For a moment, I was frozen. Which was ironic, in a way. I had always thought of Mr Ambrose as cold and immobile, but now I was the one who couldn't move. He marched over to me and grabbed me by the

arm.

'Get up, I said, Mr Linton! Now!'

97. Man and Woman

Half running, half dragged by Mr Ambrose, I stumbled out of the cabin and onto the deck. The deck? No. This didn't look like the deck I remembered. This looked more like pandemonium. All I saw, before a wall of water hit me in the face, was a strange still life in black and white, with men, women and children arranged around the ship like living corpses, waiting to die again, their faces thrown into stark contrast by the flash of a lightning bolt. ã[™] Then, the wave was on me, and the light was gone. My lungs filled with saltwater, and I was thrown back against the outer cabin wall. Only the hand that still clasped mine held me upright. The hand of Mr Ambrose. 'Steady. It's all right. I've got you.' Spluttering and coughing, I emptied a mouthful of saltwater onto the deck, and a goodly piece of half-digested goose liver, too. I hardly noticed the stench over the strange and unfamiliar scents waing over the Urania Dark scents. Cold scents. Scents of the deep sea 293 'Please, ladies and gentlemen! Please, there is no need for concern! Calm down, please!' An o icer was striding towards us, down from the bridge, his hands raised in an attempt to calm the frightened crowd. Even if he had ten arms, I doubt it would have worked. 'We are doing everything we can to get the situation under control. Please, ladies and gentle-' **3**03 'And how,' Mr Ambrose cut him o , cold steel in his voice, 'do you plan to get a storm under control? Are you St Peter? Can you close the sluice gates of heaven and stop lightning from striking us down?' аж The o icer opened his mouth, but no sound came out. His frightened eyes flickered from Mr Ambrose, to the rest of the terrified crowd gathered on the deck, to the roiling sea around us. ď 'How many lifeboats are on this miserable wreck?' Mr Ambrose's voice was still deadly cold. 'Please, Sir, you have to stay calm. The captain-' a⁷ 'The captain obviously isn't worthy of scrubbing the deck of a ship, because it was he who got us into this situation in the first place. Now - how many lifeboats are on this vessel? The o icer hung his head. 'Not enough for everybody.' His voice was mere whisper. It didn't matter. Everybody heard him. And a moment later, he could have yelled himself hoarse, and nobody would have understood a word. The crowd exploded into panic, everyone demanding that they would get on a lifeboat first, screeching insults, pressing to see the captain. As if that would help. Mr Ambrose didn't yell. The moment he heard the o icer's words he squeezed my hand even tighter, and began to drag me along the slippery deck, away from my cabin. I didn't protest, or try to stop him. I felt numb. Somewhere, deep inside, the realization had already settled: I was going to die tonight. I had fulfilled my dream, gotten my own job, lived through all those adventures and dangers, and now I would die tonight, on this measly little boat, far, far away from home. 202 At least Mr Ambrose was with me. That made me feel a little better, though also sad, for some reason. a⁵ Why? Yes, thatwas the reason: I didn't want him to die. The realization came as a surprise to me. Most of the time during our short acquaintance, I had felt like strangling him myself. But now that the sea was about to choke him for me, I didn't want it to happen. And yet, I was glad that I wasn't alone. Strange. Very strange. 'Please! Ladies and Gentlemen!' I heard the o icer call from somewhere behind me. 'The situation is not as dire as it seems. The sea is just a little rough, I assure you. Please stay where you are! We have the situation under complete control. The captain...' å 'Where are you going?' I yelled to be heard over the howl of the wind. 'He says we should stay where we are!' 'He also says they have the situation under control!' His voice had never sounded like this before. Even when he had been furious, it had always been a cold fury - cold, precise and calculated. This wasn't calculated. It was out of control. It was almost as if he were showing emotion. I, on the other hand, couldn't feel anything, not even fear. I was beyond that now. I could hear our fate in his voice, and if you already knew you were doomed, what was the point of being afraid? 517 I grasped his hand more tightly. ď 'Where are we going?' I asked, more because I wanted to go inside, away from the cold, than because I really wanted to know his destination. If I was going to die, I wanted to damn well spend my last few minutes in a warm, comfy cabin, and I wanted him with me! But he turned his head from le to right, not giving the cabins a second glance. His eyes were wild, as if desperately searching for something. a⁷ 'I don't know!' he growled. 