Reluctant Press *presents:*

Miss Katherine's Fancy

Philippa Peters

An 'ADULT TV' E-BOOK

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MISS KATHERINE'S FANCY

by Philippa Peters

A continuation and culmination of Miss Katherine's Fan

I. Mrs. MCDOWELL'S MISGIVINGS

****

"This bedroom will do well enough," said Sarah Lubbock to her husband who dragged the struggling girl into the room. Her pretty bonnet had been lost in the struggle to get her out of the coach and up the stairs.

The girl was crying and begging Sarah to let her go. Sarah Lubbock smiled as she listened to the familiar voice, begging to be set free. As soon as she had put the pistol away, the girl had attempted to escape from the hackney cab. George had had to jump down from the driver's seat and sprint after the girl who at last seemed to understand that Sarah would not fire at her.

The girl's long skirts and high-heeled slippers ensured that she could not run quickly or far. George was on her after barely ten yards. The sight of a man beating a woman and calling her a 'nagging whore' was familiar around Cleveland Street and its environs.

Several people scurried down the street as George used his horse whip across the girl's derriere. She squealed in the same pretty voice that she had been trained to use by Sarah Lubbock, her governess. She had learned her lessons well, gloated Sarah Lubbock, as she finally was able to soothe the horses and get out of the rocking cab.

"Enough, George," Sarah had to say. A rough-looking man, a sailor from his walk, stopped and might have intervened. "Those lashes will more than make up for the money she stole!"

Katherine, the girl she had trained to speak as she did, to act refined, to be in all ways the belle of the ball and the debutante of the year, as the broadsheets called her, called out hoarsely for help. The sailor listened to Sarah's cultured accent, however, and waved a hand at the thief getting what she probably deserved.

George took Katherine by her long, dark ringlets and dragged her down the alley between Mrs. McDowell's establishment and the similar establishment next door. Sarah brushed past the drudge who tried to keep her from entering the back of Mrs. McDowell's establishment.

"Bring her in here," Sarah commanded. George looked back anxiously at the lightly tied-up hackney at the street end of the alley. In the end, he knew better than to disobey his wife, so a blubbering Katherine was brought into one of the empty back bedrooms and manacled to the wide four-poster bed that dominated the room.

Esther McDowell came speeding along the passageway, followed by the drudge and a large, shambling man, a guard obviously, whom Esther had the sense to stop when she saw that her visitor was Sarah Lubbock.

"The hackney cab in front?" Mrs. McDowell enquired in her falsely, genteel accent. She tried, did the woman, but in times of stress ,her accent would fail and she would be drop her 'aitches' like the Cockney Londoners.

"I think there's a report of one being stolen from a hiring line in Highbury," said Sarah.

Mrs. McDowell pursed her lips. "It could bring the Peelers right to my door," she complained.

Sarah nodded to her husband. "Get rid of the cab, George," she said blithely. "Take some toffs for a ride and send them off by themselves up the Mall. Serve them right when the law catches them."

George grinned and left. A man of action, he could be depended on to be cunning and vicious in carrying out any orders Sarah gave him.

Mrs. McDowell ordered off the servants who had come after her. She closed the door firmly in their faces as they peered in at the sobbing girl and the black-dressed, rich-looking woman.

"That's the girl I saw you with at Marie Lecannet's," accused Esther McDowell.

"You saw me with Kate," said Sarah with a little smile on her face. She appreciated the girlish tones that emanated from the young woman on the bed who squirmed and tried to smooth down her skirts even though her wrists were manacled above her head. "But you didn't see me with any girl."

Mrs. McDowell's head whipped around and she looked at the young girl struggling on the bed. Her hair had come loose and long, dark ringlets fell across the girl's face. Her lips were blushed with some kind of lipstick.

"She, she can't be!" Esther McDowell crowed at last. "Besides, you were governess in the Earl of Hutton's house, I heard. You were governess to that Missy who's turned the head of one of the Royal Princes. Oh! Oh!" Mrs. McDowell's manner changed completely

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as she studied the manacled girl in her spare room. "It is Miss Katherine Grimond as I live and breathe!"

"Your eyes don't deceive you," began Sarah Lubbock.

"I'm not 'avin' nothin' to do with kidnappin', Sarah!" screamed Esther. The other woman's attempted to explain to her how she was going to be helping Sarah from that point on. "That's a capital offence. Or I could be transported!" The fear in her voice was overwhelming. "It's Australia and Botany Bay and never coming back, if you survive the sea voyage," she went on. "I'm not riskin' it, Sarah. I'm not. Not even for you, I won't!"

"You're not hearing me, Esther," said Sarah, standing and pushing her former friend and madam down on the single chair in the room. Sarah pushed the legs of the girl she had called Kate across the bed. Then she callously pulled up the girl's dress and petticoats to reveal shapely legs in silk stockings and silkier bloomers.

"You're thinking that George and I have kidnapped Miss Katherine Grimond, perhaps for ransom," said Sarah, taking the other woman's hands between hers. "But we haven't. There isn't any Miss Katherine Grimond. I told you. You're not seeing a girl, though you think you are. You're not hearing a girl, though he cries just like one, I have to admit. I taught him that."

"That's a boy?" asked Esther McDowell in astonishment. "I could swear… but why?"

"Kate here managed to get her master's ward with child, didn't you Kate, my darling?" asked Sarah. "Ruined the poor girl and her master's prospects of marrying the ward. So, the master wants vengeance, see?" Sarah said to Esther.

"He wants his rival to become a woman?" Esther asked doubtfully.

"Only so that she can be married and bequeath all her estates and her late brother's to her beloved husband," said Sarah. "See, the poor girl thinks that her betrothed is actually going to marry her and that they will live happily ever after, as man and wife. It's amazing how a few kisses go to the head of the pretty girls like Kate, pretty girls who aren't really girls."

"And you've kidnapped her," said Mrs. McDowell slowly. "So, this lordling can't marry her and he won't get her money if she turns up on the riverbank with her throat cut. Is that what you have in mind? He can't go to the Bobbies, can he? Or she's slitted and they'll be looking between her legs and, oh, I see it! He's going to paying big for her return." She snickered. "You going to promise never to tell the papers? I know just the writer who'd delight in putting out such a story if I suggested it to 'im for just a small fee and a smidgin' of proof, like lookin' at 'er with 'er bloomers down."

"There's bigger fish to fry," said Sarah Lubbock. 'There's a prince involved as well." Her voice became savage. "Prince Albert dallied with her on the Kent County Hunt and we got fired for not looking after her. What would he pay when he finds out that he's going to be the laughingstock of London? We'll spread his story all over London and the proposal he made to her, his sweet, little catamite, when he saved her from the runaway she faked on the Hunt."

"The Prince proposed to 'er...to 'im?" asked Mrs. McDowell.

"We'll say that he did," Sarah told her friend. "Don't worry about the truth, Esther. We'll have enough truth in the story to make everyone believe it's real. You can even help me write it and put it in print. It can make all our fortunes!"

"But that will bring the Peelers on us, for sure," whispered Mrs. McDowell. "Oh, Sarah, why did you ever come to my place with such a scheme?"

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I could not get my hands free. Sarah had cruelly chained both of my hands to the bed. At the end of my so-called training as a girl in Oakthorpe Manor, I had only had one hand manacled. A long chain had allowed me some respite from always having one hand stretched above my head. Unfortunately, Sarah had gone back to the cruel torture of having both of my hands manacled above my head to the iron railings of the big bed.

Sarah caressed my legs as she proposed outlandish scheme after outlandish scheme to extort money from Lord Douglas Moore, my 'betrothed.' I , a man, was set to be the Spring bride to the man who had wreaked a terrible vengeance on me for loving and impregnating Maddie Conley-Shore, his ward. She was off in Italy, somewhere, having my child. I was about to become a father, and a bride, at almost the same time, or so I expected.

Sarah declared me to be a gold mine to the doubtful, older woman she leaned over. The Earl of Hutton would pay, she said. The Prince would pay. I shuddered at the story they proposed to print. It was so close to the truth that the Prince would surely believe it was me who was the source for such a story. That thought made tears well up in my eyes again. I didn't care what Lord Douglas thought of me, or about the schemes he had to be rid of me. He would have given me to George Lubbock to have his way with me if I had refused Lord Douglas a kiss. I didn't care about any schemes to ruin Lord Douglas Moore.

I had been trying to run away from Lord Douglas when the Lubbocks, dismissed by him despite the havoc they had wreaked on me in the name of his vengeance, had caught me. I had the little money I had saved, now in Sarah's purse, and my jewels, including the ruby that Douglas had given me as a betrothal ring. I was engaged to marry him or so Lord Douglas thought. I shivered as I recalled kissing him and thanking him for the matching necklace and earrings. I knew I would use the jewels to finance my escape even as I tried to find the same passion in the tender kisses I gave to Douglas that I had felt in kissing Prince Albert.

But my wits weren't as scattered as they had been when I lay down in the grass with Albert. He had kissed me forcefully. I had shamed myself by responding as fiercely as any young, precocious maiden would have who was in love with a man like Prince Albert.

A pang of emotion went through me as that thought entered my skull; I tried to force it out. I was not in love with Prince Albert, even though his kisses had set me on fire, a fire I never remembered feeling in Maddie's bed. What I would have done if the Prince had taken me to his bed, I shuddered to think. I'm sure that I would have gone with him and lovingly done whatever he wanted right up until, inevitably, he found out what and who I was.

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Then, I would have cried. He would have beaten me. He would have disgraced me and I would have deserved it. I imagined him taking me in his arms and saying he was sorry and, yes, kissing me. Our lips would be glued together again. I would press my rounded, womanly body against him and he would hug me until I could go no further.

I flushed and wriggled as Sarah's hand caressed the stocking top and the garter in the middle of my thigh, beneath my bloomer. Mrs. McDowell wanted to know why Sarah had fled to her house, of all the brothels in London, with me when she had captured me. Madame Lecannet had been very forthright about the blonde girl whom I had seen, sitting in Mrs. McDowell's cubicle in her shop. Her breasts were so gorgeous that I had had to blush and look away. She had pouted at me in my boned dress and shaped, corseted figure.

Esther McDowell had led us to believe that the blonde was one of the girls who worked at this establishment on Cleveland Street. Madame Lecannet had revealed to us that the blonde girl was not a 'soiled dove.' Madame Lecannet had said that the blonde was a guttersnipe, a boy, whom Esther was attempting to transform into a woman. She had implied that Esther was struggling to do it for some purpose of her own. I immediately construed that it was a bad purpose.

"You have here a sister to this one," said Sarah, stroking my thighs, through the thin silk of the bloomers. Mrs. McDowell smiled at me then.

"I don't," Mrs. McDowell said vaguely to Sarah. She looked at me with increasing interest.

"A blonde girl," said Sarah smugly. "You were having dresses made for her at Madame Lecannet's. We talked about her with Madame."

Esther pressed her lips together and shook her head. "My little Edith," she said. "Well, what could I do? My sister, Mrs. Price, you may remember her, sends me her last boy and asks me to find him a trade. All that boy wanted to do when he got here was dress up like the girls. What a struggle I've had keeping him out of their beds.

"He grew his hair long. The girls have all had a hand in curling it for him, prettying his face and showing him how to wear his corsets so that his figure became like theirs. Oh, but you're doing the same things I did to Edith with this one, I can see.

"I was sure your Kate had a pretty bosom of her own and she does, doesn't she, just as my Edith does. You know where the silly girl is now, don't you? She had her eighteenth and she eloped from me. She's run off with some scutty little sailor, not even one of the lords or rich men who would have paid to be entertained by her. She wouldn't have had to reveal herself fully. She could have been one of London's leading whores, a real courtesan, if she'd listened to me.

"But no, the boy-girl is in love and I'm out hundreds, thousands of pounds."

As Mrs. McDowell wound down, her voice got slower and slower. She looked at me, then at Sarah in silent appeal.

"No!" I gasped in a panic. Both ladies burst out laughing as they studied my wriggling body with interest.

"Kate could pay our way here," said Sarah, deliberately putting her hand between my legs. I tossed and turned on the bed and tried to kick her.

"I think so," said Mrs. McDowell slowly. "But we must improve her temper. I think she was fed too well at the last establishment she was in. It has made her feisty. No good for us in our business to have an unwilling slut."

"No," I moaned again.

"We must change that No to a Yes," said Mrs. McDowell, her eyes glinting. "If you left her with me for a while, Sarah, I would have her longing to be used by me."

"By the gentlemen who come here to be dressed like sluttish girls by you?" asked Sarah with a knowing look. She began to unfasten my dress and show off my corsets to Mrs. McDowell.

"Oh no," said Mrs. McDowell brightly. "Those men would love to be just like Kate, as rounded and female as she is. They come to me. I've made it a specialty since I started training Edith. I have dresses of the right size and styles. I have wigs, corsets and makeup, French perfumes and jewellery by the ton. I have Earl's sons and Earls, Baronets and scions of ducal families, even a Royal. You should see the Duke of Clarence when he is here.

"Of course, he always has to go and present himself with the girls in the parlour when he is totally dressed. Some of my most sophisticated gentlemen know who he is and they delight in having him perform like a woman for them. The Duchess, Georgina, I should say, was so proud of herself on her last visit. She entertained four gentlemen over the course of the evening and earned a hundred pounds for the house. She thought she was quite fine enough to go up to the gaming clubs on Henry Street in her drag. I had to be very firm with her. She is most eager to go out and expose herself, is Georgina. She really does think that men find her attractive and not a figure of fun.

"Now, this one, Sarah, if you let me tutor her, we shall make into a proper Princess. My most discerning clients will find her most amusing. I would allow her to go out to gaming clubs, but only the finest like Monte's and Darrow's. We should try her in Edith's wigs. I do believe we could make her over so that even the Prince wouldn't know her any more."

"Kate would love that," said Sarah, standing and taking Esther McDowell by the arm. "She has started already to enjoy the attentions of men, haven't you, my pretty girl?" She stroked my breasts over the corset that held and shaped me. I reacted to her, swinging my legs and arching my back. I tried to get away from her as I writhed over the petticoats and dress that surrounded me.

"George likes her as well," said Sarah with a wicked grin. "I'll finish her for the night in a while when George gets back. She is much weaker than when we started changing her but I don't want to have to slap and beat her any more. George left her fanny quite red after he finished with his whip on her. She won't run from him after that.

"Is there a kettle on anywhere, Esther? I could really do with a good cup of tea."

They left, still talking about things they could have me do which would make money for them. Finally, I dozed until George came back, several hours later.

George leered at me. "You don't tell Sarah," he said, glancing back over his shoulder at the door of the room. "If you do, I'll whip you twice as hard and twice as long as you think I can."

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He unlocked my manacles and I put my arms down in relief, only to have George take my hands. He put them on his shoulders and lay down beside me. "Tight about my neck," George muttered and pulled my body against his. His kiss was demanding, smelling of alcohol. He loosened my corset, popped my breasts forward and began to kiss them avidly as I rolled beneath him.

"Don't!" I screamed at him. Sarah came marching in to the room, dresses, nighties and lingerie over her arms. George jumped from me. My breasts felt abused.

"She threw herself on me!" he began.

"Just as the barmaid did, and the governess, and the upstairs maid, and the assistant cook, and the daughter of the parson!" raged Sarah. "She is the worst, George, because she isn't a she! You're fooling around with a man!"

"You had me kiss her before," protested George. I tried to gather my clothes and slide from the bed.

"To teach Katherine a lesson," Sarah stormed on. "But I don't want my husband, no matter what a, a, cockroach he is, getting all lovey-dovey with a sissy-boy. Now, where do you think you're going?"

I had some idea of getting out the door, getting away. Sarah caught me and I struggled. She was right. She was much stronger than me. The starvation rations she had put me on had robbed me of my strength. The constant workouts on the dance floor tired me.

"Tomorrow, we shall start a new phase of your training," said Sarah grimly. She laced me up tightly again, increasing the pressure on my chest. A light, filmy nightie flowed over me in familiar fashion. Only the bed was unfamiliar. The manacle held me to the bed. Sarah took off my bloomers, undid my stockings and softly rolled them down my legs while George gaped at me.

"I hope the other men we have in mind for Kate," said Sarah savagely, "will find her as attractive as you do, George."

Sarah smiled as she took an enormous key from the pocket of her dress and I was locked in with my dreams and my misery. I pulled a soft counterpane over myself and blew out the candle Sarah had left me. I could still feel the imprint of George's hands on me. I could feel his weight on me, pressing on my breasts. I shuddered and tried to sleep.

It wasn't George on me. I was back in the grass by the path and it was Albert, Prince Albert, with his arms about me in my thin nightdress, his weight on me, his mouth on my breast. I wanted him to do that, to kiss me, to have his hands slipping down my body like that. Sleep came, finally, when I surrendered myself totally to the imagined caresses of my wonderful Prince.

II. SIR FRANCIS PULTENEY'S FOLLY

"I am not having George take a ransom note anywhere," said Sarah to Esther McDowell as she fitted a blonde wig over my natural hair. It was amazing how long and

curled mine was but Sarah tied it back and pinned it flatter than I would have thought possible. She put the wig on me; it fitted perfectly after she combed and pinned it to me tightly, gluing along the hair line so that I was completely blonde.

In the mirror, I looked like some courtesan at the court of the Sun King, so high was the hair on my head. My eyebrows were bleached and my skin was whitened not only by powder but by some liquid Mrs. McDowell made me wear as a foundation.

My lips were a bright red and shaped into a cupid's bow. My eyes were like deep holes of blue and black paint. My eyelashes were thickened by false ones, the whole eyelid painted. I thought I had butterflies on my lids as I batted them.

Heavy jewellery was at my neck, on my ears, in my hair and across my shoulders, between my breasts, on my arms, wrists and fingers. I even had anklets of gold that my dress occasionally swayed apart enough to flash at anyone looking at me.

I was laced into a dress no self-respecting woman would have worn. The dress showed that I had breasts. I was taped so that my chest was as fleshy as any of the other young debutantes that I knew. There was barely enough material to cup and support them. No woman I knew would have worn a dress with such a front, not even in bed.

"The latest fashion from Paris," Mrs. McDowell proclaimed. The dress followed the shape of my corset faithfully, making me out to be a very curvaceous woman.

"How do you propose to make our demands on His Lordship then?" asked Mrs. McDowell. She patted my shaped and padded fanny and I squirmed, to her amusement.

"I shall write him a letter, naturally," said Sarah haughtily. "We can pay one of your helpers here on Cleveland Street to take the letter and deliver it to Acton Square. Better than sticking it in the Royal Mail."

"And quicker," agreed Mrs. McDowell. "There," she said, spinning me so that my dress flared. "'Er own mother wouldn't know 'er now, would she?"

"Are you sure this Lord Pulteney can be trusted?" asked Sarah doubtfully.

"He was after my Edith," said Mrs. McDowell with a smile. "When I let him know that I have a finer example of sissy-boy, he'll be very content, Mrs. Lubbock, he really will."

"She looks too real," worried Mrs. Lubbock, turning me so that I could see the painted girl in the mirror, her dress flaring out. I shook as I touched the silk skirts of light blue and white silk. Sarah peered over my shoulder and adjusted my necklace between my breasts. I saw that the girl in the mirror had lovely, pear-shaped breasts above the tight ribbon tied beneath them that helped them to appear to be so womanly.

"Pulteney might ask to be convinced before he spends the night with her," Sarah said. Mrs. McDowell shrugged. She doused me again with perfume. She called it 'La Passione.' It was musky and unlike anything Sarah had made me wear before.

"Then, our little dove will give 'is Lordship a taste of 'er charms," said Mrs. McDowell with certainty. "The other girls won't object. They've seen young men in a 'ysterical state before."

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I left the room to which I had been confined for two days, rustling and wobbling on the white slippers. My dress was wide enough to brush against decorative tables and chairs along the hallway.

There was music and laughter coming from the well-lit hallway as the two women ushered me to the top of the stairs. I was brought slowly down into a circle of girls and women sitting around the large foyer.

They were dressed in the same wanton style as me, with earrings like mine, wigs like mine, makeup like mine but their bosoms were larger, fleshier in almost every case. Many of them had dresses pinned up at the front, as mine was, exposing their black stockings.

" 'Oo's the new one then, Mrs. M?" asked a girl with high, white curls just like my own. Many of the girls and women, the prostitutes of Mrs. McDowell's bawdy house, stopped talking briefly to look at me.

"This 'ere's Antoinette," said Mrs. McDowell, leading me to a sofa, where I sat with all the grace that I could. I was aware that I was being watched avidly by over twenty women.

"Looks like a virgin," said one of the women in a Northern accent. I couldn't look up at all the painted eyes studying me. That brought a round of titters from many of the girls. I could feel a flush running all over me.

"Now, now, Belle," said Mrs. McDowell from the middle of the chair. "All right girls, there are lights along the road and here is Munday."

Munday was the man who had followed Mrs. McDowell to the room I was incarcerated in. But now Munday's hair was greased back, he was shaven and he wore a butler's uniform. "Mrs. McDowell," he announced formally, "You have some gentleman callers this evening. Shall I bring them through to the reception area?"

"But of course," murmured Mrs. McDowell. I glanced up at her in surprise. She had gone all girlish as a number of men were led by Munday into the foyer where all the girls were sitting. A harpsichord was playing in the background from a large open room, its floor wooden and gleaming with polish, to the left of where I sat.

"Welcome, welcome, to our little soiree," burst out Mrs. McDowell. The men came forward, looking about keenly, bowing to her as she curtseyed to them all. "Girls," Mrs. McDowell said. We all stood and then curtseyed to the men. I felt the slightest tremble as I bowed to the little group of six men.

