

**The Bomb**  
**By Mona Morstein**  
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Steed and Emma had spent several days investigating who had stolen the secret plans from Powernex, Inc., that were the vital components to a new guided missile that was being developed for the army. Rumors were that a criminal gang had infiltrated the company; other suspects were several aristocrats who served on the board. Various clues had pointed to Lord Ponceroy Saxon, a respected and honored member of the House of Lords, with an illustrious family line that went back to the 1300s. However, the clues had sat uneasily with Steed in their ease of appearance. Finally, enough evidence was gathered to confront Lord Saxon and Steed cornered him in his penthouse in London and got from him the precise location of the papers. They were, Lord Saxon quickly admitted in an obvious stammer, contained in a bright red binder in his study at his country home in Kent. Steed didn't like how hastily Lord Saxon had confessed, nor how awkwardly--not able to look Steed in the eye--and didn't like the way he prevaricated over his motive for stealing the papers in the first place, ruining his reputation, and risking incarceration for life. Steed didn't like how Lord Saxon didn't really seem to know more specifically where the papers were hid in the study, though he denied any accomplice. Steed had a bad feeling about his whole case, but couldn't put his finger on what exactly was bothering him. However, he had no option but to recover the papers. Collecting Mrs. Peel, they left for Norfolk, outside of Ely. They arrived at twilight, around 6:30 p.m., on an overcast November day. Lord Saxon had given Steed the key to his uninhabited house.

They entered the mansion and stayed closed together as they wandered down the two story entrance hall that split into rooms on each side closed off to them by large oak doors. A curving flight of stairs rose in front of them, a runner of green carpeting covering the middle of them. Animal heads of many different varieties were hung on the wall, their blank, doll eyes staring off into infinity.

"Lord Saxon said the papers were in the study at the end of the second floor hallway, over there to the left," Steed said, pointing up over the railing as he leaned his weight on his umbrella. His handsome face was a portrait of wariness, eyes narrowed and thoughtful.

They strode to the staircase and as Mrs. Peel lifted a white-booted foot to place it on the first step, Steed put his hand on her arm. "Wait just a second, Mrs. Peel," he said, "I want to make sure there are no booby-traps about." He put his bowler on the large brass knob at the end of the railing on the first floor and draped his brolly over the thick wooden banister.

"You don't trust milord?" Emma asked, watching Steed squat down and stringently investigate the steps, the carpeting, and the oak and brass railing.

"Of course I do. As far as I can throw him."

Mrs. Peel smirked. Lord Saxon weighed at least seventeen stone at his lightest. She looked down at Steed and couldn't help notice the perfect cut to his hair, the broadness of his shoulders, the natural balance and the strong thighs and calves he had that kept him squatting without any sign of swaying or muscle fatigue. If she was facing him, she would see the impressive bulge of his genitals rounding out the front of his pants, but from the side, unless she made a very obvious move to look over his leg and down, that captivating view was not apparent. Although it was inappropriate whilst they were directly on the job to touch him with lewdness in mind, sometimes, because their physical chemistry was always so noticeable, it was very difficult to keep her hands to herself. Luckily Steed, the professional, had a much finer sense of propriety when they were actively investigating.

Steed stood up in a graceful whisper of a move.

"Safe?" Mrs. Peel asked.

Steed nodded curtly. "Safe." Sweeping his arm out he added, "Shall we?"

They climbed the stairs and Steed's continued expert surveillance of the steps and of the house in general freed Emma up to observe the mansion in a more decorative sense. She stared at the pictures of Lord Saxon's family as she ascended, each man more ungainly and hairy than the next, each woman more vacuous. She would have kept such a frightful display of atavistic unattractiveness hidden in the basement.

Once on the second floor, Steed's edginess was evident.

"Steed?" Mrs. Peel asked. Steed had been an agent, off and on, for almost twenty years and Mrs. Peel knew that at times, though not always, he had developed the ability to intuit inklings of danger which had more than once saved his, and her, life. It was an inexplicable knowing Steed found hard to describe, but that he trusted implicitly when it occurred. She was sure it was occurring now.

"I don't like this. It's too easy. I've got a bad feeling..." then he turned and smiled at Mrs. Peel. "Do me a favor, won't you, my dear? Please don't touch anything."

At Steed's words, Mrs. Peel unconsciously clasped her hands behind her back. "If you're feeling that cautious, maybe we should call in some Ministry Subterfuge reserves and have them help check the house out."

"Certainly not. We two are as good as ten of them. No, we'll just be extra careful, like I always had to be when stealing cookies from Auntie May's cookie jar. She would come at us children with a shotgun if she heard us scampering about." Mrs. Peel looked at Steed as if he had just dumped paint all over his head. Steed leaned in to her, scrunching his nose up in explanation, "Very sensitive to noise." He took off down the hall to the study, his head scanning back and forth to analyze the knickknacks, the wooden floor, the closed doors, the ceiling, muttering, "Poor Cousin Winston; has a limp to this day due to a handful of loudly stolen macaroons."

It was sometimes hard for Mrs. Peel to maintain an air of seriousness with Steed, even when the situation called for the utmost attention to alarm. Grinning and shaking her head back and forth a few times, she caught up with his slow walking.

When they made it to the study, the sliding mahogany doors were closed. Steed kept his fingers several inches away from touching the wood, but used them as a guide for his eyes to inspect the borders of the portal and the central area where the doors met.

"Mrs. Peel, do stand back, won't you?" he asked, turning to her as he placed his hands in the grips to pull the doors apart.

"If you think it's dangerous, then maybe you shouldn't open them," she suggested.

"I don't think it's dangerous," Steed said, "but...it's never unwise to be safe. Back you go."

Frowning, Mrs. Peel moved five feet back, not at all happy that Steed was risking himself. Before she could mention her concern, Steed pushed the doors open; when nothing happened he finished the action until they were entirely placed in their side holes and the room was completely visible to them.

It was a fairly spacious room, with a huge roll top desk against the far right wall, in front of one of the three large windows set into the long back wall that lightened the dark wood hues of the room admirably. From the side of the desk were two bookcases lined with hardcover editions, many quite old, and assorted knick-knacks and bookends; in-between the set was a low table matching the wooden border of the bookcases, on which sat several framed photos. A fireplace with marble mantle piece adorned the left wall, with a large painting of a fox hunt over it. A large metal trunk with metal splats on it sat to the left of the fireplace oddly containing a small, unusually modern round clock in the front of it, which must have been broken as the hands were stationary. The furniture consisted of two sofas, one in brown leather and one in an elegant blue material, with a recliner and two other bulky chairs with ottomans, and several smaller chairs completing the décor. Various side tables sat in among the furniture, and to their right, against the closest wall to them sat a sideboard with numerous expansive crystal decanters of alcohol and glasses set on trays.

"Well, he may be a traitorous thief, but one couldn't call Lord Saxon garish. What a comfortable room," Steed said, sauntering in, and, as expected, heading straight for the brandy. He really was the most predictable of men at times, Mrs. Peel thought. After making sure the sideboard and crystal bottles were danger free, he poured himself a glass, smelling the amber liquid in appreciation of its bouquet, and then poured a second glass for Mrs. Peel.

"A drink, Mrs. Peel?" he inquired.

She took the drink and sipped on it but wasn't really interested in the magnificent vintage, so put it back down on the tray. Steed's worry over the home being booby-trapped had made her anxious and she didn't want the alcohol to numb the worry; she wanted to stay sharp.

Steed, drawn to fine brandy like a moth to flames, had been unable to avoid sampling Lord Saxon's wares, but must have felt the same, because after

savoring just a couple of mouthfuls, he put his sniffer down and rubbed his hands, ready to find the papers and leave. They both looked around the room figuring out where the papers would be stashed.

Turning to each other they simultaneously said, "The desk, of course."

Mrs. Peel took a step towards the massive roll top, but Steed grabbed her arm. "Be careful. Something just isn't quite right about this."

She nodded her understanding of his intuition and went to the desk, watching where each of her feet fell. Once there, she studied the roll top, covering the entire surface of the desk and then placed a light hand on it. When nothing happened she examined where it connected to the desk top and then tried to lift it up. It was locked.

"Do you have the key?" she asked Steed.

He turned from his narrow-eyed perusal of the rest of the room and smiled, "I always have the key." He took out a set of lockpicks and tossed them to her. She snagged them from the air deftly and then bent over to set to work on the lock.

