everything with Alaister was always far too happy to be somber.

“Thank you, Alaister. You’re always a refreshing ray of sunshine.” the blue-eyed girl smiled. But as she looked back out the window, through the pouring rain, she couldn’t help but feel a stab of unease.

A beautiful scent

Twenty minutes later, the car pulled into the driveway of a large manor in the countryside. Two servants rushed over to help Skye out of the car. At the door, she was greeted by Duchess Morag Laird, famously rich socialite, and her friend since childhood. "Hello, dahling!" She smiled, kissing Skye on the cheek. "It's been far too long! Come in, come in." The foyer of the Laird manor opened into a large living room, one of many in the house. Inside was Morag's eight year old son, Lachlan, and her much older husband, Stuart Laird.

"Miss Montgomery," nodded Duke Laird, lowering his newspaper.

"Duke," she replied with a small curtesy. The child said nothing, merely stared at her, and fiddled with a pair of gloves.

He reminded her of James when he was younger. James, the gambling, her father, the illness... She found her mind drifting.

"Well then!" Morag grinned, clasping her hands together. "Skye, won't you come and taste the food for the party?"

"Oh, of course." Skye replied, jerked out of her thoughts.

"Well then, right through here," the Duchess smiled, grabbing the brunette's arm and leading her through the manor to a large kitchen, where Barney, the head

chef, was busy with preparations for the party. As he always did, he stopped to let Skye taste some of the cake batter. However, instead of staying, Morag lead her through a large double door into the acres of garden. A short walk later, they came to a large, beautifully kept rose garden. A delicate scent hung in the air. Morag took a deep breath. "Do you smell that, Skye?" she asked.

"The roses? Yes, they're lovely," she replied. "But, why have you brought me here? I thought I was tasting the food?"

"Oh, yes," the taller woman laughed. "No, I love the food. I hardly need a second opinion. I was just so excited to show you my little garden. I'm having a specialist from Peru come in. He's going to make me a perfume out of these very roses. I was wondering if you wanted any?"

"Yes! Of course I'd like some!" Skye said, clasping her hands. "They smell lovely! What woman wouldn't want to smell of roses?"

"Exactly!" Morag exclaimed. And so, though the two hadn't seen each other in years, they sat in the garden and talked for hours, as though no time had passed.

Gossip Girls

The sun was setting, and the manor was crowded with guests. Skye stood towards the corner of the room, sipping wine and mingling with the social elite. Morag was fawning over the perfume specialist, and the Duke was talking with Lachlan. These types of events had never been her kind of place, but she was hoping to meet someone who could recommend a doctor for her father. She glanced over at Alaister, who stood at the door. He shot her a reassuring smile, something that always lifted her spirits. She made her way over to talk to him, but was stopped by a small group of women. They looked to be in their thirties, but were gossiping amongst themselves like teenagers. At the front of the group was a blonde woman, whom Skye recognized from a few family reunions as Myra Lusk, one of her many cousins. “Skye!” Myra exclaimed. She smiled from ear to ear, but it was cold and mocking.

“Myra,” Skye replied, giving a slight curtsy. The women with Myra were not smiling. In fact, they were glaring daggers at Skye. “Can I help you?” she asked, slightly baffled.

“No, we just wanted to say hello,” the blonde smiled again, as the entire group burst into a fit of laughter.

“Right then...” Skye made to walk around the women, but they blocked her way again.

“You’re father is ill, isn’t he?” asked a raven-haired girl of about fourteen, who Skye hadn’t noticed. This must be Thana, Myra’s daughter. She greatly reminded Skye of a snake preparing to strike.

“Yes, but he’s being treated. He shall be well by winter.” Skye replied, drawing herself up taller. “Now, if you will excuse me,” she pushed her way through the group, over to Alaister. She reached him just as there was a scream from outside.

A Murder

All the guests had been standing outside for almost ten minutes. Some were weeping, some seemed about to collapse, and some just stood there with their mouths agape. They were all gathered around a blonde man, who was lying in the gravel of the semi-circle drive, staring up at the clouds. But the life was gone from his eyes, and the gravel around him was soaked in blood. “Stuart! Oh, my poor, poor Stuart,” sobbed Morag, kneeling on the ground with his head on her lap. Lachlan sat beside her, sobbing into her shoulder.