I had to stand there as the men surveyed us all and exchanged pleasantries with Mrs. McDowell. One man regretted that he could not stay long, owing to another appointment. Mrs. McDowell suggested 'my daughter, Renee.' The man agreed and a smiling girl went tripping up the stairs. The man held her hand eagerly as they vanished into the darker halls above.

"Well, the Duchess is not here tonight," said one of the men. Many of the girls giggled just as much as the men did.

"Oh, Sir Arthur," said Mrs. McDowell, sounding for all the world like a teenaged girl, acting like one as well. "Such spicy games are the specialty of the house."

"There is one of those nancy-boys here tonight, is there?" asked an older, red-faced man who looked like he spent a lot of time on the land.

"Just one," said Mrs. McDowell, not looking at me. "And if you can spot her, you will receive an evening on the town with her entirely free of charge."

Sarah was watching us from the entrance to the dancing room. I saw her frown immediately at what Mrs. McDowell said.

"That's why I love this house," said another man, grey-haired but young-faced, laughing at the others in the group. "Isn't it why we all come here, not only to be amused but to be challenged by the most beautiful ladies of the night in London?"

Many of the girls in my line of sight were smiling at that remark.

Munday came back then, clearly to introduce some more men to Mrs. McDowell. She waved the five men left to meet the girls even as she told Munday to show the next party in. The men looked about and strolled over to various girls who curtseyed again and chatted, smiling, to the men who accosted them.

I watched as the second group came in. Several of the men looked familiar but then they were fashionably dressed, like many of the men I had danced with at the balls I had been forced to attend. Several of the girls were sitting with men at their individual love seats and chaises lounges as a third group was announced. More men came in.

A dark-haired, younger man came up to me. I curtseyed, my legs trembling as much as my bosom, which the man was smiling at. "And who might you be, my pretty?" he asked me.

"An-Antoinette," I told him. I glanced up at him, but I couldn't keep my eyes on his face.

"A pretty name for a pretty girl," said the man. "A French name. Does that mean that you have a drop of French blood in you, as I have?"

"N-no, sir," I stammered.

"Pity," said the man with a toothy smile. "We've all heard such stories about French girls and their knowledge of lovemaking. But I expect that I will not find you lacking in that department, will I?'

"No, sir," I said, unable to think of what I could say to drive this man away from me.

Mrs. McDowell saved me then by bringing another gentleman to introduce to me. "Antoinette," she said in the same giddy, girlish voice she was now using. "This is the gentleman I hoped would be here for you this evening and he is come." She ushered forward a fair-haired young man, who frowned at the man who had been addressing me.

I curtseyed again, hearing the first man claiming that he was with 'the girl,' me, first.

"Oh, Sir Gerald," said Mrs. McDowell. "Underneath all that powder and paint, she is not your kind of girl. Sir Francis is much more likely to find Antoinette to his liking than any other girl here tonight. You, Sir Gerald, should meet a new girl I have here from Yorkshire, all newness and shyness. Her name is Belle."

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Sir Gerald looked as if he might be obstinate. The second man took my hand abruptly and pulled me back to the sofa where I was forced to sit. I had to rise a little and smooth my skirts beneath me.

"Mrs. McDowell tells me that you are a girl like her nephew, Miss Edith," he said to me, a thin smile on his lips.

"That, that, your lordship," I said, "is, is a contradiction in terms, I think."

"Oh, I love that," said the man, undoing his thick, tweed coat. "A contradiction in terms. I hope, Antoinette - that is your name? – that you are just that, a contradiction in terms like the nephew named Edith. Are you a contradiction, Miss Antoinette?"

What could I say? More and more men were coming into the establishment. It seemed that several girls were talking to more than one man at a time, just then.

Munday did his butler's duty and called out, "Gentlemen, the bar is now open and the musicians are ready. The ladies desire to dance at the gentlemen's pleasure."

"Well?" said the man I supposed to be Sir Francis Pulteney from what I had heard. "Are you a contradiction, Miss Antoinette?"

I hated to admit it to a man like him. He held my hand, stroking my long, polished nails as his watery-blue eyes looked at me intently.

"I, I think that I am, sir," I answered him. A gleam came into his eyes.

"Good," he said. He stood up and took me by the hand to assist me to my high-heeled feet. "I hope that you can dance well, Antoinette," he said. He left his coat behind as we followed the crowd, such as it was, onto the dance floor. "That was one thing that Edith could not do well. She didn't dance the quick steps well. But she was clingy in the passionate, slow waltzes and that makes up for so much, don't you think?"

"I would think so, your Lordship," I murmured. Sir Francis swept me out onto the floor and I reacted to him just as I had been trained. I had to hang on to him as the other dancers were not organized in any set or line. This was not like dancing at a ball at Acton Square. Sir Francis swung me as expertly as the Prince had done, his moves a mirror image of Albert's.

"Oh, very nice, Antoinette," said the man I was dancing with. "You have danced a lot with men."

"Oh no," I said before I even thought about it.

"You have never been to a ball?" asked Sir Francis in surprise. He looked down at me and that gleam came into his eyes again. "If it proves true that you are the contradiction that you say you are, Antoinette, I will take you to a ball. You would like that, wouldn't you?"

Pulteney was laughing at me, I could tell. I had heard stories of young men sneaking ladies of the night, whores, into great balls and grand occasions. That often led to duels by those offended by having whores passed off as grand ladies. If I was taken to such a ball and discovered, I would be flogged for sure, by the servants of whomever I had deceived.

"I would love to go to a great ball with your Lordship," I murmured. I couldn't believe how the women on the floor threw their arms about the men they were dancing with and clinched with them; their buxom bodies pressed against the men they were dancing with.

An older man, white whiskered and white mustached, came away from the bar area where he had been standing with about ten other men who didn't have women. He put out a hand as if to take me. I stood there, a little uncertain what to do. Sir Francis lifted my arms and put them about his neck, shaking his head to the man who had come to claim me.

"Oh, right, Frank," said the man, looking a little disappointed. "I'll have that one later on tonight when you've finished with her."

Sir Francis leaned over me and hugged me to him, my breasts pushing into his chest. "Now won't he get a surprise later on tonight?" he whispered in my ear. "But I don't recommend Mr. Eastley, Antoinette. I really don't. The man has no discretion. It would soon be all over London about the contradiction he found at Mrs. McDowell's establishment. Now, you act like a girl, you dance well, you speak well and you look suitably feminine for me to maintain the reputation I have. How do you fancy an evening of gaming, Antoinette?

"I'm obliged to attend my cousin and his friends this evening. A woman like you on my arm would give the night the appropriate fillip. So let us retire to Mrs. McDowell's office and we can test whether the contradiction is real or not."

Other men and women were going up the stairs and into the house. Sir Francis, his arm about my waist most possessively, guided me across the foyer to a room where Sarah Lubbock was waiting for me, her arms folded.

"Mrs. McDowell permits the use of this room," said Pulteney. Sarah opened the door, then followed us in. I stood there, a man's arm about me, claiming me.

"This one is mine," said Sarah grimly. "She's a special one and Esther needed one now that Edith has eloped to Scotland."

"She is gone to be married?" asked Pulteney. We were in the middle of a little sitting room, a table and chairs behind us, a sofa, armchairs and a fire to our left. He laughed aloud, his voice more a cackle than a true human laugh. "Pray tell, is it to a man or to a woman?"

"I believe it is to a sailor boyfriend," said Sarah, a smile crossing her face. "I gather that Edith was quite the romantic."

"She was," said Sir Francis. He pulled my body against his again but it wasn't for a dance this time. He kissed me firmly. His hands were on my derriere, pulling me against him, his leg separated my skirts, my stockinged legs tightening about him as he thrust against me.

Sir Francis mauled my mouth, his face becoming covered with my makeup. Oh, I must have looked a sight as he kissed and kissed me, rocking me so that my tasselled earrings swung about me. My breasts, such as they were, bounced against him. I shuddered as he lowered his head and began to kiss them.

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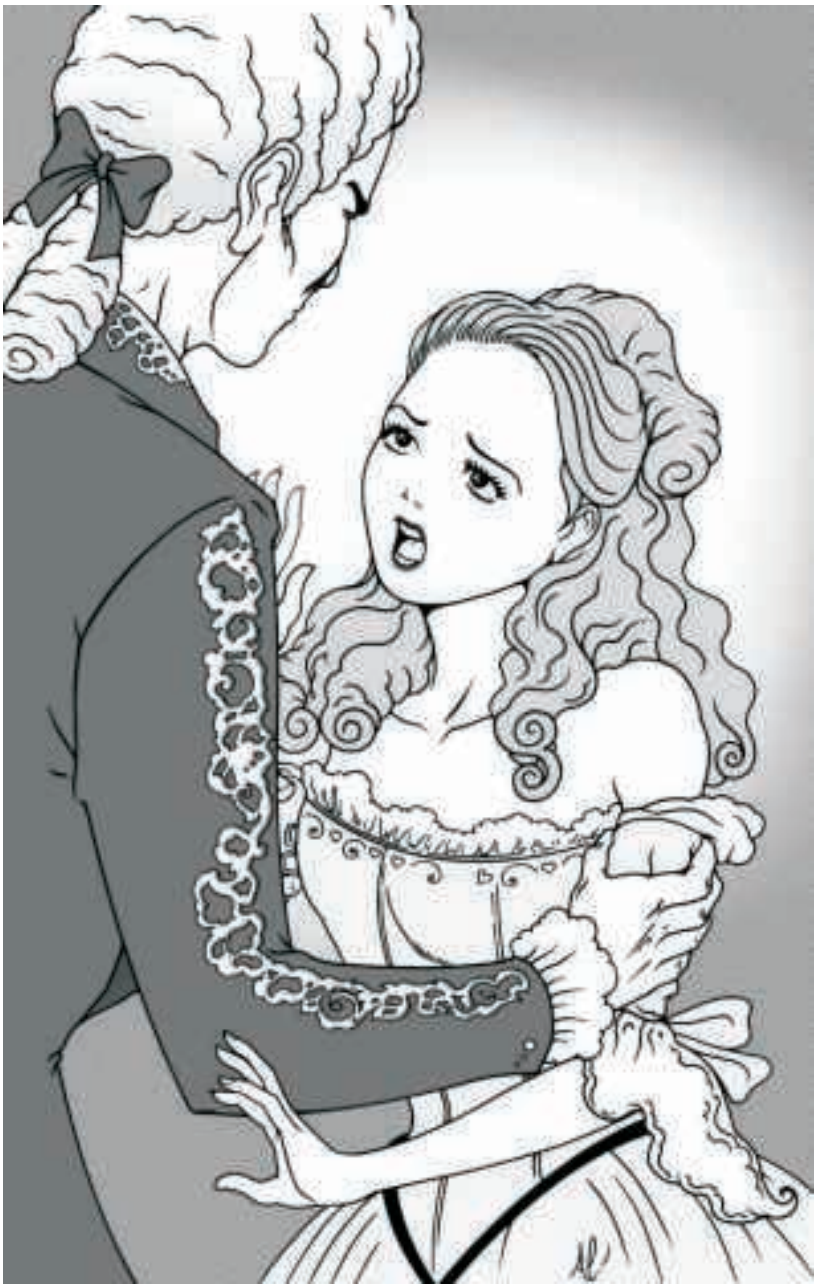
"I think you should go upstairs and take a room, the pair of you," said Sarah . She was standing there, watching him kissing my breasts as if they were womanly. She must know how loathsome I found such attentions, how shameful they were. But her eyes only gleamed as she saw me humiliated by Sir Francis Pulteney.

"I don't have the time now," said Sir Francis thickly. "But I really do have to know about your charge, Mrs., Mrs. …"

"Smith," said Sarah forcefully.

Sarah undid my dress as Sir Francis continued to kiss my neck. She stroked my arm as if to console me for what was about to happen to me.

Sir Francis put his hand between my legs and pulled my petticoats aside. I gasped and squeezed against him but Sarah was holding my arms. My bloomers were brought down and Sir Francis's hands were on my bare thighs, stroking my garters. I weaved unsteadily, moaning. Sarah held me still while the masculine hand explored me.



My panties were pushed aside and my maleness found. Sir Francis took hold of it and caressed it. I found myself shaking worse than I ever had in my life before.

"It is true," said Sir Francis. He had one hand on my manhood, stroking it, the other was about my waist holding me to him. Sarah pushed on me so that I had to kiss him again while he was playing with me; my thighs were clasping down on his hands. I had never been so terrified in my life. I knew what depravity was going to be performed on me and that I would have to do it in return to this horrible man.

"What a contradiction!" marvelled Sir Francis Pulteney, finally, reluctantly, taking his

hand away from me and lowering my skirts.

"She is everything that you desire in a woman?" asked Sarah. I felt as if I was going to be sick as my skirts swept about me. Not even the relief that swept over me as I clutched at my dress stopped the distress threatening to overwhelm me.

"Oh, more than that," murmured Sir Francis. He put his hands about my breasts, cupped them, then kissed them firmly. I felt my nipples harden. Sir Francis noticed and was pleased.

"P-please d-don't," I begged but both of them only laughed at me.

"Tonight," His Lordship promised me, "we shall have a night as man and woman that neither of us will ever forget. But we shall start at Monte's." He glanced up at Sarah. "Re-do her makeup and her undergarments. I expect that I am covered in some of that stuff you are putting on her face."

"You will take our man with you to Monte's," said Sarah as she gave the man a cloth and a towel and pointed to a bowl of water on the table. "His only task will be to see that she is delivered back safely to this establishment this evening."

"I can assure you, Mrs. Smith," began Sir Francis.

"It is the only way that I will allow my valuable merchandise to be taken out of this house," said Sarah, working on my face quickly and skilfully. "And, so that you may understand how much I value what you called a contradiction, Your Lordship, our man is armed and will not hesitate to use his pistol if need be. He has killed before and will again at any attempt to abscond with my lovely one."

"I suppose that I shall be paying for this security as well," said Sir Francis with a touch of bitterness.

"A thousand pounds for the night?" asked Sarah, stroking my hair and pinning strands back to where they should be. "I think she is worth it. And so will you, my lord, after the night you will have when your gaming is done."

"A thousand!" screeched Sir Francis Pulteney. "For a boy-whore!"

"For a very special whore," said Sarah levelly. "For a whore whom you wish to take into the most expensive gaming club in London and with whom you intend to deceive your brother, your cousin and your friends. Quite a service. I could get as much from the crowd out there and I would have takers."

Pulteney opened a coat pocket and took out a wad of notes which he threw angrily across the table. "I just made my first wager of the evening," he said, looking most severely at me. "I expect to receive everything that a man could want out of a girl like this. If she fails to meet my expectations, I will expect my money back. I, Mrs. Smith, can employ an army of men if I am crossed."

I shook with fright as Sarah put her arm about me. "Antoinette has been properly schooled, Sir Francis," she said. The notes disappeared quickly into the pockets of her dress. "She will be everything a girl should be on her first date with a man. She knows what is in store for her if she doesn't satisfy you entirely, Your Lordship. I guarantee that

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once her maidenly protests are easily overcome, as you would expect, she will satisfy you entirely."

III. SARAH LUBBOCK'S FIRST REQUEST

Lord Douglas Moore stared at the note that had been delivered to his house that afternoon and felt a stab of fear run through him. All about him, the house was in an uproar, thanks to the wife of his brother. He should never have brought Katherine to this house. He should never have let her mingle with his brother's family. William, the Earl of Hutton, was as bad as the rest.

William had even sent a note to the redoubtable William Gladstone himself, seeking his assistance in finding those who had kidnapped his brother's ward. Lord Douglas had been on the point of telling him several times that the girl who was causing them all such grief was not a girl at all. That would have shut up all this caterwauling.

Some revenge, thought Lord Douglas. He should have known that there was something wrong with that Lubbock woman. She had taken the simple act of vengeance he had planned and complicated it. But she had made Peregrine Grimond into a far sweeter, far lovelier person, if you could say such a thing about another man, than he had ever imagined she would. Now, the whole world knew 'her' and loved 'her' as Katherine Grimond.

His first reaction on not finding Katherine in the house had been anger at himself. He had known that her womanliness and femininity had all been a sham and he had fallen for it. He had felt a sharp stab of rage as he thought how he had begun to think of her as the woman she projected herself to be and how he had announced their betrothal. He remembered how he had kissed her and she had kissed him.

Douglas Moore had known that Katherine was the only woman in the world for him. He had wanted her, wanted her to be the woman that he saw in front of him. He had wanted to see her in the fantastic bridal dress that Madame Lecannet was charging him an arm and a leg for. But it was all going to be worth it, he had told himself. She, Katherine, the former Peregrine, would be spectacular as a bride and grateful to him for marrying her and making her into a woman and a wife. He had hardly dared to think what would come later. But they could adopt an heir if she wanted children.

But when hadn't been in the house for some time, Douglas was certain that Katherine had run away from him. Then, the butler reported that Miss Katherine had walked over to General Webster's to see Miss Lucy Webster. Douglas had felt a surge of relief pass through him.

Then, he made a visit to the Websters only to find that Katherine had never arrived there. The Earl of Hutton insisted on calling for the Peelers which Lord Douglas Moore didn't wanted to do. He hadn't wanted the commissioner, Sir George St. John, in his brother's house, not after the way he had been smiling and charming Katherine at the debutante ball where Katherine had come out.

The Peelers, though, had come up with the most salient fact of all. A young woman had been seized right off the High Court Road. A bunch of kids had seen it and the de-

scription they gave of the hackney cab and the driver matched a person that the whole household knew.

It spread like wildfire in the house and who knew where else. George Lubbock and his wife had kidnapped Katherine Grimond. The fan she had dropped from the cab that had been picked up by one of the kids was recognized by the Countess as one she had given to Katherine. There was no doubt that the darling of the house had been taken by the evil George Lubbock and his wife.

Commissioner St. John went off and come back late at night to report that a hackney cab had been stolen in Central London in the afternoon. It was found in the West by a band of louts who said that a man, described as George Lubbock again, had abandoned it to them. Sir George said that he had all his men in London, all the constables and special constables, on the lookout for the Lubbocks and Katherine.

There'll be a ransom note soon, said the Commissioner. "Don't you worry, Your Lordship. They won't hurt a hair on your ward's head. She is too valuable to them. Snatching her off like that in broad daylight. Amateurs! We'll catch them soon and it will be Australia for them!"

All very well, thought Douglas, as he turned the note over again. How could he explain what Sarah had written in the ransom note? The household knew he had received it and he expected St. John to be after him to see it, to read it, to want to know what the ransom note demanded.

No, he couldn't show them that one, Lord Douglas thought. He reached for a pen and began to write the note that Sarah should have written. It was brief but it took him four tries to get the writing something like hers.

It just asked for money. Fifty thousand pounds. Lord Douglas could never afford the hundred thousand Sarah really asked for. He couldn't involve the Prince as she had threatened to do. He couldn't let anyone see the references to Peregrine. Katherine's name wasn't in the note at all, or how Sarah called Peregrine 'her' and promised to return her to her betrothed if the ransom was paid. He left out all reference to the papers and the story they would have to tell if he didn't comply.

But what if the constables found her? Lord Douglas thought in panic. What if they found Katherine alive and the Lubbocks insisted on telling the whole story? Would it be better if they found Katherine dead? It might be if he could get custody of the body before anyone examined it. Why should they examine it, after all, if she was dead, shot, say, or her pretty neck was slit open?

There was a knock on his study door. Lord Douglas got up and let in his brother and the police commissioner. "We heard you have a note. Ah," said the policeman, seizing it from where Douglas had tossed it to look casually flung away. Sir George carefully read the note aloud, then put it in an empty bag he had brought with him. It seemed that the policeman had come prepared to find just such a note.

"We'll get that to the lab," said St. John.

"A lab?" asked William. "But why?"

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"Amazing what a police lab can do," said the Commissioner. "The type of paper, the ink, the handwriting, the envelope, they all tell us something. They say where something has been by all the bits that are stuck to it that you can only see through a microscope. I'll bet we can tell what part of London this note was written in and sent from in a day or so. Don't worry, Your Lordship, we're closing in on the Lubbocks with every hour passing. If one of them goes out anywhere in the City for entertainment, we'll find them. Our posters to the public houses went out tonight!"

Lord Douglas Moore sat back in horror in his chair as the others went off. He put his head in his hands. He should never have started this scheme. He should have married Maddie in Scotland right away. Disaster stared him in the face and he didn't know what he could do now to make it right and get Katherine back to him, with no embarrassing questions asked.

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Sir Francis held my hand as I held my skirts in the other. He assisted me into the carriage. The coachmen grinned at me; I was struck with fear at the thought that they recognized who and what I was.

"The lady and I will proceed to Monte's," said Sir Francis, settling beside me . He arranged my skirts about me so that I didn't show so much of my stockings. I crossed my legs and he patted my thigh reassuringly. I could barely relax. thinking that the coachmen had only smiled at me because they thought me a whore, a lady of the night.

"Just beautiful," Sir Francis Pulteney said, taking my gloved hand and lifting it up to his lips to kiss it. "On, driver, on!" he called before his voice dropped to a whisper. "You'll have to forgive the driver and his assistant," he said into my ear. "They know the kind of women that one picks up on Cleveland Street. Don't worry, Antoinette. I'll never tell them the price they'll have to pay for your special services."

I've never felt such shame and such fright. This man had touched me, run his hand over my silky, frilly panties and he knew exactly what I was. And the coachmen thought that I was a whore! I wanted to sit straight in the carriage but Sir Francis's hand was on my leg. He was caressing me, his arm about me. I sat frozen and he kissed my ear.

