Useless Beauty Revisited

A Revisiting of a Classic Tale From Antiquity as Seen Through a Female Dominant Perspective

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Introduction

Looking back to my time as a little girl, growing up in a tiny village in the foothills leading to the Mont St Victoire, I realise that the darkness keeping me such imaginative company in the present was no less vibrant in my unformed past; a *darkness*, I firmly believe, brought about by the advanced reading age that led me (when I could access them at such an age) to those titles of a more adult nature.

Not pornographic, I hasten to add as, without being judgmental, such material is of little or no interest to me.

No, my adolescent interest was piqued by titles from writers as diverse as Dumas and Hugo to Rachilde and Pierre Louys; each of whom could be guaranteed – if only in miniature in the case of the former duo – to populate their tales with a strong female character – characters such as "Milady" in the case of Dumas Pere and his Three Musketeers, together with La Marquise de Sade from the pen of the precocious Rachilde.

Thus was my interest in reading stories with a strong commanding heroine born and, those stories being few and far between, my re-imagining of many such tales from a female-led, so to speak, perspective. A tinkering for my own pleasure that has led to the pleasure of friends (yes, I do have them and this darkness I here give air to is but a necessary correlative to the decency I find imperative in my day-to-day life) and, now, and hopefully, to the pleasure of a wider range of readers with a passion for stories of strong, commanding and dominating, women who enjoy nothing more than to rule the lives of those men who fall into their toils.

Hence my revisiting of these classic tales from the masters of antiquity.

When we domesticate the imagination we lose the joy of life.

But, sometimes, our more private thoughts should *not* be acted upon and must remain either written or perceived.

But *always* as *imagination.*

Sandrine Bessancort
Honfleur
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Useless Beauty Revisited

FROM A GUY DE MAUPASSANT TALE

RE-IMAGINED
BY
SANDRINE BESSANCORT

I

About half-past five one afternoon at the end of June when the sun was shining warm and bright into the large courtyard, a very elegant Victoria with two immaculately groomed black horses drew up in front of a mansion almost at that exact moment the Comtesse de Mascaret came down the steps and her husband, who was coming home, appeared from the opposite direction.

The Comte, who remained a handsome man for whom romantic dalliances outside of his alliance with the Comtesse were not difficult to arrange, stopped for a few moments to look at his wife and turned rather pale, for the Comtesse, though he had raised her by marriage from relatively humble beginnings, was very beautiful, graceful and distinguished looking and again, after a period of some neglect on his part, seemed to be exerting an old fascination for him once again.

With her long oval face, her complexion like yellow ivory, her large gray eyes and her black hair once again seeming to entrance him, she got into her carriage without sparing him so much as a glance and appeared not to have noticed the presence of her husband. Not in the slightest. Thus, without effort, she produced in him those same violently sexual thoughts that had been constant until the necessary familiarity of marriage had taken the edge from his passion and provoked an interregnum during which he felt free to indulge in other diversions.

An interregnum that had ended, it seemed, almost from the moment she stopped questioning him on the subject of his reduced passion in respect of her and began to treat him with the same matter-of-fact and dismissive nonchalance – though, for her sake, his somewhat dark and vengeful nature prayed; thoughts running to the actresses of the Folies Bergere and others of their sex with whom he had made recent acquaintance; not *exactly* the same.

Thoughts of recent conquests fresh and of a mind to make another of a more familiar and long-standing acquaintance, his eyes narrowed as his prey appeared ready to make off somewhere.

“You are going for a drive?” he asked with that furious jealousy of old to which his own actions had given him no right in the present and which had been re-animated the moment her dismissal of him as a sexual force in her life had ensured his former passion for her had resumed once again.

She merely replied disdainfully, barely inclining her head towards him:

“On this occasion you may believe what your eyes tell you.”

He swallowed back the somewhat *heated* reply that had risen to his lips and wondered what the devil she could mean by such a remark, the latest of many such cryptic and inscrutable utterances she had taken to directing his way recently.

“In the Bois de Boulogne?”

“Most probably.”

“May I come with you?” he heard himself ask, to his own incredulity, pointless trips made with no end in mind of a kind not to his taste.

“The carriage belongs to you,” she answered simply, his uncharacteristic request not seeming to throw her out of step.

Bristling at her indifference and not trusting himself to say more at that point, he got in and sat down by his wife's side and said:

“Bois de Boulogne.”

The footman jumped up beside the coachman, and the horses as usual pranced and tossed their heads until they were in the street and husband and wife were sat side by side without speaking.

He thinking how to begin a conversation.

She maintaining such an obstinately hard look that he did not venture to make the attempt.

At last, however, he cunningly and *accidentally*, as it were, touched the Comtesse's gloved hand with his own.

The alacrity with which she drew her arm away; along with a movement that could not have expressed her disgust more certainly; left him thoughtful and, in spite of his usual authoritative and despotic character, he said:

“Gabrielle?”

“What do you want?”

“I think you are looking adorable.”

She did not reply, but remained lying back in the carriage, looking like an irritated queen.

By that time they were driving up the Champs Elysees, toward the Arc de Triomphe and that immense monument, at the end of the long avenue, raised its colossal arch against the red sky and the sun seemed to be descending directly onto the structure itself to shower fiery dust on it from the sky. The stream of carriages, with dashes of sunlight reflected in the silver trappings of the harness and the glass of the lamps, flowed on in a double current toward the town and toward the Bois. The whole of life, it seemed, was reflected in the scene.

A scene, in short, fit to stage the most fiery, tragic or… *perverse*… romance - and one that went virtually unacknowledged by the principals whose story we follow.

The Comte de Mascaret continued:

“My dear Gabrielle!”

Unable to control herself any longer, she replied in an exasperated voice:

“Oh! do leave me in peace, pray!” she half-cried, still not deigning him with a look, even in temper. “Am I not even allowed to have my carriage to myself now.”

He pretended not to hear her and continued:

“You must believe me when I tell you, that never have you looked so pretty as you do to-day.”

Her patience had come to an end, and she turned her face to his for the first time to reply with irrepressible anger:

“And I tell *you*, that you do not have the right to notice it. Far less feel empowered to actually offer comment upon a subject of such an intimate kind.”

Her outrage, which, had he looked carefully - *very* carefully, for the Comte was not renowned for his powers of observation – may well have led him to suspect there was at least *some* female subterfuge at work, was on the rise once again as she finished:

“And to *me!* Of *all* people!”

“Gabrielle, you are acting wilfully. We remain man and wife still and I try only to…”

“I know *exactly* what it is for which you *‘try only’,*” she almost spat over his attempt to placate her, stilling his attempted protestation in its infancy. “It is entirely typical of your nature that once you have discarded something or someone you no longer… *want*… that your desire for whatever that object may be is restored the very moment it no longer *wants* you.”

At this the Comte could only remain silent; even he being not so self-deluding that he could not recognise the truth of her observation in his regard as she continued:

“You are no longer a man I know or wish to know and I tell you once more, that I will never have anything to do with you in… *that*… way again.”

The words intended to break his silence had barely reached his throat when she underlined her intent:

“Never!”

Though she had indeed sworn as much to him, the Comte, whose upbringing could not be said to have made him mindful of such intentions on the part of others – especially those less exalted in either rank or class; just as she had been until raised by marriage to him - was decidedly puzzled. As well as more than a little angry. He had, after all, convinced himself that no more than a warm disposition towards her on his part and some few words of less than sincere contrition would be all that were required to close the distance between them.

Until such time, of course, that he was of a mind to widen it once again.

The elements of bafflement and temper, when mixed, ensuring his violent nature would gain the upper hand.

“What do you mean by that?” he exclaimed in a tone that betrayed more of the brutal master with whom the servants had become familiar than the lover once similarly well-known to her.

She replied in a low but no less dangerous voice; low that the servants might not hear amid the deafening noise of the wheels but loud enough that *he* could not mistake her intent:

“What do I mean by that? You, of all people ask a question that would appear obvious to the most simple of dullards?”

He bit back on anger only his restored passion for his wife held in check.

“But of course,” she mocked, “now I recognize you again! You are the husband who grew tired of me and ensured I sought my… pleasures… elsewhere.”

This took a few moments to sink in – the Comte, as we have said, being somewhat unobservant and, in common with most people for whom life has not just been presented on a plate but prepared by the most diligent of cooks, slow on the uptake in regard of the feelings and the words with which they were expressed of others.

This time, however, what had been said, and one word in particular, *did* penetrate.

Finally.

“What?” he exploded, eyes taking in both footman and driver to make sure their words were not being overheard and only trusting himself to reply when he assured himself their conversation was made secret by the sound of wheels over earth and the usual and competing noises of a Victoria in motion.

His voice when he spoke next was equally as low as that of his wife and equally, if not more, dangerous:

“What exactly, Madame, do you mean by: *‘pleasures’*?

His manner, dangerous or otherwise, seemed not to concern her in the slightest.

“Do you want me to tell everything?” she asked, eyes scornful of his attempt to intimidate.

“Unless you wish it wrung from your faithless little neck,” he assured her.

Nothing could have underlined her lack of fear for the man next to her more than the tinkling and musical little laugh with which she derided his threat.

