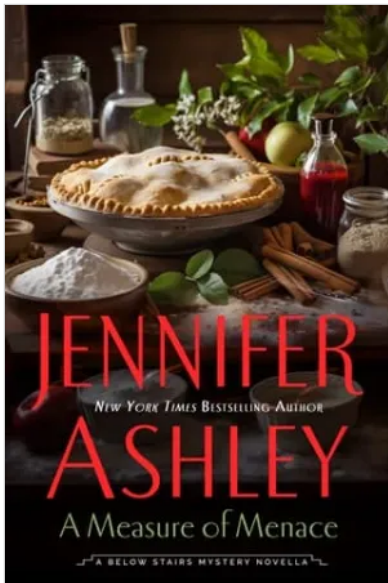




A Measure of Menace (Kat Holloway Mysteries #4)

Author: *Jennifer Ashley*

Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: October 1883

When cook Kat Holloway and the kitchen staff maintain the empty Mayfair house while the family resides in the country, Lord Clifford, Lady Cynthia's confidence-trickster father, arrives in London and asks Kat and Daniel McAdam for help. Lord Clifford might be accused of murder but won't go to the police because his involvement with the victim will implicate him in another crime.

Kat and Daniel must pool their resources and unravel this tricky situation before Lord Clifford is arrested. Kat will do anything to spare her friend Lady Cynthia disgrace and ruin, even when the investigation leads her into grave peril.

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October 1883

“Lord Clifford has arrived,” Mr. Davis, the Mount Street house’s butler, announced as he entered the kitchen.

I glanced up in surprise from my worktable, where papers, my notebook, and several cooking tomes were strewn about me. I’d seized the opportunity of having no family in the house to go over my recipes for the next social Season, which would begin in January. I’d be expected to come up with a myriad of meals for whatever gatherings my mistress, Mrs. Bywater, had planned, and I wanted to be prepared.

“I beg your pardon?” I demanded of Mr. Davis.

The Bywaters had taken Lady Cynthia, their niece, with them to their country house in Somerset to enjoy crisp autumn weather and the shooting. I knew neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bywater would actually creep through wet grass to aim a shotgun, but they would happily eat whatever their friends bagged. Mrs. Bywater was one for brisk walks but no exertion beyond that.

Cynthia, I imagined, would suffer continuous ennui. While she delighted in vigorous activity, she was not keen on her aunt’s and uncle’s rather vapid acquaintances in the country.

They’d left most of the staff behind, except Mr. Bywater’s valet and Sara, the upstairs maid who doubled as a lady’s maid. Mrs. Bywater had decided that anyone else would be too much expense in train tickets.

We were to keep the house in order and well stocked for the Bywaters' return later in the winter. I'd half expected Mrs. Bywater to insist we take less pay, as the family would not be in residence, but I suspected Cynthia had prevented that.

"Lord Clifford asked that I make up a room for him," Mr. Davis answered, clearly annoyed. He'd wanted this quiet time to inventory the wine, and Lord Clifford had the habit of pinching bottles from the cellar. "He tells me that he requires only a light repast for supper."

I gazed around the empty kitchen in dismay. The dresser held a small box of aging potatoes and a few herbs. A pot of stock slowly burbled on the back of the stove as always. I'd retained enough in the larder to feed the staff, but there was little more than that.

"Oh, does he just?" I all but snapped.

"Indeed. Mrs. Redfern is settling him in, being very civil."

Which meant that Mrs. Redfern was as annoyed as the rest of us.

Lord Clifford was Lady Cynthia's father. Mr. Bywater's sister had married him, connecting the Bywaters' ordinary but well-off family with penniless aristocrats.

Lord Clifford was a rogue of the first water, who had more or less swindled his way into his title. By now, all other claimants had passed away, so he really was the Earl of Clifford, but at one point, he had definitely not been first in line.

I rather liked the rascal, who had an absent-minded kindness in him, and he had suffered the loss of two of his children. But whenever Lord Clifford appeared, trouble soon followed.

“Well, his repast will be very light.” I slammed my notebook shut and tossed down my pencil. “I can nip out to the market, but I doubt I will find anything at this hour.” It was late afternoon, and anything good in the markets would be gone.

Mr. Davis, having no reply to this, stalked from the kitchen and continued down the passageway to his butler’s pantry. The banging door sent a cold draft that fluttered my papers at the table.

I tidied my books and notes before I rose and snatched up my coat and basket. I ordered Tess, who’d just come in but lingered in the scullery to chat with Elsie, the scullery maid, to start slicing the potatoes. I’d given Tess the afternoon off, as we weren’t busy and I’d wanted the time to work on my menus, so she was bubbling with good spirits.

“Right you are, Mrs. H.,” she said cheerily, sailing into the kitchen.

“Put them in a bowl of cold water, so they won’t turn brown,” I instructed before I charged out of the scullery door, trying not to mutter under my breath about unheeding lordships who couldn’t be bothered to send word ahead.

The cool air as I ascended to the street calmed me somewhat—it was a lovely autumn evening—but Lord Clifford had caught us at a decided disadvantage.

However, I, a mere cook, could not turn out an aristocrat from his daughter’s home or refuse to feed him. If I dug in my heels and informed him he’d have to find a meal elsewhere, I’d soon be out a post, and when all is said and done, I am a practical woman.

Also, I was a bit curious as to why Lord Clifford had abruptly turned up. Mr. Davis had made no mention of his wife accompanying him, or Lady Cynthia either. Why he wasn’t at his country estate engaged in shooting fowl like the Bywaters and every

other gentleman in Britain was a mystery.

The greengrocer in Oxford Street had slim offerings, as I'd suspected. I filled my basket with a few small cabbages, choosing those with the fewest dark spots, some additional potatoes that weren't too soft, and carrots that were the crispest of the lot.

I had some salt pork in the larder, but that was hardly fit for an earl, so I stepped to the nearest meat market for sausages the butcher hurriedly wrapped for me. He was about to close up shop and not happy he had one last customer to wait upon. I thanked him sweetly, paid over the coins, and headed home.

Once Tess and I had chopped everything, I put the vegetables and sausages together in a pan along with the potatoes that Tess had already prepared, stirring vigorously with my metal spoon to relieve my pique.

When the meal was complete, I sent it up with a few homemade buns, hot from the oven. I always had fresh dough handy so I could bake what I needed to. For sweet, Lord Clifford would have to make do with cheese and a few sliced figs. Mr. Davis raised his brows over the offering, no doubt worrying about what wine would go with it.

He sighed and took himself upstairs, his stiff back telling me he hadn't recovered from his irritation.

The staff were happy to tuck into the remainder of the dish, rounded out with the salt pork and more buns. I ate with them, though I usually took my meals alone or with Mrs. Redfern. Someone needed to keep an eye on the under servants—the footmen in particular were wont to be too boisterous. Mr. Davis and Mrs. Redfern were upstairs waiting on Lord Clifford, so it fell to me to be their minder.

Mr. Davis returned before I'd finished my repast.

“Lord Clifford requests to see you, Mrs. Holloway,” he announced in his haughty butler’s tones. “Right away, if you please.”

I dabbed my mouth with my napkin then stood and carried my plate to the kitchen. I set it on the table and laid my napkin over it, indicating I’d return. I was still hungry and did not want the others to pinch my food.

“He gobbled up his meal fast enough,” Mr. Davis said to me once we were in the passageway. “Never seen a man eat so intensely. Didn’t make much conversation, only demanded more wine once he’d slurped down the first glass.”

“And wishes to see me?” I asked with misgivings. I gestured toward the back stairs. “Shall we?”

Mr. Davis shook his head. “He stressed that you should come alone. Which suits me. I’d like some of that supper myself.”

“I have a plate warming for you on the stove,” I told him.

Mr. Davis sent me a grateful nod and made his way into the kitchen, finished with Lord Clifford. I dropped my grease-stained apron into the laundry room as I passed it, smoothed my hair, and climbed the stairs to the main house.

It was very quiet with the family gone. I missed Lady Cynthia, who liked to bound down to the kitchen and chatter away, regaling me with tales of her unconventional friends. Her conversation these days was full of Mr. Thanos, a clever but shy young man who lectured at the Polytechnic in Cavendish Square. I was pleased with her interest.

I entered the large dining room to find Lord Clifford by himself—Mrs. Redfern must still be busy opening up rooms for him. He was seated at the head of the table, in Mr.

Bywater's place. The table, even without its extra leaves, held eight, and Lord Clifford looked small and alone in the vast space.

Lord Clifford's hair was a light shade of brown touched with gray that receded from a high forehead. He'd let his moustache and sideburns grow thicker since I'd last seen him, possibly to compensate for losing more hair on the top of his head.

He shoveled in a last mouthful of the meal I'd prepared for him, wiped his lips on the linen napkin, and beamed at me, though his smile held some sadness.

"An excellent repast, Mrs. Holloway. I should have expected no less. What did you call this dish?" Lord Clifford tapped his empty but sauce-streaked plate with his fork.

"Bubble and squeak," I answered. "I am afraid there was little else to feed you."

"Bubble and what?" The earl chuckled. "Excellent. I must have our own cook learn to prepare it."

"I'm certain she already knows, your lordship. It is a common dish below stairs, made with leftover cabbage, potatoes, and sausage or bacon. Except I bought most everything fresh tonight and added some carrots for body."

"Well, it was excellent, whatever you call it." Lord Clifford pushed the plate away. "Do sit down, Mrs. Holloway. I need to speak to you."

I curtsied stiffly. "That would be quite inappropriate, your lordship."

"Pish-tosh. There is no one here. It's why I sent old Davis and Mrs. Redfern away. I have something I wish to tell you, most urgently, and no one else can overhear."

With one hand, he shoved out the chair next to him. I contemplated it, then moved

down the table to the chair above the one he wished me to take and conceded to sit in that. It did feel good to let my legs bend, but I held my hands in my lap and kept my back straight.

“Very well.” Lord Clifford breathed the words in exasperation. “I came to you because I heard my nuisance in-laws were out of the house. I’m in a bit of a bind, Mrs. Holloway, about a very delicate matter.”

I kept my face impassive, not wishing to betray the alarm that filled me at his every word. “What is this delicate matter?” I made myself ask.

Lord Clifford traced designs on the tablecloth with the handle of his fork. A few drops of dark sauce fell on the linen, but I said nothing about it.

“You see, I owed a chap a powerfully large sum of money,” he said after a few moments of silence.

Oh, dear. Lord Clifford could be a bit of a confidence trickster, but he also, according to Cynthia, sometimes wagered heavily or became enmeshed in dealings he could not afford to be, and so had to borrow money to get out of them.

“A moment, your lordship,” I said, as his precise wording struck me. “You said owed. Do you not owe this man any longer?”

“No.” Lord Clifford drew a sharp breath. “Because he’s dead. Bashed on the head, or knifed, or something, a few days ago.” He dropped the fork to the plate with a clatter and fixed me with a desperate gaze. “Some think I did it. I did not. I need you, Mrs. Holloway, and that clever fellow, McAdam, to prove I am innocent.”

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I sat still while dismay bordering on panic washed through me. Lord Clifford had the habit of getting himself into scrapes, sometimes dangerous ones, and I did not doubt that what he told me was true.

In my dim understanding of our justice system, a lord wasn't tried at the Old Bailey like the rest of us. He was expected to stand before his peers in the House of Lords and hope he hadn't made enough enemies among them to be condemned.

Even if he weren't convicted, the shame of the earl standing trial would be a blow for his wife and daughter, yet another scandal Lady Cynthia would carry for the rest of her life. The Shires family had been through several terrible ones already.

Lord Clifford regarded me piteously. He must be desperate if he'd decided the best help he could find was his daughter's cook and that cook's beau.

I told myself to approach the problem in the calm and sensible way I would any troubles below stairs.

"Did you actually see this dead man?" I asked trying to keep my voice steady. "I believe not, as you have no idea how he was killed."

"It is not that simple." Lord Clifford regained some of his arrogant impatience. "I did visit Mobley earlier that day—this past Sunday, it was. I'd arranged the meeting with him, even though his shop is shut on Sundays, as though he's a pious man." He scoffed. "As I say, I owed him quite a sum, and I asked him to give me longer to fetch it for him. We argued—loudly. I stormed away, and I am afraid a number of people saw me. Hiram Mobley's place of business is in the Strand. The road is quite

busy, even on a Sunday, and the appearance of an earl in his carriage with his coat of arms is noticed.”

“You took your own carriage to meet with this insalubrious person?” I blurted before I could stop myself.

Lord Clifford blinked. “Of course. How else was I to move about Town? My coachman drove me here all the way from St. Albans. I saw no reason for him to put his feet up while I charged about in a hansom.”

“A hansom might have been more discreet, your lordship.”

“I was not trying to hide from anyone.” Lord Clifford shrugged. “I borrowed the money, fair and square, and I meant to pay it back. I thought I’d have plenty to give Mobley, well within the allotted time, but I’ve had rotten luck, is all.”

Lord Clifford often had rotten luck. “Did you lose it on a horse?” I asked.

His eyes widened. “On the gee-gees? No, no. Horses are notoriously unreliable unless one has an informant in the stables or can somehow have a sure winner nobbled. But that’s cruel to the beasts, so I stay away from it.”

My hands tightened in my lap. “Perhaps you should tell me exactly why you borrowed the money, your lordship.”

“I had to prove that I could put up my half, didn’t I?” Lord Clifford’s gaze willed me to tell him he’d been in the right. “He’d never have agreed if I hadn’t shown him the money. Let the dog see the rabbit, eh?”

“Who wouldn’t have agreed?” I asked in perplexity. “The bookmaker?”

“What bookmaker?” Lord Clifford was as bewildered as I was. “I never saw a bookmaker. I told you, this wasn’t about horses. Or any other sort of wager.”

“Then what on earth was it about?” I commanded in exasperation.

“Steamships, of course,” Lord Clifford answered, as though this was reasonable. “Investing in a company of them, specifically. One a friend owns. It was an excellent dodge, and I could not resist. But it went wrong when old Dougherty refused to commit to the full share. We had him on the hook—oh, so beautifully—and then he said he didn’t think steamships were a good investment after all. We’d doubled his first, smaller stake, but he refused to give us a larger one. He’d decided to put all his money in railroads through the wilds of Canada. Idiot. Someone is fleecing him good and proper.”

My hands tightened further as I sorted through his convoluted tale. “You are saying you borrowed money to convince this Mr. Dougherty to invest in a steamship company?”

Lord Clifford tapped the table with the flat of his fingers. “You have it, Mrs. Holloway. I met old Dougherty at one of my clubs. He is rolling in riches, is the man. A nabob. I wish I could have been a nabob rather than an earl. I’d quite enjoy all that money, and I don’t care much for what people think of me. I truly thought gaining a title would make me filthy rich and give my wife a bit of a lark, but it has not turned out the way I thought at all.” He ended on a sorrowful note.

“Why was it important for you to have cash?” I steered him back to the point. “If Mr. Dougherty was the one investing in the company, why did you need money?”

“Well, he didn’t know my friend Jacoby had set up the scheme, did he?” Lord Clifford’s expression softened into a self-satisfied one. “I didn’t let on I knew Jacoby at all. I suggested that both Dougherty and I begin with a small investment, as it was

a good venture I'd heard about. An equal amount from both of us. I had to produce my share and show it to Dougherty, or he wouldn't have gone through with the preliminary investment."

I steeled myself. "What was the amount?"

"Ten thousand guineas." Lord Clifford winced. "I owed fifteen on it by the time Mobley turned up his toes. Would have been even more, had he lived."

"Fifteen thousand ... "

My dismay returned. The dead Mr. Mobley must have been an unscrupulous moneylender who charged exorbitant rates of interest. These sorts of men would lend to anyone, but they expected to be paid back on time and turned dangerous if they were not.

When I was a girl, a moneylender had set up shop around the corner from Bow Lane where I'd grown up. My mother had never let me walk past his place, as various ruffians the moneylender employed would lurk outside it. I reasoned that they'd not be interested in a skinny lass rushing by, as I could never possibly owe them money, but I'd heeded my mother's warning.

"It would have been worth it and easy to repay," Lord Clifford said mournfully. " If Dougherty hadn't pulled out. He cheated us out of that money, blast the man."

Or, Dougherty had tumbled to the fact that Lord Clifford and his friend were trying to swindle him and had prudently walked away.

"You said you'd doubled Mr. Dougherty's investment," I continued. "Which means your stake would have doubled as well, would it not? Couldn't you have used that to pay back the moneylender?"

Lord Clifford regarded me with exaggerated patience. “No, Mrs. Holloway. We gave the money I borrowed to Dougherty. We had to. To convince him that a larger investment would be sound.”

“I see.” I wanted to shake the man. “You were tricking him into thinking that his investment had doubled, when you hadn’t invested the money at all.”

Lord Clifford tapped the side of his nose. “Now, you understand.”

Oh, good heavens. “Is your friend’s steamship company even real?”

“Of course it is. Jacoby’s offices are in Wellclose Square, near the London Docks. He’s got stake in a ship and everything. Only, the income is not what he’d wish. We thought we’d spark it a bit.”

By cheating an honest man out of ten thousand pounds. But the scheme had failed, putting Lord Clifford deeply in debt to a moneylender who was no better than a swindler himself.

I drew a deep breath. “If this false dividend had persuaded Mr. Dougherty to give you still more money, what would you have done with it?”

“Jacoby was going to put it into his shipping company, of course. The investment would have been bound to pay off eventually, and Dougherty would see some return for it. Maybe not the riches Jacoby had claimed, but something. We could have strung him along for a while.”

I briefly wondered how Cynthia, who could be so wise, had sprung from such a gullible parent.

“Would Dougherty ever have seen any money, your lordship?” I pinned him with my

no-nonsense gaze.

“Why not? He and I both stood to gain from the larger investment, and Jacoby promised my money would come back to me five-fold, if not in the vast sums we’d promised Dougherty ...”

As I continued to stare at him, Lord Clifford frowned, and his fingers began to twitch.

Then his face crumpled entirely, and he fell back against his chair. “Oh, bloody hell. Mrs. Holloway,” he said limply. “What have I done?”