"What lovely perfume," Sir Francis whispered in my ear. "So delicate. You will be a total success with my friends with your dainty ways. We shall not tell them anything about you, shall we? Let us see how long you can maintain your girlish demeanor, Antoinette, ma mignonne."

I felt humiliated at his using French on me. I had done that to girls and they had smiled and asked me to say more to them. Connie Ashton kissed me time and again, until I had lost count, behind the curtains, out of sight of her parents at a soiree at the Ashtons. It had been one of the most delightful evenings of my life. I could guess now why I had never been invited back by the richest of my tenant farmers.

"Let me go first," said Sir Francis when we stopped outside a brightly lit house in a square of very tall buildings. He put his arms about my waist and lifted me down onto my

white, shiny, leather slippers. Their heels were elevated, making me think that I was walking on tiptoes like a dancer in the ballet.

"Sir Francis, Sir Francis, welcome, welcome!" said a man I took to be the major domo. He led us into the foyer of the house where my cloak and bonnet were whisked away. Sir Francis put his arm about me. I teetered against him, my petticoats swirling.

I felt terrible with my shoulders so bare. The men about us greeted him and looked at me speculatively. "And who is your lovely companion this evening?" asked a smaller man as he looked at me.

"This is a rare jewel named Antoinette," said Sir Francis.

"Paid a pretty penny for her companionship, what?" said another man. I quaked and tried to smile a little.

"You wouldn't believe it if I told you," said Sir Francis, breaking part of his promise about how he would refer to me right away. "I shall have to break the bank wherever I play tonight to afford my pretty girl, Antoinette."

"Where are you going to play first?" asked another man with a dark mustache. I had never been treated in such a way at the soirees and balls I had attended. I was a whore, I thought in utter humiliation. The men looked me over as if they were going to be the next ones to hold me as Sir Francis was holding me.

I moved his arm from about my waist and Sir Francis grinned. Several other men grinned as well. "Boxy is here with his Blanche," said the man with a mustache. "while the Honorable James is here with his sisters."

"They ought to be on Cleveland Street as well," said one of the men whom Sir Francis steadfastly refused to introduce me to.

I had to hold onto and lift up my skirts as Sir Francis assisted me up the long staircase and onto a passageway that opened into an enormous gaming room.

"I shall let my lovely companion direct me to the tables where I shall begin to fleece the house," said Sir Francis grandly. A well-dressed man in a tuxedo came forward from the crowd. "Say good evening to Monte Bridgewater, Antoinette."

I curtseyed to the man as I had been taught; several of the men who had walked up with us laughed out loud. Monte Bridgewater bowed to me, extended his hand to take mine and kissed it like a real gentleman.

"I apologize, mademoiselle," Monte said to me, looking at my powdered and made-up face. My eyelashes batted as I flushed at his interest and looked down for a moment. "There are some cretins here tonight who do not appreciate that a real lady is what she is on the inside. Welcome to my establishment. I will be most pleased to have you break the bank at Monte's, my lady. It will be a pleasure to pay you in treasure or," he dropped his voice, "in kind," he finished in a whisper.

Oh, I wished that I had a fan as Sarah had taught me how to use. I could have masked the consternation I felt at his clear interest in me. I felt goose bumps all at the way he was looking at me, still holding my hand.

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"Well, enough now, Monte," said Sir Francis, taking my hand from the club owner's and taking it in his. "On some other occasion, you may make the acquaintance of my little darling. For now, however, she is my companion for the evening, and will enchant the cards or the wheel on the game she wishes me to play. What is it to be, my darling Antoinette?"

"Oh, vingt-et-un," I told him, giving him a tremulous smile.

"Vingt-et-un it is then," announced Sir Francis. "Where the odds favor the house more than in any other of the games Monte is running here. But you have chosen it, my love, and a gentleman always follows the wishes of his fair lady."

Monte stayed with us and led us through the throngs of fashionably dressed people. "I see a highwayman or two, a bishop, a parson and a policeman," laughed Sir Francis, guiding me to a stool at one of the tables. I perched myself. I felt certain that I would fall at any moment. My skirts would surely go over my head and everything I was would be on display to the gossipmongers of London society.

"We allow anyone to attend our establishment," said Monte, winking at me, "as long as they are attended by sweet young ladies like Antoinette. For her sake, Sir Francis, I will put up with your country manners and wish you the best at my tables tonight."

"Bumpkin," muttered Sir Francis under his breath. Monte moved away, directing a dark-dressed waitress to bring us champagne.

"Don't let him hear you say that, Frank," said the mustached man. I adjusted my skirts so that they didn't open and expose my frillies and my legs as I crossed them. "He's quite a duellist and if he takes offence…" The man's shiver was quite genuine.

I couldn't bear to look down at the way my chest had been taped. I really did seem to have womanly breasts, even cleavage. When I looked down to make myself balance properly, my chest mounds moved with me, just like a woman's. I was used to the corset about me, shaping me. What if this shape became permanent, I suddenly thought. No, that could not be. It couldn't be. In my bath, I seemed to be flatter and less shapely than when I was bound and corseted. But the mounds on my chest didn't seem to flatten as quickly, if at all, in my scented bath water. I had to escape from the feminizing cage I was in, I thought wildly.

George Lubbock joined us then, with a little bundle of notes. He grinned at me. "I always go to the table with the prettiest girl," he said aloud to the dealer and the other players, all men.

I couldn't look at him. Sir Francis said that I was his good luck charm and he was right. He gambled awfully but he won all the time. The more he won, the sillier his bets became, aided, I'm sure, by the drinks he was plied with by a smiling waitress. But he won and won, pulling two aces to a nineteen to beat the dealer's face cards.

We soon had a crowd about us, including many women. Sir Francis fawned all over me and it got worse as he won more and more. After he won two thousand on a split pair of aces, he stood up and kissed me right on the lips, to hoots of encouragement from the other bettors.

"Can we do that as well if we win like you?" asked a florid gentleman with a Southern Counties' accent.

"Be my guest," said Sir Francis exuberantly. "I should tell you, though, something special about Antoinette." A chill went all over me. I thought that I must get down, no matter how ungainly I looked. I couldn't bear to be exposed as he obviously intended. "She loves a winner at cards, don't you, my little cherub? But, hah, here is my brother, and so you gentlemen panting for Antoinette's favors are out of luck."

Sir Francis put his arms about my waist and took me down from the stool. I wobbled on my heels as another man, with a raven-haired woman on his arm, came up to us. This brother looked just like Sir Francis.

"I hear you are having an extraordinary run at the tables," said Sir Francis's brother.

Sir Francis waved to the dealer to pass him on the deal. "Neville, my brother," he said in a resigned tone. "This is Antoinette. Do your pretty curtsey for him, Antoinette." I did; my skirts parted and all my frillies were on show to Neville and the woman with him.

"Why do you bring such a woman to this place?" asked Neville. He seemed furious, scaring me with the way he looked me over, his eyes on my breasts. I had the feeling that, at any moment, he would rip the dress from me and I would be exposed for what I was.

"The only sin permitted here is gambling?" asked Sir Francis with a laugh. His arm was about my waist as we moved a little away from the table and the players watching the two brothers.

"Leave it be, Neville," said the raven-haired woman, giving me a haughty look. "Better that your brother have a fancy woman on his arm rather than the abominations he has tried to pass off here in the past."

"Lady," spluttered Sir Francis in fake amusement. "You insult the Duchess of Clarence!"

"You know which is the greater sin," snapped Neville at his brother.

Sir Francis' arm tightened about me. I was startled. My earrings tossed wildly as Sir Francis kissed me lightly on my bare shoulder. "Oh, brother," he murmured. "Save your sermons for a Sunday, please."

The woman tugged on Neville's arm. The brother's hissed reply didn't reach us as he let himself be pulled away.

"My younger brother, Neville, is indeed a parson," said Sir Francis putting his arm about my shoulder again, hugging me to him. "He will await us, hoping, as we leave, to get you away from me. Then he will try to save you. And you, my sweet, are going to go with him. It is worth the thousand pounds to have you, all dewy and sweet womanhood, saved by my brother.

"I know him better than he knows himself. I have sent him three girls already and I know what he will do. It is like a scripted play. He will reward you with a kiss for your conversion to his side of the family. And I know, as Edwina does not, that he succumbs to rescued young women on a regular basis. He will fight it but before the night is over, he will have you in his bed."

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"I, I can't go with your brother to bed him," I said. A rising panic inside me made my voice sound very strained.

"Of course you can," said Sir Francis, blowing in my ear again and hugging me. "Who is paying for this night on the town? Me. And so you, my little nancy-boy, will do exactly as I say."

IV. NEVILLE PULTENEY'S GOOD INTENTIONS

Sir Francis was quite right. No sooner had he left me, shivering in the foyer, to talk to a friend himself and then to chivvy Monte for his winnings, than Neville appeared beside me.

"You don't know my brother," he pleaded with me. The foyer seemed to empty of people. "He, he sleeps with other men. He is unclean. A girl like you should not be with a man like him."

Sir Francis had told me to be demure, then surrender and let Neville save me. Sir Francis had given me explicit instructions on how I was to entice Neville to kiss me and how I was to seduce him into making love to me. Sir Francis promised me five hundred pounds and five new ball gowns to wear in the country at his house.

"I will take you, as a girl, to five balls myself," Sir Francis whispered to me as if such a promise would entice me to do what he wanted with his brother.

"You have me all wrong," I said nervously, meaning to say it as I would have said it as Peregrine Grimond, as myself. My voice came out high-pitched and squeaky, not even like the voice I used as Katherine, and certainly not Peregrine.

"You are a whore," Sir Francis reminded me, smiling and stroking my shoulder. "You do what a whore does. She accepts money for sexual favors. Make love to my prissy brother, Antoinette, and I will make sure the world knows. Antoinette will have men falling at her feet, then, men with large sums of money.

"Even the Duke of Clarence will attend you, though he may prefer to wear the nightdress instead of you. He pays handsomely just to be dressed as a woman by the whores at Mrs. McDowell's. Think what he will pay you when he learns what you are, everything he would love to be. Think what he will pay you if you were to bring him here with some of his friends. What a scandal that would be! But you would be the Queen of London for the season!"

I shook at his words. I did not want to be the Queen of London. I did not want to be at the center of any scandal. I just wanted to get away from the terrible things that were happening to me.

I wanted to get away. Then it hit me. Sir Francis was saying that Neville wanted to get me away from him. That meant out, away. I could go with Neville Pulteney as the demure, little dove he was saving from his degenerate brother. I could get Neville to help me to get away completely. I wondered if Sarah Lubbock had thought of that.

Neville was speaking rapidly, his arm on mine, pulling at me slightly to go with him. "My brother is a fornicator," he told me urgently. "You might think that you are a whore

and have committed great sin but you have done nothing compared to what my brother has done. Once you are in his clutches, I fear for your life."

I looked up at Neville's earnest face. "All right," I said to him unsteadily. "What do you want me to do?"

The look on Neville's face was incredible. He actually looked joyful. "Put this on," he said, opening up the black cloak he was carrying. I pulled it about me. My heart was beating wildly and I put my hand in Neville Pulteney's. He had to help me to disguise the wig I was wearing under the voluminous hood. My heels clicked as I scurried across the foyer and out into the courtyard as best I could. I was holding the cloak about me and pulling the hood over my high wig.

My face was covered. I didn't know that we passed George Lubbock until I heard his voice say, "Good night, guv'nor!" right beside me.

"You're a gambler like my brother," said Neville haughtily. "Please don't pester my wife and me any more. My brother has said quite enough to upset Edwina as it is. Come, my dear."

Neville's arm steadied me and assisted me to climb up into a coach. Of his wife, there was no sign. "Go to the corner of the street and I will direct you from there," said Neville to the driver. He climbed into the carriage sat beside me, on the cloak and on my skirts, rustling them considerably. I was pinned and couldn't move away. Finally, he pushed the hood of the cloak back and I could look at him.

My heart sank as I saw the way he smiled at me. "Don't worry, my child," Neville Pulteney said, putting his arm about me and drawing me to him. "You are safely out of the clutches of my brother now. Your days as a whore, selling your body, are over. Under my care and tutelage, you will soon be a girl fit to be introduced to the Queen!"

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Lord Douglas Moore faced the Royal across the desk from him in astonishment. He knew that Katherine had danced with the Prince but he had never expected what the Prince was now saying to him.

"My secretary called with invitations to St. James's Palace," said the Prince, glaring at Lord Douglas Moore fiercely. "He brought with him a special invitation to Miss Grimond to be presented to my mother. Imagine our concern when he returned with the invitation undelivered and we learned that Katherine would not be present to meet the Queen nor to dance with me as she promised me at the Kent County Hunt."

"Miss Grimond is quite ill," began Lord Douglas Moore.

"A commissioner of the new police force," said the Prince, ignoring Moore's words entirely, "Sir George St. John, has interviewed some members of my staff about a Mr. and Mrs. Lubbock in your employ. I have visited him on Scotland Street. After a rather unpleasant interview, Sir George told me that the purpose of his visit was to find out where the Lubbocks might possibly be hiding Miss Grimond after they had kidnapped her."

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The Prince placed the ransom note on Lord Moore's desk. "Is it true, sirrah?" he asked. "Has Miss Grimond been abducted and is it to this end, to pry money from you and your relatives. for her safe return?"

"It is true," began Lord Douglas Moore.

"If it is, why then did you write this ransom note?" asked the Prince, standing up and leaning across the desk, his face livid with anger.

"I, I didn't!" Lord Douglas began but the Prince's eyes bored into him.

"St. John's professors say that you did," snapped the Prince. "The paper is from this desk, as is the ink. The handwriting is drawn so carefully that it screams out to those who study such things that it is a tracing or copy of someone else's hand. Do not lie to me, my lord. You wrote this note. Sir George was planning on arresting you but he agreed to let me speak to you first. Is Katherine dead? Is that it? You arranged that your former employees should do away with her so that you may usurp her estates? Is that your plan?"

"No! No, Your Highness! No!" screamed Lord Douglas Moore in pain. "I love Katherine. I am betrothed to her!"

Prince Albert's eyes opened even wider, his mouth gaped and he stared at the other man in the office in shock.

"We announced it to the family after, after she returned from the Hunt," Lord Douglas Moore babbled. "We would have announced it to society at St. James', at the final debutantes' ball. I wished her to be presented to the Queen. It would have been most fitting after the season she has had." He began to realize then that he was talking about Katherine as if she was a girl. He was announcing his intentions to the Prince who would expect him to act upon them now in good faith.

Douglas Moore looked up at the Prince who had stepped back a pace, thunderstruck. "I love Katherine," Douglas said again. Then he cowered back at the venomous look the Prince gave him.

"You did not enlist the services of the police after she was abducted," snarled the Prince. "I can scarcely believe, Lord Douglas, that your brother and his wife have more sense than you have. Your brother has talked to the Home Secretary himself and that is how the constabulary is now involved in finding Miss Grimond. Now give me the real ransom note you received and I will mobilize all the forces that I can to find your betrothed."

Albert said the last two words with such disdain that Douglas Moore had to cringe. If he only knew, he considered, as he thought of what was said in the note from Sarah Lubbock.

"You were mentioned in the original note," Lord Douglas Moore said. He wondered how a sane man like he could ever have become involved in such a pathetic scheme as to make his rival for Maddie's affections into a woman. How could a man like he ever have done what he had and asked her to be his wife, knowing full well what she really was? Her image swam into his mind. He almost felt a sob coming as he thought of her. He saw her smiling and dancing gracefully, smiling into men's faces at the balls she attended. Some day, he had promised himself, she would smile at him like that. Surely, on their

wedding day when she was clothed in the stupendous dress that Madame Lecannet was making for her.

"Give me the ransom note," said the Prince forcefully. His hand was out as if Moore could immediately give it to him.

"I, I destroyed it," said a trembling Lord Douglas Moore. "I, I had to! Sarah would have come to you next!"

Prince Albert frowned. "Come to me?" he asked, perplexed. "But why?" He stopped then. "Did Katherine tell you or anyone else," he asked stiffly, "what passed between us on the pathway where I found her after she was unhorsed at Kent County?"

Something had passed between the Prince and Katherine? It was Douglas's turn to look totally shocked. He stared incomprehensibly at the Prince.

"I did make her an offer," said the Prince then, clenching his jaw. "I asked her to be my mistress, to my great shame. If your kidnappers wish to reveal that to the world, they can go ahead. I will admit what I have done. Now, give me the demanding letter, Moore, or I shall call the Peelers into this house. They are waiting at the entrance to Acton Square as we speak. Without the note, you are to be arrested on the minute and thrown into Newgate Prison, I assure you. Then, St. John and his men shall search this house from top to bottom. If that note exists, we shall find it and we shall examine it for clues as to where we might find Miss Katherine Grimond."

Lord Douglas Moore stared at the Prince. "I, I can't," he began. Then he made the fatal mistake of glancing at the drawer in his desk that contained the letter.

The Prince's face was steely as he charged about the desk and took Moore's hand from the drawer. "No!" cried the beleaguered Lord. The Prince's expression was implacable as he pried Moore's finger from the drawer and opened it. Albert found the letter in moments. Moore cried to him to stop, that this was ungentlemanly in the extreme.

The Prince read the letter once, turned his back on Moore, then moved off to read it again and again.

At last, he turned to look at Lord Douglas Moore. His face was ashen and haggard. He seemed to have aged a half-century in reading the contents of Sarah's hateful letter.

"It does seem, my lord," said the Prince then, "that you are quite correct. Such a letter can never be allowed to reach the public domain."

Moore's head nodded obsequiously. The Prince held the letter between finger and thumb as if it might soil him if he folded it.

"The Lubbocks demanded a hundred thousand pounds," the Prince went on, eyeing Moore wearily. "You changed that to fifty in the new note."

"I, I don't have the money!" Lord Douglas said, his voice rising in pitch.

"I will supply that," said the Prince. Moore recoiled as he saw the look that the Prince directed at him. "What an evil man you are," the Prince went on. "What an evil scheme the Lubbocks wish to claim authorship for."

"Yes, it was them," said Lord Douglas hastily.

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The Prince eyed him as if he was a maggot crawling over a rotten piece of meat. "It was your vengeance," said the Prince, pointing an accusing finger at him. "You set this scheme in motion. You couldn't know that I would be ensnared in your wickedness. How you must have laughed when you saw me with her, how the Countess tried desperately to bring Katherine and me together. How could this be a worse scandal than it is now!"

"You could have asked Katherine to marry you," said Lord Douglas Moore, taunting the aristocrat.

V. LADY EDWINA'S INTERVENTION

It was a relief to remove the huge hair piece I had worn for the night. I had to let Neville help me as the pins Sarah had used were often subtly hidden and stabbed me when I tried to free myself. Neville Pulteney shushed me nervously when I cried out as he tried to release me from the wig.

"Quietly," he whispered to me, glancing fearfully at the closed door to the room in the church parsonage where he had brought me. "We, we mustn't awaken the m-, the servants, yes, the servants of the house who share this floor with you."

"I think that my hair is stuck," I cried.

"Oh no," said Neville. He took my hands in his, his eyes flickered to my bosom. "Rest, Antoinette, and prepare yourself for bed," he told me, bringing forth a most revealing nightdress from the chest of drawers in the room. He laid it tenderly on the bed. I gulped as I looked at it.

"I shall go and get some solvent," said Sir Francis's brother. "This is only actor's glue and I have the perfect thing to dissolve that." He smiled at me. "You are not the first young woman I have rescued from my brother's evil clutches."

"Your brother," I gasped. "He will be after me. He will know where you live."

"Not here," said Neville triumphantly. "He will never find you here, Antoinette, for this is not my home. This is the house of my bishop and he is abroad. You will be safe here. Please. Loosen your corset and make yourself comfortable, Antoinette. If you need a maid's help, I am afraid that, tonight, there is only me." He smiled at me. "And the first of my maid's duties is to assist you to remove that incredible head of hair!"

He left me then. I was alone and I wasn't manacled to the bed or locked in a room with barred windows. I felt like dancing about the room and swirling my petticoats high at the freedom I felt. I knew what I was going to do. I was going to wait just a little while and then, when the house was still, I would steal out of this house and be on my way.

If I was accosted by a man on the road, I would have to co-operate with him if I couldn't find a weapon in the kitchen that I could use. Thank you, Neville, I thought smugly, for pointing the kitchen out to me as he brought me up the maids' stairs and to this small bedroom.

I pirouetted to celebrate my freedom, my dress and petticoats rustling about me. On the second pirouette, I spun right into the arms of Neville Pulteney.

"What a beautiful sight," murmured Neville. His face was shadowed in the half-light of the single, shaded night-candle.

"I, I was happy," I murmured to him, feeling my flesh shiver with goose bumps as his arm remained casually about my waist.

"You have such a delicious aroma about you, Antoinette," murmured Neville, gently moving my loose hair to one side. "I wish my wife," he sighed, "would wear such aromas. It is musk, is it not?"

"Oh, yes, sir," I told him, a meek, little, penitent girl.

"Sit beside me on the bed," whispered Neville then, drawing me down beside him. My dress swayed all about us both as I sat, the divide in my dress opened and my stocking legs were exposed to my knees.

"I love to see a girl in a Spanish dress like the one you are wearing," said Neville gallantly. "It brings out such beauty."

I was supposed to be demure. That was easy when I had never felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself for being in the predicament I was in. I shuddered as I thought of the things I might have to do to escape.