“But surely you do not wish to hear of my… *adventures*,” she chided him. “A man of your position? It must be obvious, even to you, that the best kept secrets are those trusted to the fewest confidantes. Think of the face you would lose were it to somehow become common knowledge and that society you keep and hold so dear were to discover the *society* kept and enjoyed by your wife.”

Again that musical and mocking laugh made common cause with the clatter of the Victoria to add a more… infuriating… sound to those already reverberating against his eardrums.

A din that could not prevent him from hearing the blood as it started to boil in his veins.

“Why,” she went on, turning her face from him with a smirk of contempt, “you would be scarcely more than a laughing stock to all those admiring jackasses you call friends and the little floozies of the stage who reveal their undergarments for no more than a paltry coin. Those same *floozies* you enjoy… *impressing*… so much.”

Boiling blood had turned him crimson with surprise and anger and he growled between his closed teeth:

“I warn you, Gabrielle,” he spoke fiercely into her ear, “you will push *too* far.”

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, a handsome man, a nobleman; a one-time roué and man of the world, who yet passed as a perfect husband and an excellent father despite the return to old ways that had been the beginning of the distance between them; and now, for the first time since they had started their outing, she turned toward him and looked him full in the face:

“You think you can threaten me?”

His expression told her he considered this a question of such infinite stupidity it was beneath a response.

“How?” she pressed. “What exactly is it that the big and powerful Monsieur le Comte can do to the wife of his children he has neglected in order to command the favours of common showgirls.”

It was the second time she had mentioned his dalliances with these women of the boards and his surprise that she could somehow have been aware of it showed upon her face.

“Really, sir!” she exclaimed. “You surely could not have believed word would not get back to me on the subject when you were flouting your dalliances in the face of Paris itself.”

She shook her head and her disgust could not be mistaken though, if it had, her next words on the subject would have dispelled all ambiguity:

“You are an even bigger ass than I took you for.”

Inhaling deeply at this, that he may control the anger he knew could become ungovernable and result in unforeseen and regrettable actions, the Comte waited, knowing as he did that she was about to supply him an answer to her first question.

It was not long in coming:

“But let us return to your idle and empty threats, sir,” she began. “let us consider that I will be the one damaged by what is revealed should you force me into the arms of those muck-rakers who like nothing better than to reveal to the unwashed that the lives of their so-called betters are just as squalid and immoral as their own?”

She seemed to ponder her own question:

“Perhaps I will,” she conceded to herself with a self-sacrificing nod of the head.

Then with more certitude.

“Yes. That will, without doubt, be the case,” she continued, “and I am certain the way in which I am damaged will carry with it a lasting taint.”

Again favouring him with a look, she shrugged her narrow and perfectly formed shoulders:

“So be it,” she said fatalistically. “Life cannot be navigated from beginning to end without the encountering of those uncharted and fierce waters we must brave if we wish to experience others of a more familiar and more calming countenance.”

Her eyes as they held his, unblinkingly, held nothing less than malice:

“The question to be asked, however, is if my proud and faithless husband who withdrew affection from his wife for no more moral a reason than that she was no longer… *fresh*… to him can bear the ignominy of his affairs being made public to all and the sly and knowing looks always inspired the moment the back of the cuckold is turned from such citizens of repute.”

The deep breaths of air he had sucked into his lungs purely as a means of forestalling his temper were taken still but, now, had more in common with that reaction with which we greet shock.

Her words, and, again, *one* in particular, had temporarily stunned his capacity for rational thought and, necessarily, stilled his tongue.

“There”” she announced, manner triumphant. “I have said it. Now you may lose that much feared temper of yours with me.”

Her next words were almost a challenge:

“If you dare!”

At that moment the Comte’s *“much feared temper”* was playing a distant second-fiddle to the outrage, shock and bemusement, preoccupying the forefront of his thought processes – though such a state of affairs would not hold sway for long and the wife seated next to him was already braced for the coming explosion.

“Cuckold?” he asked teeth already beginning to clench as the simple repetition of her description of him began to reinstate his anger; again turning to eye the footman before taking in the equally oblivious driver, convinced that were he to see the slightest evidence either one had heard the insult his wife had just flung in his face he should have taken a pistol to both on the moment of their return to the mansion.

“You heard correctly, *Monsieur le Comte*,” she smirked. “The word you hope did not leave my lips is exactly the word that did and you now have some idea of the feelings inspired by a husband and father who cheats from the other side of the equation.”

“G-Gabrielle,” he began, as hesitant and unsure of himself as she had yet to see him, despite the anger she could see he wished no more than to vent. “Tell me you are not serious and say such a despicable thing only to wound.”

The Comtesse was already shaking the head that, mysteriously, was becoming to him more by the second as captivating as it was maddening.

“Were I to do so I should be making myself a liar as well as a cheat and I consider myself to have fallen far enough thank you.”

“But…”

“The horns are upon you, Monsieur le Comte,” she said, not waiting for him to finish, “and, now I have secured them in place they will remain there forever.”

Her voice became truly spiteful and for the first time he suspected that what he had taken as her own indifference to his… *philandering*… could well be hatred.

“I would,” she told him, “not take back those marks of your disgrace even if it were possible for me to do so. For *that* is my triumph and all that see them – if such proves to be your wish - will know who placed them upon you and why.”

Eyes bereft of the love that had once softened them whenever they fell upon him were nothing less than disdainful:

“Your wife is now familiar to others,” she told him. “And in ways that go far beyond those intimacies you assured your young and naïve bride were what lovemaking between a man and a woman was all about. You are my cuckold, *Monsieur le Comte*, and it is entirely up to you whether the knowledge of your disgrace remains between myself and the men who have replaced you or becomes the gossip of tavern revellers, tittering laundry-women and the, so-called, *actresses*, who appear to have won your favour recently.”

A mist formed before his eyes and he made a slight sideways movement towards her, sure he must fling her body from the coach to be crushed beneath its wheels for the hearing of words no man of his rank and quality should ever have to hear.

No man, of any kind, *anywhere*, in fact.

Miraculously, she neither moved away nor flinched, but simply stared into eyes becoming reddened with rage and raised her chin, defiantly.

“Go ahead, *Monsieur le Comte*, strike the mother of your children in public and give the upright citizens still more reason to understand why she made you her cuckold alongside the knowledge I will supply them of your pathetic performance in the marital bed.”

Already in a condition of some astonishment, he started at this revelation that she could possibly have found him wanting in such a way; even if she had mentioned the possibility not more than a few sentences prior to this recounting of his deficiencies.

“What?” she laughed in his face. “Did you seriously believe me fulfilled by the pitiful efforts those of my new lovers have placed in such miserable perspective? Would for your reputation that I remained a woman who still knew only one man sexually.”

She gave out with a scornful laugh but it was her emphasis on the plural, *'lovers'*, that turned hot to molten so that for one moment she thought he might truly lay hands upon her, his fists clenching and eyes attempting to bulge free from outraged sockets as he fought the urge.

Then, finally:

"Stop the coach!" he cried at the top of his voice.

The driver looked back, not quite comprehending over the din of hooves and wheels.

"Dunderhead! Do I not make myself plain? Stop!"

Rising up and, with one last look of disgust at his wife, he leapt from the Victoria before the driver had even reined it to a stop.

"I go to my club," he called over his shoulder, already moving away at pace. "Take *Madame* la Comtesse wherever she wishes.

As he moved away, the Comtesse assured herself she heard him mutter:

"To the bottom of the Seine if she can be persuaded."

Whether he had muttered the words or not it pleased her to think so and her smile was that of a woman who had found a new avenue of meaning in her life.

And, along with it, the strength to take the life of her husband in hand.

And with an iron grip that would ensure it *never* escaped her grasp.

II

He was looking into her eyes and was already shaking with rage as he said in a low voice:

“You are mad.”

“Not mad, husband, but…”

“Do not dare address me in such a way,” he hissed. “It is a right you have forfeited.”

Her reaction to this was one of supreme unconcern.

“As you wish, *Monsieur le Comte*,” she said and her tone, incredibly to his infuriated ears, appeared gay. “But you should be aware that I no longer intend to be the victim of the hateful penalty of maternity which you have inflicted on me for eleven years! All the restrictions and responsibilities of which have been made mine while you used the freedom of my parental diversion to return to those carefree days of thoughtless fornication you doubtless loved at the time and of which you have felt unjustly deprived since. In short, you would do well to consider the allegory of goose and gander. It is my wish to take my place in society as I have the right to do, as all women have the right to do.”

“To do *what*?” he exploded, knowing exactly to what she alluded before throwing up his arms at her silence. “As the almighty is my witness, I do not understand you. What, exactly, is it that you intend to do as you *‘have the right to do’*?”

“That,” she told him triumphantly, amusement almost as great as the pleasure she was both taking and anticipating from placing her collar upon his neck, “is something I scarce believe you cannot divine for yourself and something no respectable woman, such as myself, would speak of to a husband.”

She appeared to start at something.

“But no, that is not correct. Did I not hear you say, but a few seconds ago, that I had forfeited such a right?”

The Comte bit into his lip violently that the pain may bring something resembling order to the thoughts she was scattering to the winds with such ease.

“Then, that being the condition between us,” she went on, “I see no reason why, in the privacy of this room and between us two, I should not inform you of just what it is I intend to do and, more importantly, have *already* done.”

Still chomping down upon his lip, though less violently now, the Comte stayed silent.

“Shall I do that… *Monsieur le Comte*?”

