The Position

A Tale of Service and Female Dominance

By
Ezra Bedford

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(A female-led tribute to the fiction of the late-19th & early-20th Century)

PROLOGUE

She had known she was her late-aunt's favourite and it was sentiment she returned. But to realise her late-mother's sister had not only made her the sole heir to her goods and chattels but actually knew her – and to the core, it would appear – would have been somewhat mortifying to her. "Would", that is, had the sealed letter handed to her after the reading by the senior partner of Pepys, Mangrove, and Pepys, not assured her that her revered aunt was not only disinclined to be punitively judgmental upon the sexual tastes and desires most of society frowned upon, but had actually shared an active fantasy life of a similar kind herself and – having been too old to act upon her desires after the death of her controlling husband – was of a mind to share what she had learned on the subject in the third-person since.

Beloved Niece,

As, by now, all the legal niceties will have been completed and you will be in possession of all that accrued to me upon the death of your late and much unlamented uncle, I hope that this most sincere of letters will be of help in allowing you to know the joy in your own personal relationships that eluded me in my own lifetime.

I refer to the desire I am certain we both share to exert complete authority – in matters social, domestic, and, yes carnal, over a male of our choosing.

From my final resting place, I can hear your sharp intake of breath as you read these words in your loving aunt's handwriting, asking yourself how I could ever have reached such a conclusion as to your inner longings and divined your most intimate desires without us ever – as is wholly right for two respectable ladies who, moreover, are (were) pretty much the only worthwhile family available to each other.

Do not be too surprised.

These desires of yours were also shared by your mother and, if my sister and I were correct, were no doubt passed down to us from a long line of our female ancestors in turn – though, to our knowledge, and unsurprisingly given the way society is so slow to evolve in regard of women, none of our forebears were ever in a position to know the practical delights of… ownership… of such an exciting and immediate kind.

I shall not linger with more words to explain my reasoning as to how I seem so certain you share these sentiments, as my malady appears to be growing stronger and all I wish to do at this moment is sleep, though I would ask, should what I suggest be distasteful to you, that you simply regard my own imperfections as those thrust upon me by the fickle whim of indifferent nature and remember me with that love and affection I have felt for you since my sister first presented you to me those thirty-four years ago.

With the above in mind, I would suggest – if your feelings on the matter are those of distaste – that you break off from reading further and simply remember your aunt with all the affection with which she, if allowed, will remember you in the afterlife.

That being the case, I will say goodbye now, my dearest niece, and wish that the security of the estate I leave entirely in your hand fetches you nothing but joy and happiness in forms of your own choosing.

As to whether, unlike me, you find the more… unsavoury… aspects of your uncle's business dealings not to your tastes, that is a question for you and for you only. Know this, though: as distasteful as I came to find my late-husband – hateful even – I found much satisfaction and, yes, financial reward to be had from continuing at least some of his more lurid and not entirely legal schemes. Enough, anyhow, to provide a lady reaching her dotage some much needed… diversion.

Should, my dear, you not be… too… repulsed by my certainties and continue to read, then what I write below may be of some help in allowing you to acquire a man to your… tastes.

Firstly:

You, of all people, know that what I now point out is not done with any intent towards malice but simply a plain truth the women of our family in possession of a mirror have been acquainted with throughout the generations.

We are not beauties!

Powerfully constructed and with faces of character?

Certainly.

But of that female ilk able to enslave a man's senses upon first, or even subsequent, sight?

Emphatically not!

From our long and loving acquaintance, I know that you are practical and honest enough to acknowledge this truth and, also, strong and intelligent enough to know that a man's heart can be owned in more ways than the allure of a miniscule waist and a perfectly oval face with bow-lips. Ways I shall outline – energy and my malady willing – towards the end of this, my final letter to you. For first I wish to run you through a practical approach to ownership in a world where such human servitude to another (and especially in regard of that of man to woman). It will be your choice if you take the approach I suggest, but I feel certain you will, at the very least be… entertained by it.

Let us begin; and be assured that your aunt has researched the physical and legal possibilities of what she is about to suggest:

"How to Make a Legal Slave of a Man"

Firstly, and once the specimen has been chosen and shown it will be in his beat interests to proceed, employ a reputable legal man to draw up a set of binding contracts and

agreements that would, to all intents and purposes, and without making your real intent plain, indenture the chosen man to you, his Owner.

If you follow the heart and desire of your aunt and your late and sorely missed mother, then I can only believe the slave/servant you acquire will be of the live-in variety.

With that in mind, and believing as I do that I am preaching to the at least semi-converted, here is what I suggest:

The first step, of course, is to find the right man and fetch him to that point of dependence and obedience (we shall discus this towards the end of this missive) where he can be made to see that it is in his interests to commit to you. To this end, I would suggest – and I know your tastes in men are similar to those of mine when at your age - that you direct your efforts to finding an educated but impecunious, for whatever reason, older man. Handsome, must go without saying, as it is so much more satisfying to make a beast bend the neck when he thinks himself one's superior, in both intelligence and looks as well as gender. But, as I have said, we will come to this later.

When you have your man at the requisite point it will be time (perhaps earlier if his situation is parlous enough to have made him suitably desperate) for him to sign a long-term employment contract as your personal servant and have it notarised by your legal people. I believe three years is the maximum period allowed with such agreements. The agreement will list each of his duties and responsibilities as well as any punishments (monetary fines, loss of privileges, corporal punishments if necessary – and yes, such penalties are legal if agreed by both parties and, of course, not of a life-threatening nature) should he fail to meet your expectations or requirements in exchange for the boon of his keep.

That "boon" being his food and lodging and the small weekly pocket money he will receive from you – should his behaviour warrant it.

Remember though, beloved niece, that the way to ensure a man remains a slave only if you do not strip him of all belongings, freedoms, property and hopes. Sovereignty is lost at that moment when the slave is stripped of EVERYTHING. For, the moment he has nothing to lose he is free once again.

Remember to reward as well as punish – though be more… painstaking… upon the latter point. He will soon come to cherish these small tit-bits of either physical pleasure or leisure time to himself and will soon be unprepared to risk losing even these meagre scraps from his female master's table by too great an act of rebellion.

In fact, and as an aside, such rebellion is no bad thing – for you, anyway – as it offers you the delicious possibility of… correcting your possession.

Also, you should make him sign a binding lease, with no escape clause, for his servant quarters in your home and insist on advancing him monies that he may furnish it. The same applies to anything he either asks for or you think he requires. Insist he pays for these things himself and have an agreement advancing the monies notarised - and with all the requisite financial penalties in place. Trust me on this, my dearest, it is not just the prospect of the noose on the following morning that focuses a man's mind. The

prospect of finding himself in debtor's prison and, even should he find himself released, being without work and upon the street is equally inductive of concentration.

There will come a time when he is so conditioned to both your power over him and his helplessness when it comes to extricating himself from his predicament, that you may then have him sign Durable Powers of Attorney that grant you full control over all of his financial and healthcare matters.

Once that is complete, it is a small matter to then finally have him sign general consent and release forms to ensure you will not be held liable for any harm or injury that he might sustain during his time as your… chattel.

In legal terms, it is that simple – and Hortense will be more than willing to ensure your choice of men adheres to the agreement once it has been made; should, as I hope you will consider, allow her to remain in the house along with you and provide you the service she has been so assiduous in delivering to me these years on from your uncles passing.

But now we come to the more complex and less easily achieved part of the human conundrum.

The human part itself

How will you find a man of the kind we are describing?

I can only tell you how I would have gone about such an acquisition were I at the age at which you find yourself and unencumbered with a husband whose control of our finances ultimately provided him with a confidence beyond his natural abilities to… rule… me.

At least until his far too late in the day death provided me with the wherewithal to achieve those fantasies of the mind that were then denied a reality by the frailties and decrepitude of my body.

This is how I should start…

CHAPTER ONE

A man stood irresolutely before the imposing portals of Cranston House, a four-storied residence in one of South-West London's more well-to-do crescents.

The would-be visitor, though handsome, had evidently experienced hard times recently, for his clothes were shabby and his boots were down at heel. His coat was buttoned tightly, his collar was frayed, his shirt had seen the greater part of a week's service, the Derby hat on his head had undergone extensive renovations, and a close observer would have noticed that his gloves were odd ones. He was, though, as evidently an Englishman and his clean-shaven and well-defined face was sallow, whereas his eyes were dark and his eyebrows black and straight.

After ringing and being admitted, by a powerfully built black woman he guessed to be of West Indian – via Africa, of course – extraction, he was seated in an armless and uncomfortable chair to the side of a heavy door and to wait until he was called.

The woman's look had not been friendly, though he did notice her eyes appraising his face, body, and state-of-dress. Insolently so. As if the position he had come to enquire of would be in her gift and that *he* would actually be serving*!*

She was dressed entirely in black and the plain dress clothing her swelled out at the chest in attempts to contain what were, quite clearly, a pair of monstrous breasts. Her waist, though narrowed in a womanly way, was far from feminine and, taken with the powerful arms and shoulders above, gave her a certain… *intimidating*… presence. Her face was *not* attractive and, though the brown skin was smooth and unlined, there was an animalistic quality to her narrow and piercing eyes that was not lessened by the flared and, thought to himself, simian nostrils beneath their unblinking stare.