He’d provided himself a motive for murdering the moneylender, was what he’d done. Mr. Jacoby obviously had planned to cheat Lord Clifford as well as Mr. Dougherty, roping Lord Clifford in by pretending to be such a good friend. Lord Clifford might have borrowed still more money and been in a tight spot indeed. Mobley’s death had possibly relieved him of this.

“I’m not certain what you believe I can do, your lordship,” I said after a time. “Catching whoever murdered the moneylender is the business of the police.”

“Good Lord, I can’t have the police mucking about in my business. You have no need to solve the murder entirely, Mrs. Holloway. Only to prove that I didn’t kill the man.”

I decided not to point out that both tasks would perforce be one and the same. “I understand.” I ran through various ways I could help at all, then emitted a sigh. “Very well. I will see what I can do.”

The utter gratitude with which Lord Clifford beheld me almost made me soften to him. Almost.

“And please, please, whatever you do, do not tell my wife,” Lord Clifford begged.

“Or Cynthia. She’d rake me over hot coals. Promise me you’ll keep them out of this.”

I had no intention of distressing Lady Clifford or Lady Cynthia with this mess. “I will do my best.”

“Thank you.” Lord Clifford rested his elbows on the table, his face in his hands. “Thank you, Mrs. Holloway. You are an angel of mercy.”

I left Lord Clifford stewing in his realization that he had borrowed a large sum from a crooked moneylender to give to his equally crooked friend. It was clear to me that Mr. Jacoby had planned to fleece Lord Clifford not only out of the ten thousand, but out of whatever Mr. Dougherty had come up with for the full investment. Lord Clifford ought to bless Mr. Dougherty for turning away before Mr. Jacoby pulled the two men deeper into his schemes.

I wondered if Lord Clifford could be forgiven the debt to the moneylender, since the moneylender was now deceased. Mobley’s heirs might want to be repaid, of course, but once the nature of Mobley’s business was exposed to the police, the heirs perhaps wouldn’t be able to collect. But there was no telling.

I descended to the kitchen before Mr. Davis decided to come hunt for me. As far as he was concerned, I’d only gone to the dining room to receive praise for my meal, but I’d been some time about it.

Tess, still exuberant from her unexpected holiday, started to clean up supper and prepare breakfast, refusing my offer of sending her to bed early. She was too keyed up, she said, and would never sleep.

“Hard work helps a body rest, don’t it?” Tess asked as she scraped food scraps into a basket. She ruined this virtuous statement by adding, “Dancing with your chap at a knees-up don’t hurt either. It was glorious.”

“Where was this knees-up?” I asked curiously. It had been an age since I’d danced, or at least, it felt like it.

“You wouldn’t approve, Mrs. H. It were a gin house, but Caleb and I didn’t take no gin. We was there for the piano and the fiddle, and we danced until we nearly dropped.”

Taverns and gin houses often offered music and dancing to entice customers in to purchase spirits. Tess was correct that I did not approve of gin, which led too many to their ruin, but I could not admonish her for enjoying herself.

I was tempted, as we worked, to ask Tess to bid Caleb—Constable Greene of Scotland Yard—to tell me everything he could find out about the death of one Hiram Mobley of the Strand. However, when I’d turned to Caleb for assistance in the past, he’d nearly landed himself in a good deal of trouble, so I resisted. Inspector McGregor, his superior, had not taken kindly to me using the constable to gain information.

I hesitated to question Inspector McGregor as well, understanding why Lord Clifford wanted his own name kept out of this situation. My concern was more for Cynthia than her father, but I knew Inspector McGregor could fix upon a suspect and squeeze him until he was a pathetic pulp of a human being.

“Angel of mercy, indeed,” I muttered.

“What’s that, Mrs. H.?” Tess looked up at me.

“Nothing,” I said. “I’m off to scatter largesse.”

I took up my basket and a shawl and went up the outside stairs. It was my habit to distribute the food scraps to the hungry who would gather near the house at this hour,

knowing of my generosity. The food would be thrown away if not eaten, so why let it go to waste?

I did not see James, Daniel's son, who sometimes lingered, both to make certain I was unharmed by those who swarmed to me or to offer his services as an errand runner. The fact that James was nowhere in sight did not mean he wasn't lurking. I sent the shadows a significant glance, hoping James, if there, would understand my silent message.

Whether James had been present or not, once the rest of the staff and Lord Clifford had gone to bed later that night, a quiet knock sounded on the back door. I opened it to find Daniel McAdam on the doorstep.

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These days when Daniel, a delivery man with thick dark hair and very blue eyes, visited at night, he greeted me with a soft but fiery kiss. He did so this night as well.

One day I'd succumb to him. Whether that surrender would be wise and beautiful or a very foolish action, I had not yet decided.

For now, I returned the kiss with warmth and led him into my kitchen.

I always held a dish back for Daniel in anticipation of his visits. Tonight, it was a portion of the bubble and squeak, which I'd topped with extra sausage. Daniel's eyes widened appreciatively when I slid the plate in front of him at the table.

"Lord Clifford is here," I said.

Daniel froze in the act of taking his first bite. He stared up at me then continued to masticate, his expression changing from consternation to blissful enjoyment.

He swallowed. "This is heaven, Kat."

I pretended not to warm to his praise as I sat down across from him. "It is nought but cabbage and potatoes. For peasants to eat after a long day in the fields."

"Lucky peasants, if you cooked it for them." Daniel's sincerity radiated. "Lord Clifford arrived, you say? That is interesting."

"It is a devilish nuisance, you mean. And he's gotten himself into a bit of bother, which is no amazing thing."

As Daniel continued eating—really, he must starve himself all the day long the way he shoveled it in—I related Lord Clifford’s tale.

“I see he is as wily as ever,” Daniel said when I’d finished. He scraped up the last of the gravy with his fork. “Though not as wily as he believes, from what you say. I agree that his friend Jacoby was about to fleece Lord Clifford as much as he’d intended to fleece Mr. Dougherty.” He licked the fork clean.

“Great luck for Lord Clifford that the moneylender was killed.” I rose to fetch the kettle I’d set on the stove and carried it to the table. “Which is what the police will say.”

I poured a trickle of very hot water from the kettle into the teapot, letting the sound soothe me. I set the lid back on the teapot and returned the kettle to the stove.

“Plenty of people will benefit from Mobley the Moneylender being no more,” Daniel said as I reseated myself. “Not only Lord Clifford.”

“Which means anyone in London could have killed the man,” I said, discouraged.

Daniel shook his head. “Not anyone. This murderer would have to get past the toughs Mobley surrounded himself with, or be someone Mobley would trust. If someone desperate rushed past the ruffians, the murderer might have been killed as well.”

“And their body dropped into the Thames,” I finished. “In that case, we might never know who killed Mobley.”

“Unless the police interrogate said toughs. Though I imagine those Mobley employed have discreetly disappeared or at least found a new post.”

“If it was someone Mobley trusted, it might have been a friend,” I mused. “Or a

brother or cousin. Or one of his own ruffians.”

“It is certainly worth looking into. I haven’t heard of Mobley, but I know men in the moneylending business. One of them might have some knowledge of what happened.”

Mobley’s rivals, Daniel meant. In the underworld, criminals kept themselves informed of one another’s actions. One had to be careful not to intrude on the wrong patch.

“Then there is Mr. Jacoby.” I lifted the teapot and refreshed our cups with the fragrant liquid. “He purportedly owns a shipping company. If Lord Clifford began to fuss about the money he now owed Mr. Mobley—and couldn’t pay back—perhaps Mr. Jacoby solved the problem for him.”

“A possibility,” Daniel conceded.

I’d had a notebook already open on the table before Daniel arrived, but it was one in which I’d been making notes on my recipes. Its pages were stained with sauce and smears of butter, but it was more precious to me than the secondhand cookbooks I’d returned to the housekeeper’s parlor.

My dear friend Joanna had given me a new notebook last Christmas, which I kept put away so it would not be dirtied. I now retrieved it from a drawer in the dresser, opening it to a blank page when I resumed my seat.

Mr. Mobley, I wrote across the top. “We need to find out more about Mobley. Was he married? Did he have children? I hope not, for the poor mites’ sakes. Who were his brothers and sisters? Friends? People he especially trusted?”

“I’ll go to the Strand in the morning, have a poke around,” Daniel offered.

“I rather hoped you’d be able to look at the police findings on the death. They must have already begun an investigation.”

“Mm.” Daniel rested his elbows on the table and lifted his teacup in both hands. “Any curiosity I betray will reach certain ears. I will try to have a glance at their files, if I can, but I believe I’ll learn more by going straight to Mobley’s shop.”

“By ‘certain ears,’ you mean Mr. Monaghan,” I said darkly.

Daniel took a noisy sip of tea and set down his cup. “He is keeping me on a short tether these days.” His voice was tight, betraying his frustration.

Monaghan was Daniel’s guv’nor at Scotland Yard, a man who had no title I could discern, but whom the other inspectors and superintendents walked softly around. Daniel was in thrall to him for a past transgression that Monaghan had taken personally.

I wasn’t certain which worried me more—Daniel investigating a moneylender and his criminal connections, or Mr. Monaghan sending Daniel into danger because Daniel had asked too many questions.

I let out a sigh. “I wish I did not worry about you so much.”

Daniel had the audacity to grin. “I rather like you worrying. It means you might care for me a bit.”

My face grew hot. I had not meant to admit such a truth. “I do care, you daft man. Why else would I have kept back the bubble and squeak for you? The rest of the staff and Lord Clifford devoured most of it. I went to great effort to hide it from them.”

“I see.” Daniel gazed at me so long my face heated further.

“Well,” I said briskly, trying to banish the troubling feelings inside me. “We have many tasks ahead of us. Where do we begin?”

I made my start in the morning by cooking breakfast for the ten staff in the house and Lord Clifford.

Before Daniel had departed, we’d made a possible list of suspects. I’d jotted these in my notebook, wishing to divide the lot between us for investigation. Daniel then said he’d take most of them, as it would be too dangerous for me to walk through London asking questions about a dead moneylender, which left me little to do.

At least, so Daniel supposed.

With the family away, I had a bit more freedom to come and go, even when it was not my day out, though I would not take too much advantage of that. I still had plenty of work to do, and I did not wish Mr. Davis or Mrs. Redfern to believe I was shirking my duties or deserting them.

Not that Mr. Davis didn’t spend long hours in his butler’s pantry reading newspapers, or that Mrs. Redfern didn’t use the time to write letters to every member of her family and all her acquaintance. I saw no difference in me occupying myself by walking about London, as long as I was home when needed.

I invented the excuse of visiting Covent Garden market to find the best comestibles for new dishes I wanted to attempt in the family’s absence. Tess declared stoutly that she could make a start on luncheon without me, so I headed out after breakfast in coat and hat, a basket on my arm.

Covent Garden was a long way from my true destination, but I began to walk that direction as I left the house in Mount Street. When I reached Regent Street, I found an omnibus heading east and climbed aboard, clutching my basket on my lap as the

crowded omnibus trundled along to the Strand.

I decided to leave the moneylender and his ruffians to Daniel but let my curiosity take me farther east, past the Tower of London. I abandoned the omnibus in Fleet Street and took the underground, a thing I disliked doing, but it saved much walking, to emerge near the soaring walls of the Tower.

Beyond the Tower, I entered the docklands. Warehouses and a large railroad depot lined the street on which I walked, interspersed with music halls and gin houses—entertainment for the dockworkers and sailors when they left their duties. These men worked very hard, and I did not begrudge them their brief time of pleasure, but I thought that pouring gin down their throats was not the wisest course. My own husband had been a sailor on merchant ships, and gin had done him no good at all.

Wellclose Square lay a little way beyond the Royal Mint. Daniel, who was rife with historical details about London, had told me that this square had been the home of ships' officers and well-heeled gentlefolk a few centuries ago. A church designed by the father of a famous actor and playwright, Colley Cibber, had stood at its center.

The expansion of the docklands had changed the face of the square over the years. Now almshouses filled the streets in spaces that didn't have public houses and gin halls. The Sailors' Home—where working sailors could board while in port—ran half the length of Wells Street, which flanked the square, and a house for sailors who'd become too enfeebled to labor sat on the other end of it. I wondered if those who lived in the first ever believed they'd finish up in the second.

Mr. Jacoby's business sat halfway along the west side of the square. The sign over the door of the building, which looked no different to those surrounding it, proclaimed Jacoby and Sons, Shippers.

The door was unlocked, so I pushed my way inside. I found myself entering a narrow hallway with two doors on either side of it. One door held a thick lock but the other, which had the label Office tacked onto it, was ajar. I opened it and peered in.

“Good morning,” I called.

I received no reply. The office was dim and dusty, with a hardwood floor that needed scrubbing. One desk reposed in a corner, with only a blotter and an ink stand on top of it. Two clerks’ desks, which clerks would stand behind, faced the door, but no clerks were in sight.

I spied another door behind the large desk. I boldly marched to it, settled my basket firmly on my arm, and knocked.

I heard rustling and voices, mostly asking each other who the devil could be disturbing them. I retreated to the other side of the desk before a plump, middle-aged man yanked the door open. He stopped short when he saw me, as though expecting—or fearing—someone entirely different.

“Yes, madam?” he asked impatiently. “How can I help you?”

“This is a shipping company, is it not?” I inquired.

The man fixed me a look that said he did not approve of women charging into offices that were obviously the enclaves of men. “It is. What about it, madam?”

I put on a firm expression. “I would like to speak to Mr. Jacoby, please. I might have business for him.”

The man’s bushy brows climbed. He wasn’t much taller than me, and his soft limbs and belly gave him a round shape. His receding sandy-colored hair contributed to this

overall form as did the fact that he was clean shaven, though his eyebrows were thick.

“ I am Mr. Jacoby. I very much doubt you have an appointment, Mrs.—”

“Davis.” I said the first name that popped into my head and hoped Mr. Davis would forgive me. Not that I would ever let him find out I’d appropriated his name for my purposes. “If I wanted to ship a quantity of woolens, what would I?—?”

I never found out whether Mr. Jacoby would view me as a potential client or throw me out, because at that moment, another man charged into the office behind me.

“Jacoby!” Lord Clifford shouted. “ Swindler . I thought we were friends, you swine.”

He hurtled around the desk and charged Mr. Jacoby, reaching out to close his hands around the other man’s thick neck.

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I seized Lord Clifford by the arm and tried to haul him backward. I could not pull him fully away, but I was at least strong enough to prevent him from reaching Jacoby.

Jacoby retreated a step, but instead of rushing to safety, he adjusted his cravat and stared at Lord Clifford in amazement.

“Swindler? Me? Clifford, whatever do you mean?”

“Mrs. Holloway is right.” Lord Clifford wrested himself from my hold, but he did not resume his attack on Jacoby. “You planned to dupe me out of as much money as you did Dougherty. I trusted you. Now a man is dead, and if his successors come after me for that debt ... You should pay it. Why don’t you hand me fifteen thousand guineas on the moment?”

Jacoby blinked at Lord Clifford in bewilderment, but I saw the canniness in his eyes as he tried to think of a way to turn this dilemma to his advantage.

“Who is Mrs. Holloway?” Jacoby asked. “She is obviously a siren temptress trying to sway you into doubting me. Perhaps she wants the money.”

Lord Clifford stared at Jacoby, baffled. “Mrs. Holloway is a cook. And she is standing right here.” He indicated me.

In the very back of my mind, I took some offense that Lord Clifford could never view me—or any cook for that matter—as a siren temptress. Cooks could be temptresses as much as anyone else, once we put aside our unflattering work attire.

My more immediate reaction, however, was dismay that Lord Clifford had exposed my ruse. Mr. Jacoby pinned me with a steely gaze.

“She told me her name was Mrs. Davis.”

“I misspoke,” I said quickly. “Davis is my maiden name.” Actually, it was Holloway, which I’d resumed after the death of my rather horrible husband, but Mr. Jacoby did not need to know my history.

Jacoby’s eyes narrowed, but Lord Clifford waved the confusion away. “Whatever you call her, she pointed out that you were drawing me into this scheme alongside Dougherty. You coaxed me in by telling me how much I could make once we finished with him.”

“Because my company will do very well, once I have it running smoothly,” Jacoby answered, assurance oozing from him. “Dougherty’s capital would have been enough to make us both rich.”

“And my capital,” Lord Clifford snapped. “I have a wife and daughter to look after. If I’m out that fifteen thousand I owed Mobley, my family will go to a workhouse. My darling daughter will have to hire herself out as a governess or some such awful thing. You owe me that money, Jacoby.”

“Surely you can raise it, your lordship.” Jacoby’s smoothness of manner returned. “You are a peer of the realm.”

“Shows you know nothing about the bloody aristocracy,” Lord Clifford muttered.

Jacoby went on in the same unruffled tone. “You are trusting the word of an ignorant cook over mine? When I am an experienced investor?”

“She is not an ignorant cook. She is very clever. She helped me work a scheme with a necklace last year that exposed an anarchist. From what I understand, the police were most appreciative to find him.”

I tried to make myself inconspicuous behind Lord Clifford and willed him to cease speaking. Jacoby turned his glare on me.

“Are you working a scheme on me now?” he demanded, more of me than Lord Clifford. “Will the police be here soon to haul me to a magistrate?” He peered past me as though a few helmeted constables would thunder in any moment.

“No,” Lord Clifford said in confusion. “Why would I alert the confounded magistrates?” He poked a finger toward Jacoby’s soft middle. “If Mobley’s mates come after me for that fifteen thousand, and you do not supply it, I am finished with you. What’s more, I will ruin you. That, at least, is something my title is good for.”

Jacoby’s ingratiating manner deserted him, and he regarded Lord Clifford coolly. Too coolly, as though he had no fear of Lord Clifford’s influence. “Then you had better leave, your lordship. Or I will summon the police to remove you and your precious cook from my premises.”

“Ruin you.” Lord Clifford jabbed his finger one more time in Jacoby’s direction and then turned on his heel. “Come along, Mrs. Holloway. Let us shake the dust of this place from our feet.”

