Hangman

**Prologue.**

*The noose.*
 All he could see was his future being taken away through that loop of rope. He didn’t see the hundreds of people gathered below him, nor did he hear their muffled shouting. Instead, he heard his heart pounding against his ribs and the torrent of blood rushing through his veins. Done. This is the end. Here, in Hale, Cheshire, *he was going to die*. He was born in this town, raised by it and ran it, but now when he needed it most, it had abandoned him. In just a few seconds, the rosy colour of his cheeks would be replaced by a white pallor and the blue hue within his irises would quickly fade.

**One month prior.**

 The air is infused with an assortment of food, perfume, cologne and hairspray. Laughter intermingles with live classical music, overpowering the gentle sound of snowflakes falling delicately outside.

 “May I please have your attention. Welcome ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to have you all gathered for the Grand opening of the Eva Bank! Unfortunately, my husband Richard, who you know as the lovely mayor Kingsley, is in a very important business meeting. Therefore, he will sadly not be joining us on this special night. However, I, Evangeline, will be more than honored to be his substitute this evening. I now present the key to the Eva Bank!”

 Evangeline gently lifted the large bronze key from the soft cushion that rested upon the top of the glass stand. She held it with such admiration, as if it were her new born. The crowd’s cheers filled the room, accompanied by Dom Perignon filled glasses clinking against one another in celebration. She turned back to the stand, placed the key on the red pillow and then faced the citizens again.

 “Let’s celebrate this wonderful milestone. It has been 20 years since the previous bank burned down in this spot. It was a tragedy; however we have finally risen from the ashes as a community, so let us embrace tonight! Enj--”

 Pitch black.
Darkness suddenly flooded the lobby for a moment and then promptly every stunning detail of the bank was visible again, along with women’s crisp white gloves fixing their voluminous soft curls and men’s glistening polished Oxfords.

 “Do not worry, it was probably a power outage caused by the piercing cold. You know how numbing the English winter’s are. In fact, I’m sure everyone is wishing they were lying on warm sand right now and soaking up the hot sun.” Evangeline laughed, but her frivolous reassurance was not enough to assure the party goers. They were completely still - paralyzed in fear. It was as if cement had been poured on everybody. Evangeline noticed that their gazes were not towards her, but rather past her. She turned around, which resulted in a matching horrified facial expression. There stood the glass stand and on it an *empty* red cushion.

 “Please stay calm. I, I will be right back - excuse me.” Evangeline was barely able to utter anything past her lips as she quickly made her way outside to the telephone booth. Trying not to slip on the iced sidewalk, she stepped inside the red oblong box, closed the door behind her and hurriedly dialed the sheriff’s number. She could see her rapid breath in the frosty air as it fogged up the glass.

 “Hello, Sheriff Stewart speaking.”

 “Hello, is the lieutenant there? This is Evangeline; I need to speak to my brother immediately.” Evangeline waited anxiously for Alex.

 “Evangeline, is everything alright?”

 “There’s no time for me to explain, please get to the Bank right away. I know you had important plans tonight, but this is an emergency.”

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 About half an hour had passed when Alex arrived. By then the guests had filed out, with only Evangeline and her friend Catherine left behind. Evangeline was surprised to see who accompanied Alex.

 “Hi Richard. Hello Alex. Eva, I will call you tomorrow, it has been a long night. I hope everything gets taken care of.” Catherine said, as she hugged Evangeline goodbye and left the bank, the sound of her heels clicking slowly fading away into the distance.

 “Richard ... I thought you were out of the city at your meeting?”

 “I felt very ill, so I called today to postpone the meeting until next week. I was going to attend tonight’s event, but realized it would be best to stay in and rest. I felt guilty for not even stopping by though, so I decided to come and just ran into Alex outside.”

 The three of them talked for while other men from the law enforcement arrived to inspect the premises.

 One of the officers approached Alex and handed him a bag containing what seemed to be evidence. “We found a black leather glove belonging to a male near the entrance. It’s made out of horsehide.”

 Evangeline looked at the glove in a strange way, catching Alex’s attention.

 “What is it Ev?”

 “It’s just that the glove looks very familiar, I think Richard has a pair like that.”

 “Well they are popular, I’m sure Richard isn’t the only man who owns them.” Alex replied, reassuring his sister, although some hesitance could be detected in his voice.

 “Alright, it’s fairly late, Eva and I are going to be on our way now.” said Richard. He shook Alex’s hand good bye. Evangeline hugged her brother and then left the bank.

 “Let’s walk home; I could use the fresh air after everything that has happened.” Evangeline said while gripping onto Richard’s arm. He freed his arm for a moment to reach into his pocket.

 “As much as I love this country, I can’t stand the winters. Let me get my gloves.”
He reached into his pockets, but only took out one glove.