To his surprise, and no small disappointment with himself, he was unable to maintain her stare and found himself looking downwards where his vision was filled by a pair of impossibly small feet for one of her upper bulk, shod in a pair of low-heeled and lace-up maid's boots, stygian leather polished to within a glare.

As he fidgeted upon the hard seat and waited, he took from his waistcoat pocket a newspaper cutting and read the faded print.

Wanted
Mature man of good education with languages for live-in position. Secretarial work and some domestic duties will be required.
Full-board and lodging in comfortable and respectable house offered, along with an amount of weekly walking-around money, should performance of duties prove satisfactory.
This position would be suitable for a man of some breeding who has, perhaps, fallen upon hard times for reason of either ill-fortune or reasons beyond his control.

Apply in first instance to…

It was certainly a most curious advert and had caught his attention immediately. Even if he had baulked at the prospect at first. It was obviously – secretarial duties aside – a

servant's position. And that, after his early expectations in life, to a point not a few years prior to spotting the advertisement even, was not a pleasing one. The thought of becoming another man's flunkey, or perhaps even to a family – though he had seen no evidence thus far to suggest either a wife or children – made no appeal to a man who had certainly known better times.

And it was not about to appeal any more when the somewhat dismissive black housekeeper entered her employer's office a moment or so later and then returned to indicate the open door and inform him in heavily accented English – and haughtily into the bargain – that he may:

"Knock upon the inner office door and go through."

Obediently, if a trifle reluctantly, aware of what he saw as the West Indian woman's ludicrous and misplaced superiority and condescencion, he rose from the hard seat without regret, and stepped through.

To meet, what his empty stomach prayed, would be his next employer.

He found himself in a room sparsely furnished with a table, a chair and a few copies of papers. An old-school map of England hung on one wall and a Landseer engraving on the other. At the farthermost end of the room was another door, and to this he gravitated and again, after a moment's hesitation, he knocked before entering, nervously.

The room that obviously served as an office was larger and more comfortably furnished than its ante-room. There were shaded electric lamps on either side of the big carved oak writing-table. One of the walls was covered with books, and the litter of proofs upon the table suggested that this was the owner's sanctorum.

But the most remarkable feature of the room hit him when the man who sat at the desk lowered the copy of the times he had been perusing and that had prevented him from being viewed and turned his eyes on the newcomer.

For the man was no man at all, but a woman who, he sensed, was in her middle-thirties.

A woman who was solidly built and – the upper half of her, at least – clothed severely in a tight-fitting grey dress that emphasised that solidity.

Her face the newcomer could not see and for excellent reason.

It was hidden behind a veil of dark silk net which had been adjusted over the head like a bag and tightened under the chin; though it was easy to see beneath it a mane of black hair that had been scraped from the face and tied at the back.

"Some Arabian affectation, perhaps?" he asked himself as he wondered why his prospective employer would have his secretary interview him.

Or why he was even required if he had such a person already in place?

The inappropriate veil yet another factor stirring his curiosity.

“Asseyez-vous,” she said, in French for reasons of her own – possibly to test him for her employer. “Et ne laisse pas mon voile te faire peur.”

“Madame,” said the new-comer easily, responding, at least to begin with, in the same tongue that he might answer the unspoken question of his fluency, “etre assuré que je ne suis pas alarmé.”

Then, in English:

“In this world, nothing has ever alarmed me except my own distressing poverty and the prospect of dying poor.”

The veiled woman said nothing for a while, though her thoughts ran as written:

“He is most handsome. Much more so than those I have interviewed before now. And his background makes him perfect. Pray, let him be the one!”

“You have come in answer to my advertisement,” she said after a long pause, well-spoken but not on a level approaching blue-blood or even lower aristocracy.

She held up a sheet of writing paper from the desk and he recognised his own handwriting.

“You are Granville Machin and, according to the application you made to try and secure the position, you are both adequately educated and in need of both a position and a place to live.”

The other bowed, disliking the woman without having to see her face and the disdainful expression he felt sure he would see written across it were the veil not preventing such access. For the third time in the past minute, telling himself he would far rather be dealing with his future employer – if he were to be successful – than this… *minion*. It seemed unnatural that the responsibility of interviewing a man should have been left to a mere woman.

“He dislikes being spoken to in such an authoritative way – and especially by a woman. He grows more and more perfect by the second!”

“Your employer requires another assistant, Madame – or is it mademoiselle?” the new-comer responded, fighting valiantly to keep the annoyance he felt from his expression. “And I am, as you rightly say, here to apply for the position. I assure you, he will find me discreet, with a knowledge of foreign languages and, as stated, I am poor – though your advertisement made it plain this would not be an insurmountable problem. I fulfil all the requirements you listed,” he went on calmly; not so nervous in the presence of a woman as he might have been – might be – in the presence of her employer.

“Not insurmountable at all,” she assured him. “In fact, if you are as impoverished as your letter of application states, then it will be much to your favour.”

“In fact, you would not be considered for my service were it otherwise,” ran her unspoken thought.

“How so?” he asked in answer to her first response, both surprised and curious.

“What is required here is for a man to live-in, full-time and on a long-term basis,” she told him without preamble. “Your parlous social and financial situation, if you will excuse my frankness, makes you less likely be a… *fly-by-night*.

“Or, indeed, a fly-by-anything, should my plans for you work as they should.”

She fell to silence for a while and the stranger felt that the woman at the desk was looking at him, though he could not see her eyes.

It must have been a long and extremely careful scrutiny for, without further preamble, she said:

“I think you'll do.”

His mouth dropped open with surprise.

“Really?” he expostulated, half-relieved, half astounded. “Would you not be best served by having me meet with your employer first.”

“That,” she began, “is the second time you have made such an inference. Please tell me why it is you assume that I am not the *‘employer’* of whom you speak?”

“But…?”

“Is it because I am a woman,” she overrode him.

“I…”

“Does being in the employ and under the command of a female offend you?”

“Whatever his answer, I sincerely hope it does. It will make his taming all the sweeter.”

He was about to protest otherwise, despite feeling a perfect horror of the prospect she described, when she again spoke over him:

“Offend you so much,” she went on, “that you would rather remain in your current situation, that of being at the mercies of the street and any succour of a religious or charitable nature likely to come your way?”

He found himself lost for a response, the prospect she had outlined terrifying him even more than the prospect of her *“commanding”* him.

The woman chair leant back in her chair and templed her hands into upon the desks surface.

“Yes. His situation terrifies him and his stay in prison has weakened him enough to be… malleable. He is ripe to be… subdued.”

When she spoke next, her voice was firm and fairly dripping with authority:

"It is I who will be your employer," she explained, "should you satisfy some few provisos I have regarding the securing of your services. Inquiries into your background have been made in the time since I received your application and, now that I have met you, I have every expectation that you will perfect for me."

His cheeks flushed.

Something in the way she intoned that final word chilled him.

Was she…?

Did she expect…?

Could it be that there might be the expectation of a… *sexual*… liaison on her part?

Unbeknownst to him, she had read his thoughts and her own ran as follows:

"Yes. You are right to assume that your duties will be part sexual in nature. Though not, I'd warrant, in the lurid and male dominant way your thoughts are describing. You are indeed a handsome brute and accepting your attentions – as controlled by me as they will be – will not be a hardship for me. Right at this moment I could…

Patience! Do not spoil your carefully crafted plans, born of aunty's advice, and let the beast slip through your fingers before he has felt the stranglehold of your collar…"

"I…" he began hesitantly, coughing to clear a tensed throat. "Your advertisement supplied a general description of the duties required but…"

"Now you would like to be provided with a more… *detailed*… summary," she said, again cutting him off in mid-sentence, noting the colour at his cheeks that spoke of his irritation at having a woman treat him so, but pleased that he did not attempt even the mildest of rebukes for what most civilised people would see as rudeness.

Yet more evidence of the terror in which his situation held him and how prepared he was to accept a little humiliation that he may, again, find himself secure.

Evidence she found almost as encouraging as she found it… *delightful*.

"His manhood hates having a woman override it in such a rude fashion. Yet he sits for it. And soon he will sit for anything."

Her laughter was internal as another thought struck her:

"If Hortense and her disciplining hand allow him to be able to sit at all."

He nodded in answer to her question, not trusting himself to speak and biting his lip that he might not be tempted.

“Along with the domestic duties you will perform by way of assisting my housekeeper,” she went on,” sending him yet another message that he would be very low on the totem-pole if he accepted her position, “I am also the editor of a little paper which circulates exclusively amongst the servants of the upper classes. I receive from time to time interesting communications concerning the aristocracy and gentry of this country, usually written by hysterical French maids and revengeful Italian] valets. I am not a good linguist, and I feel that there is much in these epistles which I miss and which I should not miss.”

