



Chapter 1

The night of the riots is kind of a blur. The push of hands and elbows and coats. The clicking of the gears. The falling ash and cold pavement stones beneath my feet. All of it mashed together, constantly moving, more like just little paintings of memories than actual solid knowledge.

It's all like that except for two things:

That night was the first time I saw the Well-Dressed Man.
And it was the last time I cried.

Between the two, everything else is just a long string of maybes.

Maybe Mom took me to the riot because she wanted the Gear to see the face of a child they were killing. Maybe she thought it would be warmer than our home. Maybe she was drunk. Why

else would you take a kid to a riot? A little kid that can't defend herself from flying bottles or constables on flesh horses or any of those machines the Gear uses to keep the lowlies in line. I don't remember Mom much. And who cares, really? She did it. That's what matters. She took me there. She took me to the shoving and the anger and the screaming and the people all around, pressing in so much that I couldn't breathe.

Someone told me once that it was the only time the Gear kept coal away from the lowlies. Something about keeping the city running, the machines ticking, and not having enough to keep the people warm. And that's when the riots came.

Like I said, I don't remember the riot much. Maybe it had just started. Maybe it had been going on for days. Maybe it was right. Maybe it was wrong. Probably not. But it was the only way us lowlies could be heard. Lots of angry faces. Fists and feet and ashfall. And the clop of hooves.

I never saw the flesh horses, but I was terrified of them. Mom always said if I saw a flesh horse to run—run, because it meant the constables were going to hurt the lowlies.

My bare feet ached from cold cobblestones. Slush lurked in the gutters, ready to splash on anyone too close. Being in the shouting crowd was the warmest I'd been in a long time. Except for my feet. I closed my eyes to soak in as much of the warmth as I could.

When I opened them, Mom was gone. The crowd pushed and shouted, and there was just people people people and hands and

hands and hips and coats and smoke and shouting and I couldn't breathe and then—

Then I fell out of the riot and into something else. I tumbled onto the cobbles. I cradled my head, expecting feet to smash down on me.

But no one touched me.

No boots kicked me. No legs pressed against me. No people at all. The voices, the shouting, they were still there, but crisp and distant.

I cracked open one eye. I still lay on the street, but there were no people around me. I opened both eyes.

I lay in a bubble of calm. No one stood here. No angry lowlies shook their fists. No constables threatened. A circle empty of anyone except me.

And him.

He wore a long black coat, not a single ash smear to be seen. No gull crap splattered his tall dark hat. And an iron leaf had been pinned to his lapel. And his face ...

I don't think I've ever seen anyone happier.

His raised, gloved hands welcomed the turmoil. He laughed, wild and free like a gear that just spins and spins with nothing holding it back.

And then he looked down at me. "What's this?" he asked. "A sprout. Such a delicate one should not be here. No, no." He clicked his tongue.

I scrambled to my feet. It was warmer in this strange bubble, but it wasn't the comfortable warm of steam. His eyes slid over me, hungry, but not in a way I could understand.

"My-my mother brought me," I stuttered.

"And what a horrible thing for your dam to have done. Can you not feel the conflict stirring, little one? Ah, here." He waved a hand at the crowd, and a path formed through the shoving forms. "Go now, sprout. Run on your little feet. We must preserve the children, mustn't we?" His smile felt wrong.

And that's when I named him in my head: The Well-Dressed Man.

I don't remember much more beyond that. I must have run down that alley of calm to the outer edges of the riot. And then I can recall just a few more paintings of what happened.

My mom lying dead in the street. She's got, like, a dent on her skull and blood coming out of her nose. It wasn't a pretty sight. I think that maybe there were constables nearby. I got that image in my brain. But I don't remember if I cried. I don't think I did. Not then.

And then Dad found me. I don't know where he'd been. Maybe he'd been at the riot too. Or maybe he'd been drunk at the pub. Maybe he'd been working, even. Trying to earn enough money for coal. Maybe.

He took me by the hand, and we walked through the streets. Maybe we talked. Hard to say. I don't think I was saying much.

The street was still cold under my toes. I think I said something about the cold. Maybe Dad said something back.

Yeah, there's a lot of maybes about that night.

But I remember when he brought me to the Gray Lady. It was dawn, and the newsboys were out. They screamed in their scratchy voices the *Bull's* headlines: "Countless Dead in Blood-bath! Coal Riots Terrify City!"

We approached one of the gray buildings that lined the street. Girls about my age and a little older raced out the door, laughing and shouting. I wondered why their hands were all black. It was like they'd been playing in coal. Mom always yelled at me for that. They sprinted down the street, one stopping just long enough to stick her tongue out at me and giggle.

Dad stopped at the door and knocked. A woman with gray skin opened it. "Yeah?" she asked.

"I have a girl for you," Dad answered.

"Don't need no more girls," she said.

"She doesn't have any parents," he said.

And I looked up at him. "Dad?" I asked. There was this funny weight on my chest. I didn't understand what was going on then.

I do now.

The Gray Lady ignored my question. "What makes you think I'll take her in?"

"This's an orphanage, right?" I remember Dad asking the question, but I can't remember anything about him. His face is gone.

His voice is gone. All I have left is the feel of his hand in mine.

And I pulled at his hand. “Dad? Let’s go home. Come on. Let’s go home.”

The Gray Lady finally looked at me. She wrinkled her nose. “She don’t look like much. I won’t pay for her.”

“Don’t have to. Just take her in.”

“Where’s her parents, then?”

“Her mother died last night in the coal riot. And her father’s killed himself in grief.”

A shock went through me. *Dad, you’re right here. You’re holding my hand. Mom’s dead. I saw her. But it’s okay. We’ve got each other, right? Two gears locked together, you and me. We can do anything.* I wanted to tell him, but I don’t think I said anything out loud. The pressure on my chest was getting worse.

“Oh?” the Gray Lady asked.

“Jumped in the river,” Dad answered.

“He won’t come back from that.”

“No. He won’t.”

“Well then. Girl. What’s your name?”

I wasn’t listening to the Gray Lady. I was staring up at Dad. He wouldn’t look at me, though. He held my hand. My bones seemed to creak he was holding onto me so tight.

“Girl!” the woman barked.

I finally looked up at her.

“What’s your name?”

“Patty Rinkin. Ma’am.”

“Ain’t none of my girls got last names. Name died with your folks. You’re just Patty now, got it?”

I looked at my dad. I tugged at his hand.

“Your dad’s not coming back from the river. Get in here. I’ll tell you the rules. Tomorrow you’ll start at the grindery.” She held out her hand.

I flung myself at Dad’s legs. I hung on. Wasn’t no way I was going with this Gray Lady. I had my dad. And I had my name. Patty Rinkin. It’s who I was, and he was my dad.

But fingers stronger than the gears themselves pried my hands off his legs. Arms bigger than anything I’d seen snatched me up. The woman held me fast.

Dad looked at me. I still can’t hear his voice, and I still can’t see his face, but his words are clearer than perfect water. “Be good, Patty. I’m sorry I couldn’t protect you.” And he turned and walked away. The people passing by on the street swallowed him up. He didn’t even look back.

I squirmed. I flailed. The Gray Lady didn’t let go. “You won’t see him again, girl. He’s gone. But he made sure you have a home. That’s better than most broken men.” She carried me into the orphanage.

That was the last time I cried.