There came no response and now it was he who kept his eyes averted from her; albeit for reasons entirely different to those predicating her earlier and outwardly similar affectations of indifference.

“You stay silent but I note that you do not move,” she observed, feeling her power over this man, the very same specimen of manhood she would once have thought twice about confronting on a matter as trifling as some household difference, growing with each forward step she took and each subsequent and grudging concession of ground she forced from him.

“I can only believe that my husband – apologies – my *former* husband, the Comte, wishes to hear of the exploits of his wife – apologies once again – his *former* wife, the Comtesse, with men endowed by nature with both the knowledge and the physical attributes necessary to give a woman as good as they get from her and more."

Still he remained silent and the Comtesse sensed she was winning their battle, knew it, in fact, and this first taste of supremacy over him both empowered and emboldened her to take make further inroads upon the masculinity she was in the process of besieging.

Drawing her skirts up her legs to a point past the calf, perfectly formed contours clad in the finest of silk stockings that clung to her creamy skin as if they too were as obsessed as the suddenly transfixed and bereft of breath Comte, she pointed the toe of a slim boot that laced its way to a point beyond a slender ankle at him and delivered him a look so lewd he thought he must ravish her there and then.

“Cuckold” nonsense or otherwise.

“Could it be that my husband again lusts for the wife he shunned?” she teased. “Does he wish again to know the softness of her lips against his and the swell of her breasts against his manly chest? Is he ready once again to try and fill the cunny made more accommodating by his insistence upon motherhood and the presence of other, more… *impressive*… lovers?”

“Gabrielle…” he began, part warning, part protest.

“And knowing,” she went on over him, convinced he had neither the will nor the strength to prevent her, “that being certain to prove unfit for the task, that he must seek to provide his wife with the satisfaction she deserves with a different and more… *reverent*… part of his anatomy.”

“Gabrielle, you will push me too far,” he warned her again, but in such an indecisive manner that she suddenly knew to her marrow that there was no set limit to just how far she could push him if pushing him was her intention.

It was.

Even now, it suddenly occurred to her as his eyes fixated upon the delightful limbs she had revealed to him, the masterful man of whom she had once lived in awe was picturing himself with his head between her legs for the very first time as that more *“reverent part of his anatomy”* paid homage to the victory she had secured over him.

It was, put simply, she told herself: *delicious!*

She raced on, almost out of control herself now as feelings – so different from those inspired by the more every day, if no less impressive, efforts of her lovers – made passage from head to womanhood and back again with a strength made all the more unanswerable for stemming from so perverse a source as the control she was gaining over the father of her children.

"Or is it," she went on, just as if she had taken a small pause between words to take in necessary air and he had not spoken at all, "that my *former* husband is one of those men, of whom I hear tell, that takes a pleasure of some kind from hearing how others have succeeded where he has failed?"

Her beautiful face was transfigured by an emotion he had never thought to see upon it – and certainly not directed at him.

Malice.

Of the most pure and unmistakable kind as she added:

"And succeeded in ways to which no woman of passion can resist a need to return."

"In heaven's name, Gabrielle!"

"Is that what you wish? To hear how the cocks of other men, better qualified by nature and sensitivity to provide your wife with the sense of being… *filled*… went about that work of which you are not capable? Is that the kind of cuckold you intend to be for me, *Monsieur le Comte*? Do not be bashful. You have only to ask and you may find me indulgent. From what I have learned of the condition you would not be the first man with horns to learn to take his pleasure from that same place in which the wife has received her own."

"You…" he began, arms spread wide to accompany the attempt of his thoughts to find words powerful enough to reflect his outrage at those words of her own and what they described.

Rising to his feet he turned his back upon her, in part to let her see the disgust and contempt her words and behaviour invoked in him but also that he might hide the excitement her lewd actions and shapely legs had provoked at his groin.

"You are quite… quite disgusting."

Her response was to give him a mock bow from the neck down, as if thanking him for a compliment of everyday male gallantry, utterly unmoved by the distaste of the expression he had aimed in her direction and, in fact, appearing to take much enjoyment from having earned such a look from him as that she saw him throw back over his shoulder towards her.

"Where have you learned to speak in such a depraved fashion?" he continued, pricked by the lack of effect his disapproval appeared to be having upon her. "Those actresses you mock for revealing their undergarments to a theatre of men would sooner have their teeth yanked from their heads than be caught with language of such a kind upon their lips. With degenerates of which kind do you associate that such madness can make a home in your thoughts?"

At this description of her mental condition, a sly look of his own transformed his features as he was struck by a thought he sensed could not only penetrate past her armour but see it dispensed with altogether.

It was, after all, he told himself, a man's world and he, even she would be forced to acknowledge, was a man.

And, within that *"man's world"*, were a whole host of checks and balances by which the more hysterical sex could be called to account when its behaviour became *too* unbearable.

Having armed himself with this reminder of her vulnerability, his manner again grew confident and he felt himself the master of the situation once more.

For as long as it might last.

"Or is it," he went on, drawing himself up magisterially, "that your reason deserts you and I must, like the concerned husband I am, be forced to resort to… *medicine*… to effect a cure for your perversion?"

What he took as high subtlety and the euphemism, in this sense, of *"medicine"* was in reality no more than a clumsy attempt to make her back down with a threat of the asylum to which, as a husband, it was certainly within his power to commit her. He would not, after all, be the first to rid himself of an inconvenient spouse in such a manner. Precedents for such a course of behaviour were not exactly thin on the ground.

It was a threat and a precedent, just the same, that fetched laughter bubbling up into her throat and past the lips he found so maddeningly inviting once again despite her current usage of him.

The astonishment such a dismissive reaction to his threat evoked in him again sent his jaw in a descent towards the Persian rug upon which he was standing and her seat was placed; knowing that at one time such a threat would, had it been necessary, have reduced her to tears of terror and invoked remorse for whatever her sin had been.

At one time!

Now it only served to underline the weakness of the man she had allowed to rule her for so long.

Too long.

"You posturing fool!" she scolded him. "Do you truly believe you are the only man of power in Paris? Believe me, there are those with influence enough to cause even you irreparable damage and a number of them are equally as besotted with the charms of your wife as you seem to be now they have been denied you."

To the Comte, who knew only his own pain and the reflection of self-justification, it was as if the spirit of a vengeful demon had invaded the body of his beautiful and previously biddable wife and even as his outrage grew so did his discomfort with this new incarnation who seemed oblivious to each tack he took with her; whether it be threatening or conciliatory.

" '*Resort to medicine,'* indeed," she snorted. *"That*," she went on, "would be an even greater mistake than deserting me."

The Comte's silence was indicative of his ineffectual attempt to bully and encouraged her to even greater insult:

"Though no greater than the mistake you made in mistreating me in the first place. That same mistake that showed you for the weak person you truly are and led to my discovery of real… *pleasure*… and real… *men.*"

His anger came rushing to the surface once again, though, compelled as it was more by an inability to act or find a defence against her, the edge had been dulled and was no longer guaranteed to evoke in her that same response that had once ensured to have her cowering before him.

This unaccustomed impotency lending his anger a quality that smacked less of intimidator than… *petitioner*.

"What I did," he protested, entirely too stupid or unused to justifying himself that he could realise he was about to use the oldest defence known to husband's who had strayed, "was no more than act upon the impulses instinctive to men everywhere and preordained by nature itself. What *you* describe to me – and I am yet to be convinced a woman as… *correct*… as you could possibly be speaking truly – is… *unnatural*."

La Comtesse did *not* look impressed.

"You are a parent as well as a woman and to act in such a way – if you truly have – would be not only an insult to your children and your sex but to the great mother of nature herself."

Pronouncing himself pleased with both his reasoning and his articulacy, the Comte waited for her to respond with much faith in the power of his argument to persuade.

It was, as we might expect at this point, not to be so.

If he had hoped a reminder of such a kind in regard of her past, and exemplary, behaviour would shame her from this present course she seemed intent upon taking – exemplary behaviour from before even that time when he had made her a Comtesse over the objections of his family - then the look staring back at him that was unperturbed and, he could describe it to himself in no other way, *contemptuous*, told him such optimism had been wholly misplaced.

A disappointment prompting him to take another tack:

"You are not an entirely stupid person, Gabrielle and, knowing something of me as you do, I am sure you will soon desist from this game you play before the patience and restraint I have shown you so far is taken beyond civilised boundaries. Boundaries that, as you are all too aware, do not stretch *too* far towards the horizon."

Needing some moments to collect and organise his own thoughts, he considered the moment opportune to take a few moments to gauge the effect upon her of his remarks.

An effect that required much in the way of intuitive and prescient thought; both of which qualities we have already marked as being almost completely absent from le Comte's mental capacities.

Then, finally, seeing little or, more precisely, nothing, in the way of either fear or contriteness in her manner he allowed his tone to become darker and even more menacing:

"I am a man, Gabrielle. With all the passion, pride and superior strength of my sex when compared to your own. You must think forward to what can be the consequences of taking these constituents to their breaking point before they reach that crisis at which no concession or pleading on your part will take back that which your own wilfulness and stupidity has provoked."

The *contempt* he had described to himself earlier had come to full flower upon the face that had, he could do no less than admit to himself, become even more challenging and delectable to him than it had upon their first meeting when he knew that he must possess this creature for himself or perish in the attempt.

