## 47. The Message Lock

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The rest of the ball went by quickly, mostly because now I had
something to occupy my mind with. What the loose-lipped
gentleman had told me about the meeting against the women's
su rage in Hyde Park kept reverberating inside my head. Ideas were
fermenting inside my busy bean. Soon they would develop into
plans.

I spent the rest of the ball plotting the downfall of mankind and the rise of womankind. Most of my plotting happened together with Ella and Patsy in Lord Dalgliesh's vicinity. This had multiple advantages: 24

1. The group around the Lord was one of the thickest in the ballroom. Thus, whenever Sir Philip came in sight, we could shove Ella behind a fat duchess or broad-shouldered admiral, and she would be saved from another dance.

2. Whenever my aunt looked my way and saw me, right there, next to Lord Dalgliesh, she beamed as if it were Christmas and Easter put together. At least she wouldn't be able to say I wasn't trying. aª

3. For some reason, Mr Ambrose stayed far away from the group. This I found strange, because earlier he had made such a particular point of greeting Lord Dalgliesh, as if they were old friends. But who was I to look a gi horse in the mouth? ar

By use of this clever method of unpleasant-people-avoidance we were able to keep the nasties out of our hair for quite some time. Everyone else pretty much le us alone, too. I was rather startled when somebody coughed beside me, thinking that it was Wilkins who had seen through our ruse at last – but it was only a servant, who bowed to me politely. đ

"Forgive me, Miss? Could you step aside? I have to deliver a message to his Lordship." 189 d Promptly, I did as he asked, and so did everyone else in the vicinity. I noticed, though, that they didn't step back too far to hear what this mysterious message might be. It consisted of a letter the servant bore

on a silver tray. å Arriving at his Lordship's side, the servant gave another discreet aª cough.

"I beg your Lordship's pardon? I have a message for you, My Lord." a Lord Dalgliesh turned from the group of friends with whom he was laughing and joking, and, seeing the tray, picked up the letter and

eyed it over his aquiline nose. "Who gave this to you?"

"Another servant who would not divulge the identity of his master or mistress, My Lord. But he said you would know the identity of the sender once you opened it." 194 d

Lord Dalgliesh's gaze quickly flicked from right to le . Feeling all eyes upon him, intent with curiosity, he snatched up the silver letteropener on the tray, and cut open the envelope. He grabbed whatever was inside and pulled. a

Out came not a sheet of paper, nor a card, nor anything else with writing on it. No, out came a lock of hair – blonde hair to be precise. For a moment, everything was still around the little group, then

