

67. Unluckily Unlocked

Mr Ambrose's porter apparently was no instant-cleaning wizard. I soon grew tired of waiting for my tailcoat's return. To tell the truth, I felt tired in general – tired and battered and dirty. What I really needed was not just to get my clothes cleaned, but to get myself cleaned, too. To wash the dirt off my skin and all the confusions of the night along with it.

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Didn't Mr Ambrose have a powder-room? With a shower? I thought I remembered something of the sort, from when I had to powder my foot. Or had it been my nose?

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I got to my feet and waited until that nasty, ill-tempered floor had more or less stopped trying to buck me off. It took some time, but finally it seemed to accept I wasn't just going to be thrown out of the window.

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With all the authority I could muster, I pointed a finger at the floor.

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"Stay!" I told it. "I'm going to go to powder my little toe now, and you're going to stay right where you are, understood?"

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The floor nodded, and I raised my chin in triumph. There! I had gained a complete victory. The little yellow piggies cheered and applauded as I paraded past the desk to the little door behind it.

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The powder-room was just as I remembered it. One toilet, one shower, and no powder at all. Not even gunpowder. But then, I had come to shower, not to blow things up, so maybe that was just as well.

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It was a little darker in the room than the last time I had been in here, though. For a moment I wondered why, until I remembered.

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Of course! It's night-time, and that bright thingy in the sky is missing. What's it called again?

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The Sun! Yes, that's what it was called.

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So... you need those other thingamies now. Those whatyemaycallit... lamps!

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Dear me! I was really quite impressed by my vast memory and intellect. It even led me to suspect that there might be some sort of switch for the lamps beside the door – and voilà, I was right! My fingers found the it and turned it.

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Bright light exploded from my left eye and I gave a little gasp, shielding my eyes from the sudden invasion. After a few seconds of familiarization, I took my hand from my eyes and saw that the room was now bathed in a soft yellow light. Now all I needed was for me to be bathed, too – with water instead of light.

287

The shower head protruded from the left wall, over a broad, white, ceramic basin. Of course, it had absolutely no gold ornaments or other adornments like any other decent upper-class British bathroom. This was Mr Ambrose's shower, after all. At the moment, though, I didn't care about ornaments. All I cared about was that water would come out of the pipes.

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Closing the door behind me, I strode over to the shower. For some strange reason I felt as though I had forgotten something, but the prospect of the shower was so alluring I put it out of my mind.

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The floor in here seemed to be friendlier than the office floor. It only wobbled slightly once or twice as I made my way across the room.

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"Good floor," I mumbled, "Nice floor. That's right. Just stay where you are."

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The floor obeyed, and soon, I had reached my destination and could grab one of the pipes for support.

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I noticed there wasn't just a shower, there were towels, too. Perfect! Though a bit strange, admittedly. Who kept bath towels in his office?

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He probably practically lives here.

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Well, all the better. I wasn't in the mood to drive an hour to my shower at home, and I needed the calming feel of water on my skin. Maybe my head would feel a little clearer after I sprinkled a little water on it.

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Humming contentedly to myself, I slipped out of my remaining clothes, getting it done much quicker than usual. Trousers were really handy things to wear, compared with hoop skirts. On the wall hung a collection of towels. His towels. Of course, they weren't made of embroidered terry cloth, but simple white linen. They felt so smooth and cool that they reminded me of him. Wrapping myself in them was almost like wrapping myself in him. It felt nice.

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But... wasn't I supposed to do that only after the shower? I felt a bit confused. Oh well, it couldn't hurt, and, as mentioned before, it felt so nice. I was so engrossed in the task of wrapping the towels tightly around me that I didn't hear the approaching footsteps outside.

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Only when the door swung open and I heard a gasp behind me did I realize I was no longer alone.

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"Mr Linton!"

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Drat! I knew I had forgotten something. Nobody was supposed to be able to come in, right? Though I couldn't remember how or why exactly...

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I turned, towels pressed against my chest, just in time to see Mr Ambrose back out of the room, his eyes tightly shut. The door slammed behind him.

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"Mr Linton?" His voice came from the other side of the door. Was it just my imagination or did he sound just a little bit not his usual cool self?

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"Yes, Sir?"

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"The next time you decide to use my private bathroom, would you be so kind as to bolt the door?"

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Bolts! That's how you made sure the door didn't open. I remembered it now. Where, I squinted at the door.

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"I can't, Sir. There's no bolt on it."

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"Of course there isn't!" he snapped. "Do you think I would waste money having a bolt installed on the door of a bathroom which only I ever use?"

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I nodded gravely. "Of course not, Sir. Time is money is pumpernickel, right?"

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"Power Mr Linton, power Not pumpernickel."

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"Oh. Right you are, Sir!"

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"Next time you go in there without informing me, wedge a chair under the door! Understood, Mr Linton?"

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I nodded again. That sounded like a sound policy.