Neville poured some liquid onto a cloth, applied it to me. Within seconds, my wig began to come free. Oh, it was so wonderful to be free of the hot, itchy wig! I removed the wig cap and used both hands to loosen my hair and shake my auburn ringlets free.

"Oh, yes, Antoinette," murmured Neville beside me, watching me shake out my curls. "You said that you were not a blonde, Antoinette. I think you are even prettier now that I see you as you should be." His hand touched my bare arm. I felt a tingling run through me, the sort of feeling I had felt when Lord Douglas Moore touched me.

"Please don't," I said to him. Neville jumped to his feet as if he had been stung.

"Oh, Antoinette, a thousand apologies," Neville whispered urgently to me. "You are safe here, my girl, quite safe. "Sleep well in this room. I shall be in the large bedroom at the end of the hall if you need me. Come at a run if you need. I am not like my brother at all!"

Neville scurried from the bedroom. I lay down on the bed, not unlacing myself at all, just using the cloth and soap as Sarah had taught me, removing the kohl from my eyes and the rouge and lipstick from my face. There was little I could do about the fragrance that emanated from me.

I propped up the pillows on the bed and tried to rest without going to sleep. The parsonage, if that was what it was, was very quiet. I would rest just a little, then I would be on my way.

I had nothing of value but the jewellery at my neck and ears and on my fingers and arms. It should bring me something, if only coppers for a meal. The dress I wore was gaudy and it should bring something in a pawn shop. I got up and quietly explored the cupboards and the wardrobe. There was no dress but there was a lot of women's underclothing and night dresses. I had seen where Neville hung the cloak I had worn when I had swished up to and through the doors. I would wear it when I tiptoed back out again.

I blew out the candle and rested.

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Cold awakened me. My room was awfully cold. Sense came surging back and I remembered where I was. Grey light poured in through the partly curtained window. It helped me to find my way to the door and out of the room.

Swish, swish, I went as I edged along the passage and down the maids' stairs. I headed to the kitchen but I couldn't see. It was far too dark for me to go rummaging for what I wanted, a knife.

I backed out of the doorway towards the front door and the alcove where my cloak should be stored. I got halfway there when I suddenly sensed tobacco in front of me. I stopped and stepped backwards but a rough hand was on my arm.

"Leaving us so soon, Antoinette?" asked Neville Pulteney. His voice was a hoarse whisper.

I tried to shake my arm free from his grip. His other arm took hold of me as well. "Stealing the silver from the kitchen?" he mocked me.

"No," I whispered. "I, I'm lost. I, I have to get out of here."

"That you do not," said Neville, still in pitch blackness to me. "I told you that you are safe here. And you are. You will be. If you just go back to your room."

"I have to get away," I whispered back to him. "I must. I, I am not who you think that I am. I, I've been kidnapped …"

Neville's lips suddenly descended on mine. His arms went about my resisting body. I found myself almost lifted from my feet as another man kissed me and held me like a girl. His mouth took complete possession of mine. My feverish struggling only seemed to inspire him even more. I was pressed against Neville's hard chest.

"It's true!" I gasped as Neville held me. His face was pressed into my hair, kissing me. He held me so tightly to him that my breasts bulged and bounced against his chest. "I was kidnapped. I'm not a whore."

"You don't have to make up stories like the other girls," murmured Neville, holding me. "I know what you are, Antoinette." He sounded very sad. "I will take you back to your room now and I will make sure that you don't run away until we have decided what we can do with you."

"I have to get out," I said loudly as he dragged me back to the maids' stairs.

"Shush," whispered Neville, putting one hand over my mouth. I tried to call out again. He seemed ready for me, for suddenly a rag was in my mouth, then another rag was put about it. I was gagged!

Neville put his hand underneath my thigh and picked me up. I tried to cry and to grab at things but he expertly steered me away from noisemakers and took me back to my greyly lit room.

Neville had not undressed either. "Say nothing and I will ungag you," he whispered, laying me on the bed.

I nodded, determined to talk to him, to explain. He was a parson! He would help me when he knew what had happened to me.

"You whores always have such wonderful stories," said Neville as he took of his jacket and took my shawl from me. "But I want no more stories, Antoinette. I have sat in the chair by the door and waited for the rustle of your skirts and the fragrance of musk to let me know that you were going to betray me, steal from me, and run back to the only way of life that you know."

"No, No!" I whispered as Neville rolled against me and opened the front of my dress with a dramatic flourish. "Please help me!" I begged him as his hands caressed my thigh and rose up my stockings to my suspenders and garter belt.

"Oh, I am going to," moaned Neville, swinging his legs between mine, forcing them apart. "I am going to help you earn five pounds, my pretty little Antoinette, far above what a girl from the gutter like you can ever expect for one night's work. And you will help me, I can assure you. You will help me in ways you cannot imagine. Think of the trinkets you can buy with five pounds, my girl, in a city like London."

Neville brought his mouth back to mine then and the fight began in earnest. He had undone my dress and my corset. My breasts were exposed and he was kissing them fervently. My legs were lifted up above his head. Whenever he wished, he caressed or kissed my legs or my panties that he had finally freed from the long bloomers that had concealed them.

What a sight I must have looked with my skirts bunched about my waist. My legs were about Neville's head. I wriggled and Neville planted a kiss on the front of my panties. His hands made my nipples harden as he caressed and pinched me. What a sight it must have been for Lady Edwina when she bustled into the room, with a lantern in her hand.

She came directly to the bed and picked up the nightdress that lay there. "And you even gave your whore the very nightdress that I wore on my wedding night!" Lady Edwina screamed at her husband, beating him about his head as he held onto me. He didn't even stop caressing my quivering, denigrated body through the first blows she rained down on both of us.

"Edwina, desist!" Neville shouted. "Desist, woman. It means nothing. She is only a whore who doesn't want to be rescued at all!"

"You fool!" screamed his wife. "Frank came to me. Guess what he told me. He's quite proud of himself. Your little whore isn't a girl at all but a sissy-boy. If you get those panties off, you'll find out quickly how your brother has made you the laughingstock of London again. He has his minions outside all waiting to burst in here and catch you 'in flagrante delicto'!"

"You're a boy!" Neville screamed at me. His hands were still caressing the tight fleshy mounds on my chest that seemed to be reacting as if they were a girl's breasts.

"Yes! Oh yes!" I gasped. "I need you to help me. I was …"

There was the sound then of a huge banging and the noise of men's voices.

"I left the door open for them," said Lady Edwina smugly.

"You filthy whore!" screamed Neville Pulteney, rolling off me just as his brother entered the room, a big smile on his face.

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"Oh, now, Neville," said Sir Francis Pulteney. "Antoinette is the cleanest of whores. And the cleverest. She's such a tease, isn't she? Come on, darling. The jest is over. Here are all my friends to visit you in your hour of triumph."

Neville was outraged and trying to swing at his brother. One of the men I had seen earlier with Sir Francis held him back. Several other men entered the room and were looking at me in great interest as I tried to put my breasts back in the breast band and corset.

Lady Edwina was laughing contemptuously at her husband. "Now, your whole precious family will know exactly what type of man you really are," she said.

I was bundled out to a cold, gray morning and a waiting carriage. George Lubbock was sitting astride his horse, my horse, looking for all the world like a highwayman as he watched me bundled in my rustling petticoats into the carriage.

"Is she to be at your Sissies' Ball tonight, Frank?" the mustached man from the night before asked Sir Francis.

"Antoinette will be the Queen of the Sissies," said Sir Francis Pulteney. "We shall have to auction her off at midnight. Bring your moneybags, Nigel, as she won't be going cheap. I paid a thousand for her services tonight and I didn't even get a taste. My brother had her all night long!"

"Why do you call this sissy-boy 'her'?" asked another man who had squeezed into the carriage with us. "She is a boy, isn't she?"

That set several of Sir Francis's cronies off into hoots of laughter. I sat there, wishing I carried a loaded pistol or two as I had when I was Peregrine Grimond.

"Stand up, ma chere Antoinette," said Sir Francis, lifting me up off the seat so that I teetered between the press of leering men. I shivered at his use of the feminine adjectives for me.

"Lift your skirts, all the way up!" Sir Francis ordered me. Then he humiliated me beyond all count. He pulled down my bloomers and my panties and exposed me to the world. "Hold those skirts up," he told me severely, spinning me about so that all his cronies could get a look at my maleness. "Now, isn't that something to wonder at?" Sir Francis smirked. I felt only despair.

"But it's so much fuss," said the mustache man, Nigel, "over such a little thing." He was joined in the last words by most of the men in the carriage.

I felt awful as the men talked and laughed about me, my breasts, my clothes and my legs. They even opened my dress again to look at my legs and my garter belt after I had dropped my skirts.

"All the sissies will dress like her, I mean him?" asked one of the men.

"More so," grinned Sir Francis. "The Duchess has decreed it. From the skin out, tonight!"

"This I really have to see," chortled the mustached man. He stroked his mustache as I sat on his lap. I hated how my breasts jiggled and how he looked over them.

"Haven't you humiliated me enough?" I muttered in despair to Sir Francis who was on my other side, holding my hand.

"Oh, not nearly enough, my darling," he told me with a crooked smile.

VI. PRINCESS ANTOINETTE'S CORONATION

Sarah and Mrs. McDowell outdid themselves with my new wig and gown. The red hair covered my own and was pinned at the side of my head. It flowed down my back, my bare back, reminding me constantly how I looked. The dress I wore was daringly strapless. The black silk across my breasts seemed to be supported only by my breasts.

Actually, the neckline was adhered to me so that I would not pop out of the dress as I did several times when I was corseted anew in a boned, black and blue merry widow. There was only silk over my breasts with no padding and so my nipples could be seen. They could be touched and would press against any man who leaned on me.

"This is such a fine result," enthused Mrs. McDowell, putting her hands on my breasts and jiggling them. "Twenty-four hour binding and manipulation?" she asked.

Mrs. Lubbock smiled at my taut, anxious face. "Among other things," she said. She whispered something to Mrs. McDowell then and the woman began to fondle my chest mounds until I gasped and pulled away, begging her to stop.

"I must try that concoction with Edith and Lord Abersford's sissy," said Mrs. McDowell, ignoring me. Sarah smiled and began to put jewellery on me to compliment my expertly made-up face. She even put a tiara in my hair and had me swish up and down the room in my new, black, strappy shoes.

"Oh, she is the perfect little sissy!" said Mrs. McDowell, rubbing her chubby hands together in glee. "The men at the ball are going to eat her up!" She laughed and laughed at her own wit.

The Sissies' Ball was a parody of the debutantes' event taking place at St. James's Palace even as I was being brought down the familiar staircase to the familiar foyer. This time, however, the sofas where the girls had sat were now home to some of the tallest 'women' I had ever seen. The girls of Mrs. McDowell's stood about, but all dressed in dark men's evening suits, their faces devoid of makeup. They bent over and touched the women on the sofas who reacted just as women should at the attention of any man.

A gorgeous blonde rose as I reached the bottom of the stairs and let one of the 'men' put his arm about her and lead her into the dancing room. Mrs. McDowell's major domo, in powdered wig and uniform, banged his staff on the ground and announced that the Princess Mathilda had entered the assembly room.

Sarah guided me to where the Princess Mathilda had sat. I sat there now, draping my skirts properly about me. Sir Francis and his friends appeared along with another group of even rougher men.

"You are not to dance with them," said Sarah, indicating the rougher group. "The soldiers are provided solely for the benefit of the other Princesses tonight. Your interests will be promoted in quite another direction."

Mrs. McDowell's 'men' gave way easily to the newcomers. Many behaved with fake male gallantry to the 'women' on the sofas, who were fanning their faces and bosoms de-

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murely with their painted fans, declaring that the men making them offers were just too, too forward. They stood and one pair after another passed through the arch and into the dancing room. Being announced as Princess Ariadne, Princess Clementine, Princess Marie Therese, even Princess Alexandria, the white-painted women with bright red lips and blue-painted eyes swished into the dancing room. Princess Gertrude brought gasps and a little applause as she went in. She was smaller and looked exceedingly feminine, I thought, as I sat and Sarah's arm brushed my bare back.

"The Honorable Charles Leonard," whispered Sarah to me contemptuously. "Don't you think he is twice as beautiful as his sister, Winifred?"

I had met the Honorable Winifred Leonard at two of the balls I had been at. She had said lovely things to me about my dresses and my skill at dancing with men. I remembered her laughing and asking me please not to watch her in the Gay Gordons. She would be the one stumbling with a partner too short for her and his exasperation with her would be very clear.

"I wish I was small like you, or like my brother," said Winifred, whose smile, I thought, made up for her already matronly figure. "That's why I'm going to the Guardsman's Ball. The men are so tall. Do say you're not going, Miss Grimond. Give us regular girls a chance at one ball this season with handsome men."

"I am not going to that ball," I assured her. Winnie linked arms with me, her perfume overpowering me, her arm making my breast jiggle, as I bit back on the thrill of the sensation of a woman touching me, and not a man.

"You're my best friend," proclaimed a smiling Winifred Leonard.

Winnie was quite right about her brother. His slight figure made the man holding his arm tower over Princess Gertrude. Gertrude smiled beautifully and minced with her partner into the room, looking like a much slimmer version of her sister, clearly loving the swirl of her dress and the man's arm on her.

"May I have the pleasure?" asked Sir Francis Pulteney. So I was paraded into the dance hall as 'Princess Antoinette' while the men and women in the room applauded for me. I tried to smile as I had been told to a thousand times by the women who had prepared me for this ball.

The music for this ball was little different from that of any ball but the dances were quite different. Here, the men held onto the gorgeously gowned ladies and the slow waltzes were opportunities for men to hold the women closely and to put their heads on the ladies' cheeks and to kiss their necks. I saw several of the women in fervent lip locks with men.

It wasn't a surprise to me as I had been forewarned that, once liquor was served, women would spread their skirts and sit in their beaux' laps, encouraging the kind of touching of their legs and dresses that could only be described as lewd. The ladies ate up the attention, welcoming it, rewarding the men with kisses. More drinks were served to them by Mrs. McDowell's 'men' in their black tuxes.

I was mauled and touched and pinched by Sir Francis and all his friends, who were getting dunker by the minute.

I was back in Sir Francis's arms. He was kissing my scented neck and long earrings while I prayed for the night to end when there was a sudden break in the proceedings. "My lords, ladies and gentlemen," announced the major domo. "Now entering the ball, the arbiter of the evening, and our reigning Queen," that drew an enormous cheer, "the Duchess of Bedlam and her princess attendants."

The Duchess was magnificent from the ostrich feathers in her tall, blonde wig to the tip of her painted toes, which we could all see through her silk stockings and open-toed high heels. She was smiling broadly as she swept into the room, blowing kissed in ladylike fashion to all her friends. She was accompanied by two dark-haired girls who skipped and danced down the floor exuberantly. The men accompanying them were grinning and hard-pressed to keep up to the women in their flowing gowns and high-heeled shoes.

I gasped as the Duchess descended on Sir Francis, wondering if she would recognize me as I recognized the Duke of Clarence.

"Oh, Frank, it is you," lisped the Duchess, clearly thinking that the appropriate way to speak at a Sissies Ball. "I hear you say such nasty things about me, you terrible man. So, here I am, your Duchess, Frank. I expect you to atone for all your bad boy ways with a proper kiss."

Sir Frank rose to the occasion. He released me and took the Duchess in his arms and kissed her thoroughly and convincingly. All the dancing partners applauded wildly. The Duchess's attendants latched on to their willing men with passionate embraces and even more passionate kisses.

"I declare that we shall now play a kissing waltz," said the smirking bandleader. "All ladies must be on the floor with a partner."

Sir Francis was locked to the powdered and painted

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Duchess. Nigel took me in his arms and I had to kiss him at every stop of the music, his mustache tickling me no end. It was amazing how quiet the hall was as all the men dressed as women were kissed and fondled. Nigel couldn't keep his hands off my fanny as he rocked against my breasts. I was crushed into his abdomen and I felt his arousal against me. I trembled as he mauled my red mouth. He forced his tongue into me, evidently a foretaste of what he wanted me to do to him.

Nigel glowered at Hedley, the young man who wanted to know why I was called 'she' in our crowded carriage ride back to Cleveland Street. For a moment, I thought the two would come to blows but Nigel relented. I had to dance with Hedley. Many of the women were taking lipstick tubes from their purses and redoing their lip, smiling into the faces of the men who had removed their makeup.

In the Sissy Parade, I had to walk the column of men, seated at tables or on the floor while they called obscenely and jovially to me and the other girls. Most of the girls loved it. Many answered back just as lewdly as the men, the banter inevitably ending with a challenge for later in the evening for proof in the nature of 'put up or shut up. Mine is bigger than yours!'

I held up my gown and sashayed down the floor. Most of the calls I heard were about my breasts. A young bucko suddenly stood up. I backed away in panic as he grabbed my boobs as the noise intensified. "They're real!" he announced gleefully to the audience as I came to the part where I had to twirl and let my dress float. Some of the men were laying on the floor and giggling as they looked up the dresses as most of the women willingly ran over them.

Three of us were brought back to parade right up to the chair where the Duchess sat. She had a crown in her hands and she ordered us to turn, Princess Gertrude, Princess Alexandria and me. I looked out over the crowded room and suddenly felt my tiara being removed. On my head was pressed the crown.

"Our new Queen of the Sissies," proclaimed the Duchess, shouting to the applauding assembly. "Sir Francis Pulteney's pretty little hermaphrodite, Princess Antoinette. I now declare her to be Her Majesty, Queen Antoinette!"

Flower petals and confetti descended on me from the Duchess's screaming, laughing attendants. Princess Gertrude hugged me. "I wish it was me," she said in a tenor voice. Then, Princess Alexandria, a striking brunette, hugged me as well, not knowing, I think, her own masculine strength.

I was paraded about the room then. More petals and flowers were tossed at me until the floor was covered and it was hard to walk. I tried to smile. All of the eager faces of the men dressed as women seemed to long to be me. I was Queen of the Sissies, I thought miserably. Sir Francis presented me with an enormous flower bouquet as if I really was a woman.

I had to stand there then in the center of the floor while the Duchess conducted a ribald auction for me. One wag bid a hundred pounds. "A hundred pounds!" screamed the Duchess. "I wouldn't get down on my knees at all for a hundred pounds!"

Once Nigel bid a thousand pounds for me, the bidding became very serious. Hedley bid two thousand, then Sir Francis bid five thousand.

"Oh, you lucky girl!" shouted the Duchess. "Just what the Earl of Huffington offered me to warm his bed last night. But I'm a Duchess, I told him, my earrings alone cost more than that. Are we going to let Frank Pulteney deflower this sweet virgin for a mere five thousand pounds? Why, I bid ten thousand pounds for her myself?"

"You can't bid! You can't bid!" shouted people in the audience. The Duke of Clarence turned and wiggled his ample fanny in the glittering silver and white dress he wore. "You're a woman! You can't bid!"

"You heard it here," said the Duchess then, smiling broadly. "I am a woman! And for a woman, not a sissy, that will cost you double tonight, Arthur." She pointed at some man in the crowd and the noise became raucous.

The Duchess then counted down the auctioneer's final offer. I was going, going, gone. I was sold to Sir Francis Pulteney to do with me what he would. I was the Queen of the Sissies and I deserved every degradation that my purchaser was going to inflict on me, I thought numbly.

I was held then by the Duchess's helpers and led out of the hall and across the hall, through a doorway into a bedroom, dominated with a four poster, canopied bed. A skimpy, nightie lay on one pillow. The helpers led me into the room and began to undress me, taking away my rings and necklace, my bracelets, even my crown. The crowd, singing 'The Whore of Babylon' in male voices, told of all the delights my lover would receive from me. The graphic detail of the amended, sissified version left nothing to the imagination.

I was undressed, my maleness proved. I didn't know which to cover most, my penis or my breasts as hands passed over me, touching me, pinching me. Then the Parade left to return to the dance and I was left naked, right there in front of Sir Francis Pulteney.

"Take your arms away," Sir Francis said to me. I lowered my trembling hands to my sides. He moved the hand that guarded my male genitalia.

"Please," I begged him. "I, I'm not a sissy, really. I'm a boy. This is all a terrible mistake."

"Oh, I hope so," said Sir Francis, putting his hands on my arms and pulling my unwilling body to him. "I do hope so."

Sir Francis kissed me and I tried to twist my head away. He seized my penis and I gasped. My hands pushed at his chest but he held me more firmly. "I paid five thousand for a night with my hermaphrodite," he said in a choked, desperate voice. "I want you to make love to me, Antoinette, man to man. Now, put your hands about my neck and kiss me."

He didn't have to threaten me any more. I knew what awaited me if I didn't co-operate. Tentatively, I put my arms about his neck and let him kiss me, let him press against me and lightly run his hands down my body. He smiled at the terrible shivers that ran through me which I couldn't suppress.

"Put on the nightdress," he said huskily. With trembling hands, I did so as he began to take off his shirt.

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I was fastening the ribbon on the frilly neckline about my breasts when an inner door opened.
"Who do you think?" Sir Francis began angrily.

George Lubbock smacked the man over the head. He grinned at me. "Five thousand?" he sneered. "I can have you for free any time."

I stared at George Lubbock as he struck the moaning Sir Francis Pulteney several times on the head.

Sarah Lubbock sauntered in then from the inner door. "Get back in your clothes," she told me, going to the door that led to the noisy revellers in the dancing hall. She tossed a cloak on the bed beside me.

"We're leaving?" I asked her stupidly.