"Got it," she said, after several minutes of tampering with various picks and hearing the lock spring. She stood up and raised the corrugated wood covering, folding it up on top of a wall of little boxed compartments making up the back of the desk. Steed came over to her then and after they was satisfied all was safe they opened all the little drawers and pulled out all the papers stuffed into the boxes. No guided missile plans.

"On to the drawers," Steed said.

Underneath the desk was a top row of three locked long, thin drawers, and then two sets of three unopenable larger, squarer drawers below the two outside thin drawers, no doubt the main lock of the thin drawer controlling the whole row of bigger drawers as well.

Emma expertly unlocked each other the hasps and then put the picks away and handed the set to Steed who replaced them in his breast pocket.

She opened the left set of drawers as Steed continued to watch the room. Rifling through papers, notebooks, a gun and so forth, she came up empty of the plans they were seeking. The thin middle drawer was also devoid of their goal. She went through the last row of drawers as Steed's eagle eyes focused on a thin wire he espied travelling down the molding at the bottom of the wall with the windows. Following it away from them it seemed to duck around and flow around the stone flooring in front of the fireplace and then end...behind the trunk. Following it their way he noticed it came around the wall and disappeared in back of the desk. Steed glanced down at Mrs. Peel's hands as they found a red notebook binder and excitedly lifted it out. His eyes widened as he saw a thin strand of wire attached to the bottom of it.

He brusquely ordered, "Don't lift it!" as he grabbed Mrs. Peel's forearm. However, it was too late, and the wire snapped off as Mrs. Peel stood up, her eyebrows raised in a question.

"Uh-oh..." Steed whispered, and he heard a tiny clicking begin across the room. Turning his head to the timepiece on the trunk lid he noticed the clock had

sprung to life with the second hand travelling up from the "ten" to the "twelve": ten seconds, nine seconds, eight seconds...

Mrs. Peel noticed the anxious expression on Steed's face, dampening her feeling of retrieval success, and asked, "What's wrong?"

Seven seconds, six seconds...

Steed's heart took off racing as his sixth danger sense screamed in his head. He grabbed Mrs. Peel by the arm hard enough to hurt her and yanked her ahead of him towards the door of the room, yelling "Bomb in the trunk! Five seconds!" Mrs. Peel was catalyzed into action and they sprinted for the exit, inhibited in a straight departure by having to dodge around several pieces of furniture.

...three seconds, two seconds...

Real panic rushed into Mrs. Peel's throat as she realized they were still too many feet away...

Emma felt a tremendous push in her back that catapulted her out the door with such force she completely lost her balance. Flying forward off her feet, the red binder sailing out of her hands, she heard a fearsome explosion behind her that scared her enough she let out a cry of surprise as she tumbled down the hallway awkwardly hitting elbows and knees on the shiny hardwood floor.

She stopped moving flat on her stomach and climbed up sorely to her hands and knees, rubbing her wrist. She was glad to see the binder by her side. They had been successful in getting the plans back.

"Goodness, Steed, that was really close--" Emma began, turning her head to her side to speak to him. He wasn't there. She whipped her head around to her other side and didn't see her partner there either. She jumped to her feet searching the whole hallway for him and then leaned over the railing to check the first floor. No Steed. A horrible sinking feeling paralyzed her for a moment as she recalled the tremendous push...and in slow motion as if time itself was slowing, congealing, Emma turned her head and looked back in the study.

An arctic chill filled her bones as she realized--Steed hadn't made it out of the room. In a desperate measure he had lunged forward shoving her out to safety but had been caught by the explosion himself. The bomb had gone off with Steed in the room.

She saw some plaster fall from the ceiling of the study, and land on the large rug, kicking up more dust than already floated through the air.

Time became normal, and Emma ran to the opening into the study, surveying with absolute dread the destruction of the room. Side tables and chairs had been knocked over, and lay many feet away from their original positions. The windows had been blown out of the wall and the slight breeze blew the ripped white curtains back and forth. To her right one of the bookcase had shelves that were broken and bent downwards, the books spilling to the floor in front of it; the other bookcase lay leaning completely forward over a chair, its books strewn in several disarrayed clumps on the floor underneath it.

And underneath one of those clumps under the bookcase, a trousered leg.

Not moving.

Steed's leg.

Mrs. Peel entered the room, her mind a blank as she slowly walked to the leg, not able to fully believe this was reality, that this had truly happened. Her eyes glanced to the sideboard, which still stood as before though its fine wooden finish was ruined, and the crystal decanters and glasses were gone, replaced by razor sharp shards. Rare, fine things can break so easily...

Mrs. Peel looked down at Steed, almost entirely covered in books. She saw his left leg, and one forearm sticking out, and a bit of his head. The bookcase was too heavy for her to lift up and put against the wall, so she grabbed Steed's legs and gently pulled him out from under it, a number of books on him staying in place. She was horrified to see a trail of blood come from Steed's head...

"Please God, no," Emma prayed as she knelt by Steed and frantically began tossing the books behind her, unburying him from his literary avalanche. Soon he was fully uncovered; he lay on his right side, unconscious and pale, a small pool of blood developing under his head. He was just unconscious, wasn't he? He wasn't...no, he couldn't be...not Steed...not durable, debonair, amazing Steed...he had nine lives, he had the luck of the fairies, he was the man she cared so very much about...he couldn't be... Fighting off tears, Mrs. Peel took a deep breath and placed a finger on his neck, feeling for his carotid artery. Not finding the blood vessel at first, nor a pulse, Emma let out a tiny whine of despair and continued moving her finger around until...there! Thank God, she felt it. Weak but regular, she let her finger rest there a moment, affording her the grace to settle down and examine Steed with a cool and calm affectation.

She knew she should move him as little as possible, but decided to turn him over onto his back to enable her to check him for broken bones and whatever other injuries he had experienced. He flipped onto his back easily and limply. She immediately took off his tie and undid the top buttons on his shirt. The first thing Emma noticed was a terribly long, jagged gash on the right upper side of his head, the laceration reaching almost to his skull, that part of his scalp loosened and hanging free. Bright red blood seeped out already covering that whole side of his face and his neck. No doubt part of the exploding metal trunk had cut him there; he also had a large piece of the trunk imbedded in his right thigh, and other, smaller pieces were in his right upper arm, forearm, and his right flank. She left them in, as their extraction inevitably would cause even more bleeding. He was losing enough blood from that one head wound, and maybe, he was bleeding inside...

Emma was wondering how to stop the bleeding of that terrible head wound when she noticed his left arm, grotesquely out of position. It hung down and in front of his shoulder socket, obviously dislocated. Mrs. Peel looked behind her; Steed must have been thrown back by the force of the explosion... ohmigod, there on the wall over the table between the bookcases was a smattering of blood. If he had impacted so solidly his arm had popped out of his shoulder socket...Emma quickly undid the buttons of Steed's waistcoat and his shirt and then spread them open looking at his chest. She noticed his broken collar bone immediately, the bruising of it as bad as that around his shoulder, and the bone's obvious deformity. She then lifted him up and checked his back

finding a dark blue splotch over some of his ribs. She pressed around the ribs and didn't quite like the subtle squishiness she palpated--she felt sure one or a few ribs were broken.

"Oh, Steed," Emma bemoaned. He was so badly injured.

Reflexively grabbing hold of his forearm, Emma aligned herself by the top of his shoulder and placing a foot against his flank for leverage, yanked up hard, pulling the arm back to the socket. With a noticeable and sickening "thunk," it settled into its anatomically correct position. Whether she should have done that or not, Emma didn't know, but it made her feel better having done something constructive for Steed. Continuing her examination, she found another, smaller laceration on the left side of his head and a large bump near the top. She imagined the bump was due to a book edge hitting him as they toppled to the floor; and from its location, the one on the left perhaps occurred when his head had hit against the wall. How bad each one of his head injuries were, she didn't know, but she was sure of one thing.

Steed needed help, now.

Emma looked around the room for a telephone and saw that the one that had been on a Lord Saxon's desk was now an unusable wreck. She buttoned Steed's clothes again to keep him warm. Kissing his forehead she stood up and darted out of the room to seek a phone elsewhere. She was unhappy to discover the rest of the doors on the second floor were locked tight.

She ran down to the first floor, biting her lower lip as she passed Steed's bowler and broly hanging on the end of the railing. Growing angry and frustrated that the doors on that floor were also locked she finally made her way to the kitchen at the far end of the house and her heart leapt as she spotted a phone on the counter. She lifted it up and began dialing the emergency Ministry number before she realized there was no dial tone. Pressing down on the lever several times did nothing; the phone was dead.

