



MARY LANCASTER

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LOST  
LOVER

CRIME & PASSION

DRAGONBLADE

**LOST LOVER**  
**Crime and Passion, Book 4**

Mary Lancaster



# **LOST LOVER**

**Crime and Passion, Book 4**

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Text by Mary Lancaster

Cover by Dar Albert

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*Chapter Twenty*

*Chapter Twenty-One*

About Mary Lancaster



## CHAPTER ONE

FOOTSTEPS ECHOED BEHIND her. They quickened and slowed when she could yet surely no one could see her in the thick fog that swirled off the canal by the river? She cast a quick glance over her shoulder, for it was hard to judge the distance of sounds in the muffling mist.

The indistinct shape of a male figure in a caped coat and a tall hat was visible several yards behind. She gripped her large carpetbag tighter and pressed onward. He could be anyone, though such a well-dressed man was likely to live hereabouts. It was not the weather for a pleasant stroll, and she, used to the stench of the river, was disgusted by the taste of it, which seemed to coat her lips and her nostrils, carried by the thick tendrils of fog.

With her free hand, she dug into the pocket of her cloak and grasped her house keys. They could be a weapon, if it was *him*.

Although if it was Joshua who followed her, she knew in her heart that her keys were unlikely to deter him.

She castigated herself for being so nervous of a stranger, or for walking, moreover, several yards behind, courteously keeping his distance. Surely, so that she would not be alarmed. And she wouldn't have been, if this hadn't happened before. But this was the fourth or fifth time in the fortnight that she had suspected someone of following her along the canal, and even in the more respectable streets of Kensington, Belgravia and Mayfair. Her skin had prickled, but she had refused to turn back like a hunted rabbit. It could still be coincidence, different people at different times walking in the same direction.

*I will not be cowed by my own nerves!*

The fog was so thick, she almost missed the turning into Hansons, her narrow street of small, terraced houses. She prayed the man behind her would miss it, or not be looking for it in the first place... But no, by the time she reached her home, she was sure the footsteps followed, steady and measured. And suddenly, she had to know. She took the two paces that separated

street from her front step and slid her key into the lock, opening the mere crack before she turned and stared into the mist.

Her heart drummed. Her fingers clenched on the key. The footstep on without pause, and the same male figure in caped coat and hat emerged from the mist. As tall as Joshua, with the same steady, lethal grace that he was wary, observing...

The moment he saw her watching him was the same moment she recoiled with a flood of relief that he was not Joshua. He was younger, leaner, features more refined—or at least they seemed so in that one in a glimpse, before he paused and met her gaze. He didn't speak or even breathe. He didn't look as if he ever smiled. His face was paler than the fog, and his features were sharper, more defined. A man to fear—no one recognized the signs better than she. But he merely touched the brim of his hat with two gloved fingers and walked on.

Weak with relief, she stared after him until he merged with the fog, which vanished, his footsteps fading away.

She whisked herself inside the house and locked the door behind her. She was shaking—with more relief than fright, she assured herself. Joshua had no idea she was back in London.

Of course, there were other dangers in the city, especially on foggy afternoons in poor streets without lighting. The man, who knew now where she lived, could well be one of those. There had been something mysterious about him...

*Don't jump at shadows*, she scolded herself as she unfastened her bonnet and hung it on the hook by the door. He was merely walking down Commercial Road and was entitled to take any route he liked. Perhaps he would come home by Commercial Road instead of the canal next time.

Having placed her bonnet on the same hook, she took her carriage through to the tiny front parlor and set it on her worktable. But she needed to get rid of the fog-borne grime on her skin before she began. She walked up the narrow staircase to the bedroom above and used water from the morning's jug to wash her hands and face. She unpinned her hair and just begun to brush it vigorously, when, in the old, speckled mirror, she saw the foot.

She blinked. On the floor, just poking out from the far side of the doorway, was *definitely* a foot, shod in smart leather, and pointing toward her.



door turned slowly from the mirror and stared at the unmoving, alien male figure.

She lived alone, without a servant of any kind. No one else should come to her house uninvited, and she rarely invited. She had never invited a man to her room. Swallowing, she snatched up the nail scissors from the rickety dressing table and took the two steps to the other side of the bed.

A man lay on his back. A big, powerful, well-dressed man with thick, wavy brown hair, a loud yellow and red paisley waistcoat, and an unfastened, his colored coat. His thick neck was horribly bruised. And his face was distinct from Joshua's.

He smiled. Instinctively, she raised the scissors in defense. But he didn't move, all his open eyes weren't looking at her but gazing straight upward. His handsome features remained perfectly still.

Revulsion and fear almost overcame her. The scissors slipped from her grasp and fell to the floor. Her whole body shook, but somehow, she managed to touch his wrist. She gasped, snatching back her hand, for his skin was warm.

She fell back on her heels, clutching at her hair. *Dear God, what could now?*

The thought that he was in her house, her bedroom, *alive*, terrified her. And yet, if he were dead, was that not even worse? Alive, he needed help. And though there was no one in the world she wanted to help less, she couldn't let him die if she could avoid it.

Could she?

*In my house! Oh dear God...*

*Dr. Tizsa!*

On that thought, she sprang to her feet and ran down the stairs. She snatched up her cloak and stuffed her bonnet on her head as she ran out of the front door and hurried through the fog toward Commercial Road and the direction of the clinic where she had once gone, months ago now, to consult a doctor. She had the headaches that blurred her vision and made it impossible to work.

He had given her a pair of spectacles that had, astonishingly enough, stopped the headaches. People said that although he was a foreigner, she saw an excellent doctor and often "forgot" to charge his poorest patients.

Certainly, he had charged her very little. But the chief reason his name had come into her head was that rumor also said he could help with a variety of problems.

oot. Whether Joshua was dead or alive, getting him out of her house would be indefinitely a problem.

m.

lressing



h dirty-JAMES ANDOVER HAD strolled back the way he had come and stopped on the other side of Hanson Row. Leaning against the convenient blank wall of the warehouse behind, he gazed through the fog at the house of the woman called herself Miss Alice Gunn, but whose real name he knew to be Joshua Jarman.

coarsely He had begun to watch her only days after his release from prison because she very probably possessed the items that had sent him to prison. Contempt for her, then, had come close to hatred as he coldly plotted her downfall and that of her husband. The thinness and frailty of the figure followed meant nothing to him. Nor did her clear exhaustion at the end of long walks, which involved visiting respectable and often wealthy households, do I do supposed she was stealing from. He made notes of them all and forwarded them forward to her punishment along with her husband's.

ied her. Until she had looked at him out of the mist just now, not in a challenge, but with a sort of expectant dread. To his annoyance, his cold help, was becoming laced with just a shade of misplaced pity, just because she could no stranger to fear. And because she was pretty.

He should have gone home, switched attentions to Jarman himself yet he had come back here. Because now she *bothered* him. Intrigued even, and he didn't know why. For those reasons alone, he should walk

e seized He didn't.

nt door He could barely make out her front door, so he doubted she would tell him if she looked out her windows. In fact, he didn't much care if she was truthful with himself, he *wanted* another glimpse of her, with the concealing bonnet. Without the fog. Perhaps he had watched her long enough, followed her long enough that he simply wanted *something* to happen.

he was When it did, it took him by surprise. The front door suddenly flew open and the young woman bolted out. She didn't stop to close, let alone lock the door, merely tugged it behind her in a halfhearted way before rushing down the street and running up toward Commercial Road as if all the fiends were after her.

as most James hesitated, but only for a moment. He would have liked to know where she was going in such a hurry, but he doubted he would have a chance again. Ruthlessly, he squashed his misplaced urge to protect. As the fog closed around her vanishing form, he crossed the road and walked to her front door. Just as he'd suspected, the door had not even closed on the

l of the It smelled clean. The narrow hallway led to a kitchen at the back of the house. An even narrower staircase led up to the first floor on the left. The Mrs. parlor opened on the right, so he walked in there. She lived alone and didn't fear discovery by friends or servants.

prison, A large work basket sat on the floor beside the one armchair. A glance showed him only reels of silk and cotton thread, sewing needles of various sizes, scissors, buttons, a few small squares of cloth. The cage he she usually carried—always, apparently, full—stood on the table beside her chair. This was much more interesting to him.

uses he But when he unclipped it, he found no valuable stolen goods, only looked of linen, a few stockings, and other garments of various children's sizes. Most had small holes or were frayed somewhere.

nger or He frowned and closed the bag again before looking around. He contempt walked out of the parlor to the kitchen, which was neat and clean. The she was contents of the cupboards sparse, the larder half-full only of basic food—a cheap cut of ham, bread, some vegetables, a jug of milk.

If. And Upstairs, he glanced into the first tiny bedroom, which contained a trunk and several bolts of cloth piled on a shelf beside ribbons and a k away strips of lace.

The other bedroom was clearly where she slept. It confirmed what he would see already gathered with increasing consternation. This was not the home of a rich woman. No expensive art or porcelain betrayed secret wealth. The furniture was old, rickety, and clearly secondhand. Her washing bowl and tub were chipped, and there was no obvious box of jewels for him to look

through. There were few comforts, let alone luxuries, here. She seemed to be, in fact, exactly what she pretended—a poor seamstress.

ock, the He moved further into the room and stopped dead.

into the A man lay on the far side of the bed, obviously deceased, with the look of hell of strangulation on his thick neck. It was her husband, Joshua Jarman.

No wonder she had bolted from the house. It was past time he

o knowsame. First, though, he crouched beside the body. A small pair of nail  
such alay on the floorboards beside his right ankle, an odd untidiness in  
As thehouse. He left them where they were while he went through the dead  
d up topockets. And then looked through the widow's bedside cabinet.  
sed. He



κ of the  
A small “DR. TIZSA!” SHE called breathlessly, catching sight of him as he walke  
, so he the street close to the clinic.

The fog wasn't quite so bad here, or perhaps it was beginning to  
A quick he clearly recognized her and came to a halt with the kind of smile th  
dles of her he couldn't quite remember her name.

rpetbag “Alice Gunn,” she said in a rush.

side the “Of course. Headaches. I trust they no longer plague you?”

“I need you come with me,” she blurted, ignoring this. “Please. U  
y a pile He might not be dead!”

s sizes. Dr. Tizsa was a breathtakingly handsome man—in a dark, d  
exotically foreign kind of a way that even she had noticed from the fi  
im. He the doctor always behaved as if no one had ever told him of his good  
an, the The quiet confidence of his bearing seemed to have nothing to do v  
dstuffs, entitled smugness of so many beautiful people. His concentration see  
be on *her* rather than on himself. Which was a danger in itself at the m  
l only a though she didn't have time to dwell upon the fact.

several “Who might not be dead?” he asked with perfect calm.

“The man in my house!” She took hold of his coat sleeve in her  
he had and he didn't brush her off, merely offered her his arm properly as tho  
ne of a were a lady and hurried in the direction she tugged him.

th. Her “Where do you live?” he asked. “Do we need a cab?”

and jug “Between Commercial Road and the Grosvenor Canal. I don't  
to rifle about cabs. I've never taken one...”

d to be, “Tell me about the patient. Why do you think he might or might  
dead?”

“He isn't moving. He's just lying on the floor, staring at the ceiling  
e marks he's warm to the touch, so I thought maybe a doctor might save him.”

“What happened to him?”

did the She shook her head. “I don't know. I just came home and found

scissors my house! In my...my bedroom.”

a neat “How disturbing,” Dr. Tizsa murmured.

l man’s The calm understatement brought a surge of hysteria she had to  
back. “There are marks on his neck,” she blurted instead.

“I see. And was there anyone else in the house?”

She stared at him in fresh alarm. “No! That is... I don’t think so. I  
just come in myself, and I didn’t look...” Her blood froze upon her  
d down that whoever had choked Joshua to within an inch of his life might have  
been lurking in the house while she was there. She swallowed convu  
lift, for “I just went up to wash and change, and there he was. When I touc  
hat told wrist to take his pulse, he felt warm, so I ran to fetch you.”

“I take it he should not have been in your house?”

“Absolutely not,” she said fervently.

The doctor said nothing else, contenting himself with striding  
rgently beside her at the urgent pace she set despite her exhaustion. Only as  
in her pocket for her keys did she realize she hadn’t brought them w  
lashing. She had not even shut the front door. If the doctor noticed, he said n  
rst. But merely touched her shoulder when she would have led the way ins  
l looks walked in before her. His head was poised as though he were li  
with the intently.

med to “Upstairs?” he asked, setting his foot on the first step.

moment, “Yes. The second door on the landing.”

He preceded her into the room, while she couldn’t resist sticking h  
around the door of the spare room. Finding it thankfully empty, she fo  
r panic, Dr. Tizsa, her heart racing. It came to her that whatever he told her, v  
ugh she he pronounced Joshua dead or alive, it would be bad. There was n  
whatsoever in this situation.

“He’s quite dead,” the doctor said matter-of-factly. He was cro  
t know squashed between the body and the window.

“Dear God.” She closed her eyes to hide whatever it was she was  
not be Shock and cold, mainly, for she was shivering.

“He’s been strangled,” Dr. Tizsa observed. “Which means murde  
ing, but have to inform the police.”

Her eyes flew open of their own accord. “I can’t!” she exclaimed  
would it look if a dead man was found in my bedroom? Word would  
him in and I’d be judged, get no work. I need to work, doctor!”

“You are a seamstress, are you not?” he asked casually, rifling through the dead man’s clothing and turning out his pockets.

She choked. She nodded, trying not to look at the body.

“I’m afraid we cannot cover up murder.”

At least he sounded apologetic, so she swallowed and tried, “Could I just move him? Even into the backyard? And then bring the police?”

He shook his head. “I’ll ask them to be discreet about anything we still reveal to the press. Miss Gunn, do you have any idea who this is?”

“No. None.” She licked her dry lips. “Do you suppose he is a bodyguard? That there were two of them and they fell out over...”

His gaze flicked around the room, and she trailed off. Obviously, he knew there was nothing here to steal, let alone kill over.

“Someone told me that if I was in trouble, you might help,” she blurted out. “Who told you that?” he asked, straightening.

“An acquaintance. In Covent Garden. She sells flowers.”

“Ah.” A faint smile flickered across his lips. He swept up his arm, gesturing for her from the room. “I’m afraid my services do not include moving or identifying murdered bodies.”

“Of course not,” she whispered, swamped by shame and humiliation.

“Forgive me for asking.” She would have to give up all her customers and move away, start again. Even dead, it seemed, Joshua could help her.

From habit, she bent to pick up the nail scissors she had dropped when she first saw the body.

“Don’t touch anything,” Dr. Tizsa said pleasantly. “The police will want to see everything as it was when he died.”

She straightened. “But it was I who dropped the scissors when I found him.”

“All the same. Do you have somewhere else you can go just now? Family? A neighbor?”

“No, there’s no one,” she said. No one she could trust with information that a man’s dead body was in her bedroom.

Perhaps he understood this, for he said gently, “I have to fetch the doctor. I’ll go straight to Scotland Yard. Do you mind waiting here, with the body?”

“How upstairs?”

She shook her head. If he had to be there, she would far rather wait downstairs. “Dead.”

through “Do you have tea?” he asked.

She nodded, frowning.

“Make yourself a pot. Add extra sugar. It’s good for shock. Let  
look in your kitchen before I go...”

dn’t we Was he looking for the killer? Could the man still be here? She  
after him, not even following, until she heard the back door open an  
ig they again.

As she entered, he turned the key in the lock. “Do you always lea  
urglar?back door unlocked?”

“Never,” she exclaimed.

e could “I found it unlocked,” he remarked without emphasis.

“Is that how he—they—got in?” she whispered.

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“Do you have tea?” he asked.

She nodded, frowning.

“Make yourself a pot. Add extra sugar. It’s good for shock. Let me just look in your kitchen before I go...”

Was he looking for the killer? Could the man still be here? She stared after him, not even following, until she heard the back door open and close again.

As she entered, he turned the key in the lock. “Do you always leave your back door unlocked?”

“Never,” she exclaimed.

“I found it unlocked,” he remarked without emphasis.

“Is that how he—they—got in?” she whispered.

“Probably.”

“There was a man following me,” she remembered, suddenly, then frowned. “But it couldn’t have been him, could it? If he was following me, he couldn’t have been breaking in.”

“We’ll talk about him,” Dr. Tizsa said, brushing past her. “Lock the front door behind me and make that tea. I shan’t be long.”



THE KNOCK CAME sooner than she had expected. But then, she had been sitting in the kitchen, staring numbly into space while the tea cooled in the pot. She had lost track of time. She jumped up, almost running to the front door, because even facing the questions of the police was suddenly better than being alone.

But when she opened the door, it was not the police or Dr. Tizsa who stood on her front step. It was the man who had followed her in the fog.





## CHAPTER TWO

WITH A GASP, she tried to slam the door shut again, but he seized the wood and held it still.

“Mrs. Jarman,” he said coldly. “I need to talk to you.”

Blood sang in her ears. Whatever had remained of her fragile world pieces at her feet.

*He knew.* He knew who she was. Now it truly *was* all over. Her head as she stumbled back against the newel post and the world went black.

It didn’t stay dark. She had the sensation of movement and strength which felt strangely comforting rather than threatening. Her cheek against fine-quality wool, and then the strong arms and the wool-shoulder vanished. She realized she was sitting in her parlor armchair, opened her eyes and let the blurred edges of her vision clear.

*He* was still here. She could feel his presence, see his still shadow on the hearth. Slowly, she turned her head and raised her eyes.

His hair was straight and black, brushed to one side off his forehead. He looked as deathly pale as he had in the fog, as though he he’d been there was no hint of vulnerability, no softness in the lean if his features, and certainly none in the cold gray eyes, which were hard and not comforting at all.

And yet he had carried her into the parlor and set her down with surprising gentleness. He must want something of her.

“Better?” he inquired with an impatience that set up her hackles more.

“No. You’re still here.” Hadn’t she thought any company was better than solitude? Any company, perhaps, who didn’t address her as Mrs. Jarman? She forced itself uninvited into her house.

“Be grateful,” he advised, without heat or mockery. “I stopped you from cracking your head open.”

“I did not fall,” she said with dignity. After all, nothing hurt.

“Only because I caught you.”

In spite of everything, warmth seeped into her face.

He was still watching her with his cold, unreadable eyes. “Am I re-  
frightening that you faint at the sight of me? You, the lady who pre-  
looked me in the eye without shame, who just discovered the strangle-  
edge of her dead husband and immediately set off to fetch a friend for tea?”

“Friend?” She blinked. “He isn’t a friend. He’s a doctor.”

It was his turn to stare. “Is he, by God?”

“Yes, and he’ll be back at any moment with the police,” she add-  
d fell to relish. “So I can tell them you are the man who has been following me

“Will you also tell them why?”

ad spun “I would if I knew.”

essedly The hard eyes bored into hers. A flicker of uncertainty took  
g surprise. Then he moved aside and lowered himself to the work chair  
arms, table. His person, his every action, was peculiarly elegant. “Do you re-  
rested, know who I am?”

covered “I don’t recall being introduced.”

air. She “We weren’t, but my face was plastered around newspapers and fl-  
several weeks. Three years ago. I went to prison for your husband’s cri-

er across Her fingers tightened on the arm of the chair, and she forced t  
loosen again before he noticed. “I don’t know what you’re talking a  
ead. He have no husband. And how do you know anything about the murdered  
ill. But my house? Was it you who broke in?”

nds some Too late, she realized the unwisdom of accusing any assoc  
as slate Joshua’s, let alone this betrayed one who certainly had a motive to kill

“No,” he replied without breaking eye contact. “I walked throu-  
n with front door, which you were so obliging as to leave open.”

as once “How dare you?” she ground out as helpless fury rose over eve  
else. How many people had violated her home, her privacy, today? /  
any of that matter beside the huge, incontrovertible fact that a man ha-  
ter than killed? Joshua had been *murdered*.

nan. Or “It required very little daring,” he said, “and I trust you’ll give m  
for knocking civilly on your door this time.”

falling Something else was distracting her from his mockery, drawing he  
into a frown. “You don’t *speak* like a criminal.” He spoke, in fact, v

accents of an educated gentleman. But then, so did Joshua when he  
to.

“Neither do you.”

really so “I am a seamstress, not a criminal. What are you?”

viously “Neither fish nor fowl,” he said flippantly. “So, where are the diam-

nd body She blinked. “What diamonds?”

“The ones I went to prison for stealing, though the crime was  
husband’s.”

That, she supposed, explained his unhealthy pallor. “I have never  
ed with husband, and I know nothing of any diamonds.”

.” He gazed into her face. “You’re very good,” he observed,  
gracefully to his feet. “I almost believe you.”

“Are you leaving so soon?” she taunted him, rashly. “I was hoping  
her by would stay and greet the policemen, who will surely want to know all  
: by the the dead man.”

ally not “Who knows more than a wife?” he retorted.

She couldn’t help it. She laughed, a harsh, bitter sound that  
frightened her and brought a sudden frown to the pale brow of the c  
yers for “Ask one,” she muttered, pulling herself together. “Goodbye, Mr...?”  
ime.” “Goodbye,” he replied pleasantly, and strolled out of her tiny pa  
hem though from some elegant soiree.

about. I Her heart thudding, she strained to hear the sounds of his moveme  
man in she heard was the opening and closing of the front door, and then s  
him through the window, his silk hat once more on his head as he  
iate of into the street and disappeared into the fog.

igh the



rything JARMAN’S WIFE CONFUSED him. What he had assumed to be act  
And did respectable spinster seamstress seemed, in fact, to be close to the truth  
ad been from the spinster bit. She was definitely lying about that. She was Ja  
wife without doubt, though her sudden and genuine faint when he cal  
e credit so was interesting. She truly was in hiding, and it didn’t appear to be v  
purpose of spending her ill-gotten gains.

er brow More than that, there was something fragile about her. Not just in h  
with the physical form when he caught her in his arms to prevent her fall, bu

wanted eyes, in her whole manner, as though she were held together by something less substantial than the finest thread in her work basket.

She was frightened.

He knew fear well enough to recognize it and to have learned distinctions?" causing it. But he would not pity Jarman's wife, who was the partial cause of his disgrace and his three lost, terrible years in prison. He would not let as you would he allow this insidious, sneaking desire for her to blossom, for that was pure idiocy born no doubt of enforced celibacy. But he could adjust himself to the r had a thinking, for the truth was not always straightforward, and it was just possible that Jarman's wife was also a victim in her own way.

rising James had not gone far down the narrow street before a hackney carriage came through the mist, the carriage all but brushing against him as it swept past. He had halted in the region of the house he had just left, and on impulse, he turned all about back the way he had come. No tall-hatted, uniformed policemen spilled out of the carriage, but he recognized the handsome man Mrs. Jarman had claimed was a doctor. The other, slightly older man, upright and determined almost looking, he did not know at all, though the man turned back and handed the convict. Third occupant, a fair young lady wearing a jaunty hat and spectacles. She *did* recognize her.

parlor as As though she felt his stare, she turned and peered through the window directly at him. And then the dark young man tugged her up to the front steps. All went into the house.

he saw Lady Grizelda Niven, youngest daughter of the Duke of Kelburn. He had once stepped known her once, in his youth, and rather liked her, for she was different from the other debutantes. She had been a friend of Cordelia's, which was not surprising. What did astonish him was that she was in any way acquainted with Elizabeth Jarman, who now called herself Alice Gunn.

of the  
1. Apart



Jarman's DR. TIZSA, HAVING briefly introduced his companions as his wife called her Grizelda, and Inspector Harris, took the latter upstairs to view the room with the Leaving Elizabeth—or Alice, as she must remember to think of herself more importantly than ever—with the unexpected Lady Grizelda.

her frail With looks like his, she supposed it wasn't surprising that Dr. Tizsa had snagged an aristocratic wife. At any other time, she would have

only by flummoxed to find herself in such august company in her extremely front parlor, but today just seemed to keep getting stranger.

“Shall I light another lamp?” Lady Grizelda suggested. “It’s getting late for and the fog makes everything so gloomy.”

“Allow me,” Elizabeth said, and reached for the tinderbox on the mantelpiece. She hadn’t even lit the fire—no wonder she was so cold.

“I came to look after *you*,” Lady Grizelda said apologetically. “That will just be such a horrible shock for you.”

“Horrible,” Elizabeth agreed. Large feet clomped above the door as they moved across the room above. Were they poking among her things? There was nothing for them to see. As she lit the lamps, she was aware of a ladyship moving behind her, lighting the laid fire with a spill. With the lamps glowing a little brighter, Elizabeth turned and watched her guest stroll out. “Please, sit.”

To her surprise, Lady Grizelda took the work chair at the table, leaving Elizabeth the armchair. She perched on the edge and regarded the woman curiously. Her hair was fair and thick and somewhat untidily brushed. And behind her spectacles, she was pretty, beautiful even, and her eyes were both sharp and intelligent.

Something thudded on the floor above, forcefully enough to shake the little parlor. Were they moving the body? Elizabeth shuddered and turned her visitor’s gaze.

“Do you look after all your husband’s patients?” she asked bluntly. “Lord, no, only when he asks. He said you seemed to have no family, no neighbors who could be with you. And he said you were concerned for your reputation.”

“I’m sure that seems odd to your ladyship,” Elizabeth said defiantly. “I depend on my reputation for survival.”

“You and most other women,” Lady Grizelda agreed. “I am not a judge, pry, or gossip.” A quick, rather charming smile dawned. “Lady might pry just a little, but I am the soul of discretion.”

Elizabeth’s stomach twisted tighter as the men’s footsteps sounded on the stairs. Inspector Harris entered first.

“Well, ma’am,” he said briskly. “We know who he is.”

Of course they did. She expected any policeman would have recognized the body, although she had hoped...

modest “Which makes it even odder that he should be in your house,” the inspector said. “Joshua Jarman is not only a criminal by career, he is very good at it, very successful and very wealthy. He is very unlikely to be robbing a house of this size and neighborhood, and if he did, it would be on the underlings, not himself, who perpetrated the crime.”

“And yet there he lies,” she observed.

“There he lies,” the inspector agreed. “You say you didn’t recognize him; he had never seen him before, but is the name Joshua Jarman known to you?” She shook her head.

“Surely you are aware of no connection between you?”

Again, she shook her head. Two blatant lies in a few seconds. But she had been lying for years. Why should it bother her now? Especially when her survival was at stake once more. She was aware of Dr. Tizsa and his men, both watching her, though without the blatancy of Inspector Harris.

“I need to ask you some questions, Miss Gunn,” the inspector said. “You will need to make a formal statement.”

Lady Grizelda stood up. “With Miss Gunn’s permission, I’ll make tea for you,” she said.

A titled lady was going to make tea for her. This was indeed the stuff of days. The inspector folded his bulk onto the chair Lady Grizelda vacated and took out his notebook.

“So, tell me what happened this afternoon, Miss Gunn, beginning when you first went out.”

She began to talk, and despite being so cramped at the table, the inspector’s pencil flew across the pages of his notebook.

“I went out about one o’clock, to deliver my completed work—my seamstress—to my customers, and to collect more. I came home and glanced at the old clock on the mantelpiece—“probably just after four.”

“Was your front door locked?” Harris interrupted.

“Yes, I opened it with my key.”

“Did you go straight upstairs?”

“Yes.” She frowned. “No, I came in here to set down my bag and gestured to the bag still sitting at the far end of the table. “Then I went upstairs to wash and change.” She shivered. “I didn’t even see him at first. I washed my hands and face, even brushed out my hair, before I noticed his foot.” She swallowed and drew in a breath. “And there he was, lying b

ie,” the the bed and the window.”

is very “That must have been a shock,” Harris said neutrally.

onsider *You have no idea.* She nodded. “It was. I stared for a moment, and I thought I should see if he was... If I could... I touched his wrist. I meant to take his pulse, just to be sure he was... But he felt *warm* thought he might be alive. But I couldn’t help him, so I ran to fetch the doctor I knew.”

ou?” “Dr. Tizsa,” Harris said without emphasis. “How do you know Tizsa?”

“As a patient.”

ut then, He wrote that down, too. Lady Grizelda came in, carrying a tray with an old teapot and mismatched cups and saucers. Weirdly, Elizabeth felt a little shame at that, perhaps because her mother would have been outraged.

Tizsa moved from his place by the window to take the tray from her. “And Lady Grizelda removed the bag, setting it on the floor instead, while her husband deposited the tray and made way for her. It was all done with a certain casual courtesy, almost like a practiced, well-executed dance by two people who knew each other well and acted in accord without fuss.

rangest “Did you tell anyone else about the body?” Inspector Harris asked. “Did your neighbor, perhaps?”

Elizabeth shook her head.

ing with “Why not?”

“It did not enter my head,” she said defiantly. “My neighbors and I exchange good mornings or good evenings if we encounter each other in the street, but usually, we don’t. I needed a doctor, not tea and salacious curiosity.”

—I’m a “I see.”

—she “Do you?” She met his gaze. “I confess it entered my head that Dr. Tizsa might be able to remove the man discreetly, either to a hospital or a home or to wherever he belonged. I make no apologies for that. I am an unmarried woman who scratches out a living making children’s clothes and underclothes. I have customers all over London, in Kensington, even Mayfair.” She looked at Harris. “I am a respectable woman who would drop me in an instant at one word. I have no reason to mourn the dead man and every reason to protect my first. I’d my reputation.”

ced his There was silence, and then Harris’s pencil moved again. “There are many of us who mourn this particular dead man,” he said unexpect-

“‘Good riddance’ would be the reaction of most of my colleagues, probably most of his, who will now be jostling for his position. How did I then find Iman has been murdered, and we must discover by whom.”

“Sugar and milk?” Lady Grizelda asked her brightly.

“A little milk, thank you,” Elizabeth said automatically.

Dr. Tizsa brought the tea to her, while his wife poured three more without asking for preferences. It came to Elizabeth that she must know Dr. Inspector Harris quite well. Was that another threat, or a good thing?

The policeman sipped his tea. “When you came home, before you discovered the body, did you notice anything unusual in the vicinity with her anyone else in the street when you came home?”

That was when she remembered she had already told Dr. Tizsa about the man in the mist. She couldn’t pretend she had never seen him, though his wife really didn’t want the police tracking him down and discovering her through him. More than her reputation was at stake there.

But no one else had seen him or spoken to him. She could be so quiet, she thought, but she must tell the people with the truth.

“I thought a man was following me in the fog,” she blurted. “For a distance—from Grosvenor Place, I thought—though it might have been more than one person going about their own business and I was just frightened and alarmed.”

“Did you see his face?”

“Not until I was outside the house, when I waited to see him pass.”

“Did he acknowledge you?”

“He tipped his hat to me with perfect courtesy and went on his way.”

“Then he was just going about his own business,” Harris suggested.

She didn’t know far they would investigate this. If they spoke to the neighbors and one of them had seen a man at her front door...

“I might have thought so,” she said in a rush, “except he came back when Dr. Tizsa left to fetch you, someone knocked on the door. I thought it was either the doctor or the police, but it wasn’t. It was this same man.”

“What did he want?” Harris demanded with a frown.

“To tell me he knew there was a dead body in my house.”

Harris threw down his pencil. “And how exactly did he know that?”

“That’s what I wondered. When I ran for Dr. Tizsa, apparently I didn’t close the door properly—it was certainly open when we returned. I



—andman—said he had come in that way and had seen the body. He would never, know if I'd found anything on him—it—the body.”

“Had you?” Harris asked steadily.

She shuddered, genuinely. “Apart from one brief touch of his hand, I didn't go near him.”

“Did you get the impression he was a friend of the dead man?” Grizelda asked unexpectedly.

Elizabeth shook her head. “No, he seemed to loathe him.”

“Then he knew him?” Harris pounced.

“He seemed to,” Elizabeth managed.

“Did he mention what in particular he was looking for?” Harris asked.

She had no time to think beyond that she should be as honest as she could without detriment to herself. “He mentioned something about diamonds.”

Harris's lip curled. “There are many who'd like to get their hands on Jarman's diamonds. What did this fellow look like?”

Elizabeth shrugged. “Ordinary. Neither tall nor short. Brown hair, brown eyes. He might have had a beard. I was too distraught to notice much, being so concerned with getting a stranger out of my house again.”

“Did he threaten you?” Harris asked.

“No, not really. He didn't stay long. I think he could see I was completely bewildered and knew nothing.”

Dr. Tizsa drew the curtains. “That's the men to take the body away. *Thank God*. Let the neighbors make of that what they wished.

“Miss Gunn, was anything stolen from your house?” the inspector asked as he rose to his feet.

“No. I have nothing worth stealing.”

“It's all worth something to somebody,” he said.

She shook her head. “I didn't notice that anything had gone. I suppose the cloth and the lace is saleable, but at first glance, it's all still there.”

“If you discover anything missing, you'll let me know?” He slipped a notebook away in a pocket, and his hand emerged holding a visiting card which he offered her.

She took the card. “I will.”

As the policeman went out to deal with the removal of the body, Elizabeth faced the Tizsas.

“You won't be very...comfortable here by yourself,” Lady Grizelda said.

nted to “Is there really nowhere else you can go for a few days? Or some fr  
family member who would stay with you?”

“My family and I don’t speak,” Elizabeth said. “But I thank you f  
wrist, I concern. I am used to being alone, and I have plenty of work to k  
occupied.” At least as long as this scandal didn’t get out.

” Lady Lady Grizelda handed her another card. “You can find me here or  
message for either of us. Dragan isn’t often at the clinic these days.”

Elizabeth blinked. There was nothing but kindness in the lady’s  
voice, and it almost undid her. “You are very kind,” she said huskily,  
away to lay both cards on the mantelpiece. “But I don’t anticipate any  
ed. problems.”

e could That was before she had the house to herself again, and on impul:  
onds.” upstairs to see if any of her meager possessions had, in fact, been take  
nds on opening the little cupboard of her bedside cabinet, she discovered t  
father’s chess set was missing.

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“Is there really nowhere else you can go for a few days? Or some friend or family member who would stay with you?”

“My family and I don’t speak,” Elizabeth said. “But I thank you for your concern. I am used to being alone, and I have plenty of work to keep me occupied.” At least as long as this scandal didn’t get out.

Lady Grizelda handed her another card. “You can find me here or leave a message for either of us. Dragan isn’t often at the clinic these days.”

Elizabeth blinked. There was nothing but kindness in the lady’s face or voice, and it almost undid her. “You are very kind,” she said huskily, turning away to lay both cards on the mantelpiece. “But I don’t anticipate any further problems.”

That was before she had the house to herself again, and on impulse went upstairs to see if any of her meager possessions had, in fact, been taken. And, opening the little cupboard of her bedside cabinet, she discovered that her father’s chess set was missing.



## CHAPTER THREE

THE MORNING AFTER Joshua Jarman was killed, James Andover stepped from his lodgings in Henrietta Street to be greeted by a cheerful “Good morning, my lord” from the young woman who fell into step beside him. A elegant Italian greyhound trotted along beside her on a leash.

James allowed her a haughty glance, then blinked in surprise. “Good morning, my lady.” Twisting around, he could discover no gentleman footmen, or even maids to escort her. “I should not need to warn you that being seen with me is carrying eccentricity too far.”

“Oh, nobody pays any attention to my eccentricities anymore,” she said dismissively.

“If you imagine the daughter of a duke is not dogged by journalists, and fortune hunters—”

“I’ve grown adept at avoiding such. I wasn’t sure you recognized me yesterday afternoon.”

“Neither was I. You pop up in some odd places.”

“So do you. Including the scene of Joshua Jarman’s murder.”

James said casually, “I didn’t kill him. Sadly.”

“I know. And it isn’t sad at all that you won’t go back to prison for your part in the murder.”

His eyes narrowed. “You *know* that?”

“Well, you were following Alice Gunn when Jarman died. Will you come to Scotland Yard with me, and clear things up with Inspector Harris?”

He began to wonder if the duke’s once charmingly eccentric daughter had evolved into clearer insanity during the three years of his “absence.” “Grizelda, I cannot go anywhere with you. Even were I not freshly out of Newgate—”

“Cleared of all crimes,” she interrupted.

“I think you’ll find that makes no odds to anyone who matters.”

“I think you’ll find the opposite,” she replied, “though perhaps

immediately. You should know that I am married now, by the way, subject to quite such strict rules of propriety.”

“Congratulations,” he said politely. “Do I know the lucky gentleman?”

“I’d be surprised, since I only met him this year. But you might have met him with me yesterday.”

He glanced at her, feeling his lips quirk into something of the smile that had once inspired in him. “Really?” he said in blatant disbelief. “You’re a policeman or the doctor?”

“The doctor. He’s Hungarian.” She took his arm companionably and tugged him south toward the river. “Why were you following Alice Guinevere?”

He met her gaze with a mixture of irritation and recklessness, as if he seemed to be common emotions these days. “Because I heard she had diamonds I went to prison for stealing.”

Lady Grizelda’s eyebrows flew up. “Who told you that?”

“An acquaintance in Newgate,” he said. “He worked for Jarman.”

“A reliable witness, then,” she replied sardonically.

“Oh, we jailbirds tell the truth occasionally.”

He thought he had kept his voice mild, with just a hint of mockery, but he felt her gaze boring into him. When he turned with a deliberately neutral expression to meet that gaze, all he saw was the glint of the sun on the lenses of her spectacles. It was a fresh autumn morning with no hint of yesterday’s storm.

“You are understandably bitter,” she observed.

“Your understanding makes it all worthwhile.” His sarcasm was unforgivable, so he hoped she would simply go.

However, she didn’t even release his arm. “No,” she said, “but you’ll still be of some use to you. What exactly did you plan to do with the diamonds, once you retrieved them?”

“Travel in luxury, of course.”

“Liar,” she said without heat. “I think you want to rub them in the faces of the authorities to prove that not only did you not steal them, but you succeeded in returning them when authority failed.”

“Close enough.” Although it wasn’t *authority* so much as his family name, Cordelia.

“Then it’s good enough for Inspector Harris. You’ll come with me to Scotland Yard?”

“I appear to be going to Scotland Yard,” he replied. “But I shall be glad to see you there.”

and not myself to dispense with your charming company.”

“There is no need,” she said sunnily. “I am meeting my husband?” Scotland Yard.”

ve seen



file she

“The SHE DIDN’T LIE. The handsome doctor was the first person he saw. A policeman led him along a dingy passage toward an open door at the end of which from which he could hear a male voice. The doctor, leaning one shoulder against the bare wall, appeared to be sketching something in a notebook. He glanced up at their approach and smiled.

had the Christ, the women must just drop at his feet. No wonder Elizabeth had rushed straight to him. He had time to feel sorry for poor Grizelda before she dropped his arm and went straight to her husband. The notebook vanished into his pocket.

“I brought Lord James,” she said happily.

“So I see.” The man’s dark eyes met his with curiosity but no prejudice, but he had no preconception. James could almost believe it was how the Hungarian revolution had affected most of the world.

on her “My lord, allow me to present my husband, Dragan Tizsa. Dragan is an old friend, Lord James Andover.”

Tizsa offered his hand, a gesture so unexpected that James gazed at it a moment before he took it. The doctor had a firm grip, his hands were rough at the fingertips, but otherwise shapely and strong.

I might “Are you really a doctor?” James asked.

with the The smile flickered again in a more rueful kind of way. “Not exactly. I did not finish my studies in Hungary before the revolution broke out. I had to come to London to pass the necessary examinations here instead. In the meantime, I assist an English physician.”

ed in At that moment, Elizabeth Jarman, also known as Alice Gunn, walked into the office at the end of the passage. She wore a different gown than yesterday, but it was no more prepossessing. Spotlessly clean, with a stiff white collar, it might once have been blue, but had faded with age to a pale gray. Her bonnet was old, too, and had been caught in the rain several times too often.

ll force Her step faltered when she saw him, but only for an instant before she recovered herself.

chin came up and she walked on. Inconvenient admiration flickered against her courage if nothing else. Although, despite the prim dress and sad she was not merely pretty. She was beautiful, her eyes a fine, defiant her mouth curiously soft and vulnerable above that pointed, determined chin. How could such a creature have been married to Joshua Jarman?

The police inspector he had seen yesterday emerged from the doorway behind her. Catching sight of James's companions, he groaned audibly at the end of the line. "You two again. What now?"

"A word?" Tizsa suggested amiably. "My wife has brought the message inside and followed Miss Gunn."

The inspector's glowering, perceptive gaze swept over James Jarman and widened with clear surprise. "Is it?" he threw at the seamstress, who answered Niven clearly, "Yes."

The inspector's eyes gleamed with recognition. He opened his mouth as if clearly desperate to ask a hundred questions at once.

"That word, inspector?" Lady Grizelda reminded him.

The inspector's mouth closed. He looked undecided, his gaze flying from her to James and back.

"Don't worry," James assured him. "I am prepared to wait five minutes." The inspector swung on his heel and stomped back to his office, James on either side of him. James couldn't hear what, if anything, was said at it for there was no tension, no anger or fear in any of the three, just familiarity. The turn of the inspector's head toward Lady Grizelda, and the relaxation of his features, Tizsa nudged the other man's elbow.

Elizabeth Jarman hovered a mere few steps from him, as though she meant to put as much distance as possible between them and then catch her mind.

As the office door closed, he turned toward her. "Doesn't it worry you that your friends are quite so comfortable with a Scotland Yard detective?" "Why should it? And they are not my friends. How could a seamstress be friends with a duke's daughter?"

"More easily than a master criminal's wife. Do they know?"

"Are you harping on that again? Why have you come here, anywhere, to confess to breaking into my house? Or to murder?"

"Nothing so dramatic. I imagine the inspector wishes to eliminate me from his long, long list of suspects. What did he ask of you?"

gain, for “A formal statement of how I discovered the dead man.”

bonnet, “The statement of Miss Alice Gunn?”

nt blue, Something changed in her eyes, as though she understood and  
ed little expected the harm James would do her by revealing her true identity  
there was no gleam of fury or even fear, just...hopelessness.

office “Who else?” she said dully, and walked briskly away from him.

y. “Not From some instinct, he started after her, but the office door  
behind him, and he turned back instead. The inspector strode toward  
an who James went forward to meet him.

“My lord,” the policeman said with a curt nod. “Sorry to keep  
es and waiting. Please come with me.”

replied The Tizsas cast him amiable smiles as they passed, strolling down  
passage as though they were at the Great Exhibition rather than  
mouth, headquarters of the police.

“Please, sit,” the policeman said. “I’m Inspector Harris, in charge  
investigation into Joshua Jarman’s murder. I understand you would  
ing from make a statement in connection with the case?”

“If you feel it would help.”

utes.” A smile passed across Inspector Harris’s harsh features. “You have  
a Tizsa ‘Tizsaed.’ They are annoying but very often right. Might we begin with  
aid, but name and address?”

arity in James met his gaze. “You already know I’m James Andover.  
ed way lodgings in Henrietta Street.”

“And how did you come to be in the vicinity of Hanson Row?”

she had “I followed Alice Gunn.”

hanged Harris’s expression gave nothing away. He was neither accusatory  
servile. “Why?”

rry you “Because while I was still in prison, I heard a rumor that she had  
ve?” diamonds I was accused of stealing.”

tress be “The accusation that sent you prison for three years and ruined your  
Harris said.

James raised one eyebrow. “There is no need to be melodramatic  
ray? Today. “But yes, I take a personal interest in the whereabouts of  
diamonds and the arrest of the guilty.”

ate me “Did you not find it odd that your informant named a street  
seamstress in Hanson Row as the thief?”



“Oh, I always knew Jarman was the thief. I assumed she was a using her trade as a cover. At any rate, I followed her a few times, d fullywhom she met with, and I watched her house, too. For the record, s ity. Butfew visitors, none of them Jarman—until yesterday, obviously— lieutenants. The houses she visited were all respectable—I have the you’re interested. My main concern was the bag she always carried, th openedseems to have contained nothing more sinister than mending.”

him, so “We’ll come back to that. At what time, yesterday, did you first see Gunn?”

ep you “About one o’clock. She came out of her house—with the ba walked along the canal to Chelsea Road, and from there to C own theSquare...” As he recited her movements, he watched Inspector’s Harri an theman gave little away, interrupting only occasionally to ask about times

At the end, James said, “Are you working out if she could have do e of theif I did?”

like to “She thinks you couldn’t have,” Harris said, sitting back on his unsteady chair, “since you were following her when Jarman was killed

“You don’t agree?”

ve been “You have an excellent motive,” Harris pointed out. “And wh th yourheard footsteps behind her for most of her journey, she only *believ* were yours. The only time she actually saw you was outside her h I haveHanson Row.”

James’s lips twisted. “Around the time Jarman must have died.”

“Close to it, certainly,” Harris agreed. “On the other hand, since y of the houses she visited aligns with hers, you do present alibis fo ory norother.”

James blinked. “You suspected *her*? Do you really think she wou had thehad the strength? Jarman was a big man.”

“He was, though you and I both know it isn’t necessary to be pre ar life,” cause a person’s death.”

James rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then let out a bark of bitter la tic,” he“You don’t suspect her at all, do you? You suspect me because, even of themy father’s support, I’m at least wealthy enough to pay an assassin.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but you don’t appear to have got far uggingthe wrong that was done you. You must blame Jarman for that.”

“I do,” James said. “Don’t you?”

the fence, “Oh, I blame Joshua Jarman for *many* things. Including the theft of the diamonds, the transport of them to seediamonds and the murder of the men transporting them. Sadly, his death prevents him from ever being tried for any of his crimes. Did you recognize his Jarman when you saw his body?”

She listed if “Yes,” James said evenly, as though he hadn’t just walked through the stranger’s empty house to do so.

“How?” Harris asked. “Three years ago, you told the police and the Queen’s Missthat you had never seen nor heard of Joshua Jarman.”

“I hadn’t. But I made it my business to see him very shortly after his arrest—and release.”

Queen’s Harris’s eyes widened slightly. “You accosted him?”

Harris. The “No, I hung around his known haunts, which had been thought of as a safe place provided for me by my Newgate informant, until an urchin identified me to the great Jarman for me.”

Harris’s gaze didn’t waver from his. “I see. So, who was this slightly Newgate acquaintance who gave you all this useful information?”

“Connor,” James said. “Peter Connor. He was hanged six months ago.”

“He had connections to Jarman,” Harris allowed. “In fact, we think she was probably Jarman’s accomplice in the theft of the diamonds. Certainly they discovered one of the stones in his possession, which is what led everyone into your release. But didn’t you think it odd that Jarman would entrust valuable loot to a poor seamstress? One, moreover, whom he never should have met?”

“Your list James almost laughed.

“What exactly did Connor say?” Harris asked. “That the diamonds were in the keeping of Alice Gunn?”

“I’d have Now was really James’s moment to tell her real name and connections to Jarman. It would come out eventually anyway. Her face, thin and present to defiant and vulnerable, swam behind his eyes. She was not what was expected.

