

## 64. Napoleon and all the Little Piggies

"...there was this drunk old fellow, you know, really drunk, you could really, really tell from the way he spockle— spak— spoke..." 295

Mr Ambrose listened to my account with his usual facial expression— or lack thereof. In fact, both Mr Ambroses did. There seemed to be two of him at the moment. Sometimes there were even three, but most of the time there were only two. They were swaying slightly and going in and out of focus. 293

"...and I totally conned him! Just like that! And he started bubbleable...babbling...and... what was I talking about again? Barman? Another round of pig's snouts... no... eyes...? Oh, to hell with it! So, I got him talking and..." 297

The blurry, stony looking Ambrose in front of me morphed into two again, neither looking very pleased. Under normal circumstances, I might have been terrified—I mean, two Mr Ambroses to hound me all day and trying to drive me insane? Please! Every girl has her limits! But right now, there was this warm, fuzzy-glowy-gargantuan-greatly-gubbledly-wobbledly-wonderful feeling inside, and not even the thought of two Mr Ambroses to deal with at once could faze me. 292

Why should it? I was a strong woman! Strong, and brilliant, and all-powerful! Ha! Let all men cower before me! Right now, I knew I could squish them all like bugs and conquer the world – even if it did seem slightly blurred. 292

"...and he said he followed him there," I finished my account, "and saw him there, because he went there, and he followed him. And he told me, and sow we know. Isn't that just peachy, slug? Um, I mean... Sir? We know what we wanted to know. Although I can't for the life of me remember why exactly we wanted to know. Bugger! Well, I'm sure it'll come back to me once I've conquered the world. Do you think I should start with Spain, or rather France?" 296

His facial expression didn't change. Somehow, he still managed to suddenly radiate twice as much cold disapproval. "Mr Linton?" 297

"Yessir!" 291

"You neglected to mention where this man you were conversing with actually went." 290

"Oh. Really? How strange. Um... well..." 295

"Yes?" 297

I tried to sort through my foggy mind to find the answer to this conundrum. It wasn't easy. Finally, the answer popped out of the mist. 297

"Duck Road!" I exclaimed. "He went to Duck Road, number 97!" 297

"Mr Linton, there is no such place as 'Duck Road' in London." 293

"Sure there is! It wasn't a native duck, though. Some kind of foreign little beast... From the East, I think." I snapped my fingers, or at least tried to. Somehow, my twenty-seven fingers got tangled up in each other. "East India Duck Road! He went to a large house on East India Duck road! Number 97!" 293

Mr Ambrose gave me a long, long look. Even in my current conquer-the-world mood, I felt that look. 293

"Mr Linton... is it possible that you are talking about East India Dock Road, not Duck?" 293

I put my plans for conquering France and squashing all men like cockroaches aside for the moment and considered this. "Possible," I conceded. 299

"Of course!" Mr Ambrose's eyes flashed, and he looked past me, half-speaking to himself. "East India Dock Road! The East India company!" 294

"I still think it was 'Duck', though," I told him. He didn't pay any attention to me. 289

"Yes, the East India Company... and Dalgliesh is the main shareholder. One more piece of the puzzle." 290

I blinked up at him. "I always get those wrong. I always try to use the piece with the blackberry as the nose for the dog in the background. Are you going to help me conquer the world now, Sir?" 290

His gaze snapped back to me. 297

"Mr Linton?" 297

"Yessir! Right here, Sir!" 297

"I again have a question for you." 297

"Shoot! But please not me." 297

"Mr Linton, did you consume even more alcohol?" 299

"Certainly not, Sir! I never drink on dudely... dudley... on duty." A burp escaped me, and I quickly covered my mouth with my hand. "That's what the soldiers in novels always say when they've been drinking, anyway." 293

"You did drink even more!" 292

"How did you know that?" I demanded. "I told you no, like any good little soldier!" 292

He ignored my question, taking a threatening step closer. "Why did you consume even more alcohol? I gave you express orders not to!" 290

I nodded sagely. I remembered that. 297

"Yessir! But then I remembered that I simply love disobeying your orders." I grinned. "I suppose I'm not a soldier, am I? Not so good with following orders." 295

"No, you're not." 293

"Blast! Well, I'm still going to conquer the world. Want to help me?" 293

"No." He sounded terse for some reason, and not at all eager to help me with my big project of world domination. Strange... Very strange... 293

"At the moment, what I want to do, Mr Linton, is to go to number 97, East India Dock Road, and to tear it down brick by brick. But considering the state you are in, that will have to wait. Come on." 293

A firm hand grasped my elbow and started to lead me towards the exit, away from the suspicious innkeeper and the dancing yellow piggies on the wall. I waved good-bye to them and smiled brightly. 293

"Nighty night!" I called over my shoulder. "Thank you all sooo much for your performance! You were mesmesmerizing...mesmerizing." 293