For now something extra had been inserted into that mix of beauty and form. Something extra that had re-awakened his passion for her in a way that cast a shadow over the intensity of its first incarnation. Where before there had been virgin territory awaiting only the planting of a flag denoting its conquest by a man bold enough to claim it as his own, now had emerged a kingdom in its own right in which she reigned as a queen with power enough to either grant or decline citizenship and, more importantly, to *use* those she deemed worthy of inclusion to this matriarchal realm for her own satisfaction.

Why, he asked himself, knowing before his thoughts had even framed the question that there would be no reply forthcoming, and when this novel development was proving so discomfiting to him, did he find this new Gabrielle so… *irresistible*?

"Listen to you!" scoffed the queen who awaited only the final confirmation of her investiture. "An infant who believes the embryonic behaviour that proved enough to win him primacy over his fellow pupils in the Lyceum yard must still prove sufficient to give him precedence over the adults who populate his maturity."

"Mark my words, Gabrielle, you…"

"No!" she cried over his feeble attempt at assertion, this with a vehemence and authority he had neither heard nor seen from her before and which had the effect of drawing him up short in a state of some confusion even as his eyes continued to drink in her form.

"No?"

The Comte could not say for certain at this point whether his perplexity was caused by her seeming assumption of the authority he had himself once wielded in their one-sided partnership, or the uncharacteristic way his neck seemed to bend so readily before an onslaught he would have one time swept away as if it were no more than an irritating and persistent insect.

Given the somewhat feeble power of his faculties for reasoning of such a kind, we must not find ourselves surprised that it did not occur to him that the latter could only have been provoked by the former and the only reason he had not responded to her in such a way before was down to that simple reason she had not seen fit to show him that which she had not known she possessed herself until now.

It had though, as he was about to discover, occurred to the Comtesse he had ignored and cheated upon and for whom his previous feelings of lust and attachment had returned.

With a vengeance.

“From now on, and if you wish to avoid the scandal that will ruin forever your own belief in your much vaunted manhood as well as that of the public beyond the doors of this mansion, *you* will mark *my* words.”

“What?” he responded, almost tempted to laugh at such a preposterous state-of-affairs between them; despite the recognition of his own thoughts in regard of her new and, yes, *imperious* demeanour. “What fresh nonsense do your treacherous lips spout at me now? Have you finally taken to speaking a moment before you think?”

He was no classicist, she knew, and this last from de la Bruyere was no more than a quote he had come across somewhere or other and consigned, parrot-fashion, to his memory that it might be brought out to impress at timely intervals - though even had it been the result of a deep-seated culture and learning its effect upon her would have been no more inspiring.

“I have *seen* you now, *Monsieur le Comte*,” she told him. “And, once seen, there can be no return for you to those days earlier in our… *romance*…” she virtually spat the word, “when the camouflage of masculinity under which you cloaked yourself so successfully masked the weak and needy little man taking refuge beneath its disguise.”

The Comte found himself fighting a sudden certainty that he was no match for either her new indomitability and the reasoning with which she presented it - though he did not describe his retreat in such a way to himself - and rose from the chair to which he had returned and turned for the door.

“This is at an end,” he told her while on the move, back turned to what he suspected was a smirk that would make him wish to throttle her slender neck and be all the more disconcerting for his not being able to see such a course of retribution through; knowing that he would squeeze, eyes blazing into hers, until, suddenly, his fingers lost all strength and he would be compelled to release his grip and have her both contempt and his own impotence magnified.

A thousandfold!

"I would… *advise…* you to stay," he heard her calm and even voice from behind him and, for a moment, wondered – hoped – she had relented and would now desist from this game she was playing.

It being necessary – and familiar to all of you, of whatever class and station, who know something of marital discord – for him to dress his need to stay by professing a desire to do the exact opposite. The union of two souls being, after all, even in its most perfect consummation, a battle. Loving or otherwise. Human nature always ensuring, to one degree or another, a need for pre-eminence of some kind.

In no matter how small and insignificant a way.

"I am leaving. I have given you more than enough opportunity to speak."

"And I shall speak more," she assured him in such a tone of voice he could not mistake the threat lurking behind it. "Open that door and walk through it and I shall raise my voice so that my maid outside may hear."

At this he turned back to face her.

"You know as well as I how the servants gossip about their masters and how swiftly such gossip becomes the common knowledge that, true or false, can tear a reputation to shreds."

Her smile as she concluded could not be said to be compassionate in nature:

"Whether that reputation be deserved or… *not*."

Being that her earlier description of him had been wholly accurate and he was terrified to the point of obsession on the subject of scandal and the battlefield it could make of his life – a *losing* field – she was not surprised in the slightest to have seen her attempt at intimidation prove entirely successful and fetch him up short a few paces from the door by which he intended to escape her presence.

And with every tribute to the ascendancy she was beginning to wield over this man who, at the beginning of their years together, had commanded respect to go along with her obedience, she felt herself grow more and more contemptuous of him.

"You will come back here and sit down," she commanded.

"Commanded?" she thought to herself, surprise vying with arousal.

But her *request*, she knew, could be considered as no less – even to one of his enduring and monumental ego.

She had, in effect, just given him, the first direct order of their eleven years together and the realisation that she had done so, and to a man some eight years her senior and a social superior by birth, set a fire raging of a… *different*… kind to that sparked by the lovers she had thrown in his face who were, in no wise, the figments of her imagination devised to punish him he believed them to be.

Though it was her intent for their existence to do just that.

Remarkably, as much to her as him, the Comte turned back and resumed his seat opposite her; though she told herself it was only the prospect of a softening of some kind on her part that prompted his obedience.

“Though it runs against your nature,” she told him when they were across from each other, aware of the hungry way in which his eyes devoured the decolletage that had once been his for the taking and had again become the temptation – even more so perhaps – that it had once been now access to it had been denied, “and if you value the life you currently lead, you must listen to me now and not interrupt.

Comporting himself as best he could before his newly assertive spouse, the Comte appeared on the verge of a rejoinder but, again to her surprise and delight, thought better of it and decided to hear what she had to say first.

It would be but the first, not that he was to know it, of the concessions he would be making to his wife in the future.

“If, after hearing what I have to say,” she continued, “you wish to live with the consequences of a scandal there will be nothing left for us to do but separate. But, you must be warned, should you feel you lack the necessary strength to face up to the ruin that would be made of your life and decide to accept the offer I intend to make, things will change between us in a way that is quite beyond your rather limited imagination as it currently stands and they will remain that way.”

This was, as you must already have surmised, not what the Comte had been either expecting or hoping to hear.

With a deep sigh, representative of the concession his subconscious was already making in regard of his inability to live with the circumstances should they separate, he heard himself utter:

“Just say what it is you wish to say and have done with it, Gabrielle,” he hissed at her, though he was unable to maintain contact with her eyes and there was beginning to be that about him which, strangely enough for a man of his indulged background and keen regard for his own position, smacked of pre-eminence becoming something more akin to… *resignation*.

It seemed now to the exultant woman that with her every action and every word there followed from him a retreat that, while grudging, remained a concession just the same.

A thrill in itself.

The knowledge *she* was the one forcing his unwilling carcass to give ground before her kept stoked that fire below decks we have already remarked upon and - if she had needed such motivation to continue what she, with her words and insults had started and could not now turn back - supplied her all the motivation she needed to see her intention in respect of him through to a conclusion.

“Let me begin by saying that I did not always feel towards you the antipathy your weakness and lack of manhood provoke in me now and have found thrown into stark relief by the attentions of more powerful and more… *potent*… men.”

A pulse throbbed at his temple as she finished:

“*Real* men.”

Before he knew it, and despite his fearful if unspoken acknowledgement of what the scandal she could bring down on them both would mean for him, he seized her arm and squeezed it:

“I will not allow you to talk to me like that much longer.”

A vein throbbed in his neck as he waited for a response that did not come.

“Understand?”

She was entirely unperturbed and held him with her magnificent and growingly autocratic eyes.

For what seemed an eternity to both, though one took more pleasure from the duration than the other, they remained locked to each other: she, by the wrist imprisoned in his hand; he by the unblinking look with which her eyes speared him upon his skin making contact with her own.

Eyes that seemed to him so mesmeric he asked himself how he could ever have missed such a quality in them and ensured he found himself lowering his own and releasing his grip.

There were a few moments of silence as she regarded him in his new and impotent misery before:

“Not only will you allow me to talk to you in such a way,” she assured him, resuming at exactly that point where she had left off, confidence in her ability to handle and manage the beast she had been misguided enough to love running now at levels she would once have believed impossible, “but, if you wish the life you know and treasure so much to continue – at least in some kind of recognisable form - you will, from this moment on, look to me as the decision-maker in our marriage and abide by any decisions I see right and fit to make reach.”

His eyes came up again:

“Have you gone entirely insane, Gabrielle?”

The slap she delivered him across the cheek was the first such slap she had delivered to another traveller of flesh and blood in her life, childhood included, and shocked her almost as much as it shocked the Comte.

Almost.

Open-mouthed from the sheer unexpectedness of such a physical rebuke – and from such a source – he could only stare across to her.

“That is right,” she spat. “Your wife has just slapped you. But you must not be too surprised. She has, after all, only corrected your behaviour in a way appropriate to the man-child you are and have been since your majority.”

