09. File Fight

my rear end but managed to grab the edge of my desk and stay upright. Bright lights flashed across my field of vision. I blinked furiously. When I could finally see again, I discovered a tiny metal cylinder lying on my desk. Apparently, it had shot out of the hole in the wall and right into my eye. The hole in the wall that was separating my o ice from that of Mr Rikkard Ambrose. I knew where	
that cylinder came from. Furious, I grabbed the thing and marched towards the door separating my o ice from his 'Hey!'	र्व व
No answer. 'Hey, I want to know why you tried to poke my eye out!' Still no answer. I banged on the door with the hand holding the metal cylinder, and as I did, it fell out of my hand and onto the floor, breaking apart	a a
in the process. It was hollow! Curious, I leaned forward and saw that there was a tiny piece of paper rolled up in the cylinder. Taking it out, I unrolled it, revealing a few hand-written words in a clear, precise, no-nonsense hand. Mr Linton, Bring me file 227B	ਕੌਂ ਕੌਂ ਕੌਂ
Rikkard Ambrose. Bring me file 227B? Just 'Bring me file 227B'? That was all? No please, no thank you. God, why did he even feel the need to sign it? No one else I know would write a message that cold, curt and discourteous. Well, maybe my uncle. But discourtesy from family didn't count.	a ä
And' MrLinton'? He couldn't even acknowledge the fact that I was a female when there was nobody else around? I had been afraid he was a chauvinist. I had been wrong. He was the king of chauvinists. But he was also the man who wrote my pay cheques. So I swallowed the adjectives I would have liked to throw at him and instead demanded of the closed door: 'Why are we communicating via tiny paper rolls? And what is file 227B?'	ä
No answer – though he must have heard me through the door. The man didn't say a single word. But shortly a er, a plinknoise came from behind me, and I turned around only to see another missive from my master shooting out of the hole in the wall. Stomping over to the desk, I grabbed it and read: Mr Linton,	a a
We are communicating via tiny paper rolls because this is the most e icient system of communication. And you should be able to find a file on your own you want to keep your position. Rikkard Ambrose	if at
Most e icient form of communication my foot! The cash-carrying bit-faker just didn't want to talk to me and be reminded that he su ered from the shame of having a girl as his secretary! Well, two could play at that game. I started to rummage through my desk, opening and shutting drawers at a prodigious rate. Finally, I found what I was looking for: in the bottom drawer was a bowl full of metal cylinders and another one full of little bits of paper. I took both out, grabbed the fountain pen that was lying on the desk and began	ä
to scribble. Dear Mr Ambrose, May I ask with all due politeness what kind of devilish invention this is you a forcing me to use? Thoughtfully, I tapped my lower lip with the pen. Then I closed the message with:	ີ່ ສື່ re ສື່
I remain Sincerely Yours Miss Lilly Linton Yes! Show him that a proper girl can be courteous even if a stinking rich man	a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a
Cannot! STORY CONTINUES BELOW	đ
Very pleased with myself I put the cylinder into the hole in the wall. It didn't move. Frowning, I examined the hole more closely – and then discovered a little lever right beside it. Well, it couldn't hurt to try. Probably. Cautiously, my fingers curled around the lever. Hoping fervently it wouldn't make the building explode or something like that, I pulled. There was a sucking noise, and the little metal container vanished into the hole. Phew! I hated mechanical stu. You never knew what would happen when you pushed a button.	ă
For a minute or two, I sat at my desk, twiddling my thumbs. But I didn't have to wait long for a reply. With another plink the metal missive-container shot out of the hole and landed on my desk. I grabbed it eagerly and unrolled the message. Ha! At least this time he would have to be more courteous. He would have to accept me as a girl. Wouldn't he? I read: Mr Linton,	a a a a
This 'devilish invention' as you deem it is the latest technical innovation for high-speed communication, called 'pneumatic tubes'. It allows me to communicate with all my employees in the entire building without leaving roo ice. This system has served me admirably ever since its installation. I would be required to change mynodus operandi in order to communicate with you vocally. That will not happen. I do not change a working system. Bring me file 227B.	ny d
And incidentally, I do not want you as mine, sincerely or otherwise. Rikkard Ambrose My eyes went wide as I read the last line before his name. The abominable, villainous That had just been a courteous closing line! Nothing more! I hadn't meant that well, I hadn't meant anything like the thing he obviously meant!	हैं व
Seething with rage, I grabbed another piece of paper and scribbled: Dear Mr Ambrose I am a female, in case you still have not noticed. How am I to give you file whateveritscalled if you do not open your bloody door? Yours infuriatedly	वि वि वि
Miss Lilly Linton The reply came soon: Mr Linton, You are no female while you are in my employ. As, by the way, you have amproven by your language.	a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a
Slide the file under the door. Rikkard Ambrose What? Now he complained about me not expressing myself in a ladylike manner, a er he had forced me to come to work dressed up in a pair of striped trousers? I itched to send back another snarky remark.	a a
But But But this man was my master now. He was the one who would hopefully one day sign my first pay cheque. He was my ticket to freedom. My only chance.	ă ă ă