He contented himself with a nod, happier with this description of his duties than the former and easing his concerns… a little.

“Yes… He will be easily won over. It is a simple matter of increments, just as aunty said. A little of what he finds unthreatening to his masculinity in tandem with a soupcon of what will eventually undermine it…”

More than satisfied she had found her man after these many months of searching, she continued:

“I therefore want somebody of discretion who, as well as providing assistance about the house, will deal with my foreign correspondence, make a fair copy in English and summarize the complaints which these good people make.”

She gave him a look and then prompted, testing the waters:

“You understand, Machin,” she said, her use of his surname undertaken with a finger snapping quality a great lady might use on the lowest of her flunkeys, “that the section of mankind which employs servants are not perfect. They usually have stories to tell not greatly to their masters' credit, not nice stories. You will also understand that there are many people with a liking of the salacious who are willing to subscribe on a monthly basis to a news-sheet that satisfies such desires?”

He nodded, face reddening, her use of his surname and the accompanying delivery of it not lost upon him.

“Very well,” she continued. “My news-sheet – more of a newsletter, actually – is compiled here in my study and then sent for printing to a small outlet that is in my possession. The delivery of such gossip is most profitable – be it printable. However, if it is not considered suitable, we will not print. But, as my assistant editor, so to speak, the fact that particulars of disgraceful happenings are not fit for publication must not induce you to cast such stories into the wastepaper basket without first consulting me and receiving my permission to do so. For my own reasons, I keep a record of such matters.”

Granville Machin was destitute but not unknowing of the world and its ways. Subsequently, he was not deceived. Knowledge was power – even if it stemmed only from the downstairs prattling of foreign servants.

Again, there was a long silence whilst the woman at the table ruminated.

"He is not a fool. The report on him made it plain and it os obvious to see. But he is desperate. Neither truth will serve him well."

She decided to introduce an element of shock:

"Were you guilty of the crime for which you were imprisoned?"

His face became a ghastly shade of white and she knew instantly that he'd had no intention of ever sharing the information he had conveniently omitted from his application.

"I… I was not guilty," he answered in a voice barely able to be heard.

"The report I had made on you supplied me with everything," she cut into his thoughts, growing more… *commanding*… by the second. "Including your spell in prison for the embezzlement of your own company's funds."

Machin looked mortified at having been found out at such an early stage. He had hoped to land the position and, by the time – if it ever did – the knowledge of his omission became known, to have proved himself to be reliable enough for the prison term to have been overlooked.

"He is on the back foot and did not think to have his past revealed so soon. Look at the worry lines upon that handsome face. Placed there by me!... And so soon and with so little effort…"

"You are desperate for a position and it is understandable that you would be less than… *comprehensive*… with your application," she told him, fetching a little relief to his features as she consulted a report that lay open upon her desk.

"You say you were not guilty," she went on, still reading the report. "And yet the prosecution, the judge, and twelve of your peers, were convinced it was you who had spirited away the missing funds that bankrupted your own company. Funds, moreover, that have yet to be recovered."

Her words seemed to inject some spirit into him:

"Had they asked themselves what possible reason I might have had for doing so, they might have…"

"Your company was failing and likely to be placed in the hands of the receivers for unpaid bills," she came in. "Surely that is a good reason?"

"I had no idea that the business account had been drawn on so extensively and that bills had not been paid until…"

His jaw clenched tightly as he thought of his weasel second-in-command who had disappeared to the continent - not two weeks before he himself had been taken into custody.

A *"weasel"* who, for some unaccountable reason, had not come under suspicion and was now, no doubt, living in some French Riviera hotspot on the money he had spirited from his employer's company.

"Ask yourself," he addressed her. "If I were guilty of stealing my own money, why would I now be so impoverished? I no longer have a wife after she found the disgrace too much to bear, and my children are withheld from my presence, probably never to be seen by me again. As a bankrupt, the possibility of again building a business is impossible and, as a consequence, gainful employment in the world of business is withheld to me also. Is this credible to you, if I am guilty?"

"He is angry and vengeful, but it lessens his desperation in no degree. He is ripe. And what his wife has thrown away I shall gladly pick up and mould in a manner of my own choosing."

Forgetting for a moment that he could not see it through the concealing veil, she allowed him a small smile into which she managed to inject a small, and utterly unfelt, tinge of sympathy.

"No," she answered finally. "It is not. Though, it must be pointed out, that your… *carelessness*… was, if not a crime, highly injurious to both your business and you."

He could only acknowledge the correctness of words in highlighting the inattention to financial detail that had allowed the weasel to steal with such impunity and, more importantly, deprived him of livelihood, family, and, for two unbearable years, his freedom.

"However," she was continuing, "and with that said, I warn you now that, should you omit the truth to me one more time, you will not only lose the opportunity to forge a life for yourself in my home and be returned to the streets, but I shall lodge a complaint with the Police for your having made a fraudulent application… Understand?"

Her face beneath the veil, had he been able to see it, was as hard as granite and her voice was no more inviting.

She watched as he swallowed back what she described to herself as equal mixtures of fear and chagrin and awaited the apology she was convinced would be forthcoming.

Her certainty was soon proved correct:

"M-My apologies…"

Granville Machin gave her a questioning look. "I'm afraid I have yet to be told your name madam?"

She was jubilant:

"Oh, how he squirms! So desperate is he to gain the sanctuary of my home and my employ. Even at this early stage my excitement knows no bounds!"

Finally, allowing him to become even more uncomfortable:

“My name is Miss Carlotta Henshall. But *‘Ma’am’*, will suffice for now and will not change even if I do decide to keep you,” she told him,” a hint of dismissal adding itself to her air of command, as if she had already taken his measure and knew her own personal armoury was more than capable of subjugating it. “Understand?”

Machin nodded.

“I am sorry. I did not hear you,” she said with edge.

“Y-Yes, I understand,” he croaked out.

They remained in silence a second or two until he realised his error; sucking in a breath as he realised what she expected from him and felt his spirits sink at the prospect of such unheard-of deference from himself to a woman:

“By that,” he began in a voice thick with the emotion of outrage, though he tried to disguise it, “I, er, mean… I understand, Ma’am.”

A thrill of pure but tainted desire coursed through her. It was, she felt sure, but the first of many unwilling concessions he would be making to her in the days and years to come and, once again, she gave thanks to her loving aunt and her wise words that had made such a likelihood possible.

“Just look at him! He is hating every second of it. The prospect of being led by a woman appals him. I can read it upon that handsome face as clearly as if the skin consisted of type-face. And, yet, there he remains. A living testament to the fear and utter desperation that will soon make him my complete and utter chattel…”

“That is better, Machin,” said Carlotta Henshall grandly, knowing that he was some twelve years her senior only adding to the arousal she felt at having a modicum of control over such a specimen of the male species. “Do not forget again.”

He felt her stare through the veil and, sickeningly, knew what it was she required.

“N-No… Ma’am.”

Now it was her turn to nod.

“Very well. I take it from your agreement to address me with the respect I deserve as your employer that you wish to accept my offer of employment. Am I correct?”

“He is hesitating. But not for long. Even as he asks himself if he can bring himself to accept a position under the authority of a woman, he visualises the life ahead of him should he refuse. How many other such opportunities will come his way before the vicissitudes of the street claim him as yet another victim fallen from grace?

Again, and exactly as her thoughts had predicted:

“Yes, hmm, Ma’am,” he answered.

She nodded.

“Very well. You will attend to your duties in regard of the newsletter at the desk in the outer-office. At all other times, you will take direction from Miss Hortense, my housekeeper, and assist her with any household duties necessary. Understood?”

The face that stared back at her was unable to conceal a perfect horror of what she had just finished describing.

Then his face relaxed and she knew he was assuring himself she could not be serious.

“Me? Be supervised by a darky woman?” she could almost hear his thoughts, so transparent to her was he becoming.

Guessing his thoughts further. and even more convinced of his desperation, she decided to test him; despite the realisation she was taking an unnecessary gamble:

“And yes, you heard me correctly. Miss Hortense has been with me some time now and for many years before that in the service of my aunt. *Her* loyalty I am assured of. Whereas *you* are an unknown quantity and it is still to be proved that you are capable of becoming a devoted… *employee*.”

He could feel her eyes on him through the veil as he squirmed before her; convinced the word she hesitated upon had been of a less acceptable kind.

Again, she guessed at his thoughts correctly:

“Yes, you are right to suspect I had another description in mind to describe the position you will occupy in my home – though I feel certain it is not one I would wish to risk in front of you until I have shown you just how much you have to lose by… defying me.”

“For that reason,” she went on, aware that he was stewing still upon the outrage, “you will accept her authority in my absence as you will accept mine when I am present.”

Carlotta Henshall’s voice grew more steely as his jaw dropped towards the floor and, when he recovered his wits enough to notice, he realised she had removed her veil.

Though why, at this point, he could not say.

Had it been to intimidate him?

Whatever.

