81. Trapped

I woke up and thought: The day has come.

Today Mr Ambrose would go to number 97 East India Dock road, and...

An excited shiver went through me. I didn't really know what exactly he was going to do – but I didn't think it would be very legal.

 It'll be exciting, though.

Oh yes. It definitely would be exciting. And I was supposed to stay home like a proper little lady and do nothing! My hands gripped the sheets tightly, balling into fists. Quickly, I looked around. It was still very early in the morning, probably around six am. The sun was just starting to peek over the roofs of the houses outside. Its rays fell on Ella, who lay in her bed, sound asleep, with a smile on her face.

Even in my current mood, I wasn't totally una ected by my little sister's happy smile. But it could not sooth me for long. My thoughts returned to him all too soon.

How dare he exclude me? Hadn't I prove my worth, earned the right to have his respect? It was I who had discovered Dalgliesh's base, a er all!

Admittedly, I had done it while I was as drunk as a lord, and rather accidentally, but still, I had done it. He owed it to me to take me along on this. When I thought of him, facing a host of heavily armed soldiers alone, delving into the dark to recover the mysterious file that was so all-important for reasons which I still did not understand, I wanted to scream in frustration.

Of course I didn't, because it would have woken Ella up. Instead, I punched my pillow, again wishing it had a greater resemblance with Mr Ambrose's head.

 I won't! I won't! I won't allow him to do this!

Suddenly decided what I was going to do, I slid out of bed and towards the window. I didn't bother putting on my dress. Once I reached the shed, I was going to exchange it for trousers and a shirt in any case. If somebody saw me running through the garden in my pink lace nightgown with little embroidered songbirds, I would just have to murder that person before they could spread the word.

I had never dressed that fast in my entire life. Five minutes later I was striding down the street, on my way to Empire House. There probably was no reason to hurry – if Mr Ambrose had any sense in that hard head of his, he wouldn't take action until nightfall. Still, the early worm catches the bird, or however the saying goes.

When I reached Empire house about a quarter of an hour later, I saw that arriving early had been a good idea: a familiar chaise drawn by a shabby beast of a grey horse was standing in front of the main entrance. Knowing that I would have to get past the grey monster, I approached carefully. It eyed me, with what I could only suppose was a mix of interest and appetite.

I raised a cautioning finger.

"If you bite me, I'll bite back," I told him. Nobody would be able to say I didn't warn him.

The horse snorted and turned its head away derisively.

Quickly, I stole past the beast and into the main hall. It was completely deserted. Nobody was in sight. The gigantic man-made cave of Mammon was as silent as its master. My steps echoed from the wall as I hurried across the floor and towards the steps, wondering why he was going this early. Did he still have preparations to make?

 Maybe he simply wants to avoid you. Isn't that nice?

On reaching the upper landing, I heard familiar voices from the hallway. One was especially familiar.

"...quicker, Karim! We have places to be."

"Yes, Sahib."

"And double-check everything."

Cool? Check. Distant? Check. Forbidding and reserved? Check. Now, who could this possibly be?

Carefully, I peeked around the corner and there he stood: Mr Rikkard Ambrose, a motionless figure in white and black, overseeing Karim, who was packing a few scrolls of paper into a bag. They looked like maps to me. Or Groundplans.

"...the main entrance. Soldiers will be stationed there."

"Yes, Sahib."

Mr Ambrose stood more like an Ancient Greek statue than ever, his body now as motionless as his face, his figure erect, his eyes distant, as if looking at something three-thousand years away.

Well, it was high time to startle some life into him.

I stepped out into the hall.

"Hello, everybody."

Mr Ambrose jumped in a most un-statue like way. He whirled around, and his hand was already on its way to grip his sword-cane when his eyes fell on me.

"You!"

"Yes, I." I marched forward, and stopped only a few feet away from him, my fists on my hips. "What did you think? That I was going to stay home and miss all the fun?"

"It was probably too much to expect sensible behaviour from you for once." His eyes flashed, darkly. "I certainly didn't expect you to be here this early."

Ha! I knew it! He had known I would show up, but had hoped to be gone before I did so.

"Well, I'm a morning person," I told him with a bright, fake smile.

"I told you to stay away!"

"Yes, well, I ignored you."

"I can see that." He took a step closer, bending forward a little. "I am displeased, Mr Linton, to put it mildly. Leave. Now."

"No."