"Why not?" asked Sarah, smiling proudly at me. "We have the hundred thousand pounds Lord Douglas Moore paid us for Katherine Grimond's safe return. We have you, Antoinette, the Queen of the Sissies. And we have yet to contact His Highness about the scandal sheet story we shall produce about him and you. I think another hundred thousand is quite possible. Come on, girl, get that dress about you. I want to be far gone from here when the crowd takes it into its mind to see how their Queen is progressing with her lover."

George Lubbock was rifling through Sir Francis's pockets. He found some bills and coins that he pocketed. "No five thousand," he said to Sarah. She laced me tightly and sealed me into my corset.

"No matter," grunted Sarah. "Let Esther and him fight over who owes who what. Come on. Let's get going. That carriage won't wait for long."

I had the cloak draped about my shivering body as I carried my shoes and my jewels. We ran out of the back door, along a passage and out into the cold air of the street.

"Hey!" yelled someone and Mrs. McDowell's hulking bodyguard stood up from a step. A pipe of tobacco glowed in the dark as the air got to it. George Lubbock didn't wait. He fired his pistol into the other man's face, swinging his cudgel as well as the man tried to reach out and grab one of us.

We left him gurgling in the dirt of the alley. Sarah ran me around the corner and a carriage eased forward. "What was that?" asked the driver, looking hard at us.

"You don't want to know," said George Lubbock. He leered at me. I trembled, half sitting in the carriage, beginning to put my stockings on as Sarah directed me.

"You're a fool," snapped Sarah. I raised my skirt and smoothed my stocking up my leg. George watched my every move avidly. "Now we have to go to ground. The hue and cry will be after us."

"We get out of the city," protested George as he watched me attach my stockings to the suspenders of my corset.

"Too late for a long haul carriage," retorted Sarah. "We ditch this one in Leicester Square and find a hack to take us to another place that will take the three of us." She grinned at me. "The Queen of the Sissies will pave the way out of London for us."

VII. THE DUKE OF CLARENCE'S CONFESSION

"I am really sorry, Your Highness," said the bruised, bleeding inspector. "I, I've never had to fight like that before. The man was an animal."

"It couldn't be helped," said Prince Albert, seeing how St. John's man had to move his left arm with his right to place it along the side of the armchair. The man had taken several devastating blows before his assailant had cut away the satchel with the money for Katherine Grimond's ransom in it.

Albert spent a little time consoling the man before going gloomily back into Sir George's office.

The commissioner was talking to a number of other officers about a raid they were about to undertake on Cleveland Street, notorious for its brothels and vice dens.

"I am sorry, Your Highness," Sir George St. John repeated. "I should have sent more men."

"The fire was clearly a distraction," said the Prince. "Your man confirms it. He was caught in an unenviable position as were the men who reacted to the fire. At least all your men are still alive and will fight another day."

"Yes, Your Highness," said St. John, relieved clearly by the Prince's attitude towards the lost money. "If only we weren't so distracted with so many operations going on all at once. This raid on Cleveland Street is taking up much planning time and many men. This is the time when the deviates crown their Queen of the Sissies, if you can believe it. They do it now to coincide with the ball at St. James. It's quite a ribald affair and we hope to round up a number of the principal organizers tonight, the Duchess of Bedlam and his attendant princesses."

Albert grimaced. He had not been able to face a ball that night. His mother was furious with him, he knew, but it would not have been any pleasure at all. He had disturbing thoughts whenever he saw a slim, auburn-haired woman lately. He looked at them hard, probably scaring them, as he imagined what they would look like if they were a man. No, no ball could cure the deep anger and hurt he felt at what had happened to him as an unwitting victim of an evil plot. Then, the money was lost as well. Still, Katherine might be returned after all. What hard words he would have to say to her when once they met again! He went to a hotel to sleep and avoid the revelries in his home that night.

Gerard, his butler, had to shake him hard several times to wake him as the Prince fought to sleep. "It's four in the morning!" he exclaimed to Gerard as the man laid his clothes on his bed. Gerard as usual was impeccably turned out, no matter the hour.

"It's a message from Commissioner St. John, Your Highness," said Gerard implacably. "He said it is most important that you attend him immediately at Scotland Street. I believe it concerns the Duke of Clarence."

"What the devil?" asked the Prince. Whatever could George have been up to now? He stopped for a moment and thought about it. Cleveland Street. The Queen of the Sissies. The Duke of Clarence. Oh heavens, his mother was going to have a fit.

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Madame Lecannet tightened the robe about herself. The hostile look she gave Sarah was clear and undisguised. "I am making a wedding dress for this girl," she said, indicating me. "Milord Moore will pay me a thousand pounds. You want me to give you refuge and lose one thousand pounds?"

"We'll give you five thousand pounds," said Sarah crisply. All hope I had that the big woman would help me vanished as I saw the thoughtful look come into her eyes.

"It is a pity about the dress," murmured Madame Lecannet. A surprising West Country accent came into her voice as she smiled at me. "You would have looked so beautiful in it, ma cherie," she said to me. "I believe that I was truly inspired in creating this special gown for you. Perhaps it was in knowing just what kind of beauty was being contained in my lovely dress."

"Enough," said Sarah Lubbock impatiently. "I have a package that I want you to arrange to be sent as well."

Madame Lecannet looked at the address on the outside and dropped it immediately as if she had been scalded. "A Royal Prince?" she said, her mouth falling open in dismay. "Are you mad, Sarah Lubbock, entirely mad?"

Sarah came behind me and stroked my cheek, flicking my tasseled earrings. I tried not to react to her at all as I sat there in my cloak and gown. "He chased after our damsel when she galloped away from the Hunt," Sarah said avidly. "The huntsmen were laughing about the amount of time the prince and our treasure were alone and no one could find them. One remarked at the Coach and Hounds in Telyham that the lady looked a trifle flushed when she rejoined their party. You never have told us exactly what went on between you and the Prince, have you, Katherine my dear? Why not tell us now? We would all love to hear it."

I looked across fearfully at Madame Lecannet's beady eyes on me. I couldn't say anything. Sarah played with my long hair and stroked my shoulders. She lifted the neckline of my dress where it had begun to sag.

"She is very charming," murmured Madame Lecannet then. "Very, very charming. You do require my help, do you not, Sarah. You and the odious George will be going abroad very soon?"

"In two weeks," said Sarah flatly. "George's cousin is purser on a Channel cog. It will take passengers into Dieppe with no questions asked as it has many times before. It's next London call and sailing are in two weeks, enough time for me to conclude the business I have over Katherine with the Prince."

"From which I shall be paid a further five thousand," said Madame Lecannet thoughtfully, staring at me, making my skin crawl. "And I shall have the use of your pretty little flower while you are here. I know of some very discerning gentlemen, men of exquisite taste, who would appreciate a girl like this one."

Sarah and Madame haggled over me like a couple of fishwives. In the end, my services were sold to Madame for a thousand pounds. She would contact her discerning gentlemen and regain her money five times over, she told me. She took me into her house and

cleaned me of makeup and left me with a long nightdress and nightcap, telling me to get my beauty sleep as I would definitely have a tryst the very next night.

The high window of the room was barred. The door was locked. The little bed was under racks and racks of dresses. I was surrounded by dresses on all sides, large travelling cases with more dresses and women's nighties and frillies hidden inside. I lay down eventually and finally did sleep in the nightie. Its touch was familiar to me now. It was actually a relief to lie unbound on the bed; the mounds on my chest were moving freely, making the nightie tent in front of me. It was funny that I didn't have any bindings and yet I still felt as if I did. My chest and my groin felt as if I was still restricted and shaped like a woman.

No one came for me the next day until the evening came. I had drunk the water left in the metal jug and used the commode. Madame Lecannet whisked both away as she told me to stay. Then I was allowed out into the shop. The assistants she employed, whom I had heard talking and singing were all gone. A bath was poured for me; Sarah was there to make sure me that I bathed in the manner that I always did.

"She is shapely," said Madame Lecannet from behind me. "She does not always need to wear the heavy bindings you have put on her."

"They keep her as she is," said Sarah sharply, "particularly in the area of her bosom. Yes, she may be soft and comely for your gentleman but she must be trussed properly at night to preserve what we have worked to attain. I wouldn't want her to be allowed out of her corsets for more than a day at a time. Antoinette is not to revert to her former state."

Madame Lecannet agreed and so, after I had soaked in rosewater, I was bound once more at my groin. A richly silk-covered merry widow, edged in black, with lace strands was put on me. My figure shaped itself with ease to the garment.

"Oh, she is so charming, so petite!" gushed Madame Lecannet, stroking my rear. I rolled black stockings up my legs and stood to attach them to the merry widow corset.

"Oh," I gasped. Madame stroked my bare shoulders and fitted my breasts into the breast cups of this merry widow, lacing me tightly into it all. I sat to apply the other stocking to my bare leg. Madame attached the stocking garters, her hands caressing me, sending shakes of apprehension and enervation through my body.

Sarah spent an age on my hair, re-doing my ringlets. She spent another age doing my face, arching and plucking my eyebrows until there must have been nothing left of them. The false eyelashes were attached to my curled lashes again. Then she painted my eyes, above and below, while Madame Lecannet looked on and passed admiring comments on Sarah's work.

"She would have looked so beautiful in her wedding dress," said Madame Lecannet with a sigh. "I will sell it but no other girl will do it justice as your pretty little boy would have. He was surely born to be a girl."

I saw the girl they were talking about in the mirror and I knew it was true. I looked so much like a girl, one particular girl. I looked like Miss Katherine Grimond. Sarah saw it as well.

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"I think she should wear a wig if she is to go out," Sarah said doubtfully. "She might be recognized."

"The old gentleman in Grosvenor Street never goes out in the evening except for private, discreet parties," said Madame Lecannet. "He will entertain the young lady at his home first. If he is satisfied with her, and I am sure that he will be, he will invite some of his friends, who possess other girls like Antoinette, to visit him. Such private parties take place all the time in certain areas of London. He will think Antoinette quite the catch, Sarah. You will receive quite a price for her if you wish to sell her as you leave London."

"How much do you think she would bring?" asked Sarah greedily.

"Fifty thousand, seventy thousand," suggested Madame Lecannet. "There are lots of girls I turn down each year until I see that their spirits are quiet like Antoinette. She has to be gentle and willing to do whatever the old monsieurs want of her. That is what she will be tested for tonight."

Sarah went with us in the carriage to Grosvenor Street as I sat in the new gown Madame Lecannet had me wear. It seemed almost sinful to me as it hugged my figure, revealing my shape perfectly. It flared below my knee, opening to show off my stockings and dark high heels.

When the carriage stopped, Madame got out and Sarah retouched my lips with the pink lipstick. "Remember, Antoinette," Sarah told me, staring into my painted eyes. "Gentle, soft, willing, womanly. Be all those things and I will let the old man purchase you and I will leave you in England. I'm sure that you can engineer your escape from this feminine captivity then. Or are you beginning to enjoy it all enough to wish to stay as Miss Katherine Grimond for the rest of your life?"

The rest of my life, I thought dully, holding my rustling skirts, as I was helped down from the coach by Sarah and a goggle-eyed coachman. I climbed the stone steps alone, thinking of being Katherine Grimond for the rest of my life. I shivered as I realized that that was what I longed to be.

Madame Lecannet took my hand and led me past a waiting butler into a luxurious waiting room. An older, grey-haired man rose from an armchair in front of a fire. His face lit up as he looked at me.

I curtseyed as Madame had told me I should when I met the older gentleman.

"This is Mademoiselle Antoinette," said Madame Lecannet. She took my cloak as I rose and handed it off to the butler with a night bag for me, filled with lotions and cosmetics I had to use.

The older man came forward and took my hand, studying my nails, my rings, my hairless skin. "Antoinette," he murmured. "Such a pretty name for such a pretty girl. Shall I have to brush up on my schoolboy French to be able to converse with her?"

"Oh no, Sir James," said Madame. "She speaks in excellent English. Antoinette, converse with the gentleman. In English, if you would."

The gentleman was looking into my face most expectantly. I felt chills start to go through me as he studied the makeup Sarah had applied so liberally to me.

"What shall I say, my lord?" I said, feeling a tremble pass through me. "I don't know what I can say on any topic that might amuse His Lordship."

"Capital!" the older man almost danced a jig on his carpeted floor. "What a beautiful, cultured, feminine voice! She far exceeds Garfield's Miss Marianne! Marberry's Jane is squeaky and squealy by turns, but this Antoinette appears to be as genuine as I have ever met." He paused. "I am not being taken in by the true article, am I, Marie? You do vouch for the girl, do you not?"

"I bathed her and put her in her stockings and merry widow," said Madame Lecannet cheerfully. "I saw her completely naked. I can vouch that she is everything and a little bit more than you would want to find in a young lady of the evening."

"Capital!" said Sir James again, taking my arm and putting it through his. "I was just about to dine and I know that Madame never feeds her girls. So, Miss Antoinette, I feel sure that I can escort you to the dining table. You can tell me all about yourself."

We strolled from the room as he waved a peremptory goodbye to Madame Lecannet. She accepted an envelope from the butler who then escorted her to the outer door.

We strolled into a small dining room where another butler was just finishing adding another place to the table, to the right side of the master's place. The little room had book-cases on several walls. Most of the books were in similar, red-covered bindings.

"You are a great reader, Sir James," I ventured, wondering if I could steal out of this place that evening. Not until I knew how many servants were about the place, I thought miserably. Then yet another manservant entered with a soup tureen that he placed in a stand on the table.

"In my profession, I have to be," said the old man, smiling in delight at me. He held my chair for me and pushed in the chair. I smoothed my skirts under me, the gesture quite automatic to me now.

"How so?" I asked him, glancing at the books. They all had titles beginning 'Proceedings of' and then named and dated some Assize or Law Court. "Oh, you are a lawyer, Sir James, I see."

"More than that, Miss Antoinette," said the older gentleman happily. His eyes were riveted on the neckline of my dress. "You might have heard of me. Sir James Covington. I am a well-known judge, I think. Anyone who has come into conflict with the laws of the land probably knows who I am."

"No," I told him, remembering to smile. That seemed to please him greatly. "I have never yet run afoul of the law and I don't intend to." A shiver ran through me and the judge noticed it.

"In your case, sweet Antoinette," Sir James said, "I am sure that the law will make every accommodation to please you. If you were ever to be brought into my court, why I should have to see you in my chambers immediately."

"I hope you would acquit me of all charges," I said to him demurely, smiling again.

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"Oh yes," he murmured to me, holding up a wine glass to toast me before dinner. "I would ensure that you, mademoiselle, received an absolute discharge no matter the circumstances."

The judge seemed inordinately pleased with himself. I wavered in my determination to entrance the man, if I could, and find my way out of the predicament I was in. I tried to smile as if I was the girlie boy he was looking at, as if I enjoyed such flirting and double entendres. I almost blurted out that I wasn't what he thought I was. But then he would return me to Madame Lecannet, wouldn't he, and then to Sarah Lubbock. No, I sat and smiled and tried again to be charming and somehow it was easy. I had dined before as a girl, after all, many times at Acton Square with Lord Douglas, his brother and his family and guests.

Sir James and I dined like any courting couple and I played the part of the fiancée as well as I could. I couldn't eat the huge quantities he put in front of me. I couldn't eat, not with my corset on. My stomach seemed to have shrunk in the starvation time Sarah had subjected me to. I couldn't take more than a few spoonfuls of soup. I just nibbled at the wonderful meal of which he tried me to get to eat more.

"You eat like a girl," Sir James said to me, the hundredth compliment he had paid me. It was as if he was courting me all the time, so polite and considerate he was of me. He asked me about the things I liked to eat and promised that there would be strawberries at breakfast the next day.

"Make a note of that, Badham," he said to a stiff butler who had stood silently by and served us at all the course changes in the meal. "Strawberries for breakfast. Make sure Cook's helper finds them in the market. Don't make me appear to be a liar to this young woman whom I am trying so desperately to impress."

"There will be strawberries, my lord," said Badham, his face deadly serious. He moved in to carry the wine and coffee into the study for us. I rustled to my feet and took the judge's arm. I minced along beside him as other footmen appeared to clear away the remains of our meal.

"They are going to love you, Antoinette," the judge said, seated beside me on the sofa. "The servants get the remains of our meals with their own, you know. You hardly eat or drink, it seems. They are going to have treats galore over the next weeks while we are up in London."

"Weeks?" I murmured. "I, I thought that I was on trial, Your Lordship."

"The judge has found you not guilty," Sir James murmured, easing himself against me. One arm snaked across my shoulders. The other went about my waist and he hugged me to him. I knew that he wanted to kiss me. I thought of refusing his advance. I looked up at him and he smiled, thinking I was welcoming him. He kissed me expertly on my pink lips. I felt my eyelashes flutter as he pressed against me.

The judge kissed me for a long time and I let him. I've kissed men before, I thought miserably. It was getting to be quite usual for me. I had kissed more men lately than I had kissed women before. Sir James gently ran his hand over my breast and I couldn't help convulsing a little at his touch.

"Are they real?" Sir James asked me in wonderment, hugging me to him. My breasts pressed provocatively into him.

"Yes," I told him.

"How?" Sir James asked me. I told him the truth as I knew it. I didn't know whether Sarah had been giving me a potion of some kind or not but I think she had. I didn't think that I could be developed the way that I was on binding alone.

"I must talk to your Mrs. Lubbock," murmured the judge, caressing the front of my dress with both his hands. He didn't realize the intensity of emotions his caresses were releasing in me. "I know of several other gentlemen who would like to have their young ladies develop along the lines that you have."

Sir James kissed my chest then. When he kissed my lips again, I closed my eyes and kissed him back. My chest was seething, my nipples were aroused, my groin ached. I put my arms about his neck and kissed him, parting my lips a little for his eager tongue.

It wasn't like kissing Albert. Sir James was not as young, as strong, as passionate as the Prince. But Sir James liked kissing me. He liked kissing my face, my neck and my chest. He stood up at last, grinning down into my flushed face.

"Let us retire early," he said. He might have thought I was demure or shy but I wasn't. I was terrified. I was so stupid to have signalled him that I was the sort of girl he expected.

I was trapped and there was nothing I could do. I let the judge put his shaking arm about me and take me from the study up the stairs and to his bedroom. There was nothing I could do, I repeated to myself. I tried to force away the distaste and anger at myself for what I was going to allow a man to do to me. The only way I could ever get free from the nightmare I was living was to make love to a man. Sir James Covington was a gentleman, at least. Even if it was unpleasant, he wouldn't really hurt me, I was sure of that, I thought with an inward sob. Just like a girl.

Prince Albert looked at his cousin in his blonde wig and woman's robe. The figure he presented was clearly padded by undergarments, so womanly did it appear. George looked at him apprehensively and Albert nodded to the expressionless Commissioner St. John.

"She says she is a Duchess," said the commissioner, looking at his notes.

"No, she isn't," the Prince said harshly. "This personage is the Duke of Clarence."

The commissioner nodded. "We had concluded that, sir." He gave the Prince a list and Albert frowned at the names of the people on the list. The Honorable Charles Leonard. Lord McAllister. Browning. Scott-Radley. Arthur Molloy. Sir Francis Pulteney. Nigel D'Epinard. There were other names, vaguely familiar names. Alan Corbett, wasn't there a lieutenant on the Vanguard with that name?

"Those underlined were in female attire," said the commissioner stonily, indicating Corbett, Leonard, Scott-Radley and Browning's names, among others. There was going to be a scandal of colossal proportions when those names were released. And then there was his cousin and his equerries, McAllister and Foster. Their names were underlined as well.

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"That wasn't entirely why I invited you here," said St. John quietly to the prince . George shifted defiantly, his dress swished noisily about him as he minced over to the bars of the cell where he was being held.

"We found Sir Francis Pulteney unconscious in a room at Mrs. McDowell's that we had to break into," the commissioner went on. "He had taken a sissy boy, I'll call her that for now, to a back room to have his way with her. The girl had just been chosen as the Queen of the Sissies, if you can believe the title. Pulteney was attacked then in the room by a man he thinks was a George Lubbock."

The Prince was startled. "Lubbock?" he asked.

"Albert," the Duke of Clarence whispered from painted lips in the jail cell. "Help me, Albert," said the Prince's cousin. His painted fingernails waved his cousin closer. The Prince grimaced as he went closer, leaving the commissioner to study his list of names.

"I saw her, Katherine Grimond. She was there," the Duke, looking quite believable as the 'Duchess', whispered from his painted lips, "at Mrs. McDowell's. That governess of hers, Mrs. Lubbock, was there, bossing Katherine like she was her slave or something. Help me, Albert. Get me out of here!"

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Mrs. McDowell looked old and tired as St. John led the Prince to the women's cell block. It was incongruous to see all the women there in male attire. The male cells were full of femininely gowned and bewigged men. Many were inebriated and flirting with their gaolers.

"Those Lubbocks. They cheated me," Mrs. McDowell complained as the Prince tried to talk to her. It was soon clear that the Lubbocks had the money they had extorted from Lord Douglas Moore. The Prince's blood ran cold as he heard Mrs. McDowell go on about a scheme they had to extort money from him as well. It was his own fault, he lectured himself sternly. He had kissed Katherine and asked her to be his mistress. He still couldn't think of her as a man. He recalled her sweet kisses and almost missed hearing that Sarah Lubbock had met Mrs. McDowell at Madame Lecannet's dress shop. Moore had mentioned that woman as well. Something about a bridal gown for Katherine.

"Would Sarah Lubbock be headed to Madame Lecannet's?" he asked the older woman who was ranting on about being cheated again.