“He didn’t name her,” James said. “Just mentioned a seamstress without Hanson Row, who held the diamonds for Jarman. Apparently, he paid her to collect one whenever he needed extra cash, as though she were his only seamstress beyond Miss Gunn is the only seamstress in the street.”



t of the TO ELIZABETH'S RELIEF, none of the major newspapers being sold in the  
s death made any mention of the body found in Hanson Row. The police were  
cognize being discreet—for now, although the death of Joshua Jarman would  
remain a secret for long. She imagined skin and hair would be flying  
into a St. Giles and the rougher dock areas as the criminals tussled for supper.  
Which might give her a little time, even after her identity came out.

ie court It probably had by now, she acknowledged as she heaved the last  
cloth into her trunk. *He* would have told Inspector Harris. And the  
fter my Even if no one accused her of killing Joshua, her connection to him  
inevitably ruin Alice Gunn.

She wondered how far her meager savings would take her. As  
ghtfully Scotland? If she kept back nothing to live on while she found work.  
ied the She trailed through to her bedroom, collecting her few clothes and  
hairbrush, which she carried through to the spare room and tossed  
helpful trunk.

A knock at the front door startled her. Her heart thudding, she cre  
go.” to her bedroom and peered through the curtains. Whoever had knocked  
hink he have been standing too close to the front door, for she could see no  
nly, we neighbor in search of gossip? Like Mrs. Smith, who had already accos  
ntually in the street, asking with false sympathy about the body taken from he  
st such yesterday. Elizabeth had muttered something about a vagrant in her  
eems to and hurried on.

Or perhaps it was Inspector Harris, come to question her again with  
sympathy than before. Or journalists.  
ds were Or Joshua's people...

A figure stepped back—a woman—and glanced up at the window  
ction to unspeakable relief, Elizabeth recognized Lady Grizelda. Not that she  
brave, to face the lady's contempt, but she supposed she owed her an apology  
he had her kindness. Lady Grizelda lifted a friendly hand in greeting, so perh  
didn't care who Alice Gunn really was.

ress in Elizabeth went reluctantly downstairs then unlocked and opened the  
pped indoor, holding it wide by way of invitation. Whatever was said, she  
banker want her neighbors to witness. Even though it was too late to mat  
habits were hard to break.

“I brought you more tea,” Lady Grizelda announced, whisking  
inside and straight toward the kitchen. “Having drunk so much o

the street yesterday, I was afraid you would run out.” She paused, glancing around at the indeed bare shelves and the open, all-but-empty larder.

“I’m sorry,” Elizabeth said. “I’ve packed everything away. There’s no more tea around here, but I’ll try to bring more tea, though I thank you for the kind thought. Please don’t worry for yourself.”

“You’re leaving,” Lady Grizelda said. She turned to face Elizabeth. “That’s a good idea? It will make you look guilty, although no one truly suspects anything at the moment. And besides, where will you go?”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

Lady Grizelda lowered herself into a chair, settling one arm across her lap and the other on her abdomen. Elizabeth wondered if the lady was pregnant. *None of your business, Beth Barker.*

“May I know why?” Lady Grizelda asked.

“I think you know. He has spoken to you already.”

“Who has? Inspector Harris?”

Elizabeth shook her head.

“James Andover?”

“If that’s the man who followed me.”

“Then yes, I spoke to him today for the first time in more than twenty years.”

Elizabeth searched the other woman’s face and found nothing but curiosity. “You don’t know,” she blurted. “He didn’t tell you.”

“Tell me what?”

“About me. About who I am.”

“And who are you?” Lady Grizelda asked.

“I was born Elizabeth Barker. He—Mr. Andover—calls me Elizabeth Jarman.”

“And are you?”

Elizabeth shook her head and sank onto the only other hard chair. “There was some kind of ceremony, but it wasn’t legal. It’s a consolation, most of all, because I was never actually his wife.”

“I knew there had to be a better reason he was following you,” Lady Grizelda sounded slightly smug, although immediately after, she

“You had better tell me.”

Elizabeth stared at her. “My lady, it is not an edifying story. Did he ever tell you?”

und the Lady Grizelda shook her head. “Is that the reason you are plan  
flee? Because you think he told us? And Inspector Harris?”

was no “Why would he not? He hates Jarman and everything connecte  
se keephim, and he thinks I know about the wretched diamonds. I wasn’t ever  
of their existence until Joshua died.”

eth. “Is “That is true. And he has cause. Do you know his story?”

uspects “I know he went to prison for stealing the diamonds, which I’m i  
to believe was Joshua’s crime.”

“James had bought the diamond and had it set in a gold ring for t  
oss herhe was going to marry. It was identified as stolen, and because the jew  
of yoursaid he bought it from denied his claim, James was charged with th

The importer, who had brought the diamonds legally into the c  
identified the diamond in his possession as one of the stolen ones,  
added murder to the charges against James. He was tried and found  
His family’s influence ensured he did not face execution, but he v  
prison for three years before another diamond was found in the posses  
one Peter Connor. Another was found at a pawnbroker’s. These exo  
James, who was then released. Not to a happy ending, sadly. His fam  
n threefriends had already disowned him, and his betrothed married another  
understandably bitter. Vengeful, even, and yet...”

ng but “And yet what?” Elizabeth asked, hoarding the information to gu  
tangled opinions of the man.

“And yet he never mentioned your connection to Jarman, not  
husband or me, and not to Inspector Harris.”

Elizabeth stared at her, letting her breath seep slowly out. “Perf  
izabethprefers to handle the matter himself.”

“Possibly. Or perhaps he has decided you are a good woman after :

She closed her eyes. “I gave him no reason to think so.”

“There “You brought a doctor to save the life of a man who, at the ver  
tly, thatbetrayed you.”

“Seduced me from my family, cheated me...” She swallowed and  
” Ladyher eyes open. She would not bleat the rest like a kicked cur. “Suffi  
sighed.say, I hated him at least as much as Mr. Andover clearly does.”

“Then you should not run away. You should help my husband  
e reallydiscover what really happened to Jarman.”

Elizabeth regarded her with fascination. The duke’s daughter had

ning toof saying the outrageous as if it was mere trivial common sense. “Why should you bother discovering such unpleasant—”

ed with “My husband and I share a strange compulsion to solve puzzles, unaware Grizelda informed her. “In fact, people have paid my husband to ca such work. He’s very good at it.”

“I can’t pay anything beyond a few shillings.”  
nclined Lady Grizelda smiled. “We would never expect you to. My hope we can persuade James to foot the bill. Tell me, have you ever been he lady Great Exhibition in Hyde Park?”

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of saying the outrageous as if it was mere trivial common sense. “Why? Why should you bother discovering such unpleasant—”

“My husband and I share a strange compulsion to solve puzzles,” Lady Grizelda informed her. “In fact, people have paid my husband to carry out such work. He’s very good at it.”

“I can’t pay anything beyond a few shillings.”

Lady Grizelda smiled. “We would never expect you to. My hope is that we can persuade James to foot the bill. Tell me, have you ever been to the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park?”



## CHAPTER FOUR

LONDON'S GREAT EXHIBITION had largely passed Elizabeth by—apart from staring at the huge glass building that housed it each time she took a stroll through Hyde Park. Disparagingly dubbed the Crystal Palace, the ten-story edifice suited its nickname so well that it had stuck. Despite her curiosity, Elizabeth had never dared buy a ticket. She was reluctant to ask Lady Grizelda to treat her now.

“Don't worry. I have two season tickets,” Lady Grizelda assured her. “And I suspect we'll find Dragan there. We need to exchange information.”

“I should walk behind you as if I'm your maid,” Elizabeth said nervously as they left her house.

“You're not my maid, though, are you? In fact, I rather suspect you're a gentlewoman.”

“Not by your standards,” Elizabeth said with the ghost of a smile. “My father is a banker.”

“When did you last see your parents?” Lady Grizelda set a crackling fire in the grate and looked toward Commercial Street.

“The day before I ran away with Joshua. They refused to come to my wedding and gave out that I had gone abroad to a school friend in France. I suppose I must still be there.”

“Did you contact them again?”

“Once or twice. They never answered.”

“Not even after you left Joshua?”

“I never told them I had done so. I could almost hear their *I told you so* even in utter silence. They were right. I was young, stupid, and rebellious, and I had no need to marry Joshua just to escape the dull prospective bridegrooms my father kept lining up for me.”

Lady Grizelda hesitated, then said, “You don't feel it would be *comfortable* to go home?”

“God, no,” Elizabeth said with a shudder. “Besides, they wouldn't



me back. To respectable people, I am ruined several times over.”

They had turned into the main road by now, and without warning Grizelda reached up and opened the door of a stationary hackney. “Let him to wait,” she said. “No point in walking the whole way and being tired to enjoy the exhibition. There’s a lot to see.”



from her

DRAGAN TIZSA KNEW he should probably stay in his government office. He had seen patterns of fraud. And if he didn’t, he should go home and study. After he’d thrust his current work into his satchel and left the building, he took him not home but to Henrietta Street, where, according to Grizelda, Lord James Andover.

“Visitor, my lord!” the plump landlady yelled up the stairs, so suddenly and so loudly that Dragan almost imagined himself back on the battlefield, which was no condition in which to meet this particular man. “Just go to the first door on the right.”

Dragan climbed the stairs and knocked on the first door. Receiving no response, he knocked again, for the landlady had seemed sure Andover was at home. Moreover, he could hear someone moving in the room beyond.

At his third knock, the door flew open and Lord James stood there, shirt sleeves, pale, scowling, and clearly ready to excoriate whoever did this to him so relentlessly. The sight of Dragan appeared to take him by surprise, his mouth closed without his uttering a word. On the other hand, there was a softening of his expression. The alteration of his demeanor was subtle, but it was neither welcoming nor comforting. The man’s very stillness was threatening. Something learned in prison, perhaps—how to intimidate without violence. And yet Dragan was left in no doubt that resort to violence would not trouble his lordship either.

“Forgive the intrusion,” Dragan said mildly. “I felt we should talk.” “What about?” Andover asked. He neither stood aside nor invited Dragan in.

“Jarman.”

The slate-gray gaze seemed to be trying to pierce through Dragan to his brain. Then, impatiently, Andover spun around and walked away, leaving the door open. Dragan took it as invitation and stepped in.

drafty, untidy sitting room.

3, Lady The reason for the draft was immediately clear—the windows were I asked open. Andover waved at a sofa cluttered with books, papers, and a carding to discarded coat. Dragan moved the coat and sat. A desk at the window piled high with more paper. Two cups sat on top of the piles. A used and a brandy bottle stood on top of a bookcase. A pair of boots graced the middle of the floor. A second door to an equally untidy bedroom was half-open—a curtain flapped in the breeze as though the windows were looking were open too. Dragan supposed a man just out of prison would appreciate And yet even what passed in London for fresh air.

his feet “What about Jarman?” Andover snapped.

resided “Do you want to know who killed him?”

“Apparently, my motive is greatest, as it was greatest in the case of the suddenly diamond stealing and accompanying murder, despite my family’s wealth—yes, given the alternative of a return to Newgate prior to execution, I’d like to know who killed the bastard.”

“So would I,” Dragan said.

“Why? What does some underworld matter to you? Did you know Jarman?”

Dragan shook his head.

“Or do you want to exonerate *her*? Alice Gunn, who found her disturbed something of a pickle with a dead man in her chaste spinster’s bedroom, for “I feel for her plight, yes,” Dragan allowed.

“Why? Because she’s more than a patient to you? I hope not. I rather liked Lady Grizelda.”

“Good. Though I would like to point out that your suggestion intimidates as well as Miss Gunn and myself.”

Andover thought about that. “I suppose it does. Sorry.”

For the first time, Dragan found him mildly endearing.

Andover kicked his boots aside and swung the desk chair around Dragan before he sat. “Why *do* you want to discover Jarman’s killer? why are you sure it isn’t me?”

“Griz and I like puzzles,” Dragan said vaguely. “I don’t think Miss Gunn’s eyes killed that brute of a man, and Griz doesn’t think either of you did.”

“And your friend Inspector Harris?”

“He will decide by the evidence, of which there is remarkably

don't suppose you removed a set of chess pieces from Alice Gunn's  
widecabinet."

The scowl reappeared. "Of course I did not."

"Well, someone did, and it was probably whoever killed Jarman. (d  
glasseems an odd thing to steal."

"There didn't seem to be much else of value," Andover pointed ou  
I return to the original point. Will your friend the inspector not object  
blundering about on his case?"

"Frequently. But he is not an unreasonable man."

"And how is it you have time to indulge such curiosity, if you as  
doctor and study for your medical examinations at the same time?"

"I also do a little work for a government department, and people  
sometimes to solve their puzzles."

Andover's lips twisted. "You want me to *pay* you?"

"I wouldn't object. You can pay me if I produce results, if you I  
not pay me at all. I imagine I'll keep working on this in any case. Bu  
strongly that you and I need to work together, along with Griz. You  
be honest with us and tell us what you know."

"I don't know anything. That's the trouble."

"You told Harris that Connor, a member of the gang who st  
diamonds, told you Alice Gunn had them. Is that true?"

"It's what he told me, though I wouldn't say Miss Gunn lives high  
proceeds."

"It doesn't make much sense to me. You've been looking  
diamonds since you were released from prison. You've spent a lot  
time following her, as though you find this accusation a lot more c  
than I do."

Andover shrugged. "Connor had no reason to lie."

"We need a conference," Dragan said abruptly. "With Griz. We  
to face lay our cards on the table and plan out the investigation properly. C  
come now?"

"Where?"

"Our house. Well, via the Exhibition. Griz and I were goin  
afternoon. I've to meet her there in...just under an hour."

Andover regarded him for a moment, a hint of bewildered amu  
little. I amongst the suspicion. Then he stood and reached for his coat from th

bedside “Very well.”



Only, it

ELIZABETH'S FIRST IMPRESSION of the Exhibition was of noise—a mingled human voices, clomping footsteps, and mechanical hum echoing around the huge glass and metal barn of a building.

She was relieved to be able stand still for a little, close to the e where Lady Grizelda had arranged to meet Dr. Tizsa, and just get sist this being there.

“So many people,” she murmured.

“I know, but once we start moving, you'll find the crowds a b spread out and bearable! Besides, there is so much of interest to see t forget about the milling throngs. There are a few sewing machines I like. Or would fascinate you. You could speed through your work with one o it I feel Ah, is that Dragan?”

Elizabeth followed her ladyship's eager gaze, but not to Dr. Tiz heart gave a huge thud at the unexpected sight of James Andover. He s at the same time, and immediately frowned. His lips moved, ole the something curt to the man beside him—and *there* was Dr. Tizsa.

The doctor didn't reply, for Lady Grizelda had rushed on him 1 on the whirlwind. His handsome face softened into a smile, and just for a m his arm crept around his wife's waist. Understated marital affecti for the much easier to watch than Andover's suspicion and frank dislike.

Elizabeth stayed where she was, though inevitably Lady Grizelda rredible the two men to join her.

“Look whom Dragan has brought,” Lady Grizelda said cheerfully we can have a more constructive conference. But first, I promised t can all Miss Gunn the sewing machines...” She set off at her usual bris an you holding her husband's arm and leaving the other two to follow.

Mr. Andover did not offer his arm, although he made a polite inc of the head as he and Elizabeth walked together. “They are a force of ng this are they not?” he said wryly. “Like a hurricane or a whirlwind.”

“Or high tide in a storm.” She flicked a wary glance. “Are you ang isement He sighed. “No. I feel I should be. I just can't remember why.”

re sofa. A breath of laughter escaped her, and she risked another glance,

find his gaze strangely steady on her face, a sardonic almost-smile from his lips. For no reason, her stomach fluttered—or was it her heart? He blinked and looked ahead at the other two. Elizabeth hurried along beside, unspeaking.

She poked around the sewing machines with interest, investigating ingenious stitches and hand and foot treadles. The others lost interest quickly, although she found she was a little too aware of Andover's presence beside her, distracting her from the machine's perfect rows of stitches.

A woman's voice broke through her abstraction. "All very well, but I deny it could challenge my embroidery skills!"

And abruptly, something changed. The hand she could see hanging from Andover's side suddenly clenched, and although it loosened again immediately, something had changed in his posture. It was no longer relaxed but almost frighteningly tense. And the silence stretched, not even broken by Lady Grizelda.

Surreptitiously, without straightening, Elizabeth glanced up and saw her group of newcomers, two fashionably dressed young ladies with crinolines, escorted by two well-to-do gentlemen.

One of the ladies appeared half embarrassed, half irritated.

The other looked...stricken. "My lord," she got out, and despite her huskiness, it was the same voice that had already spoken. And she was staring at Andover.

*My lord?*

"Lady Hampton," he said distantly. He even bowed slightly, and

Elizabeth had the odd notion there was more mockery than courtesy in the gesture.

"Why, Lady Grizelda," the other woman said, stepping forward at a quick pace, extending her hand. "What a pleasant surprise to see you here."

"Lady Helen," Grizelda murmured, taking the offered hand. "I don't know my husband, Mr. Tizsa?"

"I have not had that pleasure. How do you, Mr. Tizsa?" The woman looked slightly dazzled, as most women probably were at first sight of a good doctor, but only for an instant. "And I doubt you know my husband, Mr. Front. Earnest, Mr. and Mrs. Tizsa."

Under cover of the introductions, which had not included Andover

fading woman called Lady Hampton had taken a step nearer to him.  
t? Then “How are you?” she murmured, all but devouring him with her eye  
g at his you well? You look pale.”

“The pleasures of Newgate do that to a man,” he replied brazer  
ing their troubling to lower his voice as she had. Lady Helen—Mrs. Front—  
st more pained. Lady Hampton whitened and stepped back as though struck.  
r’s still “Are you acquainted with Sir Arthur and Lady Hampton?” Mrs  
of loopsaid to Grizelda, with just a hint of panic.

Andover stuck out his hand. “How do you do, Hampton? It’s beer  
Arthur, time, has it not?”

Sir Arthur Hampton looked appalled. So did Mrs. Front. An unpr  
g at Mr. half-smile played on Andover’s lips as he held the other man’s ga  
almost didn’t drop his hand.

casual “Arthur,” Lady Hampton whispered, almost pleading.

oken by Sir Arthur barely touched the outstretched hand. “How do you  
said. “Lady Grizelda, Tizsa, a pleasure to meet you. Best get on,  
I saw adear?” Taking his wife’s arm, he tugged her with him.

h wide “Goodbye, Helen, Front,” Andover drawled. “I know you’ll pass  
best wishes.”

Elizabeth straightened at last, looking from Andover to Grizel  
ite the back. “*My lord?*”

he was Unexpected laughter hissed between Andover’s teeth.

“Lord James Andover,” Grizelda said. “I thought you knew? He  
younger son of the Marquis of Gartside. Lady Helen is his sister.”

and yet “There’s no need to spare the rest,” Lord James said sardo  
/ in the “Cordelia, Lady Hampton was formerly my betrothed. Do you know, I  
have had enough of...sewing machines for one day? Why don’t I ca  
ard and you this evening?”

Dr. Tizsa passed him a card without a word. Lord James nodde  
Do you and walked off in the opposite direction to his sister and his once-af  
bride.

woman  
t of the  
usband,



JAMES HAD NO desire to go back to his cramped rooms in Henrietta Str  
ver, the just needed to be away from the Crystal Palace, which echoed like a

and away from all these *people*. Especially people from his old world. “Are his past. Helen couldn’t even look at him. And as for Hampton, the judgment up fop Cordelia had married in preference to him...”

And Cordelia herself, a little more mature and poised, but just as plain-looking as ever. And with more than fear in her eyes when she looked at him. There had been memory, even an echo of old love, and that he could bear less than anything else.

So he strode out of the Crystal Palace as though all the fiends in hell were following him and kept going until he was clear of the crowds. Eventually he found himself by the Serpentine and kept walking, making sure he kept clear of other strollers—children with their mothers or nannies, young women in pairs and huddles of all ranks, young lovers casting anxious eyes at the unreliable sky.

He knew he was being unfair to Cordelia. Even if she had believed in his innocence, he could not blame her for moving on with her life. Everyone had expected him to spend the rest of his days in prison. Even he had expected to get out in three years. It had taken Cordelia something like two years to marry her faithful baronet, and he knew she would have felt the pressure. He didn’t blame her. What he couldn’t bear, he thought now, was that other people’s lives had progressed while his stood still.

Or had it? He doubted he was still the same man who had been bewildered and outraged, from the Old Bailey to Newgate. Injustice could do that to a man. The brutality of Newgate would alter anyone. He didn’t mind being bitter, though it got tedious now and then, but he didn’t want to degenerate into a *whiner*.

He thought of Cordelia’s beautiful, anxious face so close to his, and he wondered how he would feel should Hampton die tonight.

Would she consider James’s courtship again? Would he?

He doubted it. A world of hurt and betrayal that he doubted either of them could get beyond lay between them. Worse, he wasn’t sure he could.

Despite his reaction to the unexpected meeting at the Exhibition, his sense of betrayal by Cordelia, by his family, had, in fact, receded. It now took its place to his determination to find the diamonds and prove his innocence beyond anyone’s doubt. Which now appeared to involve finding James’s murderer. And somehow, he had acquired unexpected allies, which he had not seemed to mind at all. In fact, if anything, the intrusion of Lady Grize

d, from her equally eccentric husband into his affairs seemed to lend a touch of pumped-up excitement to his purpose.

Breathing normally once again, he realized he had sped beyond Regent's Park into Kensington Gardens. He decided to walk back to the bridge, where he had the Serpentine and cross Hyde Park to the Cumberland Gate and home as fast as possible. But all the instincts for trouble that helped keep a fellow alive in New York

were still with him. As he approached the bridge, he was aware of a commotion. A woman and two men hurrying toward a group of trees on the same side of the park. Something was not right about the picture they presented. They were huddled together, almost as though drunk and holding each other up. The woman's feet didn't quite touch the ground, and she was twisting and turning at the hold.

This was an abduction.

He could never have looked the other way. And in this case, the woman had been ill-dressed and thin and reminded him far too much of Elizabeth Jarman. He spun away from the bridge and sprinted after them. Calling out would have attracted attention and help, but it would also warn the abductor: he would be faced faster. So, he pounded after them at full tilt until he got close enough to hear.

Both men jerked their heads around—a villainous-looking pair, not tall, not young, but clean, but not ill-dressed or undernourished. He would lay odds they were henchmen of someone like Jarman.

Their captive used their moment of inattention to hurl herself backward, twisting her head around frantically. Her mouth opened wide to cry out, and indeed Elizabeth Jarman.

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her equally eccentric husband into his affairs seemed to lend a touch of fresh excitement to his purpose.

Breathing normally once again, he realized he had sped beyond Hyde Park into Kensington Gardens. He decided to walk back to the bridge over the Serpentine and cross Hyde Park to the Cumberland Gate and home.

But all the instincts for trouble that helped keep a fellow alive in Newgate were still with him. As he approached the bridge, he was aware of a woman and two men hurrying toward a group of trees on the same side of the river. Something was not right about the picture they presented. They were all too close together, almost as though drunk and holding each other up. But the woman's feet didn't quite touch the ground, and she was twisting in their hold.

This was an abduction.

He could never have looked the other way. And in this case, the female was ill-dressed and thin and reminded him far too much of Elizabeth Jarman. He spun away from the bridge and sprinted after them. Calling out might have attracted attention and help, but it would also warn the abductors to run faster. So, he pounded after them at full tilt until he got close enough to be heard.

Both men jerked their heads around—a villainous-looking pair, none too clean, but not ill-dressed or undernourished. He would lay odds they were the henchmen of someone like Jarman.

Their captive used their moment of inattention to hurl herself backward, twisting her head around frantically. Her mouth opened wide to cry out. It was indeed Elizabeth Jarman.



## CHAPTER FIVE

HER CAPTORS WERE too strong for her. One shoved his arm further around her shoulders and clapped a hand over her mouth. The other man yanked straight between them once more.

But they had all seen James now. He was gaining on them, and they halted. They halted just inside the group of trees, far enough away not to be noticed by anyone wandering the paths. As James slowed, one of the men reached for her and whirled to face him, while the second man clamped both arms around Elizabeth, holding her hard against him. Above his grubby hand, James was viciously glad to see bleeding, her eyes were wide and terrified. And furious, which made him unreasonably proud.

“Not your business, mister,” the first man snarled, slashing a knife at James.

“Wrong again,” James said, and snatched a long-bladed dagger from the man’s boot. “Mine’s bigger.”

The man holding Elizabeth sniggered, presumably at the very idea of James being able to fight with a knife, which was generally the preserve of the gutter. Newgate, of course, was one big gutter, and James had learned the hard way to be the rat that survived.

“Better run away, rich boy,” the knife man taunted him.

“Better let the lady go, then.”

“Get it over,” growled the man holding Elizabeth, who stamped his foot and tried to break free.

James had no time to observe more, for the knife man lunged at him. He sidestepped and aimed a vicious stab that would have paralyzed his opponent had the man not made a last-second parry and rolled. James was on his feet in a flash, not falling on top of him and risking the knife but swinging his fist hard against the knife hand.

The man cried out in agony, but while James snatched up the knife, his opponent leapt to his feet and charged him with fury, head down.

barely had time to sidestep him this time, but he did manage to seize t by his belt and hurl him headfirst into the tree. He dropped like among the roots, and James swung on Elizabeth's captor.

The thug, clearly, knew that he couldn't hold the twisting, scr termagant that Elizabeth had become and still fight off James with comrade. His arm was already up, his meaty fist clenched and ready to her in the jaw. James couldn't wait. He took a flying leap, kicking c struck the man full in his stomach.

und her  
ked her  
y knew  
be seen  
eleased  
around  
which  
terrified.

His fist fell and Elizabeth broke free with a sob. The man droppe knee, clutching his stomach, and Elizabeth ran to James, who had heavily on the ground.

He was so relieved he hadn't misjudged and kicked her instead tha there for a moment longer than he should. She fell on her knees besid distress written all over her face. Somewhere, she had lost her prim and her hair was mostly loose from its pins. The combined effect wa blow to his own stomach. He tried to grin, to stop her immediate worry

Her eyes widened. "You *can* smile."  
Laughter shook him. "Only after a fight." He hauled himself to h hastily glancing around their immediate surroundings. The unconscio still lay groaning at the foot of the tree. There was no sign of the other.

He flung one arm around the girl's waist, hurrying her away fr trees and back toward the Exhibition building. "Are you hurt?" he den "What happened?"

She wiped her eyes almost angrily but didn't pull away from hi some reason, he was glad of that. She felt as tiny and delicate as a bi she was shaking uncontrollably.

"I'm fine," she managed. "Are you?"  
"Of course."

She swallowed. "I left the Tizzas at the Exhibition, since I have v do before tomorrow. I didn't see the men. I didn't look, even thoug them following, as I did when *you*... I thought I had grown too nervo just imagining things. I reminded myself you weren't following me ar and then they just swept up on either side of me and dragged me tow trees. I struggled, tried to cry out for help, but one had his arm arou shoulders and his hand over my mouth. I bit him," she adde  
James satisfaction.

he man James's lips quirked. "I know. I congratulate you, although you a stonewant to wash out your mouth when you get home. Is this yours?" Re

her with reluctance, he swiped a familiar, tired bonnet off the grouatchinggave it a shake.

out his "Oh, yes," she said with relief. "It's the only one I have, and ) punchannoyed to lose it."

ut, and Anyone should be glad to lose such an ugly hat. It annoyed him t was poor enough to value it.

d to his She plonked it on her head and tried to tie the ribbons, which w landedknotted from before it had been knocked off. And her hands still tre

He caught her arm to make her stop and turned her toward him. Wor t he layhe brushed her hands aside and unknotted the clean but faded ribbons. de him,him. She even let him catch her hair and twist it beneath the bonnet, a bonnet,she held her breath. As he tied the ribbons for her, he didn't look at s like abecause he wanted to so much.

7. His gaze was never still, though, as he sought any further threats people who looked too interested in them. No one paid them any atten his feet,when the bonnet was tied, he offered her his arm.

us man She took it gingerly, as though she were not used to such courtesie still shaking," she said. "You must think me a very poor creature."

om the "I think you're magnificent. Shall we go back into the Crystal Pal. anded.see if Lady Griz is still there?"

She shook her head almost violently. "I don't want to go back in im. Forwant to go home and work."

ird, and "Then we'll take a cab."

She looked up and met his gaze.

"We will," he insisted. "But if you wish it, I'll merely drop yo would rather go into the house with you and accompany you to the work tohouse afterward."

h I felt "There is no need," she protested. "I don't want to be so afraid I c us, wasout alone."

ymore, "And you won't be. This is just until we sort out the problem."

ard the "Problem?" She stared. "You think this attack was related to the m

nd my "It's a bit of a coincidence, otherwise. Why else risk abduc d withobviously poor young woman from a busy public park?"

"He's dead," she said.

1 might “Jarman is. Did you recognize those fellows?”

leaving She shook her head. “No. You think they are—were—his underlin

nd and “Possibly. Or they belong to some rival.”

She appeared to mull that over as they left the park by the Alber  
l I wasand he handed her into the first available hackney. He told himself  
beside her, their shoulders touching, because she needed the cor  
hat shefriendly human contact.

Friendly. He had followed her more than once. He hadn’t near  
ere stillseen, to frighten her, but he hadn’t much cared if he did, either. Sham  
embled.own behavior mingled with admiration of her, of a new, intense inte  
dlessly,had not bargained for.

She let “Do you trust the Tizasas?” she asked abruptly as the cab set off.

lthough “Yes. With less reservations than with most. Do you?” *Do you trust*

her just She nodded. Then, after taking a deep breath, she said, “You dic  
them about me. You didn’t tell the police either, according to Lady Gri

or even He shifted on the bench. “It must have slipped my mind.”

tion, so “Thank you.”

He dragged his gaze free. “It’s your secret. But I think you have  
s. “I’mthem if we’re to get to the bottom of all this. Tizsa at least suspects  
more to my following you than the word of a fellow jailbird.”

ace and “I told Lady Grizelda, so I expect Dr. Tizsa knows by now, to  
shouldn’t do that, you know.”

there. I “Do what?”

“Refer to yourself like that. You were wrongfully imprisoned. The  
for that lies with those who did commit the crime, and with tho  
misjudged you. You are blameless.”

u off. I It wasn’t easy to deprive James Andover of words, but the sea  
Tizasas’ managed it. Moreover, she had stopped trembling. Some warmth seep  
her fragile frame against his shoulder, bringing with it gratitu  
an’t goprotectiveness and something stronger—that was almost hope.



urder?”

ting anAS SHE WAITED for James Andover’s return that evening, she wished  
asked him to stay with her. It had made no sense sending him awa  
mere two or three hours, most of which he had to spend rattling

London in hackneys.

gs?” She had spent the time sewing and mending and thinking. She tried to dwell on the awfulness of her attempted abduction, when she had been at Port Gate, terrified she would be dragged back into the world she had escaped three years ago. She had been saved, and by the unlikelyst hero.

Effort of Lord James Andover. He looked so pale, so refined and elegant, she had never entered her head that he could, let alone would, take on such a job as to beof thugs, and certainly not for her. But he had raced after them, at the risk of his life, and punched without losing one iota of grace. And without showing the least heany fear.

Had she even said thank you? Or had she been too dazed by the experience, and by the novelty of the “white knight” who had flung himself to her rescue? No one had ever defended her before. That hadn’t tell risked himself for her melted the layer of ice that had formed around her heart. And now his visage, his quick, confident violence, seemed to be shining behind her eyelids. Everything about him had a strange, frightening quality she had never imagined or acknowledged before.

She had no idea what it meant, but she felt almost embarrassed to tell her mother there’s changed into her Sunday gown, a modest dove gray that was little different than her everyday dress but less worn. Normally, she wore it with a white collar. You puritanical white collar. This evening, self-consciously, she substituted a short red paisley shawl that she had once made for a customer who had claimed it. Then she sat by the window of her parlor and continued calmly to sew.

But inside, she was not calm at all. She looked forward to finally returning back, to joining her unexpected allies in the seeking of the killer and the stolen diamonds. And yet it was James Andover’s face that still came to mind from intruding on her work. *Lord James Andover*, a marquis’s son who would have looked at her even in her old life as a banker’s respectable daughter. He had gallantly saved her from abduction this afternoon. His violence both shocked and gladdened her. His kindness when she had been so vulnerable by her ordeal had surprised her even more. But she suspected he would be the same for anyone. Newgate might have embittered him, but at heart, she had not changed him. She found herself wishing she had known him very well when he had been young and carefree and trusting.

He hadn’t spoken in the carriage, after she had told him he was bla

As the hackney had turned carefully into Hanson Row, she had wanted not to blurt out that there was more to him than three years in Newgate, but she had been neither the courage nor the right. For it had taken until then for her to find that there was more to her too than a series of mistakes and a year's supposed wife of Joshua Jarman.

Only when the hackney had halted at her door did he speak with a pair of promising in his old, curt, yet casual, style to return for her just before he was tacked. Acceding to her wishes, he had not handed her down, but she knew he was waiting until she appeared at her parlor window before he gave the signal to the hackney driver to move on.

And now her heart beat too fast as she waited for him to return. Her original fear of him seemed to have vanished altogether. Now he interested her too much. But she was also looking forward to the whole evening and her seeing the Tizsas in their own home, to the first social occasion she had ever enjoyed for years, even if it was inspired by such strange and brutal events. And wouldn't her parents goggle to know that her companions included a duke's daughter and a marquis's son?

The thought made her smile ruefully, just as she heard the clatter of a lighter horse's hooves and the rumble of carriage wheels in the road. She restrained herself not to look up until they halted. A hackney stood outside her door. She set down her work and rose, calmly blowing out the candle and never swinging her cloak around her shoulders, drawing up the hood, and walking firmly to the house.

Only as she locked the front door did it enter her head that she had almost seen Lord James in the coach. She had asked him not to show himself to the neighbors for the sake of her reputation, but what if it was not he who had kept inside waiting for her? A few hours ago, she had been the victim of a would-be attempted abduction...

As she walked up to the carriage, the driver touched his whip to his forehead in a way of greeting. The carriage door swung open.

Just for an instant, Lord James's face loomed from the darkness, pale and gaunt and absurdly elegant for the neighborhood. His hand caught her, helping her inside. He reached past her to close the door, and she felt when he breathed. The horse trotted on, rolling them to the end of the street to turn.

"Were you afraid it wasn't me? Or that it was?" he asked sardonically. "I am not such a fearful creature," she retorted, although she was.

nted to “On the contrary, I suspect you are one of the bravest creatures she had met.”

realize Her whole being flushed with embarrassment or pleasure—she could not tell which. “I don’t know why you should think so.”

“You stood up to me, and to those villains in the park. I can guess again, your life with Jarman was like. Even the last straw of his death in these seven circumstances has not crushed you.”

She waited “He has not crushed either of us.” She turned to meet his rather harsh gaze. “I don’t think we should let him.”

“Hear, hear,” Lord James murmured.

Her mother. The Tizsas had a half-hidden house in a lane off Half Moon Street. In contrast to the straggled standards of Mayfair mansions, it was small and quirky, and it suited them perfectly. A cheerful maid admitted Elizabeth and Lord James and led them to a surprisingly spacious drawing room that seemed to be part study. Elizabeth and their host and hostess were arguing animatedly over something.

Elizabeth included a They broke off without heat to welcome their guests. In some of her daze, Elizabeth curtseyed and accepted a glass of sherry. The crystal wine glass was so fine in her fingers, reminding her how long it had been since she had been forced to be a guest anywhere. For the Tizsas treated her no differently from the duke’s son, friendly and not remotely condescending.

before “What happened to your lip?” Lady Grizelda asked, sitting beside Elizabeth and leaving the comfortable sofa. “Did you bite it?”

Elizabeth touched it self-consciously and glanced at Lord James. “It was not as hard as the hand I was aiming for.” And she spilled out the story of her attempted abduction and Lord James’s rescue.

Elizabeth who sat The Tizsas listened, alternately wide-eyed and frowning with concern. And then the same maid appeared and announced that dinner was served.

“This changes everything,” Dr. Tizsa said as they walked in a small huddle into a cozy yet elegant dining room. An oval table had been set for four places, and Lady Grizelda indicated they should sit anywhere.

Elizabeth said “In what way?” she asked.

“To begin with, Miss Gunn is in danger, which we never imagined.”

The maid left them. Dr. Tizsa poured the wine, and Lady Grizelda poured clear soup into bowls.

Elizabeth said “I think,” Elizabeth said, “that you should probably call me by my real name, which is Elizabeth Barker. When I was barely seventeen years



I never allowed Joshua Jarman to lure me from my respectable home into thought was marriage. It wasn't, though I didn't discover this for months. I couldn't then I was already utterly disillusioned. I had thought him a decent, charming gentleman who cared nothing for established wealth or Society's silliness. He was different from anyone else I had ever met, and he claimed to be in suchOf course." Her lips twisted.

"But I very quickly discovered he was no more a gentleman than the old gaze that fawned over him from fear. I realized he was an important figure in the underworld he haunted, a thief, a man of violence, exploitation, and greed. I broke off and took a deep breath. "I planned carefully before I left home. He gave me no money except for the food and ale he demanded at his table. I knew where he kept it. I stole enough to get me to France and live for a while. I demanded then, instead of going to the market one day, I kept going, with my money. There, but the money in my pocket, a change of clothes, and the chess set my father had given me."

"Did you make it to France?" Lady Grizelda asked.

Elizabeth nodded. "I did. I changed my name to Alice Gunn and she had job as a temporary nursery maid with a couple in Normandy, and then to the an English couple in Paris. It was they who got me the requisite papers for my new name, and then, after almost a year, I returned to England."

"Why?" Lord James asked.

"Because he would have found out I had gone to France and would have expected me to return to London."

"Then he pursued you?" Dr. Tizsa asked.

"I knew he would. Oh, not that he wanted me back in any capacity. My joke had already run to its end for him. But I had stolen from him. Not a large amount by his standards, but the principle was the same. He killed a casual who cheated him. And in his eyes, he was never the cheat."

Lord James muttered something under his breath.

Elizabeth remembered to eat her soup.

"It's a long time to live with fear," Dr. Tizsa said.

"She shrugged. "I grew used to it. I used the last of his money to rent a little house in Hanson Row, and I took in mending and sewing. Needlework was my one ladylike skill. I expanded into making clothes for babies and young children and was able to put a little money away. I eventually, I wanted to be able to move out of London, to some quiet

what land maybe teach children..." She gave a quick, embarrassed  
ths. By "Everyone must have a daydream. But then I found Joshua's body  
arminghouse. He had found me. And if he hadn't been dead, I would be."

y rules. Lady Grizelda rose and collected the soup plates. After laying the  
ove me neat pile on the sideboard, she uncovered the other steaming dishes  
there and brought them to the table. Dr. Tizsa helped Elizabeth to fish  
he dogstarragon sauce.

e in the "I'm not sure," Lord James said, performing a similar service for  
.." She Grizelda, "that that is true. Jarman must have known where you were  
im. He several months. According to Connor, his one-time henchman, Jarman  
le, but I on you and helped himself to the odd diamond when he needed to."

a little, "What?" Elizabeth dropped her fork onto the plate with a clatter  
nothing God," she whispered. Dr. Tizsa reached over and pushed her win  
y father closer to her. She took a sizeable gulp.

"I suspect now that he came while you were out," Lord James said  
he didn't stay long."

took a "How did he get in?" Lady Grizelda demanded.

en with "I don't know, but I suspect he picked the lock on the back door."

s in my Dr. Tizsa nodded. "That explains the unlocked door when I first  
there."

"Yes, but I never *had* the diamonds!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "So would  
uld nothe there?"

Lady Grizelda exchanged a glance with her husband. "We think you  
have them and never knew. What was the only thing missing after you  
y. That Jarman's body?"

a large "The chess set," Elizabeth replied, frowning.

anyone "Exactly." Dr. Tizsa leaned forward. "He pursued you for the dia  
not for whatever else you took from him. He must have hidden the dia  
inside the chess pieces. It's perfectly possible to do so. He would have  
lived when you ran away, and he probably knew as soon as you returned  
the country."

rent the "And then," Lady Grizelda added, "he must have decided it was  
; work more convenient to keep you ignorant. No one would even think of  
hes for for the diamonds in a house occupied by a poor, respectable seamstress  
away. he just helped himself when he needed the funds."

village "But he couldn't hide it forever," Lord James mused. "Pete Conno

smile. He even traced the location down to a seamstress's house in Hanso  
in my Jarman possibly gave him the diamond he was caught with to shut him

"He might even have pointed the police in his direction," Elizabeth  
offered. "It's the sort of thing he would have done to prove no one  
waiting better of him."

"But Connor could then have pointed the police to Jarman,"  
Grizelda argued. "And to Elizabeth."

"Not if he valued the lives of his family," Elizabeth said in a small  
voice.

"So, he told me instead," Lord James said slowly.

"Then Jarman was murdered for the diamonds by whoever stole the  
set." Dr. Tizsa forked the last mouthful of fish and ate with  
glass enjoyment.

"So all we have to do," Lady Grizelda said, equally pleased, "is find  
the missing chess set."

"I don't think it's quite as simple as that," Lord James said. He laid  
his knife and fork. "Because I don't think whoever killed him *has* the  
set. If they had, why would they try to abduct Elizabeth?"

They all regarded each other as the implications began to dawn.

"And over's right," Dr. Tizsa said at last. "Whatever happened  
in the washhouse that day, Jarman was killed too quickly, before the murderer found  
the diamonds."

"If Joshua saw him," Elizabeth said, "he would have to kill or be  
found." She shuddered.

There was silence in the dining room.

"After dinner," Lady Grizelda said, "we need to make a list of  
people who would or could have done this. Dragan, will you slice the bread

the diamonds

have been

returned to

as much

looking

ess. So,

she knew.

He even traced the location down to a seamstress's house in Hanson Row. Jarman possibly gave him the diamond he was caught with to shut him up."

"He might even have pointed the police in his direction," Elizabeth offered. "It's the sort of thing he would have done to prove no one got the better of him."

"But Connor could then have pointed the police to Jarman," Lady Grizelda argued. "And to Elizabeth."

"Not if he valued the lives of his family," Elizabeth said in a small, hard voice.

"So, he told me instead," Lord James said slowly.

"Then Jarman was murdered for the diamonds by whoever stole the chess set." Dr. Tizsa forked the last mouthful of fish and ate with evident enjoyment.

"So all we have to do," Lady Grizelda said, equally pleased, "is find the missing chess set."

"I don't think it's quite as simple as that," Lord James said. He laid down his knife and fork. "Because I don't think whoever killed him *has* the chess set. If they had, why would they try to abduct Elizabeth?"

They all regarded each other as the implications began to dawn.

"Andover's right," Dr. Tizsa said at last. "Whatever happened in the house that day, Jarman was killed too quickly, before the murderer found the diamonds."

"If Joshua saw him," Elizabeth said, "he would have to kill or be killed." She shuddered.

There was silence in the dining room.

"After dinner," Lady Grizelda said, "we need to make a list of all the people who would or could have done this. Dragan, will you slice the beef?"



## CHAPTER SIX

THE TIZSAS DID not appear to bother with the tradition of the ladies and the gentlemen to their port, for after the meal was finished, they all went together back to the drawing room, where the maid served coffee and Tizsa poured brandy for any who wanted it. Elizabeth, whose head felt heavy enough, refused, and Lady Grizelda wrinkled her nose.

“Then I’ll drink for two,” Dr. Tizsa said with a quick smile that immediately reflected on his wife’s face.

Oh yes, Lady Grizelda was expecting a baby, Elizabeth thought, accepting her cup and saucer from the maid.

“Would you prefer tea?” Lady Grizelda asked, catching her observation. “We’ve got into the habit of coffee, but...”

“No, coffee is perfect,” Elizabeth assured her. “I need to stay away from alcohol so far, very little is making sense for me. If the murderer doesn’t have the diamonds and was scared off by my return so soon after he killed the lady, why attack me now? Why have they not torn the house apart already? Why did he not wait for me and try to get the information out of me as soon as I came home that afternoon?”

“Perhaps he was too appalled at what he had done for nothing, my dear,” Grizelda suggested. “Perhaps he saw James following you. In the rain, he wouldn’t be very recognizable, so the killer might have imagined he was being followed by police.”

“You mean he was watching me walk toward the house?” Elizabeth exclaimed in fresh horror.

Grizelda cast her an almost apologetic glance. “We think he probably escaped via the back door almost as you entered by the front. The fog and rain have obscured vision, muffled sounds, and you were more worried about James than anyone inside the house. Probably just as well.”

“God yes,” Lord James said, though a sardonic curl of the lip came over his face almost immediately. “By all means, let us pretend I am the hero who

Miss Elizabeth's life."

"You are," Elizabeth said. "Twice, it would appear. But how did men know I was at the park, at the Exhibition? Did they follow Grizelda and me from the house?"

Lady Grizelda glanced up from her coffee. "I didn't see anyone?"

Elizabeth shook her head. "But if they are watching the house, it no sense for them to try to abduct me from a public park rather than send me to death in the privacy of the house. I don't imagine locked doors would be any more challenge for them than for Joshua."

"Perhaps they've been waiting for some announcement about the body being found along with Jarman's body," Dr. Tizsa speculated. "His name was reported in the newspapers this morning."

"But not the place he was found," Lady Grizelda said. "Inspector Tizsa kept that information quiet—as much to catch the killer out in knowledge as to protect you, I'm afraid, but it still works in your favor."

"All the same, she can't go home now," Lord James said. "It is most dangerous."

Elizabeth felt torn between a jolt of pleasure at his care and annoyance at his impertinence.

"Of course, you must stay here," Lady Grizelda said as though it was a matter of course, and then she turned her head toward her husband. "Unless..."

His lips quirked upward. "Unless Andover and I wait there instead."

"I was thinking more that you join us there," Lady Grizelda said airily.

"No," Dr. Tizsa said. "You need your rest."

"These people are ruthless," Lord James added. "Killing a daughter after Jarman will make no difference to the murderer's sense of honor. I'm happy to take them on, but the ladies should not be present."

"I doubt they'll arrive en masse," Elizabeth said, frowning. "If the murderer was killed as part of some underworld coup, there won't be many people who know who did it or why, and the murderer will need to keep it that way to maintain old loyalties. Surely they'd risk no more than two people being caught?"

"And Lord James dealt with both my attackers this afternoon. With Dr. Tizsa present as well, I cannot imagine I'll be in any danger whatsoever."