"Mr Linton?" He took another step closer. His eyes grew darker and more stormy the closer he got. "I am going to do something I have never done to an employee in my entire life." Slowly, he bent forward, fixing me with his cold, sea-colored gazes. "I'm giving you the day o . Go!"

"No."

"Didn't you hear me? You have a holiday in front of you! Enjoy it! It'll be the last you'll get out of me for the next five-hundred years."

"You can take your holiday and stick it where the sun doesn't shine! I'm coming with you!"

"You work for me! You have to obey me."

I raised my chin, meeting his gaze without blinking. "If you give me the day o , that means today I   don'twork for you, and I can do as I wish. And I wish to accompany you." Gesturing to Karim. "I can't let you walk into danger with only him around for protection."

The Mohammedan's eyes bulged, and I fancy he would have said something pretty explicit, had not Mr Ambrose spoken first.

"And what," he asked, his voice as cold as the North Pole, "makes you think I am going to let you accompany us?"

"Oh you probably won't." I shrugged. "But I can hire a cab and follow you. It's as simple as that."

"I see." For a few moments, Mr Ambrose regarded me in silence. Then: "All right. You have won, Mr Linton. You can come."

I wasn't sure whether I'd heard correctly.

"Excuse me?"

"I said, you can come. I am not fond of repeating myself, Mr Linton."

My mouth popped open.

"I... I was expecting you to fight me on this for about a hundred years."

He shrugged. "I know when to yield to superior forces. You have convinced me, Mr Linton. You should be there, you were right from the beginning. I need you."

"What?" Karim demanded. "Sahib, you cannot be serious! She cannot-"

"Silence, Karim!" Mr Ambrose cut him o . "You will speak when I say so, and not before!"

The mountainous man closed his moth, his eyes burning with anger.

"As I said," Mr Ambrose repeated, "You should be there. You have a right to."

"Well... thank you. I'm glad you've finally seen sense." A timid smile broke over my face. At last! He was starting to be sensible. He was starting to accept me! "Shall we go, then?"

"Soon," Mr Ambrose said, looking out of the window, his face as immovable as ever. "I just need one last thing. I think I've forgotten to take one of the groundplans I need. It's on the desk in my o ice. Would you get it for me, please?"

"Of course, Sir." Quickly, I ran past him and into his o ice. If he was going to take me along, I would do anything! In my mind, I was already picturing the sinister silhouette of the villain's lair. My first ever real villain's lair! My first adventure!

I had thought that the visit to the polling station was my first adventure, but compared to this, it was nothing! I would be entering a new world. A world of mystery, money, power and strife that most people didn't even catch a glimpse of. I was so excited, that I almost didn't catch the click behind me.

Almost.

I whirled around, just in time to see the door to the o ice close.

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Would it surprise anybody to hear that there was no groundplan on the desk in Mr Ambrose's o ice? No? I didn't think so.

"Let me out! Let me out, curse you!" My hand already hurt from hammering against the door. It was useless. The door was firmly locked, just as was the connecting door to my own o ice. He must have directed Karim to lock it while he was doing the same with the other, damn him!

"Let me out, or I will break this door down!"

"Don't excite yourself, Mr Linton," came a cool voice from the other side of the door. "The door is oak, reinforced with steel. It won't break. And don't bother calling for help, either. Nobody is here, and even when the other employees arrive, it won't be any use to call out. I sent Mr Stone to Newcastle on a matter of business, the hallway will be empty. Everybody else will be out of hearing range. This building has thick walls."

I heard him turning away from the door.

"Come, Karim. We still have to collect the necessary supplies and scout the area one final time before the Operation can begin."

"Yes, Sahib." Karim's voice dripped self-satisfaction. I wanted to pull his beard out hair by hair and throttle him, and then bash in his employer's head. Unfortunately, the door was in the way.

"Mr Ambrose! Let me out!"

In answer, I heard only silence. Silence, and the sound of footsteps retreating down the hallway. Then those were gone, too.

I beat against the door, again and again, not because I thought I would be able to break it, but simply to vent my anger. Anger at him, and myself. How could I have been so stupid? Of course he didn't want to let me come along! Of course he had a hidden trap laid for me! This was Rikkard Ambrose we were talking about. And I had forgotten that fact, and walked right into his trap.

Maybe I didn't deserve to come along on the great adventure. Maybe I deserved to stew here, in this o ice, like an old piece of beef in cook-pot the cook forgot to take o the fire. I felt appropriately disgusted with myself.