"Will you hold your tongue!" Mr Ambrose hissed. 290

I shook my head. 297

"No, I don't think so. It's too wet, I don't want to get my fingers wet." 296

We were out of the pub now, and walking down the street. Our progress was rather slow, though. For some reason, the world kept wobbling, and the two Mr Ambroses insisted on walking with one arm around me. Amazing how they both managed to use one and the same arm. 291

"You see," I say, gesturing at the swaying houses on either side of us, "that's why I want to conquer the world. If I could tell the world what to do, I'm sure it would sit still and not be moving around like this." 298

"Assuredly, Mr Linton. Come along." 296

"Plus, there's this whole thing about equality of the sexes. I could fix that once I'd conquer the world, and kick all the chauvinists out of government, and make them tie the shoelaces of passing schoolgirls and clean public latrines." 293

"Very sound policy, Mr Linton. Now if you could walk a little faster..." 296

I was touched. I never would have thought a Mr Ambrose would actually agree with me. I just wish I knew which of the two it was. Maybe at least one of them would help me conquer the world a er all, and we could rule it together – although he would act in a solely advisory capacity, of course. The power had to stay with women, where it belonged. 292

"I'm so happy you agree with me," I said, snuggling up against him. I could feel him still beside me, and his steps, which up to that point had been regular as clockwork, became uneven. "I mean... you normally act like the most cold, callous, cruel, dogmatically domineering bastard in the world, but sometimes... sometimes, like now, I get this crazy idea and I start thinking you could actually be quite nice. You know, if you wanted to." 296

"I... am gratified to hear that, Mr Linton." 293

The world swayed again, and I put my arm tighter around him. "Yes," I murmured. "Quite nice. You feel nice, too." 295

Mr Ambrose missed a step and stumbled. The swaying world must have started to put him off balance, too. 293

"I—indeed?" 296

Had he drunk too? For a moment, it had almost sounded as if he had stuttered. 277

"Feel nice, look nice... you'd think you have more brains." 295

"More brains?" 293

"Yessir!" I nodded vigorously, glad at the chance to explain to him what a humongous dickhead he was. "I mean this whole business with Miss Hamilton for example. I mean, how could you be so stupid? If you really had to pick somebody, why somebody like that, so shallow and emanate and... boring." 292

The fingers which held my shoulders twitched. 275

"Do feel free to air your views on my bad taste in female companions, Mr Linton," he said. Did I imagine it or did his voice sound slightly strange. "Don't mince your words on my account." 293

"Don't worry," I assured him, glad to put his fears to rest. "I wasn't going to. I mean... Couldn't you at least find somebody intelligent? No, no. You had to show up with the first pretty face you could get hold of. That's shallow of you. Made me angry." 291

"Angry, Mr Linton? Why?" 297

Stored away somewhere in my befuddled brain, I might have had an answer to that. But I thought it was time to come back to my overarching theme. 299

"And that's why I am going to conquer the world," I concluded. "To prevent such horrible things from ever happening again!" 297

"My going to a ball with a young lady? That is why you intend to conquer the world?" 296

"Yes! And to end the oppression of womanhood, of course, and the sad lack of solid chocolate and beer in the pig ears of an average English girl. These are all grave injustices which it is my duty to put to rights!" 292

"No doubt. Now, if you could just take a few more steps... There's the coach, over there." And indeed, he was steering me towards a blurry, vaguely coach-like form. "Soon, we'll be with Karim, and you can tell him all about how you want to conquer the world." 294

"Do you think he would help?" 298

"I'm certain he would." 287

"Napoleon and Alexander the Great will, you know. I think I saw them with the dancing piggies, inside the pub." 297

"Of course you did. They'll help you, and they'll help me put you into the chaise, and we will drive away to somewhere where we can make plans for world domination." 297

"Spi ing!" 290

"Yes, Mr Linton. Very... 'spi ing', indeed." 295

We were about half-way to the chaise now. My eyes had gotten used to the darkness outside the pub by now and I could see the fuzzy figure of Karim advancing towards us. 297

"Were you successful, Sahib?" 295

A muscle in Mr Ambrose temple twitched. "No, I was not." He shot me a look. "But we still know where we have to go next." 294

"Forgive me, Sahib! I do not understand..." 297

"And I'm not in the mood to explain right now! We're leaving." 291

"Of course, Sahib. As you command." 297

I would have to learn that commanding tone, I thought, if I was going to conquer the world. Maybe Mr Ambrose could teach me... 296

Karim was just about to start back towards the chaise, when he suddenly tensed and held up his hand. Mr Ambrose froze, and I stumbled right into him, getting a mouthful of his jacket collar. 291

"Mpf! Wtf if?" 297

"Silence!" Karim hissed. "I could have sworn..." 293

He cut off as, suddenly, men appeared out of the darkness around us in a semi-circle. There was a glint of sharp metal in the gloom. 298

"Look what we've got here," said a sneering voice out of the shadows. "We've been looking for you, gents." 297