"Certain to," said Mrs. McDowell spitefully from the bars of her jail cell. "I don't know that Sarah knows anyone else in town. Too la-di-dah for the rest of us, you know. She'd go there. Madame will do anything if there is money in it."

VIII. MISS KATHERINE GRIMOND'S RETURN

My heart was beating furiously again. I stood on tiptoe before the bed and let Sir James kiss me again. My skirts were swaying about my legs frantically; his hands pressed on my back, directing me against him, against the large bump in the front of his trousers.

"Most ungentlemanly of me," Sir James said, making no effort to move his body from mine. His desire for me was almost tangible in his eyes. "I hope that you will not mind that I chose this nightdress for you to wear in bed. Girls like you like everything in pink, do you not?"

"Of course, my lord," I whispered to him, trembling against him. He was really gentle as he acted like my maid and helped me to get ready to go to bed with him. He loved undoing my gown and guiding it to the floor. His hands caressed me as I shook and shook. We had to kiss some more then and he had to caress me again. His hands were light and ticklish on my overheated skin.

My slip fell away at his touch and revealed me in my corset, my garters and my stockings. His hands went over my merry widow, tracing out my breasts, agitating the frilly neckline with his mouth. Then he sat me on his bed and knelt before me. His head was against me as I quaked and held on to him. He loved it.

"So, so exquisite!" Sir James murmured for the umpteenth time as he dropped his head onto my lap and began to kiss my thighs. He grinned at me and caressed my stockings before lifting one of my legs, easing off my high-heeled slipper and kissing my leg from my toes to my panties. He undid my garters, then slowly rolled my stocking from my leg, stopping frequently to kiss my thigh. He grinned impishly at me when I jerked in emotion, gasping, my breasts heaving at the feelings he aroused in me.

I had to endure it being done to my other leg as well. Then he stroked and caressed my bare legs as I half-lay, half-sat on the bed, propping myself up with my hands. He gently kissed all the way up my thighs. Then he kissed my panties, murmuring how he loved the scent I had used in my panties, though he called them knickers.

"I love a girl who tucks as you have," Sir James murmured, standing me up then. He towered over me as I was not in my high heels any more. "You have been taught well but not by Madame Lecannet, I think."

"No, my lord," I said huskily. I sank onto the bed beneath him as he slipped out of his jacket and waistcoat.

Sir James patted my panties, his hand right between my legs. I wriggled and clutched at him as he stroked me between my legs. "We shall attend to that a little later," Sir James whispered. "Anticipation fires the blood, doesn't it?"

I had to agree with that. It was a relief when Sir James rose over me, taking time to take off his shirt. Then he kissed me, my half-naked body against his. He got up and led me to his dressing table. I was able to see my flushed, reddened face, my lipstick just a trace on my lips.

Behind me, Sir James released the corset from me. The relief was, as always, very pleasurable. The corset fell from me and my breasts were exposed, my narrow waist and wide hips were clothed only in my thin panties. Sir James put his hands on my breasts from behind me and I gasped. He kissed my shoulders and my ears, breathing on my earrings and they danced at my neck.

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I wanted to resist and I didn't want to resist. His hands touched me in ways I had touched myself of late. He was having the same effect on me I always had on myself. "You like this," murmured Sir James, squeezing me tightly. I squeaked.

I knew what I had to say. "I like it when you do it," I said, recalling the way Maddie had behaved when I had taken her.

It worked on the judge in the same way it had worked on me. His passionate stroking increased. I had to turn my head so that he could kiss me again, harder than he had ever done it before.

"Antoinette, Antoinette," he whispered in my ear. Strange feelings came over me. I liked being held, being treated gently and lovingly by Sir James. I twisted and sat beside the man who was going to be my lover and raised my face to be kissed properly and thoroughly by him. The only thing between me and complete nakedness were my panties.

Sir James still acted as my maid, taking away my earrings and my necklace, the rings on my fingers and bracelets on my arm. He took the pins out of my hair, marvelling at how long my hair was and how wonderful were my ringlets. He had cloths and lotions for me to wipe the makeup from my face but he wouldn't let me touch the kohl about my eyes.

"One night," he begged me. "I want to see those beautiful eyes like that as we make love."

"Yes, my lord," I whispered. I brushed my hair, then he took over and did it for me.

Then, he brought me my nightie, a pink delight that might have been worn by a Greek maiden as a dress. The long, pink skirt whispered about me. The thinnest of straps, tied with bows, held the nightie at my shoulders. My breasts fitted eagerly into the shaping material in the front of the nightdress. It had been made for a real woman and I fitted it wonderfully.

Sir James hastily slipped out of his shirt, vest and trousers, hopping as he took off his socks and shoes. The floor to the bed was littered with clothing, male and female. He lifted me off my feet and carried me to his bed. I buried my face in his neck, kissing him as I clung to him.

"Oh, Antoinette, that is so fine!" said my lover as he deposited me in his bed. He had just his underpants on. He stripped them off as he came into the bed after me. His manhood was huge and engorged.

I lay back in the pillows finding my courage starting to leave me. Sir James turned down the lamp to leave the room in the faintest of illumination. Then he turned to me expectantly.

"Time to remove your panties, young girl," he said to me, smiling most lovingly. His body pressed against the length of me and I felt his hand beginning to lift my nightdress.

I put my arms about Sir James's neck and put his other hand on my breast. He rolled right on top of me and pushed my legs apart. The silk of the nightie moved easily as he did it.

The loud bang on the bedroom door made us both jump. I clung to Sir James as the door flew open and several dark shapes entered the room.

"Sir James!" I heard Badham's voice calling out in outrage. "I tried to stop them, Your Lordship. I tried!"

Light illuminated the room as someone increased the flow of oil in the lamp. I looked out from under the man I was holding into the grim, stern face of Prince Albert.

"Please get out of bed, Sir James," said Albert in a deep voice unlike any I had heard him use before.

"Who do you think you are?" bellowed the judge. He glanced at the other man. "St. John! Is that you? Get out of my bedroom, man, and take your friend with you. Have you gone mad to burst in on a man at this moment? Whatever the emergency, I will be with you shortly as soon as the young lady and I …"

Sir James didn't get to finish the statement. The Prince tossed the bedclothes to one side, revealing the naked judge and his rampant manhood, my pink nightdress and panties already splashed by his premature desires. I took my hands from Sir James's neck, feeling intense feelings of humiliation and degradation as Albert stared at me. Then he grabbed Sir James by the arm and the judge was catapulted out of the bed.

The judge landed on the floor, spluttering in rage. "You! You!" he screamed and then he seemed to notice that Albert was staring at me. "Do you know this man, Antoinette?" he thundered at me.

I nodded, tears coming to my eyes. I began to sob. "Sir James Covington," I managed to choke out. "May I present

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His Royal Highness, Prince Albert?"

Sir James's face was a picture. "Prince Albert?" he gasped. "And you? A girl like you?"

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I don't know what was said to Sir James. The other man with the Prince pulled Sir James to his feet and pulled him outside. I heard raised voices from outside, Sir James's, Badham's, some other man. Then it lessened.

All the time, the Prince stared at me. "I didn't expect to find you like this, Katherine," he finally said to me. "You can get out of that bed now and dress yourself. No harm is about to come to you again tonight. Not unless you desire it." The last was said in a very low tone. I don't know if I was supposed to hear it or not.

I scrambled out of the bed. The stained nightie flared up, exposing my legs and my panties. That made the Prince start.

"He did not have carnal relations with you, the judge?" asked Prince Albert in the same gruff voice in which he had spoken earlier.

"No," I said, flushing wildly.

"He wanted to," said the Prince flatly.

"Yes," I agreed, as I gathered my clothes. I was wondering how I could get back into my corset and my dress without a maid to help me. I couldn't stand the look in Albert's eyes. He stared at me as if I was spoiled goods on a market stall. I wished I could be anywhere else but where I was at that moment.

"You need help with your undergarments," Albert said then.

"Yes," I said, thinking he would call for a maid. He didn't. Albert served as my maid. I don't think I've ever dressed as a woman as quickly as I did then, the Prince's eyes seeing all that he shouldn't. He saw my breasts and my figure. He laced me in, not as tightly as Sarah or Madame Lecannet. He watched me put on my stockings and slip. He fastened my dress for me and found my slippers for me, kicking aside Sir James's clothing to do so. Albert spoke to me once more, insisting that I put all my jewellery on and touch up my lips so that I looked like myself.

I was escorted silently out of the judge's house to a waiting carriage on the street. The man who had been with the Prince nodded to us as we entered the carriage, the Prince and me. I sat beside him in rigid silence all the way back to Acton Square.

The Countess welcomed me back with tears and open arms, drawing me into the familiar house. Her husband dashed to meet me as well and hugged me as he never had before. Lord Douglas Moore came forward as well, a young couple behind him. He nodded to the morose Prince Albert behind me.

"This is a joyous day indeed," said my betrothed formally. "Miss Katherine Grimond is returned to us from abduction. Here, Katherine, is another returnee you will be delighted to become acquainted with. You may curtsey to her, Katherine. I present to you the Countess Saruzzi, my former ward, Miss Madeleine Conley-Shore. This is her husband, Count

Pietro Saruzzi. He speaks very little English. You will have to converse with him through Maddie."

I looked at Maddie in shock. She extended a hand to me and I did curtsey. It came automatically to me.

"Katherine Grimond," said Maddie as her husband came forward and took my hand to kiss it. "Oh, I can tell you are a Grimond. You look a little like your cousin but you are so much prettier. Oh, should I say that? Are you still in mourning for Peregrine? I think I would be over that by now. He came to a bad end, I know. But he always was a wild, ill-tempered young man. I couldn't stand him before I went to Italy. It was partly to get away from his unwanted attentions. Oh, I am sorry, Katherine, are my words making you cry? We girls are so silly at times, aren't we? We never know when to cease talking, do we? Oh, I think I shall stop now."

She didn't recognize me at all. I stared at Maddie but she had seen the Prince and just had to be introduced to him. She and the Countess began to babble at the grim Prince who seemed to make an effort to talk to them.

"Your room is ready for you, Katherine," said Lord Douglas quietly. "And after Colleen has helped you to refreshen yourself, we should talk. This trying business with the Lubbocks is not over, I fear."

IX. SIR JAMES COVINGTON'S JUST DESSERTS

I didn't get to talk to Lord Douglas Moore for a week as Maddie dominated all of my time. She wanted to be with 'beloved' Katherine all of the time, frequently interrupting my dressing with Colleen and a new maid, Dora, who was assigned exclusively to me.

I was in a daze every time I was with Maddie as she didn't seem to recognize me at all. She started to call me Kate and was there with advice all the time on how to curl my hair and shape my lips and eyebrows.

Maddie showed no sign of the pregnancy which had supposedly caused her to flee to the Continent. My nerve failed as she babbled on about silks and satins and their price on the London and Naples markets. She served as my maid, helping me into my corsets and bustiers. She complimented me on my feminine features and remarked several times that I was like my infamous cousin but much finer in features.

I learned that Peregrine was rather coarse and had terrible manners; he was not very clean and didn't smell as sweetly as I did. Strangely, my blood boiled at some of the things that she said about Peregrine. I sat primly opposite her in the Countess Hutton's parlor and tried to make womanly conversation to the woman I had proposed to marry.

I almost blurted out that I was not Katherine but Peregrine, so much did the silly girl wrong me. The Countess called me to her office the second day and asked me not to mind Maddie and all her stories. "The poor girl was wronged by your cousin, we hear," said the Countess with an affectionate touch to my hand. "She has a child, a boy named Pietro after his father, back in Italy, you know, with a wet nurse, we hear. She doesn't speak of him, you notice. The marriage was rather abrupt and she was probably enceinte," she used the French word for pregnant, "going into the wedding. But that is the way some of these for-

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eigners like it, you know. Though there are the others, of course, who will only marry a virgin."

That led to a whole lecture on a woman's virginity which I barely listened to. I think the Countess was trying to find out from me what might have occurred to me while I was in the grasp of Sarah and George Lubbock. How could I speak to anyone about that? I couldn't. All my friends, the Hancock sisters, Lucy Webster, the Honorable Winifred Leonard, my bed partner, Emma Dainsbury, and other girls I scarcely knew came to visit me and enquire after my health, all wanting to commiserate with me on the ordeal I had undergone.

"It's a scandal," said Emma, hugging me and kissing my cheek as young women often do. She didn't know how much she made me wish that I wasn't a woman like her. I wished that I could be a man again when I kissed her soft cheek in return, her rose petal scent filling my nostrils.

"I mean it's a scandal that someone as lovely and gentle as you, Katherine, should be treated so deplorably," said Emma. "I hope your betrothed," she grimaced and made a face in Douglas' direction where he was engaged with his brother, ignoring the bevy of girls visiting me, "has seen fit to pay you some compliments on how you have weathered the ordeal. He seems very sparse in his praises of you lately. He can't prefer the company of that silly Italian countess, can he, to a girl like you?"

"Maddie was his ward," I told her, "before he was appointed trustee of my father's and my uncle's accounts."

"I can believe that," retorted Emma, squeezing my hand. She put on her gloves and smiled at the girls approaching us, also getting ready to leave. "The man was born to be an office clerk."

I had to smile at that. Emma begged me to attend her at her home in Kent. I said that I would try to do that if circumstances permitted. I knew that she and I would share a bed and that she would be in great danger from me. Emma was such a sweet, pleasing girl and clearly thought the same of me.

"We shall all be at the trial as well," Emma said to me, driving a barb of agony into me as I guessed what she meant. "We shall all be there to support you, my dear Katherine, to see your kidnappers get their just desserts."

Lucy and Winnie swore they had never been in a Law Court before and they would not miss it for the world.

I stood there, feeling like a statue carved out of stone. I felt positively ill at the thought of all the girls being there to hear me, in the witness box, being asked who I was. I, unable to lie, would have to admit to the world that I was not Katherine Grimond.

"Don't worry about the trial, Katherine," said Maddie as our visitors left. "I'll come as well. You will need all the support that you can get, won't you?" She then went into lurid, preposterous stories about trials she had heard about and how witnesses were abused by barristers in court.

"Oh Maddie," said the Countess of Hutton. "Please desist. Can't you see how you are frightening the poor girl? You must be ready to testify if you are called upon, Katherine

my dear, but let us all pray that such will not happen. A young girl of delicate sensibilities like you should surely be excused the rough excesses of the witness box at the Old Bailey."

I could think of nothing else for a day or so as Maddie, the silly girl, rattled on and on. More debutantes and their mothers came to visit us with commiserations for me that I had missed the debutantes' ball at St. James's Palace.

"Oh, Kate will not have minded that," laughed Maddie at the third dowager who remarked upon it. "She couldn't go and neither could I. My excuse is better because I am married now or I would surely have gone and been presented."

I could not believe how Maddie managed to turn every question back to herself. I looked at Douglas Moore sitting silently across the room from us as Maddie babbled on. I thought about how I had said I wanted to marry Maddie. I shivered in my long, russet-colored dress and thought what life would have been like for me if I had married Maddie Conley-Shore. I might already have been seeking out more congenial female company if I had remained Peregrine. If I ever got to talk to him in private, I could thank Lord Douglas for saving me from marrying Maddie.

I prepared for court as if I was going to a funeral, as I was sure that I was. Colleen curled my hair very tightly and set it back behind my ears so that the black hat with a half-veil could be pinned to cover my forehead. I wore little black stones at my ears and a cameo on the velvet bow about my neck.

I wore a frilly, white blouse over my feminine undergarments, a long, black skirt covering my black stockings and black, high-heeled boots. I had on a fitted jacket that showed off my figure, my high breasts, narrow waist and wide hips. There was nothing I could do about that. I wore just a little makeup on my lips and about my eyes. I sat daintily beside Lord Douglas Moore on the ride into the Law Courts, my legs crossed. Neither of us said a word to each other.

I passed the somber, black-coated court officials and entered a dark wood-panelled courtroom. I walked to the front bench and sat myself where a bailiff showed me to sit. I smoothed my skirts beneath me and prepared to hear myself humiliated beyond all belief.

As I sat beside my guardian, Lord Douglas Moore, I heard the swish of skirts and dresses just like mine as young women moved into the benches behind me. I could hear Maddie's voice, rattling on about how Italian courtrooms were so different, so wide and light. I wondered what she would say when I was finally unmasked in this court. I hoped she wouldn't pull a fainting fit, thinking it the appropriate thing for a young lady to do on certain occasions. She had regaled us after dinner the night before with a list of times when a woman was permitted to faint. I should take her advice and collapse, I thought sourly, at the first mention of my true gender.

We stood for the judge and I had my first great shock of the day. His Honor, Justice Sir James Covington, looking resplendent in his red robes of office and white wig, took his place in the center of the bench.

The defendants were led in. George Lubbock looked like the criminal he was, glowering at everyone in the court, especially me, as if he would and could kill us all. Sarah and Esther McDowell looked the worse for wear in drab, brown prison dresses; their faces

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were pasty without the aid of makeup. Their hair was loose and straggly, but the worst thing about the three of them was the gag that bound their mouths.

A police commissioner was the first witness. He outlined how I, Miss Katherine Grimond, had been abducted by the Lubbocks and hidden out at the McDowell brothel on Cleveland Street until the kidnappers had fallen out. Then, with ransom in hand, the Lubbocks had kept the money and me and moved me to Madame Lecannet's dress shop. Madame Lecannet had furnished information to the police on where I and Sarah and George Lubbock could be found. The commissioner identified the money, which was marked and the ransom note that Lord Douglas Moore had given to him. He produced Mrs. McDowell's confession and an outline of a scheme to take me with them and to sell me to the highest bidder in some foreign land.

Lord Douglas Moore was called. He recognized the money and the note. Madame Lecannet sat uneasily in the dock and confirmed what the detective had said, not mentioning the judge how she had sold me to him and for what. There were no questions from the defence table.

"Since the defendants have pleaded guilty and saved the Crown from having to present a long litany of their misdeeds," said Sir James from the bench, "I will take into account that they have apologized to Miss Grimond for the harsh words and threats directed against her in the forcible confinement in which she was maintained for so long. I will not apply capital measures in this case as I might if the defendants had subjected the young lady to the rigors of a long trial. I sentence all three defendants to be conveyed forthwith to the brig of the ship, Southern Fair, on which they will be transported to Botany Bay where they are to remain for a period of not less than fifteen years."

Mrs. McDowell looked quite defeated. Sarah and George both stared defiantly at the judge. Bailiffs seized them by their arms and they were hustled from the room. The judge's gavel banged. We all stood and Sir James swept from the court.

Then, a babble of girlish voices broke out around me. I turned and Emma leaned forward to hug me first, followed by all the girls, a dozen who had come in my support.

"Oh, thank goodness, you didn't have to say anything," said Maddie, hugging me just like all the other girls. "Barristers can twist your words, no matter what you say."

Emma held on to my arm and then whispered, "I would have loved to have asked you some questions under oath. I would have asked you if you were really in love with Lord Douglas and why you were marrying him."

I smiled nervously at her. Then I saw him, Prince Albert, at the back of the court. He stood up and nodded at me, his face expressionless. He turned sharply, his hat in hand and left the courtroom. The Hancock sisters both had to hug me; they jumped up and down as they said how they had enjoyed seeing my enemies get their just desserts. It seemed to be the phrase of the day as I heard it all night long at the impromptu supper party the Countess organized so that I could celebrate the downfall of my captors.

I was still in shock at all that had happened and how easily it had been accomplished. It occurred to me that the whole trial had been a manipulation and that there were people out there still who knew all about me. They must be biding their time until they could find themselves in a more advantageous position to make use of me. My nerves began to un-

freeze as I showed Emma how to dance the Schottische, being the man again. Maddie played the piano and she, Winnie, Lucy and I did sets.

"Now it's my turn to be the man," said Emma. She propelled me then through a gavotte that made the Earl call out to Douglas to join in with him as these young ladies were having far too much fun.

Emma kissed me on both cheeks and whispered that she wished she could stay but Lucy and Winnie might be jealous of us when they wanted to be friends with me as well. I promised again I would come on a visit to her house when circumstances permitted. Then I had to attend Lord Douglas Moore in his study.

"It has been such a welcome occurrence to have you back in our house, Katherine," said Lord Douglas Moore as I sat in my blue gown in front of him. "To see you with all the young ladies in the Law Court, the way they all supported you. I saw tonight how you and they are so alike, so full of fun and girlish spirits. As the Countess says, it lifts all our hearts."

"Thank you, sir," I said demurely, wondering why he had wanted to see me that very night.

"Tomorrow," said Lord Douglas Moore. I crossed my legs, my high-heeled slipper dangled from my stockinged foot. "Tomorrow, I am to attend the Queen at Windsor. I am to be invested as Earl of Oakthorpe. Normally, I would ask you, Katherine, to be there with me but I feel that I have been greatly remiss with you."

"Remiss?" I echoed him.

"Yes," he said, looking over my head and not at me. "I should have realized that you are not the young lady that I sometimes take you to be." I gasped as he said that. "Accordingly, I am releasing you from several attachments I have imposed on you. We are no longer betrothed. I have told my brother and his wife. They quite understand that you are too young and too gay to be happy with an old stick like me. Then, there is the matter of your wardship. I intend to tell Sir John Whiteley that your wardship should be set aside and you should immediately come into ownership of your own estate, namely Grimondwood."

"So I am free," I said. My heart fluttered as I realized what such words meant.