As she hung up the phone with a slam, Emma began to get a very bad feeling about all this...Then she remembered the phone in Steed's car and ran down the hallway to the front door. She pulled open the door and stood face to face with two men carrying guns.

"Well, Eddie, one of them survived, anyway," the taller, thinner of the two said, aiming his gun directly at Emma. "Don't move."

"Didn't survive for long, Stan," the other stocky, mustached one replied. "I told Bertie that a bomb was a stupid way to go. Now we'll have to batter her to death. In you go, love, and don't make any sudden moves."

Emma backed up slowly, keeping her eyes on the guns as her mind processed their exchange. She noticed they both wore a badge with an odd logo on it, a green circle with a yellow Persian type dagger through it.

Bertie?

"Bertie Saxon?" Emma asked, nearing the railing. "Lord Saxon's son? He organized this?"

"Yup," Stan answered. "Where's Steed? Did we get him?"

"Yes," Emma bluffed, "you got him. He's dead." Even in a bluff, the words made her feel empty and weak.

"Really?" Eddie asked, pulling out a walkie talkie. "Let's just make sure of that." Then he spoke into the radio, "Bertie, Mrs. Peel says Steed is dead. She's fine, though. We'll check out Steed then kill her and make it look good."

"Do it," came a surly voice in answer.

Eddie put the walkie talkie back in its holder on his belt. "Up you go," he said to Mrs. Peel, waving his gun at the second floor. Mrs. Peel turned to the stairs and in a flashing movement grabbed hold of the umbrella and swung the sword free from the inside. She turned in a flash and, with a little fencing jump she imbedded the sword in Eddie's heart; Eddie stood paralyzed for a second and then collapsed to the floor, his gun dropping right by Emma's foot. Emma let go of the sword, chopped Stan's hand so that the gun fell out of it, grabbed hold of his forearm and twisted it behind his back, then shoved his head into the solid brass ribbon in the railing. Stan fell to the floor, stunned, and Emma picked up Eddie's gun, leapt behind Stan's head, wrapped her arm around his neck and pointed the gun to his temple.

"Talk or die," she said, clicking back the trigger.

"I'll talk," the man said.

"What's going on? Who set us up? And why?"

"Steed was just in Italy and stopped a huge shipment of drugs that Bertie Saxon had organized for sale. Bertie lost a lot of face with his bosses, and the bosses were put out like anything, because Steed has foiled a number of their plans over the years. So they told Bertie to kill Steed or be killed himself. And Bertie used his stupid old father as bait, 'cause his father will do anything for Bertie, to protect him, 'cause he's his only child. Lord Saxon's a right idiot; Bertie ain't worth the scum in a pond, let alone a charge of treason. How Bertie got his dad wound around his finger I'll never know. Well, anyway, Bertie told his dad to steal some government papers and let Steed figure it out and then when Steed questioned him as to where they were hidden, Lord Saxon'd say it was in his study at one of his country homes. That way, you see, when you and Steed were blown up, Lord Saxon would take the guilt, which he'd do for Bertie, and Bertie would not only kill Steed and get back on the good side of his bosses, but also get his weak old father out of the way of Bertie getting use of the country house. Bertie got some guy from France to plant the binder and the bomb in the study. We've been waiting in the woods for you two to come and then we were sent by Bertie to check and make sure you were dead once we saw the windows blow out, and if not, to kill you and make it look like the bomb did it."

Steed's instincts had been right all along. It had all been too easy. Lord Saxon had been too nervous, too willing to talk. It had all been a set-up. Emma felt her rage rising at the damage criminals did in the world.

"How many more men are outside?" Emma asked.

"Two. Bertie and Fred."

"You cut the phone lines?"

"Yes."

"Why did Bertie use a bomb?"

"Because Lord Saxon was a demolition expert in the War, and it just points the finger to him again, leaving Bertie and the gang out of it."

The gang. Which gang? "What do those badges signify?"

"That the person is a member of the Yellow Dagger Gang."

The Yellow Dagger Gang. Steed had mentioned it to her more than once. It was a personal crusade of his to see the criminal band destroyed, and he had been victorious on more than one occasion in ruining their plans. But, they had won this battle.

"Bend over on your hands and knees," Emma said, pulling away from Stan. "Eyes looking at the floor."

"Wh-why?" the man asked, his voice raising higher in pitch. "What are you going to do?"

"Just do what I say and you'll live," she assured him.

Shaking, the man arranged himself in that position. Emma hit him very hard over the head with Steed's steel bowler and the man fell to the floor unconscious. She tied him up using his and Eddie's tie.

Taking a gun with her, Emma returned to the front door and opened it up, looking out to study the wide gravel drive and bushes and trees of the lush landscaping. It was already getting late, twilight was darkening, and her ability to penetrate the subtle grey of the approaching night was impeded. Steed's Bentley was parked in front of the house, and there was a dark sedan about thirty feet from the vintage car. Emma took a deep breath and ran from the door to the open-topped Bentley; once there she reached for the phone, hidden in the dash, and grew despondent when she discovered that the phone and the gun Steed kept there were gone.

A man's blond head shot up from the other side of the car, holding a gun in his hand. "Hello, sweetie--" he began, before Emma, holding onto a gun herself, shot him quickly in his chest. He flew backwards to the ground, and didn't move afterwards.

"Idiot," she said.

A bullet shot rang out and right back tire of the Bentley huffed in complaint and then sank flat to the ground. Emma whirled about to see a stocky man squatting by the driver side of the sedan, the door open to protect him further, speaking into a radio handset.

"--reinforcements! Now!" she heard from the agitated man.

Reinforcements. She had to move quickly. The gun held six bullets, she had fired off one. Running directly at the man she fired three times, one bullet hitting the windscreen and two the window of the driver side door. The man ducked way down and Emma made a quick momentum change so that when she soared off her feet to land in a perfect shoulder role, she came up by the passenger side door, not the driver's. In one deft movement she opened the door and shot the young man in the chest as he was looking off into the bushes for her. He twisted around to the ground and lay still.

She had killed three people. No time for remorse. Keep moving.

Emma ran back to the house and upstairs to the study. Steed still lay unconscious in the exact position she had left him in. He had been out for almost twenty minutes, now...a long time. Long enough for her to wonder if one of his head wounds was a severe injury...

"Steed! Steed!" she gently shook him. He didn't wake up.

With no other option, Emma went around behind him and sitting him partially up, she thread her arms under his armpits to lock together in front of his chest. With a loud grunt, she turned him around and then began dragging him out of the room. It was strenuous work; Steed was not fat at all, but a lean, muscular man at 6'1, 175 pounds was heavy, anyway. She didn't like how his head sagged so limply forward, bobbing around with her jerky movements. Drops of blood dripped from his chin onto the floor. In one concerted effort Emma got him to the stairway, but then she knelt by him, undoing her arms whilst keeping him upright by leaning him on her knee. She wiped some sweat from her brow, shaking her arms to release the tension in them and her upper back.

Reinforcements. She would rest later, when Steed was safely at the hospital.

Grabbing hold of Steed again, she took him down the stairs, his heels at the end of his long, outstretched legs jolting against each stair one at a time. It was very awkward for Emma to control Steed's downward motion, keep her balance and hold all his weight in her arms, but she managed. She had to. By the time she rested again at the front door, this time completely laying Steed down on the floor, another twenty minutes had passed.

Forty minutes. Steed had been unconscious for forty minutes. Too long. Way too long. It was then that Emma received a shock of joy to see Steed's eyes fluttering, struggling to open. She knelt down next to him and held his cheeks in her hands.

"Steed, come on. Wake up. Steed, you can do it," she encouraged him.

Steed uttered a loud groan as his eyes cracked open.

"Steed..." Emma said, so relieved it felt as if she was suddenly made of water.

Then Steed growled the oddest sentence ever spoken to her. "Get away from me."

Emma was, to put it mildly, taken aback. "What?" she asked, her eyebrows raised high.

Steed mumbled on, barely coherent, "Get away. Leave me alone. Fine. I'm fine. Get away."

"Steed..." Emma said, running her hand over his forehead.

Steed shook his head, initiating a new waves of moans. "No. Don't touch me," he said, trying to move his arms. That brought a full cry of pain from him, and he continued, "Don't touch me. Get away. Don't need help. I'm fine. Leave me alone."