“Nor I,” Lady Grizelda added. “And Elizabeth will need a chaperone with these... Elizabeth laughed, just because she had stopped thinking about her own Ladyprecious reputation. When had that happened? When she’d realized she would have to leave Hanson Row behind and make a new life somewhere, did she? When these people accepted her and helped her despite her being more than the mistress of an underworld villain? She became aware of it when she makes James watching her mirth, the faintest of smiles playing on his overcare melighting his hard eyes. Her stomach fluttered because he looked so... could be... Sudden lack of breath forced her to sobriety. “Lady Grizelda could you my bed.”

Dr. Tizsa opened his mouth to object, then closed it as his wife took the murderhand.

“You mentioned lists,” Lord James said. “Of possible suspects. Who would Harris need to bother with such if we’re just going to wait at Hanson Row to catch the edge he whoever it is?”

“Definitely,” Lady Grizelda said, jumping to her feet and going to the desks behind the sofa. She collected two notebooks and pencils and dropped one of each into her husband’s lap, before resuming her place at the table. “So, we think the likeliest reason is an underworld coup against Jarman, either from his own underlings, or a rival gang. Do we know anything about who were a Jarman’s people?”

“I’ve discovered a little,” Lord James said, “during investigations of his own. Jarman’s lieutenant is a nasty piece of work called Porter.”

Elizabeth shivered. “He would turn on his own mother. Brutal and deadly.”

“But would he turn on Jarman?” Dr. Tizsa asked, his pencil tapping on the duke’s sacross the page.

“I wouldn’t put it past him,” Elizabeth said. “Though he seemed cold enough...and I wouldn’t have said he had the intelligence to manage a large organization. He carried out orders, scared people into compliance. The one who Sandman, whom he called his nephew, was brighter and younger, though the way to mother, Joshua’s sister-in-law, seemed too loyal to turn on him.”

“Barb Sandman?” Lord James said. “She and her son were living in the afternoon. Jarman.”

Elizabeth shrugged. “Even in my day, she wanted to. She’s young and comely enough, despite having a grownup son.” She frowned. “I

ne.” Loyalty might well be questionable. When I knew him, he was too frightened of Joshua to do anything about it, but he used to *look* at me.” She sensed she was feeling all the old revulsion at that life she had so stupidly and wherever she walked into. Even now, it chilled her bones.

“They would be the likeliest of his inner circle,” Lord James said, dragging his gaze from her face, though he could not hide his distaste on his lips, was worse. “Although there were others who worked for him with reliability and might well have found the courage and the means to turn on him.”

“Mrs. Silver,” Elizabeth said at once. “Constance Silver.”

“What do you know of Madam Silver?” Lord James asked, staring at her. “I think she ran a house of ill repute,” Elizabeth said. “She came to the house occasionally, often with ledgers. She seemed to actually keep accounts for Joshua, which amused me in a shocking kind of way. I once caught a look in her eye once or twice... She didn’t like him. She did not like him at all.” Another memory jolted her. “She even told me her address to me just as she was leaving and Joshua couldn’t hear. Almost as though...”

“She was offering you work?” Lord James said with distaste.

Elizabeth shook herself. “Or sanctuary. At any rate, she is not a Jarman woman and did not like her situation.”

“Interesting,” Dr. Tizsa commented.

Lady Grizelda looked up from her notebook. “What about rivals of mine who might have wanted the diamonds for themselves, as well as Jarman, of their way?”

“Zeb Fisher is likeliest,” Lord James said, as though he had been considering this for some time. “I spoke to him not long after I came out of prison, and he would certainly have been happy to do Jarman any bad thing he could. And he definitely envied some of his—er... businesses. But there are devoted other people who have major grudges against Jarman. Respectable people such as those who have been cheated or stolen from, or whose reputations or lives he has threatened. Bertie—and some of those have connections to the diamond theft.”

“Such as?” Dr. Tizsa asked, his pencil so busy that Elizabeth thought he was no longer writing but drawing. Or perhaps just scribbling. After all, Grizelda was clearly taking copious notes.

“Such as Solomon Grey, the shipper who imported the diamonds. He and his employees Jarman murdered to steal the gems. Plus, around the time Bertie was arrested, rumors sprang up that Grey had connived at the theft by



ghtened the thieves where and when the diamonds were being transported. The topped, must have affected his business. And apparently, he is an ill man to happily. Having met him, I would agree.”

“We have a friend involved in shipping,” Lady Grizelda said, opined, another note. “I can make inquiries about this Grey. Who else? What the jeweler you bought the ring from? Who denied ever selling you the urchase.” James shrugged. “Mason? I think he denied it through fear of Jarm you’re right. His business did suffer from the notoriety. On the other my sympathy is limited, since he also claimed my purposes in his sh . been to *sell* him diamonds for a song.”

“But that’s bizarre,” Elizabeth said. “A reputable jeweler would produce buy goods in such a way, and someone like Lord James would know it . But I

“Besides,” said Dr. Tizsa, “none of the other stolen diamonds we n’t like found in Andover’s possession. Yet Mason had no obvious reason to li s once,

“Good points,” Lord James replied. “Unfortunately, we can’t ask about them because he died in a carriage accident while I was in Newg

Dr. Tizsa glanced up sharply. “Accident?”

“I would doubt it,” Lord James said. “Mown down, apparently by and four out of control. They found the coach and horses, but not the d

“It sounds like Joshua,” Elizabeth said, twisting in her chair. ‘ l gang overheard him giving such an order.”

nan out “When exactly did you leave him?” Dr. Tizsa asked.

“Monday the twenty-eighth of August, 1848,” she replied.

“Five days after the robbery,” Dr. Tizsa observed. “Which certain e out of Jarman time to hide the diamonds in the chess pieces. Though I s turn he we’re only guessing about that. Did you notice anything odd about the re were Any change in them.”

“I never took them out the box,” Elizabeth admitted. “I took the atened moment of sentiment, a last-minute decision when I saw them on the

Joshua’s room. The drawer where he kept his reserves of mon ight he underneath. He did play chess sometimes, though, with Bertie Sa ll, Lady among other people. So it might have given him the idea.”

“I think we have enough to begin with,” Lady Grizelda said. “W . It was some likely suspects—Porter, his lieutenant; Bertie and Barb Sandma time IFisher, the rival villain. Then we have Constance Silver and Solomon r telling And Mason the jeweler, though obviously we can’t interview him in

gossip Which of these would have been strong enough to strangle Jarman  
cross. little damage to Elizabeth's bedroom? I understand he was a large,  
man. Which probably eliminates the women."

making "Unless they had help," Lord James pointed out. "And the m  
it about clearly does, because the thugs who attacked Miss Elizabeth wer  
ring?" henchmen."

an, and "Yes, but would you trust mere henchmen to kill a man of Ja  
r hand, importance in the underworld?" Dr. Tizsa asked. "For one thing, it  
top had have to be a very loyal thug to be prepared to take it on such an enterpr

"Fisher, then, maybe?" Lady Grizelda suggested. "At any rate, we  
d never find out what all our major suspects were doing and where on the af  
." that Jarman died."

re ever Dr. Tizsa closed his notebook. "Then why don't we pack up and  
ie." cab to take us to Hanson Row? We can divide up tasks on the way."

Mason  
gate."



a coach THE APPORTIONING OF tasks proved not to be straightforward. Although  
river." sense to make use of everyone, Elizabeth's lack of safety bothered eve

"I once "There's little sense in us all piling into your house to protect you  
then all abandon you as soon as it's daylight," Lady Grizelda said. "A  
you were attacked in daylight today."

ly gave set," Lord James pointed out. "Supposing Jarman did hide it somewhe  
suppose I could help Miss Elizabeth with that."

pieces? "Though if Griz and I are searching out suspects, it leaves Elizabe  
only one guard," Dr. Tizsa added.

em in a "Well, the alternative seems to be that we all huddle in my hou  
desk in never go out at all," Elizabeth said tartly, "which would get *nothing* o  
ey was seems to me that the most important thing is to find the diamonds as  
and man as possible. So, I will happily search the house, and then go out in se  
our suspects. If we go in pairs, I will have a guard."

le have Flashes of light from street lamps and other carriages flickered ov  
an; Zeb James's pale face. "And if you're walking straight into the lion's de  
n Grey. asked quietly.

person. "Then we'll just have to appear as unthreatening as possible," El

with so said.

strong “Or keep Inspector Harris informed of our whereabouts,” suggested.

urderer Lady Grizelda smiled. “Or Elizabeth pretends that she has.”

e mere Elizabeth could almost feel the curtains twitching and the eyes g the hackney as she and her allies alighted. They must already be fas rman’s by the number of carriages and strangers seen outside her house th : would few days.

rise.” Ignoring them, Elizabeth marched up to her front door. Lord : need to hand closed over hers. She jumped in the darkness, suddenly aware ternooneariness, of the intimacy of the moment, even though he was only tak keys from her hand.

l find a “Your pardon,” he murmured.

Lady Grizelda drew her back to let the men enter the house first, a she clutched her umbrella like a sword before her. Elizabeth peered i street, following the lights of the carriage. Hanson Row appeared to be of everyone and everything else.

it made A light glowed from the hall, and she turned to see that Lord Jan ryone. lit the lamp there. Holding it high, he looked into the parlor, nodde 1, if we made his way to the kitchen. Dr. Tizsa came downstairs, carrying a fter all, and pronouncing all well.

They all repaired to the kitchen and lit some more candles, wh e chess Tizsa had taken from his pocket.

re else. “Unfair to use up all of yours,” Lady Grizelda said, “when w occupying all your rooms.”

th with Elizabeth threw her cloak over the back of the nearest chair. “I’ll n the beds and find some old blankets.”

ise and “I’ll help you,” Lady Grizelda said at once.

done. It Elizabeth was surprised to find her ladyship was not more of an o quickly than a helper.

arch of “Are duke’s daughters normally so at ease with bedmaking?” El asked as she shook the pillow into its linen case and placed it on the be

er Lord “Probably not. But I did not marry a rich man, and we only ha en?” he maid.”

“Does your family not support you?”

izabeth “My father gave us the house as a wedding present. Beyond that,

and I would rather support ourselves.” She cast Elizabeth a quick Tizsaendearing smile. “Yes, I know. I have always been eccentric.”

“You are free spirits,” Elizabeth said, placing the pillow on the admire that.”

“Well, independent spirits, so far as we can be with the exigent cinatedlife!” Lady Grizelda sank down on the bed, as though suddenly exhausted last “You should sleep,” Elizabeth said. “When is the baby due?”

“Oh, not until the spring. But I don’t like putting you out of your b James’s “It’s the least I can do,” Elizabeth assured her. “I shall be p e of hiscomfortable in the other room, where I have a ready-made mattress ing thefabric and old clothes.” She hefted the washing jug. “Let me bring yc water.”

An hour later, she folded herself onto that makeshift mattress and lthoughthe sheet and blanket up to her chin. The house was quiet. Dr. Tiz into thereading—studying, Elizabeth suspected—by the light of a single candl e emptyparlor, a slightly moth-eaten blanket around his shoulders. Lord Jame the kitchen, in darkness.

nes had It didn’t seem right. She suspected Dr. Tizsa had suffered consider d, then the late revolution and war in Hungary. Lord James had definitely suff candleNewgate. And yet both were enduring more discomfort for her. Of

Lord James was on a mission of mingled self-exoneration and reven ich Dr.he probably felt guilty about frightening someone who had been yet of Jarman’s victims. But he had had no need to risk himself for l e’ll beafternoon in Hyde Park.

Her mind drifted to the confrontation inside the Crystal Palace ake upLord James’s sister had blatantly ignored him, and the woman he had once loved, Lady Hampton, had stared at him as though she had seen a There had been *feeling* in the lady’s stare. Guilt, shame, or jus bserverElizabeth didn’t know her well enough to say, but the tension between could certainly have been cut with a knife.

Elizabeth Did Lord James still love her? At the very least, he must have d. betrayal. And yet his own sister consorted with his betrayer while ive oneJames who was innocent. Elizabeth felt indignant on his behalf. And

For there was an intense, corroding loneliness to the man that she rec only too well. Perhaps it was that which spoke to her. Not just his to Draganthe unconscious elegance of his every movement. Or his pale, refin

, rather and long, graceful mouth, so touched by sadness.

He disturbed her, this aristocratic jailbird with the violent hands .  
bed. “Igentle touch... Lord James, the marquis’s son, who was so much *not*  
that it was surely safe to think about him just a little...

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ed face

and long, graceful mouth, so touched by sadness.

He disturbed her, this aristocratic jailbird with the violent hands and the gentle touch... Lord James, the marquis's son, who was so much *not* for her that it was surely safe to think about him just a little...



## CHAPTER SEVEN

GRIZ WOKE TO her husband's gentle kiss, daylight, and a cup of tea.

"That's better," she sighed, returning his embrace and using his hand to haul herself into a sitting position. He wrapped her fingers around the teacup, and she sipped, settling the tingling, sick feeling that still troubled her occasionally first thing in the morning. "Quiet night?"

"As the grave. They may be waiting to see what if anything happened during their botched abduction yesterday. Too soon, perhaps, to try again."

She reached up to brush his tousled hair off his forehead. "Did you get any sleep?"

"I did. The chair is quite comfortable."

"What about James?"

"I found him asleep with his head on the table. Like me, he woke at the first sound—I expect prison works as well as war to that end. He's drinking coffee while our hostess makes breakfast. Toast and eggs."

Griz rubbed her tummy in anticipation. Dragan laughed and kissed her once more before rising and going to the washing bowl.

An hour later, duly washed, dressed, and breakfasted, they left Elizabeth and James to search the house and set off in search of a hackney to take them to the London Docks.

"Our hostess appears to have abandoned her insistence on propriety," Dragan observed.

"I think she's resigned to moving on. And after yesterday, she seems to trust James."

"Do you?" Dragan asked.

She turned her face up to his, frowning. "Mostly. He's...tougher than most men I knew, and much more secretive, but yes, I trust him with Elizabeth."

"But not that he didn't kill Jarman?"

Griz had been thinking about that a good deal. "He's capable of anything," she said ruefully. "And before he knew her, he might well have left her."

there to punish her. But I don't think he did. As Harris said, he could have done it and stepped out of the back lane in time to greet Elizabeth in time, but I don't think he did. He only found the body when she ran out the door, and you and he walked into the empty house."

"Or says he did."

Griz said uneasily, "You don't trust him."

"He isn't an easy man to trust. He has too many...layers. I suspect he didn't kill Jarman, but he could still have taken the chess set."

"Compensation for three years in Newgate?" Griz said. "I don't know that's his way. He's more likely to throw the pieces in front of the police, lead her to court, and stalk away."

"Probably."

"You don't like him," Griz observed.

"Actually, I do. But I like a lot of people who don't adhere closely to the law."

She squeezed his arm. "And Elizabeth. Do you suspect her, to say she could have knowingly stolen the diamonds from Jarman three years ago?"

"She could, but wouldn't she have sold them abroad in that case?"

"We have no proof she didn't. Except that she's hardly living like a princess on the proceeds, and she could never have killed Jarman without a witness. On the whole, I retain an open mind, but I believe I do trust Elizabeth and James."

Dragan nodded.

She waited a moment, then said, "Something still bothers you. Is it either of them?"

He sighed. "No, I tend to agree with you. But something isn't right about the original theft. If Andover is telling the truth about where he acquired the diamond, why would a reputable jeweler buy from an unknown source like Jarman?"

"Shall we visit his widow after we've investigated the underworld a little?"

"Why not?" Dragan said amiably. "Though I do have to be at the office by four o'clock."

it," she  
ie body





ld have “I MIGHT AS well start in here and tidy as I go,” Elizabeth said in the l  
the fog, She imagined Lord James would take himself to the parlor or to one  
o fetch other rooms to search, but, in fact, while she cleared the table and was  
used dishes, he went to the kitchen cupboards, checking inside pots and  
as well as the backs of shelves.

It should have been uncomfortable at the least to have a relative s  
pect hepoking about her meager possessions, most of which weren’t even h  
had been left by the previous tenants. Instead, it felt oddly companiona  
’t think Which was probably why she was emboldened enough to ask, “V  
ice, theyour family not acknowledge you now that you are proved innocent?”

He straightened and opened the larder door. “Habit, probably. A  
fact that I don’t acknowledge them.”

“Because they didn’t support you at your trial?”  
y to the “Yes, I am that petulant.”

“It isn’t petulance,” she argued, lifting the pile of clean dish  
o? She carrying them to the cupboard he had just searched through. “I imagin  
o.” very...hurtful.”

He was silent, and she thought he would never admit to that, eve  
; like a Then, running his hands down the back of the larder, he said, “No c  
hout anever disbelieved me before. Even as a child, I always owned  
st both misdemeanors, even when my siblings didn’t. Not to be righteous  
understand, just because I always knew we were found out and war  
punishment over with as fast as possible. I presume my father thought  
Aboutso afraid of the noose that I changed my habits and lied. But I sho  
whine. I understand his influence made sure I did not hang.”

it about “Even your siblings did not believe you?”

ired the “I’m not sure anyone cared that much whether I lied or not.” I  
rce like curled. “It was the scandal that horrified them most. Helen was furio  
me because the earl she was all but engaged to stepped back and she  
ld for a resort to the devoted but very un-noble Earnest Front.”

“It’s hardly your fault if her suitor has no honor.”

e clinic “I may have pointed that out in my own head. At any rate, we do  
and I am more comfortable that way.”

She closed the cupboard under the sink and turned to the kitche  
drawers. Remembering how Joshua had often hidden things he didn  
her to find—like bank drafts, coins, and jewels—she felt above and

kitchen, each drawer in case anything had been stuck there. Lord James was  
one of the things around on the larder shelves.

He asked the “And Lady Hampton?” she asked casually. “Did she not believe  
in panseither?”

He shrugged. “She never said either way. In fact, she never said a  
word stranger at all until the unfortunate encounter at the Exhibition.”

Elizabeth murmured, distressed on his behalf.

“Don’t be.” He shut the larder door and walked toward her. “I  
Why do I realize I’m not.”

“And yet it hurt you to see her.” Her breath caught as he came  
And she, but he only crouched down beside her and crawled under the table

“A lot of things hurt. I don’t need to pay attention to them.”

“Newgate does not define you,” she blurted.

He emerged on the other side of the table and rose to his feet. There  
was a faint hint of color along the ridge of his cheekbones,  
but it didn’t avoid her gaze. “As Jarman does not define you.”

It was her gaze that dropped. She closed the drawer.

“Did he hurt you?” Lord James asked. “Physically.”

She swallowed. “Sometimes. Often enough that I regretted that  
up to bankers my father picked out for me.”

“Did it have to be one or the other?”

“Perhaps, when one is seventeen. After I left, I came to like relying  
on myself.”

“Working constantly, with no friends? Weren’t you lonely?”

She didn’t answer directly, merely smiled faintly. “It was better than  
that alternative. Have you not resumed your old friendships?”

He shook his head. “I’ve been too focused on making Jarman  
follow the law.”

“I suppose a higher power judges him now. What will you do to  
prove his guilt?”

Something very close to a smile flickered across his face and  
didn’t talk, perhaps because of her unreasonable certainty. And then the light faded

his eyes, leaving them hard and desolate as a winter moor. “I don’t know  
what to do abroad, maybe. I think we’ve looked all over the kitchen. Where next?”

“The backyard,” she said, aching for him. “It struck me last  
time below perhaps he threw the pieces out the window in panic.”

moving He went to the back door and turned the key. "I'll watch from in  
preserve your reputation."

ve you She brushed past him into the tiny yard. Her washing line stretche  
a hook in the house wall to the back fence—barely enough hang a she  
nythinghad planted a few vegetables and herbs in the spring, but they hadn't

Only weeds and brambles seemed to thrive in this soil. She  
halfheartedly among the few overhanging branches, but it was clear fr  
've justbeginning that unless Joshua had buried the chess pieces, they weren't

"Morning, Miss Gunn," screeched her neighbor in the next garden.  
close to "Good morning, Mrs. Moore," she replied to the woman who was  
: hanging over the garden wall.

"Got some visitors, then?" Mrs. Moore asked, her eyes gleaming a  
"That's right. Family," Elizabeth lied without a qualm. "From the r

ere may "Lovely company for you, especially with you working so hard.  
but belong, are they?"

"Just a few days, Mrs. Moore. How is your husband?"  
She scowled darkly. "Malingering, if you ask me. Now I got to  
washing or we can't pay the rent. Got any for me, dearie?"

he dull "Sorry, I haven't, but I'll spread the word, if you like."  
"Thanks, love."

With what she hoped was a cheerful wave, Elizabeth turned to g  
ying oninside. The sight of Lord James's shadow behind the door brought  
thought to mind, and she paused. "Mrs. Moore? There hasn't been  
lurking around the row asking questions about me, has there?  
han theexpecting another cousin," she added inventively, "and he hasn't tu  
yet."

ace the "No, no one's asked me anything, but you know how I keep my  
myself."

nce we Elizabeth refrained from snorting.  
"I did see someone lurking across the street a day or so ago, mind

nished,it was foggy? Probably that same man what turned up dead in your  
ed fromNice for you to have family here at such an upsetting time."

ow. Go "It is," Elizabeth agreed, and walked inside before firmly closi  
" locking the door. "Do you think she saw Joshua?" she asked Lord  
t night,who was lifting one of the hard chairs and examining its underside.

He set it down and upended another. "Maybe. She might have se

here, to Or whoever killed Joshua. I expect the police have already asked neighbors about strangers. And Harris must have told them the body was found from your garden.”

met. She “I didn’t think he would be that kind. Of course, he doesn’t know grown-up, does he?”

poked “I think he knows Jarman well enough that he would still be kind.”

from the “I’ll make a start on the parlor.”

here. By the time they had fruitlessly searched the parlor and the cut under the stairs, her frustration had mounted. “This is impossible!”

is all but “You’ll never find the treasure with that attitude,” he said sardoniously. “Where *would* a pirate bury his treasure?”

vidly. “In the house of his estranged not-quite-wife, apparently.”

north.” “No, you put it there, and he found it.” He brushed past her to the Staying “Up the rigging, me hearties,” he murmured. “That’s why he was in the bedroom. And from there, he could have seen—or heard—anyone coming into the house.”

take in Without apology or permission, he walked into her bedroom—cut off Lady Grizelda’s—and stood by the window. Fortunately, the curtain was shut. He peered through a crack down to the street, then swung back to the door.

“Here I stand, the treasure in my hand, and I see someone coming through the fog. Or perhaps someone else has come in the back way and I can’t hear another voice I recognize downstairs. Someone I don’t want to find the treasure. What do I do? Throw it back in the cabinet?”

We’re “Too easy to find,” Elizabeth said. “Shove it under the mattress?” They moved up they stepped to either side of the bed and heaved the mattress up.

“No,” Lord James said regretfully, and they let it fall again. Dropping himself to his knees, he peered under the bedframe, feeling with his hands as far as he could stretch. On her side of the bed, Elizabeth did the same, but could find nothing.

. When Re-emerging from under the bed, she sneezed. Across the mattress garden. James was standing gazing across the room and through the open door. He moved suddenly, striding around the bed and seizing her hands to draw her up and her feet.

James, “From the window, he would have seen straight through to the room. You don’t keep the door closed.”

when me. “There’s no furniture, no cupboards there,” she protested, but she

ked theherself to be towed along with him. He hadn't released her hand, but  
was inalthough she blushed, she didn't mind. Inside the small spare room, he  
about him.

who I "The trunk?"

"It's empty."

"You could hide chess pieces among the lace."

"You could," she agreed, going to the pile and rifling through it. The  
byholefelt hard or lumpy.

He crouched by her makeshift bed, kneading the soft fabrics she had  
nically.lying on. A caustic remark rose to her lips but was never spoken. She  
distracted by his hands—long and slender and as graceful as the rest  
even though his knuckles were still grazed from yesterday's fight. His  
e stairs.rifled the sheets, at once strong and gentle and, she suspected, sensitive  
in yourtouched where she had lain, and for an instant, her whole body tingling  
ning tothough they stroked her person.

Heat swept through her, and she dragged her gaze away to the  
urrentlycloth piled against the wall. Needing desperately to do something rather  
is werestare at those mesmerizing hands, she stumbled past him, raking through  
her. bales.

through And then she saw it.

hear a A silk cord hung around the innermost fold at one end. A  
reasure.recognized.

"James," she breathed.

As one,



ping to  
ir as heGRIZ AND DRAGAN's first port of call was a surprisingly pleasant  
uld feelbetween the London Docks and Whitechapel.

"Crippled soldiers or orphans?" Dragan murmured as he handed  
s, Lorddown from the hackney a couple of streets away from their goal.

oor. He She cast him an assessing look as he paid the driver. "Orphans  
v her tothreatening."

Dragan offered her his arm, which she took delicately and rather  
e spareblinking at him through her spectacles. His lips twitched minutely  
eyes gleamed, but he limped when he walked, leaning on his cane as  
allowedit were a walking stick rather than a weapon.

id, and They made their way toward the square, examining the houses and looked they passed on the way. To any observers, they would have appeared searching out the most likely dwellings to provide charitable donations. The light, continuous drizzle served their purpose by dampening their cloaks, hats and adding to the impression they were trying to create, of downtrodden people doing their best to help those even more downtrodden.

Nothing The house where Elizabeth had lived as Joshua Jarman's wife was the largest in the square. Its iron gates were painted with gilt at the tips and beams of spar, and large pots of flowers flanked the impressive porticoed front door. Griz was "Good God," Griz murmured. "He didn't hide his wealth, did he?" of him, "No wonder Harris wanted to bring him down. And Andover. Let's start with this one first."

e. They At the first front door they knocked upon, a man swore at them and begged them to "shab off!" At the second, a slovenly maid let them wait in the front hall while her aged mistress hobbled slowly down the stairs to beg for alms. Griz bolted upon them. At the third, a blowsy woman tossed her head and declared that she had nothing left over to give anyone else.

ugh the "Go and try the big house over there," she advised with a hint of sarcasm that might have been aimed at them or at the Jarmans. "They got a spare."

ord she "Thank you and God bless you," Griz twittered, and was surprised to find she turned away when the woman shoved a coin into her hand. The door slammed before she could utter a word of thanks. She didn't feel bad, but the money really would go to one of her charities.

With the advice they wanted, they made straight for the Jarman house. Dragan rapped on the door with his cane. A large bruiser of a man in a black coat glared out at them.

led her "What d'you want?" he demanded. "Sir, we are collecting charitable donations for the poor orphans in the East End," Griz began.

are less "Do it somewhere else," the bruiser recommended. "Perhaps I might speak to the lady of the house?" Griz said with a coyly ingratiating smile, while Dragan stretched his "bad" leg and replaced it in the way of the door. "I know she'll want to hear what we have to say," he thought. Something in her words, combined with the sight of Dragan's large, muscular frame, must have caught the man's attention, for he paused in his clear intention.

and shopseject them. Before he could decide, the door was snatched from his hand to be a buxom woman in a wide black and gray silk gown stood there. Gold earrings swayed with her every move, and a matching necklace drew attention to her generous and well-displayed bosom.

"Good, "Who's this, then?" she demanded.

"I was just telling this gentleman," Griz said before the doorman was the open his mouth, "that such a prominent lady, as you clearly are of each neighborhood, would surely want to hear about my church's charitable work with poor orphan children."

The woman looked Griz up and down and curled her lip. Then her eyes moved on to Dragan and she smiled. "Well...!"

"You are the lady of the house, ma'am?" he asked, removing his hand and allowing her the full effect of his visage.

Griz had always thought Dragan endearingly unaware of his breath and good looks. Now she began to suspect that he merely chose to ignore until they were necessary. There was always a new layer to be discovered on one's husband.

The woman all but goggled. "I'm Barb Jarman," she said at last. "Of course you must come in and tell me about your charity, but you must understand this is a house of mourning."

"I'm so sorry to hear that, Mrs. Jarman," Dragan said, ushering Griz through the door to the threshold. "Who is it you mourn? Your grandfather, perhaps?"

Barb preened. "My husband," she said tragically, raising a black handkerchief to her eyes. "Gone to his rest too soon."

"You should bring your mistress a cup of tea," Dragan said sternly to a plain-gaping doorman, who might, in fact, have been her son or Jarman's first lieutenant, Jack Porter. "You must see how upset she is. Ma'am, would you allow us to distract your grief with those of others even less fortunate?"

Barb nodded bravely and seized Dragan's arm in a viselike grip, and Griz to trot after them and swallow back her entirely inappropriate mirror.

Ten minutes later, they were interrupted not by tea but by the presence of an arrival of a stocky dandy in a dazzling flowered waistcoat.

"Who's this?" he asked.

"They're from the church," Barb said in clear annoyance. "Collecting for charity."

"Outrageous," the dandy declared with relish. "The only business

and church in this house should be arrangements to bury my poor, dead  
and jetstepfather! Not cozening my grief-stricken mother out of her widow's  
e drew "Now, now, Bertie, there's no need o' that," Barb chided. "Where  
Christian manners?"

Bertie stared, and Dragan used the brief advantage of his silence  
n couldout his notebook and scribble.

in the Catching on, Griz said, "No, no, ma'am, your son is quite right  
le workdon't you think about what we have said, and when you are feeling m  
things, perhaps you would consider leaving any donation you'd care t  
er gazewith our charity's treasurer? This is her address."

Dragan tore the page from his notebook and rose to present it t  
hat andwith a bow. Then, under the glower of Bertie and the doorman, they  
sedately out of the lion's den.

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church in this house should be arrangements to bury my poor, deceased stepfather! Not cozening my grief-stricken mother out of her widow's mite!"

"Now, now, Bertie, there's no need o' that," Barb chided. "Where's your Christian manners?"

Bertie stared, and Dragan used the brief advantage of his silence to take out his notebook and scribble.

Catching on, Griz said, "No, no, ma'am, your son is quite right. Why don't you think about what we have said, and when you are feeling more the things, perhaps you would consider leaving any donation you'd care to make with our charity's treasurer? This is her address."

Dragan tore the page from his notebook and rose to present it to Barb with a bow. Then, under the glower of Bertie and the doorman, they walked sedately out of the lion's den.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

“JAMES.”

The breathy way she spoke his name vibrated through his whole body, inspiring a sudden surge of lust and quite inappropriate fantasy—because he had just been somewhat intimately handling the makeshift mattress he had slept on only a few hours before. He let it fall a little too quickly, schooled his expression to polite interest before he glanced up.

He needn't have worried. She was not looking at him at all. She stood perfectly still with her back to him, one hand on a bolt of printed calico. Had he noticed her shape before? Beyond remarking that she was too thin, he supposed she still was, but she curved in all the most alluring places, the slender column of her neck, her nape vulnerable to his eyes and suddenly moved him unbearably.

*What is the matter with you, man?* he demanded of himself, forcing himself to step over the mattress and approach her with his hands hanging by his sides. By some effort of will, he remembered what it was he was looking for and forced himself to look at the bolt of cloth she was touching and the silk string at its center.

As though she felt his approach, she cast him a quick glance, then reached for the cord off the cloth and tugged. The top of a small bag emerged. She grasped it and wriggled it out from its surrounding roll.

“It's them,” she said in clear delight. “The chess pieces. I can feel them.”

Brushing past him, she fell on her knees on the makeshift mattress and emptied a pile of smallish wooden figures from the bag. James followed her slowly, crushing the tangle of emotions that threatened him. He had been doing this for so long, it was second nature to him now. And yet it was more than likely that inside these elegantly carved but unassuming chess pieces was the reason for his three nightmare years in Newgate, and the ruin of his life.

He took the knife from his boot and knelt on the edge of the

Elizabeth's eyes widened. He picked up the white king. "May I?"

She nodded wordlessly, and he inserted his knife beneath the green at the king's base. It came away easily enough to reveal a disk of a dark shade to the rest of the wood. He used the fine tip of the blade to pry it too, and turned the king the right way up. A hail of small, glinting stones poured out onto the blanket.

Slowly, she reached out, her hand almost brushing his, and picked up the largest of the stones. She held it between her fingers, almost level with her face, to let the light from the window reflect off the diamond's multi-faceted surface. She smiled, excitement gleaming in her fine blue eyes. Suddenly, beside her, the diamond was dull. A small piece of rock, polished by men and declared by them to be of surpassing value. But she, a young woman of character and courage who must have faced most of the world could throw at her, and yet come through it, alone, with her sweetness and humor intact...

Still smiling, she moved her gaze to his. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Not beside you."

Soft color seeped into her cheeks, but though she seemed surprised, she did not look away. "Are you being gallant?" she asked.

He pulled himself together. "Lord, no. I'm merely having a Damascus moment. How many people have died, how many lives have been ruined, for these crumbs of stone? And yet what do they actually do beside your life or mine or even Jarman's? I find my obsession to find the killer somewhat pathetic. They change nothing that matters."

She searched his eyes, her smile fading. "Because it was you and your friends who found them in my house? And that will not take either of us off In Harris's list of suspects?"

"There is that, too," James allowed. For the first time in years, his eyes quirked upward involuntarily. "You were more right than I understood. We are not defined by our past misfortunes but by how we deal with them. Do not impress me. I do not impress myself."

She dropped the diamond among its fellows and took him by surprise, closing her hand over his where it lay on the white king. "Your choice was taken away, while mine were not. Yet you came back into your room fighting, while I hide from mine."

A frown tugged at his brow, while warmth spread through his veins.

her hand on his. "Is that truly how you see me?"

Another, gentler smile flickered in her eyes, but she didn't answer. He turned his hand, twining his fingers with hers. Her breath quickened. He looked out, he thought, with fear. Embarrassment, perhaps, at the clasp of his hand. The jewels she had only intended a brief brush of comfort. Or did his touch move

As it was moving him. He couldn't help the soft caress of his thumb. He lifted up her skin.

"You and I," he began, with something approaching wonder, and his face abruptly broke off at the sound of the front door opening. He snatched his hand from hers and seized his dagger once more.

"And over?" came Tizsa's distinctive voice. "Elizabeth?"

James's shoulder dropped with relief.

"I gave them my spare key," Elizabeth said.

Was there a tremble to her voice? Had he frightened her after all?  
*Stop being such a coxcomb!*

"Up here!" he called.

In moments, Tizsa appeared at the top of the stairs with Grizelda. She looked tired, she heels.

"We found them," Elizabeth said happily.

road-to-

ve been

matter

id them ELIZABETH WASN'T QUITE sure what, if anything, had happened between

Lord James. Awareness of him, something that had always been the

l I who turned more pleasurable with each moment spent in his company. Elizabeth

spector was a distant thing, something foolish she could hide while going about

life. Those last moments had suddenly felt intensely, almost unbearably

his lips intimate. He had understood her, touched her, and not only with his

od. We fingers, skin to skin, but something deep inside her, barely acknowledged

m. You The arrival of the Tizsas granted her a moment of respite and relief

yet she was honest enough with herself to recognize disappointment and

urprise, If they hadn't come at precisely that moment, what would Lord James

es were said? What would he have done? Would his thumb have caressed her

world, butterfly light and sweetly arousing? Would he have raised her hand

lips? To that hard, sculpted mouth... Because she had the odd, unbalanced

ns from notion now that he wasn't hard or cold at all. Not remotely.



While the Tizas exclaimed over their discovery and they all served. He investigated the rest of the pieces, she kept her expression pleased about not to pull herself together.

and when “*You and I...*”

serve her? “How was your morning?” Lord James asked, adding to the little against diamonds from a pawn’s innards. “Constructive?”

“Interesting,” Dr. Tizsa said. “We called on the delectable Lord and then Sandman—who calls herself Mrs. Jarman, by the way—and met Lord and his Bertie, too.”

“It was not,” Lady Grizelda said, running an idle hand through the growing pile of diamonds, “a house of mourning, whatever she told us wearing black, but it’s gorgeous silk and low cut as an evening gown and her jewelry is black. But she could barely keep her hands off Dragan? Or... have eaten him alive if she could. Of course, we all face grief in one way, but I’ll lay you any odds you like that she doesn’t feel much about Joshua Jarman’s passing.”

and at his “And the son?” Lord James asked.

“Strutting like a peacock,” Dr. Tizsa said, “with absolutely no connection to mourning. He thinks Jarman’s little empire has fallen into his lap.”

“Has it?” Elizabeth asked.

“Not if that doorman has anything to do with it.” Lady Grizelda said to her husband, who abandoned the black knight in order to draw her and ubiquitous notebook from his pocket and flip through the pages.

there, had “Him,” he said, setting the notebook down. “Do either of you recall that him?”

about her “Jack Porter,” Elizabeth said at once. “Are he and Bertie at all noticeably drawn?”

elegant “Griz caught a pretty filthy look between them as we were leaving.” Tizsa said. “Certainly, it will be interesting to see which of them took the grief, and here.”

as well. “Here?” Lord James said sharply. “Then you’re sure one of them does have Jarman?”

or again, “No,” Lady Grizelda said, “but I’m afraid we gave them your address to his Elizabeth. As the treasurer of my church’s orphan charity.”

flourishing Elizabeth let out a breath of laughter. “I wish I had been there to see Barb’s charitable face.”

t about “She’d have handed over hundreds for Dragan,” Grizelda said and tried mischievous grin.

“Only if she was sure of stealing it back again,” Tizsa said. “V called on the widowed Mrs. Mason, who still lives above the jeweler pile of in Ludgate Hill.”

Lord James curled his elegant lips. “Mason, who denied I had bought Barbararing from him and yet swore I had instead tried to sell him several diamonds at a bargain price? Me being, apparently, an impoverished gentleman.”

“Were you?” Lady Grizelda asked.

Lord James shrugged. “Not by most standards. But I couldn’t afford it. She is much expensive jewelry if I planned to refurbish my house in Kent. Even wife. To that extent, Mason’s lies were believable.”

“He didn’t lie,” Dr. Tizsa said, meeting and holding James’s gaze. Elizabeth, her own wife was present throughout the transaction, was even introduced to the gentleman concerned—one Lord James Andover. Mason, she said, agreed to buy the diamonds only because the name of Andover was above reproach.

*No. No, that cannot be right!* Elizabeth’s stomach twisted with confusion and anger that he was still being accused.

James’s lips had thinned and whitened. He sprang to his feet, his presence transformed. No longer the comfortable companion, he stood glancing as contemptuous and downright dangerous as Elizabeth had ever seen. And yet she ached for him because she understood his hurt. Even unexpected new friends and allies had turned against him.

“They both lied,” he said haughtily. “Since you choose to believe—

“Not deliberately,” Dr. Tizsa interrupted. He flipped over a page in his notebook to show an alarmingly accurate sketch of Lord James. The drawing—astonishingly good—caught the supreme poise of the man, from the slight movement of his perfectly arched eyebrows, to the lean, fine-boned contours of his jaw and the firm, graceful lines of his mouth. Elizabeth could not see a hand sweep up to push back the lock of hair fallen across his forehead.

“She identified me from that?” Lord James said between his teeth. “I address, she lies.”

“On the contrary,” Dr. Tizsa said. “She had never seen you before. She said this”—he waved a hand toward the portrait on the floor—“not Lord James Andover, that she could not recall ever seeing such

with aThe man who was introduced to her as Andover was several years older than you, and though distinguished and aristocratic in both appearance and manners, he had blond hair, long sideburns, and a neat mustache. He was also tall, and his hair was also to have been some three or four inches shorter than you.”

Lord James sank back down beside the mattress, his physical strength vanishing into thought. “Mason never testified in person at my trial and merely read his signed statement, naming me as the man who had sold the diamonds. How did he pay this fellow?”

“He didn’t, in the end. He heard about the robbery and realized that the diamonds were being offered.”

for my “Mrs. Mason’s description sounds nothing like Joshua, either,” Elizabeth observed, frowning, “or any of his associates that I ever met. Is it possible that his rumor is wrong, and Joshua didn’t steal them in the first place?” She said so to the “Then how would they have got into my chess set?” she said, and agreed to herself.

ach.” “An ally of Jarman that we know nothing of?” Lord James suggested. “A genuine gentleman, even, whom he used to sell the diamonds to Mason. It is plausible that he would have got fencing them so soon after the theft. But Mason heard the news about the theft too soon and informed the police. I tried to sell them to him. And then Mason conveniently died to prevent the truth coming out on these.”

“That’s what we were thinking,” Dr. Tizsa said.

“But how did the diamond end up with James?” Elizabeth demanded.

—” then blushed. “*Lord James.*”

Elizabeth in his “Oh, I think we’re all beyond the foolish formality of titles,” James said.

portrait “Probably,” Lady Grizelda said, sticking with the question, “but how did the diamond end up with James?”

almost He frowned. “Actually, I don’t know. I assumed it was, but Mason is high not the jeweler frequented by my family, which was why I went there. I determined to do things my own way. But the man was quite young. “Then suppose it could have been his son, or a trusted employee.” He shook his head. “I probably bought the wretched ring the very afternoon Mason was taken in by the police.”

—“was “The Masons didn’t have any sons,” Lady Grizelda said, “but they do have a man. And the assistant shouldn’t have sold the diamond to you.”

ler than in the ring for you. I expect that was why he kept it from his employer  
ce and “Or the assistant was one of Jarman’s men,” Dr. Tizsa speculated.  
e seems way, rather extraordinarily coincidental, wouldn’t you say?”

James met his gaze. “I would,” he agreed. “Can we speak  
l threat assistant?”

l. They “If we’re prepared to travel to the United States,” Dr. Tizsa said  
old him “He emigrated.”

“Conveniently,” Griz said.

what he “Why *did* you choose Mason’s?” Elizabeth asked James. “Out of  
jewelers on Ludgate Hill your family does not frequent?”

Elizabeth He let out a frustrated sigh. “I can’t really remember now. So  
possibly recommended Mason, though I’ve forgotten who.” His lips twist  
crowled. celebrated my engagement the night before. A rather wild party—I rec  
swering much, though very little of what passed after midnight. And in the mo  
found a note in my pocket with the name and address of Mason’s, so  
ted. “Aunt idly but in my own hand, though I don’t recall writing it.”

on quite Dr. Tizsa sat forward. “I don’t suppose you still have that note?”

than he “Lord, no, I threw it away before I even left the house that day.”

ard the “Pity,” Lady Grizelda murmured. “Did you notice anything ab  
them to paper it was written on? Or the ink?”

it.” James frowned, shaking his head. “No, it was just cheap paper so  
can recall, probably from the gaming den.”

anded, “Perhaps we need another list,” Dr. Tizsa said, “of people who a  
that party of yours. I know ways to help you remember. But not ne  
s said. starving, and we brought food.”

because

elf you



on was DURING A QUICK bite of luncheon, it was decided that Lady Grizelda  
t there, Tizsa should take the diamonds to Inspector Harris at Scotland Yard.

oung. I “And if we’ve time,” Lady Grizelda said, “we’ll drop in on a fr  
ook his ours, Sir Nicholas Swan, and see what he knows of Solomon Grey.”

went to “Grey?” Elizabeth said. “The importer of the diamonds? I’ve  
forgotten he was the victim of the theft.”

hey did “Why don’t you and I call on him?” Lord James suggested.

or set it “Good idea,” Lady Grizelda replied. “Watch his reaction to the ne



s.” we’ve found his diamonds. He could have been the gentleman masquerading as you with Mr. Mason.”

“Doubtful,” Lord James said wryly. “He is certainly not fair.” Elizabeth had been thinking, too. “Do you know where Constance has her establishment now?”

wryly. Lord James choked on his tea, and Dr. Tizsa’s lips twitched.

“She had a large manservant,” Elizabeth said, “who could easily have killed Joshua. At the very least, she disliked Joshua, and I think she would all the talk to me.”

“You’re right,” Lady Grizelda said. “In fact, I had thought Draga someone should go there tomorrow, but she might well talk more to you. I believe it is best. “Gentlemen are merely shy of admitting they know the address of a high-class call that brothel.”

“Everyone knows it,” James said resignedly. He looked directly at Elizabeth. “And I am happy to talk to her. You, on the other hand, will not put your foot in a brothel of any class.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Elizabeth said. “I hardly think Constance needs to lower herself to stealing unwilling women to work for her.”

“I meant,” James said stiffly, “it is unsuitable.”

It was unsuitable, of course. Or it would have been once. Now, so far as nothing left to lose. “I don’t think we need concern ourselves with the reputation was lost the day I left my home with Joshua, and I could not attend back if I wanted to. It doesn’t matter where I go. Though I suppose my friends might wonder why you trouble to take a woman there with you. Perhaps *I* should go alone.”

“No,” all three of them said at once.

“Remember she and a minion could easily have murdered Jarman,” Grizelda said anxiously.

and Dr. “Yes, but I don’t believe she would murder me.”

“Famous last words,” James said, rising to his feet. “We go together, or we don’t go at all.”

Elizabeth acceded to that and went to fetch her cloak and bonnet.

almost “Just be back before four,” Dr. Tizsa said, walking with them to the door. “I have to be at the clinic, and I won’t leave Griz here alone.”

James frowned as he opened the front door. “Even so, you’ve no chance, giving this address to Bertie and Barb Sandman. You can’t

eradingone of them will come here alone. One of them probably killed Jarm  
he was considerably bigger than you.”

“They’ll only come if they recognize the address,” Dr. Tizsa sai  
e Silverthat’s what will mark them as the killer. Besides, I always have the ad  
of surprise. Do you want to borrow my sword stick?”

“He doesn’t need it,” Elizabeth said, sailing past them out of the  
ly have“He keeps a wicked-looking dagger in his boot.”

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one of them will come here alone. One of them probably killed Jarman, and he was considerably bigger than you.”

“They’ll only come if they recognize the address,” Dr. Tizsa said, “and that’s what will mark them as the killer. Besides, I always have the advantage of surprise. Do you want to borrow my sword stick?”

“He doesn’t need it,” Elizabeth said, sailing past them out of the house. “He keeps a wicked-looking dagger in his boot.”



## CHAPTER NINE

MR. SOLOMON GREY had unpretentious offices above his largest warehouse near St. Catherine's Dock. The warehouse itself was a hive of activity, with men heaved crates around, loading and unloading wagons. Others, including women, scuttled about with clipboards and pencils, or sat busily at desks.

One young man, dressed in the dark suit and white collar of a clerk, rose from his desk just inside the doors and bowed politely.

"Sir. Madam. May I help you?" Somehow, his voice penetrated the busy and cheerful chatter echoing around the building.

"Yes, we'd like to see Mr. Grey, if he's available," Lord James said politely.

The young man glanced down at the open book on his desk. "Do you have an appointment?"

"No," James said pleasantly. "Is that a problem?"

"Probably not, sir." The young man indicated the three comfortable chairs beside his desk. "If you would be so good as to wait here, I'll take your names to Mr. Grey."

James handed him a card. The young man bowed and strode the length of the warehouse, and up a long cast-iron staircase to an invisible floor above.