“But how did it happen?” Alaister wondered aloud, looking around.

“Maybe he fell...” someone said, and everyone turned to look at the upper story windows, but they were locked.

“He was murdered!” came a cry from the back of the crowd, and everyone turned to look at the speaker, Donna, Morag’s handmaiden. “He was murdered in cold blood!” she exclaimed. “The knife, the knife in the kitchen is bloody!” A collective gasp went up.

“Let’s not get too hasty,” Myra cautioned, looking around her. “The knife could easily be bloody from slicing meat, and even if I did believe that it was the *dear* duke’s blood, I must ask, how did you know there was blood on the knife? Did you not come rushing as soon as you heard the shout?” she asked, her voice accusatory.

“Actually, I didn’t ma’am. I-I didn’t think it was anything until Ellen came and got me. And I didn’t think the knife was anything until... un-until...” she looked at Stuart and broke down crying once again.

“I’m going to go look at this knife.” Skye declared. “Someone call the police.”

Morag nodded, and ran into the house. “And what makes you think you’re suddenly a detective?” Thana asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I don’t,” Skye said, lifting her chin. Thana was really starting to annoy her. “But Duke Laird was a good man, and if I can, I’d like to help find whoever did this to him.” Thana opened her mouth to respond, but Skye was already at the manor door, with Alaister at her side.

Roses

Skye and Alaister stood in the kitchen. A sweet smell hung in the air, and dirty dishes from the party lay everywhere. However, mixed in among some dirty cutlery waiting to be washed, was a large, bloody kitchen knife, as Donna had said. “Barney,” Skye called, “do you know why this knife is bloody? Did you use it to cut raw meat?”

“No, ma’am,” Barney replied, wringing his hands. “I only use that knife for really special occasions. It’s one of the sharpest I own ma’am.”

“Yes, it is, isn’t it, Barney?” Skye questioned, an eyebrow raising in suspicion. “And you always have access to these knives, do you not?”

“Yes, sir, me and the rest of the kitchen staff. B-but I promise you, none of us did it!” The chef proclaimed.

“Ah, don't worry mate! We just has to go down all lines of investigation,” Alaister said reassuringly, clapping the larger man on the back. “We know you didn't do it.”

Skye's calm expression flickered. She knew the kitchen staff were suspects, and could very well have done it. People would do anything for money.

“Alaister, a word?” She asked, beckoning him to the side and dropping her voice low. “Alaister, he could be a murder. We don't know that he didn't do it.”

“I know that ma'am, just trying to keep people from panickin' is all,” the older man assured her.

“Thank you,” Skye sighed. “I want to get out of here as soon as possible. This smell is becoming overpowering.” She complained. The sweet smell was dominating her senses.

“Yeah, where's that comin' from?” Alaister wondered aloud.

“I'm not sure...” Skye replied, inhaling the scent once more.

“Doesn't it smell like...” Alaister started, but Skye had already finished his sentence. “Roses.”

A Cut Wire

“It smells of roses.” Skye said, her eyes widening.

“Yes... And?” Alaister asked, confused.

“Alaister, Morag wears rose perfume.” She told him, a sense of urgency in her stomach.

“No... But- you don't think she would- she can't 'ave... She couldn't kill someone!” He exclaimed, his face showing a hundred different expressions at once.

“I don't know... But this makes her a high-ranking suspect,” she muttered. “We need the police. This is too serious for us.”

At exactly that moment, Morag burst into the room. "Someone's cut the wires on all the phones!" She cried, terror in her face.

"What?!" Skye shrieked, charging past her. "Let me see." Sure enough, every phone in the house had had its cable cut.

"What are we to do?" Donna asked, panic evident on her face. Morag was hugging Lachlan tightly, and Myra was doing the same to Thana, though she appeared to be trying to escape her mother's grasp. At that moment, Skye decided something. She was going to solve this, no matter what. She was going to do at least one thing, even if she couldn't save her father. "I'm solving this. Right now." She muttered.

"Alaister, gather the guests together in the lounge. Find someone young and fast and send them into town to fetch the police." She instructed. "I've got evidence to gather."