Emma suddenly understood that this confusion was just part of Steed's head injury; she remembered reading that sometimes people who suffer concussions can at first fight their rescuers, their doctors, until their confusion abated after awhile. Nevertheless, understanding what was going on with Steed didn't make it easier for her; his mental state made her sick with worry, and harsh spasms contracted her stomach. She could not comfort him in his incoherence; she had to get him to the sedan and drive him to medical help.

There was no time to change the Bentley's flat tire. Besides, Emma hated to drive the ponderous Bentley.

"Steed," she whispered, as she once more lifted him up over his cries of distress and consternation, "I'm sorry."

He was too weak and injured to fight her in any way, so Emma began dragging him out the door, down the few front steps, and over the gravel drive. She just ignored Steed's constant exhortations to be left alone intermixed with cries of pain that brought tears to her eyes. Emma said a silent prayer of thanks when Steed once more fell unconscious as she neared the sedan. Once at the car, she leaned him against the vehicle as she opened up the back seat doors on both sides. Getting him into the car was very difficult as the area was confining and his belt got stuck in the doorway, but by Emma sitting in the car and pulling him up into it, she was able--with multiple curses that would have made the devil blush, and a great deal of back strain--to arrange Steed supine on the seat, knees bent up, his body tilted towards the seat back to keep him from rolling off. She clasped a seat belt around him. His head wound was still oozing blood. Emma closed both the doors, then on a whim dashed to the Bentley to grab the first aid kit under the front seat and a torch. She ran around the Bentley to grab the gun of the idiot that had so suavely caused his own death. She found the keys to the sedan in Bertie's pocket, took his gun as well, got in and noticed a tiny round green banner with a yellow dagger in the middle hanging from the rear view mirror. Disgusted, she ripped it off and threw it to the floor, then started the car, cursing again noticing the severe lack of petrol in the tank. She drove off as her quick mind went over her options. A hospital would be thirty miles away in Peterborough; she doubted they had the petrol for it. Filling stations would be closed by this time of night. Suddenly Emma remembered they had passed a small medical clinic only fifteen or so minutes from Lord Saxon's. That would have to do for now. Steed needed help badly, and even a country clinic physician would be able to formally evaluate him, stabilize him, and sew up his wounds.

She exited onto the country road and headed in the direction of the clinic, back the way they had come. Once at the clinic, she could call the Ministry for help; she dared not use the police as she knew the Yellow Dagger Gang spent a great deal of money corrupting the standard police. That's why the Ministry had directed Steed to get involved in stopping the gang's activities. No one questioned Steed's integrity; he could never be bought.

She neared the clinic as a long moan came from the back seat.

"Hold on, Steed," she implored. "Help is nearby."

It was dark when she saw the clinic, but as Emma slowed down to turn into the driveway she espied a car already parked there. As the light beams of the sedan hit it, Emma felt a tingle travel through her as she saw, hanging from the rear view window just like in her sedan, a little tiny round banner...

The gang was here, at the clinic; they had anticipated Emma's thoughts. They were waiting for Emma to bring them a terribly wounded, helpless Steed...

Emma peeled away from the car park and dashed onto the road just as another sedan was driving towards Lord Saxon's house; that sedan spun around and took off after her.

"Damn, damn, damn," Emma muttered. "Are they all over the place?"

There was no answer to her question but another moan from in back of her. Emma remembered Steed saying that just like it was known that celebrities often died in threes, when luck ran out for agents, things went very badly indeed, and oftentimes in threes as well. Emma started counting: Steed caught in the bomb explosion, the gang everywhere in this county apparently, the sedan dangerously low on gas...

She hit the accelerator just as rain began to fall like the proverbial deluge from the sky. Number four? No, she thought, not another problem, but rather, perhaps, a way to get away and find safety until the morning when she could walk to someone's house and use their phone. Emma was tempted to just screech to a stop in front of someone's home and rush in to use their phone, but now, with the sedan following her, she didn't dare do so. Even if she made the call to the Ministry, Steed would be vulnerable and certainly killed by the gang members whilst she was inside the house. Emma chastised herself for not having the forethought to realize the gang would, of course, have the intelligence to stake out the clinic suspicious of her statement that Steed was actually dead; she should have stopped at a random home earlier.

Steed would have done it that way. She remembered once when he had temporarily evaded a whole organization who was chasing them by car and helicopter after they had set fire to the grain they had created which with they had hoped to poison the country. He had stopped their car at a random house, rung the doorbell with the tip of his broom, and raised his bowler in a gentlemanly fashion when the lady of house opened the door. They'd been escorted inside by a frumpy mid-fifties wife in plain house dress who spent some time fixing her hair up nicer whilst Steed was on the phone, calling for Ministry back-up. Steed drank the proffered tea graciously served by the demure hostess after he hung up, and then as they walked back through the living room to exit the house, Steed suggested a brilliant chess move for the game going on via correspondence between the husband and his brother in Scotland. The husband was very grateful. The fact that they then had to spend fifteen minutes fighting eight members of the criminal organization on the couple's front lawn until Ministry help appeared, Steed taking meticulous care to not damage their rhododendrons in the melee, did not dissuade the wife from coming out when the men were laying still on the ground and serving a slightly mussed and eminently attractive Steed a glass of ice tea which he accepted with a smart bow, kissing the blushing woman's hand in thanks.

Emma's heart sent warm affection coursing throughout her body--Steed. Such a wonderful, dear man. She was determined that both of them would survive this night. Emma continued driving at breakneck speed and found her chance a few minutes later as the needle of her petrol tank gauge sank way below the bottom line. The road had curved quite a bit and the other sedan, with a less skillful driver at the wheel, had slowed down whilst Emma had continued

her cruising pace. Not far after a fork in the road, Emma slammed on the brakes, thankful she had put a seatbelt around Steed. Emma directed the car off the road onto a dirt path and swiftly flattened the accelerator pedal again so that the car, swerving right and left, traveled down the path with alacrity. About 1/2 mile up, Emma took an off shot to the right and drove until she came to another country road. She turned right onto that road and when another dirt road appeared she took it, turning to the left at another intersection about another 3/4 mile down. The hard downpour, the wipers and the dark impeded her vision but not enough for her to miss a barn ahead, surrounded by large outcroppings of bushes. She drove the sedan into one of the section of bushes, affording it a fairly decent hiding place in the dark and the rain.

Emma turned to look at Steed on the seat; he was still unconscious. She got out of the car and bending over in the rain, ran to the main barn doors, each about six feet wide and eight feet high; they were locked shut. Another round of curses flew out her mouth as she ducked around the side and found a normal sized side door. Unbelievably, it was open. Emma entered the barn and was happily surprised to feel a light switch beside the door; she flicked it up and lights hanging from the wooden beams came on, not enough to call bright, but enough to scout out the interior of the barn. Seeing the carpentry tables with electric saws and lathes, she understood why the farmer had bothered to wire the barn for electricity. It was filled with the typical barn contents: hay, shovel, rake and other lawn implements, horse tack items, including some wool blankets, buckets, hammers, wheelbarrow. There were no animals presently in it...it would do fine.

Emma realized that in no way could she wander around outside in the rain, in the dark, over a strange countryside, looking for a friendly home and phone. She certainly hadn't seen any near or far off lights from the car. She would never risk leaving Steed alone whilst he was so very incapacitated. Tomorrow, in the light of dawn, she would find a home, and perhaps Steed would be able to hold a gun and defend himself if necessary when she left to call for help.

Tonight, however, they would be in the barn. Emma laid out one of the blankets on a thick layer of hay she spread out over the dirt floor to make a sort of mattress, a little bit more at the top for a pillow. Then she grabbed the cleanest buckets she could and set them outside, one under the rain gutter, one just out in the open, to collect as much water as possible. It wouldn't be spring fresh, but it shouldn't give them diarrhea either. Then she ran back to the car and opened the back door to climb in beside Steed. This was going to be a chore, getting him out of the car and dragging him to the barn. With a sigh, Emma unhitched the seat belt and then hanging Steed's legs down to the floor, she was able with some hearty grunts to sit him up. Adjusting his body and reaching around his chest she pulled him slowly to the door until she was able to step out of the car onto the wet, long grass. Now able to stand up, Emma had some better leverage and she removed Steed from the car. Once his feet thumped to the ground, his weight now once more bending her over, making her back ache in complaint, in one great effort Emma towed Steed to the side door, inside the barn and placed him down supine on the blanket.