Blast him! I hurried over to the shelves that held the boxes. Two minutes of searching were enough for me to discover that whatever system my predecessor had used to sort his files, it most certainly was not an alphabetical one. Twenty minutes of searching went by, and I still hadn't discovered what I was looking for. As I was taking an extraordinarily large and heavy box from one of the upper shelves, I heard a familiar plinkfrom my desk. Balancing the monument of a file container on my shoulder I tottered over to my desk, picked up the metal cylinder with one hand, opened it with my teeth and spat the removed half into the bowl on my desk.	इ त
The message fell onto my desk. Still using only my one free hand, I picked it up and unrolled it laboriously. On the paper were written two neat, concise words. Hurry up. 'Oh thank you!' I shouted at the closed door to Mr Ambrose's o ice. 'Thank	a a
you so very much!' With a grunt I deposited the gigantic box on my desk and began to look through it. A er ten more minutes of ceaseless searching, I raised my head from the dusty intestines of box 37XV227, holding my trophy alo. 'Yes!'	a a a
Now that I had invested so much trouble into finding it, I couldn't help wondering what file 227B actually was. I took a quick peep – only to be confronted by endless columns of meaningless numbers. This was what I had spent half an hour of my precious life on? Ah, who cared what was in it! What mattered was that I had found it, finally! Triumphantly I marched to Mr Ambrose's door, knocked, and shoved the thin	á
file under the door. On the other side, I could hear the scrape of a chair being moved, and then footsteps. And oh, what footsteps they were – only Mr Ambrose could manage to make his step sound cool and disinterested. I didn't wait to listen for more, though. Right now, I was so exhausted that I didn't care what he did with the bloody file. I just went to my desk, collapsed into my chair, closed my eyes and breathed a deep sigh of relief. A plinkfrom the wall made me open my eyes again. Frowning, I picked up the	ä
metal cylinder and opened it. What now? Be quicker next time. Rikkard Ambrose. For a moment, I could hardly believe the words in front of my eyes. But only for a moment. Then, I saw red. Fuming, I grabbed my fountain pen and composed the following message in my best chicken scratch:	ਰੇ ਰੇ ਰੇ ਰੇ
Dear Mr Ambrose, If you want me to be quicker at finding your files, maybe you should explain the sorting system to me. Yours (as your secretary, whether you like it or not) Lilly Linton Istued it into the tube and pulled the lever. The reply came only a minute	ਰੀ ਰੀ ਰੀ
I stu ed it into the tube and pulled the lever. The reply came only a minute later: Mr Linton, If you are not able to comprehend a perfectly logical system of sorting files, then what makes you think you are suitable for the position of private secretary? Maybe you should resign.	a a
Rikkard Ambrose Ha! You would just love that, wouldn't you? And what perfectly logical? So far nothing I had seen of the supposed 'system' was perfectly logical, rather perfectly chaotic. How could anyone figure it out by themselves? Fear suddenly lanced through my heart. What if he sacked me? The possibility hadn't occurred to me until now, because he had promised to give me the job and could not break his word. But knowing the kind of man he was, I doubted	ä
and could not break his word. But knowing the kind of man he was, I doubted very much he would still feel honour-bound to keep me if I didn't come up to scratch. On the contrary, he would probably be delighted to throw me out at the first opportunity. Resolving then and there not to give him that satisfaction, I got up and plunged myself into the jungle that was Mr Simmons' filing system. *~*~**~*	á á
When the next message landed with a plinkon my desk, I sat there, awaiting it with a serene smile. With a flourish, I opened the message container and studied the message inside. Mr Linton,	a් a්
Bring me file 146K. Be quicker this time. Rikkard Ambrose I got up, walked over to one of the shelves, took out a box, opened it, took out file 146K, closed the box again, put it back on the shelf, walked to the door with the file in hand and slid it through the slit between door and floor. Then I knocked at the door and purred: 'Your file, Sir.'	वें वें वें
I heard him getting up and without a word taking it from the floor. All the while I stood leaning against the door, my ear pressed to the wood, grinning like an idiot and feeling like a genius. This time, nothing came out of the hole in the wall. No message. No	ä
complaint. No scolding note. I did a little happy dance in the middle of the room. Yay! He had nothing to complain about. And I bet the fact was riling him up good and proper. Not long a er, both files were returned in the same manner I had forwarded them. Attached to the top was a note.	å å
Mr Linton, Bring me file 188Q. Not a word about being quicker. If that was at all possible, my grin widened a little bit more. Quickly I scurried over to the shelves and, a er depositing the returned files in their correct place, went to the next box and got him the	á á
returned files in their correct place, went to the next box and got him the wished-for documents. The following hours passed in a whirl of fetched and returned files, and curt little notes exchanged via the pneumatic tubes. If he actually read half of the files I fetched for him, I'd eat my uncle's big top hat. He seemed determined to	đ
make me mess up, to pressure me so that he would be able to find some fault with me and have an excuse to sack me.	å