She was *not* a beauty, he could see that. There was a strength to her features but none of the fine lines and softness of expression that most men so desired. Though her eyes were of such a piercing blue it took all his resolve to meet them.

“If that is unacceptable to you, then this interview is at an end and you may return to your life upon the street.”

Granville Marshall felt a sickness at his stomach and again cursed the weasel responsible for the positive horror show that had been made of his life.

But, even beyond his hatred for his former second-in-command, was the complete and destabilising fear of the hell that awaited him should he not gain this position and take refuge beneath the woman’s roof.

But could he accept what awaited him there?

To be supervised by a black woman who herself was a servant?

“I take your silence to indicate it is unacceptable to you,” the woman told him, “so I will thank you for your interest and wish you both a good-day and good luck.”

Pure fear ran through him as he realised he was being dismissed; while, for her part, Miss Carlotta Henshall prayed she had not overplayed her hand at so early a stage.

“No!” he all but screamed and her inner thoughts rejoiced – though she was at pains to show him no sign of her elation.

Instead, she gave him a curious look. The same kind of look a child gave upon seeing the pain of the insect it was in the process of torturing. In this case, an insect that happened to be a handsome and well-educated man.

“B-By that, I mean,” he stammered, “I say that… I… I do accept your terms and would like to take the position with you.”

Her body stiffened imperceptibly and, like the well-trained animal she was intent he become, he picked up on the cause of her displeasure and added:

“Ma’am.”

Only preventing herself from swooning with a concerted effort of will; so great was the sensation she felt at overmastering the handsome and older man before her, she simply stared at the desk top as if in reflection as she bought her equilibrium the time necessary for it to show him the face of her choosing.

Finally, she leaned back in her seat and steepled her hands across her stomach, making him wait that he might sweat a little more, but also in order to further feel the relief that her desire to test him had not exploded in her own face.

Then:

“Very well,” she told him, his relief not lost upon her. “You may start immediately. I’ll have Miss Hortense show you to your quarters. Are your belongings with you?”

“They… They are at the mission,” he told her, somewhat shamefaced. “It is only my shaving equipment and a spare shirt. My wallet carries my identification and the few shillings I have and is here, in my jacket pocket.”

“Then I suggest you leave them at the mission for some other poor beggar who might find a use for them. Tomorrow we will be visiting the high-street for more… *suitable*… clothing for you and we can also purchase some items to assist with your grooming.”

His own relief at not being forced back to the mission outweighed his misgivings and he almost missed what she said next:

“There are certain legal provisos I have been advised to have you sign, and tomorrow, before visiting the high-street, we will visit my legal representatives to make sure everything is above board.”

He was still too relieved to have been successful in his application and to, once again, find himself with a roof over his head – even if it was not his own – that the presence of the West Indian woman at his side took him by surprise.

“Hortense,” came the voice of Carlotta Henshall. “Machin here is to be shown his quarters for the night. I daresay he is hungry and I will leave it to you to feed him before he beds down.”

Granville Machin felt himself colouring to the roots of his still thick brown hair as he heard himself spoken of in such a way before the black woman with the flaring nostrils and piercing eyes.

Spoken of, in fact, as if he had just accepted a status barely above that of some domesticated household pet.

“Tomorrow we shall take him to the high-street and have him supplied with some livery of our own choosing. But that will not be until we have dropped by the offices of Pepys, Mangrove, and Pepys. Then, all being to my liking, we will also see about some furnishings to go with the single mattress in his quarters.”

CHAPTER TWO

For six weeks, Granville Machin had worked with painstaking thoroughness in his new service. Far preferring his time at the desk in Carlotta Henshall's outer-office to the domestic duties the negress expected of him – though if he were truthful, even they had not proved too onerous up until this time. Content to spend his leisure hours reading in the quarters he had furnished with a loan from his employer – even if he was disturbed to find that this loan extended to the plain black shoes, trousers, and waistcoat, along with two or three white shirts, he was expected to wear as he performed his duties; the two shillings she allowed him each week enough, at least, to allow him to purchase a second-hand book and an hour or two's diversion at a local tavern

Every Friday morning, upon each of the six weeks since his employment began, he had found on his desk an envelope containing his *"pocket-money"*, as he had heard both his employer and her monstrous housekeeper describe the payment.

But *not* upon this Friday morning.

We shall come to the reasons why shortly; after we have discussed his efforts on behalf of the *"Tittle & Tattle"*.

The above being the name of the salacious little newsletter that had been started by Miss Henshall's uncle, been continued by her aunt, and then the niece herself. A newsletter that was gained only by subscription – it was his duty to add new subscribers to the list and keep account of their monthly dues – and had a decent, if not national, base. A profitable hobby, to describe it correctly, rather than a business.

Machin was, in fact, a keen student of the news-sheet but noted very little of the information he had gleaned throughout the month appeared in print. Obviously then the Tittle & Tattle served the Henshall family in some other way than as a vehicle for scandal. It was this mystery that was partly lifted on this mysterious business on a Thursday afternoon when there had come a loud knocking at the front-door beyond his office.

Knowing that the answering of the door, amongst other duties that were falling to him with what seemed to be an increasing regularity – something he intended to mention to his employer if the black housekeeper continued the practice – he opened the door to find an expensively clothed woman in her late-twenties appraising him.

Taking him, on the strength of his monochrome *"livery"* to be a domestic of some kind rather than the assistant editor he preferred to regard himself as being.

"I need to see the editor of the Tittle & Tattle," said the girl haughtily as she slowly closed the door behind her.

"That would be me," he told her, not entirely untruthfully as she eyed him up and down disbelievingly; her look telling him that, being obviously of that class attended by servants herself, she knew a domestic when she saw one.

"Well, *Mr Editor*," she said with deliberate insolence, "I had a letter from you."

Machin had not written letters to anybody of late, save the application he had sent to his employer, but he was not of a mind to include the girl in more evidence of his… *lowliness*.

"I write so many letters," he said airily, "that I really forget whether I have written to you or not."

He indicated the open door to his outer-office, knowing – or at least believing - his employer was out on some errand or other and not expected back for an hour or so in her main office.

"Come through and show it to me that my memory might be refreshed," he suggested in a tone of authority belying his *livery*.

Once seated before him, she opened her bag, took out an envelope, removed the letter and passed it across to the interested young man. It was written on the note-heading of Tittle & Tattle, but the address had been scratched out by a stroke of the pen.

It ran:

Dear Madam,

Certain very important information has come into my possession regarding the relationships between yourself and Captain Brackly. I feel sure you cannot know that your name is being associated with that officer. As the daughter and heiress of the late Sir George Bilke, you may imagine that your wealth and position in society relieves you of criticism, but I can assure you that the stories which have been sent to me would, were they placed in the hands of your husband, lead to the most unhappy consequences.

In order to prevent this matter going any further, and to silence the voices of your detractors, our special inquiry department is willing to undertake the suppression of these scandal-mongers. It will cost you £1,000, which should be paid to me in notes. If you agree, put an advertisement in the agony column of the Morning Mist, and I will arrange a meeting where the money can be paid over.

On no account address me at my office or endeavour to interview me there.

Yours very truly,

C. Henshall.

Machin read the letter and now the function of the Tittle & Tattle was very clear.

He refolded the letter and handed it back to the girl.

"I may not be very clever," said the visitor, "but I think I can understand what blackmail is when I see it."

Machin was in a quandary, but only for a moment.

“I did not write that letter,” he said suavely; “it was written without my knowledge. When I said that I was the editor of this paper, I meant, of course, that I was the assistant editor. Miss Henshall conducts her business quite independently of myself and…”

“Her?” the girl exploded. “You tell me that a member of my own sex wrote this piece of… *filth?*”

“I know all the circumstances,” he added hastily, since he was very anxious that the girl should not refuse him further information in the belief that he was an inconsiderable quantity – and, also, because he was grudgingly protective of his employer’s well-being; given it was so crucial to his own. “Trust me, I sympathize with you most sincerely and I am sure no attempt at blackmail was uppermost in my editor’s thoughts, but rather a desire to be of service.”

A little smile curled the lips of the visitor and Machin, who was ever a judge of men and women, even if a certain *‘weasel’* had slipped beneath his guard, knew that his employer had miscalculated and the woman before him was no yielding and timid creature to be terrified by the fear of exposure.

“The matter can be left in the hands of Captain Brackly and my husband to settle,” she said. “I am going to take the letter to my solicitors. I shall also show it to the two men most affected.”

Now the letter had been written four days earlier, as Machin had seen, and he argued that if it had not been revealed to these *“two men most affected”* in the first heat of the lady's anger and indignation, it would never be shown at all.

“I think you are very wise,” he said suavely. “After all, what is a little unpleasantness of that character? Who cares about the publication of a few letters? I am quite certain that my editor – in her own way – was trying to make your… *situation*… easier should the letters have proved to be… *uncomfortable*… for you.”

She was not so easily won over.

“Hmpth! And make herself a £1000 into the bargain.”