She then ran back to the car, grabbed the two loaded guns, the first aid kit, the torch, and the car keys, closed all the doors and locked them, and then ran back into the barn, locking the side door behind her. There, they were in, and they were in a defensible structure. She had two guns, with a total of 10 bullets and lots of other available weapons in the barn. So far, they were safe. That was good. What was better was Steed, beginning to stir again. Emma knelt by his side, dropping the items to the floor, but opening up the first aid kit. She had to deal with that horrible head wound.

Steed's breathing was noisy as his eyelids once more slit open. Each exhalation was combined with a sound of pain. Emma put down the roll of gauze she was holding to cup Steed's face in her hands.

"Steed. Steed. Wake up. Come on, you can wake up," she gently encouraged him.

Her breath caught as faintly, like a reverberating echo across a canyon, she heard Steed ask, "Mrs. Peel? Are you here?"

"Yes, I'm here," she answered, fighting off tears of relief at his growing mental clarity. After another few seconds, Steed's eyes opened and shut as his head rolled around on the floor. "What...happened? Where are we?" He winced at his attempt to move and crumbled up his left side a bit. "Everything hurts."

It was the disorientation that was talking through Steed, and that made Emma choke up. Steed himself would never have admitted that "everything hurts." Yet hearing that honest statement felt like acid being poured in her ears.

"Steed, you were caught in the bomb blast," she whispered close to his ear, knowing that too loud a tone of voice would probably increase his head pain.

"What...bomb blast?" he asked, his breathing harsh and shallow. He narrowed his eyes. "Can't see. Dizzy, blurry. What happened?"

"Don't you remember?"

"No. Don't remember." He was restless in his pain, his body moving around in tiny little motions, all that he could do.

"What's the last thing you recall?" Emma asked him, running her hand over his forehead, trying to soothe his agitation. There were no pain pills but a packet of aspirin in the first aid kit. Emma began to realize that she may have been misguided in her desire for Steed to wake up; although it meant his head injuries were less severe, it portended a night of utter agony for Steed.

"Arriving at Lord Saxon's house. Turned off the car."

"Nothing else?"

"No. All a blank. What happened?" Suddenly his eyes opened fully and he looked anxiously at Mrs. Peel. "Can't...move my arms...Head...hard to think...breathe..."

"Steed, listen to me. The papers were all a set-up by Lord Saxon's son and Lord Saxon played along. We found the binder with the missile secrets in them, but they were attached to a trip wire that set a bomb off in the room. You--" Emma felt a lump in her throat stopping her speech but swallowing hard several times she was able to go on, "you pushed me out of the room to safety but were caught in the explosion yourself."

"The bomb went off?"

"Yes."

"You're okay?" he asked, his slightly raised tone showing his anxiety.

His real concern for her made her mute for a moment, then she continued, "I'm perfectly fine, but you're very badly injured. Your head is cut dreadfully, your left arm was dislocated, but I put it back in, your left collarbone is broken, ribs are broken in your back, and you've got pieces of the metal trunk imbedded down your whole right side."

"I don't remember it."

"The gang came after us afterwards and we have to hide out here till morning."

"Here? Is this a hospital?"

Steed hated hospitals. For him to mention the word as if he wanted to be there... Emma wondered just how much pain he was in.

She was almost ashamed to admit that she had been able to do no better than their present location. "No. We're in a barn, for the night."

"A barn? On a farm?"

"Yes, a barn. In the countryside."

"Think I need a hospital, instead."

"Yes, you need a hospital. But, you'll have to wait until tomorrow. We've no petrol in the car, and it's raining cats and dogs, and the gang has pervaded this countryside like the plague. I can't call for help tonight." I can't leave you alone.

There was a pause that hung heavy like a cannonball around Emma's neck, before Steed finally spoke. "How long until tomorrow?"

A tear slipped down Emma's face which she quickly wiped away. It was late fall; the sun had set earlier at 7 p.m., and would rise at 7 a.m. "About 11 hours," she told him.

Steed didn't answer and so Emma retrieved the water bucket from under the rain spout and set it by Steed's side. He continued his agitation, slightly snaking his body left and right in a hopeless idea to find some more comfortable position.

Emma cut off some gauze from one of three rolls she found in the first aid kit, and dipping it in the water, began washing blood off of Steed's temple. He jolted at the contact of the cold cloth on his skin and that set him moaning.

"Ah! What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry," she apologized, chastising herself for not warning him. "Just washing off the blood."

"Don't. Hurts."

Hurts? Then Emma realized that she was pulling on his temple skin to rinse off the dried blood and that was stretching his scalp where the laceration was. Stupid, stupid, thoughtless action, Emma, she yelled at herself. She decided to just cover the wound with gauze and leave the washing for tomorrow at the hospital. She pressed the wound closed, aligning it back up as best she could so that it was flat against his scalp, ignoring Steed's plaintive cry of "Emma!" and the scrunching close of his eyes. Once the flap of skin was in

place, she began wrapping the wound and even the gentle yet firm pressure of covering of his deep cut with the gauze, continuing down and around his chin and up the other side of his head, made Steed feebly try to pull his head out of her reach.

"Emma, stop. Please. Leave my head alone," he begged. "Feels like an axe is in it."

"Steed, I've got to cover this wound. Or else it could get infected." She continued wrapping the wound a few more times, as Steed's eyes pressed tightly closed, and then taped the gauze into place.

"There, I'm done." She was not too happy to see some blood already soaking through the lower layers. A person couldn't bleed to death from a head wound, could they? She hoped the tensile integrity of the gauze helped to stop the blood flow.

"What happened to my head?" Steed asked, his eyes still closed. "Why does everything hurt?"

Emma pursed her lips at his question; she knew a concussion could make someone forgetful and confused, but she didn't know if Steed had suffered a more severe head injury than just a concussion. Her worry regarding him was not lessening now that he was awake, but so addled.

"You were injured in the bomb blast, Steed."

"Bomb blast? I don't remember. What bomb blast?"

Emma again calmly explained the whole series of events that had occurred. It wasn't Steed's fault he was so mentally dazed, and appearing upset over his loss of memory might just further agitate him.

"Steed," she added afterwards, "let me know how I can help you."

He said, "Please, turn off the lights."

The lights. Second stupid, thoughtless move. Lay Steed on the floor on his back, with a nasty concussion, at least, and aim his eyes up towards the irritating headache-inducing lights. Emma bit her lip. No one would ever say the independent, high-power executive Mrs. Emma Peel was made of nursing material, but still, being so incompetent about it set her well-developed ego on edge and made her feel extremely guilty towards Steed.

"I'm sorry. Hold on, I'll get them." Emma stood up torch in hand and flipped the switch down by the door. Turning on the torch she easily made it back to Steed. Sitting down again next to him, she softly inquired, "Is that better?" She set the torch down so that its beam gave her a silhouette outline of Steed, but didn't shine directly in his eyes.

"Much," he replied, cracking open his lids. "Thanks. Are there any pain pills, by chance?"

She frowned. "Just some aspirin."

"I'll take them."

She sat behind Steed to lift his head and neck onto her knee. Steed's eyes rolled in his head at the elevation of his head and a loud, complaining "Oh!" sprang unbidden from his throat. She waited a minute until his eyes appeared to focus again before telling him she was putting the pills in his mouth. She used the emptied out plastic first aid kit as a sort of cup to pour the water into his

mouth. He eagerly swallowed the pills. Emma gently replaced his head on the blanket and then covered his lower body with another one.

His voice was getting weaker so Emma leaned over, putting her hand lightly on his abdomen, which had, she believed, escaped injury to hear him ask, "What happened to my right side, again?"

"You've got many pieces of metal in you from when the trunk exploded."

"The trunk bomb at..."

"Lord Saxon's house."

"Right. Take them out, would you, please?"

"I'm afraid to. You're losing a lot of blood from your head; I don't want you to start bleeding elsewhere on top of that."

"Then just the one in my upper arm. Pressing on a nerve or something. Shooting pain all the way down my arm, and up into my neck."

The one in his upper arm was a fairly large piece sitting in his bicep. Apparently it was causing a good deal of suffering to Steed on its own. If she took that one out, though, she'd have to take his jacket off to wrap that cut in gauze...and two other, small pieces were imbedded in his forearm. They'd have to be removed, too.

Steed asked her again, his tone more pleading, "Emma, it's like lightning inside my arm. Please, take it out." He bent his left arm, and stretched out his fingers to try to touch the piece of metal in his arm himself, but he couldn't reach it. He let his left arm relax onto his stomach, over Emma's wrist. They instinctively clasped hands.

"I'll take them out," Emma said, kissing his fingers, "but then we'll have to remove your jacket so I can wrap it in gauze."

