

The address is scribed upon heavy parchment, no bigger than a child's palm. It is folded into half, then half again, before being passed on, in the guise of a merchant's handshake. The Lord has no shortage of pounds and shillings; He accepts the parchment without a flinch at the cost.

The Lord rather despises the town and its foul, narrow streets. When he comes to a stop in a street not far from the main square, his brogues are soiled from cesspit waste and animal droppings. The Lord's overcoat does little to spare him from the chill of the evening, and he rubs the cold from his hands as he finds the house. He checks the street briefly, ensures he is not noticed. The house is seemingly normal. Four storey and close to toppling, as every other. He raps quietly on the heavy door and presses closer to the doorframe, hoping the shadows hide his features. Rain begins to fall.

The Lord waits, until his overcoat is dampened and impatience has built. The harsh braying and stumbling of drunkards sounds closer, and he sighs with annoyance before pushing the door open and stepping quickly inside.

The room is as expected. Dark and cramped, the musk of rotten wood which has not been attended to. He squints in the darkness, is barely able to discern the outlines of a writing desk. The Lord stands. Still and silent. Unease prickles at his back, dancing along his spine.

He clears his throat.

Light spills into the room, bringing with it the kind of warmth that reminds the Lord of winters spent by the fire. At least twenty candles, all lit at once, cast shifting shadows against the mouldering ceiling. He blinks, bewildered, for surrounded by all this light sits –

A woman.

Legs crossed on the table surface, she leans back against the protesting chair. Her legs are bare, the hem of her gown fallen up against her thighs. The Lord clears his throat again and looks away. The lady wears no hat, and he imagines nothing could restrain her full head of hair, with its wild, untameable curls. She stares at him, her dark calculating eyes pressing and frightening.

He shivers. His voice seems lost in his throat, unable to fill the silent room.

He tries again, gasping, attempting to utter his inner desires.

“I understand.” Her voice, cooler than ice.

“Make your wish.”

She smiles.