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"Yes, Sir. As you say, Sir. And by the way... I think you can stop calling me 'Mister' Linton now." I giggled a little. "You've probably seen enough evidence to the contrary."

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"Mister Linton!"

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"No, no. Not Mister. Didn't you hear what I just said?"

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There was a silence from the other side of the door.

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"Mr Ambrose, Sir?" I asked. "Are you still there?"

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"I am counting to ten to calm myself. Do not disturb me, Mr Linton."

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"As you wish, Sir."

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I tried to count along, to know when it would be all right to speak again, but it didn't quite work. Every time I got to three I sort of stumbled and couldn't remember the number that came next.

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"Mr Linton?" His voice finally came from the other side.

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"Yessir?"

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"Tell me when you are done in there. I too am not completely clean and wish to freshen up before retiring for the night."

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"You can come in now, if you want," I offered, generously. "There's room enough for both of us here."

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"No!"

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He sounded quite adamant. That was strange. Confused, I looked around the bathroom.

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"Yes, there is. Don't you know the size of your own bathroom? There's plenty of room, believe me."

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"I am not disputing that. However, I still cannot come in."

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I frowned. He was so stubborn sometimes. "Why not?"

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"Because," he explained to me, his voice painfully calm, "persons of different sexes do not shower together. Society generally frowns on that kind of thing."

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My frown deepened as I tried to concentrate. If I tried very hard, I vaguely seemed to remember something of the sort.

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"But Napoleon is in here with me, too," I pointed out, waving at the Emperor who was leaning against the opposite wall, playing chess with one of members of the piggy dance troop.

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"Err, well...he's a Frenchman. That's different."

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Before I had a chance to argue, I heard hurried footsteps receding on the other side of the door. Strange. Why had he run away?

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Pouting, I removed my towels and stepped under shower. I would have been a novel experience taking a shower with somebody else. For some reason I couldn't recall at the moment, I had never done it before. Thoughtfully, I eyed Napoleon on the other side of the room, but he didn't seem interested. He was much too engrossed in his game of chess. The yellow piggy appeared to be winning, and the Emperor's face was set in grim lines of concentration.

275

It looked like I would have to shower alone tonight. I reached out for the taps and my mood became even darker when I saw that there was, in fact, only one. Of course. Money is power is pumpernickel. Why would Mr Ambrose of all people invest money into a boiler and hot water tap?

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Well, it couldn't be that bad, could it? After all, it was only a bit cool water. Carefully, I grasped the tap and turned it.

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A banshee-like scream echoed through the halls of Empire House.

Outside the door, I could hear the sound of running footsteps, and then Mr Ambrose voice, calling: "Mr Linton? Mr Linton, has something happened?"

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"Yes!" I yelled back! "Yes! A bucket full of iced water, that is what has happened! Where does the water in your pipes come from?"

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Antarctica?"

I heard something from the other side that sounded very much like a wall being punched with energy. Or maybe the floor. I hoped it was the floor. He deserved it more.

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"Mr Linton?"

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"Yessir?"

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"Do not make any unnecessary noises again. I am trying to work."

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And with that, he was gone.

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Quivering with cold, I stood under the shower, cursing the icy water running over my skin, and cursing Mr Ambrose. If he were in here with me, I was sure, I would not be half as cold. He could be surprisingly warm considering how icy he was all the time.

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Closing my eyes, I imagined him here with me, wrapping his arms around me, holding me tightly against him. For some reason, I was sure it would feel very nice having him here. He would be much more interesting company than Napoleon, who was still standing against the wall, bent over his chess game.

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When I opened my eyes again, I saw him.

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He had come after all! Mr Ambrose had entered the room. I wondered briefly why he was dressed in a red hunting costume, but who cared. I smiled a wide smile.

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"You came," I mumbled.

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He smiled back at me, opened his mouth, and growled like a tiger. Hmm... that wasn't something he did normally, was it? And normally, he wasn't so fuzzy around the edges. But you couldn't expect everything, could you? He was here, that was the main thing. Who cared if I got tiger growls instead of intelligent conversations. It wasn't as if he was a great talker under normal circumstances.

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He stepped closer, his cold eyes raking up and down my body in a way for which any man deserved a slap in the face. Yet, strangely, I felt no urge to slap him. I felt an urge to draw him closer. Maybe then the cold water would be easier to bear. Heat already began to simmer in my belly...

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"Mr Ambrose, Sir..."

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My words were cut off as he took another step forward and reached out for me.

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My Dear Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen,

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I've received and read lots of comments asking for a more intimate scene between our dear Lilly and Mr Stoneface Ambrose. Now tell me honestly, my dear fans... did you expect this kind of shower moment? ;) I hope I managed to surprise you.

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A bar of Victorian solid chocolate for anyone who can explain to Lilly this mysterious reason why ladies & gentlemen shouldn't shower together...

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Yours Truly

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Sir Rob

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