"Just rip it apart. The shirt, too."

She should have thought of that. There was a little scissors in the kit. Emma was of the mood to take a nursing course after this was over. Steed didn't want to move any more than he had to, so Emma naturally agreed with his suggestion, "Yes, okay, I'll tear them open to wrap the wounds."

She figured that that it would be best just to do it quickly, like ripping off a Band-Aid. "Okay, I'm going to pull them out, fast. Are you ready?"

Steed merely nodded once, gritting his teeth. Emma grabbed hold of the thin piece of metal and with a smooth yank, pulled it from Steed's arm, then in a one-two moment, pulled out the smaller pieces in his forearm. His arm jumped at the removal of the metal pieces but he was able to hold his distress to a small grunt. Emma used the scissors to cut the jacket sleeve from wrist to shoulder and then the shirt from cuff to shoulder as well, exposing his long, muscular arm. As expected the upper cut was bleeding quite a bit, in fact it was bleeding heavily; she looked at the piece of metal on the floor next to her foot. About one inch had been imbedded in his muscle. She applied all the butterfly bandages to it the kit contained to bring the edges of the cut together, and then began wrapping the gauze around his bicep. The blood soaked the gauze right away, so she just kept wrapping more layers around it, praying she wouldn't have to use the needle and surgical thread in the kit...

"Is that better?" she asked when all three wounds were wrapped tightly. "Has the shooting pain decreased?"

"A little," he whispered, "thank you."

His breathing was irregular, and little grunts and "ah"s leaked out with his exhalations.

"Do you need anything else?" Emma asked "Water?"

"No, no. Just quiet. Head is..." he didn't finish the sentence, but his meaning was obvious. They had no food, which she doubted Steed would have wanted anyway, and she was too tense to eat either, so the lack of comestibles was no loss. Laying down next to Steed's right side on the blanket, gun beside her, she listened to the patter of the rain on the roof of the barn as she rested her right arm over the top of his right thigh, devoid of metal bits, and grabbed hold of his left thigh through the blanket, believing that part of him to be entirely uninjured. Steed's sudden sharp gasping shocked her and she raised her hand as if it had landed on a red hot burner.

"Don't grab there," he said.

Oh, God, now what?, Emma lamented. Removing the blanket for a moment, examining his strong thigh through his trousers she felt a large round swelling on the outside of his upper leg; it was about the size of her whole hand. A bruise. How had that happened...Emma reviewed the layout of the room and in sparkling clarity realized what his thigh had struck. The table in-between the bookcases--Steed's leg had hit there first probably, propelling him even harder into the wall above it. Her intestines felt like lead ingots as she wondered if his femur was broken.

"Do you think your leg bone is broken?" she asked, dreading his answer. Another broken bone...

"No. Just hurts on the outside."

Well, thank God for small favors. "Yes, you've got a dreadful bruise there. From where your leg struck a table, I believe."

"Struck a table? How?"

"In the bomb blast."

"A bomb blast? I don't remember. What bomb blast?"

Emma inhaled and exhaled deeply. "The bomb in Lord Saxon's study."

"A bomb?...Were you hurt?"

"No, I'm fine. Just rest, now."

She hated having Steed, normally so quick, so astute, in this mentally weakened condition. Steed's memory was the talk of the Ministry; it was, frankly, amazing, and more than once he had brushed off researchers wanting to study his ability to remember things, people, names, codes, numbers, dates, whatever, as stupendously as he did. It was just another attribute to the man that made him the best agent in the country. To see him not even remember something told to him a couple of minutes ago was disturbing and a bit frightening to Mrs. Peel.

She watched him, so restless, trying to contain his torment, but his clenched jaw, furled eyebrows, little constant sounds of suffering, and uneven breathing clearly betrayed his attempts to hide the reality of the immense pain he

was experiencing. For a moment Emma felt positively useless, then she just naturally gravitated to offering solace in the only manner available to her, and in a way she had developed an affectionate aptitude.

Mrs. Peel began kissing Steed's forehead, his cheeks, and brushed his lips with hers. A little moan, only this time of comfort, of need, slipped out of Steed, giving her all the impetus she needed to maintain her actions. She continued the kisses as she brushed his face lightly with her hand, even the parts obscured by the gauze wrapping, running around his neck, and, unbuttoning his shirt, down his slightly hairy chest over his finely rippled abdomen, then back up to rub his nipples. She descended her head to lick, kiss, and nibble on them, and although they didn't harden, his restless agitation began to wane. It ceased entirely under her skilled caresses as the long minutes wore on, and she soothed him with phrases, "It's alright," "I'm here with you," "You're going to be okay," "Try to relax and sleep, now," and "My dear, sweet Steed." She kissed his lips again, only this time a little harder, dancing her tongue around and into his mouth, then raised her head and asked, with a wily look in her eyes, "Steed, you damn heroic fool; is there anything else on you that doesn't hurt that I can touch?"

For a moment her old Steed was with her, and she was happy to hear his husky, slow voice indicate she had relaxed him enough he was slipping back down to some painless sleep. "Well, aside from those spots you've been focusing on, so delightfully...my feet, and er...well, my feet, anyway."

Mrs. Peel wasn't going to let him off so lightly. Smirking, she placed her hand over his zipper, gently kneading the soft bulges she felt underneath. "Is this your 'er'?"

"Mrs. Peel, what an indelicate question...ohh...Emma..." Steed mumbled softly, as his lids closed and his breathing grew smooth and he fell asleep. Mrs. Peel's estimation of her own unique style of nursing rose considerably with that very satisfactory result of her tender ministrations.

Steed woke on his own three hours later, saving Mrs. Peel the burden of having to do it herself, to make sure he was able to wake up. She had spent that time sitting in the dark, saving the torch batteries, leaning against some hay bales as the howling wind whipped the rain about outside. A gun lay beside her.

Steed came awake with a quiet panoply of moans and a whispered, "Mrs. Peel, are you here?"

She was at his side in a second, the torch turned on so again it shone on him indirectly, giving her a clear view of his square, handsome face and his broad shoulders, but keeping the beam out of his headachy eyes.

"I'm here, Steed," she said softly, lightly caressing his brow, which was wrinkled in pain. She saw him slowly bending his right arm, and grimaces distorted his face at the movement.

"What happened? Where are we? I'm...injured...badly...it seems."

Emma's heart swelled a bit at his questions this time. She could tell immediately that although they were repetitious inquiries, now Steed was much more lucid. His calm and understated analysis of his situation instead of saying "Everything hurts," was all the proof she needed. She explained for a third time

everything that had happened to them since they had arrived at Lord Saxon's at Bertie Saxon's instigation and all his injuries.

"Remind me never to have children, Mrs. Peel," Steed said, his joke proving without a doubt he was clear-headed again. "Unless they're girls."

Mrs. Peel smiled in pure relief. "I'll remind you," she said, kissing him on the lips.

"No sign of any Yellow Dagger miscreants?"

"No."

"You have any weapons?"

"Two guns. Ten bullets."

"Good. Any champagne, by chance? I'm a bit thirsty." Yes, Steed was perfectly clear-headed again.

"Oh, of course. Need you ask? We have a whole bucket of Chateau de Rain Spout, 1965, from the north side of the barn."

Steed's lips raised into a grin. "I'll take a fluteful, if you please. Fine vintage, that."

Mrs. Peel's natural somewhat introverted diffidence to most people had given her a bit of a cold, distant reputation, and in many ways, with many people, that suited her. She liked to be left alone; relished her independence. Why, then, just because of a few sentences of glorious bantering with Steed, did she feel so much like weeping?

Once more she went behind him and lifted him up, and once more a grunt of discomfort rolled from his throat; when he relaxed, she poured the water into his mouth with the kit until he was sated, and then gently lowered his head back to the blanket.

Steed then began trying to move his right arm, slowly bending it, although even that little motion markedly increased his irregular breathing and caused him to clench his teeth.

"What are you doing?" she asked him, frowning at his useless struggles. "I can get anything you need. You don't have to move."

She was sure she imagined it in his silhouette, but it seemed as if some red came to his cheeks, brightening up his pale, grey coloring.

"Uh," he began, struggling to bent his arm further, "I do, uh, actually need to...AAH!" His arm fell back to the floor by his side.

"Pain like a shot of lightning?" Mrs. Peel asked.

"Yes, like lightning," he confirmed.

"Steed, just tell me what you need and I'll do it. You don't have to move."

Steed said nothing for several long seconds.

"Steed?"