Taking a seat, Elizabeth watched the activity, following a sliver of laughter to its source, wondering vaguely why she found it so fascinating.

"A happy workforce," Lord James said wryly from the seat next to her. His shoulder didn't quite brush against her, although if he sat back, it would. "A rare enough sight in recent years."

"Does he pay them so well? They certainly don't appear to be lazy."

"I believe the pay is good but within the normal range for the industry. I suspect the secret is that he treats them like human beings. His workers are happy to stay."

"You like him?"

“I don’t know if like is the right word. He’s too...*closed* to like easily. Mainly, I found him surprising. But I admire what he’s done. He is courteous, or was when I spoke to him a week or so ago, and he strikes as honest.”

“Closed and honest?” she queried.

“Like you,” he said. “And me, I suspect.”

She thought about that. “I expect one is always courteous to a gentleman.”

“Perhaps.”

They didn’t have long to wait before the young man hurried back, then led them the length of the warehouse and up the staircase. Beyond the door at the top, a carpet ran through an outer office, in which a middle-aged lady in spectacles sat poring over a pile of ledgers. Another door was currently unoccupied.

A balding man came out of a door to an inner office and bowed to James and Elizabeth. Their guide knocked and opened the door wide, bowing and vanishing, presumably to make the long walk back to him yet again.

The inner office was as comfortable and unpretentious as the outer. A serviceable carpet, several cabinets and bookcases, and a small mahogany table on which sat a full decanter and several glasses. And dominating the room, a large desk, piled with papers, ledgers, and small boxes. A sign on the wall read: “Hard work, not intimidation. Elizabeth’s father had possessed the same variety, she had always thought, at his bank.”

From behind this present mahogany edifice, a tall, imposing man emerged. He was younger than Elizabeth had expected, probably not yet thirty, although he had the presence of a much more experienced man. His complexion was bronzed, as though by much warmer sun than ever struck England, and his eyes an all-consuming, deep chocolate brown. Such a man, she thought unreasonably, melt with amiability. His did not.

Not that he was unamiable. On the contrary, he came around the desk, bowed to them, and when James offered his hand, he gripped it firmly. He smiled, briefly, a practiced smile of welcome on his full lips.

“Lord James, how do you do?”

“Allow me to introduce Miss Barker. Miss Barker, Mr. Grey.”

Elizabeth offered her hand, too, somewhat defiantly, and despite

the very modest appearance, Grey took it and bowed over it with perfect courtesy. He said, "Please, sit. May I offer you tea? A glass of brandy, perhaps?"

Thank me James handed Elizabeth into one of the two upholstered chairs on the side of the desk. "No, thank you, sir. We shan't keep you, I hope. Few apologies for disturbing you again, especially on the same subject."

"I heard that he was dead," Grey said, resuming his seat behind the desk. His lips curved faintly although his dark eyes remained steady on Elizabeth. "Joshua Jarman. I even wondered if you had done it."

"Sadly, someone beat me to it."

Thank and Grey's eyebrows flew up. "Sadly?"

and the "In a manner of speaking. It would have given me some satisfaction, however short-lived. I daresay you feel the same."

ask was Grey shrugged. "Hardly. My loss was minor, since I was insured against rumors that followed were worse, but we are riding those out, too."

privily to "Then your business thrives, Mr. Grey?" Elizabeth asked.

before "My businesses are diverse, ma'am. They are unlikely all to succeed, but if one fails, the others will pick up the slack. I always have a cushion. What was it about the diamonds that you wanted to discuss?"

utter. A "Mainly that we found them."

hogany Grey's eyes widened. "Did you, by God? In his house?"

ing the "No, in mine," Elizabeth said. James was right—the man was impossible to read. After the first gleam of surprise—and she thought that was genuine—although it might have been astonishment that she was prepared to admit, his expression betrayed only courteous interest.

It arose. "How odd," he said mildly. "Or, at least, it is so to me. May I know if you have any connection to the inestimable Jarman?"

an. His "It's a long story," Elizabeth said, "but I once imagined myself hidden away when I fled from him, I took with me a chess set my father had given me. Unbeknownst to me, that was where Joshua had hidden the diamonds."

"That must have annoyed him. I hope it's a comfort to you."

ask and "It is now he's dead."

rmly, if "The trouble is, we don't know who killed him," James said. "I'm assuming it was for the diamonds, although the killer never got them, so we can't know for sure."

"So, you are wondering if I or one of my stevedores...er—did him do it?"

ite her "Something like that," James said.

sy. Grey sat back in his chair, looking neither angry nor amused. "I but then, of course, I would say that."

he near "Perhaps you wouldn't mind also saying where you were on M irst, myafternoon?" James said.

"I wouldn't mind in the least," Mr. Grey replied, dragging a book e desk.him and flicking through a couple of pages. It appeared to be an appo: James.diary. "I was here in the office, until about half past three, when I le meeting in Mayfair at four. Do we know when Jarman was killed?"

"Not long before four."

Grey nodded thoughtfully. "Have you brought me back my diamor faction, "Sadly not," James said. "They are with the police, who, I'm sure, in touch with you directly."

ed. The "I look forward to it. I suppose it is also in my favor that you four and not I."

"That may yet prove a problem for me," James admitted. "If ffer, letinterested, my money is not on you, but you'll understand my r out theinvestigate all possibilities."

"I understand being driven," came the unexpected reply. "I ca advise you to let go. There is more to life."

"Such as?"

ossible The ghost of a smile touched Grey's lips. "When you find out, pl eenuine,me know."

nit it— Elizabeth glanced from one to the other. James was also right th was something likeable if completely unknowable about Solomor w what,"One more thing, sir. In your dealings with jewels and jewelers, ha ever come across a gentlemanly character, around forty years old a is wife.feet and eight inches in height? Fair and with a neat mustache?"

ven me. Grey blinked, allowing a couple of seconds to pass. "I cannot t " anyone. But then, your description is not distinctive."

James said, "Would you keep your eyes open for such a man and know if you come across him?"

We are Grey inclined his head. "Of course."

but we James rose. "Then we thank you for your time and bid you afternoon."

in?" "Allow me to show you out."

On the way, Elizabeth asked him civil questions about his busin

didn't, employees, remarking on their apparent contentment. He answered  
equal courtesy.

Monday Only when James turned to say a word to the clerk at the door did  
turn toward her and murmur, "If you need work or help of any kind  
toward usually have openings somewhere."

contentment He wasn't looking at her, but at James.

left for a "You don't trust him," she blurted.

He smiled. "Dear lady, I don't trust anyone." He bowed.  
afternoon, and good luck."

ids?"

will be



and them "HE ALL BUT offered me a position," Elizabeth said as they walked  
waiting hackney.

you're James, who had been scouring the surrounding area, presumably  
need to signs of threat, cast her a sharp glance. "What did you say?"

"Nothing. My life is much too uncertain right now."

in only "You could do worse." The words seemed reluctant, almost forced  
"Providing he isn't a murderer," Elizabeth pointed out.

Breath hissed between his teeth. "Providing that, yes."

ease let The hackney waited just outside the warehouse yard. James and El  
both scanned the street, but the only passersby, on foot or in carts, seemed  
at there be purposeful if not in a tearing hurry. Before James opened the carriage  
1 Grey, for her, she was sure he checked inside, and he definitely peered carefully  
ive you the driver before handing her in.

and five "I've lived like this for so long," she said abruptly when he sat beside  
and the carriage moved forward. "Looking over my shoulder, expecting  
think of Joshua to appear at any moment. It became just part of my life. And  
suddenly, I want it to be over. I don't want to live like that."

l let me "I don't want you to live like that either. I'm appalled you ever had  
She smiled. "It's no comfort that I brought it on myself."

"You didn't. Your father should have dragged you back from Jarmouth."

u good "I wouldn't have gone. Not until the second day, at least, and by  
was too late. He wouldn't have me back." She waved her hand impatiently  
as if that could banish all the pointless regrets and wishes. "Do you  
ess and Grey killed Joshua?"



id with “Honestly? I’d be surprised. And if it can be proved he was in May  
four, I don’t see how he could have, personally, at least. But he says  
id Greyhe doesn’t want you to hear. I have never met anyone in such perfect  
nd, weWhat did you make of him?”

“Much the same as you. But I wasn’t afraid of him.” With Josh  
had learned to read the signs, and had seen them since in other m  
crossed her path, always at a safe distance, as she had ensured. “He  
“Goodeven be *kind*.”

“That wouldn’t preclude him killing Jarman,” James said. He co  
his fob watch and tucked it away. “I told the driver to take us to Mayf  
should still have time to see Constance Silver and get back before four

“Have you met her before, too?” Elizabeth asked.

l to the His gaze moved from the window to her face. “Not in any capacity  
She dropped her gaze, shifting on the bench, and felt the blush ris  
for anyface. “Of course not,” she muttered.

“No of course about it,” he said. “I’m no saint. No prude eithe  
always found the blatant trade distasteful.”

“You prefer to dress it up with gifts and pretend it is love?” As  
the words spilled out, she could have bitten her tongue. But she c  
unsay them, so she stared pointedly out of the window as the h  
izabethrumbled westward. She still felt his gaze on her burning cheek and wo  
med toif she should apologize, or if he should for bringing up such a sh  
ge doorsubject in the first place.

fully at “Jarman does not strike me as the kind of man to bother with pre  
he remarked.

side her “He wasn’t. It was one of the reasons I liked him. I thought  
pectinghonest.” She thought he would leave it there, but he didn’t.

id now, “Who was *not* honest?”

She drew in her breath. “My father. He kept another woman, an ac  
l to.” think. I saw him with her once, in a jeweler’s shop. She was cho  
bracelet, and he was carrying a huge bouquet of flowers, which I kne  
an’s.” not for my mother. I even heard him say, *A token of my love*. It wa  
then itcourse. He was buying her favors as surely as anyone ever bougl  
tiently,Silver’s.”

u think She felt movement beside her, as though he would take her hand,  
foolish heart leapt, because she liked his touch. She liked the way it m

fair by feel. But then he stilled, and she realized he was moved by anger.

nothing “I’m sorry. Disillusion hurts. Almost as much as hypocrisy.”

control. She turned back to him, relieved that he understood. She touched  
hand, a quick, almost embarrassed caress of gratitude, quickly withdrew

ua, she

en who

e might



CONSTANCE SILVER’S HOUSE of ill repute, which was a new address, not  
insulted she had given Elizabeth nearly four years ago, was a mansion in a qu  
air. We de-sac. Her neighbors and local officers of the law presumably knew  
.” what went on there. But selective blindness and, no doubt, significant  
ensured its survival.

.” There was nothing on the outside of the house, or the tastefully de  
e to her front hallway, to distinguish it. The door was opened at the first kno  
liveried footman. Not by the flicker of an eyelash did he acknowle  
r, but I oddity of Elizabeth’s presence. Instead, he addressed James.

soon as “I’m sorry, sir. The ladies are not receiving.”

couldn’t “Of course not,” James replied, offering his card. “We desire a  
word with Mrs. Silver, if she would be good enough to spare us ten m  
ackney of her time.”

pondered The footman’s gaze swept over the card, and the door widened.  
locking step inside and I will see if she is at home.”

They were shown into another tasteful salon looking onto the  
etense, although fine net curtains concealed the occupants from any  
outsiders. A Turkish rug graced the center of the parquet floor, on v  
he was sofa and three matching chairs had been artfully arranged. A few  
watercolors graced the walls. Vases of yellow roses were reflected  
highly polished tables at each of the two windows. Constance Silver,  
ctress, I was doing well. No wonder Joshua had muscled in on her profits.

osing a Although the first footman had left them alone in the room, El  
w were glimpsed another, stationed in the hallway, perhaps to prevent them  
sn’t, of the silver, or from roaming the house unsupervised. Light footsteps s  
ht Mrs. on the staircase, and Elizabeth could not help wondering what her con  
would make of Constance Silver, who was, frankly, the most b  
and her woman she had ever seen.

ade her She strolled into the room with perfect grace. Crinolines might hav

invented simply to enhance Constance's fine figure. Her tiny waist contrasted with the wide hoop of her skirt and the soft curve of her breasts. Her hair was a rare shade of strawberry blonde, elegantly looped about her head in two braids, her complexion was creamy and without blemish, and her lips were rosy, full, and curved into a tantalizing smile.

Or at least men found it tantalizing. Joshua had almost drooled over her. Bertie had stared at her mouth even more than at her breasts. Elizabeth had never worked out whether or not she practiced that smile, or if it was the natural shape of her lips. She rather thought the latter, although Constance was certainly not above enhancing her advantages.

"Lord James?" she drawled, extending her gloved hand. "I don't think we have ever met."

James bowed over her fingers. He showed no signs of drooling, but was far too much the gentleman to stare. "We have not, though I believe we are acquainted with my companion."

Constance glanced at Elizabeth, a faint, questioning smile on her lips. She had even begun to look back to James for enlightenment, but her eyes snapped back to Elizabeth's face, widening.

"Yes, it's me," Elizabeth said.

To her surprise, Constance swept toward her and seized both her hands. "Please, Oh, my dear! Thank God! I thought he had killed you!"

"I ran away to France."

"Good for you," Constance said, her grin warm and triumphant. "I'm curious, where did you go? France? But Beth, that hat is hideous."

A snort that might have been laughter broke from Lord James's mouth, which transformed itself into a vigorous throat clearing.

"Is it a disguise?" Constance asked, pulling her down onto the sofa. "Please, clearly, no."

"No, it's lack of funds."

Elizabeth said, "You can stay here as long as you like, but this work is not for you."

"I'm a seamstress, so I'll probably be glad of any work you can send my way. In just a little."

Constance frowned. "You know he's dead? He cannot hurt you."

"He can't, no."

"And Lord James?" Constance asked steadily.

Warmth flooded Elizabeth's face yet again, which appeared to indicate that she had been

Constance. “Lord James is a perfect gentleman. He has been helping me  
“We’ve been helping each other,” James said. “I expect you know  
in soft name, Mrs. Silver, and how it has been connected to Jarman’s.”

“I know you went to prison for a crime that was almost connected  
Jarman’s. And were freed only weeks ago.” Her eyes narrowed slightly  
and, and you kill him?”

“I did not, and neither did Miss Barker, although he was found  
just the house.”

Constance opened her mouth and closed it again. Then she rose.  
so many questions that I don’t know where to begin. Anthony  
believe addressed the footman in the hall. “You had better order tea. And  
wine. We’re celebrating, after all.”

and he  
give you



JAMES WAS NOT sure what he had expected of Constance Silver, but  
certainly surprised him. She was beautiful, supremely graceful  
charming. Her voice was low and well modulated, with no stridency  
vulgar accent that might have betrayed low origins. Instead, she might  
have been a lady of birth and breeding receiving welcome guests.

She certainly appeared both astonished and delighted to see Elizabeth  
one level, that pleased him, although it also aroused the suspicion that  
excessive delight could be faked. Elizabeth had never suggested that  
were such fast friends. In fact, she seemed slightly bemused  
courtesan’s welcome, although she told her tale readily enough, right  
discovering Jarman’s body in her bedroom.

By this time, they had all been presented with wine, tea, elegant  
sandwiches, and cakes.

“Good Lord.” Mrs. Silver set her tea back on the table that had  
placed for the purpose and reached for her wine glass. “What a  
end my escape.”

“You think Jarman had come to kill her?” James asked nonchalantly  
even while the words chilled his blood.

“She left him. He was a vindictive bastard.”

The profanity on her lips was somehow shocking. “I know. Why do you  
intrigue believe her to be dead already?”

ie.” “Because she disappeared so suddenly. Jarman was humming with joy for weeks, and yet bit off the head of anyone who dared mention her name. I was afraid he’d actually done away with you in such fury. I thought if you were certainly away, you would have come to me.”

y. “Did “It was the first place he would have looked.”

l in her thought.” “And yet he didn’t,” the courtesan said. “Which was telling me that he was in her thought.”

“He must have known the direction I took,” Elizabeth said slowly. “I have only ever a few steps ahead of him or his spies... Oh, he wasn’t keeping up with me,” she added, catching sight of Mrs. Silver’s expression, “but I have lots of stolen diamonds I had accidentally taken with me.”

“The only thing that cheered him up,” Mrs. Silver said thoughtfully, “was you, my lord, being charged and convicted of the theft.”

“What did he have against Lord James?” Elizabeth asked.

“Nothing. It just seemed to be the culmination of a plan he had set up to prevent the law bothering him. They searched his house and his legal and business premises, you know, shortly after the theft, and found nothing. I don’t think he would’ve put up with that for long, since it curtailed further theft. I don’t think he would’ve put up with that for long, since it curtailed further theft.”

Elizabeth sat forward. “Did he mention this plan to you? Do you have any idea who was involved in it?”

eth. On “He tried to implicate the man he actually stole from, too, but that was stuck.”

at they “No, I mean an ally,” Elizabeth said impatiently. “Someone who could be least impersonate a gentleman. A fair man, around forty years old, with a mustache?”

Mrs. Silver thought. “I don’t recall seeing him in such company, but I saw him increasingly seldom as I wriggled my way free of him.”

“How did you manage that?”

id been “I paid him off one last time. And told him I’d given my lawyers a narrow margin of evidence of another of his crimes. That evidence would be given to the court unless he dissolved our so-called partnership forever.”

alantly, “Did you have such evidence?” James inquired.

“Yes,” she said.

James raised his glass to her, and her eyes twinkled briefly. For the first time he *felt*, rather than simply acknowledged, her attraction.

“Well done,” Elizabeth said. “I was afraid you would have to de-

with fury with Porter, or the insufferable Bertie.”

“I was Mrs. Silver regarded her. “What will you do, now that the diamond had run over?”

“I’m not sure it is, quite,” Elizabeth said vaguely. “We need to find out who killed him.”

“Why?” Mrs. Silver said. “Be grateful. Celebrate.”

But Elizabeth was frowning at James. “Why *did* he pick on me? I was Somehow, he knew your circumstance enough to make use of them. I’m glad to hear that you bought the diamond and were discovered in possession of it. The more I think of it, the more I believe this apparent gentleman is the one who did everything.”

“I was,” James nodded, aware of Mrs. Silver glancing between them, and the clock he could see above her head. “We should go, Elizabeth.”

She stood without fuss. “Allow me a moment to wash my hands.”

Constance rose gracefully at once. “I’ll show you the way and order a private carriage sent round, if you’re in a hurry.”

James would have demurred—after all, it could easily be Mrs. Silver’s way of discovering where Elizabeth lived. Although all she really needed to have anydo was ask Elizabeth. And in any case, having to discover the address implied she did not already know it, and so could not have killed Jarman. It never be threatening Elizabeth for the diamonds.

While the thoughts flew around his brain, the two women left the room. From their vanishing backs, the contrast between them was stark, and with a neat some reason that annoyed him. Instead of seating himself once more, he paced restlessly to the window, outraged all over again by all that had befallen Elizabeth through Jarman. He wondered if he should have let her go with Constance Silver. A sense of blind panic took him by surprise, and he spun around to stride purposefully toward the door.

Mrs. Silver glided through it, alone. “You are desperate to be on the law observed. “It’s not the usual reaction of the gentlemen who come here.

“But then, I didn’t come for the usual reason.” He gazed beyond the open door, willing Elizabeth to walk through.

“Perhaps on your next visit,” she said graciously, as though inviting her first to some musical treat.

“No, though I thank you,” he said distractedly.

“My lord, I haven’t kidnapped her.” The voice was deliciously

and yet not unkind. It brought his gaze back to her face.

“She has been in considerable danger, ma’am. I worry.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Mrs. Silver said. The fascinating smile flickered across her face. “That you worry, I mean. I would not like to think of anyone taking advantage of her. Again. She has been through enough.”

“I know,” James said.

“Do you?” Mrs. Silver took a step closer. “Are you truly aware of what a seaman like Jarman is capable of? At first, he was careful to strike without bruising her. The bruises wouldn’t show, but I could tell by the way she moved that she was in pain. After the first few months, he didn’t care. I have no idea what he did to her in his bed, but I will tell you this—I would not let him near one of my children. Nausea roiled in James’s stomach. This was just what he had been afraid of hearing. Disgust and fury at a dead man mingled with fresh pity for the victim and drained the blood from his face. He grasped the back of the nearest chair to steady himself.

“I need to know that you will not hurt her,” Constance Silver said. Her hardness in her soft, seductive voice. “Ever.”

That she had to ask disgusted him, too, though it also steadied him. “I will not leave everything of worth in Newgate.”

Her mesmeric eyes searched his with an intensity that was disconcerting.

And then, to his massive relief, Elizabeth walked back into the room, halted rather abruptly at the sight of James and Mrs. Silver confronting each other, but all she said was, “Your footman says the carriage awaits. I’ll be home, my lord, for this, Constance.”

“My pleasure. Send me a note next time and we can meet somewhere more neutral. You, my lord, are welcome at any time.”

He laughed, because it might have been approval or spite, and for a moment he looked at Elizabeth to the door, where he turned and bowed to Mrs. Silver.

“Thank you,” she

.”

Elizabeth

was

amused

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## CHAPTER TEN

ON THEIR RETURN to Hanson Row, Dr. Tizsa all but bolted past them with his hat and bag in his hand.

“Take the carriage,” Elizabeth called after him, for she had spoken to the coachman who claimed to be at her disposal for the next

“That is a very fine equipage,” Lady Grizelda remarked, closely locking the door behind them.

“It belongs,” Lord James said, “to Mrs. Constance Silver.”

“Is Mrs. Silver in it?” Lady Grizelda inquired.

“Would you mind?” James asked with what appeared to be great curiosity.

She smiled. “Don’t be silly. Tell me how you got on.”

They repaired to the parlor, where the fire was lit, and James brought an extra chair from the kitchen while Elizabeth told her about their interview with Solomon Grey.

“We learned nothing new,” she said, “except that neither of us thought he was guilty. Despite a certain lack of openness, he seems honest and even kind.”

Lady Grizelda nodded. “That is what Nicholas said—our friend Nicholas Swan, who is acquainted with him. Apparently, Mr. Grey is a member of several of his charities. Grey seemed embarrassed at first to be introduced across Sir Nicholas there, but they have since allied to make things go a little quicker.”

“But can we rule him out?” James asked. “He claims to have been in a meeting in Mayfair at four o’clock.”

“He was,” Lady Grizelda said. “Sir Nicholas was at the same meeting on the board of a housing charity. Grey arrived just after four, bemoaning the traffic.”

“Then he *could* have done it,” Elizabeth said with odd reluctance and a slight pinch.

“It is a lot to fit into half an hour,” James said. “And—forgive

takes time to strangle a man, especially one of Jarman's size and strength.

"He could have left the office earlier than he said," Elizabeth pointed out. "I'm sure his staff will happily lie for him." She sighed. "On the other hand, I don't really believe he is the culprit."

"It does provide us with a bit of a moral dilemma," Lady Grizelda said thoughtfully. "By everything I've heard, Jarman's death is a benefit to the world. We cannot condone murder, yet do we really want to see good men hang for the killing of a bad man?"

"It's not about morals, though," James said. "It's about the law." Elizabeth pointed out. "The law was hardly fair to you."

James met her gaze. "And yet the law is all we have to decide what is a bad man and what is a justified killing. We cannot pick and choose which laws to follow and which to punish."

"Dragan would argue that unjust laws must be changed," Lady Grizelda said. "And by the truly representative will of the people, not by the will of interested parties. By your arguments, he rose up against the law of England and the Empire and should go home to face his punishment."

His gaze remained steady. "I would not want that."

"Would you want Constance Silver hanged for Joshua's murder?" Elizabeth asked. "If she did it."

"Another whole moral morass. I did not say my argument was wrong. And besides, whoever killed him, it may well be a matter of self-defense. I suspect she is fierce enough in protection of her girls—she told me she would never let Jarman near them. But she couldn't have done it alone."

"I doubt she did it at all. She was stunned to see me alive, never would she have come to London, so I doubt she sent her bodyguards to abduct me from Hyderabad. And at four of the clock on Monday she was with her entire staff discussing the future treatment of some troublesome client." Elizabeth said one-sidedly. "I asked her."

"Did she mind?" Lady Grizelda asked.

"No."

"I daresay her staff would be happy to lie for her, just as Mr. Jarman would for him. We're not really much further forward, are we?"

"No," James admitted. "But at least we found the diamonds. What would Inspector Harris make of them?"

Lady Grizelda grinned. "He almost got excited. And then said sternly that he would not be drawn."

gth.” he would have to get experts, and Mr. Grey, to confirm that they w  
ted out same stones.” As her smile died, she met Elizabeth’s gaze somewhat r  
hand, I “I had to tell him the truth about you. How you carried them unk  
across France in the chess set. It helped that you had already told him  
da said missing, though we *might* have made it sound as though Dragan and  
t to the with you when you searched the house and found them. He said there  
od men reason to give such details to the press, but no one can guarantee i  
come out via some nosy reporter. At least we have some time, beca  
won’t release the news of the diamonds until Mr. Grey has identified th  
“Thank you,” Elizabeth said. She didn’t want to be besieged by th  
who is aor spat at in the street. She didn’t want to bring shame down on her  
e which who had so assiduously avoided it for four years. She knew those th  
her mind, and yet life seemed to be in too great a muddle for her to *ca*  
grizeldanow.

a few Abruptly, James sat up in his chair. “I’ve just realized. Once the r  
lunary the diamonds’ return comes out, there will be no need for anyone to  
Elizabeth for them. She’ll be safe.”

Elizabeth tried to smile. “Then you can all go home to you  
under?” comfortable beds, with my thanks.” *And I can go back to my sewing.*  
*was once all I wanted, and now...*

perfect. Now some unspecific dissatisfaction with such a life dragged  
fense. IBizarrely, she had enjoyed these last few days, being with the Tizs  
e would with James, who had once terrified her. With a purpose beyond  
survival. Although there was that, too.

mind in “Not tonight, we can’t,” her ladyship said severely. “The news w  
le Park. out until tomorrow at the earliest.”

cussing  
smiled



SOME OF THE same vexing questions returned in the evening after Di  
returned and he had heard all about the interviews with Solomon G  
Grey’s Constance Silver.

“We still need to find Jarman’s killer,” he said, after a simple b  
hat did dinner of stew, with rather more beef than Elizabeth had been used to ir  
years. “In case suspicion falls back on Elizabeth or Andover, if for n  
nly that reason.”

ere the “I think we have to leave any further interviewing of Jarman’s people  
uefully. Zebadiah Fisher to the police,” Lady Grizelda said. “At least for now  
nowing have no way of discovering where they were when Jarman was killed  
it was may just have to wait for a few days and bend our minds to the possibility  
I were Notes help.”

was no Tizsa frowned. “I think we should concentrate on how and by what  
t won’t Andover was placed so perfectly to take the blame for the robbery. We  
ause he Jarman was involved, to avert the worst of the suspicion from him and  
hem.” operations continue unobserved by the law. And we know the jewel  
ie press assistant lied, for whatever reason, and that Mr. and Mrs. Mason were  
family fooled into buying the stolen diamonds. And then there is this mysterious  
ings ingentleman. And how he and Jarman knew your movements and your  
re right intentions so thoroughly.”

Lady Grizelda yawned. “I’ve written it all down, in the order even  
ews of happened, but I’m too tired to think about it now. I’ll begin again  
pursue morning.”

“You’re right,” Tizsa said, putting his arm around her waist with  
ur own unselfconscious affection. “We should talk and think of other things  
Which sleep, clear our minds so that we are fresh in the morning. Come, my  
bed for you. Andover, I’ll take the kitchen this time, and leave you  
at her comfortable parlor chair.”

as, and “I’d like to take my turn,” Elizabeth said. “I’m happy to scream loudly  
simple anyone breaks in.”

“You’ll scare them off,” James said wryly. “And I suspect we won’t  
on’t be tonight for this lure to yield anything.”

“Neither of you can have slept much last night,” Elizabeth protested.  
“While I am not tired.”

“Then keep me company for an hour,” James said. “We can play cards  
I can tell you my best jokes.”

1. Tizsa “Jokes are good,” Elizabeth said, trying to hide her ridiculous pleasure  
rey and his casual invitation.

“I made some coffee and chocolate in the kitchen,” Grizelda said coming  
ut tasty shoulder from the doorway. “Help yourselves.”

1 recent Ten minutes later, Elizabeth brought in a tray with a cup of hot chocolate  
to other and a pot of coffee. James had taken the cushion off her work chair and  
sat on it cross-legged on the floor before the fire. Open on his legs was

ple and medical treatise of Dr. Tizsa's.

ow. We "Take your coat off and be comfortable," she said. "You don't need. We stand on ceremony with me."

roblem. "I could. But I have it in my head that no one has stood on any ceremony with you for a long time. To say the least."

whom "I don't imagine there's much of it in Newgate, either," she retorted.

e know "Not in the way you mean. Aristocrats are certainly not top of the list here by virtue of their blood. But if you don't mind, I will take off my

weler's He removed his coat and loosened his tie with the same grace he had almost to everything. Even in his shirt sleeves, sprawling back against the

sterioushe was the most elegant man she had ever seen. It was like looking at a work of art—a marble statue or a painting by an old master come to life

d you of lean, and muscled, with that pale, sculpted face and eyes that nothing seemed cold to her at all.

in the She had almost forgotten her old love of art and beauty. Watching

she poured a cup of coffee and brought it to him, she felt the old thrill quite excitement she had once felt in an art gallery. Well, not quite the old

. Read, This one was much more *physical*. And it had been with her in her only wife, degrees of intensity all day.

you the "Will you have the chair?" he said, sitting up to make way for her.

"No, I believe I will join you before the fire. It's how I often finish my day since the weather turned colder. If you could just pass me the cushion?"

ly have He did so, and she curled up on the cushion with her hot cheeks feeling rather like a contented cat. Somehow, in this house that had

otested, been home, and had stopped even being secure, she felt comfortable and

had something to do with the man beside her, who was both gentle and

ards, orenough and unattainable enough to be safe.

He sipped his coffee. "What would you do," he asked, his love assurance atrolling through her, "if money and background were no object? Where would you live? What would you do with yourself?"

ver her "You are asking about dreams rather than reality."

"I lost my dreams, for just a little—beyond getting out of prison and chocolate wreaking revenge. I suspect you lost yours, too."

nd now "Beyond escaping Joshua and simple survival." She had rarely let herself as some look back. She dreaded the nightmares that woke her, sweating

sometimes even crying out before she could bury her face in the pillow. It had been enough of the past for her. But slowly, cautiously, she gave permission to remember the time before Joshua, when life was unfathomably new interests and possibilities and the world had been not frightening.

"Where would I go?" she said softly. "Everywhere. I want to go to the Louvre and this time see the art. I want to go to Holland, to Florence and Venice. Rome, to Vienna and..." She smiled self-consciously. "Well, I would like to travel and spend days at a time surrounded by art. And then, full of ideas, I would like to come home to a modest, comfortable country, where I would try to paint the lush green views, my neighbors, and even the dogs and cats. But all that would be in my own precious time. I would like to teach children and fill their minds with enthusiasm for learning... Yes, I think I would run a school, where others could learn subjects I cannot—Latin and Greek and mathematics."

"I am surprisingly learned in such," Lord James said. "Perhaps you should consider employing me?"

She smiled involuntarily. "Of course." A little frisson ran up her spine. "I would have him under the same roof, working with him on such a noble project. I would see him every day... *Stop there, Beth!* She cast him a quick glance to make sure he had his eyes steady on her face and the faintest of smiles teasing at his lips. "I would see others suddenly she had no breath.

"You've changed your mind," he said in mock reproach. "Perhaps you would like to see if you can send their children to a school that employs old convicts?"

"You are not a convict, and in any case, it is not that kind of school," she said. "It is not for the aristocratic and wealthy, but for people who would not otherwise have much of an education at all."

"Ah, a charitable foundation. You will need a *lot* of charity with so many paying pupils to bolster your income."

"This is my dream, and money will be no object, remember? Other children could not go jaunting about the world in the school holidays, or even the duke's son as my classics and mathematics master."

He set down his empty cup and sprawled against the chair behind him, raising his arms to support the back of his head. "I quite enjoyed teaching myself boys in Newgate."

She blinked. "Were they interested in Latin?"

w. That “My aims were not so grand. I taught them to read and write. A  
herself of unfortunates and world-weary little pickpockets.”

rling in She shuddered to think of children in such a place. “You gave  
ing butchance,” she said warmly, “for when they are released. Was this your  
too?”

o Paris, “Lord, no, I was bored.” He sat up. “I don’t think I ever had muc  
ice and aim. I wanted to do something, but my father refused to counter  
l like to profession. I began to think of politics, but then there was Cordelia,  
eas and little more than a dazzled boy, imagined happy marriage to be the he  
ttag in my ambitions. A contented wife, children running tame about the gard  
ghbors, “Don’t you still want those things?”

time. I “I don’t know.” He grimaced. “I stopped thinking of anything  
sm and vengeance and self-justification. Everyone needs a purpose—Newgate  
d teach me that much—but I should have a better one.” He sat up. “What abo

Do you not want a husband and children eventually?”

i would Her smile was twisted. “A dream is one thing, but be sensible  
would marry *me*?”

ine. To “I would.”

ject, to Her heart gave a great thud, and then seemed to stop in a b  
find his recognition and longing and grief. She tore her gaze free and jumpec  
s. And feet with an admittedly shaky laugh.

Snatched up his cup from the floor, she said lightly, “I wonder wh  
no one father the marquis would make of that? More coffee, my lord?”

“You called me James, once.”

ool. It’s “There is a certain informality here.” She barely knew what s  
her wise saying. He hadn’t said if he wanted more coffee, but she poured his  
anyway, and then, for good measure, poured some into her own cup.

out fee- “You needn’t panic,” he said close behind her. “It wasn’t a propos  
a statement of delight. You are sweet and strong and kind and beautif  
rwise, any decent man would be proud to marry you.”

mploy a She set down the coffee pot with a bump and closed her eyes in a

She didn’t believe him, though the words themselves were soothing l  
id him, he cared enough to say them. More than that, he stood close enough  
ing the breath stirred her hair. She could smell him—a distinctive scent of la  
and spice that she hadn’t even realized she associated with him, a  
washed over her now with insidious pleasure.

mixture “I doubt you’ll want to rush into those offers,” said the voice that  
deep inside her, soft and arousing, “but don’t rule a husband out fore  
them amen are not like Jarman. The experience of a wife need not be of v  
dream, and fear.”

She could not bear it. She swung around, brushing her skirts aga  
h of anlegs, and stared desperately up at him. His eyes were not hard, but wa  
ance akind, and he made no effort to touch her. Until, unable to withsta  
, and I, curiosity, she raised one curious, unsteady hand to his pale cheek. I  
eight of little rough with the day’s stubble, but he was warm and real and be  
en.” And when his fingertips touched her skin in return, butterfly light, she  
gaze stray to those elegant, fascinating lips.

except She couldn’t help it—she stood on tiptoe, lifting her face to his. O  
e taught brief caress would be enough, and then she could laugh and walk aw  
ut you? they would still be friends. His lips parted to meet hers. They were c  
firm, like the man himself, which made her want to smile, but the  
e—whopressed hers in return, just a little, and moved delicately.

He cupped her face, lingering, as though tasting her lips, her bre  
didn’t ram his tongue into her mouth or mash his body into hers. Per  
lare of she wanted to lean into him, to feel what merely tantalized so far. Enc  
l to hershe parted her lips for his, and a new sweetness seeped through her vei

He raised his head before she was ready, and her fingers  
at yourconvulsively in his soft hair—when had they got there?—as though  
him back. Instead, she let her hand fall.

“You see?” he murmured. “Quite harmless.”

he was He stepped back, and she turned away from him with a breathle  
n some laugh. “Quite.” But even as she picked up her cup and directed him c  
to his, she knew it was not harmless at all, and neither was he. Becau  
sal, justshe felt now was physical desire. Her body thrummed with it. And t  
ful, and beauty, too.

Of course, she desperately needed a distraction. Perhaps that was v  
nguish. noticed the moving shadow through the gap in the curtain. And that g  
because reason to slip away from him and draw back the edge of the drape  
that his shadow, a deeper, man-shaped blackness in the dark of the street, v  
avender into the narrow alley between the houses that led to the back gardens.  
nd that



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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

“THERE’S A MAN,” Elizabeth exclaimed.

James, his lips still tingling from her sweet, timid kiss, his body humming with rising lust, took a moment to adjust to the importance of the words.

She let the curtain drop. “He’s gone round to the back lane. It’s time to see who he was.”

James was already moving to the door. “Wait here.” By the time he reached the kitchen, he knew she was following him, but it was important to wake Tizsa.

However, Tizsa raised his head from the table before they even entered and turned, cocking one questioning eyebrow at James.

“Someone’s gone around to the back,” James murmured.

Instantly, Tizsa rose and doused the lamp. “How many?”

“Elizabeth only saw one, but there could be more.” In the darkness he found Elizabeth’s hand and gave it a brief, gentle squeeze. “Stay by the door. Get ready to shout and lock yourself in the bedroom with Griz if you hear anything.”

He felt her nod as her hand slipped free. James edged forward through the darkness to stand beside Tizsa, halfway between the door and the window above the sink. Straining, he was sure he heard the soft squeak of a door opening. The back gate? He heard no footsteps, but then, the garden was mainly dirt and earth, and it was not wet enough to squelch.

And then came the unmistakable sound of the back door handle turning. Tizsa stepped silently toward the door, flattening himself to the wall. The lock rattled as something was thrust into it and turned.

A key? James drew the dagger from his boot, and since no further sound came from the window, he moved beside the door, where he would be when the door opened. Which it was doing now. A pale sliver of moonlight fell across the kitchen floor, and a gloved hand snaked around the edge

door.

Tizsa leapt, grabbing the wrist, which jerked violently. The door slammed against Tizsa, who was left holding an empty glove. Throwing it on the ground, he bolted outside, right beside James. Behind them, the kitchen flared, showing them the figure of a man fleeing through the back gate. The rest of the yard was empty.

“After him,” James growled, already heading back for the kitchen. “Come from the front.”

Without arguing, Tizsa charged through the gate while James followed through the house, yelling, “Lock the doors!” to Elizabeth, though wondering what would do when the intruder had a bloody key was beyond him.

In any case, she followed him with the lamp, lighting his way to the door, which he unlocked and wrenched open. A cloaked man rushed down the street, Tizsa some five or six yards behind. As James leapt into the carriage, a door slammed and a carriage jumped forward toward Commercial Row.

James swore under his breath. Tizsa, breathing deeply, uttered something in an unknown tongue that James assumed was also profanity.

They glanced at each other, then turned as one back to the kitchen. Elizabeth, still holding the lamp, her eyes wide, backed into the hallway with them in.

Lady Grizelda stood at the top of the stairs in her nightgown and clutching the banister. “Dragan? Did we get him?”

“No,” Tizsa said, “but we got a glove.” He waved it halfheartedly at her.

Through the window  
hinge—



“It’s a good-quality glove,” Lady Grizelda observed over breakfast the following morning, while James was attaching a solid piece of wood to the back door. “Fine leather.”

“Bertie *might* wear such a glove,” Elizabeth said, “though it’s a bit restrained for his tastes. He used to prefer more tassels. And it’s too small for Porter, who has hands like shovels.”

“Grey?” Tizsa suggested. He’d had a better look at the shape of the intruder than James, but it had been impossible to see his features.

“Grey’s the one person who knows we don’t have the diamonds,”

reminded him. "And he knows the police will return them tomorrow."  
"Besides, I think he has bigger hands, too," Elizabeth murmured.  
"Could it have been a woman?" Grizelda asked.  
Tizsa thought about it. "I would doubt it. He was quick and slipped  
the force when he wrenched free of my hold was considerable. I've never  
a woman that strong. It could have been Bertie, or Zeb Fisher, perhaps  
"Or the gentleman who pretended to be me," James added. Whatever  
intruder's identity, he was likely to be Jarman's murderer. Jarman must  
strode been using the key, however he had got it, to enter the house  
at good Presumably, his killer had taken it from him.

Testing, James pushed the newly attached length of wood, and it fell  
the cradle already screwed to the doorframe. A better block to a wood  
down intruder with a key than the chair they had shoved under the door last  
street, "Oh, well done," Grizelda said warmly. "That should do the trick."  
"Thank you," Elizabeth said quietly. He had felt her gaze on  
nothing throughout the simple process and suspected he had surprised her. /  
Tizsas. At least Newgate had taught him not to be a completely  
house aristocrat.

Tizsa nodded and reached for the coffee pot. "Let's think about  
mysterious gentleman. As I see it, he is either someone who knows  
someone who has access to someone who knows you—friends or servants  
When you became betrothed, did you have servants who were aware  
in front movements? A valet or groom or coachman?"

"I had a valet—Matthews," James recalled, though he couldn't picture  
man's face clearly. "But even before my trial, he had found a better place  
with some French baron. I think he went abroad with his new master."

"Getting him conveniently out of the way?" Grizelda said, sitting  
"And he could have come back to the country since. Most valets speak  
to the gentlemen and wear tasteful clothes."

"Yes, but I wasn't in the habit of telling Matthews my movements  
a little never considered it his business, and he was far too proper to ask."  
"But he could have found the note in your pocket about going to Mr  
the jeweler," Elizabeth pointed out.

"He could," James agreed. He shook his head. "I just can't imagine  
lowering himself to associate with vulgar criminals like Joshua  
' James Although," he added more thoughtfully, "you did say Jarman could

like a gentleman when he chose to.”

Tizsa reached for his notebook and scribbled down, *Matthews*  
“We’ll look into him. Give me the name of this baron.”

ery, but James obliged, after some brain cudgeling.

ver met Tizsa threw down his pencil. “Griz, will you read out the dates an  
?” of the events in ’48, from the theft of the diamonds to Andover’s arrest

ver the Grizelda put down her toast and glanced at her own noteboo  
ist have Wednesday the twenty-third of August, just after two in the afternoon,

at will. Grey’s men set off to take the diamonds to the jeweler who had agreed  
them. The jewels were inconspicuous, in two small bags, carried in

hell into pockets. Both men were armed and experienced in transporting v  
uld-be-items. They were to bring back the banker’s draft of the money owed

right. Grey for the diamonds. They went in one of the company’s carriage  
' Houndsditch, another vehicle skewed in front of them, forcing their c

on him to stop. Two men, with their faces covered, shot both of Grey’  
And the snatched both bags of diamonds, and were gone within seconds, va

useless into the panicked crowd.

“On Wednesday evening, the police searched Jarman’s business pr  
out this—or at least the ones they knew about—and his house in Ellen Square

you, or “I remember that,” Elizabeth said. “It felt like the final indignity  
ervants didn’t even know what they were looking for as they raked throu

of your things. Joshua never told me, and nor did anyone else.”

“It was the same evening I celebrated my betrothal,” James said.

ture the “And on the following morning, Thursday the twenty-fourth,” C  
osition continued, “you took your thick head to Mason’s, were shown the di

and ordered it to be set into a ring for Cordelia. The assistant told  
ing up. collect it on Saturday.”

ak like “I preferred Monday,” James recalled, “but he was insistent.”

“No doubt because Mr. and Mrs. Mason were due to return from th  
ents. I to Brighton on Monday and he didn’t want his secret deal made p

Tizsa said.

4ason’s “You duly collected the ring on Saturday the twenty-sixth,” C  
continued. “On Monday the twenty-eighth, Mr. Mason returned a

ine him immediately offered the diamonds for sale by a plausible gentlem  
Jarman. claimed to be in financial difficulties, which necessitated his selling

l sound diamonds he had only just acquired. He claimed to be Lord James A.

which convinced Mason it would be an excellent and honest deal. On the evening, as you were dressing for dinner with Cordelia's family, the came to your father's home, found the ring, and arrested you—after M d times and his jeweler identified the diamond.”

“By then, Jarman must already have hidden the diamonds in the chess set and brought it back to the house, two of same day, Elizabeth departed with it for France.”

There was silence, then Elizabeth said, “If I were the police, I would arrest me.”

“Only Jarman knew,” James said, “and he was hardly going to sell to Mr. law after you. But why pick on me to take the blame? I can't have been the only love-stricken young fool in town.”

“That,” Tizsa said, “is what's bothering me. The whole thing is planned that I cannot believe your involvement was coincidental. I don't wish to have an enemy? Someone you had insulted or won too many battles against?”

James shook his head. “Not that I can recall. I was a fairly amiable gambler and I never gambled much because I was rarely lucky. Besides, it bore no resemblance to a rival in love?” Grizelda asked. “As I recall, you were pursued by several young ladies.”

“And Cordelia by several men,” James said slowly. He met her eyes. “Hampton was sniffing around her even then. And with me out of the picture, Grizelda eventually won her.”

“And,” Grizelda added, “he is fair.”

“Though not forty. Perhaps he made himself look older...” A rest of the old anger swept over James. “I never gave him credit for such behavior.”

“He never struck me that way either,” Grizelda admitted, “but I avoided their trip to Society whenever I could and barely spoke to him. Did he know you were going to Mason's that morning?”

James sighed. “I don't know. He was around during the first party at the club. But no one could have known I would go to Mason's and was certainly not in time to learn about Mr. Mason's trip and the opportunities and tendencies of his assistant.”

“No, Mason's part must have been planned even before the road was paved,” Tizsa agreed. “But whoever gave you Mason's name and got you to

ly thendown must have made an educated guess that you could be influenced  
e. Thatdirection.”

police James wrinkled his nose. “It was more indolence. My head was po  
r. GreyI just did the easiest thing without going to my father’s jeweler.” He

his head. “I remember the dinner at the club quite well. I could tell y  
ly havewas there. We all went on to some gaming hell after that... And it’s  
for thatof a blur. A sea of faces and cards and bottles.”

“We’ll note Hampton down,” Grizelda said, scribbling in her no  
would“But let’s not jump to conclusions. Who else benefitted from  
conviction?”

end the “Honestly?” James said. “No one. My family was disgust  
een thedisgraced. So was Cordelia’s and Cordelia herself. My more reckless  
might have liked the notoriety of being associated with a diamond thi  
so wellcallously shot two men, killing one outright, but it’s not as if I died  
did youthem any money.”

wagers He felt Elizabeth’s grave gaze upon him but refused to look at he  
dragged his fingers through his hair. Her caress of those same locks la  
youth,had been sweet and suddenly intense...

d me.” “Very well, tell us exactly who was at your club dinner.”

ued by “My brother,” he began, and his stomach twisted, knotting up  
recited the friends who had been with him that night.

r gaze. At least, they had called each other friends, but when he had been c  
way, hewith the diamond theft, not one of them had stood by him or visite

They hadn’t come either when he was released. No one had called c  
written, let alone apologized for believing the worst. He had made it e  
urgencethem by staying away from his old haunts, and when he did hap  
rains.” recognize someone, he passed them by as though they were strange  
avoidedhadn’t been for his burning need to prove Jarman’s guilt, he would h  
ou wereLondon long ago. As it was, he had used the hurt like fuel for his quest

Grizelda and Tizsa wrote down all the names.

t of the “And they were all at the club with you, too?” Tizsa asked.

r’s, and James shrugged. “I don’t honestly know. I think so. I recall Langle  
tunisticbrother—being there, but mostly, it’s a sea of blurry faces.”

bbery,” “Were you in the habit of getting quite so cast away?” Grizelda ask  
write itevery day one becomes betrothed.”

l in that Grizelda and Tizsa exchanged glances.