Still reeling from the shock of what had just occurred, the Comte sat in silence.

“But what kind of reaction is this?” she mocked. “The woman you cast to the side almost from the moment she had taken the vows binding herself to you and placed herself in your power, the very same devoted wife and mother of your children of whom you were jealous - despite your preference for others of my sex - and kept shut up here that others might not be tempted by a wife remarked upon in drawing-rooms and in the newspapers as one of the most beautiful women in Paris, has just slapped your face as if you were no more to her than an impudent child in need of correction.”

He remained too stunned to respond.

“Surely you cannot let such an outrage pass?”

The face turned towards her was a temptation to laughter but she fought the urge – she did, after all, wish to experience her domination of him while alive and the objective she had in mind would be annihilated in its infancy should she push too far *too* soon.

He was not, she told herself, yet… *ripe*… for such unfettered ridicule.

La Comtesse contented herself with another demand, followed by a reminder and then one more demand still:

“Well?” she spat, eyes blazing into his with a passion he was seeing for the first time and led him to sense, again, that he would prove no match for it. “A woman, your *wife*, has rebuked you as if you were no more than a disobedient infant or, worse, her servant. What are you going to do?”

The Comte, it is not too difficult to imagine, was in a land of which he had neither experience nor knowledge.

Used to the deference of retainers and social climbers for whom his favour was necessary to either maintain body and soul or climb to a point on the social ladder his patronage alone could make possible, such treatment at the hands of others was not something for which he had a defence to hand.

And especially when that treatment was delivered from the dainty hand of a member of the fair-sex who, moreover, just happened to be his wife and the mother, as previously noted, of his three children.

It was, however, a land with which he would soon be far more familiar.

“Look at you!” she hissed, mindful enough of the maid on the other side of the, thankfully, solid doors to keep her voice low; even as she made sure it lost nothing in the way of venom.

“Gabrielle, I.”

“You are contemptible. All that I took in you for strength and principle was no more than the vinaigrette disguising the blandness of lettuce. Not wanting me for yourself, you tried everything you could think of to keep admirers from me and hit upon the abominable idea of making me spend my life in a constant state of motherhood. Persisting with that ploy until the time arrived when I should disgust every man and a wreck was made of the beauty you had, anyhow, already rendered useless.”

In a state of increasing agitation that was compounded by his complete inability to fashion a defence with which to shield himself from her barbs, he held his hands out before him in a gesture that, far from defence, could only be taken by the foe leading the assault as, if not surrender, an attempt at placation.

As anyone with the slightest understanding of the female mind or experience of marriage itself is no doubt already aware, this was exactly the approach most unlikely to guarantee a cessation of hostilities.

Though it would ensure the siege was intensified.

“Oh, do not even attempt to deny it or excuse yourself in some way,” she warned him. “I did not understand your actions toward me for some time, but then even my credulity and unwillingness to believe a man who professed to love me would be able to behave in such a way could be stretched no further.”

His lips moved but no sound emerged.

“You even boasted of your treatment of me when in your cups to your sister,” the Comtesse went on, “who confirmed me in my suspicions when she told me of it.”

There was pride in her expression for this betrayal from the lips of his younger sibling when she finished:

“That is right, *Monsieur le* Comte. Betrayed. From the lips of your very own sister. Yet another testimony to the antipathy you appear to invite from members of my sex of more quality than actresses who lower their undergarments for paying strangers. For, as you are well aware, she is fond of me while loathing you and, as you may not have been aware, was disgusted at the boorish coarseness of which you boasted.”

The colour spreading across his cheeks told the Comtesse she had hit the mark once again and that he remembered both the drink and the night in question when he had allowed a loose tongue to let slip an intimacy to the sister who, as she had said, detested the brother almost as much as she revered his wife.

Though, on prior thoughts, perhaps the above *“almost”* is misleading *and* unnecessary.

“Remember how contemptibly you have behaved in the past!” she continued to strike at the seam of weakness her assault had revealed, determined to mine it to exhaustion that she may reap every benefit from having the deeds to it in her possession.”

Looking at the man awaiting her words she was certain there would be much in the way of excavation and depletion ahead.

“For eleven years you have compelled me to give up all society and simply be a mother to your children until such time as my beauty faded and I was no longer an asset to your vanity. At which time, I could be sent off to the family chateau, among fields and meadows and neglect, to be forgotten whilst you romped happily with your actresses and whores in the capital.”

Her look became sly and, deeply, malicious:

“Children - it is long past the time at which I should have told you, but do so now - it contented me to allow you to believe were *all* yours.”

It took some moments for this latest thunderbolt to register with the other revelations that bounced as grapeshot off the walls of his cranium but, when it did, he had seized her wrist with savage brutality, squeezing it so violently that only a monumental effort of will prevented her from crying out with the pain.

“You say this to me?” he raged, the maid beyond and all else forgotten as the molten heat of his anger made all repercussions that might follow of no consequence.

“*To me!*”

His eyes, she managed to notice, were of a kind her imagination had pictured staring from the faces of those lunatics and other perpetrators of atrocities the more lurid news-sheets depicted in their attempts to attract the pennies of the masses. The thought occurring to her as a diversion enabling her not to cry out at the pain she felt at her wrist. Helped in her battle by a promise of what she would extract from the brute for having dared to lay hands on her in such a way. A promise of future retribution enabling her to wait out the course of his temper until it, as she was certain it would, subsided.

And, when it did, she felt convinced, so would the last barricade providing flimsy resistance before her determination to conquer him be blown from the path she had set herself to leave him before her… *defenceless*.

Unaware of the complete indifference – if not to the pain - she felt for his attempt to use brute strength to intimidate, yet again, he raged on:

“Should I find the smallest fraction of what you say to be true,” he told her, deep in the grip of the frenzy of outrage that had yet to diminish in strength and barely knowing what he was saying, “I will despatch both you and the child concerned, innocent as it may be, to a destination warmer and more fitting. Not only that but, being the kind soul that I am and not wishing you to travel unaccompanied, I will make sure the father – whose identity you may be assured I will discover - makes the trip with you as a companion.”

Hiding with difficulty the pain he was in the process of causing her, Gabrielle still found it possible to direct a maddening little laugh of contempt his way.

“Laugh as much as you like, Gabrielle,” he thundered, propriety and the presence of servants in the house or not, “but you belong to me. Now and always. I was your master when we met and your master I remain; regardless of your *‘powerful’* lovers. I can exact from you what I like and when I like and I have the law-on my side.”

He was trying to crush her fingers in the strong grip of his large, muscular hand and she, livid now with pain, tried in vain to free them from the vice which was crushing them; the agony making her breathe hard and, though she permitted herself to utter not a sound, fetching tears into her eyes.

“You see that I am the master and the stronger,” he said as his temper ebbed a little and a glimmer of reason began to penetrate the eclipse created by jealousy and outraged vanity.

When he loosened his grip and tossed her hand from him contemptuously, she immediately began to massage the circulation back into her fingers; in possession of herself enough still to ask him as she did so:

“Do you truly think that this reversion to the behaviour of the cave changes anything between us?”

“Gabrielle, I warn you! I will not…!”

“You will *do* whatever I take a fancy for you to do from now on,” she interrupted him, much to his astonishment after the demonstration of his capacity to cause her pain should she defy him; having expected its aftermath to be a return to the simple fear, awe and respect with which he had always believed she regarded him.

“You continue with this line, despite the little lesson I have just supplied you?” he asked, amazed.

She threw back her head and her magnificent eyes blazed as she snorted with contempt:

“And will continue to do so no matter how many lessons, and whatever their form, you waste your time in the delivering. But I sense any lessons from now on will be delivered by me and it will be you who will soon learn to observe my teaching if you wish to have any kind of a life.”

Leaping to his feet, he raised his eyes to the ornate ceiling and the rosy-cheeked cherubs witnessing what he was not to know would be the beginning of a new regime in his marriage and flung his arms wide as if he were either seeking either explanation or assistance.

“The woman is mad! Entirely mad! What am I to do with her?”

Knowing triumph was now hers and that with the revelation of their children she had crossed the Rubicon and still no barbarian spear was forthcoming, Gabrielle was content to wait until he paced and shouted himself to a standstill.

His pride, she could see, was tearing at him in just the way she had known it would.

For it was not *just* the fact that she no longer deemed him worthy of her and denied him access to those parts that were again attracting his ardour.

Now he had been informed that there were others, and superior to him, who were allowed those liberties with his wife she intended he would *never* know again.

Though there would be those she would insist she be allowed with him.

Then:

"You ask, what is it that *you* are to do with *me*," she reminded him as he came to a halt above her, not so weary and dispirited he could not find it in himself to cast longing looks down the decolletage that, in spite of all that had been said between them, greeted his vision so erotically.

The sense of power she felt over her husband at this moment was so stupendous she felt almost faint as it occurred to her that there was absolutely nothing, if she played her hand correctly, she could not achieve with her former master from now on.

Absolutely nothing!

It was a sense of power, she knew with the utmost certainty, she would do anything to experience again.

And again.

Finally:

"My answer," she went on, aware of his scrutiny and shifting her position with such subtlety he was unaware she had done so. The better to provide him with a fuller view of that which she fully intended would play its part in his coming enslavement, "is that the conundrum is one you are neither entitled to ponder and certainly not to solve."