Her eyes became hard and Machin found himself having sexual thoughts about the girl – deprived as he had been and still was of female companionship and left to his own devices on that score when in the privacy of his own, *expensively*, furnished quarters.

“Does she actually have any letters?” she asked quickly.

Machin nodded, though he was unsure on the subject.

“And will they be returned?” she asked.

Machin nodded, and the girl bit her lips thoughtfully.

“I see,” she said.

“It is simply a matter of recouping the monies and the efforts that have gone into ensuring they do not fall into the *wrong* hands, before returning them to their rightful owner,” he told her, having deduced his employer’s scheme from the outset of reading the letter and hopeful his knowledge of it might improve his own situation.”

On that score, he was to be proved most disappointingly wrong.

But this is for later.

In the now, she looked at the letter again before taking it up and, without another word, rising to leave.

Machin accompanied her to the front -door and it was only then that she spoke.

“It is the prettiest kind of blackmail,” she said at parting, and she spoke without heat. “I have only now to consider which will pay me best.”

Machin closed the door behind her and walked back to his office, opened the door and stood aghast, for standing to the side of the chair which he had so recently vacated was Carlotta Henshall herself.

She was smirking, partly at Machin's surprise, partly at some amusing thought.

“Well done, Machin,” she said; “excellently fenced.”

“Did you hear?” he asked, surprised despite himself.

“Every word,” said the other, expression becoming stern as he added: “And do not forget who you are addressing.”

Machin swallowed with difficulty under the scrutiny of her penetrating eyes. More and more, as much as he resisted acknowledging the fact, she was taking on a position of real authority in his thoughts. And not just because of the personal loans he had taken out with her to purchase his own working uniforms and the items currently furnishing his quarters.

There was something about the woman – other than his dependence upon her – that seemed… *off*.

As if she were working to an agenda on his regard of which he had not the slightest clue.

An agenda that would *not* be in his best interests.

“Apologies, Ma’am,” he heard a supplicant’s voice offer and was unsurprised to learn that it was his own; assuring himself in his embarrassment at having responded in such a way that, armed with his new and damaging knowledge of her activities, it would not be long before she accepted a wholly different form of address from his lips; rather than look down upon him as little more than a chattel to be directed by her and that monstrous darky housekeeper.

Then, he would make her pay for all the contempt she had shown him as both a man and a human being and insist she dispense with the hateful West Indian woman's services.

And yet, he would have been surprised by at least a part of his *"employer's"* thinking on his behalf at this point.

For right then, Miss Carlotta Henshall could have placed her hand on her heart and sworn that *never*, in her life until then, had she found a man as attractive and desirable as Mr Granville Machin. This as he stood unknowingly upon the threshold of a personal service to her that would remain in place – unless fate had an early demise in mind for her – until the day he took his final breath. A *"personal service"* that would make the first few months in her employ he had found so humiliating and dispiriting, seem like a brief interlude of bliss and personal independence.

Carlotta's thoughts went back to the end of her aunt's letter and, once again, she asked herself how a woman who could not have experienced *any* of the things in which she sought to advise her could be so prescient and so… *right!*

"You must never forget, my dearest niece, that once you have him in your toils both legally and financially – and I have complete confidence in your ability to achieve this with the man of your choice – then it is incumbent upon you to make his bondage complete by instilling a physical dependency.

When you have trained to place his lips upon your feet as a mark of his respect of you and his own lowly position, go further and insist that he sniff them. Even – especially! – when they are not as… fragrant… as they might be. If he is to be your body-servant - and I have no doubt your desires will dovetail with my own in this matter – then he must become familiar with the scent of every part of the body that now rules him. From the foot, you must lead him to your armpits and have him both lick and sniff their hairless superiority (remember, it is most unfeminine to allow the hair there to grow unattended – you are an English Rose, my niece, not a Spanish bush). From the armpits, he must be led lower once again to the shrine of your womanhood his tongue was placed upon this earth to worship; once more to pay homage with both tongue and nostrils to his female master's love-box.

And then, when his eyes have glazed over with surrender to the service of your intimate parts and he acknowledges himself your serf, your chattel, your most hopelessly indentured slave, you must introduce his nose and his tongue to that part of your anatomy from which spews the waste of your nourishment."

Carlotta Henshall's breath caught in her throat as she recalled the impact her aunt's words had made upon her and her eyes took in the form of Granville Machin hungrily as she recalled the words that ended penultimate section of her aunt's letter before she had made a final farewell.

"Do not rest until you have forced this final capitulation upon him, my love. If he resists, then you must persist. For if you have reached this point then you must surely be in a condition of almost unassailable power over the man of your choice; so much so that the bending of his will to yours upon this matter will be but a matter of time. Trust that

your loving aunt envies her niece very much when she pictures the delights of ownership likely to come your way and, be assured, that when you feel his tongue make contact with your shit-chute for the very first time, that will be the moment he is yours forever and will serve you until the breath finally leaves his body, as your aunt's is shortly to leave her own…"

"Do not forget again," she told him. "Both Miss Hortense and I have been moderately pleased with your willingness to accept instruction and take orders up until now. You would be minded to continue in such a vein."

Machin chewed the inside of his lip, ashamed to hear himself described so and then taken to task. Not giving a fig if her monstrous housekeeper found his… *willingness*… pleasing or not. Finding it, in fact, wholly debasing that the white woman in front of him could consent to having one of her fellow countrymen treated in such a way by a…

Her voice cut into an unspoken description that would have proved… *uncharitable*… at the least.

"And what did you think of the young lady?" she asked, taking his seat and bidding him to remain standing when he went to occupy the chair just vacated by his guest.

Feeling more… *flunkeyish*... with each second he was forced to spend in the woman's company- taking orders and *"instruction"* from a female, and especially one so many years younger than himself, not likely to inspire a warm feeling in his breast; Machin was about to answer when she held up a hand to prevent him.

"Really, Machin," she chided. "Do stand straight. Shoulders back and hands behind your back. Slouching in front of your… *employer*…"

Through his anger and humiliation, he realised she had hesitated before describing herself and had a pretty good idea of the word she would have preferred to use – even if he was wrong and her preferred word was even stronger than the one he had in mind.

It made his determination to use the new knowledge to his advantage even stronger.

A determination, though he could not have known it, that would not only seal his fate but bring it nearer.

"I shall have to speak with Miss Hortense," she said, almost to herself, earlier train of thought in regard of his… *'slouching'*… forgotten. "This is really most disrespectful."

Suddenly, she shook her head and stared at him:

"Well? What are your thoughts?"

"My thoughts, you ask?" he said, meeting her eye with a confidence born of anger and his new understanding of her *'News-Letter's'* ill-gotten purpose.

She did not flinch from his gaze but held his gaze with equal confidence.

“My thoughts,” he went on are that I am disrespected, overworked and underpaid…”

*****

“He ask what??” exploded an incredulous Hortense, in her imperfect and heavily accented English that remained undefined despite her many years of service to Carlotta’s aunt and an English family in Antigua before her.

It was the Thursday evening after the above discussion and the powerfully built negress was incendiary.

“For a raise in salary,” answered Carlotta Henshall. “He will no longer accept *‘pocket money’* but wants a proper – and substantial – salary and for his loans from me to be forgotten.”

“Or…?” asked the negress.

“Or,” smirked an unconcerned Carlotta, “it would be unfortunate for me if information regarding my little… *‘side-line’*, as he put it were to fall into the hands of the authorities.”

“An ingrate an a piss-ant,” snarled the fiercely loyal Hortense; as devoted to the niece as she had been devoted to her aunt and looking upon both as the family she had been prevented from having by employers of a lesser calibre than Carlotta and her aunt. Americans. Who, on a visit to England, had sold her as a young girl to the English lady who had promptly released her and then hired her as a housekeeper. Her own family, for all she knew, still back in Antigua but, thanks to the war between North and South, no longer indentured.

“I like nothin’ better dan to take his trousers down, lay over my knee and blister his lily-white behind wi’ de back o’ my hand.”

Carlotta’s laugh was genuine, the imagery inspired by her housekeeper’s words entirely thrilling to her and something she was in no doubt the powerful woman in her late-thirties could accomplish if – *when* – given the go ahead.

“Be patient, my loyal Carlotta,” she said. “You may have the opportunity sooner than you think.”

The nostrils in that black face flared further as a broad grin appeared.

“Den he ‘ave no idea dat letter and de lady not on de up and up?”

Her mistress shook her head.

“He is utterly clueless and, like the venal man he is at heart, is already trying to put what he thinks he knows to his own squalid advantage.”

“Where he be now? I take my belt to his…”

“No, Hortense. As delightful as such a prospect would be to witness, I have a far more lasting way of bringing our handsome man to heel. Yesterday’s visit of the young lady was timed perfectly and will have results very much to our satisfaction.”

“How dat, Miss Carlotta?”

