60. I realize I danced with a Criminal Mastermind

His head jerked up and around to look at me, but I didn't see him. Instead I saw a dozen images, whirling in my head, connecting together for the first time:

Mr Ambrose shaking Lord Dalgliesh's hand with enough force to whiten his knuckles.

Mr Ambrose staring across the ballroom to a table where only two people stood – Miss Hamilton and Lord Dalgliesh.

Mr Ambrose cutting a lock of hair from Simmons' head in the dark cellar beneath Empire House.

Lord Dalgliesh opening the envelope that contained a single lock of golden hair – hair of exactly the same shade and texture as that on Simmons' head.

"But..." I steadied myself against the wall. "But he's one of the peers of England! One of the most wealthy and respected gentlemen of the Empire! He wouldn't be involved in something like this!"

"He?" Mr Ambrose asked, his face expressionless. "Who?"

"Don't play dumb with me!"

"Mind your language, Mr Linton!"

"Fine! Don't play dumb with me, *Sir*! You know exactly who I am talking about."

The only answer to this was silence. That is, outside of my head. Inside, a multitude of voices and pictures were clamouring for attention. Rapidly, I went through everything I had seen that night at the ball, when I had first met Lord Dalgliesh.

"You went there to meet with him," I whispered. "That's why you came to the ball! To meet with him and let him know that you knew what he was up to. To warn him o !"

"I went to the ball to court Miss Hamilton," he said with a facial expression that was about as passionate as a piece of dried cod. "I went to be with the pearl of my heart, the girl for whom I feel the most ardent love which ever a man has experi-"

"Oh, put a sock in it!" I cut him o with a hand gesture. "We both know you have no romantic interests whatsoever!"

"Do we indeed?

"Yes! They would waste too much of your precious time and money."

He almost nodded in agreement, but caught himself and suggested, almost defiantly: "Love could have overwhelmed my defences and made me weak with longing."

"No it couldn't."

"Yes it could!"

"No it couldn't!"

"You don't know that for certain. I could feel the most ardent passion —"

"No you bloody well couldn't! Not for *her*, anyway!"

His eyes narrowed infinitesimally. "And why is that, Mr Linton?"

"Well... she... she... she's obviously not the right girl for you! Much too impractical and time-wasting. She's probably a er your money, too."

"Thank you for the warning." I might have been mistaken, but I thought I saw the corner of his mouth twitch. It wasn't a smile. It wasn't even half a smile. He was far too miserly with his facial expressions for that. It was about the quarter of a smile, at the most, but it *was* there. "Though I seem to remember that back at the ball, Mr Linton, you seemed quite convinced of my attachment to Miss Hamilton, in spite of her many defects. If my memory serves me right it was even you who originally suggested the idea that I might have feelings for her."

I flushed, guiltily.

"In fact," he continued, "you seemed quite extraordinarily interested in the subject—and not very pleased by it. Very interested indeed..."

"I wasn't *interested*!" I snapped. "I was being impolite and nosy, which is normal for me!"

"That is certainly true."

Wishing desperately to get o this subject as quickly as possible, I made a dismissive hand-gesture.

"Anyway, we weren't talking about Miss Hamilton! We were talking about your reason for going to the ball!"

"She *was* the reason."

"No!"

His eyes narrowed another fraction of an inch. Impressive! Together with the miniscule motion of his mouth, this was the closest he had come to having a facial expresions since I had known him. He had to be boiling inside.

"Strange, Mr Linton, how you seem to know my motives and feelings better than I."

"Yes, it is, isn't it? But if *you* don't know them, somebody has to. You went to the ball to confront Lord Dalgliesh. It was *you* who sent him that letter!"

"What letter?" His voice was so smooth, so cool, I could almost have believed he didn't know what I was talking about. Almost.

"*That* letter. It had a lock of Simmons' hair in it, as a sign that his man had been caught. Remember? You cut of a lock of hair from Simmons' head when we were down in the cellar with him. I didn't understand that at the time, but now I do."

Silence. Frozen, ice-hard silence from the centre of the arctic wasteland.