 “Rich, where’s your second glove?”

 “I don’t know. I can’t find it ... maybe I lost it or misplaced it.”

 Evangeline gave Richard a questioning look, but then decided to dismiss any suspicion. She thought it would be foolish to assume anything, especially about her own husband. They continued walking in silence, both deep in thought.

 After approximately 15 minutes, they arrived at the steps of their humble abode. As they entered their warm house, they wiped the soles of their shoes against the mat and proceeded into the bedroom to change from their party attire.

 Richard noticed how worried Evangeline looked. “Honey, would you like anything to drink?”

 “You know my favourite – a glass of red Port please. Thanks Rich. I still can’t process what happened tonight. You seem so composed, but I just can’t relax.”

 “Eva, take a deep breath. Of course I’m concerned, but there is nothing we can do right now. Everything will be okay, stay positive darling.” Richard handed her the wine and poured himself a glass of his usual, White Bordeaux.

 They sat together on the loveseat and eventually Richard fell asleep. Evangeline however, struggled with insomnia that night. More questions plagued her mind as she stared out the window until dawn slowly seeped into the room.

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**A few weeks later.**

 Three consecutive knocks on the door - Evangeline knew it was her brother.

 “How are you Alex, how have you been?” She welcomed him inside with open arms and a warming smile. “Would you like anything to eat or drink?”

 Silence. The oxygen in the living room had suddenly been replaced with tension.

 “What’s wrong?” Evangeline could sense that something was troubling him.

 “Eva, you should sit down. I, I have some news. Is Richard here?”

 “No, he’s visiting his mother. You’re scaring me Alex, what is it?” She replied while easing herself onto the dining room chair. Alex sat down across the table as well and began to speak, however not once did he make eye contact with his sister.

 “Unfortunately the county department has found the individual responsible for the theft. You must be wondering why this is unfortunate, as it should be wonderful news. You see, all of the evidence seems to lead to one person, which is what makes this so difficult. The glove left behind at the bank and the access to the electrical box, which caused the power outage. The fact that your husband was in town when he should have been out of the city. He told you that he postponed the meeting the day of the bank opening, however Stewart spoke with Mr. Johnson, the man Richard was supposed to meet with, and Johson said that Richard moved the meeting the night before. This means-”

 “What are you trying to say?! If I understand correctly: you’re accusing my husband, the mayor, for the theft of the key to his own bank?”

 “I know this is absurd, but the evidence points to him. He must have had an alternate plan for the future of the bank. By stealing the key, he could have acquired the reward later on, or done something else that would result in obtaining a large sum of money. You’re aware that recently you have not been doing well financially and building the bank was not cheap either. Britain has been prosperous since World War II, the 40’s were very successful, but now we’re falling behind the other industrialized countries.”

 Evangeline heard every single syllable that was being said, but she couldn’t swallow even one. She didn’t know if she should be angry or sad, every emotion mixed with one another. It was as if her eyes filled with blood and her heart filled with tears.

 “That was the easier news to deliver, Eva. I can’t even bare to speak the following. Due to Richard being the mayor, the highest degree of punishment will be used. I tried to negotiate with the judge, but he said his decision is final.”

 “How many years has he been sentenced to?!” Evangeline cried out as salty paths started to run down her cheeks.

 “Ev, you don’t understand! The hanging will take place in a few days!”

 Evangeline felt a part of her die in that instant.

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**2 months later.**

 Vanilla-scented candles flickered in the dim living room as Evangeline walked over to the sofa with a box full of photographs of her and Richard. She settled onto the loveseat, stretching out her legs so the other half wouldn’t feel so empty and covered herself with her favourite burgundy cashmere blanket. She was about to look through her wedding photo album, but hesitated. She set her glass of White Bordeaux on the coaster, readjusted her cream silk robe, put her matching slippers on and walked over to the coat hanger. She thought it was too soon to put away any of Richard’s items; His three coats still hung untouched. She knew he must have a pack of Lucky Strikes in one of them. How ironic, she thought; she had argued with him for years about his smoking addiction, yet here she was about to smoke herself. She reached into his black coat, the one he had worn during the Eva Bank opening, but all she could find was his one glove. *The glove*. She now felt even more emotional. She searched the pockets of his dark green coat, but like she presumed, she did not find anything, since he barely wore it. Her last hope was his navy wool coat – his favourite one. She bought it for him a few years ago on his birthday. She reached into the left pocket – nothing. She reached into the right one and just as she thought there was nothing there, she noticed something felt odd. She reached deeper in and realized there was a hole in the pocket. As she slid her hand deeper into the space between the coat and the lining, she felt some kind of bundled material. The moment that Evangeline pulled the item out and saw what it was, she dropped it.

 There on the mahogany floor, laid Richard’s *second* glove.

 *Word count: 2000*