

27. The Thief

My sleepiness vanished in an instant. 284

"A-are you sure?" I stuttered, this time not having to fake my feelings. 285

I was floored. My plan had worked! It had actually worked! Of course I never doubted it would, in a theoretical, philosophical, let's-think-this-problem-through way, but to have it actually succeed – that was something else. 284

"Yes, quite sure, Miss. He's in room forty-five on the third floor." 284

"Um... thank you." 284

Suddenly, I realized that now I was going to have to go out and tell Mr Ambrose that I had found Simmons. All this time I had been so obsessed with finding the thief, with proving to my employer that I actually could be of some use, that I hadn't thought about what might happen when we finally did catch him. 285

Now we had. And I was going to have to go out and tell that to Mr Ambrose, a man who didn't seem overtly shy about taking the law and everything else he could into his own hands. 284

I looked down at my own hands. Soon, I realized, I might have blood on them. 280

But then, if you thought about it, it was a thief's blood. And who knew, I might even get a raise out of it. 284

Before I could think better of it, I left the hotel and opened the cab door. 284

"We have him," I said. 284

All of them turned and stared at me as if I had just announced that the Duke of Wellington was a French pussycat. 287

"You... you mean to say Simmons is in there? In this hotel?" Warren asked. 289

I rolled my eyes. "No, he's in Siberia. Yes of course meant he's in this hotel! What else do you think I'm talking about?" 289

"Well, that's... That's quite impressive. Congratulations." 281

Karim held up a hand. 283

"Do not give out congratulations, Warren Sahib before we have proof of the truth. It is easy to say he is there." He raised an eyebrow at me. "But have you indeed seen the man we seek with your own eyes?" 284

"No," I had to admit. "But he is here." 284

"It is easy for you to say so but he may be indeed farther than the stars and the sky." 285

I turned to Mr Ambrose. "Where did you pick this fellow up? Does he always talk like this?" 280

My master chose to ignore this. He was examining me carefully, without saying a word. Finally he inquired, in a low voice: 281

"He is really there?" 286

"Yes," I said firmly. "He is." 285

"Then let's go." 281

Mr Ambrose was out of the cab and halfway across in a flash. His arms came up, one of them holding a cane I hadn't noticed before. He gestured, and Warren's men were suddenly out of the cab, too, spreading out in a loose semi-circle behind him. 286

Six of them, together with Karim, remained at the entrance to the hotel while the rest, without needing any orders, followed him in. They seemed to be well accustomed to follow his silent commands. 280

Well, I sure as hell wasn't! Cursing, I hurried after them. 280

The doorman of the hotel seemed to be quite surprised at the company I was returning in. His surprise, however, was nothing to that of the receptionist, whose mouth actually dropped open as we marched into the entrance hall. We passed him before he had a chance to say or do anything and were already up the first flight of stairs when we heard him call out. 284

"Where to?" Mr Ambrose inquired, ignoring the shout of the receptionist completely. 284

"Room forty-five on the third floor." I called from behind. "And slow down, will you? It's no easy job climbing stairs in this blasted corset!" 285

Will it surprise you to hear that he didn't slow down? 284

Muttering a very unladylike curse I sped up and managed to catch up with them just as they reached the third floor. 286

Mr Ambrose stood on the landing like an admiral on the bridge. With his cane, he pointed at a door a little distance down the corridor bearing the large brazen number forty-five. Then he nodded to his men. 284

Again, the men seemed to understand without needing to be given orders. Two of them positioned themselves on either side of the door, while another strode up directly to the entrance and knocked on the dark wood barring the way. 284

There was a short silence. Then: 284

"Yes? What do you want?" 280

The voice was high and slightly arrogant. I could see it fitting perfectly to the man Mr Ambrose had described. Thin, blonde, and a bit vain. 286

"Room service, Sir," Warren's associate replied in a perfect I-am-a-well-mannered-servant-tone. 284

"Room service? I didn't order anything." 283

"I know, Sir. Compliment of the house, Sir. We always present a bottle of the best wine from our cellars to guests who stay longer than three days." 282

"Oh, if that's the case..." The scraping of a chair came from the other side of the door. "Would be a shame to let it go to waste." 282

Warren's man sprang to the side, and silent as a shadow Mr Ambrose took his place. I tried to move so that I could get a look at the door when it opened, but Warren held me back. 282

"Not yet!" he hissed. "Wait until he opens the door!" 289

Steps approached from inside the room. I waited, counting my breaths in a futile attempt to calm myself. Suddenly I was wishing that I had changed back into trousers and a shirt before coming up here. Say what you will about the degradation and annoyance involved in pretending to be a man, but it certainly gives you more freedom of movement. 283