The shift of position had achieved its aim and, though she knew they had registered, her words did not strike home with the force she could have expected to exert under normal conditions.

Though she was determined it would not be very long before they did.

And very soon.

"It is not so much what you wish to do with me," she told his still part diverted expression, "but what I wish to do with *you*."

The cloud passing across his, still absorbed, face told her he had taken her words in.

It was time, she decided, for him to take in others.

"When you are quite finished drinking in the breasts that were once yours and are now forbidden to touch – save with my expressed permission – I will tell you how our life together is going to be from now on…"

III

As the great Balzac himself once wrote:

"Adultery does not establish itself in the heart of a married woman with the promptness of a pistol-shot.

This was a truism the Comtesse understood very well and the guilt she may once have felt for having dallied, and dallied still, with men other than her husband in the eyes of the church – for she *was* devout in her religion – did not trouble her in the slightest. Certainly not from that time of the Comte's perfidious decision to burden her with motherhood. This whilst he enjoyed the life of the roué he had been prior to marrying her and a decision on his part that had been brought to light by the sister who loved Gabrielle and despised her brother.

Guilt that, perfidious decision or not, would have proved short in duration anyhow once the availability of her beauty had been made known in select and discreet circles and those with more experience and talent in the ways of pleasing a woman had, metaphorically, lined the streets to place *real* and man-sized cocks in the cunny that motherhood had ensured would require equipment of such dimensions from now on.

A requirement ensuring she would be presenting the Comte and his new infatuation with her, and indeed had, with a fait accompli if he wished to remain a part of her life - an infatuation that she, by the feminine alchemy of her behaviour and inaccessibility, was transforming into obsession and for which his increasingly docile behaviour in her presence provided testimony assuring her it was of a kind he was supremely unfit to answer.

Never had she felt, nor expected to feel, so… *empowered*.

Yet, as we have mentioned, it had not always been this way and, even on those occasions when… *sympathy*… with another had roused feelings within her upon first sight, a struggle had always taken place and been surmounted on behalf of the oath taken and the feelings of duty and loyalty it invoked towards a husband she had believed at the time to be as faithful as he was manly.

Suspicions?

Yes, of course.

She was a wife and a mother – beautiful or not – in possession of a handsome husband with a position in society.

Why would she *not* entertain such notions?

But suspicion is a territory of whose geography we may only guess, while proof supplies boundaries and a description of the land within it we cannot ignore.

Nor should we.

For it is only to be expected that the person deprived of a visit to that same land another makes with treacherous impunity might desire to make an excursion or two of her own once those suspicions have been satisfied.

Just such an excursion was the Comtesse making now and was at that stage of the traveller when, after an exhausting day of visits to places of interest, she could lay back upon a big and sumptuous bed and look back upon those recent events that have provided so much pleasure.

And be able to do so in company.

The excursions and the company in question being a man in his forties with the lean and muscled body of a lover half his years and a face so prominent you would instantly recognise its description were your writer indiscreet enough and foolish enough to supply a name to one so powerful and – it can be written with confidence, given the writing in question will not be disclosing this particular lover's identity – a noted penchant for the delivery of retribution upon those he has perceived to have injured either his person or his reputation.

For ease of recognition, however, we shall call him Estephe.

"You are the most beautiful woman in Paris, Gabrielle," the man told her with that assurance honed by similar certitudes and resultant successes supplied to and resulting from other women he had bedded and wished to bed again. "Motherhood has lessened your appeal not a whisker and I must consider myself the most fortunate of men that you have chosen me to supply it with the… *nourishment*… its svelte perfection deserves."

The Comtesse laughed:

"Oh, you are silly, Estephe. Do you really find me so credulous and airheaded I should melt into your arms after such an outlandish piece of hyperbole? Especially when I do so without the prompting from flattery of such a kind anyway. "

The posture of offence taken by her lover at this disparaging of his, admittedly flowery but not totally disingenuous, assertion could almost have been taken as sincere had la Comtesse not known or, more pertinently, been filled by his tireless and monumental manhood and been aware just how many others there had been for whom he had previously provided the same kindness.

"And just why, Gabrielle, should I use hyperbole of such a kind when your exquisite body is arrayed on the bed before me in such a way as to make my cock yearn to enter it once again."

She flicked a downward glance toward the appendage in question then raised her eyes to his with an interrogation of her own:

"It does not appear to be *'yearning'* with too much in the way of haste to me," she reminded him with just such a look as she imagined the coquette she now imagined herself to be and played so well would make.

Estephe's offence turned instantly to amusement:

“The sap does not always rise at the first ray announcing the sun’s warmth, my maddeningly enchanting Gabrielle, but needs to feel convinced of its continued heat before showing itself fully.”

“Why, Estephe, whatever can you mean by such a cryptic and…” she giggled, “…*clumsy* metaphor?”

“Minx!” he laughed, snatching her hand to place it upon the cock that was already beginning to grow once again; this despite having served with tireless devotion on three occasions already in the previous two hours or so since he had escorted her up to his chambers past a manservant long used to such afternoon appointments and well-versed – and reimbursed – in the ways of discretion.

“You are not a gentleman, Monsieur,” she rebuked him, slender fingers already snaking lower that they may fondle the ball-sac which, even after three evacuations, seemed twice the size of that of the Comte she had waiting at home for her return.

But you *are* a lady,” he assured her as he ducked a leonine head toward a perfectly shaped breast and the nipple that sensed instantly the approach of a mouth that had supplied it with much pleasure already and attempted to meet it halfway in the anticipation of more. “And that combination of two opposites make us a compound of some interest”

His smile, as so many others of her sex had discovered before her, and from the same position, was irresistible as he added:

“Explosiveness, I scarcely need add.”

Her laughter and following delighted giggle as her engorged nipple was taken past his lips and into a mouth it knew from experience to be warm and inviting was evidence enough for him that his assessment of their liaison was one that found favour with her.

The questing presence that was the tip of his spear as it again sought entry into that place she had once expected one man, and *one* man alone, to know, brought a sigh from her that held nothing in common with resignation and was no more than delighted anticipation for the invasion and accompanying satisfaction resulting from it that was about to overwhelm her.

The scream that exited her lips some ten minutes later was of such intensity that the *“well-versed”* and *“discreet”* manservant who was, she knew, somewhere in the near vicinity, could well have been alarmed for her safety.

Had, that is, he not been more than familiar with sounds of such a kind emanating from the bedroom at such a time and been more than aware of his master’s capacity for inducing them.

“And how do things go with *‘la Comte’*?” Estephe asked when they were once again in the afterglow of fulfilled passion and had both decided without the necessity for words that they had shared sufficient for one afternoon.

He had met Gabrielle's husband on a number of occasions both formal and informal and had neither liked nor disliked him but had taken his mark almost immediately. Given the way he seemed to bask in the admiration of inferior men and play up to their expectations of how a *'superior'* man should act, it came as no surprise to this *genuinely* superior man that the Comte would have ignored a woman of Gabrielle's beauty and… *potential*… at home while he allowed his vanity to be stroked by inferior men and mercenary, if sometimes exciting, actresses and other women of the Parisian night. Though it was not until he met the Comte avec Comtesse at an Embassy ball for which the Comte's own attendance compelled hers that he realised how great a waste was being made.

"Slowly," she answered him, head snuggled upon a manly chest with just the requisite amount of chest hair, enough anyway to heighten the appeal of his masculinity whilst stopping short of the less attractive Neanderthal look.

He waited and the eyes beaming down upon her were expectant.

"What?" she asked.

"I wait only for you to add the *'surely'*," he told her.

She smiled, noncommittally.

"He is proving more… *amenable*?" Estephe questioned.

Gabrielle sighed:

"Is it really necessary to discuss *him*? And now?"

"I am just curious, that is all. The study of the cuckold is something of an interest of mine."

He laughed, not with cruelty but certainly with amusement:

"And what better time to analyse the creature than those moments after having made love to the woman who should have been his treasure and by dint of his own vanity and stupidity was now lost to him."

"Not *entirely* lost," she reminded him, "Besides, one would have expected the condition to have lost its novelty for you given the vast numbers of those *'creatures'* you have created these past years."

"No two cuckolds are alike, Gabrielle, because no two wives are alike. And when each situation has its own unique components, shall we say, there can be no question of novelty withering on the vine."

"And which of those unique components in this latest adventure of yours that continues to remain so novel for you relate to me?"

Estephe favoured her with an indulgent but no less inscrutable smile:

"To tell would be to rob the adventure of exactly that novelty making it special."

"Tease," she scolded him, though there could be no mistaking the affection behind the criticism.

“Now that,” he agreed, “is a charge to which I can do no more than present the beautiful judge presiding over my trial with a plea of guilty.”

He became suddenly serious:

“But you have yet to answer?” he asked as she stretched herself out lazily upon the divan.

“Hmmm?”

“The Comte?” he prompted. “Is he becoming more amenable now he has seen your female power and strength of will at close-quarters for the first time?”

She groaned.

“Again, you take us back to *him!*”

Propping herself upon an elbow sideways on to him, marvellous and still full and beautifully formed breasts revealed to his appreciative eye in all their splendour in a pose ensuring their business with each other might not have concluded itself *just* yet, she turned a long-suffering smile upon him:

“Yes,” she answered. “in fact, I would descend further than your *‘amenable’* and lower my description of his behaviour towards me as… *docile*.”