Miss Hortense’s anger turned into a big and broad smile as her, on so clever, employer duly explained…

CHAPTER THREE

On the following Friday morning, when there was no sign of not only an increased level of remuneration but the envelope containing the meagre pocket-money he had been receiving thus far, Granville Machin knocked at his employer's office and walked directly in.

She was seated behind her desk and seemed wholly unsurprised and completely composed for the intrusion.

"Have you had time to think my offer over?" he asked without preamble.

"That was done the instant you made it," she told him, eyes holding his with such confidence that his own was dented for a moment.

"And?"

"The Police should be on their way here as we speak," she told him, delighting in the shock with which he greeted the news.

"P-Police?"

"But of course? Did you really think you could steal my money and get away with it?"

"Steal…?"

She could see that his barely formed confidence had already taken a fatal hit and that the mere mention of the word *"Police"* had destabilised his lucrative new world.

"Do not feign innocence," she sneered. "A hundred guineas have gone missing from my bedroom bureau, and I shouldn't think it will take the good boys of Scotland Yard long before they narrow the suspects down to one."

Her smile was evil in its triumph.

"Especially when they are informed of your previous financial… *transgressions*… and that you omitted to mention either them or your subsequent stay in prison on your application to me."

The colour had drained from his face and she could tell he was thinking furiously.

It did not take much in the form of divination to know his next move.

"You know full well I have stolen nothing from you," he said. "This is simply a means to prevent me telling the authorities what I know of your own illegality."

"Illegality?"

"That is what I said."

“Why, whatever are you talking about?” she asked as a knocking was heard at the front-door.

Believing it to be the Police his head gave an almost hysterical lurch towards the sound.

“Remain where you are,” she told him. “My office window is barred and there is no way out. On this occasion, I think we can leave it to Miss Hortense to show my visitors in.”

“But… But, you will ruin yourself also when I tell them of how you have attempted to blackmail...”

“Ah, Miss Wilson,” she addressed someone behind him as his head swung in the direction of the newcomer. “How good of you to come.”

“But…” he protested, his world crumbling at his feet as he realised his error of judgment and the prison cell to which it could lead for a second time.

It was the same woman from yesterday. Dressed less expensively, he noted through his fear, and certainly looking less… *well-born*. But, and unmistakably, *her*.

“Miss Wilson here was good enough to loan her skills as an actress that I might test the integrity and loyalty of my newest employee,” Carlotta Henshall told him. “Both tests, I am afraid, you failed to pass.”

He watched, frozen with disbelief, as Carlotta Henshall passed the actress a number of five-pound notes before extending her thanks and watching the girl leave.

“For a few moments, of course,” she told him when the door had closed on their visitor, “I actually thought you were going to pass on at least the loyalty aspect of the test, when you handled Miss Wilson’s *bogus* situation so adroitly and in a way that *appeared* to be in my favour.”

A sickened Machin listened to her words with a sense of growing doom.

“Trust me,” she continued, “had you continued in the same vein and not made your outrageous and threatening demands to me, your life in my service would have proved far less arduous than the future awaiting you now.”

Granville Machin cursed the stupidity he had shown yesterday and gave furious thought to any possible way of extricating himself from yet another catastrophe about to befall him.

Which was when there came another, portentous, hammering upon the door that could only herald the authorities and Machin felt his stomach descend towards the office floor, desperate eyes seeking those of the only person who could rescue him from yet another unjust spell in a prison hell-hole.

“Yes,” she said, assessing his thoughts correctly. “That indeed sounds like the heavy-handed arrival of our most diligent Police.”

Without his being aware he was about to do so, he began to plead:

“Please, Ma’am. Not this. I… I… I’ll do anything.”

Her eyes widened at this last word and bore into his own with a look that gave him a fleeting reminder of some religious fanatic or other.

Then, as there came more hammering upon the door and the sound of Hortense’s heels upon the wooden floor of the hall as she made to answer it, with a smile that was breathtaking in both its evil and gleeful anticipation:

“*Anything*, you say?”

CHAPTER FOUR

It had been two weeks since that most satisfying day when Carlotta Henshall had manipulated Machin into his rebellion before using her knowledge of his record and the Police themselves to blackmail him into a personal service to her that would be as different and Draconian to the service he had known in his first weeks in her house as the service of a factory worker to a foreman was different to that of a cotton-picker and the mistress of a plantation.

There had, of course, been no one-hundred-guineas in her bedroom bureau; just as there had been no married lady of substance being threatened with blackmail for an ongoing affair with a Captain of the military.

But both coercion and threat had provided Carlotta with the desired result and catapulted the process that would bind Granville Machin to her with more swiftness and… *finality*. He had, just as she had intended, seen an opportunity to not only be treated with more respect by the two new and authoritative women in his life but seen his acquired knowledge as the means with which to gain himself a more lucrative living his straitened circumstances and prison record place beyond his reach. More importantly, for Carlotta, her decision to tell the police of the fictitious and missing hundred-guinea had placed her intended slave utterly at her mercy, as *he* would be the first person of interest they would investigate.

And especially when his serving of a sentence for embezzlement came to light.

It truly was no surprise to her when Granville Machin went from demanding blackmailer himself to terrified and begging supplicant.

And within seconds of that fateful knocking at the front-door and Hortense allowing them to gain entrance.

The only problem being that it took all of her powers of persuasion to make the police believe that Machin was a loyal and faithful retainer and could not possibly have taken the money himself.

Her success in the above task only serving to tighten the metaphysical collar she had already fastened about the neck of the beast she intended to domesticate.

Both Master and supplicant knowing, after all, that she could change her story to the authorities at any time and have him incarcerated in some dank hell-hole for a sight longer than the two-years served for his first, supposedly guiltless, transgression.

So terrified had he been of just that eventuality, that, at her insistence, he had even signed a written confession to actually having stolen the one-hundred-guineas.

This, that she might have some insurance that he would… *comply*… with her wishes.

A confession he wrote and signed at her dictation, despite both knowing he had been guilty of no such thing.

And a confession, given his terror of further incarceration, that all but sealed his fate and placed his future in *her* hands.

Now, a fortnight on, as she peered unobserved into the bedroom of Miss Hortense and observed the breathtaking sight taking place before the pulled curtains at the far side of the room, she could only congratulate herself for having carried out her aunt's directions with such facility and success.

For the sight, for those sharing her desires on behalf of men – and this man in particular – was truly jaw-stopping.

A naked Hortense, smooth black skin lent a sheen by the perspiration born of excitement, was sat naked in a high-backed chair to the side of a dressing-table. Imperious and demanding. A monstrous black queen in the process of schooling her white and equally naked lackey.

But schooling him in what, you may ask?

Why, what else but how best to use his tongue that he may please her, of course.

And, through pleasing her, be considered worthy of performing the same task for his… *Master*.

"Keep dose 'ands behind yo' back all de time," Carlotta heard that thick accent order the wretch who was kneeling between her legs, no doubt considering various forms of suicide rather than the living death of humiliation and service to one of the housekeeper's kind.

Unaware she had done so, so riveted was she by the scene unfolding through the crack of the door giving her access, Carlotta had rucked up her dress, revealing her hosed and shapely legs in the process, and was in the process of pleasuring herself as Hortense put the frightened, malleable, and, no doubt, disgusted with himself, Machin through his oral paces.

The slap that rocked his head to one side reverberated about the room and Carlotta jumped, startled.

"What I tell you?" the voice of Hortense bellowed, taking his hair in her hands and yanking that handsome head, cheek reddened from her slap and glistening from the moisture of that arousal he had at least conjured from his West Indian tutor.

The eyes that blazed down into his, amazing black breasts and distended nipples but inches for his raised chin, seemed incandescent with rage and frightened even Carlotta.

Though not as much as the sight of watching her housekeeper wield such power over their serf enflamed her own senses; knowing that soon, when Hortense considered him both schooled and worthy enough, it would be she who would be on the receiving end of his trained tongue.

“You got to worship,” she told him, punctuating her advice with slaps, forwards and backwards, to his already fiery cheeks.

“Not…”

Slap!

“…go about it…”

Slap!

“...likes you try to…”
Slap!

“…get it over wid as quick…”

Slap!

“…as you can.”

Carlotta’s womanhood fair jumped as she thought she heard a sob come from the kneeling man. Just the sight of him, on his haunches before the black woman who was almost as much his owner as she, was enough to make his true owner feel giddy. He was still in reasonably good physical condition for a man of his years and to see him before the legs of her housekeeper, head bowed at her feet as impossibly slender black ankles rose to meet equally stupendous and exaggerated calf muscles before continuing on to thighs that were positively frightening in their size and muscularity. A waist that would have been described as hour-glass, had it not been filled with a surfeit of sand, served as a plinth for the aforementioned breasts and the self-satisfied and frightening face with the flared nostrils above it served only to make the impression of savage and unanswerable womanhood all the more… *terrifying*.

The white woman’s breath all but deserted her as she watched Hortense fetch up a leg and hook it over Machin’s head, forcing him even lower so that, eventually, his forehead made contact the rug beneath his educator’s feet – ignominious position maintained by the sole of his female master’s foot as she ensured he remained in place.

