

Margot's lips twitched up. Yes, each and every door along this hallway had a sign that said NO ADMITTANCE. RING BELL. But not a single door actually *had* a bell. One of their little jokes, meant to dissuade anyone who didn't belong from interrupting them.

But it was probably Hall's appointment. Margot strode to the door and pulled it open, noting that it made the girl jump. The man did nothing but turn to look at her.

Siblings, she'd bet. They shared rich brown hair and striking silver-blue eyes ringed by dark lashes. The man, probably mid-twenties, had a knot on his nose that all but shouted that he'd exchanged a few fisticuffs in his day. He wore a naval uniform. The girl, probably around nineteen, took a step back and cast her eyes down at the floor.

Given that she'd been up for twenty-four hours, the smile Margot managed to summon was small. "Are you here to see DID and Lady Hambro?"

The girl seemed to be trying to vanish into the polished wood floor. Her brother cleared his throat and nudged her forward. "Yes, she is. Miss Dorothea Elton. Applying for the position of secretary."

Three years ago, Maman had been the only secretary in the department, and she'd been hired more as a means of getting Margot here than because the then-boss wanted anyone from the outside coming in. Now there were nearly twenty other females employed by Room 40. They were full of giggling and gossip and tips for keeping one's dress fashionable even with the shortages.

Margot found the lot of them baffling—and new hires nearly intolerable. New ones always thought she was one of them, to be chatted with.

She despised chatting as much as she despised knitting.

She nodded to the man—Lieutenant Elton, if her guess on their relationship was correct and her glance at his uniform accurate. After stepping out into the hallway, she motioned the two to follow her to Admiral Hall's office. "Lady Hambro is not in yet, but the admiral asked me to show you to him." That news delivered, she set off at a brisk pace. Once she delivered them to Hall, she'd go downstairs. Maman should be here any moment. If they didn't pass in the halls, Margot would wait at the front door for her.

"Oh . . . well . . . thank you. I mean . . ." Miss Elton's voice shook. Nerves, no doubt. Though she'd better get a handle on them, or she'd never survive the interview.

For that matter, who had recommended this girl? The secretaries' names were all submitted by other Room 40 staff, and then they were vetted and interviewed by Lady Hambro. Perhaps someone here knew the brother, the lieutenant. It was as likely as anything.