## 25. I Go Dress-Shopping

"A what and a what?" Mr Ambrose stared at me as if I had lost my

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| I smiled at him innocently. "Is your hearing not as good as it used to  | C    |
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| be, Si?"  "How," he asked very slowly and deliberately, "are you going to track a thief with with a dress and a sack full of vegetables?"  "Onions. They have to be onions. And the how," I said, tapping my  |      |
| nose knowingly, "you'll just have to leave that to me. Secrets of the trade."  "How do I know this is going to work?"   |      |
| I gave him my most sweetest smile.  "Easy. You'll have to trust me."  *~*~****  *restance of the same |      |
| wouldn't budge. Finally, he declared that, fine, we were going to try something else. When I asked him what exactly, he didn't look very pleased. Finally, Warren and a few of the others joined my side, arguing for him to let me have a go.  "We don't even know whether Simmons is still in town," Mr Ambrose   |      |
| pointed out, stubbornly shaking his head.  The door to my o ice chose this moment to open and admit the monumental form of Karim, who bowed, and in what I thought was perfect timing said: "Nobody has seen Simmons at the train station, Sahib It is safe to assume that he is still within the city."  |      |
| There was one moment more of hesitation – then Mr Ambrose grabbed his top hat from the coat hanger and slammed it down on his hard head.  "Fine. We're going. Karim, come along. We're going to buy onions."  With a slightly puzzled expression on his face, the bearded man   | 10   |
| followed his master out. I, unable to conceal a grin, was right at his heels.  "What are you planning, Mr Linton?" Warren whispered behind me, but I just shook my head.  |      |
| We had to run to keep up with Mr Ambrose. Out in the street, he didn't hail a cab, but began to march down the street.  "Err Sir?" Warren cleared his throat. "If the situation is as grave as you have indicated, the expense of a cab would surely be justifiable. It is a much quicker means of transport, very convenient in such an  |      |
| urgent situation."  "Fine."  Irritably, Mr Ambrose waved a hand and when a cab stopped, ordered us inside with a jerk of his head. All about a dozen men plus one   | (0   |
| disguised woman, into one cab! The driver looked at us as if we were completely insane, and I couldn't blame him.  The good news I didn't end up with Karim sitting on top of me. The bad news were I ended up with Mr Ambrose sitting next to me. Very closenext to me. I didn't want to think about how close. His lean body was nearly squashing me against the wall and there was something hard pressing into my leg which I very much hoped was the end of his walking stick.  Through the window that connected the inside of the coach with the   |      |
| driver's box, Mr Ambrose threw the cabbie a look. "Drive fast."  The man's eyes widened. Apparently, he knew who was talking to him. The whip cracked, and we started to move with astonishing speed for a vehicle carrying three times the intended load.  "Take us to Flemming's," Mr Ambrose shouted over the whirl and  |      |
| clatter over the wheels. I had no idea who or what Flemming's was – hopefully a place where one could get either dresses or onions. I didn't know if this crazy plan of mine was going to work, but if it was to succeed, I definitely needed all the right equipment.  A er a ten minute drive, the cab stopped in front of a large building with grimy windows and a lot of stu-crammed together, displayed   |      |
| there. Over the door, large, ornamental letters proudly spelled out "Flemming's".  I took a close look at the department store. I didn't know much about fashion, but I knew enough. The frilly, cheap things displayed in the shop window were not exactly what I was a er. I looked at Mr Ambrose.  |      |
| Ambrose.  "I said I needed a beautifuldress."  "What's wrong with those? They're cheap."  "That's exactly what's wrong with them."  I knocked against the roof of the cab. "Take us to the best dressmaker in town."  |      |
| *~*~***  The little dressmaker was a hunched figure, with a long, hooked nose, remnants of grey hair over both ears and a resplendent   |      |
| waistcoat in blue and gold. He was intent on examining a few rolls of brocade, and didn't look up when he heard the doorbell ring. Only when footsteps approached and the annoying presence of a customer drew him from the contemplation of the masterpiece he was no doubt thinking about creating, did he look up. A frown spread over his wrinkled face and he eyed the slight man in baggy trousers who was standing in front of him – yours truly – with obvious doubt in his eyes.  "Is there something I can do for you, Sir?" he asked. "Or did you  |      |