Silence.

"Steed, for goodness sake what is it?" Her perspicacious mind was already gleaning some idea as to what "need" Steed had...but, she decided to let him tell her, in case she was wrong. "After all we've been through together, you don't have to feel uncomfortable about anything."

She heard a heavy sigh, and some curt mumbling she couldn't quite make out. After another few seconds finally Steed said, "I...have to urinate."

Mrs. Peel maintained a straight face with great difficulty, biting down on her lips and tightening up her jaws. Poor, dear Steed! If anything could upset the man more than needing help doing that, she just didn't know. She knew he must be internally cringing from mortification. A no-nonsense no problem attitude was the only way this was going to succeed at all.

"Right. I figured as much," she said. "It's not that big a deal, don't worry." She ignored Steed's closed eyes and his scowl. "I think...the best way to do this is let me get a container, and then either sit you up or turn you onto your right side, because I think laying on your left shoulder would be worse than on your right leg...and then, uh, give you some privacy. Does that sound all right?"

Another long pause. A brief, "Yes."

"Good. Hold on a moment." Emma stood up and taking the torch with her found on a work table a glass jar three quarters full of many different kinds of nails. Alone, she quietly allowed a tiny snicker to erupt from her, disguising it immediately in a hearty throat clearing. Carefully emptying out the nails into a neat pile on the table, she brought the jar back to the infirm Steed.

"Here we go," she said, cheerfully, putting the jar down next to him. "Now, what do you think, Sitting up or on your right side?"

"I think sitting up is best. Avoid laying on those metal bits in my leg."

Emma nodded and squatting down behind Steed she wrapped her arms through his, clasping them on his chest and then lifting him a little, pulled him to the hay bales two feet away, then propped him up against them.

"Oh, no, this isn't good. Not good at all. Lay me down, lay me back down," Steed complained as his head sagged forward. "Too dizzy...head spinning..."

"Is on your right side okay?"

"Right, left, whatever, just get me down...very nauseating...uhhh..."

Mrs. Peel spread some hay on the floor by his right side, using more for a pillow, and then slowly and in a very controlled fashion, lowered him onto his side. Steed buried his face in the hay for a short while, breathing deeply and waiting for his head to clear.

"Are you in much pain on your side?"

"Truthfully, Mrs. Peel, yes, I am, but I have some little use of my right arm, and bent like this I'll make better use of it. I think, though, from now on I'll have my tailor sew some morphine tablets in the breast pockets of my jacket. Let me just deal with this...situation, and then I should be very grateful if you would return me to the blanket laying me as I was before. It was uncomfortable, but it is better than any other position, apparently."

"Steed...I'm so sorry. Let me get the jar."

"Please do."

She came back, and as she had a hundred times before during more amorous times, opened Steed's belt, unbuttoned and unzipped his trousers. She figured it would be easier for him to have clearer access than just unzip and have him fumble clumsily around inside his briefs with an injured, non-dexterous limb.

"Can you take over from here, do you think?"

"I think so. Just arrange the jar right here against me."

She put the jar where he directed against his hip and then covered him with a blanket to afford him much needed privacy. Patting his foot a couple of times, she removed herself from his presence and went to the far side of the barn. It was quiet in the barn aside from the patter of rain on the roof and she could, eventually, hear his urination begin and then, after some long time, hear it end. She waited another few moments; if Steed had use of his right arm and hand a bit, then he certainly would want to manage things as much as he could without her there staring at him.

Then she walked back to him, turning the corner of the hay bales and asked, "Okay?"

"Yes, okay."

She came back and with precise clinical detachment put the blanket to the side, removed the now half-filled up, warm jar far enough away it wouldn't get mistakenly knocked over, and then turned towards putting Steed back together again. He had himself been able to do a bit of it all, so all that was necessary was for Emma to button and belt his trousers.

"Now, let me move you back to the blanket."

It took more time than she would have thought to move him the two feet back to the hay mattress and blanket, and Steed's grunts and inarticulate sounds of pain accompanied every inch she had to move him. She should just have put him on his side to begin with...she should have figured he couldn't sit up, yet... stupid nursing move number three...

Finally he was back in place on the blanket, sweat appearing on his forehead, his groans and jerky respiration matching his renewed restlessness.

"Sorry for the rather ungainly display of groans, Mrs. Peel," Steed finally gasped. "But, I fear the bomb must have blown off my stiff upper lip." He tried a brief smile, but lost it immediately to a grimace.

"Steed, you don't have to hide anything from me. I can't imagine what sort of pain you are in."

"Well, my left side feels as if a giant keeps smashing it with a huge wooden mallet, if that helps you picture things more clearly."

Emma's heart melted inside, and she once more began caressing his face and neck. "And your right arm and neck is lightning and your head feels as if an axe is in it. I know, I know. I wish I could do something more for you. In just a few hours you'll be at a hospital and I promise you that you won't lack for morphine." She studied his head and arm, pleased to see both wounds seemed to have stopped bleeding. "Just try to get back to sleep," she encouraged, adding, earnestly, "my love."

His voice was weary and fatigued, more from the pain, probably than actual exhaustion. "...my love," he murmured. "I do like that."

Emma bent over him, kissing him. "You do know I love you, don't you?"

Suddenly Steed's tone grew serious. "You've said you do, a few times, but I never really...dared to actually believe..."

She kissed him again, then wiping the sweat from his forehead she looked him in his grey eyes, and said firmly, "Believe it."

"Emma..." Steed whispered back, "believe I love you, too."

She slid her arms under his uninjured low back, and rested her head on his abdomen. "When I first saw you on the floor in the study, not moving, the whole room a frightful mess, I...was so very scared..."

"Shh," he said, "I'll be alright."

Suddenly Emma realized that Steed, broken, bruised, lacerated Steed was comforting her; that made her feel a bit ashamed. She released her arms and slid back up the blanket to him, pecking him on his cheek. "Get some more sleep. You need to rest."

"I'll try," he said. "I'll try."

He was patently unsuccessful. As Steed's lucidity had returned, so had his alertness and it wasn't so easy just to sink back down to sleep given the agony he was in. He asked Emma to place a little more hay under the left side of his back, to make it more softer to lay on yet not putting him completely on his right side. It only helped a little. It hurt to breathe, it hurt to move, it hurt to not breathe and not move. Sharp, shooting pains in his right arm, up to his neck; sharp, penetrating pains in his head, in his right leg; deep bruised, stiff pain in his left thigh; throbbing, pulsating pain in his left shoulder and back. It was a chorus of agony sung in many voices, each one more discordant than the other.

He tried to meditate and take himself away from the pain, and go to Hampstead Heath on a sunny summer day riding on a horse with Mrs. Peel by his side, and they were laughing together. That worked for awhile but it took too much mental strength that he didn't really have to maintain the images. Steed asked Mrs. Peel to tell him stories, so he could passively leave the barn in his mind, carried on the soothing voice of his partner, his lover, the woman who said she loved him...and that worked for awhile until all the words began getting jumbled up in his head and made his headache much worse. He tried entering into the pain, becoming one with it, floating along with the throbbing, the lightning, merging with it, losing himself in it so he didn't realize there was another pain-free way to live, and that wasn't helpful at all. Pain was pain and it hurt. He didn't like not being to move at all, being so powerless, either. He worried about the Yellow Dagger gang finding them, and Emma staying to protect his disabled body instead of fleeing to safety herself.

Steed couldn't fall asleep at all, and time had slowed it seemed so that every second took thirty minutes to pass. After asking Emma what time it was with only a twenty minute difference, he grew abashed and didn't ask again. He finally just reached a certain peace with his pain; it was here with him, it was very bad, there was nothing to be done about, he would suffer for a few more hours and that would be that. He then allowed himself his occasional moans, his restless twitching; people in pain are allowed, at times, to do that. What bothered Steed most of all was thinking about being out of work for months until he fully healed up. He hated the forced inactivity of convalescence. Once he was healed up, though, the Yellow Dagger Gang would feel his wrath. His gentlemanly wrath, he amended his thoughts, seeing Emma looking down at him with anxious eyes, but his wrath nonetheless.

For now, though, he just had to deal with the pain.

Emma sat back against the hay bales, quiet now that she was no longer telling stories of her childhood and her years at University. The torch was off again, but she knew where Steed was from his random groans and rustling about on the blanket. Unlike him, her eyes were growing heavier by the minute, and she had to fight to keep them open and stay awake guarding him from the arrival of any gang members. Mrs. Peel thought about getting up and walking around, but didn't want to use up all the batteries; so she just kept her face wet with the cold rain water, and that gave her temporary respites from the tiredness of her body.