“I wants you to think ‘bout how you as disappointed Miss Hortense and how you goin’ to do better when she lets you up.”

The black woman’s eyes turned to the door then and, as if she knew her employer and fellow conspirator were behind it, she gave a little wave that seemed to Carlotta light-hearted and incongruous for both the situation and her housekeeper’s temperament.

How far they had come with the man.

And in so short a space of time.

For some reason, Carlotta Henshall’s thoughts went to a meeting planned for the next day.

A meeting in the chambers of Pepys, Mangrove, and Pepys, that would – should her chattel behave himself as he had been instructed – make the stranglehold she had already taken upon the life of Mr Granville Machin more akin to that of a death-grip.

An event her wise aunt had insisted she see through and one that would truly set the seal on his coming enslavements.

*****

Approaching his seventies - and the senior partner in the law firm owned by himself, his younger brother, Cedric, and Mr Vernon Mangrove – Ernest Pepys had thought there was not much that could surprise him when it came to either the law or human nature.

At this point, however, he was not so sure.

"This is most unusual, Miss Carlotta," he had told her, addressing her with a little more familiarity than was usually the case in his relations with clients as he had been her aunt's solicitor for some years and, before that, to her overbearing husband. Consequently, Carlotta was not a stranger to him and he felt somewhat… *protective*… of the girl. "You will be taking on quite a responsibility. And, if I may say, Mr Machin here does not seem the type of man who would require supervision of his affairs."

"Appearances are deceptive, Mr Pepys," Carlotta answered. "The façade of a house may look perfectly normal, while the interior is little more than a ruin."

She gave him her most sincere smile.

"A ruin in need of care and attention," she finished.

"But, still… to take on such a responsibility for a man so many years your senior?"

"It's the Christian thing to do, Mr Pepys. Besides, I am a woman living alone with only a female housekeeper, so the presence of a man in the house will be a reassuring one. Especially a man who is willing to work for his keep and assures me he will recognise me as his superior."

"Yes," said Pepys, looking more than a little surprised by her choice of words. "I suppose there is that to it."

He drew himself up, suddenly businesslike:

"Just the same, I am obliged to inform Mr Machin here that signing of these documents is no small matter. Once they are witnessed he will no longer have any say in certain concerns regarding him."

Pepys eyed the man with a faint whiff of contempt, unsure as to why a man, of nervous disposition or not, would entrust his affairs, and power over him, to a woman – let alone a woman so many years his junior who was neither related or – as far as he knew – romantically involved with him.

“I would also be remiss,” he continued, addressing Carlotta, “if I were not to state my concern about allowing a known felon into your household – apologies, Mr Machin, but I state no more than a simple fact.”

Pepys noted that the man was barely able to meet his eye and seemed more interested in the floral weave of his office carpet.

Which begged the question:

Why, if agreeing to such a power-of-attorney mortified him so much, was he agreeing to it in the first place?

It was Carlotta Henshall who answered his concerns:

“Machin has been acting as my live-in secretary and manservant…”

The wince of the man referred to at the mention of the description *“manservant”* was not lost upon the old solicitor.

“…and his behaviour to this point is all that I would expect of a loyal servant.”

Pepys noted another wince.

“Is it so hard to understand that I should feel compassion for a man who has paid for his past mistakes with the loss of his business, his family, and his freedom, when he confesses to me that he feels he is too nervous and demoralised to take proper care of his affairs?”

“No…” agreed Pepys thoughtfully. “When you put it like that, your kindness does you much credit.

Then, with a regretful shrug:

“Just the same, it is something I would prefer to hear from Mr Machin’s own lips before we move on to the signing and notarising of the power-of-attorney.

A silence followed and Machin seemed to have no inclination towards breaking it, when:

“Do not be rude, Machin,” Carlotta scolded in a low but pointed voice. “Mr Pepys has just asked you a question and you must answer if you wish for me to take responsibility for you.”

Still no response came from the man and Carlotta could see her solicitor was becoming – and she prayed she were wrong – suspicious. Terror took hold of her insides. Were all her best laid plans about to go wrong at this late stage?

Could it be that Machin had decided upon prison rather than the incarceration of a different nature she intended for him?

Then, just as her fear threatened to make her careless:

“I… I’ve not been myself for… for a long time now,” said Machin in a quite beaten voice. “Not since prison. The thought of having to do for myself terrifies me. “There have been traumatic… events… in my life and they… they seem to have caught up with me.”

At his side, Carlotta Henshall tried to disguise her relief that he was sticking to the script she had supplied him as his nervous eyes flicked upwards to her, cheeks as red as Vesuvius at its most molten.

“I… I’m very grateful to Miss Henshall for offering me such a chance,” he finished, returning his eyes once again to the carpet that interested him so much and had the added value of preventing him from seeing his own disgrace in the old solicitor’s eyes.

Finishing with a mumbled:

“I… I feel safe with… with Miss Machin, and I know use the authority I give her over my affairs justly.”

Carlotta reached out and gave Machin’s arm a reassuring squeeze before sharing a sympathetic look with Pepys.

Then:

“Very well,” sighed the solicitor. “I am convinced that Mr Machin is entering into this agreement of his own conscious will, subject to the usual checks and provisos.”

He waited for Carlotta to add anything further and then continued:

“Well, everything appears to be in order and I think we can now make this arrangement legal.”

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It was with a wrinkling of the nostrils, that she was brought back from her recall of the meeting that had effectively given her control of the free man who had once been an individual of no small esteem in his own right. A husband, father, businessman, and a figure of no small respect in his former community. And now a man who was at pretty much the lowest scale of the working society he had once known.

Even from her position at the crack of the partially closed door the smell reaching her was pungent and unmistakable.

It was the inimitable scent of a woman’s arousal.

Arousal stemming from a former native of Antigua as she received the attentions of a tongue she was training to the service of the English Mistress whose aunt first, and now she, had helped transform her life from the drudgery of service she had known since childhood.

Her eyes widened and her own arousal, already considerable heightened, multiplied at the sight waiting to greet her.

The foot of Hortense had been removed from his head and Granville Machin had again been allowed to raise his head from the rug and maintain a kneeling position between her legs. The sight of him in such a humble and supplicatory position before the black woman, hands clasped behind his back respectfully, that they may not take liberties with her smooth and copious ebony flesh, literally breathtaking to a woman who had visualised such sights since she had been old enough to develop fantasies of her own. Carlotta Henshall felt truly heady.

"That a good boy," she heard her housekeeper coo childish encouragement to her white chattel as his tongue lapped reverently and… *enthusiastically*… the length of her aromatic gash. "Much better. You really be pleasing Miss Hortense now an' she be pleased wi' you in return."

For a moment, a pang of jealously reared itself in Carlotta's consciousness as anger.

Why was it the gash of her black housekeeper receiving such attention?

Was it not *she* who was the master of the household and those within it?

Should she not be the one in receipt of such… *pleasure?*

But then, had it not also been she who had suggested that it should be Hortense who ensured their manservant's tongue was… *skilled*… enough before it was allowed to be used in the service of its owner?

And, anyway, Hortense was aware that it would be *only* her gash and her feet that would know the feel of Machin's tongue upon them.

Though the black housekeeper would be the one entrusted with the task of rewarding their man and his cock their release when he was deemed worthy of such an indulgence.

A revolting prospect that, just the same, did *not* revolt Carlotta so much she wished to be absent when she gave permission for that release to be given.

And besides, there was that part of her own anatomy awaiting his attention once it was trained to the task.

A part that was as virgin to her as it would, no doubt, be virgin to his tongue.

As her housekeeper pressed Machin's worshipful head into the fetid swamp his tongue was making of her black cunt, Carlotta Henshall's manipulation of her own womanhood took her over the edge with such abandon it was all she could do not to scream her voyeuristic presence to the man on his haunches between Hortense's muscular and meaty thighs.

A withholding the black housekeeper had no intention of making as the abject Machin took her over the edge into wonderland.

EPILOGUE

To the devout ladies of the parish church who visited Miss Carlotta Henshall's home during the first Tuesday of every month – confirmed and one-minded Tories all – the serving of the tea and other refreshments provided by Miss Henshall had become a ritual to which they each anticipated with relish.

Not that they would have admitted as much to each other – and certainly not to husbands who were at *least* their equals when it came both the *"natural order"* and hypocrisy; not to mention the almost psychopathic vigour with which they protected their reputations in both the local area and beyond.

Just the same, and in their more reflective and… *private*… moments, each of these position conscious and self-proclaimed *"high-minded"* women had known intimate interludes – sometimes in the company of their husbands themselves – where the object of their, admittedly narrow and stunted, sexual imaginations was Miss Carlotta Henshall's handsome and utterly attentive manservant.

The fact they had learned he was under not just the command of the woman with the unprepossessing features but, too, the unheard-of supervision of a darky housekeeper had also kept their tongues as active as their imaginations.