| perhaps want to come in through the servant's entrance?"  "No." I, shook my head. "I'm here to pick out a dress for my sister. It's going to be a birthday present."  Methodically, the dressmaker took a pair of pince-nez out of his  | 6    |
| waistcoat pocket, polished them on his sleeve, and clamped them on his nose. Then he studied me like he would a piece of his cloth.  Apparently, he found that I was second-hand, with quite a lot of moth-holes, too.  "And you're going to pay for it?" he asked, disbelief dripping from his voice.  |      |
| "Oh no. He is." Stepping aside, I pointed behind me. A lean black figure appeared from between the shelves and mannequins and strode towards the two of us. In theory, Mr Ambrose was dressed quite as simply as I. Nothing about his black tailcoat, black waistcoat or black trousers indicated wealth.   |      |
| But the arrogance of his dark eyes did.  "Oh. I see." The dressmaker swallowed. "And the gentlemen's names are?"  "I'm Mister Linton," I answered. "And this is Mr Ambrose."  |      |
| The pince-nez fell o the man's nose and his eyes widened. "Mr Ambrose? Mr RikkardAmbrose?"  "Yes." Mr Ambrose nodded, curtly.  "Oh dear Sir, please forgive me for not recognizing you on sight.  |      |
| "Oh dear Sir, please forgive me for not recognizing you on sight.  Please forgive me for not properly welcoming you to my humble establishment. You honour me with your presence here!"  "Yes." Mr Ambrose nodded curtly, again.  "Once more, I beg a thousand pardons. Everything I have, everything   | 10   |
| I am is at your disposal. What do you wish to see? I have some very fine waistcoats, just came in yesterday from France. Very expensive, but the best, the very best. Please, let me show you"  "I'm not here to buy waistcoats," Mr Ambrose cut him o . "I am here" He paused for a moment – gathering his strength, I would   |      |
| imagine. "I am here to pay for a dress for this man's sister. One dress. As pretty and inexpensive as possible."  The dressmaker blinked, surprised. I would have wagered that not one of his clients had ever before placed an order for a dress they wanted to be cheap. He dealt comparatively well with the new circumstances though, springing up from his stool and bowing deeply.  | 10   |
| "Of course, Mr Ambrose, Sir. Please follow me, Mr Linton. What should the dress be made of? Muslin? Brocade? Silk?"  "Silk would be perfect. With plenty of lace at the sleeves and the cleavage, and gold embroidery, and little diamonds everywhere." I smiled at him. "Don't pay attention to what Mr Ambrose said. The dress needs to be spectacular. Make it demure but alluring."   |      |
| The little dressmaker winked at me and nodded like an overexcited woodpecker, determined to make a new home for himself. "I completely understand, Sir. I think I know just the thing. Do you have your sister's measurements, Sir?"  |      |
| "No, but she is about my build. You can use me as a model."  Half an hour later we emerged from the shop, and Mr Ambrose was carrying a large package.  "If this is going to be a waste of my money, you will be deeply, deeply sorry, Mr Linton," he said, his voice as cool as ice.   | - (0 |
| "Don't worry. The onions will be cheap, I promise."  *~*~***  "This is in contradiction to our agreement!" Mr Ambrose told me, quiet menace in his voice.   | 200  |
| quiet menace in his voice.  We were back at Empire House. All of us – Mr Ambrose, Karim, Warren and his cronies were assembled in the hallway in front of Mr Ambrose's o ice. Mr Stone, who normally occupied the desk here, was nowhere in sight. Maybe Mr Ambrose had given him the day o. More likely though, he'd sent him to slave in some other part of the building while we conducted our secret business here.  "It is not," I said, cutting open the first string that held together the package containing the dress.  "It is. I only accepted you under the condition that you would pretend  |      |
| "It is. I only accepted you under the condition that you would pretend to be a man while working for me."  "And I will," I said patting the dress fondly. "I will pretend to be a man pretending to be a woman."  "You" Mr Ambrose might have said something else, but for the moment he seemed lost for words. Then he demanded: "And this is  | 6    |
| really necessary for that infernal plan of yours? You are not just doing this to anger me?" I gave him my brightest, most happy smile. I was smiling a lot lately. But why the heck not? Thief hunting was fun! "Now why would I do   | 7.0  |