"By Jove!" a Colonel in the Royal Dragoons exclaimed. "I think it's	3.1K
rather more likely this letter came from a lady than from a gentlemen, don't you think so, my friends?" This was greeted by a irmations and laughter from all sides. "Come on, Dalgliesh, tell us who the lucky lady is!"	295 C
For a moment. Lord Dalgliesh stood stock-still, not seeming to see or hear the world around him, concentrating only on the lock on his hand. Then, quick as a flash, he stuck it back into the envelope and stu ed it into his pocket. Turning to the others, he smiled brilliantly, and said: "Now, now, my friends, you would not want me to compromise a lady's honour, would you? Besides, I assure you. This is far from being a token of a ection. You might rather call it a	
deceleration of war."	<sup>æ</sup> ය
rather a formidable creature!" Lord Dalgliesh's smile broadened, yet at the same time, I noticed, it seemed to harden.	ส์2 สา สา
I shook my head. Somehow, I didn't think the hair came from a woman. It had looked far too short for that. To be honest, I had no idea what to make of it, though I had the strange feeling that I should have been able to. All in all, it was far too strange an occurrence for my personal taste. As charming as he was, I vowed to stay far away from Lord Daniel Eugene Dalgliesh in the future. Then and there, I didn't know how short a time it would take until	3.9K
	373 A3
door, curtsying to her dear friends, and to people she couldn't stand but had to be polite to anyway. My aunt was in high spirits. She was so pleased about my dance with Lord Dalgliesh that she hadn't even noticed that Ella had only danced three times with Wilkins during the	<b>1</b> 01
had been forced to listen to a prolonged lecture of my aunt on how I was doing better than them with seeking out prospective husbands. I did not relish the thought of getting in a coach with them, but reasoned that there were five other people in the coach, so they could hardly try and beat me to death with their parasols. I was just about to sneak past Lady Metcalf and get some fresh air	<b>1</b> 07
before the coach ride, when suddenly, a gentle but firm hand placed itself on my arm and held me in place. "A moment, if you please, Miss Linton?"	a7 1833
It was Lord Dalgliesh. Over his shoulder I could see my aunt, making frantic gestures of encouragement. I would have to disappoint her. Somehow I doubted that the enigmatic nobleman wanted to discuss an engagement. "What is it, Lord Dalgliesh?" I enquired, letting myself be steered into a small niche, where we were cut ofrom the view of all others in the	244
room, including my aunt – to her severe disappointment, I was sure. Lord Dalgliesh placed himself between me and the rest of the room so I could not leave without his stepping aside. Suddenly, I felt a tiny twinge of unease. I would have felt more unease, if not for the fact that the nobleman's smile was so very reassuring.	102 766
He smiled brightly, seemingly pleased by my reply.	462 2
"Indeed I am. Yet I have an excuse: the music has stopped, the musicians are gone. Will you still grant me my heart's desire and assuage my curiosity?" "That depends on what your question is. Ask, My Lord, and we shall	,509 C
see about the answer." "Very well." He leaned forward. His steel-blue eyes bored into mine like with a hypnotic intensity. "Whenever I looked up earlier this evening, I knew I was being watched. Watched closely. The name of the one who watched me should be familiar to you, I think. It was one	a <sup>9</sup>
I almost felt like laughing. He wasn't watching you wanted to say. He was watching his dear darling Miss Hamilton. But then my thoughts screeched to a sudden halt. Hadhe been watching Miss Hamilton? Whenever I saw them, Lord Dalgliesh and Miss Hamilton had been standing right next to each other. Could it be that Mr Ambrose had been watching the former, and not the latter?	ер3 1.9К
But why? He couldn't very well be in love with Lord Dalgliesh, now, could he? A maelstrom of confused thoughts roared in my mind. I tried not to let any of them show, though. Instead I asked: "And what has that got to do with me?"	2.3K
"Simply this: Whenever Mr Ambrose happened not to watch me, his gaze was drawn to you." What?	a <sup>ĸ</sup> a¹
"Trust me, I am sure." His Lordship stared at me, keeping his face carefully clean of any emotion. But I could see them in his eyes: mingled curiosity and incredulity. "He looked at you more than at any	
I felt a surge of triumph rise inside me, and beat it down with everything I had. As nonchalantly as I could, I shrugged.	aී අ
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"Ah yes, my question." He nodded. "I wish to know: What is Mr	180 0 962
I wet my lips, and forcing my voice to be calm, said: "I was not aware	a ₹
I felt my spine stien, and instinctively crossed my arms in front of my chest. "Should you not direct that question at Mr Ambrose?"	390 101 a
"He danced with you tonight. He singled you out, in fact. All the other young ladies he danced with were ladies introduced by his host or ladies he could not help dancing with without giving o ence. You on the other hand You danced with him without being introduced. You had to have met before. Where was that? What happened?" "I do not recall. I think I might have met him at some other party, or in	745 C
Damn! Why couldn't I keep my voice steady? Maybe it was the way he was blocking my way out of the niche. It was bloody annoying! More than annoying, actually. It started to be slightly worrying. "Most young ladies," Lord Dalgliesh observed, leaning a little closer,	ส์ สื
He still wore his charming smile, and to anyone listening, his questions might have sounded like nothing but idle curiosity. Yet I didn't think that anything about this man was idle. Still, he was blocking my way. "Well, I have a very bad memory," I snapped. "Especially for people I	a³
His eyes narrowed. "Miss Linton" "Step aside, I said!"	276 80 891
"You're an intriguing young lady, Miss Linton." His eyes were sparkling like moonlight on cold steel. "I will look forward to meeting you again."	<b>4</b> 0 <b>56</b> 5 <b>7</b> 68
"Until then, My Lord." Keeping my back ramrod-straight so I could always look him in the eye, I gave a quick curtsy. Then I marched away at a measured pace,	æ 8
Only when I was in the hallway and he couldn't see me anymore did I start to run. The slaps of my shoes sounded harsh on the marble	đ
I stumbled out into the cool night air. Fog from the river Thames was wa ing towards me. Yet neither the clammy moisture nor the cold air did anything to clear my mind. A thousand questions where whirling around inside my head. Only they weren't the same ones as a few hours ago, when Mr Ambrose had entered the ballroom, that hag on	237 C
his arm. Had Mr Ambrose really been interested in Lord Dalgliesh, not his beautiful partner? What did the lock in the envelope mean? Where did it come from? And why, of all people in the ballroom, should Mr Ambrose have been looking at me	2.2К С
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Then I looked up – and saw Wilkins sitting on the opposite bench. A rose and an enormous sunflower were sticking out of his tortured buttonhole, and he had a dreamy expression on his face which I immediately mistrusted.	,968 C
"Ah, Miss Lilly," he said, smiling at me with a smile like a seasick baboon. Or, maybe, like a man in love. It was di icult to tell the di erence, sometimes. "How fortunate that you are the first to arrive. I wonder if I might have a word with you. It is about your sister, Ella."	<b>3</b> 84 a <sup>8</sup> 4
My Dear Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen, You were quite correct in your assumptions! ;-) Quite a few among you have already your doubts regarding Mr Ambrose's passion for Miss Hamilton. Now, we finally know for sure that there's	
something quite dierent on his mind Now only a single question remains: will he finally reveal his real plans and feelings?	ື ສື
Yours Truly	106 7 7 48
Sir Rob P.S: For any gay people among my readers, I should perhaps point out that Lilly's incredulity to the possibility of Mr Ambrose's being attracted to a man is natural, considering the time during which she lived. Back in Victorian England, only very few people displayed homosexual tendencies publicly, which was quite understandable, considering the fact that until the year 1861,	a <sup>8</sup>
homosexuality was a capital o ence. Fortunately, that particular law has landed on the rubbish heap of history ;-)	ц²к d
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