



The wrought iron bars of the fence surrounding Evanshire's Home for Neglected Girls were slick with that evening's rain, and chilled by the fog. Even so, Emily wrapped her hands tightly around them, ignoring the cold wetness, and let out a soft whistle through her teeth.

She waited patiently, as she did every night, for her best friend. But she didn't have to wait long. Almost immediately, a four-legged creature trotted forward in the gloom, its existence made visible only by the dim gas streetlamps above. It emerged from behind a tower of old shipping

crates, looking more like a shadowy monster from another world than a slender canine from the streets of London.

As the dog approached the fence, Emily could tell her friend Archie had gotten into even more trouble that day than yesterday, or the day before that. His fine brown-and-white coat was muddy, and his white paws were covered in black soot, as if he'd decided to crawl his way through the inside of a chimney like Simon, the tall, balding chimney sweep who came to the orphanage every month.

Emily held out her fingers through the bars and Archie licked them eagerly, his tongue lingering on her sore red knuckles as though he somehow knew the injury was for his benefit. How he knew, Emily had no idea. Dogs were just smart that way.

Because the rapping on Emily's knuckles *had* been for Archie's sake. At supper, she'd swiped a small piece of meat pie off her own plate, and while she managed to hide it in the pocket of her smock, Miss Evanshire saw the trail of crumbs across the table and assumed—rightly—that Emily

was to blame for the mess. Miss Evanshire had rapped Emily's knuckles with her cane and warned the girl that rats could be sent into her bed once they'd had enough of her crumbs.

But rats didn't scare Emily; the thought of not being able to see Archie did.

He whined and sniffed the girl's wrists while she scratched behind his ears. "Shhh, boy, quiet now." With her other hand she pulled out the smooshed meat pie and held it out through the bars. "Eat up, I've got to get to bed before someone notices I'm gone," she whispered, more to herself than to Archie, as he always had a habit of scarfing down his meal instead of savoring every bite.

Sure enough, the English pointer mutt finished his dinner in two gulps, hardly chewing the mushy, soft pastry. Emily bent down, her face pressed against the bars, arms threaded through them, and hugged her friend around his ashen neck. Her smock was dirty enough that no one would question the soot stains later.

How Emily wished she could give Archie a real hug and

play fetch, but she hadn't been able to do that for a year now. Not since he'd gotten too big to easily pass through the fence, and Emily had to make sure that he wasn't inside the grounds of Evanshire, lest he be caught by one of the caretakers—or worse, the old witch herself. So she'd let him out through the fence one day, knowing that, as dangerous as the streets of London were, at least out there he had a chance, while under Miss Evanshire's nose he would surely be sent to the pound.

Like Emily, Archie had no parents. He had been abandoned, just as she had. Except she'd found him in a shipping crate one day when she'd passed the docks on the way back from mass, whereas a constable had discovered a newborn Emily under a bench in Regent's Park. Emily had taken the shivering, tiny puppy and hid him in her coat. By some miracle she had managed to keep him hidden until he'd gotten too big for the attic, then too big to slip through the fence.

But even after she'd taken Archie outside the gate, he hadn't abandoned her. He came back every night,

even when there was no food to share several evenings in a row.

Archie did his best to lick away any final crumbs on her hands, his slippery pink tongue darting between her fingers to grab every last morsel.

“Good boy,” she murmured softly, stroking his neck and looping around to scratch under his chin. Archie’s soft brown eyes grew sleepy and content as he enjoyed her touch, until Emily finally had to pull away. “I’ll be back tomorrow,” she told him, as she did every night.

Reluctantly, and with one final look at the dog she’d raised since he was a little pup, Emily ducked under the hedges and crawled through the bushes of rhododendrons, their strong scent tickling her nose. Praying she wouldn’t sneeze, Emily scrambled to her feet and stuck to the shadowy corners of the grounds until she came to the back door. It was ajar and creaked loudly on its rusty hinges. She was confident, though, that no one would hear.

It was just before curfew, around the time when the groundskeeper, Mr. Duford, would be having a “special drink,” as he liked to call it, in the scullery. Emily didn’t say anything about his drink and he didn’t say a word about her using the back door so late. It was an unspoken mutual understanding between them.

She took the stairs two at a time and hurried down the hall, avoiding the floorboards that made the most noise, and finally slipped into the dormitory that she shared with five other girls.

“You’re in trouble,” came a singsong voice from the farthest bed, next to the window.

Emily shut the door behind her, nerves spiking as she whirled around and found her second least favorite person sitting on *her* bed. Lying on her stomach, feet in the air, Agatha wore a smug smile on her face.

“Get off my bed,” Emily snapped.

“Miss Evanshire already came for the head count, and you weren’t in your bed.”

Emily’s stomach shriveled and dropped like a stone.

“But . . . she’s early!” Emily protested, as if this fact alone were reason enough that she shouldn’t be punished for being out of bed at night.

Agatha raised her eyebrow at the stupidity of the declaration, knowing as well as Emily—and as well as any other girl at the orphanage—that this meant absolutely nothing. “She said she didn’t care if you were eaten by rats or taken away by Spring-Heeled Jack,” Agatha said, her lips curling into an even bigger, crueller smile.

Emily recoiled at the mention of the slender half devil, half man who was said to roam the streets of London frightening innocent young woman. The very idea of being anywhere near the awful creature with red eyes, who could leap over nine-foot-tall fences, was utterly terrifying.

Miss Evanshire’s heartlessness, on the other hand, wasn’t at all surprising. Out of all the girls, Emily was the one who the old woman hated most—she was sure of it.

Little Mary, one of the youngest girls, sidled up to Emily, tugging on Emily’s sleeve. “She came early to tell us a

couple would be coming tomorrow,” Mary informed, her green eyes wide and bright. “She said they want to adopt a girl as soon as possible!”

Emily wanted to be as excited and as hopeful as Mary, but she’d long since stopped hoping or dreaming of being adopted. After twelve years in the orphanage, watching couples come and go, taking the prettiest girls with soft curls and big blue eyes, Emily had simply stopped expecting a different, more beautiful life. She knew her future lay in a workhouse. In only a couple short years, she’d leave her little bed in this dank dormitory for an even worse bed in an even drearier room. Bruises, burns, and an empty belly would be her only proof of a long and endless day of work. In fact, her imagination would be all she’d have to keep her mind from going loopy from exhaustion and a never-ending ache in her bones.

But Emily refused to instill in the younger, newer girls the same sense of hopelessness she had, or the same acceptance. So she smiled and placed her hand on Mary’s strawberry-blond hair. “That’s so exciting.”

Agatha gave a very unladylike snort and hopped off Emily's bed. "Don't be daft. They'll do what every couple does. Come to look at us, compare us, throw around fancy words, then leave. Same as always."

Mary's gaze dropped to the floor, the light in her eyes vanishing like the flame on a candlewick.

"Don't worry, tomorrow will be different," Emily whispered in Mary's ear. "I can feel it."

Mary gave Emily a happy, shining, *hopeful* smile, and Emily tried to return it as best as she could, even though the lie twisted, painful and sharp, in her chest.