I’d not had the chance to question Jacoby—I’d planned to ask whether he had been near the moneylender’s shop on the day of Mobley’s murder, and whether he knew the moneylender at all—but I had little choice except to follow Lord Clifford out.

I paused on the threshold to glance back at Jacoby. Whether I meant to apologize or say something polite so he wouldn’t rush after me and clout me, as many felt they

had the right to do to servants, I wasn't certain.

Jacoby wasn't looking at me. He watched Lord Clifford stride away, and the hardness on his face told me he would not soon dismiss the earl's threats. He was a dangerous man. Lord Clifford, I realized, did not understand how dangerous.

I turned and hurried out before Jacoby could notice me.

Once outside, I drew a breath of the sharp October air. Autumn had arrived in London, with gray clouds piling in the east and a stiff breeze flowing up the Thames.

I reached Lord Clifford as he passed the music hall, shut and quiet this early, and turned the corner into Cable Street. He was going the entirely wrong way if he intended to return to Mayfair, but he was marching in a fury, paying no attention to his surroundings.

"Perhaps we should find a hansom, your lordship," I panted as I trotted next to him.

"Eh?" Lord Clifford peered at me as though he'd forgotten my presence. "Oh, I suppose." He waved at one that was racing along the street, its horse's legs a blur. The driver utterly ignored us. "Damn and blast the fellow."

I tugged his sleeve. "There is a stand at the next corner. We have to queue."

"I haven't queued for anything since I was a young man scratching for a living," Lord Clifford growled, but he let me lead him toward Prince's Square. "Do you know, Mrs. Holloway, that being related to an earl means you can still be dirt poor? And said earl doesn't give a damn? Not that the peerage endowed me with any large sums once I inherited it. Probably my cousin, the former earl, didn't have two coins to rub together, either. It's a funny old world, isn't it?"

His rage at Jacoby seemed to have dissipated. Lord Clifford regarded me with sadness, his eyes red-rimmed, as though he'd shed a few tears since racing from Jacoby's office.

At the turning to Prince's Square, I hailed one of the hansoms that slowed, seeking new fares. I bundled Lord Clifford inside the cab and gave the driver our direction in Mount Street.

The cabby barely let me sit down before the vehicle jerked forward. I clutched my basket securely and balanced on the seat.

Lord Clifford gazed into the street as we passed delivery wagons and people moving about in their daily labors. His entire body drooped. "I've been a complete fool, haven't I? I thought I was so clever, believed Jacoby a trustworthy mate."

"Have you known Mr. Jacoby long?" I asked.

Lord Clifford shrugged. "For years, though I haven't seen him since I became a respectable aristocrat. Jacoby was always good for a scheme, and I usually came out of it well. He has changed," he concluded sorrowfully.

"As have you, your lordship. Perhaps now that you are a peer, Mr. Jacoby regards you more as a mark than an ally."

"That is it exactly. How on earth am I to tell my poor wife that I might have lost us fifteen thousand guineas? We do not have it. As my daughter is always quick to point out, the Shires family is skint."

"Perhaps you will not owe the money." I tried to sound hopeful. "Mr. Mobley was a villain, was he not? The police might close down his business entirely, in which case you'd not be beholden to anyone trying to collect the debt."

“The police.” Lord Clifford snorted. “My dear, I have had my fill of the police for my lifetime. When they came to investigate my beloved son’s death, do you know what the detective inspector told me?” He faced me, his expression one of rage combined with bleak sorrow. “That I was to blame for poor Reggie shooting himself. That I should have known he was in a bad way and ought to have locked up all the guns. And do you know, Mrs. Holloway?” Lord Clifford’s eyes filled with tears that drove away the anger and left only grief. “The inspector was right. I know that, if not for me, my Reggie would still be alive and with us.”

Lord Clifford put his gloved hand over his eyes and bowed his head.

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I beheld Lord Clifford in silent compassion as the cab sped its way around the Tower to the Minories. His shoulders quivered, but I let him cry without embarrassing him with exclamations of sympathy.

I doubted very much that Lord Clifford had been to blame for his son's death, and I grew angry at the unnamed inspector for telling him so. What a cruel thing to say to a man who'd just lost his son.

From what little Lady Cynthia had related to me about her brother, I'd gleaned that the Honorable Reginald Shires had been a wild young man, prone to deep play, amassing large debts he couldn't pay. He'd also been one for the ladies—those with expensive tastes—which hadn't helped. He'd been in despair the night he'd died, Cynthia had told me, though about what, she hadn't known. He'd been quite inebriated on top of this, a bad combination.

However, I knew the death of a loved one could bring much guilt, whether that loved one had passed peacefully from a lingering illness or abruptly in a shocking way.

If only we'd realized what was happening, we would think. If only we had worked harder to prevent it, hadn't been paying attention to our own lives, had been there more for them.

It had been several years after my mother's death before I realized that, unless I'd suddenly acquired divine powers, I could not have forestalled her passing. She'd urged me to take the position in a good kitchen as under-cook, which would be excellent training for me, and wouldn't hear of me staying home to take care of her.

She'd know even then that she was ill, I'd understood long afterward. She'd been making certain I could make a living on my own once she was gone.

Even now, more than a decade on, these thoughts made my eyes sting.

I believed Lord Clifford had no reason to feel such guilt, but he'd been the lad's father—an ineffectual father, from what Cynthia said. He could not help but feel responsible.

Also, young Reginald had been Lord Clifford's heir, and gentlemen set much store by their heirs. Male ones, that was. Daughters were inconvenient beings that had to be married off, and it was rather scandalous when they were not. Lord Clifford had managed to see one daughter married—Cynthia's sister, Emily—and then he'd lost her as well.

The cab left Aldgate Street for Fenchurch Street and meandered through the City to Cheapside, where people lingered to watch Mr. John Bennett's entertaining clock chime the hour. As we passed Clover Lane, which opened from Cheapside, I gazed longingly into the narrow passageway. Near the end of it was the small house where my friend Joanna kept my daughter safe.

I hugged my basket and shrank into the corner of the hansom as Clover Lane fell behind us. If anything happened to Grace, I would be devastated. While I was a cook and Lord Clifford a lofty earl, we shared that understanding.

When the hansom trundled past Temple Bar and rattled into the Strand, Lord Clifford suddenly came alert.

“Driver,” he shouted. “Stop here.”

The cabby abruptly pulled the horse past two wagons and halted at the side of the

road. Lord Clifford slammed open the folding door of the hansom and leapt to the pavement.

I scrambled out after him, certain I knew what he intended. Above me, the cabby snarled invective—he hadn't been paid.

"Wait there, please," I called up to him, and hurried through the crowd after Lord Clifford.

I barely kept the earl's thin back in sight but caught up to him when he turned to a door and plunged through it. The door was not marked, but I knew in my bones that it led to the establishment of one Hiram Mobley, moneylender.

"Your lordship, I do not think this is a good idea?—"

I tried to grasp his coat, but Lord Clifford evaded me. He charged down a hall similar to the one that had led to Mr. Jacoby's office and pounded on the door at the end.

"Open up," he bellowed. "I've come to tell you you'll get nothing from me, do you understand? I'll have the law?—"

The door was wrenched open, but no moneylender or his ruffians appeared on the threshold. Instead, Lord Clifford gaped at a tall, slim-faced man of about thirty in a neat black suit. The man's pale hair was combed and pomaded back from his sharp face, and a pair of light blue eyes skewered Lord Clifford without fear.

I stepped into the shadows, knowing full well what sort of gent this was, and I had no wish for him to notice me. I saw no sign of Daniel anywhere—if he'd been investigating in Mobley's office, as he'd said he intended to, he'd have come forward to assist.

“You’ll have the law do what, sir?” the tall man inquired in a cool tone.

“Arrest the lot of you,” Lord Clifford spluttered. “You’re extortionists and thieves, and I owe you nothing.”

The man did not change expression. “If there is any arresting, sir, I will be the one doing it. I am Detective Sergeant Scott, looking into the murder of Mr. Hiram Mobley. Who might you be?”

Lord Clifford drew back. “Oh. Well. Good. So you should.”

“You did not answer my question, sir.” Sergeant Scott spoke with calm assurance.

“No? I am the Earl of Clifford, young man. I’ll leave you to it, shall I?” He attempted a negligent gesture. “You carry on.”

Scott gave him a shallow bow that held no deference. “Your lordship. Mind if I ask you a question or two, now that you’re here?”

Lord Clifford stiffened. “Why the devil should you?”

I could have told Lord Clifford that this was exactly the wrong thing to say. Arrogantly swearing to a detective from Scotland Yard would only convince him of one’s guilt.

“I meant to pay a call on you, your lordship,” the sergeant said. “You’re on a list of gentlemen who owed Mr. Mobley a powerful lot of money. In addition, you came here on the afternoon of his murder and argued with him. The next morning, he was found dead. The doctor who examined him said he was killed sometime between ten o’clock that evening and midnight. Will you please tell me what happened? In your own words?”

Lord Clifford swung to me, his face holding stark fear, but I nodded at him encouragingly. The sergeant completely ignored me.

“I argued with him, because he was a swindler.” Lord Clifford regained some of his composure. “He demanded I give him half again what I owed him, right away, if you please. Bloody cheek of the man. I refused, and he threatened me—and my family. I told him what I thought of him. Then I left. He was alive when I went out, Sergeant. Now, I have matters to attend to. Good day to you.”

“Another moment, sir.” Sergeant Scott’s quiet voice was powerful enough to stop Lord Clifford from rushing out. Had I been here on my own, I’d have already been in the wind, but I wanted to make certain Cynthia’s father returned safely home.

Lord Clifford turned back ungraciously. “What is it, now?”

“I’d like you accompany me to Scotland Yard, your lordship. To have a chat with my inspector and get your statement written out all proper.”

“I will not,” Lord Clifford stated in a haughty tone. “I told you, Sergeant, I am quite busy. Good day to you.”

Any other police detective might be intimidated by angering an aristo, but Sergeant Scott was obviously not easily daunted.

“Constables,” he barked. Two uniformed constables appeared, one from inside the office and another from the door behind me. “Lord Clifford, I am placing you under arrest for the murder of Mr. Hiram Mobley. As you are a peer, you’ll not be locked in the cells, but you’ll speak to my inspector, who’ll then determine where and when you’ll be examined.”

“The devil I will.” Lord Clifford glared at the sergeant for a moment, his back

straight, then he did a foolish thing. He turned and sprinted for the outside world and freedom.

Lord Clifford barreled past me, and I scarcely avoided being slammed into a wall. He tried to charge past the constable in his way, but that constable was a beefy young man, who spread his arms to form an unmoving barrier.

Lord Clifford's fists came up, as though he planned to punch his way out. Perhaps such tactics had worked when he'd been a young man, fleecing others up and down the streets of London. He was middle-aged now and likely not as fit as he had been.

The muscular constable caught the blow Lord Clifford threw at him and pushed the earl backward.

"None of that, your lordship," Sergeant Scott said quietly. The second constable locked a cuff around Lord Clifford's wrist and the two young men hauled Lord Clifford out.

I stepped bravely in front of the sergeant, swallowing when he turned his sharp gaze on me. "Please, do not do this," I said shakily. "There is no need. Lord Clifford is distraught, but he's done nothing."

Sergeant Scott regarded me without benevolence. "Take yourself out of the way, missus, if you don't want to be nicked alongside him."

As worried about Lord Clifford as I was, I did as Sergeant Scott bade me. I reasoned, through the panic that started to grip me, that it would do no good for me to get myself banged up.

I'd seen the inside of a prison before, and I never wanted to see it again. If the sergeant arrested me, I'd be thrown into a dank cell while Lord Clifford was served

tea in a detective inspector's office. I was nobody important.

"He is an earl," I tried.

"As I said, my inspector will sort it out." The sergeant set a low-crowned hat on his head. "Out you go."

He clearly did not know who I was or why I'd come with Lord Clifford, but he wasn't interested enough to discover anything more. He herded me out ahead of him into wind that had turned cold, then locked the front door firmly with an iron key.

I could only watch as Lord Clifford was bundled into a plain black carriage by the two constables, he struggling and protesting all the way. Sergeant Scott climbed in behind him and his men without a word, slamming the door. The driver gave a command to the horse and the carriage surged into traffic, leaving me alone.

I frantically scanned the street, as though Daniel would pop up out of nowhere and assist—to be fair, he sometimes did—but I saw nothing of him.

My panic, which memories of Newgate had engendered, faded. I made certain the carriage was long out of sight before I turned and headed back into the office that had once housed Mr. Mobley.

When I emerged from the offices again, I saw, to my amazement, that the cabbie had waited for me. Not out of concern or politeness, I understood. He didn't want to be out his fare, which now I'd be expected to pay.

"Regent Street, please," I said as I climbed inside.

This time, the man let me be seated before he charged away down the Strand.

I'd found nothing of interest in Mobley's office. Though the sergeant had locked the door—I assume Scotland Yard had taken charge of the keys when they'd carried away Mobley's dead body—I knew how to not let a lock stop me. A few hairpins sacrificed, and I was in.

The police must have removed anything suspicious, because I found mostly empty drawers. No ledgers, no stacks of cash or bags of coins, no strongboxes. No convenient letters from clients threatening to kill Mr. Mobley if they weren't given more time to pay back their loan, outlining the exact day and time they'd do it.

Nothing to point to anyone, including Lord Clifford, that I could see. Sergeant Scott must be a thorough young man.

I had not heard of Sergeant Scott, so I had no idea who his inspector was—not McGregor, whose subordinates I'd met. I would have to find out more about him.

At Regent Street, I paid the cabbie more shillings than I truly wanted to part with but also gave him my thanks for staying with me. He drove away with a brief nod and didn't look back.

I entered the tall house that was my destination, hefted my basket, and made my way upstairs to a higher floor. I did not see the landlady on my way, so I could not inquire whether the gentleman I sought was at home. He might or might not be at the Polytechnic, where he'd become ardently absorbed in his work, but I had to try. If he wasn't here, I'd make my way to Cavendish Square and hope to be admitted to his office.

I tapped on the door at the top of the long flight and was rewarded with a thin voice saying, "Enter."

A slender young man with very dark hair and a pair of spectacles hunched over a

desk against a wall, absorbed in the three books and several sheets of paper spread before him. He did not look up when I walked inside and closed the door, as though he'd forgotten anyone had knocked.

"Mr. Thanos?" I ventured.

His head jerked up. Mr. Thanos swung around in his chair, blinked a moment, and then hurtled to his feet.

"Mrs. Holloway." He bounded across the carpet to me, beaming a wide smile. "What a delight. Sit down, sit down. I'll have my landlady bring us up some tea and as many cakes as you wish."

When Mr. Thanos expressed delight to see a person, he meant it. Any other man might simply attempt politeness, hiding his annoyance that I'd interrupted him, but Mr. Thanos was quite sincere.

"No need." I held up my hands to keep him from rushing out to the staircase and calling for the tea. "I must leave at once. I have come to ask if you could find Daniel—Mr. McAdam—for me."

Mr. Thanos's dark eyes widened behind the thick glass of his spectacles. "What makes you believe I can find McAdam any quicker than you can? The man is as elusive as a ghost. And ghosts do not exist, as you know."

I shook my head. "What I mean is, I need help finding him. I would rush about London seeking him myself, but it is not my day out, and I cannot stay away from home much longer."

As my desperation reached him. Mr. Thanos softened with sympathy. "Of course, my dear Mrs. Holloway, I will be most happy to assist. You seem unhappy. Is something

amiss?” His concern, like his joy at my visit, was true.

“Cynthia’s father has been arrested.” Before Mr. Thanos could splutter questions, I rushed on. “I need Daniel to find out what is happening and make certain Lord Clifford is released. At once. He no more killed the moneylender in the Strand than I did.”

“Good heavens.” Mr. Thanos stared. “Are you speaking of that murder? It was in the newspapers. Why the devil should anyone believe Lord Clifford had anything to do with it? He’s a congenial chap. I’ve had fine chats with him.”

“You read the newspapers?” I asked. This was the most astonishing statement in Mr. Thanos’s last speech. He rarely lifted his nose from thick tomes on calculus, electromagnetism, and other mysterious topics.

“My landlady peruses them all.” Mr. Thanos waved fingers stained with ink. “She especially loves sordid crimes—as long as they happen far from her. She told me of it. But why?—?”

“I will explain everything in time, Mr. Thanos,” I assured him. “I must hurry off. Please, if you find Daniel, send him to Scotland Yard at once. Or send word if you are unsuccessful. I have other means of prying him out if necessary.”

“Of course, of course. I will go immediately.” Mr. Thanos snatched a coat from the stand beside the door and began to put it on wrong-side out.

I slid it from him, turned the sleeves the right way around, and helped settle it on his shoulders. He thanked me profusely, grabbed his hat, and opened the door for me, ushering me out ahead of him.

We went down the stairs together. Mr. Thanos offered to find—and pay for—a

hansom to take me home, but I declined. It wasn't far, and I'd run to Mount Street faster than a horse and cab could wind through the heavy traffic.

I thanked him, letting Mr. Thanos wring my hand. He'd come out without gloves but still wearing his spectacles, which he disliked being seen in. Before I could mention either, he spun from me and dashed up the street, waving at hansoms who rushed past him.

I turned my steps for Mount Street. I was right that I could reach the house quickly, and soon I was clattering down its outside stairs to the kitchen. My basket was still empty of comestibles, but that couldn't be helped.

Tess looked up from where she chopped onions, her eyes streaming from their pungent emissions.

"Oh, Mrs. H., I'm that glad you're home. Lady Cynthia's here. She's upstairs in her chamber, but very upset, Mrs. Redfern says. She wants to see you, and was that unhappy when Mrs. Redfern told her you were out. You'd better?—"

Before Tess could finish telling me what I needed to do, the backstairs door banged, and a harried tread sounded in the flagstone hall.

A moment later, Lady Cynthia, dressed in well-tailored trousers and man's coat, strode with her usual vigor into the kitchen.