But I didn't let him get to me. I ran between the door and the shelves like a

me some time to figure out, but it wasn't that di icult, really, once you had

taken a moment to think about it: the first two numbers on the boxes stood

that were really Roman numerals, numbering the boxes relating to that

had to run along the shelves until you reached the right one.

door and returned to my desk to wait for the inevitable note.

for years (37, for example, stood, or so I assumed, for 1837). The letters behind

particular year. And the number behind that signified the place of the box in

the overall order of boxes within the room. It was really simple to find a file

With a self-satisfied grin on my face, I pushed the fi y-second file under the

In spite of my success, I couldn't really say I was looking forward to the next

sparks flying out of my eyes. The arrogant son of a bachelor was completely

Why was he so determined to ignore me? Was it that he could not stand the

So what if it is you? asked myself. That's no problem, is it? It's not like you

Right. I had to remember that. It really didn't matter as who or what he

But... but I wanted independence as a female Not independence as some

cheap imitation of a man. I crossed my arms. That was it. I didn't want to be

that romantic crap and so forth. No, definitely not that, I told myself fervently.

And I was going to get it, even if I had to shake it out of him. He couldn't avoid

me forever. At the end of the day, he would have to come out of hiding, leave

~~**~*

About two hours later, when a long time had gone by without any missives

from His Mightiness and I was just beginning to wonder whether perhaps he

might have choked on one of his files, somebody knocked at my o ice door –

Surprised, I looked up. I was certainly not used to people knocking at my door

as if they could disturb me doing something important. As if I weresomebody

noticed by him in the way a girl wants to be normally noticed by a man, all

What I wanted was far harder: I wanted recognition. I wanted respect.

thought of me, just that he gave me my salary and independence.

trying to ignore the fact that I was a girl! The fact that he was the best-looking

note. Every time I read the greeting line 'Mr Linton,' I could almost feel the

man I had ever seen in my life didn't do much to sweeten that fact.

idea of a girl in his employ, or was it me?

his o ice, and then I could confront him!

the one to the hallway, not to Mr Ambrose' o ice.

Mr Stone poked his head in. 'Mr Linton? Are you busy?'

'No, no.' I quickly sat up straight and tried to look very professionally

'Thank you.' Smiling his cautious smile, Mr Stone entered. 'I just came to give

you a message. Mr Ambrose has sent me to inform you that he has gone out

on urgent business and that he will not require your services for the rest of the

I sat there, dumbstruck. Could this be what I thought it was? Could he actually

Anger boiling up inside me, I stomped past a startled Mr Stone, went down the

stairs and le the building, determining there and then not to let Mr Haughty

tomorrow. He would have to accept me or choke on the fact of my femininity.

Disconsolately, I wandered home through the dusky streets of London. When,

every now and again, couples passed me and I saw a smile on the lady's face

that showed she was infuriatingly happy with her miserable lot in life as an

accompanied the woman nearly always noticed, drawing a protective arm

Since there were a lot of people out on the street and I had a lot of glowering

The door to the house was wide open. Anxious, excited voices were calling out

inside, and there was a large carriage right in front of the door. My uncle didn't

own a carriage. Gripped by apprehension, I started to run. What the hell was

What do you think of Mr Rikkard Ambrose's technological improvements?

Would you prefer the abominably modern invention called 'email' or a

wonderfully Victorian system of pneumatic tubes to send your secret

Your reply shall reveal whether you are real Victorians at heart...

Bit-faker: An insult for a Victorian Gentleman. I leave it to your

Continue reading next part □

imagination which bit of himself he's faking...;)

to do, I didn't reach home for about an hour. When I finally turned the last

corner and saw my uncle's house, my eyes went wide in shock.

inferior to chauvinists, I couldn't help but glower at her. The man who

around his charge and glowering just as fiercely back at the stranger.

Chauvinism. Pure chauvinism, wherever you looked.

Almighty and Annoyingly Handsome Ambrose slip through my fingers

have cut his day short in order to avoid seeing me? Why would he go to such

abnormal lengths to avoid me? Was it such a blot on his honour to have a

Or so I thought.

important.

day.'

'Err... come in?' I called.

secretarial. 'Come in, please.'

female for a secretary?

going on in there?

messages?;-)

Yours Truly

GLOSSARY:

Sir Rob

My dear Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen,

want to be noticed by him.

once you noticed that the file numbers related to that last number. You simply

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prize race horse, fetching each file in record time. The filing system had taken

And in every single note he sent he kept calling me MisterLinton.

Wasn't I a smart girl?