A crack of thunder woke Mrs. Peel up abruptly, making her realize she had actually fallen lightly asleep. Castigating herself viciously, she realized she had to do something to keep busy; it was then she heard "Oh, ohhh!" from her side, an utterance of pure, unmitigated pain from Steed.

An idea to keep her busy and help Steed blossomed in her head. Regretting not thinking of it sooner, Emma scooted over to him, placed the torch in its indirect lighting position, and began once more caressing him, rubbing him, kissing him all over his face, for many mutually enjoyable minutes.

"Relax, Steed," she directed him, "focus on my hand, focus on where it makes you feel good...Does it make you feel good here?" She ran her hand over his chest, through his sparse light brown hair, over his nipples.

Steed grunted. "Yes. Emma..."

Emma brought her face to his chest, and licked his nipples, then settled on one at a time, biting them, sucking them, until, to her surprise, they grew hard. Hmm, a lucid Steed was a responsive Steed, she thought, pleased. Then she wondered, if he was responsive there, on his nipples...Emma lifted her head up and kissed his lips, dancing her fingers around his neck to thrill the back of it as she thrust her tongue into Steed's mouth.

She raised her head to see his eyes closed and his face more at ease. "Focus on me, Steed, focus on what I am doing to you..." she urged, "how I'm touching you, licking you, caressing you..." She bent once more to her task. She unbuttoned his shirt all the way, running her hands over his abdomen, staying far away from his whole upper left side, where even with the low torch light she could see the darkness of the bruises there. She licked his abdomen, his neck, used her fingers to keep his nipples firm.

"Let me relax you Steed, soothe you, calm you, love you..."

"Emma..." he begged, "don't stop, please. Feels so good. Helping so much."

She had no intention of stopping, and even though she could feel herself responding between her legs, moistening, wanting him inside her, she knew that this was only to be for Steed's sake, and she didn't mind that one little bit.

She kissed his whole face, and then slid her hands down his chest and abdomen, back to his belt and trousers. Again she undid his belt, this time slipping it out entirely; again she unbuttoned and unzipped his trousers. She could sit and stare for hours at his genitals hidden by his briefs; their form and size were undeniably, over-whelming powerful sexual stimulants to her. She

rubbed his stomach, his nipples, as she just gazed at the bulge there hidden by the white cotton, and then finally not able to contain herself any longer, Emma extended her arm and rested her hand on it, impressed that for all of Steed's weakening injuries, he had already grown a bit hard. Oh, yes, she definitely liked lucid Steed better.

"Focus, Steed, focus," she repeated. "I love holding you, feeling you, making you hard..."

She massaged his groin with one hand and his nipples with the other, until Steed's groans and heavy breathing could never be mistaken as being due to pain. Encouraged by his positive response, she placed her hand inside his briefs, lightly caressing his penis, and reaching underneath and grabbing hold of his testicles. The effect was instantaneous to increase the expansion and firmness of his manhood, and she returned to that organ, running her hand up and down the shaft, letting her thumb spend extra time at the blunt top, coaxing drops of semen out.

She removed her one hand from his nipples and brought it also to his groin to help in smoothly freeing his erect penis from the confines of his underwear. A helpful lifting of his buttocks enabled Emma to pull his briefs and trousers just a bit lower. She swung around and very, very gently spread his legs out a bit to allow her to kneel between them. As one hand held the bottom of the shaft, and the other ran up and down his lower abdomen, Emma said, "Focus on me, Steed. Let me stroke you, squeeze you, taste you, engulf you; it makes me want you so very much..."

She had never spoken much during love-making with her husband Peter, nor had he with her. It was not something either had ever thought of doing. Yet, from the first with Steed, he had spoken endearing and tender words and sentences in bed, making her hotter for him, making her orgasms more intense, making their time together afterwards so special and intimate. For all that Steed was a silent man about so many things, in bed with her he had a command of the language of love that was real and earnest and sincere and drove her crazy. And little by little he had nurtured that in her, allowing her to be vulnerable, to lose inhibitions, to speak as she wanted to, to direct him to what she needed, how he could best please her, making her aware of how she could, too, heighten his sexual response merely by honestly telling him what she loved to do to him, how she loved to make him feel. At first a bit reticent, Emma had soon taken to that with gusto. It wasn't that they never made wordless love, but then when either wanted to share a need, a feeling, they enjoyed doing so, and it just made everything better.

Steed's buttocks contracted with her words and his hips lifted a little. That was all the signals Emma needed to take him into her mouth as far into her throat as she could without gagging, then slowly pulling on him, repeating that over and over. Randomly she stopped and flicked her tongue around the head of his penis, or licked it forcefully; all the time her one hand squeezed and released the lower part of the shaft, whilst her other hand either stroked his scrotum, his inner thighs, his abdomen.

After some time, Emma lifted off of him again and said, "Focus on me, Steed. I want you to grow so hot that you beg me to keep going. I want you to empty yourself into me as powerfully as you ever have..."

Steed's hips bucked a few times. "Oh, Emma, that feels so very fine..."

"Focus on me, Steed; on how good this is feeling. I want to make you feel so good..." and she lowered her head onto him again to a cry of total pleasure from Steed.

It took quite a bit longer than usual to build Steed to his peak, but Emma loved doing oral sex on Steed, so she didn't care. She loved the long, smooth heat of his penis, the hardness of his male virility, the salty taste of his semen; she loved reducing this strong man, so addicted to being in control, into a bucking mass of mindless orgasmic urgency. She loved how he looked at her afterwards, his grey eyes so thankful, so soft.

After some time, her speed increased avidly, her sucking grew in intensity; she took him in deeply as he gathered the strength every so often to thrust into her. At some key moment that Emma had quickly learned to recognize, his breaths grew shorter and more frantic, and his every exhalation was a staccato "uh", which grew in force, loudness, fervor, and irregularity until the rhythm broke completely and his breathing stopped for a few seconds as his whole body spasmed. He thrust into Emma, ejaculating with a cry that extended out the whole length of his shuddering, rapturous release. When he was done, Steed's penis collapsed into flaccidity as he collapsed on the blanket. Emma slowly removed her mouth from him, and then kissed his manhood as she replaced it into his briefs and set his clothes back to order. Although she could feel a sheen of sweat on Steed's chest, and felt his carotid to notice his heartbeat was still increased, she could see Steed relaxing into a post-coital state of sleep.

"Focus on me, Steed," she whispered in his ear, "I love you."

He turned his head to her, eyes closing and kissed her on her lips. "If only," he said, "I could hug you, hold you. Thank you, thank you so much, my love..."

She blinked tears back. When she could speak without choking up, she murmured, "Go to sleep."

He closed his eyes and did.

Steed slept through until the morning, which broke sunny. After he woke up, Emma gave him some water, then opened the side door and walked outside, wary for gang members. She found none. Walking around the barn she was able to see, about a quarter mile off, a house. She could make it there and back in no time. She tried to sit Steed up again, but he was just as muddled in that position as he was several hours earlier; she quickly laid him back down, and sat by him until the extreme dizziness disappeared. She left him on the blanket cocked gun in hand and ran to the house where she bulldozed her way in immediately calling the Ministry. She explaining their situation, got directions from the burly though friendly old man who lived alone in the house, and then ran back to Steed, who was thankfully safe and sound.

The Ministry arrived with cars and an ambulance thirty minutes later and collected Steed forthwith, taking him to their own private clinic for agents where Steed would get the best medical care available in the world in the safest place possible. He spent a couple of weeks in the hospital and was then released to the recovery clinic, where he was released to go home another week later, once the nerve irritation in his right arm had settled down enough he had full use of his still weakened limb. Steed hated the terribly unpleasant collarbone brace that aggravated his shoulder and rib pain; he hated that it would take months until his left shoulder was better after massive amounts of physical therapy; he hated how much it hurt to breath through his broken ribs; he hated the daily pounding headaches he had; he hated the occasional moments when the room suddenly spun so intensely he would sometimes fall over, spilling drinks, having to crawl to the sofa; he hated that Lord Saxon had committed suicide because of a no good scoundrel of a son. But, he loved Emma Peel, and he dared to believe her when she said she loved him, and having her around cheerfully putting up with his crankiness, his irritability, having her mouth on him, having her sitting on him, being able to use his mouth, his hand to make her yell out in bliss, made it all worthwhile and indeed, much, much easier to heal.