A somewhat smug grin responded to her re-evaluation of her husband’s behavioural condition.

“Is it not exactly as I told you it would be?” he was unable to help himself crowing, that part of the equation where the previously dominant husband began to accept the yoke of the wife he had previously ruled almost as satisfying to him as his subverting of the wife herself. “Did I not assure you that the moment he knew himself to be less than a man in your eyes and in your bed you would again be that object of desire in his eyes he would rather die than be denied and he would soon begin to try and… *please*… you?”

“You are far too smug and conceited for my liking, Estephe,” she took him to task. “However, and as much as I have no wish to add coal to the fire of your self-regard, it has been as you said it would be these past few weeks and he more and more comes to accept my authority to both run the household and him.”

The subject of the Comte now raised, Gabriele began, reluctantly, to allow him back into her thoughts and their conversation.

“His eyes follow me hungrily at all times and that temper of his has become little more than a memory in so short an elapsed period of time as two weeks. Even the servants give him stranger looks for the absence of the usual terseness and autocracy with which he deals with them and I suspect they feel he is in the grip of some strange malady that has robbed him of his power.”

“Then they suspect no more than the truth,” Estephe laughed.

“Yes,” she laughed with him. “But I wonder how they would react to know that I am the malady they suspect and that their master’s former power now resides with me.”

“It would be best for you that they do not find out,” he assured her as she turned an affronted eye upon him, grown so used to wielding power now she could take the slightest whiff of criticism as mortal insult.

“Why, pray?” she questioned.

“Is that not obvious, Gabriele?” he asked in return with more than a little of the patronising in his tone. “The obsession in which your face and body holds him is but a part of the prison cell you have fashioned for him and is no more than the door to him you use for your own desires and devices.”

“Yes, so?”

“The unyielding and inescapable stone into which that cell door is set, however, was and is contrived from the Comte’s mortal fear of discovery and public mockery. It was his terror of social ridicule and harm to the erroneous and ill-deserved regard which many extend to him that has proved the foundation of your power over him to this point and, whilst his growing sexual fixation for that which he can no longer experience adds another element to that power, it is this fear of the wider world becoming familiar with his less than manly acceptance of what his married life has become that remains the foundation of your power still.”

As we know to be the case already, the Comtesse was far from slow on the uptake and had now, so to speak, caught up with Estephe to find herself at least upon the same chapter of the book featuring their exploits.

“The moment your servants and, through them, the world were to discover the circumstances of your new… *understanding*… with the Comte, would be the moment your power over him – if not your sexual allure – vanished into recent history.”

“And you believe me unaware of such an obvious possibility?” she sniffed, sensing in herself, even as she refused to give him the pleasure of having his reasoning applauded, something of the Comte’s former attitude towards her when he was the *master* and felt it beneath his dignity to be corrected.

Not wishing to become that which she herself had detested, she made a mental note to watch out for such behaviour as her lover shrugged and let this evidence of her own vanity pass.

“We – I – remain careful to be as discreet as possible and our upstairs chambers; indeed the whole of the upstairs itself has been made, with an explanation of desired privacy, forbidden to such servants as we now keep in the home.”

This, of course, immediately instigated a question of another kind in Estephe’s mind, though he remained silent as she continued:

“So, as you can tell, there is little danger of the *‘foundation’* of my power over the Comte being compromised by our domestic situation.”

“Then I am satisfied,” he smiled. “I should hate to have that cuckold spice adding extra taste to our devouring’s of each other become scarce or, worse, forever unavailable to us.”

“Your worries are groundless, Estephe,” she assured him, “and, now that I have experienced the joys of a tireless and experienced lover such as you and a needy and growingly obedient husband such as he, you may be convinced that I will do nothing to compromise such a delightful situation.”

His nod told her he was pleased to hear of her intent to do all in her power to maintain the status quo currently in place between them and the powerless husband who had no say as to how matters were progressed.

“And?” he asked, thoughts going to the less metaphysical aspects of the man’s cuckolding and wishing to hear more of its daily reality.

La Comtesse giggled.

“My, we are an excited man, are we not?” she tittered as his tireless equipment began to arrow upwards, magnetised, it seemed to her, by the irresistible poles that were her nipples.

“What *real* man would not be the same in your presence, Gabrielle. Your charms are such they would raise water in that most constantly parched of deserts.”

Again it was a sigh that greeted his latest and flowery attempt at metaphor.

“But,” he went on, “I do believe you have more to tell me on the subject of the horned one.”

Encircling his cock at its base between thumb and forefinger she began a gentle but insistent up and down motion that caused him to close his eyes with delight and gave her much almost as much pleasure as it provided pride that she could have such an effect on so seasoned a lover.

“Hmm,” she murmured, eyes not leaving his cock as, remarkably, it came to full attention under her ministrations. “Would it surprise you to know that I have discharged my maid and that *he* has agreed to undertake the duties of my… *body-servant*?”

The base of his cock between her fingers gave a massive start and she wondered if he was not ready to release his latest emission of the afternoon so soon.

“I see you like that idea,” she observed. “You are picturing my proud husband as he enters my chambers so respectfully that I may allow him to bathe me before dressing me for the day ahead. It is what I meant when I informed you that the servants were no longer permitted above stairs.”

“Not even to…” he caught a breath as she gave the base of his penis a delightful squeeze, “…perform their domestic duties?”

“Not even for that.”

“But…? How…?”

“I insist *he* takes care of it – he is, after all, the one with most to lose should a servant inadvertently witness his new and reduced… *home-life*.”

Not even Estephe had heard of such a thing and the image of the Comte as he carried out the duties of a flunkey under his wife’s supervision added a strange new realm of decadence and perversion to a situation already well-served by both.

Combined with her slow and persistent manipulation of his cock, the imagery fetched a soft sigh from him

The true origin of that sigh was not missed.

“Yes,” she said, face flushed with the excitement she herself was taking from winning such a response from her lover. “You are imagining him as he finishes with the tidying of my chamber and then rushes over to be of assistance with my toilette.”

“Oooooooh….!

“Picture him, Estephe; the once masterful Comte as he runs a silk stocking up my legs towards a creamy thigh and the treasure lying above it. That same treasure he is not allowed to touch without first receiving my permission… A permission he has yet to receive and, when he does, will be sure to disappoint that which he believes and hopes I will finally relent and allow him. Do you see this?”

The fingers on his cock became motionless when no answer was forthcoming..

“I asked you a question, Estephe,” she said in a voice of authority to which the Comte was becoming increasingly familiar but which her lover had yet to hear from her.

“Y-Yes, Gabrielle,” he said in a voice that was tremulous with the perverted desire the scene she was painting inspired. “Do not stop!”

The Comtesse smiled and, this once, allowed herself to be directed.

“Do you see him, Estephe, as he kneels to place a respectful kiss upon my dainty stockinged foot before he places one of the boots, the very same boots I have insisted he polish, upon it and laces it up to my calf before repeating the menial task with my remaining foot?”

An epiphany suddenly took her:

“But… Can it be?... Is it your own image that you see pictured there, Estephe?”

Her fingers began to move with greater rapidity along the length of his shaft.

“Are you really imagining yourself as you pay homage to the superior woman even your wonderful and relentless cock is unable to conquer? The same wife, mother and now adulteress who would remain perfectly capable of receiving yet more lovers when that beautiful penis of yours has finally exhausted its ammunition and must wait for a new consignment.”

His breathing was growing more and more ragged and she sensed she had mined yet another seam of male need and weakness.

“Can it really be that I have I judged you correctly, Estephe?”

“G-Gabrielle…” he gasped, realising that he was reaching the crisis faster than he would have liked and – duration being a point of pride with him - attempting to prolong the process.

“Is it you that you see with your lips pressed to my toes, bereft now of their stockings and moist with the sweat inspired by those exertions of which you are temporarily unable to continue?”

“Gabrielle, I…”

“Is that how you will thank me and pleasure me when your beautiful cock has been conquered once again by my indefatigable cunny?”

“I… I…”

“As much my slave, in fact, as I intend to make of the impostor who now waits at home for me and who I once considered a husband.”

Incredibly, the image of himself in exactly that position of submission in regard of a women he had empowered was stoking this powerful and dominant man’s desires to a degree he had yet to experience.

“Is that how my big strong Estephe sees himself?” she purred. “As his masterful Gabrielle’s… *slave*?”

“Aaaaaaaaaagh!”

The scream torn from his lips to accompany the plume of semen that jetted from his cockhead to cover her breasts was of a volume and power undiminished by his previous exertions. Unlike, in fact, any other sound she had heard from him during their other couplings. Almost girlish, she thought and knew suddenly that she had found, if not his Achilles Heel, exactly, then, at least, a gateway to his male weakness through the use of a foot containing her own.

“That, hmm,” he began after a necessary period of inactivity as she remained with head propped upon elbow and regarded him, “was, er, marvellous, Gabrielle.”

She noticed he could not meet her eye and was taking advantage of her exposed breasts to continue not doing so.

“Allow me to get you a cloth to remove my, hmm, mess,” he said with what she would have seen as chivalry if she had not known it was nothing more than an attempt to escape her presence for a few moments and try to make sense of this new development between them.