Confessions

After a few hours, night had fallen. Skye and Alaister had been investigating the crime scene, kitchen, and just about everywhere else in the house. The guests had gathered in the living room, as requested. Skye stood at the front of the room. "There is a murderer among us." She announced. "And I am going to get answers. Let's start with..." She looked around the room before her eyes fell on a redhead.

"Donna! The maid." She smiled, clasping her hands. "Donna, you didn't come running when you heard the shout, did you?"

"No ma'am. I thought it-" Skye cut her off.

"Why is that, Donna? Did you think it not important? Or were you busy putting the knife back in the kitchen?" A collective gasp rose from the guests.

"No, I-"

"Well, if you noticed the knife, you saw who put it there, didn't you? There was someone out of place in the kitchen, wasn't there?"

"I-I'm sorry ma'am, I wasn't really focusing..."

"Oh come on, one person?" W-well I think I saw someone in a red dress, or maybe it was pink?"

"Well, that's something isn't it?" Skye smiled. So, we know there was someone in a pinkish red dress out place in the kitchen today. Now, who here is wearing a red or pink dress? Morag and Myra, of course. Why don't you two come up here?" The brunette beckoned. The two blondes exchanged glances before standing up. "So, Myra. You were quite close with the duke, weren't you?" She began.

"Well, our parents are close so-"

"Close enough to be on his will?"

"What? No, I-" Myra started, but Skye interrupted her, holding up stack of parchment.

"Found it in the library." She said. I give to you, the will of Duke Stuart J. Laird. "Let's see here..." She began to scan the first page. "Ah, here you are, right On the first page. 'I leave to my childhood friend, Myra Lusk, my mother's set of jewelry.'" She read aloud. "You know that's worth a lot of money, don't you Myra? And that gives you motive. Not to mention you're wearing the right dress."

Myra opened her mouth to protest, but Skye had already moved on. "Morag, Morag, Morag," she sighed, shaking her head. "You smell lovely, by the way," the brunette added quickly.

"Oh, thank you. It's the perfume." Morag said, giving a small smile.

"Yes, the perfume." Skye shook her head. "it's a lovely scent, but why was it all over the driveway and the kitchen? You seem to have been at both of the places, because the scent still hasn't faded.

However, I've solved part of this murder. You see, there was no way Morag could have had time to restore the knife to the kitchen after the murder. She was with Stuart seconds after he shouted. No, it

had to be someone who could easily sneak in the back, like, Myra."

"What? No!" Myra protested. I was there the whole time!"

"She was." Barney confirmed. "She stood next to me." Skye sighed. "Well who wasn't there besides Donna?" She asked. A silence fell over the room before Lachlan raised a silent finger at Thanas.

"Who, me?" The black haired girl laughed. "That's ridiculous. I'm just a kid."

"But are you?" Skye questioned. "I think you might just look very young for your age."

Thana laughed again, but it sounded forced this time. "That's ridiculous." She said, glaring at Skye.

"How old is she, Myra?" Skye asked, narrowing her eyes." Myra shook her head.

"She's 14. She's 14" she muttered.

"Well of course she is, Myra. Any older and she would have been born almost five years before you were married."

Myra shook her head over and over again.

"She's 14. She's 14. She's 14. She's 14. She's 19"

She finally whispered. Thana let out a guttural howl and lunged for her mother. Luckily, Barney grabbed her by the arms and restrained her.

"How dare you?!" Thana howled. "Everything I did was for you! I killed the Duke so you could have the jewelry! Selling it would have made us rich! Rich beyond our wildest dreams! I even framed his wife! I went through all the trouble to make sure all the cords were cut! All so you could be happy!"

She screamed again and began fighting against Barney trying to claw at her mother, who had broken down in sobs. Just as Skye was sure Barney could hold on no longer, that Thana would harm, or even kill Myra, the sound of police cars came from outside. A swarm of policemen came in with handcuffs and batons. They were everywhere, everywhere, everywhere, fixing everything, handing out blankets

and whiskey. Hours went by in seconds, and suddenly, Thana and Myra were gone.

The End

In a blink of an eye, Thana was in a police car with Myra sitting in the front. Morag and Lachlan were swaddled in blankets, and all the guests were leaving. Skye stayed for another week, to support Morag and Lachlan. The day before she left the Laird manor to return to her own in Edinburgh, she received a message. It was from James and consisted of three words, but they were the best three words she ever

heard in her life. "Treatment is working,"