

# CHAOS AT CARNEGIE HALL by Kelly Oliver

## EXCERPT

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Inside, the cabin was the opposite of Hugo Schweitzer's. Whereas the German's room was disorderly and repulsive, this man's berth was tidy and attractive. In fact, it hardly looked occupied. The bed was made in a neat military style. There wasn't an article of clothing nor a personal item in sight. A faint scent of pine and citrus graced the room. Like a familiar embrace, the uniform order and pleasing smell put me at ease.

Hugo Schweitzer's disgusting mess had allowed clues to remain hidden in plain sight. This man's neatness required clever hiding places. Where would I hide a secret document in this room? Under the mattress? In the wardrobe? Sewn inside an article of clothing?

I crossed the room. Getting to the wardrobe was considerably easier than it had been in Schweitzer's clutter. When I opened the wardrobe, a waft of pine and citrus caressed my nostrils again. I thought of Archie. When would I see him again?

Concentrate, Fiona. Now was not the time to behave like a lovesick schoolgirl.

Two neat suits hung on hangers, spaced apart like sentries guarding a gate. One was a uniform. A British uniform. Could this traitor be in the British army? The other was a black evening suit. Whatever the blackguard was wearing under that trench coat constituted his third and final outfit. There were no more.

Standing to attention at the bottom of the wardrobe were two tall black boots. I bent down to get a closer look. Inside a boot would make a decent hiding place.

"Looking for something?" a man's voice boomed from behind me.

I gasped and squeezed my eyes shut tight.

If only I were wearing my maid's costume—although what maid would be cleaning at this time of night? I should have changed into Harold the helpful bellboy. At least then I'd be dressed as a man. As it was, I was wearing a flimsy evening gown and as vulnerable as a lamb in a ship full of wolves. Did I dare turn around and face my accuser?

“Did you find it?” The voice was closer now... and softer... and familiar.

Good heavens. I whipped around and practically flew into his arms. “Archie.”

He chuckled. “I should have known I’d find you breaking into my room.” He pulled me into an embrace. “Fiona. Dear Fiona.” He kissed the top of my head.

I buried my head in his shoulder. *Abhh*. The scent of pine and citrus... and those horrible Kenilworth cigarettes. The scent of Lieutenant Archie Somersby.

My heart was racing. From being scared out of my wits, or from being in Archie’s embrace, I didn’t know. “What are you doing here?”

“I could ask you the same.” He held me tighter.

“You, first.” I inhaled his familiar presence.

“I will tell you, but only because it’s necessary.” He pulled out of the embrace and held me out at arm’s length. “It’s crucial that you don’t expose me.”

“Expose you?” I had to censor my imagination. His earnest green eyes framed by those dark lashes and that wild lock of chestnut hair falling across his forehead made it deuced difficult.

“I’m on an important mission.” He fortified his countenance with a steely gaze. “You mustn’t let on that you know me. In fact, you should stay away from me.” He pulled a gold pocket watch out of his waistcoat pocket and glanced at it.

I pulled my arm out of his grip. “Does your mission involve Hugo Schweitzer?” My tone was pained, but I couldn’t help it. I wished my feelings for him weren’t so strong. After all, I hardly knew him. Still, I knew he worked for British Intelligence, despite Fredrick Fredricks’s accusations to the contrary. Afterall, who was more trustworthy? A German spy or a British soldier, an especially attractive one too?

Archie tilted his head and gave me a quizzical look. “How did you know?”

“I saw you together earlier on deck.” Without a doubt, the trench coat and fedora Archie was wearing, along with his sleek silhouette and graceful gait, were identical to those of my mysterious compatriot and Hugo Schweitzer’s clandestine companion.

He laughed. “I should have known that was you watching us.” He kissed me on the cheek. “Fiona, you’re an ace. I’ve never met a girl quite like you.” His eyes danced mischievously.

The way he was laughing, I didn't know whether to be insulted or flattered. *Wait a blooming minute.* "Did you forget something?" I'd seen that amused expression before. "Why did you return to your cabin?"

"To catch you in the act, love." Archie grinned.

"So, you saw me in the corridor?"