"There you are, Mrs. H.," she proclaimed. "I was about to tramp the streets searching for you. Mummy told me my errant father escaped his tethers and came to Town. We haven't heard a blasted word from the man since. Mrs. Redfern says he arrived here, but he's gone off again. Do you know what the devil has become of him?"

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Tess watched me with rounded eyes that were red from the onions, Cynthia in worried impatience. I set my empty basket on the dresser and contemplated how best to answer Lady Cynthia's question.

"Perhaps we should go into the housekeeper's parlor," I suggested to Cynthia.

Her annoyed concern turned to alarm. "Please tell me now, Mrs. Holloway. What has happened? Is my father dead?"

"What?" I started. "No, indeed, he was alive and well when last I saw him."

Cynthia exhaled in relief, but her urgency didn't ebb. "Tell me, Mrs. H. I don't mind if Tess hears. She already knows much about my benighted family."

I glanced to see who else was nearby. The footmen not upstairs under Mr. Davis's thumb were being loud and merry in the servants' hall. Elsie washed up in the scullery, singing at the top of her voice. The boot boy, Charlie, should be upstairs in his bunk, taking a nap or studying his reading. I gave him very light duties when the family was not in residence.

When I was satisfied I wouldn't be overheard, I leaned to Cynthia. "Lord Clifford has been arrested. I am so sorry. I could not stop it."

Cynthia groaned and dramatically slapped her forehead. "What has he done this time? Break it to me gently. Who has he bamboozled? The Prime Minister? A royal prince?"

“I am afraid the police believe he committed murder.”

Cynthia’s hand came down, and she stared at me in amazement. Her eyes were very light blue, a different color from but the same shape as her father’s.

“Murder? Papa? Absolute rot. The man can’t bear to squash a bug.” Cynthia gazed at me as though willing me to tell her it had all been a mistake. I was certain it had been, but I had no answers. “Where is he? Bow Street?”

“I believe he was taken straight to the Yard,” I said. “I am trying to find out what will happen to him.”

Cynthia grew suddenly solicitous. “My dear, Mrs. H., I have no doubt you did everything you could. My father in trouble is a common thing, I’m sorry to say, though it’s not usually this bad. I’ll go to Scotland Yard at once and speak to that inspector fellow—McGregor. He doesn’t like me, but he’s a reasonable chap.”

“It might not be that simple. It is not his case.” I explained about Sergeant Scott and how he’d indicated he’d have Lord Clifford speak to his inspector, though not that inspector’s name. “McGregor might be able to do nothing.”

“Doesn’t hurt to try. I’m off then. Come with me, Mrs. H.?”

I hesitated. “I have Mr. Thanos looking for Daniel, and I will bid James to as well if I can find him. Daniel will be able to secure Lord Clifford’s release, I’m certain of it.”

“McAdam can work wonders,” Cynthia agreed. “But I’m not the sort who’s willing to sit and wait.”

Neither was I, but I was much more restricted than Cynthia, a fact she did not always remember.

“Go on, Mrs. H.,” Tess urged. “It’s only the staff to get meals for, and I can do that. They know I won’t take none of their lip if they don’t like what I cook.”

I preferred them to enjoy their meals, but I was grateful for Tess’s help. “Mr. Davis will be most annoyed,” I said, prevaricating.

“We’ll make it up to him,” Tess assured me. “You need to go spring his lordship.”

“Thank you, Tess. I’ll make it up to you as well.” I observed Cynthia’s attire. “Perhaps you should change into something more conventional,” I said as tactfully as I could.

Cynthia gazed down at herself. “You mean they might arrest me if I go barging into Scotland Yard in my frock coat and trousers? Ah, well, you are likely right. I’ll rush upstairs and change into a frock so I can bat my eyelashes and all that rot. Pretend to be a shrinking female distraught about her papa.” She hesitated, worry entering her voice again. “They can’t truly believe my father had anything to do with a murder, can they?”

I nodded with reluctance. “Lord Clifford was heard arguing with the man, and he’s being very vague on what exactly happened.”

Cynthia heaved a long sigh. “Dear Papa is not the wisest of persons when it comes to the law. He learned in his early days that the less one says to the police, the better. Be back in a tick.”

She rushed out with her usual verve, and soon we heard her ascending the stairs.

“How awful,” Tess said as she resumed her onion chopping. “Want me to ask Caleb to have a listen and find out what’s happening?”

“No,” I said quickly. “I do not want to land the lad in more trouble.”

“He’s learned to be marvelously discreet. Besides, last time his prying did help Inspector McGregor catch a killer.”

“Be that as it may, I would like Constable Greene to remain employed.” I put away my empty basket and tried to gather ingredients for supper but only wandered ineffectually from dresser to table. “He likes being a policeman.”

“He does that. Wants to make sergeant someday. And become a detective. Then I can help him on his cases.” Tess brightened as she wove dreams of her future.

“I will see what I can find out with Lady Cynthia. If Daniel turns up here, please tell him where I’ve gone. We will hold Caleb in reserve.”

“Right you are.”

Tess’s knife clacked happily against the board. I knew that if Caleb walked past on his beat, Tess would tell him everything, but that couldn’t be helped. Constable Greene was turning out to be a wise lad, though too kindhearted for the police, in my opinion.

I gave up trying focus on cooking and shrugged on my coat again when I heard Cynthia return.

She’d donned a light gray walking gown trimmed with dark violet piping, topping that with a matching jacket and a hat with drooping feathers.

In such an ensemble, she ought to be leaving by the front door to step into her carriage. Instead, she swept out through the scullery, making Elsie jump. Water nearly splashed Cynthia’s fine skirts, missing them by a fraction of an inch.

I made a reassuring gesture at the startled Elsie and followed Cynthia up the stairs, struggling to keep up with her brisk pace.

We found a hansom in Berkeley Square. While Lord Clifford had indicated he'd brought his carriage and coachman to London, they were not in Mount Street, and I had no idea where he'd put them up. The Bywaters had given their own coachman a holiday—why pay the man to idle in his rooms above the stables while they were gone? Lesser paid grooms could take care of the horses.

Cynthia directed the driver to Scotland Yard. As we rode, I explained the whole affair to Cynthia—her father's involvement with Mr. Jacoby and Mr. Dougherty, what he'd borrowed from Mr. Mobley, and why. I'd not wished to distress her with the tale, but now I could not justify keeping it from her. Cynthia listened in dismay but not much surprise.

The roads were clogged with traffic, and after a considerable time, we descended in the narrow lane that opened just south of Charing Cross and entered the building that housed the Metropolitan Police.

I had been in this noisy hallway with its counter, desks, and milling constables too many times—once, I'd needed to access the morgue and discover whether Daniel had been killed. I tried to forget that awful day as we walked inside.

A woman huddled on a bench in a corner, keeping her two children close. I wondered if she'd come to find out what had happened to a husband, son, sister, mother, or to report a crime that had devastated her. I sent her my compassion.

Cynthia stepped up to the counter and rapped upon it. "I am here to see whatever inspector arrested the Earl of Clifford," she announced.

The sergeant in charge gazed at Cynthia sharply and without respect, I am sad to

relate. I'd encountered this man before and knew he hadn't much use for women, even aristocratic ones.

"Sergeant Scott brought him in," I supplied. "There has been a misunderstanding."

The desk sergeant recognized me, but his sneer didn't lessen. "You ladies need to go home and wait for word. You can't be swanning in demanding to speak to inspectors."

Lady Cynthia became her most imperious self. "Now, see here?—"

"It's all right, sergeant." Daniel's welcome rumble floated over us. "I'll take them up."

"McAdam," the sergeant growled as Daniel stepped off the stairs and approached. He obviously didn't like Daniel interrupting his remonstrations to forward women.

Daniel gestured for us to follow. "I agree with him in one respect," he said in a low voice as we joined him. "This is no place for you, Lady Cynthia. Or you, Kat."

"Nonsense," Cynthia scoffed. "My father never killed anyone. I'm here to take him home."

Daniel had long ago learned the futility of arguing with either of us. He led us up the stairs to the second floor without further word.

We trudged down a series of corridors in the long building to a thick wooden door set in the middle of one of the halls. Daniel tapped on it, and it was opened, to my surprise, by Mr. Thanos.

"Lady Cynthia," he exclaimed. Mr. Thanos's eyes, now free of spectacles, fixed on

her. I doubt he even noticed me standing behind her.

“Thanos found me and told me your tale,” Daniel said. “Lord Clifford is speaking to Chief Inspector Ferguson at the moment.”

Daniel tried to usher Cynthia and me into a busy outer office. Mr. Thanos, who’d remained standing in the doorway gazing at Cynthia, flushed and stepped back for us.

Sergeant Scott looked up in cold disdain from behind a desk but did not greet us. The other desks were taken up with various constables and clerks who busily sorted through papers, made notes in books, or carried sheafs to and fro. One young man in plain clothes was struggling to type on a typing machine with his two forefingers, one letter at a time.

The far wall held another door, closed, with the label Chief Inspector Ferguson painted on it.

“I offered to be a character witness for Lord Clifford,” Daniel said. “I must inform you, Lady Cynthia, that your father is being too evasive about where he was the night Mobley was killed.”

“Bloody hell,” Cynthia stated loudly. Several of the constables glanced up in surprise at her language, but a few of them grinned at her. “Let me in there. I will make him tell me.”

“Perhaps that might not be the wisest course,” I suggested. If Lord Clifford was hiding his whereabouts, he might have been doing something else that could have him arrested.

“He is my father, Mrs. H., but he is a fool, and I need to extricate him from his follies. Take me in, McAdam.”

Daniel, resigned, knocked softly on the inspector's door. A barked "Enter" had him opening it.

I caught a brief glimpse of Lord Clifford, his cravat awry, shoulders hunched as he sat on one side of a desk. On the other was a slender man with graying hair and a long nose, presumably Chief Inspector Ferguson. He had dark blue eyes that pinned us with a hard stare.

"Lord Clifford's daughter has arrived, sir," Daniel said deferentially.

Ferguson switched the stare to Cynthia alone, silently dismissing Mr. Thanos and me. Lord Clifford, who'd drawn a sharp breath when he'd seen Cynthia, shrank farther into his chair.

Ferguson nodded at Daniel, who gestured Cynthia in, but when Mr. Thanos and I tried to follow, Daniel stopped us. "Please wait," he said, sotto voce. "I'm sorry, Kat."

He closed the door, shutting the pair of us out.

"Well," Mr. Thanos huffed. "There's gratitude. After I raced all the way to Southampton Street in pursuit of him." He made a thin laugh, as though he joked, but I could see he was put out.

"Did you find him in Southampton Street?" Daniel had several hideaways around London. He flitted about the metropolis either in his job as deliveryman or investigating whatever he was sent to.

"No, I caught sight of McAdam striding along the Strand," Mr. Thanos explained. "I leapt out of the hansom, much to the cabbie's annoyance, and nearly tackled him. Once I told him of Lord Clifford's arrest, McAdam commandeered my cab, and we

came here.”

“I am pleased you did.”

Mr. Thanos glowed under my praise, while I chafed to know what was being said inside the room. Short of bursting in, I would be in the dark until Daniel or Lady Cynthia could confer with me afterward.

A voice at my elbow made me jump. “What is McAdam’s interest in this case?” Sergeant Scott had approached so quietly that neither of us had heard him. “Who exactly are you ?” Scott demanded of me.

Mr. Thanos answered indignantly before I could speak. “She is Mrs. Holloway. Quite a respectable woman and also a jolly fine cook.”

“A cook?” Scott gazed at me up and down as he would some sort of strange insect. “Lord Clifford’s cook?”

“No, no, Lady Cynthia’s,” Mr. Thanos again answered for me. “Her family’s that is. Lord Clifford is merely visiting.”

“Why is the family cook being a minder to Lord Clifford?” Scott demanded, eyes still on me. “Why aren’t you home fixing his steak and kidney pud?”

I drew myself up. “I do not like your tone, Sergeant.” Cooks were among the senior staff of households, and I did not believe myself to be lower in status than a police sergeant. Also, I was a child of backstreet London. While we’d had proper fear of the police—who could arrest us for any imagined transgression—we’d also learned never to let on that they intimidated us. “Lord Clifford did have dealings with Mr. Mobley, but if there is no evidence he was near the man on the night in question, I believe you must let him go.”

The sergeant definitely did not like a cook telling him how to do his job any more than I wanted him telling me mine. I sympathized with Sergeant Scott, as catching an elusive murderer when he had little to go on must be frustrating. Also, his inspector had shut him out of that room as neatly as he had us.

“Now you are his lordship’s solicitor?” Scott asked me. “What was he doing at Mobley’s establishment?”

“Looking for clues as to who killed Mr. Mobley,” I said. “How exactly was he killed?”

“That is the police’s business,” Scott answered in irritation.

“It is also Lord Clifford’s business,” Mr. Thanos broke in. “As he has been accused of the crime.”

“Lord Clifford’s, yes.” Scott acknowledged this with a hard nod. “Not yours.”

While I longed for all the details, I understood his point. If he told us every aspect of the crime, we, as loyal friends to Lord Clifford, could concoct him an alibi.

Scott gestured toward the outer door. “Best you wait in the corridor. The inspector will not keep her ladyship long.”

“And hopefully he will not keep his lordship, either,” I said.

Scott had had enough of us. “Mrs. Holloway.” He pointed to the door. “Mr.— er ...”

“Thanos,” Mr. Thanos supplied cheerfully. “We will depart, do not worry. But if Lady Cynthia and Lord Clifford are here longer than they should be we will return with solicitors. Good afternoon.”

Mr. Thanos offered me his arm and escorted me to the door. I noted the constables taking surreptitious glances at us as we passed. It was unlikely they'd ever witnessed ordinary folk twitting their severe sergeant.

Mr. Thanos and I exited into the hall. There were no seats about, as this was a thoroughfare and not a lounge, but I hovered, not minding standing. Or in my case, pacing.

The plainclothes constable who'd been painstakingly typing slipped out a few minutes after our departure and quickly closed the door behind him. "Sir? Madam?"

Voice quiet, he indicated that we should follow him along the corridor to another small office. This one was dim, lit only by one narrow window. It was apparently unused, if the mismatched and much-scarred desks pushed against the walls were any indication. Storage for superfluous items, I guessed.

"I am Detective Constable Wallace," the young man addressed us. He had a freckled face and dark red hair, his eyes a deep brown. "I am working on the Mobley case, though my sergeant likes me to keep out of the way. But I am very certain the murderer was not the Earl of Clifford." He paused, glancing behind him as though fearing one of Sergeant Scott's toadies would follow to report on him. "If I have his lordship released, would he be willing to tell me all he knows?"

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While I debated how to answer Constable Wallace, Mr. Thanos spoke. "Only if you guarantee Lord Clifford can come home with us."

I was grateful to Mr. Thanos for grasping the essentials. "He might speak to you," I put in, trying to decide whether the young man was trustworthy. Constable Wallace seemed it, with his quiet confidence and steady gaze. He'd welcome our help, that gaze said, but he'd continue on his own course of action with or without it.

"I will arrange things," Wallace said. "The chief inspector can only recommend that Lord Clifford remains in London, preferably at home, until a hearing, and that is only if the inspector believes him guilty. Leave it with me."

"Thank you," Mr. Thanos said fervently. "You are a good man."

That remained to be seen. Wallace was ambitious, I saw, perhaps wishing to solve this case before the sergeant and catch the attention of Chief Inspector Ferguson. But if Wallace succeeded in having Lord Clifford released and proved he killed no one, I would not quibble about who the constable displaced as he moved up the ranks. If Sergeant Scott was competent, he'd deal with the lad or else learn to use his talents.

"Out of curiosity, who do you believe killed Mr. Mobley?" I asked Wallace.

The constable fixed me with cool assessment worthy of Inspector McGregor, then shrugged.

"His partner, most like. Man called Parkin. With Mobley gone, he takes over the business and any moneys Mobley might have had locked away. Placing Parkin at the

scene is proving difficult, though. I'd like to hear what Lord Clifford has to say about his last visit to Mobley, and what else he observed, if anything."

My indignation rose. "If Mobley had a partner who inherited everything, why is Sergeant Scott not interrogating him? A much more likely candidate to be a murderer than poor Lord Clifford."

"The sergeant and the chief inspector have their eyes on him," Wallace assured me. "Sergeant Scott is thorough, if slow and careful. Me, I'd rather have Parkin sitting before me, and not let him out of the building until we are certain he did nothing. Parkin apparently is in Manchester, and was at the time of the murder, but that has yet to be determined. The police in Manchester have no reports to confirm him there."

"I am certain Lord Clifford will be happy to speak to you," I repeated. "Once he's at home." I would make sure he didn't flee back to Hertfordshire before Constable Wallace could turn up.

Constable Wallace gave me an understanding nod. "Wait here. I'll bring him out soon."

He departed, leaving Mr. Thanos and me alone in the dim and somewhat dispirited room. I'd speculated, when we entered, that unwanted things were stored here. At the moment, those unwanted things were myself and Mr. Thanos.

Mr. Thanos slid out a chair that was the least battered of the discarded lot, and gallantly gestured for me to sit. I did, as my feet were tired, and who knew how long we'd be kept waiting?

It was about twenty minutes, in fact. We heard voices in the corridor and emerged to see Chief Inspector Ferguson himself usher Lord Clifford, Lady Cynthia, and Daniel out of the main office. Constable Wallace and Sergeant Scott were nowhere in sight.

Lord Clifford's face was gray and haggard, but he walked with his head erect, his eyes filled with defiance. Cynthia had hold of his arm, and Daniel stuck close to his other side, as though to prevent him running off.

The chief inspector nodded at Mr. Thanos but ignored me. "As I said, please remain in Town for a few days, your lordship. Until everything is cleared up."

"He will," Lady Cynthia assured him in a firm voice.

"I will think on it," Lord Clifford said loftily. "It is my business if I return to Ardeley Hall. Everyone knows where it is."

He referred to his estate in Hertfordshire, near St. Albans. Lovely countryside, I had been told. I'd never been there myself.

"All the same," Ferguson said wearily.

"We will stay in London a while longer," Cynthia told the inspector. "There's no need to worry my mother about all this, is there, Papa?"