'There must be something! Some way to... You can't... you can't just...' Another voice, amplified by a speaking trumpet rose over the raging storm and drowned out his stuttered exclamations. a 'Attention! Attention, please, ladies and gentlemen. This is the captain speaking. This vessel is nearing a storm that we might not be able to circumvent. Please remain calm. Everything is being done to ensure your safety. Everybody proceed to the lifeboats, please, and prepare to embark, in case of an emergency. Women and children first. This is an order!' ₫ĸ Mr Ambrose's head snapped around to the origin of the voice as if he were Tantalus starving in the underworld and it had just o ered him a slice of apple pie. I thought he would start running in that direction, but no: he started to drag me o again, heading away from the voice, not toward it. Soon, we were back at my cabin. Mr Ambrose ripped the door open and pushed me inside. Stepping in, he slammed the door shut behind him. Suddenly, the howl of the storm and sound of the thunder were muted. It felt like another world - a warmer, safer one. If not for the bucking of the ship beneath us, I might have believed we were far, far away from danger. I might have believed we were not going to die. I was glad Mr Ambrose had brought me in here. This was what I had wanted. To not be out there, in the cold and wet, at the end of my life. I smiled at him in silent thanks, but he glared back at me as if I had o ended him somehow. å⁵ 'Well?' he demanded. 'What are you waiting for? Strip!' ã™ I blinked. This wasn't what I had been expecting. a³ 'S-strip, Sir? Strip what?' 'Your clothes o, of course!' 'M-my clothes?' a 'Yes, your clothes! Get out of those ridiculous army trousers and into a skirt! Right now, Mr Linton!' a⁴ĸ This didn't do anything to detract from my confusion. a ' Youwant me to put on a skirt, Sir?' a³ 'Are you deaf? Yes. A skirt, a dress, a hat and all the rest of it. All those things that make a girl actually look like one, and not some cheap imitation of a man!' **5**42 Slowly, anger started rising up inside me. I had wanted to spend my last few minutes of life in peace and quiet, and here he was, insulting me, trying to do get me to do the very thing he had forbidden me from doing for weeks now. And for what? Because I wasn't worthy to die in a man's shoes and trousers? **643** 'Well,' I snapped, 'you'll have to do without the entertainment of a charade, I'm afraid. I'm not playing dress-up for you! Lord, we're about to die! What is going on in that sick head of yours?' 248 'I told you to strip, Mr Linton! Strip and put on women's clothes! This is an order!' a⁶ 'Do not call me Mister! And I do not care if it's an order or an anchovy! I'm about to drown and don't have to do another word you say.' å" He advanced towards me. His eyes were beyond wild now. They were dark pits of death, as dark as the sea that was about to swallow us up. 41 102 'Put on girl's clothes. Now!' I stepped forward, too, facing him directly. a 'No! I will not. I would not, even if I had them - which I don't.' å ' What? ď 'Use your head, if it hasn't turned to a block of stone yet! Where should I get girl's clothes from? I didn't take anything onto the ship with me. I only have the clothes on my back, nothing more!' ₫³ 'But...' He looked around, frantic ice in his eyes. 'You must have something! A dress, or a night shirt, or... anything!' **857** My hand hit him in the face with enough force to make him stumble back three steps. 'You bastard!' I shouted. 'We're about to die! Do you understand? Die! I don't care about what clothes I wear. I care about...' 225 I stopped. đ What did I care about? I couldn't really find the words for it. But as I gazed up into his deep, dark eyes, I thought I found at least one of those things in there. 'You must have,' he muttered, as if he hadn't even registered the fact that I had slapped him. 'You must have some girl's clothes.' a⁴ĸ 'No.' For some reason, my voice was suddenly so, hardly loud enough to be heard over the roar of the storm in the background. 'Why do you care? They're clothes, Sir, just clothes.' Almost involuntarily, my hand reached up to clasp his trembling fingers. 'It's what's underneath that matters.' ₽¹K 'Not right now,' he murmured, his voice more controlled again, but just as ferocious as before. 'Don't you see, Mr Linton? The captain said 'women and children first'. Women' It took a moment for the penny to drop. I had gotten so used to my disguise, to pretending that I was a man, that I hadn't even thought of the meaning of those words. Women first I wasa woman. I could get a place on one of the lifeboats. a I can survive this. a⁵ My eyes, which had reached out into the far distance, snapped back to Mr Ambrose. a But he can't аж He seemed to read the thought on my face. ď 'Mr Linton,' he said, his voice colder than I had ever heard it, 'you will be on one of those lifeboats. No discussion. This is an order.' 678 'You can order as much as you want,' I whispered. 'I don't have any girl's clothes. Nobody will believe I'm a woman.' ₫° 'They will! I will makethem belief!' **308** 'Why do you care anyway?' My voice suddenly sounded hoarse. Was I catching a cold? Well, on the bright side, it wouldn't really matter, because I would be dead soon. 