His eyes were dark, the dark green-blue of the sea, and totally unreadable. Still, I had a feeling he knew exactly what I was talking about. I for my part hovered somewhere between exhilaration, doubt and fear. I had figured it out, finally! I knew who was behind the the , without a doubt. Everything fit together.

And yet... and yet... it couldn't be. It was insane. Lord Daniel Eugene Dalgliesh was, by all accounts, one of the wealthiest men of the British Empire. He didn't have need of petty the . He had armies at his command, an entire subcontinent under his control. What would he want with one miserable piece of paper?

"The only thing I don't understand," I continued, my eyes lit still by my epiphany, "is why the lock? Why send him a lock of hair, not just a simple letter warning him o ?"

I expected him to deny it again, or to once again be silent. He actually was silent for some time. But then, just as I opened my mouth for the next attack, he raised his chin and said:

"A letter could have incriminated me. A paper in which I accused him of the , even in the vaguest terms? He would have found some way to use it against me! A lock of hair on the other hand – that was a message only he would understand. A message that needed no words or signature."

A wave of cold swept over me. He had admitted it. He had finally admitted it. My exciting theory was no longer just a theory.

"It can't be him." How come my voice suddenly sounded so small? "It simply can't. I mean... He's so wealthy. So powerful. And it's just a piece of paper. It's not important."

He regarded me coolly. Not for the first time, I had the feeling that he was assessing me. And not for the first time, I had no idea what the result was.

"The American Declaration of Independence was just a piece of paper, Mr Linton. It lost us most of our American Colonies. In retrospect, do you think it was 'unimportant'?"

"Um... well... no, I suppose not."

"Indeed."

I li ed an eyebrow. "The pen is mightier than the sword? Is that what you're driving at?"

"It very much depends on the context. I would prefer a sword to fight a duel, but a pen to plan a war."

He said "to plan a war" as if it were something he did on a regular basis. Looking into his calm, emotionless face, I could believe he did. Another shudder ran down my back. But it was no shudder of revulsion. Oh no. I remembered his powerful body pressed into me, feeling all that tightly contained energy only a fraction of an inch away. What could he unleash, if he wanted to?

More importantly: what would be unleashed when he pitted himself against his arch-enemy?

"Lord Dalgliesh," I muttered. "Lord Dalgliesh is a thief."

Before I could blink, Mr Ambrose had crossed the distance between us. He didn't grab me this time. He just stood very close in front of me, one finger touching my lips. The feeling was electric, sending tingles from my mouth all through my body.

"Don't ever," he mouthed, "say that aloud again. Not ever. Not if you want to live to see your next birthday. Do you understand me?"

That did it. Anger welled up inside me, pushing my fear to the side.

"No, I don't understand!" I snapped, nearly biting o his finger. "You two are businessmen or financiers or whatever you call yourselves – not cold-blooded killers! If he is guilty of this the , why should I be afraid of him? Why shouldn't I simply go to the police and tell them what I know!"

"Which is?"

"That he's guilty!"

"Based on what evidence?"

"Based on... well..." For a moment I floundered, but it wasn't long. "Based on Simmons' word, for one. We could make him a witness!"

In answer, Mr Ambrose simply turned and walked away from me. I was about to protest, when he stopped and snatched up a newspaper from his desk. A paper? I frowned. What did he want a paper for?

He came back and held out the paper, opened at a particular page. One section was outlined in blue ink.

"Read it."

"What is this?"

"Read it, Mr Linton!"

Grumbling to myself, I took a closer look at the paper. It was open to the obituaries page. My eyes travelled to the outlined section.

Died, at London, 15 September 1839

Mr Walter Simmons

A er having been most brutally attacked by two members of the criminal classes and robbed of all he possessed, he succumbed to severe wounds in St Christopher's Hospital. Our hearts go out to his poor parents, whose only child he was.

I read it, and I read it again. Then I read it a third time. Still, I couldn't quite process it.

"Dead?" I whispered. "Simmons is dead?"

"Why so surprised, Mr Linton? I told you this would happen."

"But how... how did this happen? Why did two people attack him? You took his money away, why would they want to rob him?"

His steady, cool gaze was unnerving.

"Do you really need to ask that question?"

The way he said it, it sounded like there was an "I had thought you were clever than that!'" attached at the end – which was silly, of course. Mr Ambrose didn't think me clever at all! He thought I was a girl, and that all girls were stupid and weak.

