

Start

→ ANABELLA. Darling if that shocks you, I'd drop the curiosity where you stand. Your father poisoned every pond he passed. He left wreckage and desperation and depravity with his every step. And I defied him. *I* did. For you. Now I know that you think you're very modern, but darling...what I had to do for you. *That* was unheard of. Women do not leave their husbands, even when their husbands are philandering, ne'er-do-well erotic obsessives.

ADA. You said he left us.

ANABELLA. He did. To wander the world from bed to bed. And yet, if I had not acted in the way I did to protect you from him fully and completely, you would have been taken from me and forced into your father's life. I fought for you in the courts, in the press. And what did he do?

He died sick and alone, mocked and sunk in the thought that no one loved him enough to save him from himself. Does that sound heroic? The genius Romantic? And yet the world gives him power through obsession.

ADA. He doesn't have any power, he's dead.

ANABELLA. *That is* power. Dead a decade and still haunts us with rumors vile and sticky. He is a constant downpour.

ADA. He's gone. Why shield me from him any longer?

ANABELLA. Not from him. From his nature in you.

ADA. I know what they say about him.

ANABELLA. Good. It's all true. The darker the truer.

ADA. They say that he was great. Flawed and—yes—dark, but a great genius of our age.

ANABELLA. Do not idealize him.

ADA. That's what we do with genius, and I hope there is some of that genius in me. I would better like to be dark and genius, than sunny and useless.

ANABELLA. You underestimate the vileness of his damage. Do not think his darkness was part of his genius. It cut his genius short, and it will do the same to you if you do not brace against it.

*Ada hears this.*

ADA. It's words, Mother. Just words. It's not an attack, it's only a poem.

ANABELLA. A poem you thought was about you, I'm sure. They all think his poems are about *them*.

*That's exactly what Ada thought...*

Don't be an idiot, darling. It's about some shivering bit of flesh from before you were born. I'm sure he abandoned her as soon as the lines were penned. Like you. Paste your name in a few lines, call it love, and never be seen again. That was his general *modus operandi*.

ADA. What lines? My name in his lines?

*Will Anabella tell her the truth?*

*She finishes ripping the volume...but reserves one page.*

ANABELLA. Canto Three. All for show of course. To lighten his image after he sailed away from you never to return. Who would abandon a child they loved? Who would fill a young girl's life with rumor and scandal she cannot ever escape?

*Ada takes the page from Anabella and reads the passage.*

Once you're married and you can't mess up your life any further, I'll answer any question you have about him, but not before. It's hard enough to find a man of worth to marry a strange girl, but more so when you have your very public lineage.

ADA. (*A fleeting edge of defiance.*) You married him, not I.

ANABELLA. (*Vicious.*) And when I see his instincts in yours I cringe, I weep, I long for the power to rip him from your fiber.

*Pointed pause.*

But tonight? Tonight we will give them nothing to whisper except compliments for your grace, your beauty, your deference. Tonight we prove our poise. Don't we?

End

ADA. Is this your debut or mine?

*Anabella slaps her face.*

ANABELLA. None of that cheek, my dear. That simply won't do.

ADA. Yes ma'am. I am sorry.

ANABELLA. Good. Posture.

ADA. Yes.