“This afternoon,” he said, “I think you and I should go to the gambling you mentioned, and see if we can’t jog your memory. For now, I’d like to go to your brother and ask him—”

“No,” James said flatly.

Tizsa blinked. He obviously knew a resolute negative when he heard Elizabeth, however, did not.

“Do you want to get to the bottom of this or not?” she asked in a low voice. “You are not children to be sulking and refusing to talk to each other. If you can tell me what we all need to know, then you need to ask him. I shall be glad to go with you and take notes.”

James narrowed his eyes at her. “You will not.”

She met his gaze without fear. Even in his annoyance, he was glad to see her. He was even ashamed of his feeble attempt at intimidation.

She rose to her feet. “Ten minutes,” she said, and walked out into the kitchen.

“And that,” James murmured, his ill humor vanishing like mist in the sunshine, “is how she survived Jarman and three years of running. Very clever. I’ll go to my damned brother. What will you two do this morning?”

“Tidy up the loose end that is the underworld figure of Fisher,” she said.

James regarded them with unease. “I thought you were leaving him to the police? You plan simply to ask him if he killed Jarman?”

“We shouldn’t have to,” Grizelda replied. “We just need to listen for rumors in the right places.”

open to

rs. If it

ave left

THE FIRST TIME Griz and Dragan ventured into the rougher areas of St. Petersburg they had drawn considerable attention. They began today at the soup kitchen where Griz often volunteered. It was still too early to have open company—my several tattered urchins, desperate mothers, and homeless men were skulking in the vicinity. Most of them knew Griz by sight. One or two of them had been treated by Dragan, so they were happy enough to talk. It

it isn’t about Fisher was a different matter. His name produced a lot of shuffling and head shakes. No one even appeared to know which alehouse he frequented.





Until a dirty boy, wearing a cap several sizes too big for his little head, bounding up and said cunningly, "I'll take ye, lady and gent! But you like you to give me the price of my dinner, 'cause I'll probably miss it here now."

Griz and Dragan had been caught out by over-helpful urchins because they only followed him to the next crossroads, where Dragan stopped and drew a coin from his pocket.

"We'd hate you to miss your dinner," Griz said kindly, "but you can't have the coin, just for telling us the tavern where we're most likely to find a fisher."

The boy's eyes widened, as if he couldn't quite believe his luck in acquiring such riches for so little effort. "Nag's 'Ead, first on your right, then two lefts."

Dragan tossed him the coin, which promptly vanished inside the pockets of his unspeakable garments. Griz wanted to take him home, bathe him, give him fresh clothes, and send him to her father's estate, where she had sent the other helpful urchin from this neighborhood. She could not save them all, but she'd look out for him next time.

"You want to watch yourself, missus," he said with a cheeky grin.

"Likes pretty ladies like you." Then he took off back to his post at the kitchen.

"I hope no one robs him," Dragan murmured, as they moved on in the suggested direction.

Walking down dark alleys in St. Giles was a hazardous pastime indeed, strewn with both filth and crime, and the way described by their informant was increasingly dark and narrow. However, the final turn took them into a street that certainly was not deserted. A crowd had formed beneath a dining table that might once have portrayed the head of a horse. Now, it was large and filthy, but it probably was the public house the boy had meant.

"I'd tell you to wait here," Dragan murmured. "But I doubt you'd be safer in the kitchen."

"They do seem a little angry," Griz noted uneasily, wrinkling her nose. She picked her way through discarded rubbish and rotting food and two of the most malodorous material she didn't care to contemplate.

A loud, indignant voice reached them. "No, we're not giving him anything and bloody Peelers! He'd turn in his grave, he would."

"Nothing the Peelers could tell us anyhow," another man growled.

e head, know who done it.”

’ll have “Oh dear,” Griz murmured. Someone turned and saw their approach.” unless they were prepared to turn tail and run, they had to keep moving forward. Griz drew in her breath and called authoritatively, “Who did it?”

ed him Surprisingly, the crowd parted to show her a body slumped on the ground, his throat slit from ear to ear.

can still “Mr. Fisher,” someone said piously, removing his greasy hat. “Never mind Mr. nothing to no one, and yet the bloody Jarman did him in.”

“Jarman’s dead,” Dragan pointed out, inevitably releasing her to go on her way. The men watched him with hostility. Not that there was anything about the lifeless state of the body, but he would see what he could do about the wounds.

e boy’s “Yes, but his dandy stepson ain’t,” came another ugly voice. “You’ve got to give him a good one, Jack Porter, who likes slitting a good man’s throat or battering him to death.”

the last “Did anyone see the killing?” Dragan asked, rising back to his feet.

though A few heads shook. Someone said, “Found him this morning, but he didn’t come to open up.”

“Fisher” “Don’t need to see it to know it,” the first man snarled, glaring at the man in the soup. “Are you a Peeler?”

The moment was nasty. Griz gripped her umbrella, ready to use it on anyone who raised a finger to Dragan. But he had once kept a company with desperate revolutionary soldiers in order, and he didn’t look nervous in terms of intimidated.

nt was “No. I’m a doctor, as it happens,” he said mildly. “Nothing I can do for an alley this fellow. But for you... I can only advise you: don’t look for trouble with the Jarman. I suspect the Peelers are already all over them for something they’ve done. My sympathy on your loss.”

Slightly bewildered, they didn’t prevent him rejoining Griz, and he felt their eyes on the back of her neck all the way back to the end of the alley, no one gave chase.

nose as “Revenge for killing Jarman?” Griz suggested when she could do nothing other than to wait.

“Possibly. Or perhaps designed to look that way. Either way, I expect the police have an underworld war on their hands. Let’s go back to Hanso’s office. I have work to do before I drag Andover off to his den of iniquity.”

d. “We” Griz squeezed his arm. “I miss being home.”

“So do I,” he murmured. “And I think we can probably go back to each, so the word is out about the diamonds.”

The news seemed to be all over all the newspapers they discovered what?” their return journey to Elizabeth’s little house. They found it empty, so the tavern made tea while Dragan scoured the newspapers for any mention of the hostess.

“None of them mention her,” he said, “though Andover gets mentioned as the man who was originally and wrongfully imprisoned for the theft. They all name Jarman and Connor as the robbers and remind me without doubt that the diamonds resurfaced only days after Jarman’s own murder.”

Griz poured his tea. “Probably good for James *and* Elizabeth. Dragan—you—” She broke off as a peremptory knock on the front door shattered the quiet. “Who the devil...?”

“Does not sound like a friendly neighbor,” Dragan said with a grimace. He pushed Griz’s bag nearer her, for it contained her gold when she had her little pistol, and rose, picking up his walking stick before going to the door.

Dragan.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

EVERYTHING HAD CHANGED with a kiss. As though in some children's fa Elizabeth had been wakened in James's embrace, not just to sweet, a sensation but to emotion. To unspecific hope and awareness of life. T walking at her side this morning remained unattainable, but he v distant. He was a symbol of what life could be.

They said little as they walked north along the canal side. Elizabeth mind. Although the weather was cloudy, the world seemed brighter sang above, and the men on the barges passing up and down the can cheerful. She didn't pretend James was hers, but she wouldn't have s these minutes for anything.

Only as they eventually turned into Grosvenor Place did he say, "S apologize for kissing you?"

*Only if you want to break my heart.* "I'm not offended, if that's w mean." She stole a quick glance at him. "Nor do I make any silly presu

"I don't regret it," he interrupted.

"Then why apologize?" she retorted.

His lips quirked. "I didn't. I would apologize for offense, bu you've taken none, I am happy." He took her hand, drawing it into th of his elbow, and breathless warmth spread through her. It fe contentment.

"People will find me an odd, poor creature to be on your arr warned.

"No," he said. "They're more likely to think me an unsuitable crea be near any lady. But I'm long past caring what *people* say or think c matters."

"But it bothers you to be going to your brother."

He didn't deny it, but there was a distinct pause before he said, different. I once cared for his opinion and didn't realize it."

"When did you last speak to him?"

“The day I was arrested. Saturday, the twenty-sixth day of August. Don’t lecture me. You haven’t seen your family in even longer. Are they still in London?”

She nodded. “I once mended bed linen for their neighbors. As I walked along the street, I saw my mother leave the house, and kept my head down. But she would never have noticed someone like me.”

“Does it strike you that you can end the lie now? You are in no danger from Jarman or anyone seeking the diamonds. You don’t need to hide from such...obscurity.”

“No, but I can’t go home either. They won’t have me, and my hypocrisy sickens me.”

“There are other options. More genteel professions. Griz has informed you know, through her family and her charity connections. She can help you teaching posts if that is what you’d prefer.”

“She has already done so much.” She shook her head.

“We are both lucky to have engaged the Tizsa interest.”

“I don’t think you are quite so lucky,” she said wryly. “I believe that is that you pay for it.”

“Funnily enough, I am happy to. My father’s house is along the south side of South Audley Street.”

“My father’s house. Not my family home. They were both excellent people, but in James’s case, he was innocent, and his family had acknowledged it. They must, she thought angrily, be the worst kind of people. She was almost surprised that he had tolerated her interference. It was almost like a visit, but she still sensed he wanted support, to face his family with one friend who believed in him. Even if that friend was a badly paid, lowly seamstress.

He seemed calm enough as they walked along South Audley Street, except that he curled his fingers involuntarily before they turned up the steps of the imposing townhouse. And he snatched an extra breath before he raised the knocker.

The door was opened swiftly by a liveried servant. Lord James held his card between two fingers. “Lord Langley, if you please.”

“That’s all. If you step inside one moment, I’ll inquire...”

Abruptly, the door was wrenched wide and an older, white-haired man in the dark, perfect attire of a butler stared at James, who was u

st. And Elizabeth into the house before him.

ney still “Lord Jamie!” the butler exclaimed. “Oh, my lord, welcome home.

“Hello, Clifford, you old rascal,” James said amiably, holding a  
walked casual hand. Elizabeth felt his relief as if it were her own, as if  
l down. expected the entire household to turn their backs on him still. “How  
you?”

danger “All the better for seeing *you*, my lord.” The butler, clearly an old  
live in retainer, gripped the outstretched hand hard with both of his. There  
actually tears in his eyes.

father’s “And your family?” James asked.

“Thriving, sir.”

fluence, “Excellent. I’m very glad to see you looking so well, Clifford  
elp find extricated his hand. “Is my brother about the place?”

“He is,” said another voice before the butler could answer.

Lord James did not start, nor even twitch, but something changed  
suddenly in his demeanor, almost as though his body was clamped by  
he plan iron control. He turned slowly to see the man coming swiftly down the

Physically, he looked like a healthier version of James, though he  
here in have been an inch shorter, his shoulders slightly broader. His hair  
shade lighter, his eyes a more definite blue, his complexion healthy,  
siles, it English gentleman who enjoyed the outdoors. His stride was impetuous  
l never reached the foot of the stairs, and then slowed, and his expression  
kind of longer eager but uncertain, wary.

“The office will do,” James said, turning away from his brother  
at least striding toward the back of the house. At the last moment, he remem  
dressed, snatch Elizabeth’s hand to his coat sleeve and tow her with him.

There was not really an excuse for such abruptness, nor even for d  
Street, where their reunion should take place, since he was not living there.  
re front doubt for the sake of privacy—heads had appeared over the banisters  
fore heard a growing bunch of people had gathered about the baize door that  
the servants’ hall—Lord Langley allowed it.

held out The office was a working room containing two desks, twice as  
chairs, and a bookcase on which resided several ledgers and a few  
books on land management. It may have been the preserve of the but  
man insteward, or where their lordships met with tradesmen or men of busi  
shering whom they did not want to introduce into the family part of the house.

James released her and turned briskly as his brother closed the door behind him. "This is Miss Barker, who is kindly giving me her aid in these matters. Miss Barker, my brother Lord Langley."

The faint frown on Lord Langley's brow may have been constant, but it had now become betokened consternation or bewilderment. At any rate, he was enough to bow when Elizabeth curtsied.

"I need to ask you a few questions," James said, without allowing his brother to speak. "Miss Barker will take notes for me. Please, take care, ma'am, and be comfortable."

Lord Langley allowed this, also, though he said sardonically, "I have a few questions for you, too. Where have you been?"

"Newgate," James replied, as though surprised.

His brother sighed. "Since then."

"Henrietta Street, mainly. I sent the address to Father."

"Did you expect him to call on you?"

"God, no," James replied. "I thought he might forward me some correspondence, though even there I didn't hold out much hope."

"He isn't here. He's in the country."

"That must explain it," James said without any pretense of belief. "How like you be so good as to answer my questions?"

"If you answer mine with equal honesty."

James turned, throwing his hat on the desk Elizabeth had not occupied, but she thought it was an excuse to hide his face.

Lord Langley's frown deepened. "They did not take your hat."

"Ah well, like you, I expect they were overcome by my presence."

"Please be long. Please cast your mind back to the night of my betrothal party occurring years ago. We had dinner at White's."

"I recall it," Langley said warily.

"Do you recall who was there?"

Elizabeth had Lady Grizelda's list, so as James's brother began, had to recite names, she marked them on the list with an *L* for Lady's many confirmation.

"Why was Hampton there?" James asked. "He was hardly a partner or a friend."

"He called, just as we were setting off, and you were in such good luck that you swept him along with us."



ie door James's frown cleared. "So I did. I felt sorry for him because i certainwho'd won Cordelia in the end. I didn't really expect him to come, tho

"No, neither did I, but he proved himself a better man. Why a or mayasking about this?"

as civil "Because it's important to me, and I drank far too much for my n to be accurate. Where did we go after White's?"

ing his Langley grimaced. "Some hell—I beg your pardon, ma'am—a a seat,den off Drury Lane. Coal Yard Lane."

"There was a waitress there that you liked," James remarked.

have a Lord Langley colored, though his eyes didn't falter. "I remembe touched that you took us there when you were celebrating sor altogether more respectable."

"And yet only a few hours before, I'd been shooting strange stealing diamonds," James said. "What an actor I was in those days."

"James—"

d any "Did everyone who had been with us in White's come to Coa Lane?" James interrupted.

Langley sighed. "Yes, and a couple more besides."

E. "Will "Who?"

"Darchett, Front. Forsythe Niven—No, we came across Niven in and he joined the party."

cupied, "Niven?" James repeated, while Elizabeth wrote down the added He glanced at her. "He's Lady Grizelda's brother, who might also be help. Why did Front come? I wouldn't have thought gaming hells at I shan'tthing."

y, three "I expect he was hanging on the coattails of the nobility," Lord I said. "Helen wouldn't look at him then, so he was reduced to us. Jame is this about?"

"It's about whom I talked to that night. What did I do at Coa ltingly,Lane?"

ngley's "We all played cards. After one game, I left you to it. When I ne you, you could barely walk or string a sentence together. But you ref irticularcome away with me. Niven and Graham promised they would see you home, which they did barely half an hour after I got to the hous l humorunexpected smile flitted across Langley's lips. "I left you in bed, snor a pig."

It was I James did not respond to the smile or to the insult. He asked, "Was I gambling when you left the hell?"

are you "No, you were drinking, and clearly had been in quite a concealing manner, in a huddle with Niven and Graham."

memory "Was I with them all evening at Coal Yard?"

Again, a tinge of color seeped into Lord Langley's face. "I don't think gaming wasn't in the same room. But you looked pretty... ensconced."

"Did I ask you about jewelers?"

Langley blinked. "You said you wanted to buy Cordelia a betrothal ring at once, and not wait until the next quarter's allowance put you back in nothing. And you said, Godfrey's was too expensive and too old-fashioned, and be damned if Papa got to hear how much you'd spent on it. Therefore, I would go elsewhere."

"Did I mention Mason's? Did you?"

"I certainly didn't, for I'd never heard of it until the trial."

Coal Yard "And when you left the gambling club, was everyone else mentioned still there?"

Langley thought. "So far as I can recall. No, Darchett had gone off by the time I returned to the main room."

the den "And Hampton?"

"Still playing cards. Or was it dice by that stage?"

names. James moved to pick up his hat then paused. "To your knowledge, is anyone able to any of our party short of funds?"

all his Langley wrinkled his nose with an aristocrat's distaste for the sultry money. "Graham, perennially, I suppose. And Forsythe Niven because Langley's father was trying to keep him on leading strings with indifferent success, what James nodded and took his hat from the desk.

Elizabeth said, "To your knowledge, my lord, did any of those men in Coal Yard harbor a grudge against Lord James? A reason of any kind to dislike him?"

"James and Sir Arthur Hampton were rivals in love. Hampton certainly next saw have *liked* that James won the lady, but I doubt it was personal. Even I used to like James."

1 safely James's lips twisted into a bitter smile. "Oh, *everyone*."

se." An "So far as you observed, my lord," Elizabeth pursued, "did anyone seem surprised by the news of Lord James's arrest? Particularly among the people you have already named."

is I still “No.” Langley looked perplexed. “But I didn’t really see most of them when they heard the news. Cordelia and her family were devastated. Elizabeth concentrated my parents and my sister.”

“I shall be sick,” James announced. “Shall we go, Miss Barker?”

Reluctantly, Elizabeth put away her notes and rose.

know. I “Wait,” Lord Langley said, scowling. “You haven’t answered my questions yet.”

“You didn’t ask any.” The direct clarity of his gaze told her James was referring to more than today, and Langley’s shifting feet betrayed that he recognized her.

“I’m asking now,” Langley said evenly. “Why did you not come here, you were not invited.”

“For God’s sake, James, this is your home! You don’t need an invitation. We assumed you would know that much.”

“Yes, you assumed a great deal,” James said, brushing past her. “Entirely erroneously. Miss Barker?”

She moved toward the door, remembering to curtsey to the man by the unhappy-looking heir, and walked beside Lord James out of the house.

“You need to go back and talk to him,” she said low, all but trying to keep up with James’s spanking pace.

“Why?” he snarled.

“Because you are brothers, and whatever he did or didn’t do, he can’t blame you.”

“Oh, *deeply*,” James said with heavy sarcasm. “Like everyone else, I used to be a convicted felon and I was acquitted in the space of two seconds and ignored thereafter.”

“Did he?” Elizabeth asked.

Scowling, James glanced at her, and must have finally realized how inconveniently furious his pace was. He slowed. “What do you mean?”

“When you asked him about Mason’s, he replied, *I’d never heard of anyone until the trial.*”

James’s shapely lips parted. His eyes widened. “He was there?” The scowl descended once more. “I looked. None of them were there. At least, none of them read it a newspaper, I suppose.”

“You need to talk to him again,” Elizabeth said. “Not today but at some other time, perhaps on more neutral territory. He must have been

of them partly in the wrong, from our point of view, but you owe it to you  
As we listen to his side of the story.”

James opened his mouth to retort, no doubt something off-ha  
biting. But before the words were uttered, he blinked. A half-smile tu  
his lips. “*Our point of view*,” he quoted. “I like that. I’ll kiss you for  
ed my we have a private moment.”

Heat flooded into her face. Memory tingled in the pit of her st  
ies was “No, you won’t,” she retorted, wishing her voice sounded steadier. “K  
ie same gratitude are neither necessary nor appropriate between us.”

“What about welcome?”  
ome?” A rush of emotion, part panic and part longing, propelled her al  
him, lost for words, even coherent feeling.

iritation. He caught up with her an instant later, catching her hand and dra  
into the shelter of his arm. “There, I’ve stopped. I didn’t mean to distre  
to the Let’s talk instead about what we learned from John. From Langl  
corrected himself at once.

arquis’s “We have a few more names, but I don’t know these people. Who  
them is fair? Do any of them fit Mrs. Mason’s description?”

ttling to “Forsythe Niven is fair, but too young. As is Hampton. And Fro  
Lord Darchett.”

“But only Hampton bears a grudge?”  
ares for “I think I punched Darchett’s nose when we were at school. And  
sent Front about his business for importuning Helen at some ball. S  
else, he clearly uncomfortable and wanted to marry Lord Eaglesome at the tir  
red me they were old grudges and trivial. Only Hampton is likely to have a  
temper.”

Elizabeth shook her head. “I don’t think whoever engineere  
ed how downfall was acting in temper. It was too well planned.”

’ “I may just have been in the right position at the right time,” h  
*rd of it* raking his free hand through his hair. “There didn’t need to be a grudge

“Just knowledge,” Elizabeth agreed. “And we still don’t kno  
hen the steered you to Mason’s. What about this Graham fellow?”

least he “One of my best friends, an officer in the Royal Navy. He sailed l  
was arrested.”

it some “And Lady Grizelda’s brother?”

at least “Too good-natured, I would have thought. But he’s clever, as she

herself to can ask her. Or Tizsa, since he's more likely to be unbiased. Although  
 added with sudden bleakness, "I have heard that no one ever knows  
 and better than a sibling."

gged at "I wouldn't know," she said, "being an only child." She glanced  
 it when closed profile. "Knowing your brother, then, how would you have dealt  
 him the day before you were arrested?"

stomach. "Annoying," James said at once. "Upright and obedient and efficient  
 issues of please." He hesitated, then added, "A little shy. Less sure of himself  
 pretended. Fun when he let himself relax and give his sense of humor  
 rein. And utterly loyal."

head of "And that is why you are so angry with him? You believed in his  
 and he let you down by believing the worst of you."

owing it James nodded once, then opened his mouth and closed it again. At  
 ess you spoke in a quiet, unsteady murmur that she might not have been mean  
 ey," he heard. "Worse. I feared he knew me so well that I was capable of the  
 they said I had done."

among They were on a public street, flanked by windows and carrying  
 pedestrians. There was nothing she could do to give him comfort and  
 nt. And except squeeze his arm and briefly press her cheek to it, as if she had tumbled  
 into him by accident.

"No," she said flatly. "No."

l I once He drew in a breath. His free hand covered hers as though hanging  
 he was lifeline. And then he changed the subject. "What was it like growing up  
 ne. But only child? Were you lonely?"

icted in For the rest of the walk to Hanson Row, they compared childhood  
 which drew understanding and occasional laughter. And so, equilibrium  
 d your been restored by the time they arrived at the house. She let them in with  
 key.

ie said, Dr. Tizsa emerged from the kitchen door. "You had better come  
 e." said, and fixed his steady gaze on Elizabeth. "You have visitors."

w who Her stomach gave a twist of unease. To get it over with, she  
 quickly past him into the kitchen to find her visitors seated incongruously  
 before the table with cups of tea.

"Greetings, dearie," said Barb Sandman with a wolfish smile.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SHEER UNEXPECTEDNESS of it made her head reel. And yet it wasn't surprising at all. They had all been waiting days for Barb or Bertie or Porter to make an appearance in pursuit of the diamonds. But why come when the diamonds' recovery by the police was all over the newspaper?

"Barb. Bertie," she managed. "You've taken me by surprise."

"Thought we might," Barb said, looking her up and down. "Come a bit in the world, ain't you, since you ran away from Josh?"

"I wouldn't say that. I see my friends have provided hospitality. What do you want?"

Barb smiled. Her jet earrings swung as she turned her head toward her son. "What is it I want again, Bertie, love? Oh yes, I want to know why you sent your nobby friends to spy on me, pretending to be collecting for charity."

"And if she gave *all* the diamonds to the police," Bertie reminded her mother, smirking.

"And if you or your nobby friends killed my Joshua."

Elizabeth took the wooden chair James held for her. Grizelda handed them both a cup of tea, and James took his to the back door, where he leaned his shoulder against the wall. Dr. Tizsa lounged in the kitchen doorway.

"I didn't send my—er...nobby friends," Elizabeth said. "Although they knew your address, they called on behalf of someone else entirely. Yes, I gave *all* the diamonds to the police, or at least all that I discovered. My father's chess set. Finally, no, none of *us* killed Joshua. Did you?"

"Chess set?" Bertie stared at her. So did Barb. "So that's where the diamonds were—"

"Robert!" Barb snapped.

"—where the old devil hid them," Bertie finished. "Cunning. So you've had them all the time?"

"Apparently."

Bertie's lip curled as he surveyed Elizabeth's old gown and the

peeling kitchen. “Keeping your wealth hidden so that those who de- don’t get it?”

“Don’t be daft,” Barb scoffed. “She didn’t know she had them, d Goody two-shoes! Not till Josh got himself killed. No wonder he hopping mad when you vanished. The hoity-toity whore thought he’ away with you, too. Not that I’d have blamed him if he had.”

Elizabeth ignored the last part of this speech. Instead, watching the carefully, she said. “Then you really didn’t know where the diamonds? He never told you?”

Barb sniffed. “A private man, was my Joshua.”

“He was certainly private with his wealth,” Elizabeth agreed. “So h you know I was here?”

“Guessed,” Bertie said breezily. Too breezily? He jerked his head direction of each Tizsa. “No one comes to Jarman’s house for charity he’s dead. Papers won’t say where he died, but Ma got the name of th out of some Peeler, and then we remembered your charitable friends h

“You only learned about Hanson Row today?” Elizabeth said.

They nodded in perfect time with each other.

“They knocked at the front door,” Lady Grizelda said.

Meaning they probably didn’t have the key to the back?

“Fine gloves,” James said, speaking for the first time as he toward the table, where Bertie’s discarded gloves lay beside his teacup

“Thank you,” Bertie replied, reaching for them. He was too slow.

James whisked them off the table and held them up to the light, ac the tassels and elegant embossing on the leather.

“I can put in a word for you with my maker,” Bertie offered with a

“Oh, I shan’t put you to the trouble,” James said. “I merely won you’d lost one recently. Your pardon, ma’am,” he added politely to El

as he opened the drawer under the table and removed the glove Dr. Ti yanked off their intruder last night.

“A dull glove,” Bertie said dismissively, although his eyes had na and Barb’s had widened as James held the two gloves together, con sizes.

“I would like to return it to its owner,” James said, when it was c intruder’s glove was rather broader. “Perhaps you recognize it?”

“No, but I recognize you,” Barb said aggressively. “Where have



serve it your handsome face before?”

“He probably collects for charity, too,” Lady Grizelda murmured. “Did she?” Barb cast her a quick glance of dislike.

“Nah. Nothing to do with that. Something to do with my Joshua...” Elizabeth’s stomach tightened painfully. Not, she was almost surprised to discover, because she believed for a moment that James really was in love with Joshua Jarman. But because Barb might accuse him and rekindle suspicions were? suspicion that had already sent him to prison, reviled by everyone.

But Barb broke into a peal of genuine, delighted laughter. “Got it! I forgot a face! You’re the lord Joshua got blamed for the diamonds! How did they get poor Pete Connor.”

James leaned forward, clearly about to ask for elaboration, but the questioning never worked on Barb.

“I don’t believe you,” Elizabeth scoffed. “Joshua could never have street arranged such a thing.”

“Bloody could,” Barb countered. “You never had any idea what he was capable of. Too high and mighty to look. He could do anything, my dear, he just knew the right people.”

“My point exactly,” Elizabeth taunted her. “Joshua did *not* move in the right circles. Far from it.”

“Shows what you know,” Barb retorted. “He don’t need to move in the right circles. He just needs to *know* someone.”

“Such as?” Elizabeth asked.

Barb leaned forward, an ugly expression forming around her face. Elizabeth was afraid to breathe.

And then Barb’s face cleared and she gave a laugh of derision. “I’ll never find out. You won’t never find out.”

“Damn. Elizabeth tried another tactic. “Did you know Joshua had a key to my house?”

Bertie sneered, but his mother had herself better in hand. “The lord wanted to give you one for the old times?” she said crudely. “He never got at the diamonds, didn’t he?”

“I don’t see how he could have got a key, though.”

Barb winked. “Easy enough when you know how.”

“But you don’t, do you?”

“No,” Barb said flatly.

Clearly Elizabeth needed another new tactic.

ed, and “Who did he give it to?” Dr. Tizsa asked from the back door. Dr. Tizsa transferred his gaze from the window to the Sandmans.

” “The police must have found it on his body,” Bertie said. “Either he or she got it.”

involved “His killer got it,” Dr. Tizsa said. “Doesn’t that bother you? Do you want a spot of revenge? In this case, we can see that you get it—foolish little cooperation.”

I never Bertie would have spoken again, except his mother elbowed him nonchalantly.

“I see,” Dr. Tizsa said. “You think you’ve already taken your revenge for murdering Zeb Fisher.”

“Fisher is dead?” Barb muttered. Impossible to tell if her surprise was genuine. “Good.”

“Where were you in the early hours of the morning?” Dr. Tizsa asked. Bertie was

Josh, if “In my bed, of course,” Bertie said with a smirk. “And I don’t intend to answer your damned questions.”

in the “No, but you’ll need to answer those of the police, so you might as well get the practice in. We might even be able to help you.”

in the “I didn’t kill him,” Bertie said, so smugly that Elizabeth found it hard to believe him.

“Did you know I was back in London?” she asked.

mouth. “Didn’t even know you’d left,” Barb replied, staring at her. “Why did you come back? Had enough of the poor life without Joshua?”

“That’s “That must have been it,” Elizabeth said, removing her tired old shoes.

“Why are you wasting your time here, Barb?”

key to “Damned if I know.” Barb sighed and rose to her feet.

“Who was with Joshua when he stole the diamonds?” Elizabeth asked. Bertie winked

eded to “Nah,” Bertie said with some regret. “Got himself a new partner. He? Did it on the quiet before—Ouch!” He broke off to glare at his mother who had kicked his ankle and was all but snarling at him. “According to what I heard on the streets,” he added.

“What partner?” James asked. “According to what you heard on the streets.”

Bertie shrugged.

Dr. He “A fair man, perhaps, who spoke and dressed like a gentleman?” suggested.

that or “Could have been anyone,” Bertie said. “We were never introduced. Good seeing you again, Bethie. You take care.”

n’t you “Why?” James asked. “Have you got some more thugs lined up to kill her just after?”

Bertie curled his lips. “What would I want with her?”

one too Dr. Tizsa and Lord James conducted their visitors to the front door.

“Do you believe a word they said?” Lady Grizelda asked, low-voiced. “One or two, maybe, but they’re the type of people to lie even when they

have no reason,” Elizabeth replied. “If I was guessing, I’d say they didn’t know the diamonds were with me in the chess set. And they didn’t know who Joshua’s gentlemanly partner was. I think Bertie recognized them, but I asked too, though I can’t be sure.”

“Do you think they lied about killing Fisher?” Lady Grizelda asked. “We saw his body in St. Giles.”

“I doubt they did it personally,” Elizabeth replied. “The police will catch them first. But they could easily have been responsible.”

“As revenge?” Dr. Tizsa asked. He and James must have watched Sandmans walk the length of the street, judging by the time it had taken to return.

“To be *seen* as taking revenge.” Elizabeth’s lips tightened. She could prevent a shiver as the violent and criminal discussions of the past crept into her memory. “Or to try to take over Fisher’s business. God, I thought I left all that behind me.”

James’s hand closed on her shoulder, gentle yet firm, at once comforting and thrilling. Every time he touched her...

asked. He released her and sat in Bertie’s vacant chair. “But you don’t think he killed Jarman?”

“I suppose they could have followed him here,” she said. “The other, who has known he had access to the diamonds, because of Pete Connor’s what? On the other hand, if they’d been caught spying on him, they’d have his fury.”

“Perhaps they caught that fury and that’s why they killed him,” Connor mused.

“There was no sign of a fight in the house,” her husband reminded James. “Suppose they could have tidied up, but they’d have had to be extremely careful about it, and I can’t help thinking Elizabeth would have noticed. I don’t want to introduce you to anything useful from your brother, Andover?”

“I learned that I apparently spent some time with yours, Griz.”

“My brother?” she said. “Which one?”

“Forsythe.”

“Oh. Well, that’s fine,” Grizelda said in apparent relief. “We can’t get into your brains easily enough.”

“Did you find talking to your brother jolted your memory at all?”

“Tizsa asked James. “Have you remembered any more about that night?”

James shook his head in clear frustration. “Very little.”

“This happened to my sister once,” Grizelda said. “Not from any overindulgence, you understand, but from a nasty shock. Going back to the places she had been, seeing the same people, seemed to help.”

“Which is why you and I need to find out where you were and what you did,” Dr. Tizsa said cheerfully. “Especially after you left White’s.”

“Oh, I know that, for I’d been before the night in question,” Dr. Tizsa replied. “I can find it easily enough—if it’s still open.”

“Excellent. We can go this afternoon, if you like. I find myself available, and we should consider taking your brother and Grizelda’s with us.”

“Mine has had enough of me for one day,” James said. Then he frantically added, “Besides, we should not leave the ladies alone, not since most of the underworld seems to know of this place.”

“You’re right, of course,” Dr. Tizsa responded. “I think we’ve done everything we can from Hanson Row and should now repair to Half Moon Street Lane.”

Thank them



Despite Elizabeth’s objections—“I have a mountain of sewing to complete, and I cannot accept your hospitality”—she found herself duly escorted to the house on Half Moon Street Lane.

She could not deny that Lady Grizelda’s spare bedchamber was more comfortable than her best room, but somehow that made things worse.

“I must not get used to this lifestyle,” she said in a rush. “I need to

l her. “Ibare little house and hard work. If I stay here, I will no longer be coi  
y quickgo back.”

did you “Do you think you will be if you don’t come here for a couple of d

Elizabeth sat down on the soft feather bed and sighed. “I don’t kno  
life is upside down again.”

Grizelda said, “No one should work so much that they damag  
hands and their eyes just to survive. I know it happens to many, o  
pick hischildren in much more appalling circumstances, but this is wrong f

You are a lady of education and intelligence—”

l?” Dr. “I am a fallen woman,” Elizabeth said. “Rightly disowned by my p

” I would rather work than beg.”

“You are a tricked and cheated woman, and I fail to see why we  
t fromlet Jarman win, even when he’s dead.”

κ to the Elizabeth blinked. “I can’t change the past.”

“We can change perception of the past. But I’d rather you think  
hat youfuture, what you would like to do with your life. I know you’ll want t

the sewing you have agreed to, so I suggest you take this time to fi

Jameswithout taking on more. I’m not wealthy, but I’m happy to take you  
companion for bed and board and a few gowns that you’ll have

ailable,yourself. Dragan doesn’t like me to be tired. It will be dull work, mos  
it will give you peace to think without having to worry if there’s a ro

owned,your head or if you’ll have enough money to eat the next day.”

of the “My business will suffer,” Elizabeth said stubbornly, “just  
beginning to grow.”

learned “Do you care?” Grizelda asked.

f Moon Elizabeth closed her gaping mouth. “No. Not really. But I *should* c

“I have a large family,” Grizelda said, “with a long reach. If you  
sew, we can recommend you to higher-paying customers. If you want  
permanent companion or governess or teacher, I can help with that,  
you want to marry and have children—”

omplete “You’re a matchmaker as well?” Elizabeth said with a hint of desp

nced in Grizelda laughed. “Who’d have thought it? Seriously, though, I

speak to some people about this case, and I think you should come w

s moreWe need to know about some of our suspects from Society’s point c

Therefore we need to go into Society, and I will need a companio  
y own,doesn’t say the wrong thing.”

intent to Elizabeth narrowed her eyes. "You are trying to manipulate me."

"Come and look at my feeble wardrobe. And then we need to v  
ays?" sister Azalea."

ow. My Half an hour later, wearing one of Lady Grizelda's plain but exc  
made gowns, Elizabeth walked with her hostess to Mount Street a  
ge their imposing townhouse inhabited by Lord and Lady Trench.

even to She felt very self-conscious in her borrowed finery, and yet t  
or you. material, the elegant cut, even when cinched in with a sash to fit Eliz  
thinner figure, made her feel oddly herself again. Lady Grizelda's ma  
parents. appeared to have many talents, had also pinned her hair into a less  
style. Grizelda had also lent her a hat with ribbons that matched the  
shouldher gown. Gradually, she felt herself remembering her posture, v  
straight-backed with her head up. As though clothes could change w  
who she was.

of your They could certainly change perceptions, though, as Grizelda had  
o finishout, for neither the Mount Street servants nor Lady Trench herself see  
inish it, see anything odd in Elizabeth's appearance. Her ladyship was disc  
on as a playing with her children in a private sitting room, and looked up a  
to alter from the floor with an unembarrassed smile.

tly, but Lady Azalea Niven, now Lady Trench, was beautiful by any sta  
of overPlaying so naturally with her children, she was breathtaking. Elizabeth  
ache that she eventually identified not as envy but as longing. Not fo  
as it's Trench's beauty, but for her children and the happiness they so  
brought her.

"Griz," her ladyship said. "Thank God. You have saved me fr  
are." wicked pirates."

wish to The pirates released their mother and hurled themselves at Lady C  
to be a instead with cries of, "Aunt Griz! Aunt Griz! You must be the enemy p  
too. If "Yo ho!" Grizelda said enthusiastically, waving an imaginary cutla  
one hand while she hugged them with the other.

eration. "Not all visitors are pirates, however," Lady Trench said. "And it  
need to for lessons before your father comes home."

with me. The children sighed, bowed and curtsyed, cast final grins at G  
f view. and ran off.

on who Lady Trench rose and smoothed her skirts without apology.

"Zalea, this is Miss Barker," Grizelda said. "Elizabeth, my eldes

Lady Trench.”

visit my “How do you do, Miss Barker?” Lady Trench said, offering a carelessly friendly hand. “Do sit down and we’ll have tea. What can I do for you, Griz? I know that look.”

and the “You sent us a card a couple of weeks ago,” Grizelda said, “for a soiree or some such thing.”

he soft “Yes, we’re raising money for a housing charity of Eric’s. *You don’t have to pay up to come. In fact, I was hoping you and Lady Swan would be here, or something. There will be a musical part of the evening, supper, and dancing.*”

trim of “May I bring Miss Barker?” Grizelda asked.

walking “Oh, yes,” Lady Trench replied, at the same time as Elizabeth exclaimed “Oh, no!”

Elizabeth blushed. “That is, you are very kind, but I have rather a pointed habit of going into Society.”

meant to “Then you should find it again in a good cause,” Lady Trench said cheerfully.

at them “Especially as some of the guests will interest you as well as Grizelda added. “Did you invite Lord James Andover, Zalea?”

standards. “Actually, I did. I’ve no idea where he is, but I included him on the list. I felt his family. Poor man. It must have been awful for him.”

or Lady “Did you also invite Sir Arthur and Lady Hampton?” Grizelda asked clearly. “Why don’t I just show you the guestlist,” Lady Trench said dryly. “You can tell me who else I should invite at insultingly short notice?”

om the Grizelda followed her sister to a desk, where she studied a long list with interest. The tea duly arrived, and she abandoned the list with a sigh of satisfaction.

irate!” “Anything else?” Lady Trench asked sweetly.

iss with Grizelda smiled. “Can we have some of your gowns?”

t’s time

Grizelda,

t sister,

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN RESPONSE TO Lady Grizelda's scribbled note, sent by urchin to her mansion in Park Lane, Lord Forsythe Niven was collected from White's on James and Tizsa's way to Coal Yard Lane.

"Andover!" he exclaimed in surprise, although his hand shot out without hesitation. "You must have had a grim time of it."

"Not as grim as some." James shook the outstretched hand, grateful for the normality of the greeting that made no effort to ignore his past. But Lord Forsythe had always been both good-natured and accepting of something of Grizelda's curiosity.

"And as if that's not bad enough," Niven said, "now Griz has involved you in one of her mad starts?"

"Actually, it seems that Griz—and Tizsa here—have involved them in my madness, for which I am grateful."

"Of course you are." Niven grinned at his brother-in-law, with whom he seemed to be on friendly terms. "Where are we going, then?"

"A gambling den in Coal Yard Lane," Tizsa replied, setting off in that direction.

"If it still exists," James added.

"Oh, it exists," Niven said uneasily. "It was raided by the Peelers a couple of years ago, but then it popped back up again, somewhat changed. Different fellow in charge, different members, including some very colorful characters I wouldn't like to sit next to, let alone play cards with."

"Then it no longer boasts gentlemen members?" Tizsa asked.

"A few of the fellows who like to live dangerously."

James raised his brows. "Have you grown staid, my lord?"

"Apparently, *my lord*," Niven replied with a lopsided smile. "I've had enough trouble dodging the matchmaking mamas without having the company of a fraternal fraternity on my coattails, too. Why do you want to go there?"

"We want to know how Andover came to take the blame for the d

theft,” Tizsa said. “And we think something might have happened that night of his betrothal party while he was at this den of vice.”

“I was there,” Niven said in a pleased tone of voice.

“You were,” Tizsa agreed. “And for once, we are relying on your sense to tell us what happened.”

“Lord, yes, you were three sheets to the wind,” Niven recalled, giving James a friendly nudge in the ribs. “In fact, as I recall, I helped take your father’s home.”

“For which I remain eternally in your debt. Did I ask you about jewelers?”

“Shouldn’t think so. Don’t know anything about ’em. My valet would not do that kind of purchase for me, since, apparently, I have no taste.”

“What jeweler does he use?” James asked, since, after all, Niven looked like a gentleman, although he couldn’t imagine a gentleman killing or robbing or lying to send an acquaintance to jail.

“No idea,” Niven replied. He was frowning. “You were going on about a ring at one point, though. For your intended, who was that beautiful girl?”

“She’s still a beautiful girl,” James said, almost surprised by how long Niven thought of her. “Though she wears someone else’s ring.”

“Sorry, old fellow.”

“Don’t be. Do you remember other people giving me advice about jewelers?”

Niven scratched his ear. “Not really. Don’t pay much attention to that kind of talk.”

“What did you do at the den?” Tizsa asked his brother-in-law.

Niven shrugged. “The usual. Played dice, played cards, flirted with girls.”

“When did you first see Andover there that night?” Tizsa asked.

“When he first arrived, I think... Yes, you came in in the midst of a noisy group, just as my card game was finishing up. You were with your brother Langley, and a naval officer whose name I’ve forgotten—he was going to carry you home, though—and several other fellows. Hampton was there, which surprised me, given that you’d just won the lady he was madly in love with. I waved to you and your whole crowd came over. Since my game was breaking up, you all sat down with me instead.”

“Who did Andover sit beside?” Tizsa asked.

on the Niven groaned. "Lord, how am I supposed to remember that? It was years ago, and I've sat around a lot of gaming tables since. Nevertheless, he scratched his ear some more, knocking his hat sideways at a very rakish angle as he did so. "Me," he said at last. "And I think I was on your other side."

giving "Where was Hampton?" James asked.

like you Niven cast him a disapproving look. "How in Hades do you imagine details could ever...? Wait, though, he was on the other side of the table about think, next to your brother, who had that banker fellow on his other side. One who married your sister."

makes "Earnest Front," James said.

had fair him then. "That's the chap. Amiable, decent kind of man. Though I barely had fair him then."

ne him "Did you converse during the game?" Tizsa asked.

about a concentrating on the cards." "Must have done," Niven replied, "though I'm pretty sure we were about concentrating on the cards."

rl..." "How many games did you play?"

ittle the "Oh, the devil, I can't remember such... Two." Niven sounded surprised. "Langley abandoned us after one, and a shiftier fellow took place."

about "What shifty fellow was this?" James broke in.

to that pursue my favorite waitress, and the rest of you moved on to some drinking, or playing in some cases, though I didn't see you at the table again."

with the Tizsa glanced around Niven to catch James's eye. "Do you remember of this?"

"Parts of it. Like disjointed photographs." Which wasn't comfortable for a big, all. He must have got ridiculously drunk, appallingly quickly, and he had to think of himself with so little control.

helped "When did you next notice him, Forsythe?"

s there, "Must have been an hour or so later," Niven said. He cast a quick glance at James. "You were with Hampton. No idea what you were saying, but the fellow looked pretty disgusted, so I went over to defuse the situation before it got out of hand."

"What was I saying?" James asked, though he wasn't sure he was

as three know.

then.” “No idea. Your naval friend had the same idea as me, and when they arrived, Hampton made his excuses and left.”

Marchett “Left the club?” Tizsa asked. “Or just your company?”

“The latter. I think. Didn’t pay any attention, to be honest, but Andover was in such a state he could hardly slur his words together.”

ne such “Christ,” James muttered.

table, I “Sorry, old chap. Been there too, and it’s never fun afterward. The brother Langley tried to persuade you to go home with him, but you weren’t having it. We said we’d take you when you’d finished your drink. What the odd, because you didn’t have a drink just then. Probably thought another y knew minutes would make you more pliable.”

“Was I *fighting* drunk?” James asked, appalled.

“Lord no. You could barely stand, let alone take a swing at someone. We were all just seemed pretty determined to stay where you were. Probably because you were almost asleep. About a quarter of an hour later, we heaved you up and you didn’t object. We all but carried you into the hackney and then up to a faintly bedroom. Left your brother to put you to bed.”

ook his “Thank you,” James muttered. “And my apologies.”

“None necessary, old fellow, it’s what friends are for. Besides, it’s every day a fellow gets happily betrothed.” Niven grimaced. “Sorry.”

James stopped. They had turned into Coal Yard Lane, and he recalled the serious the gambling den only too well. It was housed in a tall, old, ramshackle building, with steps rather like the area steps of a big house, leading down to a lower-ground floor and an unexpectedly grand front door with a large square window. The porter, he recalled, peered at everyone before he let them in or sent them about their business. The ground floor at least had a table apart of the club, housing private rooms for rent, though James had not inquired about the rest of the building.

Niven, who apparently was still a member of the club, led the way down the steps.

grin at “Do you remember coming this way that night?” Tizsa murmured but the James as they followed.

efore it James nodded.

“Then keep me informed as we go,” Tizsa instructed him. “Even if you intended to that you recall, whether you’ve mentioned it before or not.”

James remembered the block sliding back and the perusing eye of the reporter, although it was not the same porter who let them in now.

“Welcome, gentlemen. Please sign in the book.”

Niven signed for himself and his guests, though Tizsa peered over his shoulder, no doubt taking in the other names on the page.

The slightly dingy passage was familiar, as was the main room into which Niven led them. Only, no candles were lit in the daylight of the afternoon. Your making the room gloomier as well as much emptier than James recalled. There weren't one sat at the large gaming tables, or the roulette wheel. Only two debauched looking young gentlemen sat at one table, playing piquet with a large silver jug between them. By the state of their posture, hair, and clothes, nothing of the stubble on their jaws, they had probably been there at least the same time yesterday.