Lord Clifford winced. "Quite," he whispered.

Chief Inspector Ferguson gave Lord Clifford a polite bow. Lord Clifford nodded and strode away with Cynthia, his nose in the air. Rather overdoing his haughty earl act, I thought.

Daniel lingered to murmur something to Ferguson I did not catch. Then Daniel joined us, taking my arm to walk me out. Thanos bade Ferguson farewell before he fell into step beside Daniel and me.

A glance behind me showed Chief Inspector Ferguson standing by the door to his

office, watching us. His expression was neutral, so I could not tell if he were angry, resigned, or satisfied that we were taking Lord Clifford away.

“How did you convince Chief Inspector Ferguson to let Lord Clifford go?” I burst out to Daniel as soon as we were in the street. Lady Cynthia and her father moved swiftly ahead of us as we turned the corner from Great Scotland Yard and on into Charing Cross. I wasn’t certain whether Cynthia was searching for a hansom or intended to walk all the way home.

“He always meant to release him,” Daniel answered. “Sergeant Scott brought in Lord Clifford in case he’d actually committed the crime, but Ferguson is no fool. He’ll check Lord Clifford’s weak story, but I had the feeling he doesn’t think the earl had much to do with it. Or at least didn’t wield the heavy object that ended Mobley’s days. Lord Clifford is more a witness now than a suspect.”

“Thank heavens for that,” I said in relief. “Sergeant Scott is much more suspicious. He’s the sort who’d keep all the suspects under his eye until he decided which was the most guilty.”

“True. Sergeant Scott is a hard man, but like Ferguson, no fool.”

We strode onward, reaching the crowds of Trafalgar Square. Nelson’s column rose high in the square’s center, holding the admiral aloft from the ordinary rush of London. Pigeons rested comfortably on his shoulders and also flowed over the rest of the square, fluttering away as people walked through them.

Lord Clifford and Cynthia turned on Cockspur Street, heading for Pall Mall.

Mr. Thanos asked the next question. “What about the chap, Constable Wallace? He’s keen to have a go at solving the crime himself, to best his sergeant, I imagine. Wants to interview Lord Clifford himself.”

Daniel raised his brows. “Does he? Wallace is a bright young man, from what I have heard. Even Monaghan has mentioned him with grudging respect. If he’s careful, he’ll go far.”

“Should we let him near Lord Clifford?” I asked. “Sometimes ambitious policemen will coax a man to say whatever will incriminate him, whether that man is guilty or innocent.”

“I don’t know Wallace well,” Daniel admitted. “Or that entire office, in fact. Monaghan doesn’t have much dealing with them. I propose we allow the lad his interview. He might draw more from Lord Clifford than even we can, because Lord Clifford fears that anything he says to us will reach his daughter or wife. Wallace might be able to pry out the truth.”

“What is the truth?” I asked in exasperation. “I have maddeningly few details to go on.”

Daniel grinned down at me. “I will enlighten you then. Hiram Mobley was murdered in his office in the Strand on Sunday night, sometime between ten in the evening and midnight—as far as the doctor examining the body can ascertain. He was killed by a blow to the head with something wooden, heavy, and narrow, with a polished edge that left few splinters in the wound. A walking stick, perhaps. The charwoman of the building had already been and gone for the night, and she declares Mobley wasn’t there when she arrived at seven to do her nightly scrubbing. Wasn’t there when she departed at half past nine, either. His office door was locked, as usual, she claims.”

“All very convenient for the killer,” I said.

Daniel continued. “The man of business who lets the offices next door, Mr. Ogden, noticed Mobley’s door ajar when he arrived at six on Friday morning. He hurried inside, fearing burglars had been there in the night. He found Mobley’s body lying

between the desks, fled, and looked for a constable. Fortunately, one happened to be passing as he ran out, who could secure the scene of the crime right away. He was one of Sergeant Scott's and summoned him."

I squeezed Daniel's arm, grateful for this clearer picture. "Why do you think Mobley returned to his office on a Sunday night?" I asked. "Well after Lord Clifford's meeting with him. Was the killer with him then, and accompanied him in? Or did he—or she—arrive for a late appointment?"

"A clandestine one," Mr. Thanos put in as he strode beside us. "Both Mobley and the murderer must not have wanted anyone, not even the charwoman, to know they had the meeting."

"Or did Mobley simply return to go over his books at a quiet time?" I pondered. So I liked to sit in the empty kitchen at night contemplating my recipes and putting my thoughts in order. "The killer saw a light in the office window and decided to catch him?" I pursed my lips. "Did they have an argument, and whoever it was seized the nearest object and bashed him? If the killer used a polished walking stick, that points to a gentleman or someone of means. Did Mobley have some sort of hold over this person—wanted to call in a debt, or threatened him in some other way? Perhaps the murderer went there with the express purpose of killing Mobley to alleviate the threat."

Unfortunately, the scene I'd just painted was one in which Lord Clifford might feature prominently. Mobley could have vowed to expose his debt to the world—to his wife. Lord Clifford had already told me that Mobley had hinted that Cynthia or Lady Clifford might come to harm if Lord Clifford couldn't pay.

"Lord Clifford is reluctant to say where he was at the time," Daniel told me. "The chief inspector taxed him with it, but Lord Clifford is uncommonly stubborn."

“We will have to make him tell us ,” I said. “You say the chief inspector believes Lord Clifford is probably innocent, but I don’t think Sergeant Scott does. Can Sergeant Scott have him sent to trial if Chief Inspector Ferguson doesn’t agree?”

“Possibly, if Scott can persuade enough of his superiors that Ferguson is wrong,” Daniel answered. “A difficult task, but one that can be done.”

I watched Lord Clifford and Cynthia turn north at Waterloo Place, which would quickly become Regent Street. It seemed that they would walk all the way home.

It wasn’t terribly far, but as I’d noted before, my feet were aching. His lordship and daughter would be able to have a good rest when we reached the house, but I’d have to hurry down to the kitchen and cook dinner for them.

Mr. Thanos seemed to sense my fatigue. “Shall I fetch a hansom, Mrs. Holloway? Cynthia loves a good tramp, but not all of us are as robust.”

Now I felt enfeebled and querulous. “You are kind, Mr. Thanos, but it is no trouble.”

Daniel was already whistling to an empty hansom traveling in the other direction. The driver glared at him as the cab passed but then he checked the horse, wheeled the vehicle around, and stopped it beside us.

“In you go, Kat.” Daniel took me by the elbow and more or less lifted me into the cab. “Mount Street,” he told the driver, handing him a coin. “Number 43.”

“Aren’t either of you coming—?” My question cut off as the cab jerked forward, leaving Daniel and Mr. Thanos behind. “Damn and blast.”

I cursed feelingly for a few more seconds then decided to sit back and enjoy the conveyance. Daniel and Mr. Thanos were really very solicitous. I was blessed to have

such friends.

The hansom ride did give me a respite, letting me exchange coat for apron when I reached the kitchen to begin the evening meal. It would necessarily be a simple one, but as Lord Clifford had discovered yesterday, simple could be tasty.

I put together a hash of what potatoes and sausage were left from the bubble and squeak and rolled the bread dough into buns. They'd bake faster than an entire loaf, so when supper was finished, they'd be ready.

Tess had spent the afternoon chopping enough cabbage and carrots to make a nice side dish, seasoned with thyme and parsley. She'd also set the supper's dough to rise its second time without me mentioning it. I was blessed to have her too.

Once the meal went up, I gratefully sank down and ate my own portion of it. The hash was warm and satisfying, the buns, with a smudge of creamy butter, perfection.

Daniel and Mr. Thanos obviously had gone elsewhere after they'd put me into the hansom, because neither of them turned up at the house. I'd barely noted their absence while I worked with Tess to finish the meal for the household, but now I wondered where they'd gone and why they'd not bothered to send word. My testiness returned.

At eight that evening, Mrs. Redfern entered the kitchen to state that Mr. Thanos and a friend had arrived at the invitation of Lord Clifford, and they'd brought a plainclothes policeman with them. They'd requested me to join them when I was finished with my supper.

Mrs. Redfern was a very proper housekeeper who did not approve of employers summoning staff above stairs unnecessarily, interrupting either their duties or their scarce private time. Her rigid stance told me she expected me to decline, but I very

much wanted to be present when Constable Wallace questioned Lord Clifford.

I finished mixing the bread dough for the morning, set it in the coolest part of the larder to ferment overnight, removed my apron, and ascended the stairs.

The company had assembled in the dining room. Mr. Davis and a footman were pouring out goblets of brandy for the gentlemen and tea for Lady Cynthia. Mr. Davis, catching sight of me, added a cup of tea for me, which was good of him.

Mr. Davis frowned in stern disapproval at Daniel, dressed in a tidy but clearly secondhand suit, who sat diffidently at Mr. Thanos's side.

Obviously, Daniel was the "friend" Mr. Thanos had brought with him. As he was known in this house and to Constable Wallace, Daniel hadn't bothered to don the disguise of upper-class twit or City gent. This was his delivery-man-uncomfortable-in-his-best-clothes persona.

Mr. Davis already didn't think much of Daniel, believing him to be a far inferior creature to either Mr. Davis or myself. Daniel being invited to the dining room, even by a welcome visitor such as Mr. Thanos, was straining the bonds of hospitality.

"That will be all, Davis," Lord Clifford said. "Leave the brandy. We'll serve ourselves."

Mr. Davis regarded him stiffly, only unbending when Cynthia sent him a reassuring smile. The footman hesitated, but Mr. Davis herded him out, closing the door behind them both.

I knew the footman would not linger to listen with Mr. Davis chivvying him back downstairs, for which I was grateful. That was not to say that Mr. Davis wouldn't return and listen himself.

“Thank you for seeing me, your lordship,” Constable Wallace stated. He wore a black woolen suit rather like Daniel’s, with a carefully tied cravat. His pomaded red hair glistened under the gaslight chandelier.

“Well, here I am.” Lord Clifford regarded Wallace ungraciously as he took a sip of brandy. The brandy, a fine one acquired from France by his son-in-law, did not soften him.

Wallace shot me a glance, probably wondering why Lord Clifford wanted his cook present, then opened a small notebook and readied his pencil.

“Now then, your lordship,” Wallace began. “Please tell me what transpired on the night of Saturday last. Take your time.”

Lord Clifford’s brows knit in puzzlement. “Surely you mean Sunday? That’s the night Mobley was killed, was it not?”

“Yes, but you arrived in London on Saturday evening.” Wallace flipped back a page or two until he found the information he sought. “Your carriage pulled up at half past six at the Rider’s Club in Jermyn Street. You dismissed your carriage and driver, who put up at a boarding house and mews near Leicester Square. You left the club at about half-past eight on foot. Where did you go?”

Lord Clifford listened in astonishment, his brandy glass dangling from his fingers. “How on earth do you know all that?”

“Prominent gentlemen such as yourself are noticed,” Wallace answered calmly. “As are a fine carriage and team. Your coachman confirmed that he drove from your estate, Ardeley Hall, to St. James’s, with orders to linger until you were ready to return to Hertfordshire. As to your movements after you left the club, you will have to tell me. No one followed you, and the doormen at your club do not like to speak to

the police.”

“Thank God for that.” Lord Clifford took a gulp of brandy. “I told your inspector all about Sunday night. I don’t know why I should go over it again.”

“I am asking about Saturday, your lordship.” Wallace kept his tone patient. “My questions could possibly clear you of suspicion of murder.”

True, but would Lord Clifford’s answers put himself in the frame for something else? It was by no means certain that Constable Wallace would not arrest him for a different transgression.

“Tell him, Papa,” Cynthia said in a steely tone. “Mama need never hear of it.”

“It might be in your best interest, your lordship,” Daniel said.

Daniel’s assurance seemed to bolster Lord Clifford more than his daughter’s words. The earl glanced at me, as though seeking my encouragement. When I nodded at him, he heaved a sigh.

“Very well. But you need to give me your word that this will not lead to more police rooting around in my business. Mobley is dead, the affair is concluded, and I refuse to be ruined because of it.”

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Constable Wallace scribbled a few notes in his book, as though unbothered by Lord Clifford's dramatic proclamation.

"As I am only interested in arresting whoever killed Mr. Mobley, then I agree," Wallace said once he finished writing. "Anything else you are involved in has no bearing on this case."

"I am hardly involved in anything," Lord Clifford huffed. "How can I be? Because of Mobley, I am now a pauper."

"Get on with it, Papa," Cynthia said with glance heavenward. "Where did you go after you settled yourself at your club?"

If Lord Clifford were any other gentleman, one might believe he was trying to hide a liaison with a lady. But Lord Clifford was fiercely devoted to his wife, as I'd observed on more than one occasion. It was not a dalliance that made Lord Clifford falter.

"I had a meeting with friends, Mr. Jacoby and Mr. Dougherty, at a restaurant," Lord Clifford explained with every sign of reluctance. "At Wiltons, if you must know. They have very good oysters. We dined and spoke about ... personal matters."

The personal matters must have been the ruse Jacoby and Lord Clifford had tried to play on Mr. Dougherty. I pictured Mr. Dougherty accepting what the two men paid him, tucking it away, and enjoying the rest of his dinner. The pained expression on Lord Clifford's face told me this was what had happened.

“And what time did this take place?” Constable Wallace asked, continuing to write.

“What does that matter?” Lord Clifford spluttered, but under Cynthia’s narrow gaze he rushed on, contrite. “We met at nine o’clock. Mr. Dougherty took his leave from us at about half past ten. Jacoby and I then went to a public house, where we drank insubstantial ale until about midnight. Jacoby went off home, and I returned to the club. I will instruct the doorman to confirm that I shuffled in shortly after that hour, inebriated, tired, and needing my bed.”

“I would be grateful if he would corroborate,” Wallace said as his pencil scratched. “Now then. We come to Sunday. Take me through that day, your lordship.”

Lord Clifford turned his brandy glass on the table. “Sunday ...”

“The day the man was killed, Papa,” Cynthia said. “I’m certain you remember.”

Lord Clifford shot his daughter a baleful glare. “Of course I remember. I am not feeble. I woke late, breakfasted at the club. I had a meeting with my man of business.” His expression turned sour. “The fellow was entirely unsympathetic. He works for the Clifford estate, he has told me on numerous occasions, not me personally. He’s a stiff-necked, pompous wretch and was no help at all.”

Lord Clifford must have tried to pry the fifteen thousand he owed Mobley out of the trust or whatever financial vehicle the earls of Clifford’s money and property was contained in. The man of business had been wise enough not to simply hand it over to Lord Clifford. Perhaps there was simply nothing the man of business could possibly liquidate to cover the debt.

“He may not have been able to help,” Mr. Thanos said, confirming my deductions. “Trusts and entails are complicated things.”

“So the man explained, again and again,” Lord Clifford said morosely. “I wandered about a good bit after that. Sought advice from a few friends in Town, but they were no help either.”

I interpreted this statement to mean Lord Clifford had tried to touch these friends for the funds and had come away empty-handed.

“Finally, I visited Mobley,” Lord Clifford continued. “I’d sent a message to him that morning, and he returned word to meet him in his office in the Strand. I had to tell him I couldn’t pay what I owed. Not when it was due, anyway. I promised he’d have the money if he’d give me a few more weeks, but Mobley sneered at me.” Lord Clifford lifted his brandy and took a long drink. “He told me I had to have the money to him by Wednesday—today, in fact, no later. I explained that it would make no difference—I didn’t have the bloody cash. Oh, beg pardon for my language, Cyn, Mrs. Holloway.”

Cynthia and I both nodded, unoffended.

“You quarreled with him,” Constable Wallace prompted.

“I did.” Lord Clifford set down his glass with a thump. “I told him he’d never see the money at all if he did not give me more time, and then he threatened me, the damned upstart.” He sobered abruptly. “He threatened my wife and daughter. Horrified me. I’d never heard the like.”

He sent a glance to Cynthia then bowed his head, revealing threads of graying brown hair that straggled across the top of his balding scalp.

The anguish I’d seen in his eyes before he’d shielded his gaze touched my heart. Lord Clifford had been genuinely concerned for Lady Clifford and Cynthia, his only surviving child. Mobley’s threat must have stirred his greatest fears.

“These sorts of fellows like to resort to intimidation,” Constable Wallace observed as he noted this all down.

Cynthia laid a hand on her father’s arm. “Poor Papa. Mama and I are made of stern stuff, you know. And we’re surrounded by people who would defend us.”

Daniel and I exchanged a look. We both knew that men like Mobley and his ruffians would make certain the threats were carried out. They’d wait until Lady Clifford or Cynthia were unguarded, even if it took weeks or months. Cynthia, in particular, ran about a bit recklessly in Town with Lady Roberta and other friends. While a few of these young ladies might be good in a scrap, they’d be no match for the professional bone-breakers Mobley employed.

“How did you leave Mr. Mobley?” Wallace asked.

“Alive, if that is what you mean,” Lord Clifford snapped. “I told him I didn’t care for his tone and that he harmed my family at his peril. Mobley continued to spit invective at me, so I snarled some back and stormed out. I feared his men would detain me, and perhaps quiet me with their fists, but they stood aside and let me go.” Lord Clifford let out a breath and wiped his forehead. “An encounter I would not care to repeat. But Mobley was standing upright, breathing, and calling me foul names when I walked out his door.”

“Did you return any time after that?” Constable Wallace asked calmly.

“No.” Lord Clifford’s answer was resolute. “I never wanted to see the fellow again. I went to a tavern and ordered a brandy. I am not certain how long I stayed there—I rather lost track of time—but when I emerged, it was dark.” He drained his goblet and regarded it mournfully. Daniel, without a word, fetched the decanter Mr. Davis had left and refilled the glass.

“Where did you go once you left the tavern?” Wallace continued.

Lord Clifford accepted the refilled glass from Daniel and took a quaff. He ran his tongue over his lips as he set down the goblet.

“I decided to visit Dougherty,” he said, his voice a near whisper.

“Mr. Dougherty?” I asked before I could stop myself. “Why did you do that?”

From what I understood of confidence games, once the person one intended to dupe had walked away, one let them go. To persist would arouse too much suspicion.