The door open. 289

Mr Ambrose nodded to whomever was on the other side. 281

"Hello, Simmons." 281

I heard a startled yelp, and then the door moved to close so fast my eye hardly caught the movement. Mr Ambrose caught it, though. 281

His foot darted forward and wedged itself between door and doorframe. He gripped the doorknob, the desperate man inside still struggling to push the door closed, and thrust it back with surprising strength. The door flew open. 287

Then he stepped into the room. 284

"Now!" 283

Warren let go of my arm and I darted forward. I was in the room even before the six other men. Mr Ambrose was standing over a deathly pale Simmons, who lay on his back on the carpet. 289

Taking an empty wine glass from a table beside him, Mr Ambrose raised it to the man on the floor in a mock toast. 285

"Bottoms up. I'm afraid I haven't brought any wine. But I have brought a few of my friends." The glass sailed out of his hand and crashed against the wall, splintering into a thousand pieces. Simmons twitched, but Mr Ambrose's face remained calm as an iceberg. "Actually, it's not just the bottoms who are up," He mused. "It's the game, too." His voice suddenly became hard, as impenetrable as mountain of granite. "Where is it, Simmons?" 282

"H-how... how," stuttered the figure on the floor. 283

"How I found you?" 280

Mr Ambrose threw a look over his shoulder, and for a moment his dark eyes held mine, filled with an expression that was difficult to interpret. 286

"That is none of your concern," he answered, returning his gaze to Simmons. "I will ask the questions. Not you." 286

"N-no, Sir," Simmons mumbled, his eyes darting right and left. "I mean... how can I ever thank you. Thank you for coming after me, I mean. There were these men... they entered your office, and took some things, and forced me to come with them and..." 287

"Simmons?" 284

"Yes, Sir?" 284

"If you utter another lie, you are a dead man." 281

Mr Simmons' mouth remained open, but there didn't come one more sound out of it. He seemed to have gotten the message. 287

Without paying any great deal of attention to the man on the floor, as if he were just another speck of dust, Mr Ambrose went over to the bed and flipped open the suitcase that lay there. It contained a few neatly folded shirts and trousers. With a flick of his cane, Mr Ambrose threw them aside. 282

An involuntary gasp escaped me as hundreds of banknotes appeared beneath the clothes. I couldn't make out the numbers from where I stood, but I didn't really need to, to be able to tell that this was a lot of money. More than I had ever seen in my life. 286

All for a piece of paper... 287

What sort of paper could be worth that much? 287

"Strange baggage for an abducted man," Mr Ambrose stated, calmly. 288

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a sudden movement. When I turned my head I saw that Simmons was on his feet again and heading for the window. 283

At first I thought he had gone insane or something and wanted to jump to his death – but then I saw that there was a building outside. A building with a flat roof. 280

"No! Get him!" 284

I sprang after him, trying to grab him. Unluckily, I forgot I was wearing a crinoline, got tangled up in the legs of a chair and fell with the ground with an unceremonious crunching sound. The last thing I saw was Simmons jumping out of the window, then my head slammed into the carpet and suddenly my eyes, mouth and nose were filled with fluffy dustiness. 284

Crap! 284

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My Dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, 284

A big round of applause for every one of you my dear readers, for being such marvelous literary experts! I've gotten quite a few right answers to my little quiz in the recent installment of this story (as to which stories Lilly stole her Alias from). In fact, so many among you have come up with the correct answers that I concluded I have to open my very own Victorian solid chocolate factory to fabricate all the solid chocolate that I owe you as a reward for guessing the right answer. So here we go: 284

****hands out massive amounts of chocolate**** 285

As so many of you correctly guessed, the name Juliet came from Shakespeare's well-known tragedy Romeo & Juliet while Desdemona came from another play of Shakespeare's named Othello and, last but definitely not least, Jane Austen originates from Elisabeth Bennet, the heroine of Bennet's romance novel Pride and Prejudice 284

I sincerely hope the solid chocolate was tasty, my dear Lords, Ladies & gentlemen! I shall now stop manufacturing virtual Victorian sweets & return to writing more about our favorite Victorian couple for your enjoyment! ;-) 284

Yours Truly 284

Sir Rob 284

P.S: 285

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The Duke of Wellington: For all those of you who are not familiar with Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington – he was Great Britain's military hero who defeated Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo and saved Britain from occupation by the French Army. To refer to him as a French pussycat would have been considered less than polite in Victorian Britain ;) 282