Well, my bones certainly agreed with him on the last part right now. Stumbling over to the chair in front of the desk, I fell into it and put my arms around me in an unusually vulnerable gesture.

"And if we went to the police..." I managed to say.

"... they would probably not be very eager to investigate a personal friend of the home secretary and relative of her Majesty the Queen on an unsubstantiated allegation of murder," he finished my sentence. "In fact, one might even say they would be strongly averse to the idea."

"And if we just brought up the the , Sir?"

"The one for which you've just lost your only witness, Mr Linton?"

"Oh."

"Quite." Mr Ambrose shook his head, looking down at me. "You have to believe me when I tell you that there's more to business in the British Empire than signing papers and building machines. Oh, here in the Metropolis it's all glamour, smiles and handshakes. But behind the façade, things are not so pretty."

"So... what will we do now?"

"We?" He gave a little derisive noise. "We will return to our original discussion: the subject of your impending dismissal."

My head shot up, and I stared into his eyes disbelievingly.

"What? You really meant that?"

His eyes were very dark.

"I do not say things I do not mean, Mr Linton! You made a fool of me in front of the entire city. I do not take such things likely. And you're mistaken if you think you can sidetrack me. Who stole the file, whether it was Lord Dalgliesh or Queen Victoria or Santa Claus for that matter is no concern of yours!"

There were noises from outside the room – the footsteps of a heavy man, coming closer. But neither of us paid attention to them. We were too intent on each other.

"But... of course it is of concern to me if I'm going to help in the search for the file," I protested.

He made a move towards me – then stopped himself in mid-movement. Slowly, as if he had to drag himself back, he removed himself from my vicinity and retreated behind his desk, where he sat down so he was on a level with me and could stare directly into my eyes.

"No."

The footsteps were still coming closer. They were as loud as drumbeats now, pounding down the hallway outside. But still, neither of us cared.

"Yes, Sir, I will!"

"No, you won't."

Behind Mr Ambrose, over the city, the sun was setting. Its last red remnants of light streamed directly into the room, casting Mr Ambrose's shadow towards me and making him look more like a stony, sinister statue.

"You," he said, slowly and precisely, "will not have anything to do with the search for the file, whether you stay or go, and let me tell you, at the moment the latter is far more likely. You will not come within a hundred leagues of Lord Dalgliesh! You won't even hear a whisper of any trail or clue my men and I will discover! I'll make sure to keep you far, far away!"

The footsteps outside came to a sudden halt and the door was thrown open. We both turned to stare. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a rebuke form on Mr Ambrose lips about how anyone could dare to disturb him without knocking – but his lips froze when he saw who stood in the doorway.

Karim was breathing hard, leaning against the doorway, triumph flashing in his eyes.

"We have found it!" He exclaimed. "*Sahib*, we know where the file is!"

My dear Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Huzzah! 3 big cheers for "Storm and Silence"! Let drums be beaten & trumpets be sounded throughout the realm of Wattpad! :-) I've got fabulous news! "Storm and Silence" has just now reached the fi een million reads mark and has also gotten more than 400,000 votes by this time. The only thing that currently keeps me, Sir Rob, from exploding from joy at the moment, is the fact that I shall have to stay alive long enough to write the next chapter ;-)

Thank you for all your fantastic support! Thank you! Thank you! **gentlemanly bow**

Yours Truly (and happily celebrating!!!)

Sir Rob

GLOSSARY

Peer: In British english, the word "peer" doesn't necessarily refer to the same thing as in other English-speaking nations. A British peer isn't someone who happens to be the same age as you, but rather means a person who held a political position of considerable power in the Victorian Age, power which, to a certain extent, still exists today. All the peers assembled together make up the House of Lords (1 of the 2 English houses of parliament) and therefore, in the Victorian Era when British parliamentary democracy was still less democratic, they held an great amount of political power. I've included historical painting of the House of Lords within this installment. You'll be able to see for yourself what the members of the house looked like, all gathered together and wearing their fine red, fur-lined cloaks, which even nowadays still remain as the o icial dress code for all gatherings of the the house of lords, in case you happen to be wondering. ;-)

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