Otherwise, a waiter sprawled at a table by the window, yawning and reading a newspaper, although he sprang to his feet as the newcomers entered. “Gentlemen, please sit where you will. What would you like? Some wine or ale? A little dinner, perhaps?”

“Bottle of decent claret, if you please,” Niven said cheerfully.

“And a pack of cards,” Tizsa added.

Niven turned toward one of the smaller tables, but Tizsa caught his arm to stop him. Catching on, James glanced around to recall where he had recognized before. The positions of the tables were much the same. He walked to a large table in the center of the room and chose a chair in the middle of one of the long sides. Tizsa and Niven sat down on either side of him.

The wine was brought and poured, and at a nod from Tizsa, Niven dealt them the cards. Yes, this had happened before, only the chandelier above had been lit and a lamp had glowed on every table and in the corners of the room.

“Recall things as they were that night,” Tizsa said. “Where did you and your brother sit?”

They went through it all without playing a game, although Tizsa asked unexpectedly, “Who won that first game?”

“He did,” James said, jerking his hand at Niven, who nodded in agreement.

After that, they went through what James recalled of the second game, and, considering three years had passed with many more events to

of the trivia, he was surprised by how much he could recall. The more images that had previously flashed through his mind had become in fact much steadier, continuous memory.

“Who won that second game?” Tizsa asked.

James wrinkled his nose. “Hampton.”

“Did that annoy you?”

“No, but his smug expression did. Then Earnest Front said something. Nolike, *Lucky at cards, unlucky in love*, and Hampton glared at him. I felt touched-tactless of Front, to say the least, and felt more charitable toward Hampton. Niven sat up. “I’d forgotten that, but you’re right. Bad form, kid, to say fellow when he’s down.”

“Was that why you stopped playing?”

James shook his head. “I don’t think so. I was just bored. Graham took our wine to a quieter table and talked, because he was leaving in the morning for his ship and probably wouldn’t be back for the wedding.”

“Where did you and Graham sit?” Tizsa asked. James stood and walked around him, before walking toward a small table at the back corner. He picked up the cards, and Tizsa brought the bottle. As they resettled, the waiter looked slightly bewildered, then returned to his newspaper.

“Did you have a bottle with you?” Tizsa asked.

James stared at the table, remembered the glass in his hand and Graham’s face opposite, laughing as they clinked glasses over an empty table. “I’ll have the glasses in our hands.”

“Did you order a bottle, then?”

“Not that I remember, but I suppose we must have... Wait, the waitress refilled my glass with brandy and sauntered off. I called her to pour one for Graham, too, and she laughed and said it was from another bottle and Graham could get his own. So he did.”

“Did you drink from his bottle, then?”

James rubbed his forehead. Images flashed behind his eyes, the scene with wine and brandy in glasses, laughing friend’s faces, a girl tossing her hair and swishing her skirt provocatively as she moved away from him. A noisy, mostly innoise, voices and clinking glasses that sounded too loud, piercing his thoughts, a blur of faceless people that were increasingly hard to recognize. And in the end, mind had hummed with new and interesting thoughts, and though he knew he should go home, he had felt too good.

nentary “I was happy,” he said in disbelief. “How the devil could I be h  
places at that state?”

“Did you go anywhere else?” Tizsa asked. “Or did you just sit here  
A foggy memory flitted by James. Weaving unsteadily between tal  
arm holding him up.

“Whose arm?” Tizsa asked. “Graham’s?”  
nothing “No... That is, I don’t think so. I sat somewhere else.”

“There?” Niven said, pointing to a table nearer to the waiter.  
pton.” where I found you.”

Tizsa lifted the bottle once more, and they moved to the table  
indicated. The waiter began to look decidedly wary.

“We’re chasing memories,” Tizsa said to him. “My friend hasn  
n and there for three years and is piecing together one memorable night. Ha  
; in the worked here long?”

“A bit more than a year. After it changed hands.”  
looked “Who owns it now?” James asked.

“There are a few partners,” the waiter said. “I only know Mr. Gorn  
e waiter The name meant nothing to James. Nor, looking about him, co  
remember more than blurs. Once there was his brother’s voice, and  
had determined to stay with this good feeling and not obey John, w  
aham’s just plain bossy—but beyond that, only a pressing blackness that su  
No, just frightened him.

He sprang to his feet. “Going for a walk,” he muttered, and all bu  
from the main room in search of fresh air.

In the passage, however, he halted. Here, the smell of stale alcol  
back to cigar smoke was less. A cool draft drifted through from the back  
admirerhouse, where the kitchens were located, bringing with it fresh cooking

A staircase led to the floor above, where private rooms could be rer  
games or supper, or less respectable activities. James was fairly s  
lash of brother had made use of one of them on the night in question. Jo  
er head always been terribly respectable, which was what made his obsessio  
blur of that little waitress so rare.

*Did I go up there, too? Was that where I got so drunk and so happ  
yet he couldn’t walk?*

Try as he would—he even set his hand on the banister and his foo  
first step—he couldn’t recall ever climbing those stairs. He turned

happy infacing the front door, and realized the porter had gone from his post. ' was early and things were quiet. No doubt there would be little break :?" later on.

bles, an James took the opportunity to go up to the members book, which back years, and began to scan the pages at random. Voices and the cl pans drifted through from the kitchen, then hurried footsteps coming him.

"That's Rather than bolt out the door or try to hide in the porter's narrow James decided to brazen it out, and continued turning and scanning the : NivenThe footsteps paused. The hairs on the back of James's neck prickled draft brought another scent, of male cologne, familiar and yet unpla 't beenAbruptly, and yet furtively, the footsteps began again, this time receding ive you James spun around in time to see a dark gray coat and a flash o hair vanish to the left of the kitchen. James started after him, since t was clearly even more reluctant to be seen than James.

The blond man had turned left into a narrow passage that was en an." the time James got there. A door at the end led, probably, to a ba ould heApart from that, James found only a broom cupboard. Hastily, he tu l Jamesback door and found it locked. There was no sign of a key.

ho was He returned to the main passage, where he found Tizsa peering ou iddenlygaming hall.

"Are you well?" Tizsa asked.

t bolted "Fine," James said impatiently. "But a fair-haired man just bolte the sight of me."

hol and "Did you recognize him?" Tizsa asked.

of the "I only caught a glimpse of him from the back. It could hav smells.anyone."

ited for As they talked, the porter ambled toward them from the kitchen. ure hishelp you, sirs?"

hn had "No, we just thought we might leave quietly by a back door," Jame

on with "Sorry, sir, the back door is for staff only. It's kept locked."

"But you must have a key," James replied.

y that I "I'm staff," the porter pointed out, making no offers.

"Of course you are. I suppose the owners use the back door, too?"

t on the "On occasion."

l away, "Satisfy my curiosity. Who is the owner with the fair hair?"



Well, it “Oh, I think they all have fair hair.” The porter and James regarded for him other with dislike.

“You’re a close-lipped fellow,” Tizsa observed. “Secretive business, suppose, running a club like this.”

“Your hats, gentlemen,” the porter said with finality.  
toward



box,  
pages. “THE NIGHT OF your betrothal party,” Tizsa said to James, “did you see and the night?”

It was after a simple, pleasant dinner in Half Moon Street, and the night they sat in the drawing room. Elizabeth, surrounded by glowing lamplight, sewing with swift efficiency, her eyes intent on her work, although she clearly listening.

There was something different about her appearance, although James until now to realize what it was. Her hair was different. No longer scraped back from her face in a severe knot, her riot of curls was carried more loosely, allowing a soft frame for her face that emphasized the beauty of her features. She also wore a much newer, better-quality gown that was slightly too big for her. Not that it seemed to matter what she wore, how she pinned her hair. He liked to look at her too much. It gave him a warm, tingling feeling about his heart that was as addictive as the desire thrumming somewhat lower. The faint color staining her cheeks told him she was aware of his scrutiny. She didn’t look up, but nor did she seem upset or unhappy.

“Sleep,” James repeated, aware that Tizsa had spoken to him. He had been absorbing the rest of the question and trying to think back. He frowned. “Can I think so, but to be honest, my head was so fuzzy and I had such dreams that I’m not sure. Even without the fiendish headache in the morning, the dreams would have been enough to turn me sober for life. Why ask?”

“Because I’m pretty sure you were drugged,” Tizsa said. “Probably laudanum, although there are other substances that could have the same effect. Probably after you stood up from the gaming table and before your head started spinning. My guess would be it was in the brandy they gave you when she gave none to your friend Graham.”

ed each James blinked. “Isn’t it more likely I was simply drunk wheelbarrow?”

iness, I “Excessive alcohol can lead to blackouts,” Tizsa allowed. “But w describe—the flashing images, the increased sensitivity—are not symptoms of simple drunkenness. Do you know who the waitress was’

James shook his head. “I didn’t go there often enough to distingui anyway, my head was too full of Cordelia to notice other women. Joh brother Langley—is more likely to know, but I don’t believe he was leep all room at the time. But why would anyone trouble to drug me? Just so make a fool of myself?”

four of “Or so you wouldn’t remember who recommended Mason the j ps, was And if you did remember, no one would believe you because of the st she was were in.”

Elizabeth lowered her sewing to her lap, gazing at James with distr it took Grizelda said, “And so you would feel so dreadful in the morni longer you would take the easiest path to your committed intention of cho onfined ring for Cordelia.”

delicate “None of that was guaranteed,” James protested.

wn that “But it worked,” Elizabeth said. “You do have an enemy amor wore or friends.”

him a “Jarman’s gentlemanly ally,” James said slowly.

earthier They thought about that for a while. Then Grizelda said, “The l :kbones candidates will all be at Azalea’s soiree on Wednesday. James can loc did she over, and we can observe their reactions to him. And, of course, Dra sketch their portraits. And then we can show them to witnesses lik plinked, Mason.”

l. “Yes, James and Elizabeth both gazed at her in consternation.

1 awful “In a nutshell,” Tizsa said.

orning,  
do you

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re your  
waitress

James blinked. “Isn’t it more likely I was simply drunk as a wheelbarrow?”

“Excessive alcohol can lead to blackouts,” Tizsa allowed. “But what you describe—the flashing images, the increased sensitivity—are not normal symptoms of simple drunkenness. Do you know who the waitress was?”

James shook his head. “I didn’t go there often enough to distinguish, and anyway, my head was too full of Cordelia to notice other women. John—my brother Langley—is more likely to know, but I don’t believe he was in the room at the time. But why would anyone trouble to drug me? Just so that I’d make a fool of myself?”

“Or so you wouldn’t remember who recommended Mason the jeweler. And if you did remember, no one would believe you because of the state you were in.”

Elizabeth lowered her sewing to her lap, gazing at James with distress.

Grizelda said, “And so you would feel so dreadful in the morning that you would take the easiest path to your committed intention of choosing a ring for Cordelia.”

“None of that was guaranteed,” James protested.

“But it worked,” Elizabeth said. “You do have an enemy among your friends.”

“Jarman’s gentlemanly ally,” James said slowly.

They thought about that for a while. Then Grizelda said, “The likeliest candidates will all be at Azalea’s soiree on Wednesday. James can look them over, and we can observe their reactions to him. And, of course, Dragan can sketch their portraits. And then we can show them to witnesses like Mrs. Mason.”

James and Elizabeth both gazed at her in consternation.

“In a nutshell,” Tizsa said.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

OVER THE NEXT day, Elizabeth worked her way through her remaining and mending tasks. The day after that, accompanied by Lord James, w returned to his own rooms but called each day in Half Moon Street La returned the finished items to their respective owners. To each customers, she said she was spending a little while away and would l know when she was available again. However, she increasingly liked t of never being available for such work again. The prospect of retur Hanson Row made her feel unspeakably lonely, and yet she could n herself to live off Grizelda and Tizsa for more than the few days unt Trench's party.

"Are you nervous about the party?" James asked her once, as they back from Kensington, through the park.

"Inevitably, but I'm excited too. I have a feeling we'll learn a gre And besides, I've been altering an evening gown of Lady Azale myself. Griz extracted several gowns *and* hats from her."

"I don't imagine you accepted them for nothing."

"I'm mending some linen for her," Elizabeth admitted.

"And for Griz?"

"Letting out some gowns so that they'll be more comfortable as h grows."

He looked at her. "Griz and Dragan might live a little hand-to-m the standards of the wealthy, but the Trenches are, in vulgar pa stinking rich."

"That doesn't matter. I don't like to take something for nothing. I suppose." She cast him a rueful glance. "You don't want to go to the all, do you?"

"No. But since a large part of our aim seems to be to let people g me, I shall just have to put up with it."

"I'm sure you'll repel the gawpers with one lift of an eyebrow." Sl

his arm a little shake, since she was holding it at the time. She liked it of it, solid and protective. “I don’t believe your old friends are rejecting my lord. But your protective indifference makes it seem that you rejected *them*. In the case of your brother, there is more to the story than you know, because he clearly cares for you. You should take the opportunity to speak to him.”

She thought he might be thinking about that, but then he said, “I’d be much better when you call me James.”

“A slip of the tongue,” she muttered.

“I’ll forgive you if you dance with me at the soiree.”

“Don’t be silly, my lord. You will dance with ladies of your own rank.”

“I’ll dance with whom I like, providing the lady agrees.”

“We’ll see,” Elizabeth said primly, taking the coward’s way out, but in truth she wanted to dance with him far too much, and the last thing she needed was to fall any deeper into...whatever this feeling was.

“You’re right about one thing, though,” he said, gazing straight ahead. “My body might be free, but my mind is still in prison. Instead of making the most of my freedom, I’ve been obsessed with the past, with vengeance. I can change nothing for the better.”

“Be kind to yourself. You’ve only been free a matter of weeks.”

“My first duty should have been to the people I am responsible for. I have a decent little estate in Kent. I have tenants and dependents that I have neglected. I’ve gone near.”

“Go now,” she urged, although she would miss him. “Go before it’s too late for your party.”

“I thought I might. May I ask a favor of you?”

“Of course.”

He looked down at her, his eyes unreadable. “Come with me?”

Emotion hit her in a torrent. Intense pleasure that he would ask her to go with him, and the disappointment that she could not accept. “I can’t. Whatever I do, I will lose my reputation. Wherever Miss Barker has been for three years, she has been at least been out of the public eye. She cannot be seen gallivanting with me now.”

“I don’t mean to stay there this first visit, just post down there for a luncheon at the house—in the presence of my very respectable household—and return before dark. I would like to see it through your eyes.”

the feelquirked. "I would like your company. But if you would rather not, I  
ng you,sulk."

u have She drew in a breath rather than give in to temptation. "I will as  
han weGrizelda what she thinks," she said at last.

inity to A hiss of laughter escaped James's lips. "You do know that Gri  
paid attention to convention? If she wasn't a duke's daughter, she wou  
I like itbeen ruined several times over. You would do better to consult Lady A

He told her that, even though it worked against him. And for that  
she decided to go with him before she had asked anyone's advice.

ank."



becauseTHEY LEFT AT first light, in a comfortable closed carriage that protecte  
ing shefrom the threatening fog in the city, and from any rain encountere  
country. As they left London behind, she sat forward in excitement,  
ahead.eagerly out of all three windows in turn. It was so long since she had  
ing thethe countryside that her heart lifted immeasurably. She even pulled do  
nce thatwindow and took off her bonnet to feel the wind rushing against her s  
tugging at her hair.

Watching her, James smiled and poured her coffee from a flask. He  
: I ownthe back-facing bench, which was quite proper. As much as the  
haven'tviews, she found she liked the glimpses of his lean body swaying easil  
movement of the carriage. Their conversation was desultory yet comf  
ore thewith just that edge of physical awareness she always felt in his compar

Eventually, after they changed horses, the flat, bucolic scenery ga  
on one side to the sea.

Elizabeth inhaled the salty tang. "Do you live near the sea?"

"Yes, just another few miles beyond Rochester. Gailsham Court i  
c. Deepfrom the main roads, so it's quite peaceful."

ill need "Was it your childhood home?" she asked.

has at "Oh no. We lived mostly at my father's main seat in Staffordshir  
ith youLondon, when we weren't at school. We only visited Gailsham occas  
but I always knew it was mine. I imagined I would live there with C  
e, haveonce we were married, though to be honest, I never thought about th  
keeperas much as I did in Newgate."

His lips She glanced at him. "Did you make plans in Newgate? Fo

[ shan'trevenge?"

"Not really. I vaguely—very vaguely—vowed to do something Ladyworthwhile, something good and selfless if only I could be free again," she gave a dismissive, self-deprecating wave. "You can't make deals with the Almighty."

The horses slowed and turned into a road that was more of a track than a zalea." leaned forward and pointed out the window. "Look, there's the house," she said, "can just see it through the trees."

The first glimpse of golden stone and shimmering water beyond the carriage gave her breath. The second, clearer view from the drive left her speechless. A pretty, stately manor house overlooked a fountain and well-kept grounds, with woods to the back and fields to either side, and the sea in the distance. Somehow, the whole place just seemed *warm*.

"Oh, James, it's beautiful," she said at last. And she—or the horses—received one of his rare, melting smiles.

When the carriage pulled up at the top of the drive, he alighted unhurriedly and turned to hand Elizabeth down before he glanced up at the house and at the housekeeper waiting to welcome them. His manner was

tranquil, unemotional, but it seemed Elizabeth had learned to read the signs. She sat on the carriage for she sensed the pleasure, the excitement rushing beneath his surface. It seemed to hum beneath his light touch, showing outwardly only a slight stiffness of his posture, as though he held himself under rigid control. Even the housekeeper, whom he introduced as Mrs. Fairley, and who

dashed down the front steps in welcome, seemed compelled by his presence into a more distant welcome than she had intended. On James's request, she swept Elizabeth up to a bedchamber to wash and be comfortable for luncheon.

"I'm sorry, we don't have a full staff here just now," Mrs. Fairley said, "so I can't offer you the services of a maid. However, I am happy to help with anything personal you might need."

"Thank you, but I'll only be a minute or two."

It was as she re-emerged from the room that the housekeeper looked at her. "How is he?" as though the words would no longer be contained.

"Well," Elizabeth replied, and then, since she could see the genuine concern in the older woman's eyes, added, "Adjusting."

"Of course."

There was something of the old retainer in her clear affection, something James had told her he rarely came here. The house had always been in his plans than in his life.

“Have you been in this position for long?” Elizabeth asked.

“About five years.” Three of which James had spent in Newgate. James must have seen the question in Elizabeth’s expression, for she smiled. “You came when my husband died. He was the vicar of Gartside in Staffordshire. I was provided for, of course, but I had nothing to do, and the new vicar thought it presented my involvement in the life of the parish. Lord James offered me a position here, and I jumped at the chance. I hope he will live here at least a few years, of the time, for...” She broke off as James came into view, wandering in from the garden. “Luncheon will be served in the parlour, my lord.”

“I wish I’d known you before,” Elizabeth blurted as he led her into a bright, pleasant dining room with views over the lawn. A fire burned brightly in the grate, providing a welcome warmth and homeliness to a house too little used at the moment.

He didn’t ask before what. Before his world had betrayed him. The signs, prison had changed him.

“I am not destroyed, Miss Barker,” he said mildly. “I was always in the same way.”

“Like what?”

He poured a glass of sherry and handed it to her. “Introverted and contained. If anything, that gave me strength in prison.”

She took the glass carefully, and yet their fingers still brushed in part before like the wings of some fleeing butterfly. “No youthful wild oats for you then?” she asked lightly.

“I didn’t say that.” Something changed in his eyes that sent her searching for help.

He must have been irresistible to women, all curiosity and desire beneath a formidable self-control. She felt it now. Even knowing what he did of men, she felt the dangerous tug of physical attraction and wondered what intimacy would be like with him.

Shocked at herself, she turned away to hide the heat flooding up from her toes, and was relieved to see Mrs. Fairley carrying in a soup tureen. A little maid scurried at her side with a loaf of new bread that smelled de-



and yet The round table had been set with two places, gleaming silver, and fine  
more in James held Elizabeth's chair for her then sat beside her, a  
comfortable kind of intimacy. For a week now, she had not eaten alone  
more often than not, this man had been among her companions. And  
te. She his word. The proprieties were observed, with the maid hovering by the  
iled. "I whenever Mrs. Fairley was out of the room. The conversation fre  
lshire. Included the housekeeper, who answered his questions about local  
r's wife and brought one or two tenant disputes to his attention. He listen  
me the promised to speak to the steward.

ast part "Excellent luncheon, Mrs. Fairley," he said when they had fi  
ig from "Especially produced at such short notice. Thank you. Would you ca  
lirectly, walk, Miss Barker? It's a pleasant stroll toward the village."

Elizabeth agreed to this with alacrity. Though, of course, strolling  
: into a enough.

l in the "I want to run," she confessed, after a few minutes of de  
le lived perambulation on James's arm.

"So do I," he admitted. "I used to dream of it in Newgate—  
Before dream. Exercising in a cell is not the same."

"A lady never runs," Elizabeth said.  
ys like "Foolish rules." He glanced behind them, and then all around  
harvest was in, so the fields were quiet. "I don't think anyone will see  
we?"

l. Self- His eyes danced beguilingly. There was no way she could resist  
Catching her breath, she released his arm and untied the ribbons of her  
passing, Lady Azalea's hat. She whisked it off with one hand. He took the other  
or you, as one, they began to run.

"To the trees!" he shouted. It was the first time she had ever heard  
tomach raise his voice.

The run was brief, joyful, exhilarating. Even beneath all those skirts  
passion legs stretched and pounded over the uneven ground while the sharp  
hat she whipped through her hair and over her skin. His hand steadied her when  
ondered stumbled, though his pace never let up, and neither did hers, until she  
his longer legs needed more, and she wanted to weep for him  
rom her confinement, unbearable to a young and active man.

while a "Go," she gasped, releasing his fingers. "Go."  
licious. But he held on, shaking his head before casting her one indecisive

the china, glance. "With you," he said into the wind, pulling her on. A whole train of more emotions surged, pushing her onward until she didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

He kept She did laugh when they made it to the trees, because he did, and for a few moments they held on to the broad trunk of a tree, panting.

Quietly "That," Elizabeth gasped, "was happiness!"

Matters "Is," he corrected her, swinging up their still joined hands. He turned his head against the bark of the tree, smiling at her, and her bones seemed to

dissolve. He moved, reaching up to her cheek. His handsome face, bathed in the autumn sunshine, swam before hers—and then his mouth covered hers for a

moment. A sound like a sob escaped her because she had wanted this so much when he would have drawn back, she grasped the back of his neck and pulled

him toward her. His body enveloped hers, pushing her against the tree, and she felt a

thrill of threat, only wild arousal and pleasure. Deliciously aware of every movement of his

body, she opened her mouth wider, welcoming him in, glorying in his responsive groan. He caressed her throat, and slowly, tenderly, moved his

arms, literally shoulders and breasts to her waist and hips, where they lingered, holding her steady while his body began to move in time with his mouth.

"We could show each other such new worlds," he whispered again. His lips touched hers. "New wonders, new joys... You bring me *life*, Elizabeth Barker."

He shall His words struck some chord deep within her that tightened her heart around him. Her body felt on the verge of disintegration, every nerve

trembling now with delight and desperation. She knew he felt it too, for his breathless words—that was different now, and the intense, clouded heat of his eyes betokened a

smoldering desire that excited rather than frightened her. He kissed her again, trailing one finger from her lips down her throat and

then he covered the hollow between her breasts. "I meant to be good and gentlemanly and honorable, and now all I can think about is taking you to the woods, herbed. Or at least to some soft, hidden place in the woods..." Leaving her

to breathe, he rested his forehead against hers. "Don't worry. I won't." She swallowed. "I'm not worried."

She realized A breath of laughter that was part groan escaped him. "Don't tempt me, long For a moment, all she could hear was the drumming of her heart against

his beat strongly beneath her fingertips. Then she realized the fallen leaves were rustling gently in the breeze and the birds were singing sweet, herable songs above.

ngle of He said, "I am a reticent man, a flawed man. But I refuse to be a  
her sheone. Could you ever love me, Elizabeth?"

She closed her eyes, letting warmth and gladness and loss overwhelm her for a passion. "I am a fallen woman and a seamstress. Even before that, I was a mere banker's daughter, unworthy of a marquis's son."

"You are avoiding the question," he observed, stepping back, and when she panicked and seized his hand.

"No. I am trying to make you face reality."

His fingers caressed hers. A smile tugged at the corner of his devilish mouth. "Then there is hope for me?"

*I love you. God help me, I loved you from the first.* "For us," she said, clinging slipping free of him and picking up her fallen hat. "Now, where is this roof yours?"

inch of

his soft,

ver her

ling her IF JAMES HADN'T already had leanings toward egalitarianism, Newgate  
inst her have taught him. No one cared about your birth or whether your spillo  
er arms was blue. Only the strongest and the richest survived. Elizabeth had  
e alight safe, respectable home for a man her parents considered beneath her—  
essness as it happened, but if they hadn't been so quick to judge, perhaps she  
ayed a have discovered for herself before it was too late. But that she should  
preposterous. his superior birth as a barrier to their being together now

Of course, that might not be the only reason. He was experienced  
throat to to recognize a willing woman, and Elizabeth was far from indifferent  
today, But attraction and physical desire were not necessarily love or comm  
you to She needed time. After all, they had barely known each other a  
ier lips, however much of that time had been spent together. This feeling b  
them had grown from an instant spark to a consuming fire, at least for  
He hadn't consciously given her his heart, but it seemed she held it a  
t me." this quiet, strong woman who had not only survived but thrived, quit  
t, while in a world that was scarier than any female of her class would norma  
l leaves discover.

, gentle He showed her the village, made conversation with the locals, and  
to curious passersby. In between times, they talked of impersonal thir



fearful nevertheless revealed her opinions and her compassion and her precise thought. James drank everything in, but they were almost back at the elm here before he realized another barrier to their being together, perhaps the one that mattered.

He had never mentioned commitment or marriage, only love. Given in spite she regarded herself, this was a catastrophic mistake, and one he instinctively knew he couldn't mend convincingly now by making promises. How many girls had been ruined by false promises of marriage?

Instead, as they approached the front of the house, her arm propped on his, he said casually, "I'm a fallen man too, you know."

She blinked. "I beg your pardon?"

"I fell when I was sixteen," he explained. "I enjoyed it so much many times after that." He met her stunned gaze. "Youthful wildness is quoted. "Now I lean more toward mutual fidelity, along with all that peace and joy. You know, you could divide this house in two quite easily."

"Why would you want to do that?" she asked, bewildered.

"So that our school full of noisy little brats doesn't overrun the crowded drawing room, of course. Look, I'll show you. There's a side entrance here..."

Although slightly bemused, she followed him around the house through the side hallway to the back of the building and the other staircase.

"Are these the servants' stairs?" she asked, surprised.

"No." He pointed to the green baize door. "The servants' stairs go through there. This is just another family staircase for convenience. It could block this part of the house off with a partition and a door. The classrooms here could easily be classrooms."

He leapt up the stairs, two at a time, and was relieved that she followed him and even peered into the large salon at the top.

"For play sports on rainy days," he said gravely.

"Nonsense," she protested. "It is clearly the music room where they learn to dance like little ladies and gentlemen. Oh, very well, and play on rainy days, too. It is an excellent room."

"With a teachers' sitting room opposite, and even a dining room."

"Not with a carpet! Think of the ground-in mess after the food fight."

"My dear Miss Barker, there will be no food fights in our school."

"Then we shall have to ensure the food is too good yet not too at

esses of to lose value.”

the house “Excellent plan.”

They only Their ideas became gradually more ridiculous and so amusing that  
was barely time to show her the rest of the house—“Where we shall  
en how peaceful and civilized opulence,” he declared—before it was time to go  
actively “So, what do you think of my house?” he asked as the horses pulled  
v many down the drive.

“I think it’s beautiful but needs to be lived in,” she said. “And I think  
erly on could be very happy there.”

He sat back, prepared to settle for that. For now.

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to lose value.”

“Excellent plan.”

Their ideas became gradually more ridiculous and so amusing that there was barely time to show her the rest of the house—“Where we shall live in peaceful and civilized opulence,” he declared—before it was time to go.

“So, what do you think of my house?” he asked as the horses pulled them down the drive.

“I think it’s beautiful but needs to be lived in,” she said. “And I think you could be very happy there.”

He sat back, prepared to settle for that. For now.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ON THE EVENING of Lady Trench's soiree, her ladyship sent the carriage to collect them early, so that they were all comfortably ensconced when she wished to be before the other guests arrived. Elizabeth was glad of the opportunity to settle her nerves.

When she had emerged from Lady Grizelda's spare bedroom and came downstairs to join the others, Grizelda had beamed approval at her. "You look lovely, Elizabeth! Doesn't she, James?"

"Yes," James had replied. "But then, you always do."

It was mere politeness, of course. But there had been those kisses which really must not think about tonight, of all nights, when it was her wish to see him restored to the family and Society from which he had deliberately isolating himself.

In the couple of days since their trip into Kent, she had forced him to avoid him, to concentrate on altering the evening gown and morning dress given to her by Grizelda and Lady Trench. To avoid the memories in London—sweet, arousing memories for which she would always be grateful—she had tried to think of her future.

She thought she would gladly accept Lady Grizelda's help in finding an alternative, more congenial employment, as a governess or a school teacher. The trouble was, she could no longer think about teaching, but only remembering James's country house, and their half-joking visions of the school they would create there.

Why had he brought the subject up? Why had he kissed her? Why had he confessed to his youthful indiscretions? Just to show her that he was not inferior to her? Men were not expected to be pure, of course, particularly not men of his class, but it was hardly gentlemanly to talk about it. On the other hand, she could not shake the belief that he was being deliberately, calculatedly dishonest. So that she might believe everything else he said.

*"Could you ever love me, Elizabeth?"*

Lady Trench, who seemed to be very tolerant of her sister's inventions and oddities, was discovered in the main salon enjoying a quiet glass of wine with her husband—another fair man. Both came at once to welcome the guests. Lord Trench greeted Grizelda casually with a kiss on the cheek and shook hands with Tizsa before the introductions were made. He shook hands with Elizabeth, too, and said to James, "Very glad to see you here, with Grizelda. Griz has inveigled you into."

"Dragan just needs to draw some people whom James will point out to you," Grizelda said as though this was perfectly natural behavior. "Barker and I shall observe."

"You won't start a fight, will you, Griz?" Lady Trench asked with a slight unease. "Because Eric's sisters will never forgive me."

"Why, of course not," Grizelda said, shocked. "We shall be positive and discreet. Show me where you and Eric will greet the guests..."

By arrangement, all four of them began the evening close to the door. James lounged elegantly in conversation with Elizabeth, so that the guests would see him at once. Grizelda lurked to the side of the door, guarded by Tizsa, who had his inevitable notebook and pencil at the ready.

"Here they come," James murmured as the sounds of arrivals filtered through the doorway. Elizabeth felt a stab of panic through with disappointment because her time enjoying James's exclusive attention was over. He touched her hand. "You are a charming, beautiful lady," he murmured. "With as much right as everyone else to be here."

There was no time for more, although she soaked up the compliments like a needy sponge. The first people to arrive were total strangers to each other. Elizabeth and James. Grizelda shook her head surreptitiously and watched the couple behind, who appeared to be family. As they swept past Lady Trench into the room, Elizabeth got a clear view of the two people standing in line.

Her parents. Words deserted her. But she must have made some sound of distress. James glanced down at her and said something, just as her smiling face curtseyed to Lord Trench—and looked past him straight to Elizabeth.

Her mother's jaw dropped. She stopped so suddenly that her father's feet swerve very neatly to avoid collision. Then, of course, he followed his frozen gaze to their daughter.



They hadn't changed a great deal, except that they had clearly come with the world to be invited to Lady Trench's event, charitable though it might be. They still looked healthy and prosperous, and the sapphires around her neck and mother's neck and in her ears were familiar. They even looked almost as shocked and horrified as when she had last seen them, when she had told them she had never been going to marry Joshua.

They had been right to forbid her. The knowledge kept her as pale as death, until James murmured in her ear, "Elizabeth?"

"Miss Elizabeth," he said, "It broke the spell enough for her to take a stumbling step forward, then they moved, too, sailing forward with grim determination like warriors in a vague battle."

"Mama," she said, her voice uncharacteristically husky. "Papa." James stepped back again, no doubt to give them privacy, and Elizabeth almost panicked.

"What are you doing here?" her mother whispered furiously. Her eyes swept the room. "Don't tell me *he* is here, too?"

"Joshua is dead," Elizabeth said flatly, "so no."

"Then why on earth—*how* on earth—are you in this house?" he demanded, his voice low and furious. "Do you think to embarrass me, shot blackmail us?"

She had been foolish all over again. Just for an instant, when she had seen them, she had longed for them like a child, imagined that things would be different.

"No," she said, glad to hear that steadiness had returned to her. "Lady Trench invited me as a friend of Lady Grizelda."

Her parents looked stunned. And then, with relief, she felt James stand beside her once more, the back of his hand brushing against her fingers, lending her strength.

"I think you are not acquainted with my parents, sir?" she murmured.  
"Allow me to present Mr. and Mrs. Barker. This is Lord James Andover, for James did not offer his hand to her now completely flummoxed by her mother. His demeanor was that of the cold, sardonic man she had first seen emerge from the fog, and he merely inclined his head. "How do you do, my lady? I had to compliment on your charming daughter. Perhaps you will excuse us, as my wife's another friend has arrived, Miss Barker."

He threaded her numb hand through his arm, urging her to walk.

ie up intoward Grizelda and Tizsa, who stood now with a handsome couple  
it was.darker man she recognized as Solomon Grey.

nd her “I’m sorry,” she whispered, “I didn’t mean... It was so unexpect  
nost asnow we’ve missed several arrivals. We should return to our previous—

he was “In a moment,” he said. “I will still be seen. Let us greet Mr. Gr  
Griz know he would be here?”

ralyzed “She didn’t mention him.” Grizelda hadn’t mentioned Elizabeth’s  
either, though she had studied the guestlist carefully enough that sh  
rd, andhave seen their names.

arships “Hmm... Do you think we’re still on trial?”

Startled, Elizabeth met his gaze. “No, they would not be so kind  
thought...” A breath of laughter escaped her. “I think they like to be s  
izabethI doubt they really believe in your guilt or mine.”

Mr. Grey bowed to them. “Miss Barker. My lord. A pleasure to s  
er gazeagain.” He seemed perfectly at ease in this aristocratic company, n  
than Elizabeth, who was now introduced to Sir Nicholas and Lady S  
handsome couple who were clearly friends of Grizelda and Tizsa, alth  
r fatherthe sensitive Elizabeth, Sir Nicholas bore an edge of danger that m  
ass us,wary.

She was glad to see him shake hands in friendly fashion with Jam  
iad firstthen another distraction occurred at the door, in the shape of Sir Artl  
s mightLady Hampton. James turned toward them and was seen immediately.

Lady Hampton’s step faltered. The sight of James clearly affect  
: voice.Which may have been the root of her husband’s angry flush a  
hardening of his thin lips. Nevertheless, they exchanged minute b  
s at herHampton tugged his wife forward and off in the opposite direction.

ling her “You are a remarkably speedy and accurate artist,” Mr. Grey  
Tizsa, who smiled faintly without looking up.

anaged. “My husband does not care much for the social events I drag h  
er.” Grizelda said brightly. “So he occupies himself thus. My family is inu  
parents. “Is there one of me?” Grey asked.

nerging Tizsa paused in his portrayal of Hampton and flipped back a j  
lo? Myallow everyone a glimpse of Grey’s slightly haughty face, cleverly sh  
s? I seeshow his darker complexion.

Grey raised his eyes to Tizsa’s face, intent now on Hampton’s  
k awayonce more. “Do you show them to other people?”

and a “Sometimes,” Tizsa replied.

The Swans wandered away. More guests arrived.

ed, and “Do you mind?” Tizsa asked Mr. Grey.

–” “No. Though for some reason, they remind me of the ‘Wanted’ list.  
ey. Didlampposts.”

“Very astute,” Tizsa said. “They have been used as such.”

parents “You are, perhaps, Lord James’s ally in his search for truth about  
the mustdiamonds?”

“As I said, astute,” Tizsa murmured.

“Did you get your diamonds back?” James asked.

if they “I did,” Mr. Grey replied. “I hope you have similar luck with  
reputation, my lord.” With a graceful bow to the ladies, he moved away.

“Do you still suspect him?” Elizabeth asked uneasily.

see you Tizsa looked beyond her to the door. “Not really. I can’t see who  
more would fit in to either the theft of his own diamonds or the murder of  
Swan, aBut he has an interesting face.”

ough to “James, it’s your father,” Grizelda murmured, which was more  
ade her than she had given Elizabeth about hers.

But James had already seen. His father was a stout man of digni-  
ties. But preceding iron-gray hair and a magnificent scowl. Beside him  
walked his eldest son, Lord Langley, who lifted a hand in greeting to James.

nodded curtly in return, just as his father caught sight of him and  
waited for his son to go to him, though his expression never  
changed. James bowed to his father, who waited one more instant in vain,  
as Langley murmured something to him and they turned aside to greet  
else.

said to “He’s waiting for you to forgive him,” Elizabeth said.

“My father has never sought forgiveness in his life. Nor has my sis-  
ter,” Elizabeth recognized the couple greeting their host and hostess—  
her sister, Lady Helen, and her husband, Earnest Front. Helen pretended  
not to see him. Front gave an unsurprised yet slightly embarrassed little hal-  
lowed to the room.

Tizsa sketched some more.

picture



AS AN AWKWARD debutante, James recalled, Lady Grizelda had never. Like him, she had never wanted to be there, on show at what had once been known as the Marriage Mart. She had never said the right things or held on to unexceptionable conversations. In fact, she knew astonishing amount on unlikely subjects, from classical texts to the plight of the poor. After the first season, he had seen her less and less, except by accident in unlikely locations: the British Museum, or obscure afternoon musical concerts, and from a distance, in a soup kitchen.

Lady Grizelda, he suspected, had somehow managed to step back from the social whirl and create a pleasant life for herself, probably without the help of her busy family even being aware of it. Which must have been highly unusual. She had met the revolutionary refugee almost-doctor, though how she'd managed to make that acceptable to her family or the rest of Society was another matter. In any case, here in heaven her ambitious family had seen how curiously right they were for her. And, of course, the heroic Hungarians were fashionable, from the exiled leader Mr. Kossuth down.

As Grizelda took up her violin beside the piano, at which was seated Lady Swan, another memory intruded. One of those excruciating evenings when young, marriageable ladies were meant to show off their accomplishments. Most people had cringed, or even laughed behind their hands, as Grizelda had sat down at the piano, and certainly she had glided through her piece at breakneck speed. But even so, she had displayed poise and even feeling, and no one had laughed as she had stood and marched before the duchess, her mother.

Now, he heard that skill honed and comfortable. She and Lady Swan had clearly played together often before, and this, an adaptation of Chopin's violin concerto, was breathtaking. Beside him, Elizabeth surreptitiously wiped the corner of her eye with her finger. He loved that the music moved her.

Tizsa, meanwhile, stood apart from the audience, leaning one shoulder against the wall while he scribbled away at his book. It wasn't clear whether he was sketching his wife or catching more details of some of their surroundings.

Two rows in front of James was the back of Hampton's head, and the swanlike neck of Cordelia that had once moved him to passion. They were both known each other at all, he realized now. He had loved her as one would love a beautiful painting, not as a real, flesh-and-blood woman, and he su-

shone. she had seen him in a similar light. A marquis's son, after all, even if he had been a younger son, had been a catch. And she had undoubtedly liked the way he had looked.

She turned her head and lifted her hand, as if she were rubbing away that first vague irritation on her shoulder, though she used the moment to glance fleetingly at James before she faced forward once more.

Something about his return troubled her. The nostalgia of loss

Shame at not waiting for him? Or did she know that her husband had somehow been involved in James's arrest? In the theft of the diamonds? She added his name to the rest certainly on his list of people to talk to this evening. As were his sisters. Now she had her husband, although it seemed Helen would only speak to him in private. Perhaps he should leave her to Lady Grizelda.

Perhaps why was Helen so standoffish? Just because the scandal of his arrest had scared off the earl who had been courting her, reducing her to the name of the rich Mr. Front? Judging by the silks and jewels she was awash in, she

found a very comfortable life. And yet she sat on the end of his row of seated people he didn't know, her lips thinner than he recalled, and even in the evenings pinched with discontent.

Releasing the hurt of her determined rejection, he realized that she had never used to look like that. They had been allies in mischief. Once.

The piece came to a delightful conclusion, though not the ending Chopin had written. It was, after all, merely an excerpt from the concerto. The applause was rapturous, as it should have been.

Beside him, Elizabeth had jumped to her feet, her face shining. She had clapped enthusiastically. "I never dreamed she was so talented! An Chopin's Swan..."

"Azalea knew," James said wryly, for Lady Trench looked positively smug as she thanked the duo and introduced the operatic tenor who

followed. Lady Swan returned to her smiling husband, and Grizelda's shoulder peered at Tizsa's sketches while his arm crept around her waist, a reminder of that affectionate marital intimacy that made his longing for Elizabeth so fierce.

But it seemed he was no longer the young man he had been, could not look forward, desperate for tomorrow. Now he knew to appreciate what was present, and so he let her closeness seep into him, inhaled the clear, unexpected scent of her, enjoying the occasional glimpse of her lovely profile.

ven the changes in her breathing as the music affected her. There was a de-  
way her tortured pleasure in being this near and unable to touch her.

“Perhaps you would join me for supper?” he murmured as the  
g some performance was applauded. “I thought we might attach ourselves  
glance brother.”

“By all means,” she said. She lowered her voice. “Although he might  
t love? my presence odd.”

had been “He is too much the gentleman to notice.” He was, too. James  
the was moment to wonder why his brother was not married, for he was, sur-  
ter and most eligible bachelor in the country. And yet James had never seen  
t under pursue any woman except that waitress at Coal Yard Lane.

Supper was laid out buffet-style in the next room, with trestle tables  
rest had up along the wall and spilling into the room beyond. At first, El-  
ouveau seemed uneasy, almost embarrassed that he should serve her from the  
she had dishes.

beside “Did you not have some kind of Season in your youth?” he asked.

repose A smile flitted across her face. “It seems like another world. In ar-  
the company was never quite so... distinguished.”

she had “You mean aristocratic. It is not at all the same thing, less so all the

My brother should not be tied to land or politics just because our father  
ng Mr. duke, any more than the footman there should be tied to a life of  
concerto. because of *his* birth.”

“You are a radical,” she observed, with a quick smile of amusement  
as she imagined also held a hint of pleasure, or even admiration.

and Lady He shrugged. “I am a realist. I see the progress of the world and with  
impetus is. Which is too serious a subject when what one really needs to

sitively decide is between these elegant vol-au-vents or the more substantial pie  
was to By then, she was either comforted or had remembered her early time

went to for she betrayed no unease as they wandered through the throng in search  
casual, place to eat. They found his brother in the end, supping opposite Sir

suddenly Grey. There was space at the table, so James pretended not to see the  
lady and her mother making a beeline for the same seat and laid his hand

instantly the back of the chair next to Grey’s. “Don’t tell me. You’re on the  
late the charitable board.”

and, fresh John looked up quickly and stood.

and the “Several, actually,” Grey replied, also rising.

licious, “Miss Barker,” John said, bowing. “Won’t you join us?”

James deposited their plates, then held the chair for Elizabeth as she finally took the one next to his brother. For a little while, as they ate, they discussed the musical performances and the charity it was all in aid of.

Elizabeth asked Mr. Grey something about his workers’ conditions, but during the ensuing lively discussion, James and his brother fell into silence.

At last James said, “You came to my trial?”

John glowered at him. “Of course I came to your damned trial.”

“I didn’t see you there.”

“I came in quietly after everyone else, with my hat down and my hands up. A concession to Father’s order that none of us go near the Old Bibles that day.” His gaze flickered and he mumbled, “I wanted you to have seen Elizabeth there.”

“I was always receiving callers,” James said sardonically.

“That’s not what I heard. I sent you a note, and Father said you had nothing to do with...” John laid down his fork and sat back, staring at his brother. “I thought you were ashamed, but none of it made sense, which is why I tried to see you.”

“And you never guessed that Father might try to stop you? Even when he is as you believed the worst of me?”

“Damn it, James, I knew how desperate you were to impress Catherine and I knew how reckless you could be. I assumed it was some wage-slave prank that had gone horribly wrong.”

“Anything but the truth,” James mocked.

“You wouldn’t return the diamonds or say who your accomplices were to know why now—because you had nothing to do with it. At the time I was bewildered and angry—”

“Me too,” James said mildly.

John’s eyes closed. “I can’t change it. I can apologize.”

“Can my father?”

“Yes, if you give him the chance. He only came this evening because I told him you would be here.”

“And how did you know that?”

John’s lip quirked. “Lady Azalea told me.” He drew in an unsteady breath. “If I could, I would give you back those three years. I’m sorry, for what you went through.”

James was silent. He realized he was gazing at Elizabeth's fingers before around the stem of her wine glass. He raised his eyes to her face and they shifted to his brother's. "It's funny, but I'm increasingly less sorry for it. Then I hated it, loathed it, but the longer I'm away from it, the more I think it and in fact actually have been good for me."

John's eyes widened. "And for Cordelia?"

"Hmm. I'd say yes, except... Is she happy with Hampton?"

John shrugged. "I think so. Though I imagine seeing you again up there. After all, she didn't wait for you, even if she professed to believe in you. You were a y collar. "Did she?" How much such knowledge would once have meant to her. Now it was a minor mystery.

Someone asked, "Will you speak to the old man?" John asked.

James sighed. "Yes, I will speak to the old man."

If nothing else, their few words, and his father's brief grip of his shoulder, wanted to give the gossips something to chew upon. And brought James, unexpectedly, at his a modicum of peace.

By the time he moved on, both John and Elizabeth had left his side. They were dancing—John with Lady Azalea and Elizabeth with his brother, though Earnest Front. Tizsa was dancing with Lady Swan, Grizelda with Sir Grey. Cordelia Hampton sat beside a grumpy-looking old dowager. Cordelia seemed vaguely familiar to James. He decided to rescue his own sister, or, some betrothed, but as he moved toward her, among all the other expensive perfumes, both male and female, one made him halt and discreetly sniff the air.

He had smelled it in Coal Yard Lane the other afternoon. For some reason, it meant something to him, but he couldn't remember what.

He wrestled with it as he crossed the room. Cordelia saw his moment of panic lit her face. She excused herself to the dowager in a rush it was barely courteous. But then, when he fully expected her to leave in the opposite direction, she came toward him instead.

"My lord," she said, with that same look of panic.