He raised his eyebrows and nodded. "Afraid so."

I punched his shoulder. "And instead of saying anything, you pulled this trick?"

"I'm sorry." He intercepted my hand and brought it to his lips. "Can you forgive me?"

I pulled out of his grip. "Only if you can tell me about Mr. Schweitzer and the chemists' war."

"You know I can't do that." He sighed. "It's classified."

"What does the war have to do with aspirin, the headache remedy?"

He led me to the bed, sat down, and patted the bedcover, inviting me to sit too.

My cheeks flamed. It was only then that I realized I was alone in a gentleman's room... after midnight, no less. Dilly Knox's words echoed through my head. "Our Fiona will do anything for King and country, don't you know." That only strengthened my resolve. I was on official business and not a romantic getaway.

I took a seat on the bed and tucked my gown tightly around my thighs. "You were going to tell me about aspirin?"

"You're nothing if not persistent." Archie smiled and put his arm around my shoulders.

I scooted to the head of the bed and out of his reach. "Aspirin?"

He shook his head. "You really are quite a girl."

I folded my arms over my chest and glared at him.

"Righto." His smile faded. "Aspirin is made from a chemical called phenol."

*Phenol.* I'd heard Hugo Schweitzer mention it. And phenol was in the letter from the Kaiser. The Kaiser's letter. Should I tell Archie about the letter? Or report it to Captain Hall first? "What does phenol have to do with the war?"

"We need phenol to make trinitrotoluene." Archie gave me a knowing look.

I gave him an ignorant stare in return. "What is trinitrotoluene?"

"TNT."

"The explosive?"

He nodded.

“Golly.” Still, why did it matter if aspirin and TNT shared one element? How did that affect the war? Could aspirin be turned into an explosive?

“Golly is right.” When he smiled, tiny dimples appeared at the corners of his mouth.

I had to stop myself from reaching across the bed to touch that tempting lock of wavy hair... and those dimples. Stop it, Fiona. You’re on an espionage mission and not on holiday. A holiday with Archie... how divine. Stop! Just stop.

“I’m sorry we can’t work together in the open.” He took my hand and kissed it. “But for now, I’m undercover and I have to stop Schweitzer at all costs.”

“I have a confession.” I sat on my hands to keep from touching him. “I broke into Hugo Schweitzer’s cabin.”

Archie sat up straighter. “Go on.”

“He has a briefcase full of papers and letters... in German.”

“Yes,” Archie said encouragingly.

“One of the letters was from the Kaiser.” I glanced over at him.

“I don’t suppose you can recount the letter verbatim?” He raised his eyebrows. He’d seen me do it before.

“I don’t suppose you have a pencil and paper?” I released my hands from their bondage.

Archie got up and went to the dressing table. He opened the top drawer and pulled out a sheet of paper and then withdrew a pencil from his breast pocket and held it up.

I joined him and sat down at the table.

He placed the paper on the table in front of me and handed me the pencil. “Work your magic, my love.”

My pulse quickened. Did Archie just call me *my love*? My cheeks warmed. With a smile in my heart, I closed my eyes and let the words form before my mind like captions across a black screen. I didn’t know what they meant, but I could see them as clearly as if I were holding the letter in my hands. I opened my eyes and began setting to paper what I had seen. My hand was flying across the page. When I finished, I scanned my reproduction and then held it up to Archie. He’d been breathing over my shoulder as I wrote, which was deuced distracting.

As he read, the grim look on his face spoke volumes. “Good God,” he gasped. “So that is what they’re up to. And the phenol plot goes all the way to the Kaiser himself.” He dropped the paper on the dressing table. “Schweitzer is siphoning off phenol from the allies on orders from the Kaiser himself.”

Siphoning off phenol. The chemical needed to make explosives. So that was the phenol plot.

The corners of his mouth turned up ever so slightly. “Fiona, you’re a genius.”

I couldn’t help but smile.

His eyes hardened. “I’ve got to stop him.” Archie’s hand trembled as he ran it through his hair. “I’ve got to stop Schweitzer.”

I gazed up at him with as much resolve as I could muster.

“You mean we’ve got to stop him.”