When my hands hurt so badly I could hardly feel them anymore, I stopped torturing the o ice door. Instead, I looked around, desperate for a way to get out. But there was nothing. The o ice was just as bare as I remembered, with no possibilities to... wait a second.

In the farthest corner, there was a niche I hadn't noticed before. Quickly, I crossed the room to see what it contained, and found myself in front of a door. My heart made a leap! Could it be? Could my escape be so easy?

I reached for the doorknob. My fingers clasped the cool metal, turned it, and – the door was locked.

 Blast, blast, blast!

Of course, my escape couldn't be that easy.

Turning around, my gaze dri ed to the windows. They, too, appeared to be firmly shut and locked. I could break the glass, of course, but what would that gain me? If I shouted from the top floor to people in the street that one of London's richest financiers was keeping me prisoner in his o ice, this surely would bring the police down on me. I would be lucky if I ever got away, let alone in time to join Mr Ambrose in his illegal endeavour.

 Yes, but it would make a nice, juicy scandal and annoy the hell out of him, wouldn't it?

True. But in my heart of hearts the problem I didn't want to annoy him.

I wanted to help him.

 Blast!

Resigned, I dragged my feet over to Mr Ambros' desk and slumped into his chair. Not even the thought of what he might say were he to know I was sitting in the chair reserved for the master of the house could improve my mood right now. I sat there, in endless apathy, horrible images flitting through my head the entire time: Mr Ambrose faced by a platoon of the Presidency Armies, Mr Ambrose being led o to a firing squad...

The thought sent a shock of pain through my heart.

But why? Why did I feel pain? For the future I might lose if he died? My job? No. This pain was not for me. It was for him. Maybe... maybe I didn't detest him quite as much as I had always imagined.

 This is getting you nowhere, you lazy idiot! Think of something!

My fist came down on the desk, hard. Curse him! Curse him and his chauvinistic ways! How dare he go without taking me with him! Hadn't I earned the right to be a part of his life, to go where he went and support him in what he did? And he le me behind simply because I was no man!

 But then, whispered a nasty little voice in my head, maybe, if you were a man, you might not want to go with him so badly.

Angrily, sprang up and marched over to the window. The sun had risen by now. I could see people coming down the street. It wasn't di icult to pick out the ones that were heading to work at Mr Ambrose's: they were the ones running like scared rabbits.

Suddenly, it occurred to me that some of those people might know me from sight. If I smashed the window, and called out to someone who worked here, telling them that I had locked myself in and couldn't find my keys...

Even before the thought was finished thinking, I started pounding on the glass. If I had managed to brake it, I would probably have cut my hands to ribbons. Yet the glass held firm, no matter how hard I pounded it.

Of course it did. This was Mr Ambrose's o ice. His walls were hard, his chairs were hard, his head was hard, why shouldn't his windows be hard, too? Plus, they were next to his archive and safe. Whatever these windows were made of, I would not be able to break them, not even with a hammer.

I went back to the chair of the man who had locked me in here and sat down again. A humourless smile spread on my face. My entire life I had been afraid of being trapped by a man. Most of my imaginings had contained such gruesome horrors as engagements, wedding bells and a honeymoon in the south of France followed by a slow death by domesticity. Never had I imagined to be literally trapped by a man in a room, high up in London's largest monument to Mammon. And, also, unlike in my imaginings where the man himself would have been my prison and I would have wanted nothing more than to get away from him, now, the room was my prison and I wished nothing more than for the man to be with me, or for me to be with him.

But not because I felt anything for him, of course! I was a strong, independent woman and would never have any sort of silly, soppy feelings for any man, least of all Rikkard Ambrose. I just...

My eyes slid shut, trying to keep the tears in.

Well, I just wished I were with him. That was all.

If only there were a way to have someone come and open a door...

Slowly, my eyes opened again – and fell on the pneumatic tube with the basket of message papers right beside it.

My Dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I did it! I finished the chapter one day early! I hope you enjoyed my "Thank you"-Chapter! What plan do you think Lilly is cooking up in her devious little Ifrit's head? ;-)

You won't have to wait a week until the next chapter, by the way! I will be posting the next one over the weekend! You've been so ufailingly loyal during the wattys, you deserve two early chapters! My university work will have to wait ;-)

I have contacted wattpad about when they'll be releasing the wattys voting results, and will tell you as soon as I know more!! :) Keep your fingers crossed for Storm and Silence, and your big toes, too! :)

Yours Truly

Sir Rob

Continue reading next part