He bowed. "My lady. We seem to have missed the start of the waltz. Perhaps you would take a stroll with me? We might hunt down some waltz partner. He offered his arm with a sense of challenge, daring her to take it.

James didn't even think about it. Her gloved hand clung to his sleeve, and they began to stroll around the perimeter of the dance floor, past the trio pro-



trailing the music.

and then “How are you, James?” she whispered.

“Oh, I am well.” This close, there were lines of worry around her mouth and might shadows beneath her eyes that spoke of too little sleep. “Are you?”

“I hate to think of you in that place.”

“I am not in that place. Unless you mean *this* place, which is complimentary to our hostess.”

“Don’t joke,” she begged. “You must hate me. You must hate all of us.”

He sighed. “Hate gave me something to do in prison,” he said. “But to him, of it was aimed personally at you.” Well, not much of it. “Most of it those who put me there. What is upsetting you?”

She veered away from the entrance to the card room, wherein lurked her husband, and tugged James toward the open doorway leading to the boiler room. Few people milled there, but it was much quieter than the main salons.

“Arthur was always jealous of you,” she blurted. Color seeped into her face and the swanlike neck that had once entranced him, even into the neckline, and her chest visible above the deep V of her gown. “Because you were my first-in-law choice. It has made our marriage...difficult.”

“Then I wish you hadn’t chosen such a weasel.”

“He isn’t a weasel,” she said, though without the conviction, let alone the anger, he had expected to provoke. “Indeed, I made my bed, as they say. I am content to lie in it, but our lives—my life—would become unbearable if there were he ever to find that I... That you and I...”

For a moment, stupidly, he couldn’t even think what she meant. And for some time he didn’t know whether to laugh or flounce away in high dudgeon. He really thought so little of him. But the genuine fear in her eyes overrode his impulses.

He lowered his head to say quietly, “My dear, there is no need to hurry in ever to know. It is our secret and no one else’s.”

She seemed to sag on his arm. “Thank you,” she whispered.

“There is no need of thanks. I should never have taken advantage of you, but wouldn’t it if I’d known I would be arrested only days later?”

A hint of laughter trembled on her lips. “You didn’t exact advantage from me. But she advantage, James.”

“I only wish you well, Cordelia,” he said gently, and was surprised to discover how true it was.

Returning to the main room as the music came to a close, Corde almost immediately swept away to dance by an eager young man. She darkstrolled on, inclining his head to anyone who caught his eye. Elizabeth had been right. No one cut him. They all bowed in return, as though they had merely been waiting for him to make the first move.

hardly A rueful smile tugged at his lips. He might not have discovered the deal in his quest to find out who killed Jarman and set him up to take the blame for the theft, but he seemed to be putting things right on a not nonepersonal level.

was for Hampton crossed in front of him and went into the card room. Elizabeth followed, interested to see whom he talked to, if he could sustain the look she had locked her James in the eye. For the first time, it struck him what he would be doing in the hall. A Cordelia by exposing Hampton as a thief and murderer—if that was what he was.

into her Lord Trench was in the room, not playing but rattling the bowl on the other part of the table in mock demand for money, for the gamesters would pay a fee of ten percent the first percentage of their winnings to his charity. Earnest Front sat at that table beside him, rather to James's surprise, sat Elizabeth's father.

Hampton took the vacant chair beside Barker, and as James moved around the table to stand opposite them, memory inevitably intruded. The beginning of that evening in Coal Yard Lane, Front and Hampton had taken similar positions, with James's brother between them. Then John had gone in search of his waitress, and the shady character Niven could then remember had taken his place.

that she James had barely noticed him—his mind hadn't really been on them, but the man had been acknowledged by both Front and Hampton.

Elizabeth had objected to him joining the table. Had James known him, too? Where for him? What had made him "shady"?

Both Front and Hampton noticed his observation at the same time. The former nodded to him. Hampton frowned. Barker looked up, and his eyes widened. James nodded to him, too.

If James had been drugged that night, the early part of the evening would surely have been unaffected. Except that what happened later seemed to have taken on a given the whole evening a weird, dreamlike quality, interspersed with moments of raised volume and loudness and blurry images. The man's face still eluded him.

He walked on around the table, waiting for it to come to him.

lia was exchanged a few words with Trench, meandered around the other table. James then, having no reason to linger, headed for the door. At the last moment he had glanced back over his shoulder, just as Hampton threw down his card with an air of annoyance. He did it with a certain flamboyance that James recalled from his childhood. It always seemed an overly dramatic gesture, and he had done it that way at a great many parties. James had excused himself to all with a quick sweep of his eyes around the table. And the face between Front's and Hampton's had been...

*Jarman's.*

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exchanged a few words with Trench, meandered around the other tables, and then, having no reason to linger, headed for the door. At the last moment, he glanced back over his shoulder, just as Hampton threw down his cards with annoyance. He did it with a certain flamboyance that James recalled because it always seemed an overly dramatic gesture, and he had done it that night at Coal Yard Lane, just before James stood up and left the game.

James had excused himself to all with a quick sweep of his eyes around the table. And the face between Front's and Hampton's had been...

*Jarman's.*



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FOR AN INSTANT, he forgot to breathe and had to grasp the door to himself. Then he moved, knowing only that he had to tell so particularly Elizabeth. His hungry gaze found her in an instant, laughed at something Forsythe Niven was saying to her. James strode them and, without ceremony, took Elizabeth's hand, placing it firmly on his arm.

"Sorry, have to talk to Miss Barker," he said curtly.

A hint of annoyance crossed Niven's face, and then he just looked at her. "High-handed, Andover."

"At least he apologized," Elizabeth pointed out over her shoulder.

"Don't defend me. I'm being unforgivably rude, but I have to talk to you. I've just remembered who else was at the gaming table that night, the character Niven recalled. It was Jarman."

By then, they were in the hall, where he had earlier spoken to Cora. Cora was quieter now, but even so, he swept Elizabeth away to the dark beside the stairs leading upward, and behind a pillar.

"Joshua?" she said breathlessly.

"I didn't know him then, had no reason to remember his face. But I did feel a vague familiarity when I first saw Jarman, when he was pointing to me as he swaggered up some alley by the docks. Not enough to connect the dots, but when I saw Hampton throwing down his cards, the whole scene came back to me. The man sitting between Front and Hampton was definitely Joshua Jarman."

"Then you think he was there to meet someone? Or that *he* was who drugged you? And urged you to go to Mason's for the ring?"

"He might have. It might *all* have been Jarman. You said you could appear gentlemanly on occasions."

"He could assume the accent and the manners," she agreed. "It wasn't fair."

“He could have worn a wig.”

“He could... Whatever he says, Bertie or Porter could easily have his accomplice in the robbery, and Mrs. Mason would have no reason to recognize her gentleman as Joshua.”

“No.” Frowning, James rested his forearm on the pillar above her head. “But then, if it was all Jarman, who the devil killed him? And who did he wear a glove when he tried to break into your house?”

“Do you care?” she asked.

He looked down at her, realizing at last how close they stood, and how predatory his stance might seem to any inconvenient observers. And yet there was no fear in her eyes. Awareness, yes, a swift shallowness to her breath, but no alarm. Slowly he lowered his head, until he rested his forehead against hers.

“I do care. It would be convenient to simply blame Jarman for the robbery and assume he was killed by some underworld enemy. But it would not necessarily be the truth. After all, it was convenient once to blame me. I can imagine Jarman would have gone to the trouble of picking me out as a suspect. Some pointers. No, we can’t rule out an accomplice.”

He smiled, because things were clearer, because there was fresh air. And because he was close to her, too close not to be affected. A quick kiss assured him no one was near, no one could see, and then he moved back, still, crushing her gown until his body fitted to hers. She let out a little gasp of shock, and he kissed her parted lips.

The kiss was too brief, and so much less than he craved, but her reaction was sweet and heady. He had to stifle his groan as he forced his mouth to release hers. “Say you’ll dance with me.”

“I’ll dance with you.”

Smiling, he stepped back, fiercely glad to see the trembling of her hands as she smoothed out her elegant skirts. He offered his arm once more. “Come, we’ll stroll a little further before the last waltz, just to catch the one wayward body.”

Her gaze dipped, and she blushed even more fiercely as she grasped his arm.

“Marry me, Elizabeth Barker, please marry me. But she could not be rushed. And for her, he could be patient.”



ve been

ason to ELIZABETH'S EVENING FELT like some mad horse ride of emotion, with jumps and a few nasty falls. Seeing her parents and facing their cold rejection. The beauty of the music. Watching James reach the beginning of that understanding with his brother and father—and then watching him leave the room with Cordelia Hampton. Jealousy was not an emotion Elizabeth used to, and she hated it.

nd how He had implied he no longer felt anything for Cordelia. But the cold set therein his face had proved he did still care. If Cordelia crooked her fingers, reaching, even though she was married to another, would he be able to resist? Or would he even want to?

Then, of course, he had kissed *her*, and danced with her, and jealousy had wholely vanished into a sea of silly happiness just from being in his arms.

ouldn't "I never cared much for dancing before," he'd murmured as they moved around the floor. "Yet with you, I could dance all night."

without "I think Lady Trench might throw us out."

Even as Lady Trench's carriage returned them to Half Moon Street, Elizabeth was aware of James on the opposite bench, lounging gracefully in the shadows, his face in the shadows, and yet she knew he was watching her. How close he could almost feel his eyes caress her skin.

le gasp "So what did we learn?" Grizelda asked brightly.

"James remembered more about his time at the gambling den," Elizabeth responded, glad to have something else to focus on. "Joshua was there, playing the same game."

"Was he, by God?" Tizsa sat up straight. "Then we should track down the staff who were there that night. They're bound to have known who he talked to."

more. "My brother Langley might be able to help there," James said, sounding oddly reluctant. "I'll go and see him tomorrow. There's something else pretty sure Cordelia Hampton is afraid of her husband."

ped his Elizabeth's stomach twisted, as though cords of jealousy, pity, and anger knotted together. "Then she should leave him."

not and "I don't think she wants to leave him. But if we prove he is the man who stole the diamonds and killed Jarman, the matter will be taken out of her hands."

Elizabeth said, "There is also Earnest Front. I danced with him, spent much of the time asking me about James."

soaring "Did he?" James asked.

ntinued "He's married to your sister," Grizelda pointed out. "It's nat  
ning of should be concerned. Did he ask you if James was pursuing the reas  
ave the his arrest?"

eth was "No," Elizabeth replied. "He isn't someone I took to. He...fl  
enthusiastically. But that is hardly proof of theft or murder."

concern "He has no need of theft," James said. "His family could buy and  
er now, all."

Would "I'll make inquiries tomorrow," Tizsa said. "When, sadly, I am fc  
go to the office. We should know who owns the gambling club at Co  
usy had Lane by then, too. Nightcap, Andover?"

James hesitated, then he said, "No. But I'd like Elizabeth to con  
waltzed me to Gartside House tomorrow."

"Excellent idea," Grizelda said, and yawned while Elizabeth blush  
pleasure and alarm. "I shall have to be busy on other things tomorrow.  
eet, she

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er. She



IT WAS EARLY when James called for her the following morning. Even  
Tizas had already left the house about their own business, while El  
izabeth tried to finish the mending she had undertaken for Lady Trench. In fac  
ying in didn't appear to be much wrong with the linen she had been given to re

The Tizas' maid, with all her mistress's cheerful ignoring of conv  
own the simply showed James into the drawing room, where Elizabeth sat  
Jarman window, trying to find something to sew.

She jumped up. "Oh! I wasn't expecting you so early."

ounding "Do you mind? I want all this finished with and behind us."

lse. I'm "No, it makes sense, only... Why do you want me with you to vi  
brother?"

d anger "Because you might see things I don't." A smile flickered across h  
"And because I want my family to know you."

an who A helpless flush of pleasure and pain consumed her. "James..."

of her "Shall we go?"

As they walked to South Audley Street, she realized the pa



and herceding into something very like hope, even wonder. James was not or naïve. He understood the world in which he lived. Yet he wanted love him. A gentleman did not take a mistress, or even a prospective nural heto visit one's family. Did he—could he?—want to *marry* her? In the ions forhis family's disapproval? Was this love possible in spite of everything?

*Don't hope*, she told herself fiercely. *Don't dare. Not yet...*

irts too Instead, they talked about "the case" and where their discoveries lead until, by the time they reached Gartside House, she felt sell usconcentrate.

This time, the butler, looking delighted, led them upstairs to a br forced toparlor, where Lord Langley and Helen Front sat at the table, leafing t al Yardnewspapers. It was a quiet, domestic scene, though it brought Jam sudden, surprised halt.

ne with Langley stood at once. "James! Miss Barker. Have you broke fast?"

ed with "Yes, but a cup of coffee would be welcome," James replied.

"Thank you," Elizabeth murmured, taking the seat Langley cour held for her while she watched a fascinating array of emotions flash Lady Helen Front's face.

At first there seemed to be a smile of surprised pleasure in he so, the swiftly followed by a stare of something very like hunger, and then Elizabeth of a hunted animal before her eyelids swept down and a frozen calm re t, there Ignoring James, she nodded distantly to Elizabeth.

repair. There were no servants in the room, presumably by the family's vention,so Lord Langley poured coffee for his guests and returned to his place by the folding up his newspaper.

"You've missed Father, I'm afraid. He's off to foment chaos Lords."

"Any sign of life would be an improvement in the Lords," sit your observed wryly. "But it was you I came to see. I want to ask you ab gaming club in Coal Yard Lane."

his face. Helen was stirring her freshly poured tea as though trying to wear in the cup.

"What about it?" Langley asked warily.

"I was wondering," James said, "if you might know what became in was staff who worked there on the night of my betrothal party."

foolish Langley blushed. He knew exactly which staff member he was talking about—his inamorata of three years ago. “I believe one opened a shop,” he said evenly.

Abruptly, Helen stood up, as though she recognized they were discussing matters unfit for a lady’s ears. “I must go, Langley. My love to Papa Barker, James...” The last name was little more than a whisper, murmured as she was already turning away and making for the door.

She was a well-dressed woman of ladylike posture and grace, but there was something stiff in her movements. Perhaps it was outrage at the breakfast brothers. But Elizabeth, abruptly remembering her dance with Earnest who had set up all her hackles, suddenly didn’t think so. Alarms rang through her head, depriving her of breath, and yet she could not just sit there.

With a murmured “excuse me,” she rose and followed James’s sister into the room.

“Mrs. Front,” she called, and the woman halted at the top of the stairs. Hurrying toward her, Elizabeth ascertained there were no lurking servants. Helen waited for her, her expression wary and a little haughty.

“Miss Barker.”

“Don’t tell him,” Elizabeth blurted.

Helen opened her mouth to deliver what would surely be a blurted fear. Yet what came out was, “I cannot tell anyone what I do not hear returned.” “Leave him,” Elizabeth pleaded.

Helen stared at her. “You know the signs, don’t you? I could see your face last night when you danced with him. I don’t know how you escaped your fate, but there is no hope for me. My father would send me to him as law and custom dictates.”

“Your brothers would not.”

“And if they kill him?” Helen said. Clearly, she had thought about James. “Langley might be acquitted in the Lords, but James...” She drew out the shuddering breath. “He has suffered enough.”

“So have you.” Elizabeth met the other woman’s stare. “Mrs. Front, do you know where your husband was on the night of Monday the 15th of October?”



s being “YOU SET ROSIE up in a hat shop?” James said in amusement when the  
d a hathad gone.

“She needed to get away from that hell. It was being frequer  
cussing criminals who were pressuring the girls to prostitution from which  
a. Miss wanted their cut. Most of the girls there were willing enough for th  
bled as man, but this was something else entirely.”

“These criminals,” James said, “wouldn’t have been Joshua Ja  
and yet gang, would they?”

e at her “His name was mentioned. I just wanted her out of there.”

t Front, “Do you still see her?” James asked.

through His brother shrugged. “Now and again. I like to be sure all is w  
her.”

er from “No more?”

e stairs. respectable, and I need to marry one day, if only to stop you succeedin  
wants in

“I’m all for that. Will you take us to see Rosie?”

“Does Miss Barker need a new hat?”

“God, yes,” James said fervently enough to make John grin.

“Who is she, Jamie? What are you up to?”

istering “She’s Barker the banker’s daughter. I mean to marry her if she’  
:.” me.”

“Why would she?” John asked. “She seems intelligent as well as pi

ee it in “Thinking of cutting me out, your lordship?”

ow you “Think I couldn’t?” John retorted.

ne back “I don’t know,” James said ruefully. “Which is why I’d rather you  
try.”

After a moment, John finished his coffee. “I used to think you  
out this. taking down a peg or two. And now I find I’m sorry for it. If you w  
w in a truth, she can’t take her eyes off you. No one could cut you out with he

James felt color rise into his face, and quickly drained his cup  
out, dorising. “Can we go and see Rosie now?”

sixth of When they emerged onto the landing, Elizabeth and Helen stood  
top of the stairs, gripping each other’s hands. The sight was so surpris  
James came to a halt. He didn’t think either woman had seen him  
Helen turned and fled down the stairs. For an instant it struck him t  
might have been happy, which was when he realized that each time he

the ladies' eyes on her since Newgate, she had been extremely *unhappy*.

"Rejoice, Miss Barker," John said. "You are to have a new hat."

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are right



THE MILLINER'S SHOP had customers when they walked in—a matron and her two daughters, all of whom appeared to recognize John, judging by their curtseys and blushes.

The smart and respectable young woman helping them smiled with more ease. "My lords, ma'am, welcome. I'll be with you shortly."

It took James a moment to recognize the laughing, flirty waitress as a prim being, but she was there.

"No rush," John said amiably. "Miss Barker is merely browsing."

Obligingly, Elizabeth lifted an elegant hat from its stand to address James. "James enjoyed making her blush by untying the ribbons of her own bonnet, letting his knuckles brush for an instant against the soft skin of her cheek. Then he turned her to face the mirror on the counter as she placed the hat on her head.

"No, something more open, I think," John said.

"Langley is good with hats," James assured her. "He chose all my hats for her first Season."

Elizabeth was tolerantly trying on her third hat when the proprietor finally showed her other customers out and bustled over to join them.

"My lords." She smiled. "A special pleasure to see you again, James."

"And you, Miss Rose. What a fine establishment."

"His lordship helped me find my niche," she said, "as I'm sure you know."

"Miss Barker, allow us to introduce Miss Rose Smith," John said before Barker needs a new hat."

"Several new hats," James murmured, provokingly, and won a smile at the irritation from his beloved.

"And James, unfortunately," John continued, as though his brother had just spoken, "needs to ask you a few questions about the old days in County Lane."

The light faded from Rosie's eyes.

“There’s no trouble,” James assured her quickly. “I’m just convinced the accusations made against me are connected to the night of my birthday party. Only I can’t remember most of what happened.”

“You were drunk as a lord, my lord,” she said wryly.

“A doctor friend of mine thinks I was more than drunk. He thinks I was drugged.”

A hint of outrage sparked in Rosie’s eyes.

“No, I’m not accusing you,” James said at once. “Not for an instant. I’m just trying to find out who I sat beside, who served me after I stood up from the card table.”

“I didn’t see you leave the card table,” she said coldly. “When I came back into the room, you were three sheets to the wind, along with two other gentlemen.”

“Niven and Graham, I know. I was hoping you could remember which other waitresses were on duty that night.”

“It’s important, Rosie,” John said quietly.

“Lila,” she said reluctantly, “and Jenny, I think. They don’t work there anymore. Lila left before I did and vanished. Jenny left when it came to her hands. I think she went home to Berkshire, but she doesn’t write.”

“Do you know who bought the club over?” Elizabeth asked.

Rose shook her head. “No. The police shut it down before that. It was well away from there.”

“Did Joshua Jarman ever appear in the club?” Elizabeth asked, and Lord James swung on her, glaring.

“He’s why I left. He was making the owner pay a protection fee and was trying to get us to whore for him. Some of the girls had no choice but I did, thanks to his lordship. And if you—” She broke off, frowning. “That girl was there that night, the one you’re talking about.”

“Did he speak to Lord James?” Elizabeth asked.

“Not in my hearing. But he spoke to Lila all right.”

“What about?” James asked urgently.

“Whoring, I imagine,” Rosie snapped. “He certainly scared her, and she had to get out.”

“Did you know, by name, any other patrons there that night?” Elizabeth asked, taking some of Tizsa’s sketches from the inner pocket of his coat.

Rosie shook her head. “No, they were mostly new faces to me.”

ed that Jarman's presence scared off the regulars. But then, we might have c  
etrothal them a word. With Jarman, there was bound to be cheating and stealin

“Do you recognize any of these men?” James asked, spreading  
portraits across the counter.

s I was Rosie glanced at them impatiently. “I’m sure I’ve seen him before  
pointed at Sir Arthur Hampton. “And him.” She tapped Earnest Front  
were in your party that night, weren’t they? Don’t know him,” she  
ant. I’m touching Solomon Grey, “although I wouldn’t mind. *That fellow c*  
ip from with Jarman once.”

James wasn’t surprised. It was Jack Porter, Jarman’s lieutenant. “I  
I came see me speaking privately to any of them?”

o other Rosie shook her head.

“Did I ever ask you about jewels or jewelers?” James asked,  
: which apologetically.

Rosie laughed. “What would I know about such things? Of cou  
didn’t. You didn’t even ask me about hats.” She reached beneath the  
k there and placed a rather fetching creation before Elizabeth. It was cream  
hanged graceful feather and dark red silk roses. “Try that one, ma’am.”

Blinking, Elizabeth obeyed, and James smiled because she lo  
bemused and hopeful and pretty that he wanted her to wear it fo  
I keep wedding.

“We’ll take it,” he said.

d Rosie “We shall not,” Elizabeth exclaimed. “I can’t afford such a thing!”

“It’s a gift,” James said. “With an ulterior motive. Where did you  
to him Lila go?” He was guessing, but Rosie’s eyes had dropped each ti  
choice, mentioned her. Like the less hardened convicts who hadn’t learned  
ig. “He convincingly when they stole from you.

“I told you, she vanished,” Rosie said. “Could be anywhere. She  
want to be found.”

“Rosie?” John said quietly. “Please?”

“I promised!”

and she “You know Jarman’s dead?” James said. “He can’t hurt her or  
else. Besides, I won’t tell a soul. I just need to talk to her. And if we’r  
James she’s among those who will be made all the safer for what she can tell  
at.

Rosie glared at him, then glanced from Elizabeth to John. She n  
I think across to the other counter, taking the hat with her. “You had better be

dropped she said grimly, seizing a pencil and scribbling on a piece of paper. "A  
g." "I can't take *her* there," she added as they followed her.

Tizza's Elizabeth raised her eyes from the paper to James. "I know that a  
It's Constance Silver's house."

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she said grimly, seizing a pencil and scribbling on a piece of paper. “And you can’t take *her* there,” she added as they followed her.

Elizabeth raised her eyes from the paper to James. “I know that address. It’s Constance Silver’s house.”





## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LORD LANGLEY SEEMED more stunned than appalled that not only Elizabeth knew Constance Silver, she had been in her house before.

“Thank God we took the carriage with no crest,” he muttered. “Have no veil to hide your face, Miss Barker?”

“Not this time, but if you have a book I could pretend is a Bible or prayer book, I could try to look like a reformer of fallen women.”

James laughed, a rare, unexpected sound that closed around Elizabeth’s heart and made her smile. “We’ll be inside so quickly, no one will see us,” he told his brother. “The staff are most discreet.”

Constance greeted them in the same room they had met before, perfectly untroubled to have a marquis’s heir calling upon her. Most of her attention, in fact, was on Elizabeth, who said bluntly, “We need you locating someone. A girl called Lila who fled from a gambling den in Yard Lane.”

“My ladies never use their own names,” Constance said pleasantly.

“Please, Constance. We’re sure she knows something that could clear several different crimes and clear Lord James’s name completely.”

Constance stared at her a moment longer, then said, “And what name?”

“It need never be mentioned beyond these walls,” James said. “Not here?”

Constance turned her attention on him. She was, Elizabeth suspected, a formidable judge of character. “Do I have your word as a gentleman of silence? Do I have your promise not to bring the law down upon our heads?”

“Both,” James said.

“And yours, Lord Langley?”

“Of course,” Langley said haughtily.

Constance sighed. “I hope I shan’t regret this.” She rose, went to the door and spoke quietly to the footman waiting in the hall before returning to the room.

“She won’t be long.” She sank back into her chair, all smooth, sensual and met Elizabeth’s gaze. “Is this still to do with Jarman?”

Elizabeth nodded. And then quick footsteps sounded in the passage before a young woman burst impetuously into the room. She wore a respectable dark blue gown and clutched a ledger in ink-stained fingers. She looked nothing like Elizabeth’s hazy idea of a gaming hell waitress, but like a woman of ill repute.

“Mrs. Silver?” she said cheerfully. “I was just about to take the book back to...” She trailed off as she realized there were other people present with a faint, quizzical smile, glanced at each in turn. Until she came to Elizabeth.

Her eyes widened with something approaching horror. The book fell from her hands to the floor, and she bolted.

Elizabeth froze with shock. Memory rolled over her in waves. Old hurts she would never accept again for herself or anyone else. Dread when she had first seen James looming out of the mist, the hardness of his eyes and the strength of his rage beneath the pale, haughty exterior.

Why was this girl so afraid of him?

“Lila!” Constance exclaimed before the girl even reached the door. The men were on their feet, but not, Elizabeth was relieved to see, in the Coalbrookdale. “Where are you going? You know *no harm will come to you here.*”

As if those words meant something important, Lila paused, her hand grasping the door handle. She turned slowly to face the room.

James said, “I mean you no ill, Miss Lila.”

There was a kind of desperate strain in his voice that caused Elizabeth to turn her gaze toward him. He held himself stiff and straight like a man awaiting a blow. *He was afraid.*

“I wouldn’t blame you if you did,” the girl said hoarsely.

Constance took her gently by the hand and drew her down beside the sofa. Lord Langley sat back down. James did not, though nor did he look intimidatingly. He kept his place several feet away.

“Did I ever hurt you?” James asked evenly, though his normal composure looked even whiter than usual. “In any way?”

“No, sir,” Lila whispered.

“I ask because there are things I don’t remember, and I need to know the truth. Why are you afraid of me?”

The girl’s eyes filled suddenly with tears. “Because of what I did to

In grace, Elizabeth felt herself sag with relief—and shame. She thought she had known the girl's crime, and was sure James had guessed, too. And yet, in his passage asking for details, he said in a carefully neutral voice, "Did I behave ill to you first?"

Years. She Elizabeth began to understand the full awfulness of his memory gap. He didn't know what had been done to him, or what he had done to others. The latter must have been hardest of all to deal with.

He books "God love you, sir, of course not." Tears coursed down Lila's cheeks, and she clutched Constance's hand as though for strength. "You were always perfect gentleman to me, to all of us, and generous, too, which is what makes all from it all the worse."

James all but fell back into his chair, leaving Elizabeth awash with wild fear, and an aching urge to put her arms around him. But all she could do was give him time to recover his self-possession.

ness of "Are you talking about the night of Lord James's betrothal party?" she asked. "When he and Lord Langley and their friends came to Court Lane?"

or. Both "Miss Barker," Constance murmured. "An old friend of mine."

pursuit. Lila nodded.

"What did you do?" Elizabeth asked.

fingers Lila took a deep breath. "I put something in the brandy I gave him."

"Why?"

"Someone asked me to." Her gaze flickered desperately to Jarman, then to Constance. "He paid me. Said it was just a laugh, to help his lordship enjoy one of his last nights of freedom."

"Did you believe him?"

Lila nodded once, eagerly, and then fresh tears flowed down her cheeks. "No. No, how could I? I *knew* Jarman had put him up to it. That's what he loomscared into doing it."

"No one blames you for being scared of Jarman," Constance said.

l pallor "Whom did Jarman tell to drug Lord James's brandy?" Elizabeth asked. The whole room seemed to have gone still. The waiting was unbearable.

"I don't know his name," Lila said, wiping the back of her hand across her face. Constance gave her a handkerchief. "I'd never seen him before, but he came in with their lordships, so I told myself he couldn't do you any harm, not if he was his friend." She swung around

e knew James. "I didn't know whether to be relieved you weren't dead who  
stead of carried you out, or afraid that you would be by the time you got home.  
l to you She wiped her eyes with the handkerchief. "I knew I'd done

More, I knew Jarman knew, and through that could get me to do anyt  
aps. He liked. Whoring, thieving, murdering. Rosie told me about Mrs. S  
ers, and didn't think she'd look at me, but she took me in, and now I'm learni  
to keep the books for respectable businesses. And you went to priso  
ks, and tried to tell myself that made what I'd done fine because you were a m  
rays the and a thief, but in my heart I couldn't shake off the feeling that what I  
t make to you was the cause of it all. Rosie didn't believe you could have  
and his lordship told her you hadn't."

th guilt "Did he?" James spoke too quickly, glancing at his brother, who  
as gives lightly but held his gaze. James turned back to Lila, raking his  
through his hair. "You didn't cause my going to prison. They'd have  
y?" she some other way to manipulate me into doing what they wanted." He  
al Yard into his coat pocket for Dr. Tizsa's drawings and stood. Taking the  
placed it on the low table in front of Lila and Constance. "Was that t  
who paid you to drug my brandy?"

Everyone looked at Sir Arthur Hampton's smooth, haughty face  
had even caught the faint smile that didn't reach his eyes.

" Lila shook her head. "I've seen him before, but it wasn't him."

James frowned, clearly disappointed.

ies and Elizabeth rose and slipped the next portrait from his pile. She la  
ordship the table beside the first.

Lila's eyes widened. She leaned forward and snatched it up. "That  
Yes, that's him."

cheeks. Elizabeth looked up at James.

y I was "Earnest Front," he said slowly. "My brother-in-law."



sked.

rable. "DID YOU KNOW?" James asked as his brother's carriage began it  
l across] journey to Half Moon Street.

n there Elizabeth shook her head. "No. But at Gartside House I suspect  
't mean] sister ignored you not because she wanted to but because she w  
to face] frightened not to. She had been instructed. Front wasn't there, so she

en they ignore you completely this time, but she still ran before she disobeyed  
” have developed a...sensitivity to violent bullies, and I’m sure Front is  
wrong. “But why would he set out to disgrace a member of the family he  
hing he into?” Lord Langley demanded.

ilver. I “Because I doubt he stood a chance of marrying into it until Jan  
ng how disgraced and the earl who was dangling after your sister got cold feet.  
n, sir. I “Violent bully,” James repeated, staring at her. “Do you think h  
urderer Helen?”

’d done “I’m sure he does,” Elizabeth said.

done it, The brothers looked at each other. “Brook Street,” Lord Langl  
grimly. “Front’s house.”

flushed “No, wait,” Elizabeth said urgently. “The best way to protect h  
fingers prove his guilt of theft and murder. Beating him to a pulp will not he  
e found will killing him,” she added as she caught the murderous flash in  
delved eyes. “I told her you would help her, even if your father would r  
first, he without proof of his other crimes, the law will only send her back  
he man husband. Make up some pretense that her father needs her at Gartside  
for the next few days, or find a way to keep Front in London while si  
e. Tizsato stay with friends or family in the country. Meanwhile, we will f  
proof we need.”

“We found Lila,” Lord Langley said. “She is our proof.”

“It’s not enough,” James said, throwing himself against the back  
id it on bench. “Lila can swear Front bribed her to drug my brandy. She ca  
swear Jarman told him to do it, but that’s not a hanging offense. We  
t’s him, prove he was Jarman’s partner in the diamond robbery and the kil  
Grey’s men, *and* that he murdered Jarman. The trouble is, he’s a wi  
brute and has left no evidence whatsoever.”

“There is the glove,” Elizabeth said thoughtfully. “A word with h  
and even the glove maker should identify it as his.”

“He could just say he lost it and someone else must have been v  
it,” James said. “Besides, it would only prove he broke into your  
s short Which will help, especially with the valet’s cooperation on timing.

need more. *A torrent* of proof. Or...” His eyes glazed over for a m  
ed your then refocused on Elizabeth. In spite of herself, she shivered.  
was too confession.”

e didn’t

l him. I  
one.”



married “A CONFESSIO,” LADY Grizelda said thoughtfully when they had to  
everything that had happened that morning. “We should think how to  
ies was such a statement from him, because he doesn’t strike me as the sort  
” who would be intimidated by the police or by our accusations. A con  
e *hurts* would seal his appointment with the hangman, whereas he must kn  
have nothing that would convict him. Yet.”

Her face lit up at the sound of the front door opening. “But let’s he  
ey said Dragan has learned...”

Dr. Tizsa’s voice was heard in the hall, along with the maid’s, and  
er is toran upstairs. Grizelda met him at the drawing door, to be embrac  
lp. Norkissed without embarrassment.

James’s “It’s Earnest Front,” she said, dragging him to the sofa to hea  
not, but Elizabeth and James had already told her.

to her “There’s another connection,” Tizsa said at last. “Front is part  
House company that now owns the club at Coal Yard Lane. Jarman bought  
he goesong three years ago—probably by threats—not long after Andov  
ind the convicted. It was raided and shut down, though somehow Jarman w  
out of charges and kept ownership of the building. Then he sold it  
company made of himself, Front, and a few minor business owners an  
c of the slightly seedy characters.

an even “It maintains a semi-respectable façade, no doubt with a little  
have to bribery to the local officers of the law, but the dice are loaded, th  
lling offrequently marked, and the roulette wheel fixed. Anyone who comp  
ly ba...threatened. Any gentlemanly clientele of your day, Andover, has  
away. Apart from the more reckless, jaded youths with too much mor  
is valet not enough to do. And anyone drunk enough in the streets and taver  
might be enticed there by the club’s employees—including girls.”

wearing Grizelda poured glasses of wine and passed them out, while Tizs  
house. one of the desks and stretched out his long legs.

But we “There is something else,” he went on, “which you might like to  
oment, your father about, Andover. Around five years ago, rumors began to c

“Or that old Front’s financial empire was not as sound as it had been. His c  
were expensive, and while the sons, particularly Earnest, were given  
control over the business, they appeared to lack old Front’s Midas t

suspect it wasn't just your sister's nobility the Fronts wanted, but her d  
James frowned. "According to my brother, the Fronts negotiated  
old her terms of settlements. My father was inclined to admire the effronter  
) obtaining in. So you're saying Earnest was actually pockets-to-let?"

of man "Heading there. Which certainly gives him a motive to look for  
injection of cash. Hence his association with Jarman, culminating, pr  
low wein the diamond theft."

James's lips twisted with a hint of savagery. "He must have been  
re what fire when Elizabeth absconded with the diamonds."

"Presumably, other joint ventures went better for them. In any c  
then he married your sister. Perhaps he began to suspect Jarman had the dia  
ed and back. Certainly he must have known by the time Connor was arres  
possession of one."

ar what "Which was why he followed Jarman to your house," Grizelda

Elizabeth. "He must have killed him thinking he'd find the diamonds  
of the enough, and before he could, you came home, forcing him to duck  
it for a back door again."

er was "It makes sense," Elizabeth agreed. "But we still have no real proo

triggled "I think it's time I spoke to his valet," Tizsa said.

to this "And I should talk to my sister," James said bleakly. "At the ver  
d some she needs to be safe. At best, she might know where he was or wasn

Jarman was being murdered. I should go," he added abruptly, rising  
added feet and setting his half-empty glass on the table beside Tizsa. "I'l  
e cards back tomorrow."

lains is His gaze lingered on Elizabeth, who managed to nod.

melted Grizelda said, "Yes, do. We must think how to get Front to confess  
ey and night, James."

ns who James turned slightly at the door, as though he thought Elizabeth  
follow him. She didn't, and he went on his way, leaving her heart s  
a sat at heavy.

talk to  
circulate



children IT WAS ALMOST fully dark by the time he got back to his rooms, w  
greater found a scribbled note from his brother. *I brought Helen back to G  
ouch. I House. Come for dinner if you can.*

lowry.” He paused only to wash and change, and then set off again for  
hard in Audley Street. His head was spinning with what he had learned today  
ery and anger and pity over Helen’s situation and his own lack of awareness.

knowing what had happened to Elizabeth, it had never entered his head  
a quick his sister could possibly face anything similar. Even when he had  
obably, Cordelia was a little afraid of Hampton, he hadn’t thought it a fear of p  
abuse.

mad as It may have been all the talk of such violence that made Elizabeth  
distant since they had left Constance Silver’s establishment. Whatever  
case, because, it concerned him, adding to his anxieties. These days, Elizabeth  
amondsconscious of a slight ache whenever he wasn’t with her—which, he supposed  
ted for was quite pathetic for a man who had always been so self-sufficient, and  
had honed to extremes in prison.

said to Self-sufficiency, it seemed, was another word for loneliness.

s easily Clifford’s eyes lit up at the sight of him. “They’re all in the drawing  
out the room, my lord,” he said, taking his coat and hat. “Shall I announce you

“No, no, I remember the way.” James cast the butler a quick, dis  
f.” smile and ran up the staircase, letting memories bombard him.

As he strode across the landing, familiar voices assailed him—  
y least, quietly humorous, Helen’s softer, his father’s half-forgotten bark of laughter  
’t when mingling suddenly with a much higher-pitched and childish giggle.

g to his James stopped, his eyes widening. The footman at the drawing room  
l come grinned at his astonishment and threw open the door.

Helen sat on the floor, the frozen dignity of their previous moment  
nowhere to be seen. He should have recognized the signs of her distress.  
s. Good he had not been dealing similarly with life since his arrest three years ago  
hiding, with contempt for the whole world. He was not proud of such  
a might absorption, but at least he could appreciate the picture before him.

ore and An infant of about twelve months staggered from his mother’s arms  
those of his grandfather, who was perched on the edge of the sofa to  
him. The child chortled with delight, and made next for his uncle, who  
him high into the air before he caught sight of James, hovering just in the  
doorway.

here he All eyes turned on James, their fatuous smiles dying into expressions  
artside mingled dread and hope—apart from the child, who grinned at him  
reached out his arms for his mother.



South “Good Lord,” James said mildly, although his insides seemed to  
y, withturned to mush. “I have a nephew. You never told me I had a nephew.”

s. Even “You never asked,” John pointed out, passing the child to Helen.

ead that There was a lot he hadn’t asked. For now, as the child hid his face  
realizedmother’s neck and smiled sideways at him, he settled for smiling back  
physicalasking, “What is your name, small nephew?”

“George,” said the child, lifting his head.

both so James offered his hand. “I’m James.”

ver the Solemnly, George shook his hand and then grinned, melting the  
he wasJames’s heart. George wriggled to get down, and as Helen put him  
pposed,James said, “You are staying here, Helen?”

trait he “Apparently Papa needs a hostess for his important dinner ton  
night,” she murmured. “Or at least, John seems to have convinced  
does.”

rawing “Did Front mind?”

i?” “No, I think he’s glad to have peace for a few days.”

stracted “We should have known,” he blurted. “We shouldn’t have let y  
there. We should have known.”

John’s, Helen’s voice wasn’t quite steady. “We let you go to prison. We  
daughterhave known.”

“You couldn’t have stopped it,” he said. “But we *will* stop this. O  
m dooror another.”

Her face changed. “Without any of us going to prison,” she  
meetingsanxiously.

ss. Had “Any of *us*,” James said grimly.

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“Good Lord,” James said mildly, although his insides seemed to have turned to mush. “I have a nephew. You never told me I had a nephew.”

“You never asked,” John pointed out, passing the child to Helen.

There was a lot he hadn’t asked. For now, as the child hid his face in his mother’s neck and smiled sideways at him, he settled for smiling back and asking, “What is your name, small nephew?”

“George,” said the child, lifting his head.

James offered his hand. “I’m James.”

Solemnly, George shook his hand and then grinned, melting the last of James’s heart. George wriggled to get down, and as Helen put him there, James said, “You are staying here, Helen?”

“Apparently Papa needs a hostess for his important dinner tomorrow night,” she murmured. “Or at least, John seems to have convinced him he does.”

“Did Front mind?”

“No, I think he’s glad to have peace for a few days.”

“We should have known,” he blurted. “We shouldn’t have let you stay there. We should have known.”

Helen’s voice wasn’t quite steady. “We let you go to prison. *We* should have known.”

“You couldn’t have stopped it,” he said. “But we *will* stop this. One way or another.”

Her face changed. “Without any of us going to prison,” she said anxiously.

“Any of *us*,” James said grimly.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, James found himself once again in Newgate

His blood flowed icy cold in his veins, and yet his skin was damp with sweat. His stomach felt so tight he thought he might disgrace himself and ruin up his accounts.

“You don’t need to come in,” Tizsa had said as the prison doors opened ominously out of the fog. “Take the cab back to Half Moon Street. I’ll have someone kept their eye on Griz, to be honest.”

Tizsa too had been a prisoner at some point, although not in this cell, and there was understanding in his carelessly spoken kindness. Perhaps that which made it possible for James to move, to alight from the heavy chains and force his steps forward. Like forgiving his family and recognizing his own failings, this was something he had to face to be whole.

And at least this time, he was entering via the governor’s house. Tizsa bowed low and showed every respect as he and Tizsa were shown into a gloomy room, while a guard was sent rushing to fetch Jack Porter.

James kept his gaze on the open door and imagined himself pushing the walls back and back.

“Will you manage if they lock the door behind Porter?” Tizsa murmured.  
“I will.”

Porter all but swaggered into the room, his chains clanking. He looked suspiciously from one man to the other. “You ain’t the Peelers, but you, don’t I?”

“We met in Ellen Square,” Tizsa said. “I was collecting for charity

Porter peered at him and allowed himself to be thrust into the room behind the damaged wooden table. “Didn’t get any, though, did you?” Tizsa said with a grin. “Tight-fisted, is old Barb.”

“My name’s Tizsa. On behalf of this gentleman, I’m looking into the diamond theft three years ago, and the murder of your late associate Jarman. If you don’t recognize this—”

“Andover!” Porter exclaimed. “Lord James Andover. Never would they’d stick a nob away for old Josh’s sins.”

“There were two men who committed that crime,” Tizsa said. “You deny you were with Jarman?”

“I was with him in his house by the fireside,” Porter said virtuously.

“What you raking all that up for, anyway? Everyone knows it was Connor who stole the diamonds. And though I’m just as innocent of *this* as I’m in here for the murder of Zeb Fisher.”

Prison.  
up with  
and cast

“You were seen, Mr. Porter. By any number of witnesses.”

loomed  
d rather

“Yes, well, set up, weren’t I?” He sniffed resentfully. “I was promised the streets would be clear, that only our people would be around.”

country,  
s it was  
lackney  
ing his

“Who promised you that?” Tizsa asked.

“Barb, of course. Should never have believed her. Woman lies here.”

“Did you tell the police that?” James interrupted.

he staff  
a bare,

“What’s the point? They wouldn’t believe me, just think I was paying old scores or trying to shift the blame. They’ve got me for the murder, would they rock the boat?”

ing the

“Because this conspiracy makes perfect sense for Barb and Sandman,” James said. “Jarman’s dead. You got rid of Zeb Fisher, Fisher’s gang weak enough to take over, and then the law gets rid of him, leaving Barb and Bertie with no competition in replacing Jarman at the top of his questionable little empire.”

nured.

Porter looked from one to the other. “You want to take down Barb and Bertie?”

looked  
I know

“It would be a pleasure, if there was proof,” Tizsa said. “Did they send you out to kill Jarman, too?”

..  
e chair  
he said

Porter looked genuinely outraged. “I’d never have hurt a hair on your head! Looked after me like a father, he did! Tell you what, whatever for, I hope they hang the bastard who did Josh in, too.”

“I heard,” James said, “that it was a gentleman who killed Jarman.”

Porter’s lip curled. “Wouldn’t be surprised. Can’t trust a nob. Meant to offend.”

nto the  
te, Mr.

“Oh, I think you meant quite a lot of offense,” James said, although I can’t say I care. Jarman worked quite a lot with this gentleman, didn’t he not? Helped him steal the diamonds, by what I hear.”

“Couldn’t have,” Porter said with no effort at conviction. He walked away.

thought determined never to “squeal” on Jarman, even after the man’s death.

“By what I heard,” James continued, “he also killed Jarman for those same diamonds.”

Porter stared. “Nah. Fisher killed Jarman. Everyone knows that.”  
“We have his glove,” James said, taking the captured evidence from Petepocket and waving it in front of Porter’s face.

“And he might,” Tizsa said, spreading his sketched portraits along the length of the table, “have looked like one of these gentlemen...”

ised the



“MRS. MASON,” ELIZABETH said suddenly, dropping her sewing into her lap—  
Grizelda, who was replacing a string on a guitar, glanced up over her spectacles. “What about her?”

“She can identify Front as the man who tried to sell the diamonds to her husband.”

“That’s what we’re hoping for,” Grizelda said.

Bertie “Yes, but Front probably killed Mason so that he couldn’t be identified. Don’t you think Mrs. Mason might be in danger, too?”

of you, “If Front thought she could harm him,” Grizelda said, “wouldn’t he at least tried to do away with her before now?”

“Possibly,” Elizabeth allowed. “But if he starts suspecting what we’re up to, won’t he start doing away with *any* evidence that might lead to him?”

Grizelda looked thoughtful. “James is a greater threat to him. James can easily recall who sent him to Mason’s that day.”

Elizabeth’s stomach jolted. “You think he’d try to kill *James*. Oh God, I never thought of that. *Why* did I never think of that?”

“Don’t panic,” Grizelda said calmly. “Dragan is with him. And Front has no reason to fear James. Too many people saw what state he was in last night, and his evidence would always be suspect. On the other hand,

ning no eyes began to sparkle behind her spectacles. “On the other hand, Front can be persuaded that James *is* a danger, with other witnesses to back him up. *That* is the way forward!”

ian, did “Not for James, it isn’t,” Elizabeth said indignantly. But Celia appeared to have moved on, for she was frowning again, setting her head aside.

“Perhaps you’re right about Mrs. Mason, too. Maybe we should work to persuade her to stay with friends or family for a little.”

Accordingly, they set off through the fog for Ludgate Hill and the street above Mason’s jeweler’s shop.

When the hackney let them down, there seemed to be a lot of people on the street, their voices muffled and subdued in the mist. The shop had a light on inside, presumably to be seen through the murk. Elizabeth and Grizelda made their way between gossiping women to the blue door next to the shop. The voices died away and a shiver of premonition passed down Elizabeth’s spine.

Grizelda reached for the knocker.

“No point in knocking, ma’am,” one of the watching women said.

“Is Mrs. Mason not at home?” Grizelda asked civilly, knocking against the door. And to Elizabeth she added, “We could leave a message for her.”

“She won’t be getting it, ma’am, and you’d be wasting your time with the same officious woman. “Mrs. Mason’s passed away.”