"Yes," said Lord Douglas Moore. He sounded most unhappy. "Yes, you are free of me, Katherine. You are free to continue on as Miss Katherine Grimond. I would recommend to you that you do that for some while. My brother and his wife wish you to stay on here for as long as you like. If, if you should decide to, to make certain changes in your style of life, and you require assistance in doing that, I, I would be most happy to make amends."

"The trial today was not a real trial," I said slowly.

"No," agreed Lord Douglas Moore. "But please accept it for what it was, Katherine. Sir James was most annoyed to lose his Antoinette and may call upon you soon if you would choose to receive him."

That Douglas knew about that shook me. I shivered as I recalled the state I had been in with Sir James. I recalled being pulled back from the very brink of a degradation I would have chastised myself about forever after.

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"If, as an independent woman," Lord Douglas Moore went on, "you needed a man who could shield you in society, I would offer myself as such a person."

I stared at him, not able to grasp how he could say that when he had just released me from being betrothed to him.

"You paid a considerable ransom for me to the Lubbocks," I said to him, trying to work out what he meant. His eyes were on me now. It seemed as if it hurt for him to look at me.

"I put up half of it," Moore said.

"And who put up the other half?" I asked him. He looked more unhappy still.

"Your Prince," he finally said.

"My prince?" I asked him, flabbergasted.

Lord Douglas Moore opened his desk and took out a note. It was a ransom note but it wasn't the one presented in court. This was written in Sarah Lubbock's flowery handwriting.

'Is the truth to be known?' the note began without preamble. 'Is it to be known that Lord Douglas Moore's catamite has come out as this year's prettiest debutante? How much is such a secret worth? I say one hundred thousand pounds. One hundred thousand pounds and neither Prince Albert nor the gutter press needs to be exposed to the true gender of Miss Katherine Grimond, nor does the world. Prince Albert must also pay for the pleasures he received from the soft, dewy woman I created for you from the body of a scurvy lordling. Rue the day, Lord Moore, when you sought to cheat your faithful servants of their rightful due. Pay or Peregrine Grimond will be resurrected and Katherine made into the laughingstock of England as you originally intended that he should be.'

The letter was unsigned. Consternation rose in me as I read it. "Who else has read this besides you?" I asked Lord Douglas Moore.

"Only the Prince," said Lord Douglas tersely. "You can see why it was fair that he pay as well as me. We both had our reputations to lose, he more so than me, in fact."

"The Prince knows all about me?" I asked him, feeling distinctly unwell. "Albert knows that I am a man."

"Yes," said Lord Douglas. "He knows."

And he makes you an earl so that you get your heart's desire and do not involve him in any further scandal, I thought bitterly. I got up shakily, taking the note with me. "I must get to bed," I said.

I could feel tears coursing down my face as I got a night candle and made my way to my room. Albert knew all about me. When he had come into Sir James's bedroom and found a man on top of me, he had known that I was a boy. He had seen how I had welcomed another man's touch.

I had thought him silent because I had been a woman and I had betrayed him. But Albert had known that I was a man, I thought in despair. Well, my decision should be easy now about what I was to do in the future.

I changed for bed, cleaned my face, brushed my hair and tied my braids with ribbons as Colleen had said I should. I stared at the girl looking at me from the mirror,. I touched the wobbling mounds on my chest. What was I going to do about them? The Prince would expect me to return to being Peregrine. He had nodded to me in court, as if I was another man. I thought of how I had sat beside him in leaving Grosvenor Street and the judge's house, being as femininely coy as I could. All the time he must have been disparaging me for the way I was acting.

It was a terrible night for me. Maddie finally came to drive me out of bed, informing me that if I had gotten up early enough, we could have gone to Windsor with Lord Douglas.

"He's meeting the Queen today," I told her and the reason for it.

That excited Maddie. She had to run off and tell everyone what was going on. By the time she returned, I had had my bath, dressed in my undergarments, had a robe about me and Colleen was reviving my ringlets with a hot iron. I wouldn't be doing all of this very much longer, I promised myself.

X. KATHERINE GRIMOND'S INTERVIEW

I couldn't seem to gather the energy to fly away, however, now that the cage door was left open. There were so many invitations to soirees, to parties, even to balls from all levels of London society. The Countess of Hutton insisted that I accompany her to visit all of her friends who had called on me at Acton Square.

Each day was a whirlwind of dressing to go out and going out to visit with the Honorable Winifred Leonard, or Lucy Webster, or the Duke and Duchess of this and that, friends of the Countess. I was praised everywhere I went for my beauty and for my sensible opinions. Since most of the time I listened and asked my hosts and hostesses for their opinions, drawing them out, it was not praise I deserved.

As I rose in people's opinions, so did my opinion of Maddie sink lower. I was actually glad when she suddenly announced that she and Pietro were going home to Italy the week following the ball at the Dainsburys, to which I was quite committed.

Emma was distraught that I couldn't sleep over at Audley. She couldn't invite me because of "dratted aunts who insist on staying with us with their spotty-faced daughters." Emma made me promise to spend the day with her, however. I did, only to find out that her cousins were nice girls, not spotty-faced at all. In fact, they were as lively as Emma. On our walk about the gardens of Audley Manor, Emma's home, they teased some of the handsome gardeners outrageously.

"Let's leave them to their bucolic pleasures," said Emma, taking my arm, not knowing how she stirred me with her familiarities. Her hand sliding through my arm would catch my breast. Her cousins soon came after us, however, and danced all the way back to the house. Emma and I had to join in and not be 'fuddy-duddies' as Caroline, the younger cousin, called us.

Our cheeks were pinched by the cold. The older Dainsburys praised us all and sent us to prepare for the evening. Baths were poured and maids bustled about, helping all of us

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to prepare eagerly for dancing. "We're not as formal as the Countess here," said Emma as I sat for her maid to pin and tease my ringlets into place high above my head. She had laughed at my insistence on privacy to bathe and put on my most delicate undergarments. She showed no modesty at all as she prepared along with me.

I was eventually ready, my eyebrows and eyelashes enhanced with kohl, my lips a pink blush, my face powdered. Pearls dangled from my ears. The Countess had found the pearls in my jewellery box and insisted I wear them with the white gown that Madame Lecannet had made for me. Its neckline was rounded and showed off my feminine attributes very well.

Emma laughed at me as I struggled with my foundation garment, my corset, white like my dress. "Why do you insist on wearing this?" she queried me. "You have such a womanly figure as it is. You certainly don't need the curves it gives you. Flat-chested girls like me do. But you are so pretty. You could wear this dress without a corset, you know."

"I would feel undressed without it," I had to admit and Emma laughed at me.

"I'm not wearing mine tonight," Emma confided in me. "So when a man takes me by the waist, I am going to feel him against me completely!"

We entered the throng of people in the reception area. I stood with Emma as she greeted her friends warmly and introduced me to all of the eligible men, as she put it, in the neighborhood. Every one said the same thing, declaring that they would dance with me at the ball.

"Notice how they don't say that to me," Emma murmured. I smiled, enjoying myself and the attention I was getting. My earrings bobbled; I loved the feel of them at my neck. I loved the touch of my dress on my stockinged legs. I loved being with Emma, my friend, flirting with the men who praised us so fulsomely.

I loved dancing with so many handsome partners. I was smiling and laughing when a tall, dark, slightly scarred man joined the little party of girls I was standing with and spoke gruffly to me. "Miss Grimond," the Prince said to me. "May I have the honor of the next two dances with you?"

I curtseyed to him to hide my blushes and the tingling feeling that ran through me as he touched me. "I, I would be honored, Y-Your Highness," I stammered. The girls about me, Emma's cousins, all lifted their fans to their mouths as they smiled at me. The Prince abruptly put his hand under mine. We were among the first couples to go out onto the floor, joining a set with Lord Dainsbury himself.

His Lordship appeared startled to see the Prince, who nodded formally to him. Emma's father glanced at me; a smile came to his face which he instantly covered when he saw how I blushed.

I shook through the whole dance, one in which I did not have to touch my partner. I think the Prince had chosen to ask me deliberately for that reason. Every eye in the room was on us, however, and I had to force myself to act as I had been acting all evening, as a coquettish young girl, enjoying the pleasures of a country dance.

"This will not do," said the Prince as the dance ended and we remained with a few other couples on the floor. "I have much to talk about with you, Miss Katherine Grimond."

He said that and his jawline strengthened in determination. "I shall speak to His Lordship and acquire his study later in the evening. When a footman comes for you, please follow him and let me conduct an interview with you."

I lowered my eyes, my bosom heaving in front of me. "Of course, Your Highness," I murmured. He deserved to have a chance to rant and rave at me. I was thankful that he would do it in private. I didn't doubt that he would insist I return to my own county and begin to reconstitute myself as Peregrine Grimond. I would promise, I knew, but I realized that I didn't know if I could ever be Peregrine again. Being Katherine was so natural for me now.

We danced again in silence and I curtseyed to the prince before I left the floor. Emma was right there to question me. "I didn't know Prince Albert was going to come tonight," she said excitedly. "My mother was quite put out. I suggested to my father that he mention you would be here. See how it has worked out so well? What did you talk about? Were you making plans for some secret assignation?"

"Emma!" I scolded my friend, who linked arms with me again and brushed my breast familiarly. He should never have sought me out so publicly.

I danced a number of dances but the sparkle had gone from the ball. I was merely awaiting the tolling of the bell, pitying myself. The footman who approached me asked me to join Emma's mother in her study on a matter of urgency. I went with him, Emma frowning after me.

The footman closed the door. I rustled and swished into the little room. The prince was standing in front of the fireplace. He turned and looked at me. I gave him a little curtsey, with my heart pounding, "Your Highness," I murmured. He grimaced.

"No need for formalities," he said gruffly. "First, I was unalterably rude to you, Miss Grimond, in the offer I made to you at the Kent County Hunt. I asked you to become my mistress, as you must recall. I would like to say that I now rescind that offer. It was never made. It has become unsaid."

He called me Miss Grimond, I thought. It was as if I was back at school, called to the headmaster's study. "It shall be unsaid, Your Highness," I said to him. He glowered at me.

"The trial," the Prince began. "Well, it was hardly a trial, was it? But lest you think it was all staged for your benefit, Miss Grimond, it was not." He told me then all about his cousin, the Duke of Clarence, about the Sissies' Ball and about the arrest of so many aristocrats in female attire at the ball.

"It was George who told me that he had seen you there," the Prince said thickly, "and that you had asked him to help you." I didn't recall that at all. I had been certain that the Duchess had not recognized me at all. "That led us to Mrs. McDowell, to the Lubbocks and to Madame Lecannet, who told us how I was to be blackmailed and how you were to be sold into virtual slavery. We found Lubbock lurking outside Grosvenor Street. Mrs. Lubbock was arrested in the docks arranging your passage to Dieppe.

"The commissioner, for my mother's sake, wished to conceal the involvement of the sissies in this, as the Duke must have been called to testify. That meant that the defendants had to be gagged; they would have blurted it out as they tried to at the end of the trial. Sir

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James Covington was easily persuaded to fall in with the commissioner's wishes. Thus you were spared an ugly scene in court. It has meant that all the other participants in the Sissies' Ball have been released. In all conscience, I could not let my cousin go free and not the others accused of the same crimes.

"Since so many of the sissies at Cleveland Street had retired to bedrooms with their paramours and were found in positions of great compromise, conditionally releasing them all was very easy in the light of day." A ghost of a smile crossed his face. "The ladies were not so ladylike in the full glare of sunlight. They readily agreed to not speak of this affair ever again."

The Prince took a drink then. "I spoke to Lord Douglas Moore about his evil scheme concerning you," Albert said looking into the fire. I was burning in embarrassment as he began to talk about me and the matters I now wished he had never known. "He had the original ransom note."

"I burned it," I whispered to him and he nodded.

"Good," he said. "Lord Douglas got his earldom and the whole reward was returned to him. I trust he has kept his part of the bargain and set you free of all bonds that have held you with him at Acton Square?"

"He has," I said. I knew that at any moment I was going to disgrace myself even more by bursting into tears.

"Good. Good. All is settled then," the prince said. "Of course, it is really unsettled. The commissioner and I know that George will fall again to his unnatural urges. Sir James Covington will use Madame Lecannet to procure another willing young lady, well, a sissy, to warm his bed and meet regularly on Portland Street with a most peculiar crowd. I dare say that Cleveland Street will be in the papers as a scandal once again. My mother has been kept out of it all for now but, if it happens again, Commissioner St. John has assured me he will arrest and charge every person concerned."

I realized that Albert was passing a warning on to me. "Commissioner St. John knows about me?" I asked him.

"Not entirely," Albert said, his eyes boring into me. "He doesn't know of Sir James's appetites, either. He believes that a young lady like you was threatened and made to behave in unladylike ways because of Sarah Lubbock's mad ideas about vengeance on all men for the way they had treated her. She was ruined by an English lord as a young girl, you might as well know. But don't pity her. She was for the gallows for any of the things she inflicted on you. She chose gagging, deportation and a chance to live, if she can survive the sea voyage to Australia. Many do not."

"I should thank you," I said. The Prince waved off any declaration that I could make.

"I thought we should meet and be clear about things," Albert said awkwardly. "One other thing that might interest you. My mother has agreed that I shall not marry Sophia after all. She has set our European cousins to find a more suitable match for me. I believe the list has reached double figures already." He looked at me with a curious smile on his face. "Will you come to my wedding?" he asked me, the most unexpected question of a thoroughly unexpected interview.

"You want me at your wedding?" I asked him stupidly. The smile on his face grew.

"Most certainly," the prince said. "Whenever it is arranged, I wish to see Miss Katherine Grimond in attendance."

"V-very w-well," I stammered. "I-I will be there."

"Say that Miss Katherine Grimond will be there," said the Prince, stepping from the fire.

I stepped back as well. My whole body tensed at the nerves exploding all over me. "Miss Katherine G-Grimond w-will be at your w-wedding." He crossed the study after me. But he didn't touch me. He merely opened the door for me and let me go in a flutter of dresses and petticoats.

"Enjoy the rest of the dance, Katherine," the Prince said after me.

Emma waylaid me, as soon as I was over my flustered feelings, back in the company of so many boisterous people. "Well?" she asked me with a smile. "Did the Prince declare his feelings for you? Did you accept him or reject him?"

"Emma!" I gasped at her. I couldn't tell her that the only declaration made in her father's study had been the rescinding of a past declaration, now to be unsaid.

Emma pressed me and pressed me. Finally, I did relented and told her that the Prince was not to marry Princess Sophia of Brandenburg or wherever, a list was being compiled of his possible future brides, but she shouldn't tell anyone that. It had just come up in conversation.

"Why tell me then?" asked Emma as we sauntered about the dance floor. Our next set with the Apsley brothers was forming at the far end of the ballroom.

"Guess whose name was number one on the list," I said mischievously to her.

"You?" she gasped.

"Not me," I told her. "I'm not even on Douglas's list any more."

"Marvellous," Emma said enthusiastically, stopping to give me a dramatic hug . It caused fifty people over the course of the rest of the evening to ask me why Emma had been so pleased for me. I think I gave fifty answers, all different. "So, who is on this long list of suitable women? Did he say?"

"Since you are at the top of the list," I whispered to her, "I promised him that I would be at his wedding whenever it occurs."

Emma couldn't stop laughing. Of course, we couldn't repeat the joke to our dancing partners but we were so happy that I am sure that they enjoyed just being with us. "You girls are so delightful," said the elder Apsley. "Dancing for me has rarely been so much of a pleasure as it has been tonight, Miss Grimond. Might I call you Katherine?"

I smiled at him. "Why not?" I asked him brightly. I let him have the next dance, a lively waltz, that secured our friendship, Arthur said, forever.

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XI. PRINCE ALBERT'S WEDDING

Maddie went home, confiding in me at last that she missed her son, Pietro, and so did her husband. Her affairs were now all in order and she wished me well.

"Douglas is pining for you," Maddie told me, "in case you hadn't noticed. He is in love with you, you know. You shouldn't treat him so abominably."

After what Douglas Moore had done to me, ostensibly for Maddie's sake, I thought that I had every right to treat him as abominably as I wished. What could he do after all? I suppose he could call me out and challenge me to a duel. That would be the manly way of solving our differences.

I could do nothing else but smile to Maddie, however, and wish her well and ask her to spoil the child I would never see.

"Who is this Madame Lecannet?" the Countess asked me as she passed a note from the mail to me.

It was an invitation to attend Madame Lecannet in two weeks' time for a fitting for the wedding of Prince Albert. "I didn't hear that Prince Albert is to be married soon," I said to the Countess, passing her Madame's letter in all innocence.

"Neither had I," said the Countess in all indignation. "Why should you have to attend a fitting with this, this woman?" she added in distaste. She remembered where Madame Lecannet had entered our family's recollections before.

"She does make wonderful gowns," I told the Countess. I didn't tell her about the special dress she had made for me to wear for Douglas. I didn't want to re-open that old business despite Maddie's urgings. "I think it is just a warning to us all to expect an announcement very soon. I suppose I should go."

"She expects a reply," said the Countess.

I penned Madame a reply and gave it to the butler on duty to post for me.

"So, I shall have you for another week at least," the Countess said happily, patting my hands. I had been intimating to her that I should leave her soon and set up my own household. I had to decide soon whether I should ask her for Colleen to go with me. Of course, I would only need Colleen if I was going to remain as Katherine. Surely I could learn the date of the Prince's wedding, then I must come to a decision on whether to carry on as Katherine or not.

Emma was still pressing me to visit her and I should. I just had to think of some way of disguising myself in bed and in the bathroom with her around. I had seen the bathrooms at Audley Manor and there was no privacy there at all on the girls' wing. Going with Emma would expose Miss Katherine Grimond forever and I didn't want that to happen.

I dithered. I couldn't make up my mind about what I wanted to do. I found myself immersed in being Katherine and planning my days, enjoying my friends and their admiration of me. If only they knew, I would think smugly. We, mostly Emma and me but sometimes Lucy and me, would tease some of the young men at the soirees we went to, in our curls and pretty dresses and French perfumes.

I learned not to mind the compliments I received. In truth, I loved the compliments I received. I liked to see my pointed shoes poking out beneath my dress. I loved seeing my reflection in the mirror. I loved being safe and how everyone was so concerned for me, admiring my fortitude in adversity. I had never heard such constant praise before. I knew it was turning my head, making me think I was really Katherine Grimond.

I scented my ears and my breasts and kept my corsets on as much as I could, even when Sarah wasn't there. I would end it all soon, I said to myself. I knew I would miss being a girl, a woman. Maybe my experience would help me in the future when I married at last, I thought.

I had to admit it to myself at night time in my nightdress in bed. I did love being a girl and I looked forward each day to wearing the new dresses and gowns Madame Lecannet had sent me. I loved the feel of earrings in my pierced ears; even binding myself was little trouble. My skin was wonderfully fragrant and I couldn't go out without my eyelashes curled and kohled and my mouth made into a pretty, pink bow. I was wearing my most daring gowns and sparkling jewellery. The Countess remarked that she loved to see me so happy.

"I love to see you being so happy being a girl," the Countess of Hutton said to me. "For so long, you were quiet, Katherine. I love this new, feminine side of you. You should flirt with young men. You have the face and figure to be a notable beauty in this city. When you marry, your husband will be the envy of every young man in town."

"Thank you, milady," I murmured. She adjusted ribbons and bows in my hair and hugged me about the ruffles on my shoulders. I was dressed for dancing at Winnie's. It was thoroughly enjoyable as so many Guards officers attended the party. There weren't enough girls and so I danced every dance. I do so love being a girl, I thought that night in bed. I was eager to get to Madame's in the morning and order new dresses and gowns for myself for the last Spring Balls of the season.

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Ten o'clock on a chilly Tuesday morning, I set off in a hired carriage to Madame Lecannet's. She met me at her front door, furious with me. "You are late, mademoiselle. You are late," she snapped at me. "I expected you here at ten o'clock! I cannot be held responsible that you are late, on today of all days!"

Mystified, I was hustled into the shop. Her assistants came flooding about me, whisking away my coat, my hat and then my dress without so much as a by-your-leave. "I do want to order some new gowns," I said timidly.

Madame smiled at me. "That can come later," she said. "First, however, we must get you ready for the gown you are to wear at the Prince's wedding."

"Oh yes," I said nervously. Madame's assistants came in with the most delicate of underwear and lingerie. "Is his wedding to be very soon?"

"Very soon," said Madame, shooing out her assistants, telling them not to intrude on us until she called them.

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"Now undress yourself, Miss Grimond," she said, opening my camisole and then my corset. I clung to them as she began to take down my bloomers.

"Madame Lecannet!" I gasped hoarsely, clutching my falling underwear to myself.

Madame continued her assault on me, undoing my dark stockings from the corset. "You cannot wear these with the gown I have made for you," she proclaimed. "I wish you to be properly dressed from the skin out. No, no corset. Your figure is in proper female proportions as you stand in front of me."

I flushed at that.

"Come," Madame Lecannet said softly, chucking my chin, making my earrings swing wildly. "There are no secrets here. You should experience being a young woman without the encumbrances of corset and cinches. Disrobe, Miss Katherine, and let me re-clothe you as a young woman of your station should be clothed."

Madame clothed me entirely in white, in silks, and satins, and lace, all of it white. A tight, white panty replaced the binding. A soft white brassiere went about my breasts and caressed them softly as I moved. White stockings slid sensuously over my legs. They were attached to my white garter belt; each place they touched had a white rose and ribbon to make my legs spectacularly feminine. My panties were short in the leg, embroidered with roses and festooned with frills.

I broke out in goose bumps and Madame smiled at me. "This is the way you should always dress," she said to me. Then she raised her voice and called her assistants to attend me.

