

33. What To Do with Pink?

I pretended not to notice Ella crying herself to sleep that night. But I noticed. Oh yes, I noticed all right. 47

My dreams were full of evil lords with oversized ears trying to snatch my little sister away from me, and choke her under a mountain of flowers. For the umpteenth time I regretted that I, as a girl, didn't have the same rights as a man. If I had, I would have learned how to handle a weapon long ago, and then I could just go to Wilkins and challenge him to a duel. 99

One bullet right between the eyes. That would do the trick! 90

As things stood, though the only thing I could do was get to work. Despite my worry for my sister and my determination to figure something out to help her, I had to admit I was also curious as to whether Simmons' night in the cellar had yielded any results. 9

Oh yes, you are. And you're even more curious whether one of these results is Simmons' ice-cold, mutilated corpse, aren't you? 7

I shook my head. Mr Ambrose would never do something like that! 99

Well... probably. 8

Before I le, I sneaked over to Ella's bedside and wiped the remaining tears from her cheeks as best I could without waking her. It would do no good for my aunt to see them. Although she was probably delusional enough to imagine them to be tears of joy, I was sure Ella had rather not let them be seen. Finished with my demoistration, I stroked my little sister's cheek one final time affectionately, and then hurried down the stairs and out the back. It was time to get going, or Mr Ambrose would skin me alive! 83

At Empire House, Sallow-face let me pass upstairs without comment. I couldn't suppress a tiny, triumphant smile. 1

Yay! He had accepted me. I only hoped Mr Ambrose had done the same, and not decided to change his mind. 3

Exchanging friendly nods, I passed Mr Stone in the upper hallway and entered my office. I had hardly sat down at my desk, when, with a little 'plink', a message plopped out of the pneumatic tube. 4

Oh dear... Here we go. 5

Mr Linton, 0

I have been waiting for you for hours. Where have you been? I do not tolerate tardiness, as I believe I have told you before. 40

Rikkard Ambrose. 9

What the heck...? Late! I could have sworn that I arrived on the dot! 0

Rising from my chair along with my temper, I looked around the room – but Mr Ambrose was too stingy to even buy a clock for his secretary's office, and I still didn't have a watch. So I marched to the door and flung it open. 9

"Excuse me, Mr Stone, what time is it?" 3

A bit startled, he looked up from his papers, and, being confronted with an angry fury in baggy striped trousers, hurriedly fished his watch out of his pocket. "Eight am exactly, Mr Linton. Um... Why?" 1

"Nothing! Thanks." 1

"Oh, Mr Linton, wait!" He held out a hand with a couple of envelopes. "I almost forgot to give you these. The correspondence of the day." 1

"Thanks again." 1

Grabbing the letters out of his hand, I marched back to my desk like the wrathful angel of justice, and snatched up pen and paper to scribble furiously: 9

My dear and most beloved Master, 8K

It is exactly eight o'clock, the time I usually arrive at your palatial office, which, by the way, doesn't even have clocks in its rooms 3

Yours ever 1

Miss Lilly Linton 1

The reply wasn't long in coming. 5

Mr Linton, 5

Yes, it is eight o'clock. You may remember our discussion from the day before? The discussion during which you gained the concession from me to be treated like a full employee? You are facing the consequences of that concession. Yesterday, I gave you the emoon to recuperate. When I give my employees time off, I expect them to put in longer hours at some later date. I was expecting you at five am this morning. 7K

Rikkard Ambrose 6

Was he kidding? 0

A brief image of his stony face flashed in front of my inner eye. No. Of course he wasn't. My answer was short and to the point. 1

Dearest Mr Ambrose, 6

How the bloody hell was I supposed to know? 4K

Yours Sincerely, 1

Miss Lilly Linton 0

There! That would show him! 1

I had already shoved the message into the tube when I remembered that now I had a key to his room. I could just have stood up, gone to him and told him to his stony face! 90

Or could I? If I were face to face with the tyrant, I might very well use the phrase "sincerely up yours" instead of "yours sincerely". Probably not good for my career prospects. Also, I had to admit... this way of communicating was kind of fun. 2

I shoved the message into the tube. His answer popped onto my desk only a minute later. 1

Mr Linton, 1

Mind your language. I will let your tardiness pass once, since you were not familiar with my office policy. Do not let it happen again. 4

Rikkard Ambrose 1

I had an idea – a rather delicious one, and I caught myself grinning as I wrote the reply. 9

Dear Mr Ambrose, 9

So... were you up in your office at five am this morning, waiting for me? 8K

Yours truly 1

Miss Lilly Linton 1

The reply was as quick as it was short. 1

Mr Linton, 3

Yes, I was. Bring me file S37V1288. The key to the safe is under the door. 8K

Rikkard Ambrose. 1

He had been waiting for me! For three hours! 2

Whistling, I skipped off to get the safe key, imagining a grouchy Mr Ambrose at five in the morning, sitting in the office and twiddling his thumbs with stony ferocity. The image held a great deal of appeal. I found the file in record time, shoved it under the door and went back to my desk to examine his correspondence of the day. 63

A few advertisement letters from some firm or other quickly landed in the bin, so did several charity requests. I very well remembered his reaction to my letting those pass the first time. Then, I fished a familiar pink envelope out of the remaining pile. 1