This time, Elizabeth’s whole body shivered. Her gaze clashed with Grizelda’s. “When did this happen?” she managed.

“No idea. Haven’t seen her since yesterday, but the police were here and...and she’s gone to a better place.” The woman nodded solemnly to her murmuring acolytes, who looked now like so many crows in the mist.

“Do you suppose we could go in and poke around?” Grizelda murmured.

“Not unless there’s a back way in. Let’s see if we can...” Elizabeth looked away from the dispersing women, peering through the fog for signs of an alleyway that might lead to the backs of the buildings.

A shop bell rang and a man in a tall hat walked out.

The mist swirled around him and parted to reveal the unmistakable features of Earnest Front.

Only clamping her teeth together prevented her from crying out. “I’ve seen her, too, for he smiled, coming closer and tipping his hat.

*You killed her. You killed Mr. Grey’s men for the diamonds, and you probably forced Mason’s poor assistant to emigrate if he were*

*alive. And you basically sent James to prison for your crimes. Plus you killed Joshua.* The knowledge, the outrage, kept her rooted to the spot.

“Miss Barker?” Front said pleasantly, his voice grating across her ears.

“I almost didn’t see you in this dreadful fog. How do you do, my lady?”

arn her, “Sir,” Grizelda said graciously. She was clearly made of sterner stuff than Elizabeth. “Yes, the fog makes one sorry to be out and about, does it not?” Elizabeth asked.  
“May I escort you somewhere?” he inquired politely.

*No!*

“How kind,” Grizelda said, “but we shan’t keep you. I’m searching for the perfect gift for my sister. Good day, sir.” Grizelda took Elizabeth by the arm and led her out of the shop.  
Grizelda which jolted her at last out of her paralysis.

She managed to stretch her lips and incline her head as they swept past Elizabeth’s front and into the shop.

“We were too late,” Elizabeth whispered in helpless rage and grief. “I wish I had killed Mrs. Mason...”

“Yes, I suspect he did,” Grizelda hissed back. “He looks far too nervous with himself. Which is why we’ll wait in here until he’s well away from the shop. And then we shall go home and decide how to finish this before anyone else sees,” she said.

the Lady



Here, EARNEST WAS INCLINED to think the stars were aligning in his favor once again, as did he. He had had a few shocks, and a few anxieties remained, but on the whole, he felt safe.

At home, with the curtains drawn against the foggy darkness and the fire burning cheerfully in the grate, he settled down with a glass of brandy and breathed a sigh of peace. He enjoyed the distinction of possessing an aristocratic wife, and his son was a marquis’s grandson, but God, the brat was so annoying and noisy under his feet. Let the brat disrupt his lordship’s important dinner while Earnest enjoyed a couple of days of quiet space to plan his next moves.

But he wondered if he should give his staff a day’s holiday. He could not entice the Barker girl here... Or, more constructively, deal with the matter of Mr. Andover. Or would staff absence look too suspicious in that case?

One way or another, though, he rather thought he would have to deal with his brother-in-law. Lord James was his one major worry.

The man had been at Coal Yard Lane, nosing about. It was possible he had remembered something, though even the recollection that Earnest had given him the name and address of Mason’s was hardly a hanging offense.

iff than But Ernest had been naïve in those days. He had let Jarman plot?" him to bribe the girl, which left him a little exposed if this ever came to light. The girl herself had vanished years ago, which had suited Ernest and both. What worried him now was that James seemed to be much more of a company of that Hungarian fellow who had, Ernest had learned, a good reputation for solving puzzles and finding people who were better left alone.

Moreover, Tizsa was related by marriage to Lord Horace Niven, who was a very powerful and connected to issues of law and order. The last thing Ernest needed was either Tizsa or Niven poking about in his affairs.

The question he faced was how to spike James's guns without suspicion on himself. The murder of an aristocrat who had already been wrongfully sent to prison would create far too much attention. James would have to die, preferably quietly, of "natural causes." Or a tragic "accident."

Ernest mulled over some pleasingly gory scenarios. Perhaps he could even somehow involve Elizabeth Barker, who was much in Anne's company, and whom he found a rather tempting armful. Something about her manner, both gentle and unafraid, courteous and yet too direct and submissive, appealed to him. She would indeed be a pleasure to subjugate.

He heard the knock on the front door without interest. He intended to go to bed tonight while he enjoyed his peace, not go out or entertain. His servant was well aware of the fact, so he was irritated when Soames appeared at the fire.

library. "Are you at home, sir, to family?"

"I'm not at home to anyone," Ernest snapped. "I believe I may be in a position plain."

"Yes, sir, of course, sir." Soames bowed and backed out.

"Wait," Ernest commanded, frowning suddenly. "What family? My brother, is it?"

"No, sir," Soames said, returning to the room with a white card. "My lady's brother, Lord James Andover."

Well! "In that case, you had better send him up."

Too late, it occurred to Ernest that he hadn't asked if Andover was alone. He certainly didn't want the Hungarian on visiting terms, and it was no point in trying to deal with Andover under the eyes of a shareholder. He had a witness.

He rose and went to the decanter to refill his glass.



ersuade “Lord James, sir,” Soames announced, and departed.

ut. The “Ah, my lord,” Earnest said affably. “A pleasant surprise. Brandy?”

Jarman “No, no thank you.” His lordship was frowning, his thin, aris  
in thenostrils twitching. But at least he had come alone. “I need your help.  
growingfrown deepened to a scowl. “Damn it, it’s you I remember, isn’t it?”  
lost. beside me in that dreadful hell the night of my betrothal party three year  
who wasI even remember talking to you about jewelers. How much do I  
Earnestapologize to you?”

Taken by surprise when he was half expecting some kind of accu  
castingEarnest blinked and paused in the act of waving Andover to a chair.  
ly beenall,” he said. “You were hardly the first drunken youth to bend my ear  
neededlast. Besides, I can’t imagine I didn’t behave in a similar manner at th  
age. What help do you need?”

e could Andover threw himself into the chair next to Earnest’s. “I’m tr  
dover’spiece together what happened that night. Not for any great reaso  
out hercertainly not because I think it will redound to my credit in any way  
to behate not knowing. Holes in one’s memory are most disconcerting, and  
gate... to *know* before I can properly get on with my life. Does that ma  
to plansense?”

its were “I’m sure it does,” Earnest said sympathetically, “when one ha  
l in thethrough what you have.”

“I want to be married,” Andover said. “And I need to know th  
before I can think of proposing.”

ade my “My dear fellow, what can be worse than Newgate?”

Andover cast him a distracted yet shrewd glance, as  
acknowledging the barb, so Earnest added smoothly, “If the lady unde  
It’s notabout that, then surely a night in your cups is...ah—small beer?”

“That’s what I need to know,” Andover said. “I’ve spoken to my l  
on hisI even dragged Forsythe Niven to Coal Yard Lane with me.” His eyes  
wider. “But then, you know that, don’t you? *You* were there. Avoiding

“I was,” Earnest admitted smoothly, while weighing the pros and  
er wasdisclosure, “though not for the reasons you might be imagining. I  
d theregenerally known that I own a part share in that not-entirely-salubri  
rp-eyedpleasantly lucrative establishment. And I don’t particularly want it kno

“You came from the staff area,” Andover said, his brow clearing  
went back the same way to get out of my way.”

“I did,” Earnest admitted.

” “Will you come there with me now?”

ocratic Earnest’s glass bumped against his teeth. He lowered it hastily. “No  
..” The “I know it’s an imposition on your time, but, well, you’re my  
You sathusband, and we ought to know each other better.”

ars ago. Earnest couldn’t deny it felt good to hear him say so. After all, t  
need tothe man who had once haughtily forbade him from “importuning” hi  
with requests to dance at a ball.

isation, Andover rubbed his forehead. “And being there at the club help:  
“Not atremember. I recalled odd snippets when I went with Niven, and the  
. Or thedistinctive scent to your soap that made me recall our sitting togeth  
ie sametalking about jewelers.”

“Soap?” Earnest said, genuinely startled. “You smell my soap?”  
ying to A quick grin flashed across the pale, serious face. “Or whatever it  
on, andsmells so pleasant. I only notice it because it sparks memories I can  
7. I justreach. Will you come?”

l I want Assuredly, it was time to shut James Andover up for good. Earnes  
like anywished he’d done it three years ago rather than arrange such con  
revenge. But then, nothing about the diamond project had gone right.  
as beendidn’t have his hands on the wretched stones and never would now. 7  
humor his brother-in-law.

e worst “By all means. Does your family know what you intend? Dor  
mind?”

“I told my father and Langley I was going to drag you there if I  
thoughAndover gave a deprecating twist of the lips. “I think they were glad  
rstandsme out of the way of this precious dinner. Thanks for this, Front. I ap  
it.”

brother. “I hope you still do so by the end of the evening,” Earnest said :  
openedmaking for the door, “when your memories of embarrassing, y  
me.” drunkenness come flooding back to appall you.”

cons of

It’s not

ous but

own.”

}, “And

“I did,” Earnest admitted.

“Will you come there with me now?”

Earnest’s glass bumped against his teeth. He lowered it hastily. “Now?”

“I know it’s an imposition on your time, but, well, you’re my sister’s husband, and we ought to know each other better.”

Earnest couldn’t deny it felt good to hear him say so. After all, this was the man who had once haughtily forbade him from “importuning” his sister with requests to dance at a ball.

Andover rubbed his forehead. “And being there at the club helps me to remember. I recalled odd snippets when I went with Niven, and there is a distinctive scent to your soap that made me recall our sitting together and talking about jewelers.”

“Soap?” Earnest said, genuinely startled. “You smell my soap?”

A quick grin flashed across the pale, serious face. “Or whatever it is that smells so pleasant. I only notice it because it sparks memories I can’t quite reach. Will you come?”

Assuredly, it was time to shut James Andover up for good. Earnest rather wished he’d done it three years ago rather than arrange such convoluted revenge. But then, nothing about the diamond project had gone right. He still didn’t have his hands on the wretched stones and never would now. Time to humor his brother-in-law.

“By all means. Does your family know what you intend? Don’t they mind?”

“I told my father and Langley I was going to drag you there if I could.” Andover gave a deprecating twist of the lips. “I think they were glad to have me out of the way of this precious dinner. Thanks for this, Front. I appreciate it.”

“I hope you still do so by the end of the evening,” Earnest said affably, making for the door, “when your memories of embarrassing, youthful drunkenness come flooding back to appall you.”



## CHAPTER TWENTY

FOG, THICK AND filthy and evil-smelling, still swirled around the dark Coal Yard Lane. It probably scared off all but the most desperate criminal yet somehow didn't make Dragan feel any safer.

For the last fifteen minutes, he had been skulking outside the premises, moving from the street through the narrow arch that led to the alley, which he suspected was the best place to commit murder. Part on such a foggy night when very little could be seen from the windows above.

Dragan almost started when the boy touched his arm.

"He got in the hackney, and your friend's with him."

Dragan pressed a coin into the boy's palm. "Good lad. Go home and warm."

The boy's eyes gleamed, even in the fog. "There was another cover too," he offered. "Watching the same house."

Dragan paused. "Who?"

The lad shrugged. "Never saw him before. Thief, like as not. He slipped off when I did but went the other way."

"Did he?" Though the watcher made Dragan uneasy, there wasn't much he could do about it from here. With his collar up and his hat low on his head, he strolled toward the back entrance to the club. The door was not locked.

"Gentlemen," he murmured without glancing left or right. A foot stepped in one direction. A brief mutter came from the other.

He encountered no one in the passage, and the kitchen staff glimpsed at the far end paid him no attention. He ambled on to the main gaming room which was fuller than one might have expected so early in the evening. The fug of tobacco inside was as choking as the fog outside, and the smell of alcohol was profound. It was not well lit for a gaming establishment, Dragan supposed, made it harder to spot the cheating.

He slid into the place beside Inspector Harris, who, this evening garbed in a slightly smelly working man's coat and cap with heavy buttons. Beside him was the normally immaculate Mr. Solomon Grey, dressed in one of his own dockers. He even slouched. Acting came a little too easy for Grey.

"They're on the way," Dragan murmured. "Took the hackney the way you meant to, so our man can help Andover if there's any trouble en route."  
"I can't imagine there will be," Harris said, "not until he finds out exactly what he wants. And as long as you're correct in all your assumptions in the first place."

Dragan wasn't fooled. Harris wouldn't have come, let alone deployed men, had he not believed in those "assumptions."

"Someone else was watching Front's house," he said, reaching for his pocket. "Ran off in the opposite direction. He wasn't one of yours, was he?"

"No. Contrary to your apparent belief, I don't have a limitless supply of men for my own cases, let alone for yours."

"Are we playing cards, or what?" Grey inquired, already dealing with practiced ease.

Dragan glanced across the small, empty table next to theirs, to see a pair of gentlemen playing a distracted game of piquet while a scantily clad woman with blackened eyelashes at them. Both seemed curiously interested. Catching the eye of his brother-in-law, Lord Forsythe Niven, he nodded. Forsythe murmured something to Lord Langley.

Only moments later, Lord James Andover strolled into the room with Ernest Front at his heels.

longer



ELIZABETH STARED AT the unrecognizable figures of herself and Lady Cressida in the mirror. "How do you even *have* garments like this?"

They both wore thin, gaudy gowns, low cut and revealing. Griet's gown, vibrantly purple with pink ribbons, had a curved slit up the side to reveal her leg. The one which, if she chose, she could flash her ripped stocking. Elizabeth's gown was scarlet with torn black trimming, and, without petticoats let alone crinolines, it clung indecently close to her figure. Their hair was not so much dressed but shoved under a few pins and left to straggle.

ig, was “They’ve been useful in the past,” Grizelda said. “Dragan and I  
r boots.stick our noses in places where a duke’s daughter might stand out.”  
sed like “Dr. Tizsa was fairly explicit about your going nowhere near Co.  
asily to Lane,” Elizabeth reminded her.

“Well, he can’t turn tyrannical husband on me just because I’m hav  
y werechild,” Grizelda said flatly. “This is who we are as a couple, and he pr  
” me that it would not change, provided I was careful. Besides, I believe  
ut what was equally... er—explicit.”

ll your “James has absolutely no right to control my movements,” Elizabeth  
stiffly. Then, ruining the effect, she sagged. “I can’t let him be hurt,  
yed his can’t.”

“Well,” Grizelda said, picking two shabby cloaks off the bed and  
his ale.one to Elizabeth, “judging by how he dealt with your would-be abdu  
would say it’s quite hard to hurt him, physically speaking. And he do  
pply of Dragan looking out for him, along with his own brother and mine,  
nothing of half the metropolitan police force. But I don’t see why we  
g them be left at home worrying.”

“This man killed *Jarman*,” Elizabeth said forcefully, “withou  
the two making a mess!”

lad girl “That’s true,” Grizelda allowed, taking a small gold-plated pistol fr  
immune.dressing table drawer and placing it in her tatty reticule, “and why  
ed, and taking this with us. Also, Beth, we must not be separated und  
circumstances.”

n, with “Don’t worry about that. Dressed like this, I’ll be sticking to you  
leech.”

They fastened their cloaks and pulled up the hoods before they  
house. Elizabeth clutched the cloak carefully around her.

“If our mothers could see us now,” Grizelda murmured in amuse  
Grizelda they hurried toward Half Moon Street and Piccadilly.

“Mine would only see what she’s been assuming for three  
zelda’s, Elizabeth said with a hint of bitterness.

through Grizelda looked at her. “You should let James speak to them. He  
i’s was them on their knees begging for your forgiveness in five minutes.”

oline, it “I can’t.”

ssed as “Times are changing, Beth. His own sister married a banker. Ar  
happened to you is no one else’s business.”

tend to Elizabeth shook her head violently. "It's not that. It's... I didn't *tru*  
Griz. When Lila looked frightened of him, I actually believed she mu  
al Yardcause, that she had to be scared of something *he* had done. I cannot be  
man of whom I have such doubts, not in *any* capacity."

ving his Griz raised her eyebrows. "I'm told that's what engage—"  
omised "Beth?"

e James They both swung in alarm toward the speaker. She had called fr  
open door of a carriage that had halted in the road, much to the annoy  
eth saidthe vehicles behind it.

Griz. I "Quick, get in," Constance Silver demanded, and on impulse, El  
dragged Grizelda by the arm and into the coach, which immediately  
passingforward, even while the coachman exchanged insults with the drivers  
ctors, Ihackney and the dray behind.

es have "Um, this is Mrs. Silver," Elizabeth said uneasily to Grizelda. A  
to saythey might have been dressed as women of ill repute, but that didn't  
shouldduke's daughter wanted to be introduced to a notorious brothel  
"Constance, Lady Grizelda Tizsa."

it even Elizabeth needn't have worried. Grizelda thrust out her hand a  
"Mrs. Silver! I've heard so much about you."

rom her Constance's finely arched eyebrows flew up. "I can't imagine that'  
we areshe drawled, though she took the offered hand briefly before turn  
ler anyfrowning gaze on Elizabeth. "What are you about? You look like a  
nuns."

u like a Grizelda snorted. Elizabeth pushed back her hood and parted he  
briefly.

left the Constance closed her eyes. "Covent Garden wear. Don't you fee  
be better off in my establishment?"

ment as "It's a disguise, Constance," Elizabeth said.

"I noticed," Constance retorted. She didn't look amused. "For  
years,"sake, what are you thinking of?"

"That now we know who killed Joshua and stole the diamonds a  
'll havethe blame on James," Elizabeth replied. "James and Lady Grizelda's h  
have gone to make him confess, and we can't be in such a place  
standing out."

id what Constance looked bewildered. "What place?"

"Lila's old gaming hell."

st him, Constance sighed. “My dears, they’re hardly likely to ad  
st havecompetition. They have their own whores, who’re more likely to te  
e with a hair out than share. You won’t get in the front door.”

“The back door?” Grizelda said hopefully.

“No,” Constance said. “You’ve no idea the danger you’d be in.”

“Griz has a pistol,” Elizabeth said. “The thing is, I can’t—we can’t  
om the quietly at home while they face who knows what dangers from a mar  
ance of killed several times already.”

Constance lifted a speaking tube from a hook beside her and spoke  
Elizabeth “Change of plan, Danny. Coal Yard, if you please.” She replaced the tu  
moved regarded them. “The best we can do is lurk in the fog outside.”

s of the “We?” Elizabeth repeated. “You’re coming with us?”

“Someone clearly needs to look after you children.”

fter all,

mean a

keeper.



JAMES TOOK IN the gaming room at a glance. He pretended not to see  
it once, who, in any case, had his back to the door, and strode straight to the  
table a few feet from John and Forsythe.

s true,” Maintaining what was now mostly a fiction of distance between  
ing her James merely nodded to his brother. “Langley. Niven.”

pair of “Evening, Andover,” Niven said cheerfully. “Don’t disturb me—c  
out your brother’s pockets!”

r cloak James pointedly sat with his back to them, which meant Front’s ba  
to the disguised Inspector Harris and Solomon Grey. Tizza hadn’t t  
l you’d with disguise. He looked, as he often did, like a gentleman fallen c  
times. Or a refugee who had left everything behind when he fle  
tyranny.

God’s A waiter, who clearly recognized his employer, rushed over to tal  
order. Women no longer served at tables, James noted. Instead, they  
nd cast around the room, blatantly flaunting their wares, or sitting in lap  
usband couple, hand in hand, left the room, heading for the stairs and the  
without chambers above.

“Brandy, my lord?” Front suggested. “Since I believe it’s what we  
the last time.”

James nodded curtly, though he added impatiently, “There’s no



nit themy lord me. We're family, for one thing, and for another, there doesn't  
ar yourmuch place for formality in this mess." He took a deep breath, scanned  
around the room, aware of Front's gaze upon him, curious at first and  
gradually more amused.

"Remembering anything?" Front inquired.

t—wait "Not yet."

1 who's "Have some brandy as an aide memoir." Front picked up the bottle  
had been left at their table along with two glasses and a pack of cards.

0 into it. "Did we play cards?" James asked.

0 be and Front shoved one glass of brandy toward him. "No, you'd had enough  
games by the time you and I had our conversation."

"Did I just come up to you and sit down?"

After the briefest hesitation, Front said, "No, you were with the  
officer whose name I've forgotten. When I wandered over to you,  
being enticed away by some comely waitress. I took his place, sir,  
seemed to want to talk."

0 Tizsa, "What did I talk about?"

0 empty "The perfection of your betrothed," Front said flippantly. He raised  
glass. "To the eternal perfections of Lady Hampton."

1 them, And at that gesture, one of those elusive flashes of memory struck  
had sat here and raised his glass with Front to toast Cordelia. The scene  
leaning Front was the same, the words only slightly different. James took hold  
glass, feeling again the strange, euphoric unsteadiness of that evening  
ack was blurring of the face beside him, the surging loudness of the surroun-  
roubled voices.

on hard For a moment, it overwhelmed him, and he tightened his fingers  
d from brandy glass, swirling the amber liquid that he had no intention of drinking.

"I went on about the ring I wanted to give her as the token of my  
ke their James said slowly. "I was horribly maudlin, for which I apologize."

strolled "There is no need. Your sentiments were perfectly genuine, although  
is. One was not like you to share them so openly. You wanted the ring to be  
private special as her, and paid for with your own money, not your father's.  
couldn't afford the prices of your family's favored jeweler. So I told  
0 shared one I had honored with my own custom, where you could get fine jewelry  
rather less cost."

need to "Mason's... You gave me a scrap of paper and a pencil, and I've

't seem down. You even tucked it in my pocket." And that was when, with peculiarly heightened senses, James had noticed the smell of Front's second then "I did," Front said. "You were effusively grateful and then apologized for being so drunk. Which you were."

"Never been in such a state before or since," James said. He raised his glass to drink, though didn't let the liquid more than dampen his lips. His glass had been full then, too. Front had toasted his health and happiness as a married man. And then, rather cheekily, James's sister recalled the feeling he should object to that but being far too tough on the world to bother.

And then, laughing, Front had walked away. He had stopped and talked to a waitress, then dropped something heavy in her apron pocket. Her face remained blurred in James's memory, but he thought it was Lila, the girl he had brought home that first, drugged brandy. And Front, he knew now, she had paid her for her efforts.

At the time, no such thoughts had entered his happy, increasingly crowded head. Graham had come back before he fell asleep. There had been a woman who sat in his lap and laughed at him before kissing him and skipping out.

And then Niven had joined them, shortly before John reappeared. James had been pleased to see his brother, although he hadn't wanted to go home knowing he'd needed to—he just wasn't sure he could stand up.

There was euphoria as well as fury in the return of those memories, they would always be blurred and stuttering, but he knew now what had happened. He frowned at Front, as though still trying to remember. "What came of it then?"

"You told me in strictest confidence that you needed some air. Which you clearly did."

"I don't remember that bit. Did I go?" He hadn't. He knew he hadn't.

"Yes, and I went with you. Out into the back alley."

"What did I do there? More infernal talking?"

Front looked hesitant. "I'm not sure it will make you happier to have it there, Andover."

"I want to know."

Front shrugged. "It's all coming back to you now, one way or another."

"I'm not going to tell you, but I'll come with you again, if you really want to."

with his “I really want you to,” James said, standing up. To prove he was  
cap. the way and doing exactly what he was sure Front wanted, he n  
ized for straight out of the room.

Every nerve in his body tingled. He felt the hairs on the back of h  
sed his rise as they had done before attacks in prison. These next few minu  
wer lip.knew, were when Front meant to silence him. Not because his re  
l future memories on their own could hang Earnest Front, but because they coi  
Helen.doubt. And a man in banking did not need doubt about his honesty  
happyspread around the city. All Front had risked with his criminal adv  
would be lost if his family’s respectable bank failed.

spoken They were all gambling on Front’s attack coming outside, so that  
er face would not necessarily intrude on the club. Although, of course, once j  
irl who kitchen door, and into the narrower passage, he could knife James in t  
w, had and haul his body outside...

Trying to breathe evenly, James all but wrenched at the back door.  
sleepy the last time he had tried, it was unlocked. Had Front done that? Or  
waitress And if the latter, would Front notice?

ing off. James spilled into the foggy alley, instinctively shoving his back  
nes had the wall while Front stepped outside to join him, and pulled the ba  
e. He’d closed. Another tricky task loomed. To get Front far enough from th  
that he wouldn’t notice when it opened again to let out Tizsa and Har  
s. They yet keep him close enough to the building that he could be heard fr  
opened doorway and be in no danger of bumping into policemen too early.

lid I do Front swung around to face him. James pushed himself off the w  
walked into the swirling mist before pacing swiftly back the way  
ich you come. He sensed human presence there—Front’s thugs? Or Harris’  
Both, possibly.

it. Other shops backed onto the alley, and most of the buildings were  
thin. This one was broader, with a narrow tunnel running through to th  
of Coal Yard Lane. Various faint glows from several windows :  
know through the fog, but he doubted anyone looking out from them would  
to see who murdered James.

James walked back and forth across the narrow alley, between t  
mother building and the lower wall of the next, just to make sure there was  
want me behind to attack him. Then he halted about halfway between the bu  
facing the club, and waited.

leading “Anything?” Front, only just visible at the back door, took a step  
marched nearer him.

“No,” James said. “I don’t believe I was ever here at all.”

his neck “Ah, everything’s coming back to you now?” Front said, not both  
ites, he argue.

turning “You paid the girl to drug my brandy. I saw you give her a purse.”

uld cast “I might have been paying her for anything.”

y being “But you weren’t, were you?” James said. “All you wanted was for  
entures be unsure who had given me Mason’s address.”

“Had to take the suspicion off Jarman and me,” Front said, and  
the law James’s muscles to relax in relief. He had never been sure this incite  
past the confess would work. But the danger was hardly over. He could not at  
he back relax.

“Then you really did steal the diamonds?” James said, allowing a  
Unlike disbelief into his voice.

Tizza? “Of course we did. It all went exactly as I planned, right down  
being arrested for the crime.”

against “Seems unnecessarily vindictive,” James observed, watching  
ck door hands hanging loosely at his sides. Behind him, he thought something  
re door have moved. Hopefully Tizza and the police.

ris, and Front shrugged. “I needed your family mired in a little scandal so  
om the would suddenly become an acceptable suitor for your sister.”

“You wanted her that much?” James asked. “And yet you treat her  
all and than I would a thieving cur.”

he had Front’s right hand had begun to move upward, but paused now. “S  
s men? you that? Well, women need a bit of discipline.”

“Did Jarman teach you that?”

tall and Front laughed. “Yes, actually, he did. It’s about all he was usefu  
re front the end, because, as I’m sure you’ve guessed, he managed to let  
showed diamonds. His whore ran off with them. That’s when my doubts h  
be able hand glided into his coat pocket.

“How did you know he’d found them again?”

he club “One Peter O’Connor, whose arrest heralded your rather ar  
no one release.”

ildings, “So you started following Jarman and thought you knew where the  
hidden?” James allowed himself a jeering laugh. “You killed him

or two diamonds and still couldn't find them!"

Front twitched, and his hand emerged from his coat with a large, s  
dagger. "The bitch came home, and I couldn't risk her screaming blue  
ering to over Jarman's body. I decided to go after her later."

"When someone else could do the dirty work for you?" James snee  
"Exactly."

"But now you're reduced to doing your own?" James said, noddin  
r me today, which Front still held poised in his right hand.

Front laughed. "Would I hurt you, *my lord*?"

causing "What will you tell my brother?" James asked.

ment to "Nothing. I'm not going back in there at all." With breathtaking  
fford to Front leapt, and the dagger whipped down at James's throat.

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Front's  
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it." His

noying

ey were  
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diamonds and still couldn't find them!"

Front twitched, and his hand emerged from his coat with a large, serrated dagger. "The bitch came home, and I couldn't risk her screaming blue murder over Jarman's body. I decided to go after her later."

"When someone else could do the dirty work for you?" James sneered.

"Exactly."

"But now you're reduced to doing your own?" James said, nodding at the dagger, which Front still held poised in his right hand.

Front laughed. "Would I hurt you, *my lord*?"

"What will you tell my brother?" James asked.

"Nothing. I'm not going back in there at all." With breathtaking speed, Front leapt, and the dagger whipped down at James's throat.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

JAMES ONLY JUST managed to seize Front's wrist, which at least lessened the force of the blow and upset the deadly aim. Still, he felt the cold but slicing against his skin.

Front's eyes were murderous, glaring with spite. "You and I will be weaving off together into the night, and someone else will glimpse you hours' hence, long after I am in much more reliable company. I have good associates in many walks of life. Now, *die*, my lo—"

And then, everything happened very quickly. As Front wrenched the knife hand free of him, James kicked brutally at his ankles, bringing his brother-in-law down beneath him. Panicked voices and hasty footsteps rang through the mist. Still, Front's dagger hand flailed free and rose again as James made a grab for it, a swirl of skirts flashed before his eyes, the dagger spun away into the fog with Front's astonished cry, and he glancing upward, gazed into the terrified face of Elizabeth—who had disappeared from view as Front rolled, James under him, and he groped desperately for the dagger.

And then, finally, Front was plucked off him by a man on either side—Inspector Harris and John, the latter looking both appalled and furious.

Harris barked something at his men, and two tall-hatted policemen took charge of the prisoner, while John dropped down beside him. "Dear God, James, where are you hurt?"

That was when James realized there must be blood. He felt for his head, which was wet and sticky and had begun to sting.

"Damn it," he murmured, sitting up and reaching for his handkerchief, which he shoved halfheartedly over the cut. "It isn't serious." He looked around, searching for the vision of Elizabeth that should *not* have been there.

Only she was, the center of a fog-framed tableau, standing, trembling, between Constance Silver and a ragged version of Lady Grizelda.

"That will need cleaned and dressed," Tizsa said, presumably

wound, as he and John helped James to his feet. “But it isn’t life threat  
James barely heard him. His eyes were locked with Eliza  
Somehow, she was here. She had kicked the dagger from Front’s hand  
saved him. And in this moment of overwhelming emotion, tears streak  
painted face—*painted?*—her expression was naked.

*She loves me. Dear God, she does love me...*

ned the  
rn of it, They both moved at the same time. He touched her soft cheek,  
fingertips brushed the skin of his neck. He began to smile, as though  
had broken through the impenetrable mist and an answering light in her  
began to dissolve her fear. And then someone shouted.

be seen  
u a few “Oi! Grab him! Get back here, you—”

I have  
bloody dolts!”  
“Oh, for the love of...!” Inspector Harris exclaimed. “After his  
bloody dolts!”

ned his  
ing his  
s broke  
1. Even  
es. The  
James,  
bruptly  
reached  
“He’s gone under the arch, heading for the front,” Tizsa said grimly.  
And because no one was safe while Front was free, James let his hand  
from Elizabeth and ran after the policemen who’d managed to lose  
Others were charging through the back door to go through the house.

The narrow archway dipped beneath the building and took up part  
ground floor, giving easy access on to Coal Yard Lane. It was a grimy  
noisy tunnel, and the policemen ahead of him were already at the  
end, emerging to peer either way up the lane.

James paused. The policemen had moved fast after their escaped partner  
They would have at least seen which direction he took. And there was  
nowhere else for Front to have gone. People did not vanish into thin air.

Frowning, James peered at the dark, dank walls of the tunnel. There  
surely no space for a man to hide, flattened against the wall, and yet  
else could Front be? Wishing he had a light of some kind, James  
hands over the rough walls, to the left and right, and finally found  
right, not a body or even an opening, but the texture of wood.

It was a narrow door in the wall, with no handle. He pushed it  
stepping swiftly aside in case Front was waiting to lunge.

He wasn’t.

James moved forward warily and bumped his lower shin. Light  
down from far above, showing him, now that his eyes had adjusted,  
staircase made of iron. *It must lead to the roof.*

He hesitated, for he wanted to give Front no warning that he was



ening.” after him—if indeed Front had gone this way. On the other hand, the  
beth’s was slippery and cornered, and at this point had nothing left to lose  
nd and compromised by leaving the wooden door open. That would at least g  
ing her allies. Meanwhile, he ran up the stairs as silently as he could and e  
somewhat breathless onto the roof.

The fog, he thought, might be dispersing at last, for he could  
as her welcome breeze stir his hair. However, it was still thick enough to  
the sun finding Front difficult—and stumbling off the edge of the roof dang  
er eyes easy.

He paused to get his bearings, and to listen for movement, for the  
sounds of breathing. What might have been an echo of his own  
m, you panting caused his head to whip around. His skin prickled. Nerves?  
Front there?

y. He scanned all the way around him until he could make out the  
and fall buildings across the back alley, and even the edge of this roof. And t  
se him, the swirl of fog shifted, he made out the figure leaning against the c  
stack.

t of the “You really do bear a grudge, don’t you?” Front said amiably. “/r  
gloomy, really prepared to die just to see me locked up and your own  
e other disgraced?”

“Yes,” James said, although God knew he didn’t want to die, not n  
risoner, he had found Elizabeth, not now that he had seen that love in he  
re was *Concentrate, you fool!*

r. “I thought so,” Front said conversationally, as James walked  
ere wastoward him. “Which is why I took the precaution of leaving one of t  
t wherehere, just in case I was cornered.”

ran his Front’s hand rose from his side, revealing an old-fashioned pistol  
, to the steadily at James.

“What is the point?” James said. “You confessed to everything  
t open, witnesses, including several officers of the law and a peer of the real  
were seen to try to murder me, and you cannot possibly escape. Enje  
notoriety. And after all, you might not hang. I didn’t.”

filtered “My papa isn’t a marquis,” Front said with a sudden snarl, and  
a spiral James charged him, there was a deafening report. James barely felt the  
his arm, so intent was he on the man who might not hang. He kept goi  
coming for the first time, Front looked alarmed. It was instinct to step back,

the fellow did, desperately raising the fired pistol like a club—except that he stood. James and wobbled backward, teetering on the edge of the roof. At the last minute he reached for James, who sat abruptly on the roof, mostly to stop the merged momentum carrying him into Front, who fell, yelling, arms flailing, in the night.

James peered over the edge. The mist had thinned, and there were no lanterns below now, by which he could see the scattered people. Greatly alarmed, a smote him at once, for he had assumed everyone had gone inside at least to the front of the building. But there was Elizabeth staring up at him, faintest. And surely that was Constance, clutched in the arms of Grey, as though he had shallowly hauled her out of the way of the falling body.

Or was it? “Dear God,” James whispered, appalled by what he could have done in his sudden spurt of arrogant fury.

“*You might not hang.*” The sudden realization had been unbearably clear when, as he fell, his arm began to hurt like the fires of hell. Behind him, a fire chimney flared, and he turned, blinking toward the light.

“Meant him to fall, did you?” said Bertie Sandman, sitting down on the ground. “Are you him. “Don’t blame you. Suits me too, to be honest. In fact, I arranged for your family to come up here to see to it. Better for everyone this way.” He took a flask from his pocket and unscrewed the top while he peered at James’s arm. “How about that, you didn’t he? Here, this’ll help.”

He passed the flask to James, who, beginning to feel lightheaded, took it from him with his sound arm and raised it gratefully to his lips. A very slowly something familiar assailed him, giving him pause. He stared at the man whose eyes gleamed avidly in the light of his lantern, and abruptly everything fell into place.

That was how Front—a pretty inept fighter, after all—had managed to kill the vicious Jarman without even making a mess. Because Jarman had been drugged, just as James had been three years before. And Bertie had been his ally. No doubt they had meant to share the diamonds.

At the Exhibition the day Elizabeth was attacked, Front had been at the Crystal Palace. He must have sent word to Bertie, and Bertie’s thugs had just as to abduct her to discover the location of the diamonds. The diamonds were lost to them both, but Bertie and Barb really were making a play for them, and Porter’s murder of Zeb Fisher had got rid of both a rival gang leader and Jarman’s lieutenant. Front had been a troublesome and, no doubt, ex-

umbledally.

instant, Bertie smiled at James. “Go on, takes the edge off the pain. C  
top hisAbruptly, he broke off and sprang to his feet, just as Harris and h  
into theloomed out of the darkness and seized him. “Here, get off! I ain  
nothing!”

e were Tizsa dropped down beside James. Again.

uilt and “Opium,” James said, holding out the flask with considerable effort  
de or atseemed very far away. “Enough to kill me, I suspect. I can smell  
at him.here.”

gh he’d Tizsa took the flask from him, and his stern, handsome face faded  
mist.

done in



e.

lanternWHEN THE MISTS cleared, James was in a strange but bright and pleasant  
enfolded in the comfort of a feather mattress and clean, fresh bed lin  
ppositearm throbbed and his neck stung, but sun streamed through the window  
to meetwhen he turned his head in search of familiarity, Elizabeth sat in  
sk frombeside his bed. Inevitably, she was sewing.

‘He got *We must be in the Tizsas’ house.*

Having found his necessary point of reality, James relaxed  
took itremembered. He smiled.

whiff of As though she saw it from the corner of her eye, her head jerked  
Bertie,Her sewing went flying and she all but threw herself upon the bed.

rything “Oh, James, thank God!” Her voice was muffled in his neck—t  
side of his neck.

aged to His good arm crept around her without his conscious will, and he  
ian hadhis head again so that he could bury his lips in her hair and inhale her  
ad beenbeloved scent.

“Dragan said you wouldn’t die. But you wouldn’t wake up either  
1 in thewas so afraid...”

ad tried “Has Tizsa been poking about it my arm?”

ls were “Apparently the ball passed straight through your flesh without to  
power.bone, so providing there’s no infection, you will heal. Only you hav  
der andlot of blood and need rest. But oh, James, *why* did you go up there alor

pensive “Why were you there at all? And with your face painted?”

A sob of laughter shook her, and she raised her face, half weeping and half smiling. "We disguised ourselves as women of ill repute in order to get into the club. Fortunately, Constance found us and convinced us we'd be safe from the real women of ill repute if we even tried to set foot there, so we lurked in the alley instead. No one saw us for the fog, but I heard your voice, and when you started fighting, I didn't care who saw me. Tizsa was going to stab—"

"Hush," James said, smoothing her hair beneath his hand. "You saved my life, or at least preserved me from a nasty injury. I won't scold you for going into there, even though my heart almost stopped with fear. I went after you because he had to be stopped, and I knew Tizsa and the police would catch me sooner or later."

He stared into her face. Although it might ruin the fragile love she had for him, there had to be honesty between them.

He swallowed. "I knew he would fall. Even after he shot me, I didn't let him." At best, he'd made no effort to save him.

Her eyes didn't change, and for a moment he thought she hadn't heard. Her hands were on a chair, and she understood. Then she said, "Good."

A shudder of shocked laughter passed through him. It hurt, but he couldn't stop, and after a moment, Elizabeth began to laugh, too. Both her arms were around him, and even through the bedclothes and the mirth of the pain, the shape of her shaking body aroused him.

Over her head, he saw the bedroom door push open. Tizsa appeared, and then vanished again. He closed the door silently, and as the safe privacy had been promised with that one soundless act, desire surged through James, hot and urgent, an affirmation of life and love.

He moved, throwing off the covers and pinning Elizabeth beneath him. Only then did he realize he was stark naked.

She didn't appear to mind. The laughter dying slowly on her lips, she gazed up at him without fear.

"I love you," he said hoarsely. "Every moment since you first loved me in Hanson Row, I loved you. And now I couldn't bear to let you go. Please marry me..."

She gasped, her breast heaving beneath him. "Oh God," she whispered. "Oh James, I..." She lifted her head and fastened her mouth to his.

Her answer was in her kiss, and rightly so. There was so much to say...

ing, halfonly their bodies could show their meaning. Pain vanished in hot, get intokisses and wild caresses that somehow loosened her gown so that she be tornthrow it off.

foot in “Oh, but your wounds,” she whispered.

I could “Make them better,” he said, for they were the least of his concern. Helet me heal yours.”

He hadn’t forgotten the horror of her experiences with Jarman. Ived mythe urgency of their embrace and the clamoring of his body, he k r beingcaresses slow and tender until she lay trembling and eager in his a er himthrough utterly bewildered as well as wildly aroused.

find me His fingers found the heat between her silken thighs, and she arching into his caress. In moments he thrilled to the feel of her comir felt foragainst his hand, the sweet, desperate sounds of her pleasure. Onl locking his mouth to hers, did he begin to enter her body and rock the ..*madeto* heady, shattering joy.

heard or



but heELIZABETH LAY NAKED on his pillows, stroking his head, which rested oth herbreast as their breathing slowly calmed. Still astonished by what he ha and theher—the first physical pleasure she had ever known, and the certainty love—she couldn’t stop smiling.

's head At last he moved, propping himself once more on his sound elbow thoughinto her face. A smile played around his lips, although there was a throughanxiety in his eyes. “This isn’t quite how I intended the first time betw to be. Rushed and silent... Did I hurt you?”

th him. She cupped his cheek. “Don’t you know what you gave me? My or is that I might have caused you pain. You were *shot*, James, and I had ps, shewhat I was doing...”

oked ateverything. I’ve never found such delight, such pleasure, as in yo you go.turned his head to kiss her hand. “Forgive my urgency.”

She smiled. “Forgive mine.”

ispered. “Was it acceptance of my proposal?”

“Of course it was,” she whispered, and lost herself once more say thatwonder of his kiss.

, heavy “In that case,” he murmured at last against her lips, “you had better e couldbefore the Tizas decide we’ve had long enough alone and unchaperon

In the event, they were only just in time. Barely a second after s dressed and helped James restore order to the bed, a knock sounded is, “anddoor.

Hastily, Elizabeth went to open it and admitted both Grizelda and Despitewho at least pretended not to know what their guests had just done ept hiscarried a tea tray, which he set down on the dressing table.

arms as Grizelda sat on the chair before it and began to pour tea, while T on the edge of the bed and examined both James’s dressings. James gasped,look innocent.

ig apart “Very glad to see you awake,” Grizelda said, passing the first y then,Elizabeth, who ferried it to James, who was now sitting up again m bothpillows.

“Thank you,” he murmured, making sure his fingers brushed her eyes asked a question, and she could only nod. Aloud, he said, “I hope be the first to congratulate me. Elizabeth has just agreed to become my

“Excellent.” Grizelda beamed, approaching the bed with two cups, on her which she gave to her husband before settling in the armchair by the b d given glanced at Elizabeth. “I see all doubts are at an end.”

y of his James had been honest with her, so Elizabeth sat at the foot of and met his gaze. “There was a moment I doubted you,” she blurted. to lookwe first met Lila and she was afraid of you. She thought you’d c hint ofaccuse her of poisoning you, but there was a moment when I feared yo veen usjust like Jarman and Front and all those other men. It broke my heart then to have doubted you devastated me.”

ily hurt “And now?” he asked.

no idea She dropped her eyes. “Two weeks ago, we had never spoken,” s with difficulty. “We are still learning each other, but I know enough ou areyou. As I hope you trust me.”

u.” He He held out his hand, and she moved closer to take it.

“There is still your family, though,” she said ruefully. “They will be thrilled.”

“Well,” said Tiza, “the Nivens were hardly overjoyed when Griz : in theon marrying me.”

“They’re not above using you, though,” Grizelda pointed out.

er dress “Nor above helping me,” he returned.

ed.” Grizelda smiled. “It’s family,” she said to Elizabeth and James. “You she had find your way, as we do. Do you want to know about Earnest Front at the Bertie?”

“Yes,” James said.

l Tizsa, “Front is dead.”

l. Tizsa “Good,” James said fiercely, then swallowed. “I have a horrible he almost took Constance Silver with him. It never entered my head Tizsa sat was down there still. I never looked...”

tried to “Well, it provided her with a rather startling introduction to Mr. Griz said, “but no harm was done. And frankly, it’s better for your far cup to he’s dead. Easier for Helen.”

nst the James nodded. “And Bertie?”

“Under arrest,” Tizsa said. “So is his mother, though they might ers. His let her go. He’ll be tried for Jarman’s murder and your attempted murder.

e you’ll “I think he’d come to kill Front,” James said. “I was just a wife.” opportunity. Only, how did he even know Front was going to be there?

, one of “He had someone watching Front’s house,” Tizsa said. “My lady said. She So Bertie went to Coal Yard Lane, left word with the staff to send Front

him, and went up to the roof to wait for him. He went from inside the the bed so he didn’t know anything about the commotion outside. Front was

“When on the roof, but before Bertie could approach him, you appeared.”

ome to James frowned. “I *thought* someone else was there when I first you were but I assumed it was just my nerves playing tricks. It has all been

art, and Bertie and Barb seizing power in the underworld, hasn’t it? Killing trying to get hold of the diamonds, sending Porter to kill Fisher, getting

out of the way.”

he said Tizsa nodded. “I think so. They’d had enough of Jarman’s tyranny to trust fancied a bit of their own. Only, they overreached, and now Bertie

babble fast enough in the hope of being granted transportation instead hanging. Harris looks forward to breaking up a lot of crime, including

hardly smuggling, prostitution, and a whole ring of theft and stolen goods.”

Elizabeth drank her tea, one sad thought breaking into her happiness insisted wish we had been in time to save Mrs. Mason.”

To her astonishment and not a little outrage, both James and Tizsa to grin.

“We were in time,” he said. “Andover and I went round there yesterday morning before we went to Newgate, and advised her to go to Brighton and week or two. Her sister is there, and she’s thinking of going for good. I hurried her along and...er—told one discreet neighbor that the poor lady had sadly, died suddenly. We hoped the news would get back to Front.”

Grizelda set her teacup down in its saucer with unnecessary force. “I was feeling unfortunately, it didn’t get back to Elizabeth or me, and we went to Ithaca Hill to discover her ‘death’!”

“Sorry,” Tizza said. “It slipped my mind.”

Grey,” “And mine,” James admitted. “But then, you forgot to mention to me that you meant to storm the club as ladies of easy virtue.”

A breath of laughter escaped Grizelda. “Well, it was worth it to see the appalled face of a genuine madam. Where will you live when you have to marry?”

“Distracted, Elizabeth met James’s gaze. Another moment of bonus communication passed between them.

Elizabeth smiled. “James has a house in Kent. It will divide easily between us two and has lots of space for a school.” *And for goodness and love. I don’t want to live up to fear or loneliness, ever.*

“I have a house,  
already

arrived,  
I about  
Jarman,  
g Front

my and  
e can’t  
stead of  
; opium

ness. “I

a began



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## About Mary Lancaster

Mary Lancaster lives in Scotland with her husband, three mostly grown kids and a small, crazy dog.

Her first literary love was historical fiction, a genre which she is mixing up with romance and adventure in her own writing. Her most recent books are light, fun Regency romances written for Dragonblade Publishing. Her *The Imperial Season* series set at the Congress of Vienna; and the *Blackhaven Brides* series, which is set in a fashionable English spa town frequented by the great and the bad of Regency society.

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