| something like that, Sir?"  Before he could reply, or try to throttle me, I vanished into my o ice and locked the door behind me.  "Err Sir?" Warren's voice, mu led by the door, was as nervous as it was curious. "What is he doing in there?"  |      |
| "Apparently," Mr Ambrose said, his voice as arctic as ever, "Mr Linton' plan requires a female participant. Since we have none available, Mr Linton will impersonate one."  "Will that work?"  "Oh yes. Take my word for it, Mr Linton is famous for his impersonations."   | S    |
| impersonations."  Dear me. Mr Ambrose was capable of sarcasm? Wonder of wonders  As quickly as I could, I stripped. Then I took out the dress Mr Ambrose had so ungraciously provided proceeded to put it on.  Dressing took considerably longer than stripping. Not having Ella to help me this time, it took especially long to squeeze myself into the   |      |
| help me this time, it took especially long to squeeze myself into the blasted corset. Finally, I was finished and took out a small mirror, about the only useful item ladies were allowed to carry.  My hair still looked a bit windswept, but that was not a problem. On the contrary, it would work to my advantage. The dress looked just as it was supposed to look. The tailor had really done a spi ing job.  |      |
| Taking a deep breath, I stepped towards the door. Now for the first test. I opened the door, stepped out and did a little twirl.  "Well? What do you say, gentlemen?"  All of them were looking at me with interested expressions. Well, all apart from Mr Ambrose, who didn't have an expression on his stony face, and Karim, who had an expression, but not one that I would like to describe.   |      |
| Warren stepped forward and nodded slowly.  "I've got to hand it to you, Mr Linton, you know what you're doing.  You look almost like a genuine girl."  I raised an eyebrow. "Almost?"   |      |
| "Well, you know" he waved a hand in the air. "When one knows the truth one isn't as easily fooled as everybody else. One just sees those little signs that indicate something is not quite right about you."  "You can say that again."  That nice comment came from Mr Ambrose. "Now, can we get on with   |      |
| this?"  We did get on. Or rather out, of the building to be exact. Then, to our employer's severe displeasure, we got into another cab and drove away. Our first stop was the Brown's Hotel in Albermarle Street. When the cabbie stopped his horses, I got out, but held up my hand when Mr Ambrose moved to follow me.  | 6    |
| "No. I'll go in alone."  "What? Do you intend to catch Simmons all on your own?"  "No, of course not. I'm just going to inquire if he's here."  "And they're going to tell you just like that, are they?"  "Yes, actually they are." I winked at him. "Could you hand me my sack of onions please?"   |      |
| He didn't. Instead he said: "You can't go in there alone. It's much too risky."  "Risky?" Did he actually sound worried? Worried for me  "I mean," he added hurriedly, "if Simmons should hear your questions and decide to flee before we can catch him."  |      |
| "Don't worry. I won't let that happen. My onions, please?"  He hesitated a moment – then handed me the sack of onions, looking as though he had just bitten into one.  Wordlessly, I turned and entered Brown's Hotel.  *~*~***   | 6    |
| *~*~***  Ten minutes later I was out again and climbed into the cab.  "He's not here," I proclaimed. "Let's go try the next one."  "How do you know?" demanded Mr Ambrose. Yet this was a demand I  |      |

Continue reading next part □

was not very disposed to comply with.

are more intelligent than an insignificant little girl."

Ambrose's expression and stopped laughing.

"Not here," I stated. "Let's go on."

hands were balled into fists.

"Oh, it's just my female intuition."

My Dear Lords and Ladies,

Good Bye!:D:D

**Yours Truly** 

Sir Rob

le again.

excursion.

you-know?"

I smiled.

"You mean you can't guess, Si?" I purred, smiling at him. "Surely you

The others laughed, thinking I had made a joke. Then they saw Mr

Soon, we stopped at another hotel. I entered, and ten minutes later

"How," Mr Ambrose asked, his voice dangerously low, "do you know?" 242

We stopped at another hotel, and another, and another. A er eight

I climbed into the coach again, just returned from my latest

"He's not here either," I said. "Let's try the next one."

Well, what does your female (or male) intuition say? ;-)

MIne says I have no time to write a longer author's note today.

failures, Mr Ambrose expression had turned from stony to steely. His

"How," Mr Ambrose inquired, putting emphasis on each word, "do-