



Good Turns and Strangulation

by Mia Sundby

Renfry tapped his shoe against the slick pavements as he waited. Through the grey haze left after the rain on the city streets, he cast his gaze about.

Nothing yet.

With a short sigh, Renfry shook off the rain from his bowler hat. As he replaced it on his head, a figure in the bustling city crowd caught his attention: stood beneath the overhang above the railway station, almost unnaturally still, hat pinned to her pale curls, her gloved hands wrapped tightly around a waxed parasol.

Tensing, Renfry gritted his teeth behind his thinly-closed lips, and wended his way through the crowd.

She didn't look at him as he appeared at her shoulder.

When something close to a minute of silence had passed, Renfry grumbled, "I've been waiting for half an hour."

"I had trouble getting away." She said in her delicate tones, a pucker between her pale brows. "Your people insisted on trying to follow me here."

Renfry's jaw clenched. "You noticed then?"

"With all due respect, your people need more training. But," she added, her doll-like lips twisting wryly, "My lady and I are more observant than both."

Renfry dipped his head minutely in agreement. He could attest to that; the Heiress and her doll-like lady-in-tow, Miss Davenough, were the first people he'd tailed who had noticed him. And the first to invite him into their house to discuss the terms by which he was hired.

Renfry wondered, not for the first time today --not for the first time in the last hour--, how he'd gotten himself into this mess. Poisoners, sorcerers, creatures of the dark underbelly of the capital city... He had belonged to simpler times; following disloyal spouses, tailing thieves for merchants and suspects in murder cases.

Shifting uncomfortably, he glanced down at Miss Davenough. "They're there for your protection."

"My lady and I are more than capable of protecting ourselves." At last, she met his eyes as she said, "As you well know, Inspector."

He held her sharp gaze for as long as he was able; he could recall all too easily the taste of the tea in his mouth as it soured, as his limbs grew heavy, his skin grew feverish, and panic had seized his body.

"Now, now, Inspector," the Heiress had murmured, standing over him, her skirts pooling around his useless, twitching body. "I need you to stay focused..."

They had given him the antidote after only a few questions.

"...Indeed you are." He responded flatly.

Miss Davenough nodded curtly. "She doesn't want your protection anyway; she wants your information, or on your head be it." Miss Davenough glanced up, a shimmer of sympathy in her gaze.

Renfry's jaw tightened. One seldom was able to do her a good turn without some thoughts of strangulation.

Blowing out a breath, he looked off into the city crowd. "What does she need to know?"

Overhead, a crackle of thunder boomed through the heavy clouds. Miss Davenough, though dainty in figure, had steel in her eyes as she turned them unblinkingly on him.

"Everything."