Even if there was not the slightest whiff of impropriety and – other than the manservant's direct supervisor and superior in the home being a woman of colour – there was never a hint of anything indicating aberrant behaviour.

Though, you may be sure, it was behaviour of such a kind the devout, social climbing, and utterly hypocritical ladies pictured as they received the attentions of either their own feverish fingers or the less than galvanised thrustings of their husband's manhood in a parody of marital sex that was seldom spontaneous and *always* predictable.

"Your servant has the air of the gentleman about him," had been observed to Carlotta on many an occasion when the servant himself was out of hearing.

"And a handsome gentleman at that," one of the more daring wives had offered upon one such observation, to smothered titters all around.

Carlotta's answer to such queries seldom varied by even a word.

"You are correct, of course," she would tell them – though not, she would hasten to add, on the subject of his looks, lest her fellow parishioners get… *ideas*."

"He was once the owner of his own business, with a respectable family and a home in Wimbledon," she had informed the gathering upon the first time of inquiry.

Going on to shock their narrow souls with:

"He has also spent time in prison for the crime of embezzlement," she had enlightened shocked faces. "Though he assures me the monies stolen from his own company were taken by a former employee who has been neither seen nor heard since."

“Just the same though, Carlotta,” chided one of the high-minded women whose belief in the scriptures and the necessity of forgiveness and redemption did not run to convicts – white-collar and handsome or not. “A felon! And living in your home too?”

“Your concern for my safety serves you much credit, Matilda,” she had smiled at the woman, laughing inside at whose safety she would have been concerned for had she known the true state of play in her home. “But, guilty or innocent, Machin is a much-changed individual since his time behind bars.”

She gave them a smile of indulgence and regret; a great lady only too willing to help and be sympathetic towards those who had fallen from grace – so long as they were willing to be useful to their betters.

“The experience made him very needy and destroyed whatever manly confidence he had. Is it so surprising he would respond to a strong female hand that provided both guidance and shelter and gave his ruined life some meaning?”

Their response was always supportive and, if the looks they gave her man when he waited upon them with their refreshments, seldom meeting their eye and made forever scarlet of cheek by the embarrassment that never seemed to lessen, envy *and* jealously were not too far from the surface either.

“I should sometimes like to apply a *‘strong female hand’* to my husband on occasion,” that same daring member of their group had said after a similar interaction.

“Really, Bernice!” had frowned the high-minded Matilda, but it was easy to see even she had entertained similar thoughts in the none too distant future.

“I say only what we all think,” offered an unrepentant Bernice. “I know my Albert would be all the better for a little female correction and you may be sure there are occasions on a daily basis when I am inclined to supply it.”

“Matilda is right,” opined another of the ladies. “You go too far.”

Matilda remained unrepentant and Carlotta wondered how much greater would the ladies’ outrage have been had they been present the evening before.

How would they have reacted to see her handsome servant, trousers and undergarments at his ankles, draped across the bare thighs of her *“darky”* housekeeper and reduced to tears by her *“strong female hand”* as it made a battlefield of his vulnerable and lily-white behind?

And how outrage would have been transformed into sheer amazement as that housekeeper had rolled him from her thighs contemptuously before sending him nose first to a corner, that he may:

“’Ave a good think abouts your behaviour and whats you going to do ‘bout it.”

It was all she could do at the time not to burst into joyous laughter as she pictured the looks upon the faces of these all too correct women.

When they had left on this occasion, a somewhat overheated Carlotta had instructed Machin to draw her a bath.

She knew the perfect way to cool down.

And the bath would come afterwards.

Her aunty, she knew for sure, would have been proud of her.

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The first time he performed analingus for her, as she had described it, Granville Machin had thought he would lose the contents of his stomach.

That his subjugation to the horrific womanhood of the equally monstrous black woman who owned it made him feel, and understandably, less than a man had made what he was expected to perform for the depraved white woman who, to all intents and purposes, was now his owner no easier.

In fact, being expected to deliver such a service to a woman of his own race seemed, for reasons he had yet to understand, even more demoralising to a soul already in deep torment. He was no longer allowed the diversion of attending to the correspondence regarding the news-letter and was used now simply for all tasks domestic. A white beast-of-burden supervised by a merciless black master.

Worse, was the fact that, despite his self-loathing and hatred and contempt for the two women treating him so shamefully, he was beginning to find sexual arousal in his unmanly subjugation!

Had he not, only yesterday, when Miss Hortense had taken him to task over some trivial offence and placed him over her thighs to chastise him, shamed himself even further by taking with him to his *"Reflection corner"* an erection as hard and enduring as any he could recall?

How had his life degenerated in such a way?

And in so short a space of time!

For by far the most humiliating of his travails was his body's response to their domination of him. Even on those surprisingly frequent times when alone in his quarters and allowed to divert himself with a book or daily paper that his situation might not drive him beyond the edge and into insanity, his thoughts were only for the time he spent between the legs of his black supervisor and the scent of her cunt. Though, and far more frequently, he dwelled on an image of Carlotta Henshall. More crucially, he recalled the intimate scents she with which she had insisted he become familiar.

Images of him with his nose thrust into her smooth and none too fragrant armpits, this as she prepared to bathe, constantly assailed him. And, if not them, those of him sniffing and tasting the pungency of her tight little slit and the even more humiliating aroma and taste of feet and toes that, though long and shapely, appalled him even more than the

other devotions she required of him. For there was nothing that brought home the abject truth of his position in her home with more force than being forced to position himself at her feet, this as she either read or took care of the household accounts, and feel the sole of her foot upon his head as his tongue showed her the debasing respect she insisted upon from him at all times.

A service he was often asked to provide for his monstrous black supervisor also.

In the space of months, the two women had turned the world upon its head and now, here in the very heart of the Empire and its capital, it was he, a formerly free white man, who was the indentured servant of a woman and her black housekeeper.

Were there any solace he could take from his situation, it was that he was at least well-fed and clothed and was allowed a roof over his head.

That and the fact the full and abject nature of his service was known to none but mistress and housekeeper.

Though he had his suspicions that some of the odious and worthless church wives who visited upon occasion had their suspicions.

He was also coming to desire the less than beauteous – at least facially – younger woman who now controlled his life with such evil and depraved ease.

He still recalled the first time he had seen his *"owner's"* undraped body.

Despite his hatred of her for what she had made, and was still making, of him, the sight of her had taken his breath from him. This as Hortense had led him to her room upon all-fours as if he were an animal in her training. Tugging him along via a thin chain lead attached to a collar he wore at all times; except, of course, for when they were expecting visitors.

For Carlotta Henshall, in all respects save that *"face of character"*, was a goddess.

A degenerate, bestial, and pitiless goddess without doubt but, bodily, one of their number, just the same.

With her coal-face black hair loose, and flowing over alabaster shoulders, she was, from the neck down anyway, a sight to make any man in full-possession of his sexuality drool.

And with curves to make a Praxiteles swoon.

Her breasts on their own were enough to make Machin sigh aloud and forget for a moment both the collar about his neck and the lead by which a fully clothed black housekeeper was leading him. But it was not until Miss Carlotta Henshall speared him with a look that seemed a mixture of supreme indifference, contempt and, yes, excitement, this before turning upon her heel and presenting him with the most perfectly formed and unblemished buttocks, that he felt his knees threaten to give way.

A feeling of lust and, yes, unwilling reverence, that was soon transformed into nausea when the monstrous Hortense led him to within inches of her glorious rear.
Self-disgust and an urge to vomit almost overwhelming him when he saw the slender fingers of Miss Carlotta Henshall take a grip either side of her perfect buttocks and ease them apart to reveal a thoroughly hairless and utterly unblemished ring.

Knowing what was expected of him, he had instinctively reared back.

Only to be jerked into position by the black monster and find his own buttocks delivered with a number of powerful slaps that took his mind from all but the pain his *"Miss Hortense"* was capable of causing him.

"Bad boy!" she had admonished him.

Before, from over her shoulder, her mistress said:

"Do not be too hard on him, Hortense."

Her housekeeper growled, unconvinced.

"All puppy's need to be taught after all, and this one is no different. Trust me, he will soon grow used to the new regime under which he serves and will prove to be just as diligent and subservient as we always expected him to be."

"'e 'ad better be, Miss Carlotta," Hortense answered. "'e ever want to feel Miss Hortense's black hand round his tiny lily-white cock any mo'."

Rather than upbraid her housekeeper for indulging in such vulgarity in her presence, Carlotta Henshall had laughed gaily at her description of Machin's manhood, before facing away once again and spreading her cheeks to reveal the orifice her *"man"* was intended to clean.

And, not seconds later, the strong hand of the black housekeeper also in charge of him, ensured that had done just that…

…As he waited in the bathroom for his female master to present her rear for cleaning, *prior* to taking the bath he would attend her in, he again felt the strength of an erection which, as much as anything else, kept him in place as the chattel of two women.

And, as the tip of his tongue made contact with his goddesses puckering anus, the thought came unbidden to him that, even if he could escape his fate, he was by no means certain he would even try!

THE END