What? Another one of those? Yes, the sender read, in curly feminine handwriting: Samantha Genevieve Ambrose. Just like last time. And there was the same coat of arms stamped on the envelope, a lion and a rose, with the rest of the crest, as I now noticed, filled out by stormy waves. 11

Whoever she was, you had to give the lady her due, she was persistent. But honestly, I wished she wouldn't be. What should I do with her letter? Mr Ambrose had given the first back unopened. I supposed that meant he wouldn't want another. Was I supposed to throw it away? Or was he just returning the first letter unopened out of principle, and would relent to whatever the lady was writing? 3

Somehow, I didn't think so. Mr Ambrose wasn't the relenting kind. Especially if the message came in a pink, scented envelope. 3

Still, I couldn't just destroy the letter. For all I knew, he might want this one, even though he hadn't wanted the first. I hadn't forgotten the crest on his watch, exactly like the one on the letter, and was reasonably sure by now that there was some deep connection between the letter-writer and Mr Ambrose. 4

But what kind of connection? Not knowing drove me insane! And it made it impossible to decide what to do with the cursed pink thing. 3

Well, what are you waiting for, Lilly? The problem of not knowing what's in there can be solved easily enough! 7

Hesitantly, I reached for the envelope. 2

Should I? I had to admit, I was more than a little curious to read what was inside. Was it from a relative? Or... maybe from his wife? 5

I swallowed. Up until now I had just assumed he was single, but you never knew. Maybe he was a romantic soul and deeply in love with his wife, and was just hiding it very, very, very, very well. Maybe... maybe the letters even had something to do with the mysterious stolen file! Oh, the suspense of not knowing was killing me! Literally! 90

Surely, opening the letter couldn't really be wrong if it meant saving me from death by acute Nosystic curiositis? 8

I reached out for the letter-opener – but my hand stopped in mid-air. 9

Mr Ambrose had taken me on. He had given me a job when many others wouldn't. I was his secretary, and should behave like it. A professional wouldn't pry, and I intended to be a professional. That was the whole idea behind getting a job. Agonizingly slow, my hand drew back from the letter-opener. 91

Blast! A conscience can be such a nuisance, sometimes! 7

But the problem of what to do with the letter still remained. 1

Then I had an idea. I was a secretary, right? My job was filing things. And I still had the key to the safe. 5

Quickly I got up and started to search the shelves until I found an empty file box. I put the letter inside, and marched to the safe. Unlocking the safe-room, I entered, and stowed the file box in the remotest, darkest corner I could find, where Mr Ambrose himself would hopefully never find it. Then, satisfied with a job well done, I left, closed the safe again and returned to my desk. 2

Two messages were already waiting for me. 1

The first read: 1

Mr Linton, 1

Where are my letters? I do not pay you to dawdle. 2

Rikkard Ambrose. 1

The second read: 1

Mr Linton, 1

Perhaps I was not clear enough regarding my intolerance to dawdling. Where are my letters? 5

Rikkard Ambrose 1

Quickly, I looked through the rest of the letters. They all seemed to be strictly business-related to me, which was sure to be a balm for the soul of Mr Ambrose. No dealing with frightening pink personal letters today! 1

I scribbled a note, went over to the door, and shoved the letters under the door, together with the safe key and a note which read: 1

Dear Mr Ambrose, 1

Forgive my unforgivable dawdling. There were a lot of letters to sort through. 0

Yours always, 2

Miss Lilly Linton 1

It didn't take him long to send a reply through the tube. 0

Mr Linton, 1

Please correct your address of me to coincide with the truth. I am not "dear" to anyone, least of all, I am sure, to you. Also, it is my ink you are wasting by writing unnecessary words. A bottle of ink costs 3 pence a piece. Therefore, I order you to refrain from all endearments in the future. 8K

Rikkard Ambrose 1

I cocked my head. 6

Oh, particularly grouchy this morning, are we? I wonder why... 2

I quickly scribbled a reply. 1

Dearest most honoured and beloved Mr Ambrose, 8K

Courtesy hasn't killed anybody yet. By the way, has Simmons given any information? 0

Your ink-wasting 8K

Miss Lilly Linton 7

He couldn't have been absorbed in his letters yet, because his reply didn't take long. 6

Mr Linton, 1

Courtesy might not have killed anybody yet, but it has ruined quite a few people who didn't realize how much money it costs. Mr Simmons has not yet divulged anything. I am displeased, to say the least. We will talk about this more later. Now bring me file 28V214. And be quick about it. 8

Rikkard Ambrose 3

For some reason, a smile tugged at the corners of my mouth. 3

Here we go again. Another normal day with Mr Ambrose. 9

Getting up from my desk, I made my way towards the shelves in a leisurely stroll. 1

I should have known better, I guess. I should have realized by now that no day with Mr Ambrose ever would turn out to be normal. 4

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My dear Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen, 4

Unfortunately, I don't have time for an author's note, today. I received a letter from an interested publisher for one of my books, and am terribly busy preparing stuff to send to them. Please, keep your fingers crossed! :-) 96

Yours Truly 9

Sir Rob 0

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