“Because I knew he had blunt, lots of it. Perhaps he would loan me enough to keep Mobley from me. Dougherty is a respectable chap, hardly likely to endanger my female relations to make me return his money.”

“And did he loan it to you?” Wallace asked.

“No, because I never saw the man.” Lord Clifford took another long swallow of brandy. “Dougherty was not at home, according to the obsequious chap who answered the door. I will wager Dougherty was lurking upstairs somewhere, commanding his man to shut me out. After that, I walked a good bit—not certain where—and then saw a hansom. I climbed in and had the driver return me to my club. I at least had the coins to pay for that.” He sat back, red-faced and unhappy.

“And then?” Wallace said.

“Then, nothing. I went to bed. Slept like the dead. Suffered the embarrassment of the police calling on me in the morning. Seems I’d been overheard arguing with Mobley, and so of course, I must have coshed him.”

“Where does Mr. Dougherty live?” Wallace asked.

Lord Clifford stared at him. “What has that to do with anything?”

“Just making an account of your movements, your lordship. For my records.”

“It’s poking about in a man’s private business, is what it is,” Lord Clifford growled.

“I live in Pimlico,” Wallace said in a friendly tone. “I don’t mind who knows it. What difference can it make to tell me where Mr. Dougherty resides?”

Lord Clifford waved a hand. “Oh, I suppose it is no matter. A house in Upper Holland Street. I forget the exact address. In Kensington.”

“Upper Holland Street, Kensington,” Wallace dutifully wrote. “A fair walk from the Strand.”

“I was agitated. After all the brandy at the tavern, I was also a bit drunk. I took a hansom to Dougherty’s, because I knew I’d never find the place on my own. Had no idea where I was when I left his street. I am not familiar with that part of London.”

“Then you took another hansom back to your club and remained there for the rest of the night.” Wallace finished writing and punctuated the last sentence with a stab of his pencil.

“Yes, I told you.”

“I’m trying to make everything clear, your lordship,” Wallace said in a soothing tone. “All this will be verified, of course, but I wanted to hear it in your own words.”

“Verified,” Lord Clifford muttered. “A man’s word isn’t good enough, I suppose.”

“This is a case of murder, your lordship.” Wallace closed his notebook with a snap. “We must do everything correctly, so the wrong person isn’t landed in the dock.”

“My father is the wrong person, I assure you,” Cynthia said. “He’d have made a muck of things if he’d tried to murder someone, leaving no doubt that he’d done it. As it is, he stumbled around London ineffectually and went to bed.”

“Thank you very much, Cynthia,” Lord Clifford said tartly. “Children are supposed to be a prop and a comfort in a man’s old age.”

“You have plenty of years left in you, Papa.” Cynthia patted his arm. She kept her words light, but I saw the relief in her eyes. She hadn’t been entirely certain of her father’s innocence until hearing his story.

“Not if the police keep questioning me,” Lord Clifford returned. “I have aged a decade in the last few days.”

“Nonsense, you look fit to me,” Cynthia said. “Is that all, Constable? My father should rest.”

“Of course.” Constable Wallace came politely to his feet as Cynthia tugged Lord Clifford up with her. Mr. Thanos, Daniel, and I quickly joined them.

Cynthia bade us a cordial good night, though Lord Clifford only nodded absently. I did see as he passed me that Lord Clifford was indeed exhausted. His face was lined, his eyes red-rimmed.

He was a man beaten. While his current predicament was his own fault, I felt great compassion for Cynthia’s father.

Mr. Thanos followed them out, but Constable Wallace stopped me before I could

depart.

“What time did his lordship arrive here, Mrs. Holloway? The police interviewed him at his club much of the day on Monday, and he stayed there that night. The next afternoon, he took his bag and climbed into a cab, but his whereabouts after that were unknown.”

Sergeant Scott had had the earl followed, Wallace meant, but his men had lost sight of him.

“About five o’clock that evening,” I said coolly. “Lord Clifford is welcome in the house anytime.”

“If that is so, why did he not come here upon his arrival?” Wallace asked. “Why stay at his club?”

So he could help Mr. Jacoby fleece a man without anyone in this household being the wiser, I was certain, but I could not say this to the constable.

“The family is away, and he likely believed the house was shut up,” I offered. “I’m sure that once Lord Clifford realized the staff was still here, he decided to change his lodgings for a more comfortable bed and my meals.”

Wallace wrote down my words. “Any idea why he’d taken a loan from a moneylender like Mobley?” He included Daniel in the question. “A man would have to be desperate to seek out Mobley, who had a rotten reputation. Even other moneylenders didn’t like him.”

“He must have had good reason,” I said. “Lord Clifford might be an earl, but as he indicated, the estate does not have much ready money. He could have wanted to make improvements to the property, or to fix houses of his tenants. Being a landlord is

quite expensive.”

Daniel kept his expression neutral as I rattled out this explanation. It didn’t satisfy Wallace, I saw from his expression, but he made a few more notes and closed his book, sliding it and the pencil into his pocket.

Wallace thanked us before he took his leave. I admired him for being so polite—many policemen were unctuous to those of the higher classes and uncommonly rude to people like Daniel and me. Wallace was even-handed, neither overly sycophantic nor overly discourteous.

Mr. Davis appeared as soon as we exited the dining room to usher Wallace to the front door. He was still disapproving—a constable should come and go below stairs, but it seemed silly to drag him all the way down and out through the kitchen when the front door was steps away.

Mr. Davis glowered at Daniel, as though wondering if Daniel would be impertinent enough to use the front entrance. When I led Daniel toward the backstairs instead, Mr. Davis stalked into the dining room, signaling the footman in the vestibule to join him.

Mr. Thanos was nowhere in sight. I assumed he’d gone to assist Cynthia with Lord Clifford. Mr. Davis would see him out when he descended.

Daniel and I made our way to the kitchen, where Tess was cleaning up from supper. We could not discuss much while the staff was about, and Daniel departed, saying he had things errands to do. After a whispered promise that he’d return later, he went out into the night.

That left me at the kitchen table making my own notes about what Lord Clifford had told us, before I helped Tess with the final cleaning of the day.

By the time Daniel returned to the darkened and quiet house, I'd made lists in my notebook, divided by solid lines, of where each person involved in this case had been at the time in question—as far as I knew—and why they'd possibly murdered Mr. Mobley.

There were several names, and I could not decide which was the culprit.

“Tomorrow is my day out,” I told Daniel as I brought some leftover hash to serve him. I'd held back plenty of gravy as well, which I poured over the plate after he sat down.

“Thursday,” Daniel said as he inhaled a mouthful. “I know.”

“I wish to spend it with Grace,” I said.

Daniel quirked a brow at me. “Again, I know.”

“I also believe you or I should speak to Mr. Jacoby, Mr. Dougherty, Mobley's partner if he is back in London, and also any gentlemen who share Lord Clifford's club. Members, I mean, not the staff. Can you arrange it?”

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Daniel was nonplussed by my demands but not very surprised.

“Thanos knows a few of the club members, luckily,” he said as he resumed eating. “Mates from his university days. I remember them myself—they’re not bad chaps, if vague, and would have no idea what to do if their funds were cut off. Thanos went to visit them earlier tonight to ask casually about Lord Clifford. I have not seen him since he left here, so I don’t yet know what they told him.”

“Do his mates remember you from university?” I asked in curiosity.

Daniel’s smile turned wry. “No, but I don’t expect them to. They know me as a friend of Thanos, which in their opinion, is enough.”

Daniel had worked odd jobs at Cambridge, sneaking into lectures when he could. Thanos had noticed and offered to share his books and tutor him. Daniel had never forgotten his kindness.

I grew indignant with the other gentlemen for not noticing Daniel, and decided it was fortunate Mr. Thanos was questioning them and not me.

“As for the others,” Daniel went on, “I agree they need to be interviewed, and not by the police. You should leave them to me, though I know you’ll argue.”

“Not at all,” I said briskly. “I told you, I prefer to be with Grace. But I wish to know every last detail of what they say.”

The corners of Daniel’s eyes crinkled. “I would expect nothing less.”

As he resumed his meal with enjoyment, a strange and unexpected longing came over me. We ought to be sitting cozily in our own kitchen, a tiny one, with Grace and James asleep in their bedchambers in the house above us. Daniel and I would linger over supper and tea, and then do the washing up, because I'd never leave a kitchen untidy. After that, we'd adjourn to our own chamber, and ...

My face went as hot, as though I'd thrust it too close to boiling water. Daniel, absorbed in the meal, didn't notice, thank heavens.

I managed to school my expression by the time he looked up. I smiled at him over my teacup, which he answered with a puzzled expression.

When Daniel moved to kiss me goodnight at the back door, I kept it brief, adding to his puzzlement. I promised I'd see him in the morning, and then took myself to bed.

I lay awake much of the night, trying to decide why I'd so vividly imagined the scene with Daniel, and why it had felt so natural.

I was tinting marriage with a rosy glow, I decided as I finally drifted off. In reality, I'd be working alone in a hot kitchen with a too-small stove that didn't draw smoke well, while Daniel stayed away for long stretches on his police work.

My life was perfectly fine as it was, I told myself. I was paid for my skills, and tomorrow I would see Grace. Thoughts of Grace at last let me relax into sleep, but regret followed me. If I lived in the cramped house with Daniel, I could be with Grace every day, instead of only during weekly visits.

But that was my lot, and I would make the best of it. I always did.

When I departed the kitchen after breakfast the next morning, clad in my nicest frock and hat, I found Daniel waiting for me at the eastern end of Mount Street. He lounged

against railings of a respectable house there, resembling the layabout many thought him.

He fell into step with me as I passed and tucked my hand under his arm. I forced my thoughts away from what I'd envisioned the night before as Daniel led me onward at a brisk pace.

"You did not say much more last night," I said as we skirted the corner of Berkley Square and made our way toward Piccadilly. "Too busy eating, I suppose." I hadn't wanted to discuss my wayward thoughts, so I hadn't said much either.

"It was an excellent meal," Daniel said. "I wanted to give it my full attention. Your sauce was superb." He kissed his fingers to the sky.

"You evade the question with flattery." Not that I minded. "You never told me what you thought of Lord Clifford's story."

Daniel shrugged. "Plausible, all the way around. I would like to know exactly where he was wandering between the Strand, the tavern, and Kensington, and what he hoped to gain speaking to Dougherty, apart from money, I mean, if anything. I have already asked my friend Lewis to find what cabs took him to and fro and exactly from where to where."

Daniel knew almost everyone on London's streets, friend or foe, including a cabby called Lewis, who seemingly did whatever Daniel asked of him.

We had to press ourselves close together when we reached Regent's Circus, which teemed with traffic, curtailing conversation. We turned down the even busier thoroughfare of Haymarket, to Cockspur Street, passed through Trafalgar Square, and emerged into the Strand.

Not until we drew close to Mobley's place of business did Daniel speak again. "Parkin, Mobley's partner, returned to London late last night. Sergeant Scott wasted no time dragging him to the Yard. Scott didn't want to talk to me this morning, but I managed to pry out of Constable Wallace that the man swears he was in Manchester since Saturday, attending a family wedding, no less. Scott has already wired multiple people in Manchester to confirm this. On the off chance, I ducked into Mobley's office after leaving the Yard and found Parkin there."

"Was he, now?" I eyed the building ahead of us that Lord Clifford and I had entered yesterday.

"Yes, at eight this morning. He seems upset that Mobley is gone, saying Mobley was the brains behind the business. He vows to carry on, but he's not certain he can."

"What about Lord Clifford's debt?"

"Parkin believes anything owed Mobley was owed the business itself, so the debt is still valid. However, he's more amenable to discussing terms than Mobley was."

Not the answer I'd hoped for. Even if Lord Clifford was given more time to pay, the usurious nature of the moneylenders meant he'd have to come up with still more cash on top of what he already owed.

"Perhaps I ought to speak to Mr. Parkin," I said.

"God help the man," Daniel said in jest then glanced at me. "Did you mean now?"

I slowed as we approached the door of Mobley's business, but I had a more pressing engagement pulling me onward. "Later, I think. Grace is waiting."

Daniel, fully understanding why I wanted to diverge from investigating this problem,

led me past Mobley's office without slowing.

Once I was inside the small house in Clover Lane, with my daughter hugging me tightly, Lord Clifford's woes, the murder of a moneylender, and other difficulties, evaporated. Grace was my world, and anything else was peripheral to that.

Daniel remained, at both Grace's and Joanna's invitation, and we had a lively chat. For our walk today, we ventured on one of our favorite strolls to the Tower of London. The castle had been both royal residence and notorious prison, and now was a place of historic fascination. The Crown Jewels were kept there, guarded by the red-uniformed Yeoman Warders, who these days pointed out the more exciting areas of the Tower to visitors.

We wandered along, trying to decide which wing had housed Queen Anne Boleyn, the ill-fated wife of Henry VIII so long ago.

"I wouldn't marry a king," Grace declared. "Aunt Joanna has us reading about old King Henry for history lessons. It seems far too dangerous to be a queen."

"At one time it could indeed be perilous," Daniel agreed. "If a lady did not bring the right amount of power and influence to the marriage, and even more importantly, bear the king a son, she could be banished. Or in Anne's case, arrested on trumped-up charges of treason. Her family gambled that she could bring them fortunes and the favor of the king, and they lost. Her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, was condemned to the Tower several times, escaping his execution sentences by the sheerest luck. Anne was not so fortunate."

"Poor lady," Grace said with true sorrow.

"On the other hand, her daughter was the greatest queen Britain ever saw." Daniel sent me a grin. "It is why I'm always kind to ladies. One never knows when they'll

become powerful indeed.”

He had me blushing again. I admonished him to not be so daft, and both Grace and Daniel laughed.

“I visited an interesting square the other day,” I told Grace, to change the subject, which was growing ridiculous. “Wellclose, not far from here. There was once a Danish church in its center and some fine houses, though it has lost its grandeur since then.”

“May we see it?” Grace asked at once. She was ever curious.

At any other time, I might steer us to a respectable teashop instead, but my own curiosity was as great as hers. Grace had inherited that from me.

Mr. Jacoby’s office was in Wellclose Square. The police did not suspect him of murder—and why should they? His place of business was nowhere near the Strand, and Lord Clifford was trying to keep Jacoby out of it, not to mention his own involvement in Jacoby’s confidence scheme.

But Jacoby had a connection, didn’t he? Which was why he was on my list of suspects. Lord Clifford had gone to Mobley to raise funds to be part of Jacoby’s swindle. Jacoby had known this, and had known Lord Clifford could not pay Mobley back. Why this would cause Jacoby to kill the moneylender, I had no idea, but I could not resist trying to see what Jacoby was up to at the moment.

Daniel must have shared my interest, because he guided us toward the square without hesitation.

He chose a route that would not take us past any gin houses or almshouses, fortunately, and we walked along with Grace between us, like a proper family.

As I had so vividly imagined last night ...

Before another wave of longing could swamp me, my attention was arrested by a gentleman leaving Mr. Jacoby's shipping office, which was now a few doors from us. The man wore a fine greatcoat and hat—I knew quality when I saw it. His wardrobe would have set him back a fair amount. He had a bushy, gray-streaked beard that was well-combed and thick eyebrows to go with it.

I'd never seen the gentleman before, and apparently neither had Daniel, who betrayed no recognition. Another gent doing business with Jacoby—or being cheated by him, whichever was the case.

The man was thrusting things in his pockets as he passed us, forcing us, the nobodies in his way, to press ourselves against the railings of the nearest house.

A paper fluttered from his pocket, unnoticed. Before I could stop her, Grace darted forward, retrieved the scrap, and hurried after the man.

“Beg pardon, sir, but you dropped this,” she said.

The man swung around. When he beheld my daughter holding the paper out to him, smiling brightly, did he soften and beam at the sweet girl? No, he snarled and snatched the page from her hand.

“Were you trying to pick my pockets?” he demanded. “Be off, you, before I call the constable.”

“She most certainly was not robbing you.” I'd charged to Grace the moment the man turned to her. “She kindly retrieved what you lost, and for that, she should have your gratitude.”

The bad-tempered man turned his bellicose stare on me, but I lifted my chin and met his gaze. He might be more wealthy than I was, but that did not make him my better. Such ingratitude to an honest child made him the lesser of us.

The man darted his gaze past me to Daniel. I could not see Daniel's expression, as he was behind me, but whatever invective the gentleman had intended to hurl at me died on his lips. His eyes flickered as he looked from Daniel to me and back to Grace.

"Er," he managed. "It was good of you." This phrase to Grace was uttered in the most grudging and halfhearted tone I'd ever heard. "Here, girl, have a farthing." The man dipped a gloved hand into his pocket and held up a copper coin between his fingers.

Grace backed a step. "No, thank you, sir. I was only trying to help."

The gentleman clearly did not know what to make of us. He growled, dropped the farthing into his pocket, swung on his heel, and charged off in the direction of Wells Street.

Once he'd disappeared around the corner, I pulled Grace into a quick hug. "You did well, darling. I am proud of you."

"Daniel frightened him off." Grace finished our embrace and did a little victory hop. "He knew Daniel would thrash him if he wasn't courteous."

"Thrashing is not the answer to everything," I admonished, though I secretly agreed with her. "You have lived too long among boys, I'm thinking."

"Mark and Matthew are gentle lads," Grace said, naming Joanna's sons. "But it's what happens in stories."

"Then you are reading the wrong stories," I said firmly.

As much as I scolded, I knew that Daniel's presence had prevented the man from shouting for the nearest constable or trying to drag Grace off to a police station on his own. I preferred to stand up for myself whenever I could, but I admitted it was nice to have a protector behind me.

I shouldn't have a warm, pleasant feeling about this, but I could not help myself. I was still a silly romantic, as last night's visions showed, in spite of my best efforts to push such nonsense from my head.

I took Daniel's arm with more enthusiasm than I should have, and we continued our walk.

The door of Jacoby's shipping offices opened once more, and Jacoby himself stepped out.