'Why do you care if I survive? If I drown, at least you'd be rid of me at last!' **4**53 He took a step closer. His dark eyes, burning with cold fire, didn't leave mine for a second. 'Maybe I don't want to be rid of you.' I had to swallow. It was hard. 'And maybe I don't want to leave you behind.' a4K He went rigid, as if suddenly paralysed by some hellish poison – or a heavenly one. å 'Mr Linton, I...' Suddenly, the ship, hit by another wave, gave a violent lurch, and I was hurled forward, towards Mr Ambrose. His arms came up reflexively to catch me and, just as reflexively, his lips parted. There I hung, limply, in his arms. The force of the wave was spent. I was no longer being forced forward, and yet I was, by another wave, a wave of unknown emotions welling up inside me, keeping me moving, until his face and mine were just inches apart. I stared into his fathomless, sea-coloured eyes and saw in them volumes of unspoken words. For just the briefest of moments I thought I felt a gentle caress of his lips on mine – then, another wave hit, and I was thrown back, away from him. Crying out, I reached for something, anything to hold me upright and grabbed a coat hook on the wall. With my other hand I reached up to brush my lips. God almighty...! Mr Ambrose, too, had grabbed a coat hook to hold onto. He let go of it now, and fixed his eyes on me. The shock of the second wave seemed to have shaken him out of his momentary paralysis. ď He grabbed my hand. đ 'What are you doing?' I demanded, my voice breathy. å His hand tightened around mine. 'I'm going to see to it that you survive this night!' ã° 'I said I didn't want to leave you!' A17 The fire in his eyes sparked in a way that was both infinitely hot and infinitely cold. 'Is that so? Well, you are just going to have to, Mr Linton.' **3**45 'You can't make me!' ď 'There you're wrong.' Before I could say or do anything, strong arms took hold of me and I lost my footing. It took a moment to realize: Mr Ambrose had swept me o my feet! I was so stunned, I didn't even contemplate my natural response, which would be bash his head in with a parasol. 631 a But since I didn't have a parasol, that wasn't really an option, anyway, was it? ď ď Crash! Dazed, I watched him kick open the door and march forward. He was moving as if I weighed no more than a feather, and in a heartbeat we were outside again. If anything, the chaos had increased. The waves were twice as high as before - high enough to easily reach over the railing and roll over the ship's wooden deck as if it were already part of the ocean. The passengers were all crammed together in one corner beside two flimsy-looking boats, secured to the deck by ropes. Each and every one tried to jostle forward, to get into one of those fragile promises of safety. ar9 Nobody paid attention to what we were doing – and that was a good thing. With me slung unceremoniously over his back, Mr Ambrose marched right up to the door of the cabin next to mine and drew back his foot. It came forward again in a lightning-fast movement and connected with the door with a thunderous crash that nobody noticed over the roar of the wind and the sea. ď 'Mr Ambrose!' I protested. 'That's Lady Timberlake's cabin!' 245 'Exactly,' he said, and drew his foot back again. 'That's why I'm kicking the door down.' ä Once more, his foot shot forward. a Crack! ā⁷ The door burst inward, splinters of wood from around the lock flying everywhere. Not waiting for me to protest again, Mr Ambrose marched inside and slammed the door behind us. For a moment, we were in darkness. Unlike my cabin, where I had le a lamp burning, Lady Timberlake's cabin was not illuminated, and even though there was a window, no light came out of the dark storm outside. The clouds had long blocked out the moon and the stars. They were gathering to cast the world into shadow, to use it as the dark anvil for the bright hammer of lightning. ₫¹ Suddenly, Mr Ambrose slid me o his back and more or less shoved me away. Panicking, I tried to grab him, but caught only empty air. å 'Mr Ambrose?' I turned my head le and right, but could see only black. I didn't want to be alone! Not in this dreadful chaos of death that was coming down on us. 'Mr Ambrose? Where are you, Sir?' å⁷ ď 'Where are you, darn it?' ā" Without warning, a light flickered to life in the corner of the room, and I had to shield my eyes from the bright invasion. Mr Ambrose stood there, holding a safety lamp, next to a large trunk that stood open beside Lady Timberlake's bunk bed. As I watched, he bent down and pulled out something enormous, pink and frilly, which glittered in the lamplight. He held it out to me. 