

NOT THE MARRYING KIND

London, 1913

The photographer directs Marjorie to the costume room. 'Call me if you need any help,' he says, then returns to fiddling with a mahogany box atop a tripod.

Marjorie walks along a line of gowns that hang from a rail on the right-hand side. She runs a finger over velvets, satins and silks in colours that her mother would approve of - willow green, blush pink and periwinkle blue. Graceful and feminine. This portrait must attract the right kind of gentleman and secure her place in society, she reminds herself.

At the end of the room, she pauses, then turns to the opposite rail. She runs the same finger over chocolate-brown wool, olive flannel and gunmetal-grey suede. Her finger lingers, as if of its own accord, on a worsted serge in a russet weave. I wonder? she thinks. She takes the jacket, waistcoat and trousers and holds them up against herself, then grabs a white shirt and cravat before heading to the changing room. Her hands smooth the cloth, and she is surprised how determined and strong the fabric of men makes her feel.

She poses, chin up, in front of the painted garden backdrop.

'Oh no, Miss! That's a gentleman's suit,' the photographer laughs nervously.

The outfit gifts a comfort and protection that emboldens a new voice, one she has not heard before.

'I will not be changing.'

'Miss, it's not...proper.'

Marjorie is about to insist when she hears shouting in the street below: *Extra! Extra! Imprisonment with hard labour for Lilian Cownley, caught masquerading in men's attire! Read all about it!*

Marjorie crumples and withdraws, a familiar ache inside her. She returns in lavender taffeta and looks into the camera with eyes narrowed and shoulders hunched. Her message perfectly clear: I am not the marrying kind.