When he caught sight of me coming toward him, by Daniel's side, a shadow of abject terror settled on his face. He backed up into the office and slammed the door. We were close enough to hear the snick of a bolt sliding home to lock us out.

I reached home without mishap that evening, after enjoying the remainder of a wonderful day with my daughter. Daniel had left us after our repast at a teashop, his significant look at me indicating he'd be off to gather more information from and about our suspects.

I pressed the warm feeling of being with Grace close to me as Tess and I went through our preparations for poached haddock followed by a roast with plenty of potatoes and greens—I'd returned us to cooking several courses now that Lord Clifford and Lady Cynthia were in residence. Mr. Davis stepped into the kitchen as we worked and told me that Cynthia and Mr. Thanos wished to confer with me upstairs after supper.

His pinched face told me of his disapprobation. Not, I discerned, because he thought I was getting above myself, but because if Mrs. Bywater got word of it, she'd possibly try to sack me ... again. At the very least, she'd keep Lacy Cynthia from me, believing that I had a harmful influence on her.

"Perhaps Lady Cynthia and Mr. Thanos should meet with me in the housekeeper's parlor after they dine," I suggested. "That way we are not underfoot when you are trying to put the dining room to rights. Is Lord Clifford supping with them as well?"

Mr. Davis went colder than ever. "He has requested a tray sent up to his bedchamber. I gather he is ailing." His tone conveyed that he believed Lord Clifford was sequestering himself rather than being actually ill.

"I will concoct something to soothe his digestion," I said.

Mr. Davis nodded, still not happy with the situation. He'd been vexed ever since Lord Clifford had turned up, as he'd been enjoying his holiday sorting through the wines, free from the family's demands.

"By the way," I said before Mr. Davis departed. "Have you read anything in your newspapers, either recently or in the past, about a shipping company run by a man called Jacoby? Any sort of scandal?"

Mr. Davis's thin brows rose. "You mean Jacoby and Sons?"

"That's the one," I said in surprise.

"I recall something." His annoyance at Lord Clifford faded as he began to muse. "Let me have a think and see if I can remember."

"Thank you, Mr. Davis."

“Not at all, Mrs. Holloway.”

I busied myself with cooking for the next hour. I always believed any job was worth doing well, so I concentrated on the task. After the fish went up with its butter and caper sauce, Tess and I turned out the roast and potatoes with a side of braised greens with onions, topped by a nice sauce made from the beef’s juices, with arrowroot as a thickener.

A tray with a smidgen of beef and potatoes plus a few slices of fresh bread and hot tea I sent to Lord Clifford via Mrs. Redfern, while I cranked the rest up on the dumbwaiter to the dining room.

Mr. Davis was behind me when I turned from the dumbwaiter, startling me. He was in his tailcoat and wore an introspective expression, which he did when he was thinking something through.

“I did recall what happened at Jacoby and Sons,” he said. “There were no sons, first of all. About five years ago, I think, a man who’d done a great deal of shipping business with Mr. Jacoby turned up dead. Washed up in the Thames, his throat cut. Probably robbed by ruffians, but Jacoby was under a cloud of suspicion for some time. His name was cleared—he hadn’t been in London on the day—but his business slumped for a while. I remember journalists writing eagerly about how shameful it was that the police presumed a man guilty until proven innocent, nearly ruining him. Instead of the other way around, as it should be.”

Having said his piece, Mr. Davis strode out of the kitchen and to the stairs, leaving me with my thoughts spinning.

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“ Jacoby, a murderer?” Mr. Thanos exclaimed when we sat down together in the housekeeper’s parlor later that evening. He’d left off his spectacles, which made him peer at me. “My, my.”

“Alleged murderer,” Cynthia corrected him. “The police let him go, Mrs. Holloway said.”

Daniel, who’d been perusing the bookshelf’s sparse collection, which included a dictionary, a few of Dickens’s stories, a tome on ancient Rome, and my cookbooks, turned to us. “But it’s interesting that he’s connected to another death, isn’t it?”

A second reason I’d wanted to meet in the housekeeper’s parlor was that I could send for Daniel to join us. Mr. Davis would hardly allow him into the upper floors again without Lord Clifford’s invitation.

Lord Clifford remained in his rooms, refusing to leave them until he knew he was safe from arrest, or so Cynthia told me when she arrived downstairs. Her expression indicated that while she’d long since lost patience with her father, his low spirits made her heart ache.

“Very interesting,” Mr. Thanos agreed with Daniel. “As was what my friends from Lord Clifford’s club told me. Though nothing to do with the murder,” he added quickly to Cynthia.

Cynthia plopped herself on the parlor chair, and I took the hard chair from the writing table so Mr. Thanos and Cynthia could be comfortable. I wished for tea to wet my throat, but I did not want to take the time to run off and brew it.

I left another soft chair for Daniel, but he seemed more fascinated by the reading material.

“Who is having a go at Gibbon?” he asked, studying a fat book’s spine.

“Mr. Davis,” I answered. “He likes the grisly tales of the more lurid Roman emperors.” He’d once regaled me with gruesome details about Caligula until I’d begged him to cease.

“Reading about ancient decadence can make one feel virtuous and sensible,” Daniel said. “I beg your pardon, Thanos. Please, go on with your report.”

Mr. Thanos had taken the chair closest to Cynthia and regarded her unhappily. “I mean no disrespect to your father, Cyn.”

“My dear Elgin, my pa lost his claim to respectability long ago,” Cynthia assured him. “It is his own fault, not yours.”

I liked that the pair addressed each other as Cyn and my dear Elgin . I was so pleased by this that I almost missed Mr. Thanos’s next speech.

“My friends confirm that Lord Clifford departed and returned to the club at the exact times he states,” Mr. Thanos said. “On Saturday evening, at about half past eight, coming in again just after midnight. On Sunday afternoon, at around half past three, again returning after midnight. They also confirm that he was quite inebriated both times he came home.”

“That is my father, yes,” Cynthia said wearily, as I scribbled this information into my notebook. “I doubt he feigned it.”

“But only drunk,” Mr. Thanos continued. “Not frightened or guilty or splashed with

blood or anything. One of my friends greeted him as he stumbled in on Sunday night, then fetched one of the footmen to help him upstairs to bed. He saw nothing odd in Lord Clifford's behavior. He'd observed such many times before." Mr. Thanos flushed.

"As have I," Cynthia assured him. "I wish he could remember exactly where he wandered about. That would help his case enormously."

"My friends also observed a visit from Mr. Dougherty," Mr. Thanos resumed. "The exchange became heated, they said. My friends are not talkative gentlemen, and any animated conversation alarms them. They worried they'd have to summon the doorman to have them turned out."

Lord Clifford hadn't mentioned this. I turned back a few pages in my notebook and consulted my jottings of Lord Clifford's story.

"He told us he met Mr. Jacoby and Mr. Dougherty at a restaurant," I said. "On Saturday evening. I assume that is where they paid Mr. Dougherty the money they told him was a return on his investment. I thought Mr. Dougherty was so pleased by the funds he decided he'd bank them and cease with the speculation."

Mr. Thanos nodded. "This was on Sunday afternoon. About two, my chums think. Just after luncheon, anyway. Mr. Dougherty paid a visit on his own."

"Did he, indeed?" Lord Clifford had not mentioned this either.

"Yes. I beg your pardon if I was unclear."

It was not Mr. Thanos I was annoyed with. "What were they arguing about? And why didn't Lord Clifford tell us about this?"

“Presumably because he did not know Constable Wallace,” Cynthia said in exasperation. “But why didn’t he tell us?”

Exactly my question.

“My friends could not say what they quarreled over,” Mr. Thanos continued apologetically. “They didn’t hear specific words, only raised voices and Lord Clifford cursing roundly.”

“Then it was about money,” Cynthia said. “Mark my words. I will wager that dear Papa summoned Mr. Dougherty to the club on his own to beg him to continue investing, so Papa could recoup his losses. Mr. Dougherty must not have been the soft mark Papa thought he was, and so Papa lost his temper. This is not a mad guess on my part—it has happened before. Papa has never learned how to gracefully bow out if a mark won’t take the bait.” She peered at me in sudden consternation. “Mrs. H.? Are you well?”

I had frozen, my pencil stiff in my fingers. Realizations washed over me, both enlightening me and making me feel a complete fool.

“We’ve been looking at this the wrong way around,” I said, my voice cracking. “Cynthia, do you think I could speak to your father? Immediately, I mean?”

Cynthia’s brows climbed, though whether from my request or because I’d called her by her given name without any honorific in front of it, I could not say. When I was agitated, I sometimes forgot social rules.

“I believe he’d talk to you,” Cynthia said. “Why? What are you pondering?”

“I want to ask him before I tell you my speculations. I might be completely wrong.” I jumped to my feet, thrusting my notebook and pencil into my apron pocket.

I rushed to the door, which was opened by Daniel, who'd come to my side as soon as I'd stood.

He and Mr. Thanos did not try to follow as Cynthia and I swept out of the parlor and made for the stairs. They tacitly understood that Lord Clifford might grow alarmed if we all descended up on him, and I was grateful for that understanding.

Cynthia and I went up into a quiet house, no one in sight. The staff must all be in the servants' hall, or some already retired for the night. I hadn't seen either Mrs. Redfern or Mr. Davis as we'd hastened to the backstairs, but the two of them sometimes holed up in Mr. Davis's butler's pantry when the family was away. They'd sample the wines, to make certain they were good enough to serve at table, of course.

Cynthia had no qualms about marching to her father's bedchamber on the second floor and hammering on the door.

"Papa? Make sure you are covered. I am coming in, and I have Mrs. Holloway with me."

I heard Lord Clifford squeak something, and then Cynthia pushed her way inside. Lord Clifford had not locked his door, but I had the feeling a flimsy lock would not keep out Cynthia when she was this angry.

Fortunately, Lord Clifford was not abed or even undressed. He sat at a writing desk, pen in hand. He shoved whatever he'd been working on under another piece of paper and scrambled to his feet as his daughter stormed inside. I followed more quietly.

"What is it?" Lord Clifford's exhausted and sad tones stirred my sympathy. "I wish to be left alone."

"Why did Mr. Dougherty visit you at your club on Sunday?" Cynthia demanded.

“Were you touching him for money?”

Lord Clifford flushed, but he lifted his chin. “Of course, I was. Jacoby let him go too easily. I thought I could convince Dougherty to put in another investment, but he proved uncommonly stubborn. Some wealthy blokes are. Dougherty is so tight-fisted his fingers must cramp. He wouldn’t budge, damn the man. I thought I’d try again that night, but as I say, his man turned me from his door.”

“Your lordship,” I said before Cynthia could continue any remonstrations. “What does Mr. Dougherty look like?”

“Eh?” Lord Clifford blinked at me, as though just becoming aware of my presence, then he shrugged. “Ordinary. Pretentious man of the City, who’s made so much money—or his father did and left the business to him—that he forgets about those in straightened circumstances. Doesn’t care, really. He made his twenty thousand pounds and left me in the hole.”

“Can you describe him exactly, please?” I slid out my notebook, hoping my pragmatic gesture would cut through his dramatics.

“Ah. Yes, well. Tall, I suppose. A bit taller than I am. Tidy. Everything combed and groomed. Dark hair going to gray. Full beard kept overly tamed?—”

“Bushy eyebrows?” I broke in. “Stare like polished steel? Rather rude manner to anyone he feels is beneath him?”

“Yes.” Lord Clifford regarded me in bewilderment. “That’s the chap exactly. How do you know?”

I snapped the notebook shut—I hadn’t been writing in it anyway. “Because Mr. McAdam and I saw him today. He was coming out of Mr. Jacoby’s establishment.”

I'd seen writing on the piece of paper he'd dropped that Grace had handed back to him, but at the time, I'd been too concerned for Grace to realize what I'd noticed. It had been a receipt with some number on it, and I'd also made out a few words that looked like Shires, Ea ? —.

Reginald Shires, Earl of Clifford.

Why should Mr. Dougherty have a receipt or whatever it was, with Lord Clifford's name on it? I had no idea what the paper was about, but it plus the fact that he'd emerged from Mr. Jacoby's place of business formed a stronger a connection between the two men.

“That is why I said we were looking at things the wrong way around,” I went on. “You and Jacoby weren't swindling Mr. Dougherty, your lordship. I believe both Jacoby and Dougherty were swindling you . They must have been in league with each other. It was one of them who suggested you consult Mr. Mobley for your share of the funds, wasn't it?”

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“But does that make the pair of them murderers?” Mr. Thanos asked when Lady Cynthia and I had returned to the housekeeper’s parlor.

Lord Clifford, after my revelation, had still been tired but less sorrowful. He’d uttered many profanities when I’d finished my announcement, and the defiant glitter had returned to his eyes.

“I’m not certain,” I said to Mr. Thanos now. “But it is worth Constable Wallace or Sergeant Scott finding out, I think. This is my reasoning: Mr. Jacoby knew that Lord Clifford liked to fancy himself a clever confidence trickster. They’d done a minor swindle or two together before Lord Clifford became an earl. Perhaps Mr. Jacoby thought Lord Clifford had come into money when he inherited the title, as so many believe those of the peerage are showered in riches.”

Cynthia snorted a laugh. “More fool they. Some of the high and mighty are swimming in cash, but most of Papa’s money is tied to the land. My father is correct when he complains that keeping up the house is beggaring him. He also has to repair the tenants’ homes and pay the staff, when crops or other products might not bring in the sums they used to.”

“Men like Mr. Jacoby might not realize this,” I said. “They see the magnificent houses built in another age and have no idea how costly it is to maintain the drains or keep the foundations from falling to bits. Mr. Jacoby decides that he can skim some cash from Lord Clifford by making him believe they will be cheating a conceited but wealthy middle-class man, Mr. Dougherty.”

“Who actually was in it with Mr. Jacoby,” Cynthia said. “I begin to see. They would

take Papa's ten thousand in cash and give it to Mr. Dougherty, pretending that Mr. Dougherty's ten-thousand guinea stake had doubled. But in reality, Papa lost ten thousand pounds—fifteen with the interest Mr. Mobley demanded. Messieurs Jacoby and Dougherty split Papa's money, making them five thousand each. An easy day's work."

"Lord Clifford confirmed that Mr. Jacoby sent him to Mr. Mobley," I told Daniel and Mr. Thanos. "Lord Clifford confessed he could not produce ten thousand from his pocket, but he very much wanted to fleece Mr. Dougherty. Mr. Dougherty was quite wealthy, Mr. Jacoby told him, and they stood to make fifty thousand or more each off him. Lord Clifford could easily raise the sum of ten thousand from the moneylender and pay him back with what they got out of Mr. Dougherty. So, Lord Clifford trotted off and borrowed the money."

Cynthia shook her head. "Cruel of them. Papa has always believed he was so clever, but sometimes, he's just daft."

"Mr. Jacoby played on his vanity," I continued. "When I realized it was Mr. Dougherty we saw coming out of Mr. Jacoby's offices, it made me wonder two things. First, why was he visiting Mr. Jacoby again when he'd already taken the money and departed? Second, why did Mr. Jacoby believe that so stingy a man would be a good mark for such a large swindle? Lord Clifford described Mr. Dougherty as extremely tight-fisted, and Daniel and I witnessed for ourselves how mean he was." I was still indignant about how he'd behaved toward Grace. "Someone like that would be very careful about letting ten thousand guineas out of their sight. But if Mr. Dougherty knew he didn't have to truly pay over anything, and that he'd be getting Lord Clifford's guineas, he'd have gone along with such a scheme. He wouldn't be out any money at all, only pretend to be."

Daniel nodded. "It also explains why Jacoby jumped like a rabbit when he saw you, Kat. He must have worried that you'd returned to pry or to fetch a constable to

question him.”

“A constable should truly visit both of these gentlemen,” I said. “Perhaps Mr. Dougherty and Mr. Jacoby worried that Mobley, who might have been in on the ruse, would tell Lord Clifford the truth. When they realized Lord Clifford was truly a bankrupt and couldn’t pay back Mobley, a dangerous man, they possibly feared that Mobley would try to pry the money out of them. If Lord Clifford was arrested for Mobley’s murder, so much the better.”

“Horrible men,” Cynthia said with adamance. “Papa has been through quite enough. He’s a fool, yes, but not wicked.”

Daniel rose from where he’d perched on the chair I’d used before. “I will consult with Chief Inspector Ferguson. I’ll tell him your theory, Kat, and what you said about the meeting at the club, Thanos, and suggest he send Constable Wallace to investigate both gentlemen. That young man wants a result so much he can taste it. A real result, not a dupe to take the blame.”

I’d also sensed that about Constable Wallace. While Sergeant Scott and even the chief inspector had been happy to intimidate Lord Clifford, Wallace had been gentle with him, only interested in finding out what had truly happened.

Daniel came to me and kissed me on the lips, right in front of Lady Cynthia and Mr. Thanos, neither of whom bothered to look away.

“I’ll go at once,” Daniel said. “I’ll likely catch one of the detectives even this late but I’ll leave a message if nothing else.”

“Go with him, Thanos,” Cynthia said abruptly, wiping off the smile she’d assumed when Daniel had kissed me. “I’d feel better knowing neither of you were wandering about by yourselves, in case these two gents start worrying about what you know.

Thanos's friends might let on to Dougherty that he'd been asking questions, and both Jacoby and Dougherty saw you today, McAdam."

Cynthia's qualms mirrored mine. "Yes," I agreed. "Go straight to Scotland Yard and then return home and bar your doors."

"Jacoby and Dougherty saw you too," Daniel reminded me. He'd remained close, which was most distracting.

"We'll be safe here," Cynthia assured him. "I'll have Davis bolt all the doors and check that the windows are locked. My father won't stray a step, even if I have to sit on him."

Mr. Thanos was obviously reluctant to leave Cynthia alone with only her father and our servants for protection, though I could have told him that our footmen were quite robust. But Mr. Thanos could hardly stay the night without damage to Cynthia's reputation, even if we maintained that he was the guest of Lord Clifford. Mrs. Bywater would certainly be incensed when she learned of it.

Mr. Thanos seemed to understand. He pressed Cynthia's hand as he left her, not going as far as Daniel had with a kiss. Mr. Thanos nodded to me, then followed Daniel out.