'Put this on!' There was no doubt in his voice, no room for hesitation or argument. It was a command. And I didn't care. đ I crossed my arms in front of my chest. đ 'Never!' I didn't want to leave his side. I couldn't. Besides, I, unlike poor old Lady Timberlake, actually had some dress sense. a۳ He took a step forward, the dangerous glint in his eyes intensified a thousandfold by the light of the lamp he held up. The flickering flame shone on his face and gave it a whole new appearance, the sharp angles thrown into clearer contrast, the hardness now more clearly visible than ever before. ď 'You are going to change into female attire this minute, Mr Linton, or I swear, by all the banknotes of the Bank of England, I will rip your clothes of and stu you into a skirt myself! Do you understand?' At any other time, the thought of him ripping my clothes o might have unleashed a torrent of forbidden images and dreams. Not now, though. Now, there was a real torrent coming for us. From somewhere not far away, I heard wood splintering, and the ship shuddered. It wouldn't be long now. ď 'Do you understandMr Linton?' he repeated, enunciating each word, his teeth clenched. I couldn't escape his penetrating glare. And somehow, I found, I couldn't deny him. a 'Y-yes, Sir.' æ 'Adequate.' He nodded, turning on his heels and marching towards the door. *A*34 'I'll be waiting outside,' he said over his shoulder. 'Don't take too long. Your dressing room is sinking.' a a *~*~** I stepped out onto the deck. Mr Ambrose already awaited me. a 'You took your time,' he observed. a 'It was di icult to get the dress on,' I said, my voice as lifeless as the rest of me. 'The buttons are at the back.' There were so many things I should have said. Yet that was all I could think of. The buttons are at the back. ₫ The ship swayed, and I grabbed the doorframe to steady myself. Mr Ambrose didn't move an inch, somehow seeming able to sway contrary to the ship's motion, so he was always standing ramrod straight. He held out his arm to me. ₫ I stared down at it. Having dressed up as a man for so long, I had almost forgotten how a gentleman was supposed to behave to a lady, and that he was the former, while I was the latter. To have this resurface now that we were in danger of sinking into bottomless depths forever was the cruellest of mockeries. With shaking hands, I clutched his arm, and we proceeded down the ship, towards the clamouring crowd beside the lifeboats. ā² Again, I heard the ship's alarm bell ringing high above me. It suddenly, painfully, reminded me of church bells announcing a wedding. 378 HalAs if this was anything like a wedding. At a wedding, everything was white. Tonight, everything was in black. At a wedding, two people were joined for life. Tonight, two people would be divided in death. At a wedding, two people loved each other. He only hated me, didn't he? He had said it o en enough. I glanced sideways at Mr Ambrose and saw that he, too, was watching me, his dark eyes burning with cold fire. I remembered his lips skimming over mine, and suddenly it struck me that in this last respect, maybe tonight wasn't so unlike a wedding a er all. My jaw began to quiver, and I could feel moisture at the corner of my eyes, threatening to spill over. **ā⁴¹** 'Don't, Mr Linton.' The voice was Mr Ambrose's - but it was neither as hard nor as cold as usual. It sounded almost gentle. 'It's wet enough as it is.' a^{9K} I nodded hurriedly and clenched my teeth. I wouldn't cry! I would be strong. å We arrived at the sodden altar of our deadly wedding. The wedding guests didn't seem too pleased to see us. Particularly, when Mr Ambrose started pushing through the crowd. are 'You there!' one of the men shouted. 'Stand back and wait your turn, like any of us!' **a** Mr Ambrose shot the man a glare that could have frozen lava and held up our joined hands. 'I'm not seeking a place for myself, but for this lady here.' 'What the hell is that supposed to mean?' The man growled, not even bothering to look at me. 'There are already heaps of women in the boats. All that were on the ship!' a⁶ 'Apparently not.' Mr Ambrose's voice remained calm and cool, but I when I glanced at the little finger of his le hand, I knew the truth behind the mask. The finger was twitching in prestissimo'As you can see, there is still this young lady le, and...' ď 'What, that strumpet?' the man growled, glancing in disgust at my less than orderly attire. 'Not a chance she's getting into the boat with us. It's time that honest men got a pla-' a⁴ĸ Mr Ambrose's fist moved faster than a lightning bolt. The man was thrown backwards, driving people right and le, and slammed into the ship's railing. a⁹⁵ 'Just to clarify,' Mr Ambrose said, still as cool as an iceberg. 'I'll be staying behind to make sure she gets on board safely.' 'No!' ₫³ The word was out of my mouth before I knew why or how. The crowd's eyes snapped to me. Then, from me, they went to Mr Ambrose, and back to me again. Something appeared in their eyes then, some understanding I couldn't quite reach, and they backed away. Mr Ambrose led me through their midst, though now I had started to struggle. I was finally starting to realize all of what he A76 meant to do. 'No!' I protested. 'You can't stay behind! You can't! I won't let you!' He said nothing, just picked me up and deposited me in the lifeboat as if I weighed nothing at all. I tried to scramble out again, but the hands of other women grabbed me, holding me back. I could feel wetness stream down my face. Were those tears, or was it rain? The storm roared louder and louder. a⁴ĸ