As was about to roll from the divan she took hold of his wrist and detained him.

His head turned to her with puzzlement and beneath it she could see how discomfited he was by what had just happened.

“Leave it,” she told him.

“Leave it?” he repeated, growing still more puzzled.

She nodded, eyes holding his with something of that embryonic authority she had first used upon the Comte.

“It is not your responsibility to clean your… *‘mess’*… from me.”

“Not my response…?”

Now she shook her head.

“At home, my husband awaits my return,” she informed him.

“Yes, but even so…”

“And he has a decision to make.”

Comprehension began to dawn in Estephe’s eyes.

“In fact,” she went on before pausing with a smirk and a downward flicker of the eyes that even a man of Estephe’s ilk, a man noted in sexually enlightened circles as being both depraved and ruthless, could only describe as evil…

“…My husband has *two* decisions to make.”

IIII

"It is your decision, Christophe," she told him, having taken to using his forename while insisting upon the usual Madame and eschewing completely his use of *"Gabrielle"*.

It made him seem, to her anyway, more servant-like.

"Please, Gab… I mean, Madame." Have I not proved with my actions towards you how bitterly I regret my past actions towards your person? Can we not, for the sake of our children away at school and the love we once shared, return to those happier times?"

Those *"happier times"*, in point of fact, may as well have not existed, if indeed they ever did, if the tableau being acted out in the bedroom of the Comtesse spoke true.

Having greeted his faithless wife home at some time during the mid-evening after her afternoon… *appointment*… the man who had once ruled his own domain with a fist of iron had escorted her upstairs to her chambers and began a task that was becoming increasingly familiar to him.

Kneeling before her as she stood above him, face cold, imperious *and* expectant at one and the same time, he had first untied the boots he had only that morning polished – thankfully away from the all-seeing eyes of the downstairs domestics – and slid them from her feet. Noting yet again as he did so that even the odor of her perspiration steeped in leather was enough to transport his thoughts to a world of lust and lewd behaviour where she reigned as Empress. The kiss he placed upon a dainty and fragrant toe was one she demanded from him but had soon become an act of respect he would have performed unbidden.

From there he reverently, as she had schooled him, unbuttoned her dress to kneel once again and lower it to those same feet he had just kissed before she slid for herself the remaining chemise away from that body he had once known so well.

Leaving her…

His breath had caught in his throat.

Naked.

Entirely bare!

Save only for the stockings clinging to her shapely legs.

The shock, despite the numerous others she had provided him over the past week or so, acted upon him with the same effect as a bucket of cleansing and ice cold river water on a freezing morning.

Only this did *not* cleanse.

She had traversed the streets and ridden *his* carriage.

With a complete absence of undergarments!

“They are in my valise she told him,” reading his thoughts with the consummate ease that was becoming even easier to her. “You may launder them for me when you are finished here.”

The cunny she insisted his cock would never feel itself inside again was not inches from his transfixed eyes, all thoughts of his reduced situation and the humiliations to which he was allowing her to subject him forgotten as he took in what had once been his and was no longer.

“Do you remember my words to you before I left to be penetrated and filled by a superior man?” she asked, disdain all the more palpable for being directed down to him through hooded eyes.

The look of utter horror that asserted itself upon his features told her that he did.

Her thoughts were amused:

“But then, how could he not?”

“Gabrie…” he began. “Madame. Have you no feeling for me at all that you could ask such a thing of me?”

“You know the answer to that as well as I,” she responded instantly, up to all his entreaties and pleas and utterly confident in her ability to override them.

“But…”

“There are to be no *‘Buts’* from you as of this moment. You told me it was your wish to remain my husband and prove yourself loyal to me and, to this point, I have been pleased with your attempts to do so. But there is the little matter between us of conjugal relations.”

At this, as she had intended, his eyes left her cunny – no mean feat of willpower, she smirked to herself – and looked past her bare breasts to meet her stare with what could only be described as hope.

“Hope” it gave her so much pleasure to dash.

“Not, of course,” she actually laughed, “that they will be relations your cronies and actresses would describe as conjugal – and certainly not *normal*.”

His face fell.

“Stand before me, Christophe, for we have reached a crisis point.

Fully dressed and understandably worried, the increasingly cowed and subjugated Comte rose up from his position adjacent to her cunny and stood facing her, red-faced, shamed, and something else.

“Something else” your writer feels it is safe to leave to his reader’s imaginations.

“You know what it is you must do and it will at least give you access to the body I know you lust over so… *obsessively*.”

She could see he was in mental agony and the cunny that had just been so well used made a response that was no less powerful than the one it had made to the first of Estephe's… *invasions*.

"If you refuse all is over between us and I will go to the lover who not an hour before was pleading with me to leave you and go to him."

Her eyes held his, hard and utterly inflexible.

"A decision, once made, that will ensure the game is up for you and there can be no turning back."

"Gabrielle, please!" he begged, far too perturbed to correct his forbidden use of her forename and believing her lie in regard of Estephe in total – even if he was still unaware of the man's identity.

"This way, at least," she went on with the implacability and refusal to bend that had multiplied over the past weeks and to which he had no answer, "you get to retain your dignity – who knows, I may even, if I find your behaviour pleasing and I am of a generous disposition, allow you a short visit to your clubs that you may keep a small amount of face with those cronies who will have marked your absence."

Suddenly, it seemed to her as if the last of his spirit escaped his body and his shoulders sagged with its departure. She had already beaten him and a part of her husband's logic had accepted it. Now she swore she was witnessing those more recalcitrant elements of his psyche preventing a fuller acceptance falling into line also.

"It is, if you consider it, a way for you to be intimate with the wife who is now your master," she told him, knowing that even in his condition of misery such a promise would gain his attention even as her description of the position she occupied in regard of him would ensure mortification ran alongside his... *anticipation*.

As expected his eyes, beaten and pleading, joined with hers and prompted an escalation of the torment she so loved to provide him.

"My breasts and my cunny are covered with the emissions of a real man, Christophe."

His horror was palpable as she turned from him and unwilling eyes watched the most perfect derriere saunter across to her bed to swivel around and seat herself upon the end of it; legs apart and nipples as hard as if her husband were Estephe himself.

"I am not, as you know, an unreasonable person, and I will not expect this from you every time," she told him, as if it made such a task more palatable, "but now, and as a token of your submission to me, I want you to kneel upright between my legs and lick clean my lover's semen from my breasts before repeating the service for my delicious cunny you assure me you miss so desperately."

It was the moment of his reckoning and she had told him before she left that it was coming. Yet something had compelled him to believe she would not go through with it. She was, as he liked to console himself, testing him as to his stated intention to prove himself worthy of her affection again.

In fact, the more he considered it the more he came to believe that even at this late stage she was simply trying him to ensure he was sincere.

Yet the faint dry streaks whitening the already pale skin of her breasts gave every impression of being…

Well…

That!

No, he assured himself. It was a test. Nothing more. The moment he looked as if he were about to do as she asked he was convinced she would stop him. And, if that turned out not to be the case, then he was likewise convinced that those dry white streaks were something other than that which she was trying to lead him to believe.

Before he knew it, his feet had taken on a life of their own and were leading him to the spot she had indicated between her naked legs and bald cunny as she stared up at him expressionless; imperious and autocratic as if this was no more than the obeisance to her he should have made upon their first meeting.

“Kneel,” she ordered in a calm and low voice that was no less impossible for him to obey and, had he been blessed with the facility to understand such subtleties, was seething underneath with an excitement of her own of such intensity that, in spite of all she had one and had done to her thus far, left her as amazed as she becoming delirious.

He did as she asked and knelt upright between her legs.

“Begin with my breast,” she told him, fighting to keep her control and take it slowly that she may savour every single second of his coming disgrace and final fall. “Show me that you wish to be the most obedient and worshipful cuckold you can possibly be for me from now on.”

The breasts in question, covered in that mysterious substance, met his eyes and he realised his cock was rubbing painfully against the buttons of his trousers.

With a little prayer that asked for vanilla essence or some other cooking ingredient, the Comte ducked his head towards her succulent breasts for the first time in months and gingerly protruded a tongue until it touched an encouragingly hard nipple.

“So far so good,” he told himself with his characteristic lack of originality and began to lick upwards, studiously avoiding the dry streaks until he was all out of flesh and had no option but to apply his tongue there also.

Which, after an understandable pause, was exactly what he did.

Still praying for the presence of a cooking ingredient the taste that met his tongue was, he was sure, nothing of the kind and he would have pulled away if two dainty but persistent hands had not kept both head and tongue at its debasing task.

“Be good, Christophe,” he heard from above. “The moment you have shown me who you truly are relations between us, though one-sided, can become more… *pleasing*… for you.”

Tentatively, the Comte’s tongue protruded once again and did indeed show her who he was now.

“Good boy,” came humiliating praise from the lips of a woman he had once ruled. “When you have finished with my breast you must show proper diligence to the service of my cunny.”

The smile as she gazed down upon her husband while he lapped at her semen streaked breasts as deliriously happy as it was undeniably perverted.

“Then, when you have done that to my satisfaction, there will no longer be any doubt in your mind as to the true identity of your…”

She paused, both to delight in the sensations of his tongue removing her lover’s cream from her breasts, and to better emphasise to him exactly who she was in regard of him from now on:

“…*Master*.”

END

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