They left through the kitchen, sending a chill draft down the hall as they departed.

"Very clever, Mrs. H.," Cynthia said. She helped herself to sherry that Mrs. Redfern always kept in a decanter on the side table. "Those two swindling chaps will regret that they tried to cheat my father."

"It is an idea only. We will know if I am right when the gentlemen are questioned." I let out a breath, uncertain again. "For now, we will have Mr. Davis bolt the doors as

you suggested. Then you ought to go to bed yourself. You are as tired as your father.”

Cynthia downed the sherry and made a face—she preferred brandy or whiskey. “I admit it is a trial looking after him. But Mama would be devastated if anything happened to the old idiot. She’s already been through quite enough.”

I went to her and dared lay a hand on her slim shoulder. “I am so sorry, my friend. Your father has been blaming himself not only for losing the money but for what happened to your brother. He needs kindness at the moment, not scolding.”

Cynthia thunked down the glass, but she didn’t shrug me off. “He always needs scolding, Mrs. H. For his own good.” She shook her head. “I know he blames himself about my brother, but he’s wrong. Reggie never would have lasted long, in any case. He’d become almost frantically drunk and a danger to everyone around him, including his own family. He nearly shot me and Emily once—by mistake, he babbled later. He’d thought we were ruffians coming to murder him. When he came out of his stupor, he’d sink into a lake of remorse and be inconsolable. Everything he did was done to the extreme. I’ve come to terms with the fact that it was only a matter of time before we lost him completely, whether he topped himself or someone else did it for him.” She sniffled as she finished. “Damned sherry always makes my nose run.”

“At one time, you feared you’d be like him,” I reminded her gently. She’d confessed this to me one cold night, frightening me out of my wits.

Cynthia nodded, her eyes moist. “I know. Because I am also extreme, aren’t I? Putting on trousers and following Bobby and my friends to gentlemen’s gaming rooms, daring anyone to catch on.” She sent me a tremulous smile. “But you talked sense into me that night, Mrs. H., never worry. Besides, Thanos is a decent chap, and I don’t want to frighten him off.”

“I don’t believe you will.” I returned the smile and gave her another pat. “Now off to bed with you.”

Cynthia sketched me a salute, her confidence returning. “Aye-aye, Mrs. H.”

Once she’d tramped upstairs, I returned to the kitchen and fixed a tray of tea with some leftover currant scones, a large pot of jam, and another of lemon curd. I carried the tray upstairs myself, in time to see Mr. Davis shoot the heavy bolt across the front door.

“Just popping this up to his lordship,” I explained.

Mr. Davis nodded without answering and moved to check the windows of the drawing room.

Lord Clifford was still awake and dressed, answering the door I tapped on. His eyes lit when he saw the scones and tea, which was not unexpected. There wasn’t much sadness that current scones, lemon curd, and jam could not comfort.

He stepped aside so I could enter. “Mrs. Holloway, how good of you.”

I set the tray on a table and poured out a cup of steaming tea with a dollop of cream. “You get this inside you, your lordship, and take yourself to bed. I’ll have Lady Cynthia do the same.”

“Cynthia.” Lord Clifford’s shoulders drooped as he lifted the cup. “She will be happy to see the back of me. I hardly blame her.”

It was not my place to offer advice to an earl about his family. But people are people, whether they are earls or unhappy queens or match sellers in the gutter. They live and love, worry about their children, and try to steer their way through this life the best

they can.

“Lady Cynthia cares for you very much,” I said. “If she did not, she’d hardly rush to London to make certain you were well.”

“Huh.” Lord Clifford took another sip of tea. “She knows what a reprobate I am.” He lowered the cup and looked directly at me. “It is a hard thing, Mrs. Holloway, to lose a child. The Lord not only took my son from me, but my daughter. He is either very cruel or does not exist.”

My own theology was a bit shaky, so I did not try to relieve him with platitudes from Sunday pulpits. “You have another daughter, who, as I say, loves you. She only wants your affection and understanding in return.”

Lord Clifford regarded me another moment, then raised his cup again. “You are very astute, Mrs. Holloway.” He managed a shaky smile. “And those scones look delicious. Send Cynthia in here—I will share them with her.”

I silently slid out a clean cup I’d tucked into my apron pocket and set it on the tray.

“Right way, your lordship.”

I left him regarding me in both bewilderment and amusement. I delivered the message to Cynthia and returned to the kitchen, satisfied that I had done my best.

In the morning, I took up my basket, told Tess I was going out for fresh vegetables for the day, and headed for Covent Garden.

The market was located conveniently near the Strand, so after I found my produce, I popped along to Mr. Mobley’s office and had a word with his partner. Mr. Parkin was surprisingly courteous and chatty, with no sign of any ruffians nearby. Next, I took a

chance and knocked on the door of Mobley's neighbor, the one who'd found his body.

Mr. Ogden, the man of business, was rushed and distracted, but he answered my questions readily enough.

From there it was another short walk to Southampton Street, where Daniel lodged. I reached the tall brick house quickly, so eager was I to tell him what I'd learned.

Daniel, unfortunately, was out. His landlady, Mrs. Williams, knew me, and after we had a brief chat, I decided to wait for him. I went upstairs to Daniel's rooms that I'd made more comfortable by adding a cushion here, a colorful picture from a secondhand shop there.

It was as I impatiently paced Daniel's front chamber that Mr. Mobley's killer found me.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:29 am

“We made an arrest this morning,” the man said after he apologized for startling me. “Mr. Jacoby. For the murder of Mr. Mobley. Mr. Dougherty was arrested as an accomplice, though we believe Jacoby committed the actual murder.”

“Ah.”

It was all I could think of to say. While he’d surprised me, he’d not looked in the least unsettled to find me wandering about Daniel’s quarters by myself. That either meant he found nothing odd in a woman who was not Daniel’s wife at home in his rooms, or he’d followed me.

“McAdam was there when the men were brought in,” he continued. “He told me you’d put two and two together and made out that Jacoby was partners with this Mr. Dougherty. That the pair were swindlers. Mr. Jacoby often sent clients to Mr. Mobley when they couldn’t pay him. A man answering Jacoby’s description has been seen at Mobley’s business often, including last Sunday.”

“Indeed.”

He peered at me. “You do not seem as pleased as I thought you’d be, Mrs. Holloway. We got the man, or men. McAdam gives all the credit to you, though I dare say we’d have plodded there in the end. But I thank you for your assistance, especially in convincing Lord Clifford to speak to us.”

“I was helping his lordship prove his innocence,” I said stiffly. “He was an unlucky man, not a murderer.”

A nod. "This proved to be the case. But I must wonder—if you were satisfied that Mr. Jacoby and Mr. Dougherty were guilty, why did you visit Mr. Mobley's office today?"

So, he had been following me.

"Because something bothered me." I knew I was unwise to tell him exactly what I'd discovered, but my curiosity about whether I was right was too strong. Besides, I heard Mrs. Williams downstairs, humming in her kitchen, and any scream from me would alert her and all the other lodgers in this house.

"What was that?" he asked.

Did I imagine menace in his eyes? Or only friendly helpfulness? I could be wrong, after all.

"How you were so quick on the scene when Mr. Mobley was found." I took a step toward the window, where I'd left my basket on the table. I lifted it, heavy with my shopping. I'd found some particularly fine potatoes. "I spoke to Mr. Ogden, who lets the offices next door to Mr. Mobley. He said he found Mobley dead, walked out of the door, and nearly ran into a convenient constable, who happened to work for Sergeant Scott. He did not say a detective constable at the time, but he did today. He described you exactly. Detective constables do not walk a beat, I am given to understand."

"I happened to be passing along the Strand that morning," Wallace said easily.

"Or making certain you were near so that you'd be first to investigate. Both so you could clear up any evidence you'd accidentally left behind and to impress Sergeant Scott and Chief Inspector Ferguson with your eagerness and thoroughness."

Constable Wallace raised his brows. "That is an interesting supposition. How do you

know I am not telling you the truth?”

“Because you told us you live in Pimlico,” I stated. “You’d have no need to go anywhere near the Strand on your way into work.”

“Where I walk in the morning is my own business.” Wallace’s affable expression did not waver, but his eyes hardened. “How does it make me a murderer?”

“You can explain to Sergeant Scott where you were,” I said. “I’m certain he would be most interested.”

Constable Wallace’s eyes flickered. I decided to try to make my way out, but he stepped directly in front of me.

“Did Mobley’s neighbor actually see me commit the murder?”

“No,” I had to admit. “Mr. Ogden only arrived in the morning, long after it was done. So you can spare him.”

Wallace studied me closely, as though he did not know what to make of me. “You are adamant. Why on earth should I kill Mobley? I barely knew the man.”

“Not necessarily. Mobley was a moneylender, notorious for his ruinous fees and quite dangerous. Why should he be allowed to continue his business, growing rich from lending to desperate men like Lord Clifford? Or maybe you owed him money yourself?” I doubted this last. Wallace didn’t have the haggard appearance of someone deeply in debt.

“I’d never do business with someone so repellent,” Wallace answered in disgust. “You are right that Mobley’s death is no loss to the world. Filth to be washed down the gutter.”

The deep anger in his voice chilled me, but I plowed on. “You must have persuaded him to meet you on Sunday night, without his ruffians, so they wouldn’t overhear your discussion. Perhaps you made out that you’d be willing to take a bit of his profits to look the other way at his dealings.”

“Now you are imagining things, Mrs. Holloway. I’d never take a bribe from someone like him.” The curl of Wallace’s lip told me this was true.

“But he wasn’t to know that, was he?” I said. “Also, you are ambitious. If you solve this case, you will receive many accolades and move up in the world.” I adjusted my basket. “Sergeant Scott is very careful, but you surged ahead and found a killer for him.”

Now all pretense of friendliness left him. “I worked long and hard to drag myself up from lowest constable on the force to my place as a detective. I don’t come from a police family, and I didn’t have friends at the Yard to recommend me. I moved into my position all by myself, and I do not intend to be brought down by the speculations of a silly woman. Of a cook .”

“I also came to my position in a prominent household by hard work,” I said. “But I never murdered anyone to do it.”

“You will never prove that I killed Mobley,” Constable Wallace stated with derision. “You can’t. Neither can anyone else. Jacoby is swindling scum, and I can place him near the scene of the crime at the time in question. He used Mobley often enough, and I made certain to make my appointment near the same time Jacoby made his. Dougherty will hire an expensive barrister to get him off, but Jacoby will break rocks at Dartmoor. He deserves to go down. It would have been entertaining to watch the Earl of Clifford stutter before the House of Lords and have his reputation destroyed—aristos are parasites on the rest of us—but I couldn’t produce enough evidence against him. I wager Dougherty truly wasn’t at home when Lord Clifford called on him, and he’ll have to dance to prove he wasn’t helping Jacoby murder

Mobley.”

“Then you will have to take your chances that Sergeant Scott won’t tumble to your ruse,” I said. “Good afternoon, Constable Wallace.”

I tried to move around him, but wasn’t surprised when he would not let me.

“You will come with me, Mrs. Holloway. We will walk to Scotland Yard and face Sergeant Scott together. I wonder who he’ll be more willing to believe?”

“No, indeed. If I leave with you, you’ll find some quiet turning or empty building in which to knock me on the head, as you did Mr. Mobley. If we stay here, and you try anything, I can shout for the landlady, who will run for a constable. The beat constable on this street is honest—I know him .”

Wallace came at me, and in that second, he became very frightening indeed. His eyes were lit with rage, determination, and a frustration that anyone would have the gall to stand in his way. He raised his club—a long, slender thing of polished wood, like what had killed Mobley. All I could do was dart aside and lift my basket to fend off the blow.

Which never fell. Unlike Mobley, who unluckily had been alone, I had a rescuer. Daniel, who’d been standing in the doorway for the last few minutes, ripped the club from Wallace’s upraised hand and expertly twisted the man off his feet.

Wallace fell heavily but rolled away and sprang up once more. He’d had training, but Daniel had been fighting for his life since he was a wee lad. Daniel delivered an elbow to the chin and then the gut, followed by a few tight punches. Wallace fell again, this time to lie unmoving on the carpet.

“Kat.” Daniel’s eyes blazed with anger, worry, and something else I dared not pin hopes on. “What the devil?—”

“I knew you’d come right away,” I said quickly. “I saw James lurking and then race away to fetch you. That meant you weren’t far, or he would have told me so. If that had been the case, I would have gone at once to Scotland Yard to speak with Sergeant Scott.”

I was babbling and shaking, because I’d had no idea that Constable Wallace had followed me and would confront me here. I’d only wanted to tell Daniel what I had found out and leave the mopping up to him. I’d blurted my theory to Wallace because I’d heard Daniel’s step below and knew he’d be a witness, one respected by Scotland Yard, if Wallace admitted his sins.

Two witnesses, I realized, as James came bounding in, gaping at Wallace on the floor.

“He was a bad ’un, wasn’t he?” James asked me, the lanky youth towering over Wallace’s prostrate form. “Not right when the police are criminals, is it?”

I tried to answer him with some quip, but my strength failed me. I found myself sinking to a chair, which somehow had Daniel on it first. He held me on his lap, and I buried my face in his shoulder and hung on.

Daniel cradled me close, kissing my hair. James patted my shoulder, trying to soothe me, and I decided there were no two better men in the world than they.

“I am taking Papa home tomorrow,” Cynthia announced to me the next morning as Tess and I finished cleaning up the breakfast things. It was Tess’s day out, but the dear girl wanted to make certain everything was neat for me before she departed. She’d also lingered to hear about my adventures.

“That would be best, I agree,” I said to Cynthia as I finished wiping my worktable.

“He’s feeling much livelier now that the true murderer has been arrested,” Cynthia

went on. “Add to that, Mr. Parkin agreed to soften the terms of the loan. Papa will pay back every penny, but thanks to you, he has much more time and will owe far less interest.”

“Mr. Parkin wants to make a go of having a legitimate business, he told me.” I set out a basket of carrots from yesterday’s shopping and began to go through them. “It was one reason he went to Manchester, apart from the wedding. To attract new investors, or something of the sort. I wasn’t quite certain what all he was explaining to me.”

“You ought to have taken me with you,” Cynthia said sternly. “Wallace could have popped you on the head at any time you were walking about.”

“Hardly in the crowds of the Strand and Covent Garden.” I lined up the carrots I’d chosen, readying them for peeling and scrubbing. “I did not inform you because you were looking after your father, and besides, I wasn’t sure I was right. I only wanted to ask Mobley’s neighbor more details about that morning, because no one paid much attention to his story. I only meant to tie up the loose ends, not be followed and attacked.”

“Lucky for you, Daniel was there,” Cynthia went on severely.

“That’s what I said,” Tess put in. She snatched up her bonnet and set it carefully on her head, checking her appearance in the mirror. I guessed she’d meet Constable Greene today for another lively knees-up.

“It was not luck.” I’d explained many times to both Daniel and Cynthia that I’d not have remained in Daniel’s flat if I’d thought I’d be cornered there. I’d been very careful and would have gone straight to Scotland Yard had I not thought Daniel would soon be along. “Never mind. Please convey my best wishes to your father for a safe journey.”

“I will.” Cynthia grinned. “He’s taken with you, Mrs. H. He might hire you away

from Aunty and Uncle to come cook for us in Hertfordshire.”

“No, he will not,” I said firmly. “I prefer London, and in London I shall remain.”

Cynthia knew exactly why I wished to stay in the metropolis—for several reasons, in fact. She only widened her smile and turned away, clattering through the hall and up the stairs to prepare for their journey.

In the late hours that night, when the house was dark and quiet, Daniel arrived at the back door. I greeted him silently and set before him a plate of leftover roast, carrots, and potatoes I’d served to Lord Clifford and Cynthia for supper. I plunked a fork next to it and seated myself not far from him.

“Magistrate was not kind to Wallace,” Daniel told me between mouthfuls. “Was quite unhappy that a policeman had managed to commit murder and then investigate his own crime under other policemen’s noses. Apparently, Sergeant Scott had already suspected him and had been quietly investigating Wallace’s movements.”

“Sergeant Scott will go far, I predict.” I poured tea for both of us, adding a bit of sugar and dollop of cream in both. “He has the cool-headed resolve for the job.” I wasn’t certain I liked the man, but I recognized his competence.

“If Sergeant Scott had a helpmeet like you, he would go far indeed.” Daniel winked at me as he took another large bite.

“Impertinence,” I scolded. It would never do to let Daniel know how much his offhand compliments pleased me.

As he finished eating, my ebullience ebbed. I descended into the troubling thoughts I’d had since I’d spoken so forthrightly with Lord Clifford the other night.

The only sounds beyond us now were the quiet hiss of the kettle I always kept

warming and a thunk of coal breaking apart inside the stove. A breath of peace in a kitchen that could see so much bustle.

“I told Cynthia’s father to be kind to her,” I said as Daniel scraped his plate clean and laid down his fork. “In other words, to take comfort in the child he had left. But oh, Daniel.” I let my hand slide from my teacup to go limp on the table. “I can pity him so deeply. If something happened to Grace, it would be the end of me.” My eyes stung, and I suddenly found it difficult to breathe.

Warmth touched me as Daniel knelt next to my chair and slid his arms around me. “I feel the same about James. We’ll protect them together, you and I, shall we? From everything bad in the world.”

“Will we be able to?” I asked, the words shaky.

“I intend to have a damned good try. Join me?”

“Of course.” My resolve resurged. I’d protect Grace from the demons of hell if I had to. “Let anyone try to get in our way.”

“That’s the spirit.” Daniel tugged me closer. “My brave, brave Kat. What would my life be without you?”

“Your stomach would be less filled, that’s for certain,” I said.

Daniel laughed, a warm, gladdening sound. “So would my heart.”

And mine . But as it was, with Daniel, Grace, James, and my friends, I had everything I needed.

Another piece of coal broke, reminding me of the late hour. I’d need to bank the fire and go to bed.

Instead, I sat with Daniel holding me, my head resting on his smooth hair, letting myself savor this moment of happiness as long as I was able.