'Look a er her, will you?' Mr Ambrose asked Lady Timberlake, who

'I will, young Sir! I promise. Such a lovely girl. She looks just like I when I was younger. Why, even her dress looks like one of mine! It's

'No,' I mumbled, helplessly, not looking at her once. 'No! Don't do

I tried to reach for Mr Ambrose, but he retreated far away. Other people started to climb into the boat a er me. Were they were men or women? I did not know. They could have been elephants, for all I cared. All that mattered was: he wasn't one of them. He didn't even try to get a place on the boat. He just stood there, staring at me as if his gaze, connected to mine, was his lifeline. I stared back, knowing that all too soon, that line would no longer hold. In such a moment, another man might have spouted goodbyes, confessions – he said

From somewhere far away and unimportant, I heard a shouted command. The boat rose into the air and slowly began to be lowered over the side of the ship. I held Mr Ambrose's gaze until the very last moment. When he vanished behind the side of the ship, I buried my

This couldn't be happening! We were supposed to have won! To have

face in my hands and slumped to the boat's floor.

aboard. But hewasn't. He wasn't.

real. It had to be a dream.

his kiss was no dream, either.

brought back the prize in triumph! This was impossible!

With a violent jerk, the boat touched down on the roiling sea. Someone shouted commands – a man's voice. So there were men

Over the yowling of the wind I heard the splash as oars dipped into the water. The little boat was carried away, dancing like an empty nutshell on the surface of the water. I felt just as empty. There were arms around me, and the voice of an old woman was muttering soothing nothings into my ear, but I didn't feel able to respond, or even to hear. Some part of me wanted to fight her o, but my arms felt so weak, so terribly weak. This could not be happening!

Glancing up through the wild veil of my hair, I saw the ship, far above and away, atop a giant wave, just as much at the mercy of the ocean as we were in our tiny vessel. For just a moment, I thought I saw a lone figure standing at the prow. Then my head slumped down, the rest of my energy used up. Tonight had simply been too much to be

But you know it isn',tcame a voice from the back of my mind. Just as

I cringed, shuddering with pain. From above, I heard a crash, a giant roar, and thought That was the ship, splitting apart.wanted to look, wanted to look so much, but could not. I didn't have the strength.

All I could do was listen. My ears strained to hear some noise, some sign that would tell me that the ship was still afloat, that he was still alive – but no such sound ever came. There was nothing but the crashing of the storm waves against the bow of the boat. And then,

THE END

So this is it - the end of 'Storm and Silence'! But, as you all will probably have guessed, it is certainly not the end of Lilly's and Mr

Yes, my Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen, there shall be a SEQUEL!

Please don't hesitate to post suggestions in the comments! Here are just some of the questions I'd love to hear your opinion on! Do

- want to learn more about the enmity between Lord Dalgliesh &

- want another book set in London, or a more exotic adventure

- want more Lilly & Ambrose action? (If Mr Ambrose is not a

I am eagerly looking forward to hear what you think! Please pelt

By now, the sequel, "In the Eye of the Storm" is written. It's fully available on Wattpad, and you'll find it on my profile. Click the "next chapter" button for a look at the cover and more info. Have

Continue reading next part \Box

me with feedback! **raises protective shield**;-)

I shall be taking some time o from writing to complete my research for my next book, but once that is finished, we will embark on our next fabulous literary journey into the nineteenth century! To stay up-to-date regarding any and all information on the latest info of the 2nd volume of this series, and to get all the newest teasers and / or announcements about the release date, please follow me on my Twitter or Facebook account. Both of those can be found via the username of "TheSirRob". There I will provide you with all the latest info in regard to the "Storm and

even that was gone, and there was only silence.

My Dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ambrose's story.

drumroll

Silence" series!

Mr Ambrose?

Yours Truly

fun reading:-)

Sir Rob

- want Mr Ambrose to survive? (Duh;-)

- wish to know who the pink letter lady is?

- want to see more of Captain James Carter?

- want the yellow piggies to return?

somewhere in the British Empire?

- want the pace faster or slower?

skeleton at the bottom of the sea...)

P.S.: UPDATE, Oktober 2017:

you

almost like fate. I promise, nothing will happen to her.'

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was cowering in the boat, right beside me.

The old lady nodded.

not a word.