A white silk camisole went over my shoulders and fluttered down my body. Madame's assistants then took me over completely and gave me a manicure, changing my nail polish to a soft, glistening pale pink. My lips were outlined and painted the same color. My eyes were worked on and my eyebrows thinned. My eyelashes were augmented with false ones and darkened. The thinnest of lines about my eyes gave them feminine shape. I was delicately rouged and powdered and perfumed with something from Paris that Madame said was called 'Intimate.'

Her assistants laughed at that as I flushed. Then I saw what they had done to my hair. I had a mass of waves and curls in front and a greater mass behind my ears, all of it stranded with ribbons and white roses pinned in a row above my ears until they trailed into the loose hair that the girls had made straight. It fell back with ribbons and roses over my shoulders

"There," said Madame, as a gold necklace with white diamonds went about my neck. My earrings matched the necklace. "Not expensive at all," said Madame. She put an anklet about my leg, then a garter she fastened at my thigh before lowering my dress from the grinning assistants who were whispering about me behind their hands. "A gentleman friend gave them to me to give to you. No," she added. "Not Sir James. He would love to give you something more than diamonds."

I remembered being in bed with Sir James, how he had lain on top of me and how we had kissed. We kissed many times. I let him undress me and I wanted him to kiss me more and more.

"Edith came back from Gretna Green," Madame said with a smile. "Not a penny to her name, totally humiliated by the Scots and her supposed husband-to-be. She would have been in dire straits with Mrs. McDowell, her aunt, sent off to Botany Bay." It was Madame's turn to shiver. "Anyway, my old gentleman friend is still lonely and Edith needs a rich husband to look after her. So, I am training her to be you, Katherine, a blonde version of you that the old gentleman finds very diverting. They have trysted these last three nights. The old gentleman has made a proposal to Edith and she has accepted. She drove a much harder bargain than you would have. She'll get the house when Sir James dies. He told me that she is so frolicsome in the bedroom that that may occur much sooner than anyone thinks."

I was mulling over that when the assistants returned with a cart. On it was a long white dress. It took me a moment or two to realize that this was the wedding dress Madame had been making for me to wear to marry Lord Douglas Moore.

"Oh, girls," said Madame clapping her hands. "I had forgotten about that. What a capital idea! Katherine, you must try this on and we can see what our efforts should have led to."

"I, I can't," I breathed nervously. "The wedding is off. I am not going to be a bride."

I felt sad as I thought of that. But I shouldn't be feeling this way, my mind protested. There was not any way I could ever have fallen into Sarah's perverted scheme to have me marry Douglas.

"Nonsense," cut in Madame. "Put those lovely white shoes on, Katherine. Belle, Dorothy, help the girl into what would have been her wedding dress. Peg, set the train on her hair."

I protested but the girls were giggling, so I stepped into the white shoes. Peg helped to fit them to my feet, lifting petticoats to my waist and tying them to me. White roses decorated the petticoats that swirled about me femininely. The dress was lifted about me. The girls gasped with delight at my appearance as I put my arms into lace sleeves. The dress fitted me perfectly.

"See," exulted Madame Lecannet. Peg got up on a ladder and affixed a veil and a train to my hair that pulled against me as I moved slightly. I looked down at my breasts covered by satin, embossed with roses. The dress flared out, showing similar material all about me. No, this can't be me, I thought. I shouldn't love the way this made me feel, so much like a woman. But, in truth, I didn't want to stop. I was thrilled to be wearing such a dress, to feel the excitement of Madame's girls as the wedding gown was fitted to me. I wished it was true, that I could be a bride.

Madame buttoned me into the dress. It gripped me tightly at my waist and at my chest, which wobbled as I moved on my high heels. I had to lift my dress and my underskirts to move and see myself in the mirror. A gorgeous, feminine bride looked back at me. Madame, standing beside me, smiled in pride at her creation.

"Is the gown not as beautiful as I promised?" asked Madame Lecannet.

"Oh, yes, Madame, it is so beautiful," I enthused to her, smiling as a bride should. lI loved all the exquisite refinements she and her assistants had made to my hair and to my

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face. I felt thrills passing through me, over my gartered legs and my softly-held, feminized body. But it was all for nothing, I thought. I could never have worn this dress and married Lord Douglas Moore. I couldn't.

Madame dropped the veil over my face. I could barely see. "Come with me for a little walk," she said. "I want others to see this dress. Maybe I can convince another customer to buy it, instead of you."

I really didn't want to but a few steps in the lovely dress and I was enthralled with how I felt. I envied the girl who would wear it on her wedding day.

"That's it," encouraged Madame Lecannet. Suddenly I was passing a column of Madame's assistants; I was led right out of the dress shop. The outline of a carriage was in front of me. I lifted my veil and there was Lord Douglas Moore inside the white carriage, in his top hat and morning coat. He had a thin smile on his face as he looked down on me.

"Oh no!" I screamed at Madame Lecannet. Panic overcame me as she pushed me forward, lifting my dress so that I could step on the short ladder and enter the carriage.

"You are not marrying him!" Madame hissed at me. "He is merely window dressing for my beautiful dress and the even more beautiful bride. A short ride into town and you won't have the dress very much longer."

Two assistants, Peg and Belle, came and almost lifted me bodily into the coach. I sat there, almost hysterical, as my dress and its train was piled into the carriage about me. Finally, the door was shut. Madame blew kisses at me from the steps. "Just remember," she said to me, the hugest smile on her face. "It was not my idea to do it in this fashion."

"Do what?" I asked, terrified as the carriage lurched and Lord Douglas Moore looked at me and sighed. "Do what?" I asked him directly. He moved my dress and revealed an enormous bouquet of white roses, which he passed to me.

"This wasn't my idea, either," Lord Douglas said. He stared at me. "I don't think I got the best part of the bargain. I am an earl now and I have a hundred thousand pounds but I think I would rather have been your husband, Katherine. I really do."

"Where are you taking me?" I asked him as the carriage set out on the main street into the center of London.

"We'll be there in just a moment," said Lord Douglas. Passers-by began to applaud the carriage as we went by.

"What a gorgeous bride!" some people called. I wished that I could hide under the seats but I couldn't, not in such a wide and long dress.

"Who is she?" I heard some other people ask.

The carriage suddenly turned into a churchyard. I heard cheering and people clapping. Looking out, I saw all the servants from Acton Square and tradespeople whom we knew. There were also lots of people gawking at me whom I didn't know at all.

Lord Douglas Moore got out first and took my roses. I didn't want to get out but two footmen, in white uniforms, smiling away, came forward and lifted my train and my dress out of the carriage. I had to go with it, descending in masses of silk and satin and lace and

an incredible rustling of feminine materials. The dress was carefully lowered about me and I stood before the arched doorway of an old parish church.

The Countess of Hutton's children then came giggling and running out of the church doors, all dressed in Sunday best clothes, with three other children. They surrounded my dress and train, taking it in their hands and lifting it up as I stared at them in agitation. Lord Douglas Moore presented me with the roses and moved in beside me to take my arm. I clutched his arm for protection against falling.

"Since you are technically still my ward and I am your guardian till the end of this month," said Lord Douglas Moore, "it falls to me to give you away, Katherine Grimond."

"Give me away," I whispered stupidly. I thought that he meant to give away who I really was. But suddenly, the twin doors of the old church opened together and Lord Douglas pulled the veil down over my face.

A peal of organ music sounded. Lord Douglas was moving and so were the children holding my train. I scarcely recognized those who were directing us along a red carpet up to the front of the church past a crowd of people, all smiling at me. Winnie waved at me; her younger brother was frowning beside her. There was Lucy and her parents, and the Dainsburys, Emma on the outside of their pew, waving at me and looking delighted. There was the Earl and the Countess, beaming as much at me as their children.

I teetered as Lord Douglas led me onto the steps and placed my arm under Prince Albert's. "What, what are you doing?" I asked him anxiously, as I teetered on my high heels. The children had set down my train. It felt so heavy as we mounted three steps and paused waiting for a cleric to turn around.

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"Well," Albert whispered back to me as the music thundered on. "I said that I wanted you here on my wedding day and you did agree to come."

"I-I didn't agree to be a bride," I whispered back to him. "I didn't agree to marry you! I can't! You know why!"

"You're not married to anyone else, are you?" Albert murmured. "So when Neville Pulteney asks you his list of questions, just answer 'I do.' Then no one will have to know why you said 'No' to a Prince and exposed both of us to such ridicule, perhaps even exposure of our special relationship."

Neville Pulteney turned, a huge smile on his face. The organ music died and he began the service with the familiar words, "We are gathered here to join this man and this woman in the bonds of holy matrimony." I heard very little else. I was going to be married as a woman. I couldn't do anything about it, not with all the people there looking on so eagerly.

I whispered, "I do," several times, hearing things like loving, honoring and obeying my husband. I cringed inwardly as I followed Albert's clear acceptance of his vows. I said that I would marry him and be his wife, cherishing him with my body.

Albert had a ring for my finger that fitted me perfectly. How could he have known my size? How long had he planned this humiliation of me? Then Albert raised my veil and Neville Pulteney smiled as he said, "I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride."

The music began again and I looked up at Albert in fear. He put his arms about me and kissed me. He kissed me long and passionately. It seemed to go on forever. I swayed and clung to his heavenly arms as he possessed my lips with complete assurance.

I hardly noticed that a grinning Neville Pulteney coughed several times before Albert reluctantly took his lips away from mine. How could I with the tremendous feeling of embarrassment I felt; all my friends saw me kiss a man! They must have seen how eagerly I kissed him, lost for a little while in the heaven of kissing Albert. I felt so girlish and so right to be kissing him, with his hands on me.

Albert then put his arm possessively about my waist and I swished beside him along the aisle, past everyone to the top of the church. The children scampered to take my train and I clung to Albert's arm. We were cheered all the way down the aisle. My girl friends all wanted to touch me and all the men wanted to shake the Prince by the hand.

"Smile," whispered Albert, though he was smiling wide enough for both of us. I tried a little smile. I knew that I should thank His Highness for this day. Yes, it was a terrible trick to play on me but I did feel wonderful, womanly, on his arm. I smiled a little more as the doors opened. I felt tremendous relief at getting out of the church.

The carriage was freshly garlanded with roses, I saw. Our status as a wedding couple was exposed immediately as we left the church. An eager crowd had gathered and were calling out to the Prince whom they seemed to know well and fondly. Prince Albert took a handful of coins and scattered them across the courtyard, setting off a wild scramble among the urchins who had gathered.

I saw Madame Lecannet and her assistants there, all grinning like Cheshire cats at me, obviously loving the way they had duped me into being dressed so fantastically as a bride. I saw a dark carriage on one side of the road. From it, Sir James Covington lifted his hat to me. The blonde-haired, well made-up girl beside him rested in the crook of his arm. She was holding his arm about her waist and smiling at me as well. Then she pouted to Sir James and said something about 'wanting to be as well,' which I took to mean she wanted to be a bride as well. I saw Sir James beaming and nodding to her. She reached up and kissed him on his lips right there on the street.

Prince Albert was kept busy as we went through the streets; he dispensed his largesse to everyone on the sidewalks as is the custom. I saw the half-guinea and crown pieces he was tossing and thought that no one would complain about the Prince's generosity in the scandal sheets.

"Just so that you know," said the Prince as we turned into a magnificent estate and the wedding procession followed us. "I am no longer a Prince of England since I have married you without my mother's consent. I have been disowned and our marriage is considered morganatic. I am, however, to retain one of my titles. I am Duke of Conniston which means, Your Grace, that you are now the Duchess. Don't be surprised if your friends all curtsey to you this evening at the reception for my bride."

"Albert," I pleaded with him. Servants came scurrying to the carriage from what could only be described as a palace. "W-what have you done?"

I thought of what he had done to marry me. He had given up his position at court to marry me and for what? He could hope for nothing from me. He knew that I was a man just as he was.

No, I wasn't a man like he was. He put his hands about my slender waist and lifted me up high. An exuberant smile was on his face as my bosom bounced. He could see it and feel that it was me he caressed and not the bony confines of a corset about me. I wanted him never to put me down. I looked up at him and he smiled down at me as his footmen freed my train from the carriage. Albert put my arm through his again and led me into his palace.

I scarcely saw him through the reception in the high-ceilinged room. He assisted me to remove my veil and train. Then we both had duties, as he called it. I tried to be what I was supposed to be, a blushing bride. I had all the girls to meet and talk to. They called me sly and duplicitous. Emma said she was quite angry with me. She was sure the Prince had made me an offer at her home. I had not allowed her to announce it right there and then.

"Is the Queen really furious?" Emma giggled, taking away all the sting of saying she was angry with me. It seemed everyone knew I was to be married that day and had been under strict orders to not talk about it, especially to me. I walked about and was hugged and hugged by men and women alike. I was a married woman now, said Lucy Webster in exaggerated jealousy. She was envious of me, she said.

The Countess and Earl of Hutton were delighted for me as well. "I knew you would marry well!" burbled the Countess. "I've been telling William for four months now that the Prince had his eye on you and that Douglas would have to step aside in his favor. It is

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criminal that Albert must surrender his rank to marry you. You should be Princess Katherine. Someone as pretty as you should be a Princess, not just a Duchess!"

Albert and I eventually met and did all the customary things at such a reception. I sat beside him but we couldn't converse as our guests were watching us closely. I couldn't eat, nor did I dare to drink. The only thing that I could do well was to kiss Albert. The gathering kept tapping their glasses and we would have to stand and kiss again. I didn't know what was going on at first until Albert stood and held my hand and told me what I had to do. The Countess told me to stand and kiss my husband like a good wife should. It was wonderful to do that, even though I was embarrassed each time. I hoped that Albert was enjoying himself with all of our kisses. For my part, I was becoming very excited, thinking thoughts about another man that no man should ever think.

We finally repaired to a hall where our small assembly was dwarfed by the massive room.

"We shall give a ball here very soon, when we return from Paris," announced my husband, "and everyone here is invited to be our special guests." They all cheered at that. I felt the oddest sensations go through me as he talked about what he and his wife were planning to do. I danced the first dance with him; a quintet on a raised stage played delightful music. After that, I only saw him across the room as I had to dance with every man in the party, from Lord Douglas Moore and his brother, William, to friends of the Prince, no, the Duke now, whom I scarcely recognized.

We danced past supper and another repast was served. A maid led me to the Ladies' Room with Emma, Lucy, Winnie and other girls I scarcely knew. There, I was able to repair my makeup. Then, the time came for me to sit on a soft-cushioned chair. My husband lifted my dresses and caressed my stockings, exposing me to all and sundry as he found the garter Madame Lecannet had put high up on my thigh. I felt much arousal as he took away the garter and looped it high in the air for his friends to catch.

Albert noticed my nerves and thrilled response to his touch. He held my arm and steadied me so that I could toss my flowers over my head to the bevy of girls waiting for just that moment. I think it was Winnie who caught the bouquet but there were so many roses that I think every girl actually got one. The end of the reception came and we had to line up and bid the wedding guests farewell. I was hugged shamelessly and complimented many times on being such a beautiful bride. William, the Earl of Hutton, told me that now all my troubles would be little ones.

I was not, it appeared, going back to my familiar room in Acton Square. All my thoughts became consumed about what must pass between us once Albert and I were alone. I turned to Albert as the Moores left last of all but Albert said nothing. He just smiled at my stammering and scooped me up. He carried me, in my lovely dress, up a wide flight of stairs and into a huge bedroom where a canopied bed awaited us.

"Al-Albert," I said hoarsely. He laid me on the bed, then began to take off his morning coat, his shirt and studs, his pants and shoes, his socks, then his underclothing.

"Albert," I pleaded. I had to tell him again what I was and how he must be mistaken about me. We were not married as man and wife, we couldn't be, no matter what Neville Pulteney had said.

Albert leaned over and kissed me. He climbed onto the bed and kept on kissing me. Any resistance I had planned faded in an instant. He didn't take care at all of my magnificent wedding dress. He got on top of me and kissed and kissed me passionately, his hands stroking me.

All protests left me as I responded to him, my mouth eagerly accepting him. My body responded and my nipples hardened as I accepted his caresses as my due. I let him take the ribbons from my hair and the jewellery from my throat and ears. I assisted him to find the right buttons to open my dress, to find my brassiere and open that. His hand gently touched and slipped inside my loosened brassiere, exploring my breasts. I held onto him, kissing him, not taking his hands away. He then helped me to slip all the petticoats and the camisole from my eager body.

I gloried in his caressing and kissing of my breasts, the strangest urges swirling through me. I wished that I could be a girl for him but I ached, knowing that I couldn't be that. My husband, if I could think of him that way, didn't seem to know that I wasn't the woman everyone thought he had married. His hand caressed my stockings, my garter belt and my panties. He slipped my panties down and I let him. He found my manhood.

I think I cried as he took it and stroked it. I writhed in shame beneath him. What was worst was that I came all over my delicate women's panties just as a man would. I was humiliated that I should do that with another man while he was still gently stroking and kissing me. I sobbed and frantically tried to hide what was happening to me.

Albert only kissed me more and more tenderly, however. I couldn't do anything for him, my husband, that a woman should do for her man. Tentatively, I reached for him as well, thinking that I should do for him what he had done for me. Albert had other ideas. He swept my panties away and lifted my legs about his waist. Then I felt him against me.

I realized what Albert was going to do. He kissed me, caressed my breasts and stroked my legs, waiting until my wriggling subsided. I clung to him. He was gentle but silently insistent so I let him penetrate me as he wanted. He kissed me and hugged me and treated me just as if I was a woman. He treated me as I had treated women. Oh, I loved feeling his weight on me, feeling how we were united as one. I would honor and obey my husband. I loved him. He kissed and kissed me again, gently stroking me.

"You, you can go harder," I whispered. He was hurting me but trying not to. "You, you can have me any way that you want."

Albert groaned and tightened his arms about me. I loved it as he made me his woman. When he began to rock in and out of me, I felt something different. I put my arms about his neck, lifted my legs about his waist, and pushed back at him. He kissed my breasts and I began to move with him, my husband. I wanted him so. I wanted to pleasure him. I kissed and smothered him with caresses. I came again, then he followed. It was so wonderful as he whispered my name, Katherine, Katherine, oh Katherine. Then he said what he didn't have to. He said that he loved me, his wife. That set me off in tears of joy as I clung to him and he seemed to understand my emotions only too well.

"I love you so much, my darling wife," he said to me again. I could feel him inside me growing again.

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Albert's darling wife tried in every way from that point on to please her loving husband. I would have done anything for him. I found that if I writhed under him, he loved pushing in me more. I wiggled and incredible pleasure rose in me and I spasmed beneath Albert. I didn't know what was happening to me but he looked down at me, smiled, and said that I seemed to be having a womanly orgasm.

"It's only fitting, woman," he whispered in my ear. "You are my wife and it is nice to know that you love me so much that you can enjoy me like this. I plan to do this to you for years and years, wife, to pleasure you as you so pleasure me. I love so much to touch you, so pretty and so feminine."

I put my arms around my husband's derriere and drove him fiercely into me, squealing with pain and ecstasy. The feeling of being a woman was so tantalizing that I gave up completely on any idea other than that I was Albert's wife and his woman, as he told me I was. I was married to the most wonderful man in the world. I shivered and shook as he took me again, kissing my stockinged legs that he lifted over his shoulders as he pushed deeply into me, ignoring my maidenly squealing.

"I love you," I whispered when Albert had flagged at last. That made him attack me with renewed vigor. He made me spasm again, laughing at the way I danced and writhed beneath him in the passion I felt for him.

"You are a beautiful woman and my wife," my husband repeated to me. "And I love you, Kate. No one is ever going to separate us, certainly not my mother."

I had to say it to him. I had to say, "I am a beautiful woman." He wanted to hear me say it. I was kissed each time I did. I loved him to kiss me. I had to say, "I am your wife." I had to say, "I love you, Albert." I had to say, "I will love you, honor you and obey you for the rest of my life." I was showered with kisses as we snuggled under the soft sheets and gently aroused each other.

My husband nibbled on my breasts and I cuddled to him, giving him any part of my body he wanted. I was his wife and I would make myself as beautiful a woman as I could for him in all the days we would have together. I promised him that.

I awoke after a wedding night of bliss. I was Katherine, Duchess of Conniston. My husband awakened me with kisses. I panicked at first at having him there in my bed and doing what he wanted to do to me. It was amazing how much easier it was for me to accept my husband on my second day of marriage, to accept him eagerly and assist him in taking me and making me feel like the woman I know I will always be now.

I have left behind any other life I might have aspired to. Our friends say that they have never seen two people so in love. My husband cannot keep his hands off me. He doesn't care if we are in Emma's house or our own. He has me whenever he wants me, and he wants me often.

I will lift my skirts for him anywhere which has been a little embarrassing on one or two occasions as I am quite noisy when I am being loved so forcefully. I can't help it, though. I love him to make love to me. I do things I never thought I would ever do for a man. But he is my husband so nothing seems wrong. I will do anything to give him pleasure. Just being with him, being touched by him, makes me feel so womanly.

It took two years before I finally was presented to his mother. The Queen had obviously been briefed upon our libidinous reputation for her eyes sparkled as she bade me sit on a sofa with her. My dark red dress emphasized the womanly curves I still cultivate by corseting myself severely whenever I can.

"We are so pleased that Albert, of all our sons, is so happy in his marriage," she said grandly to me. Then, surprisingly, she slipped into familiar pronouns as she leaned towards me. I was frightened by her intensity until she said, "I should reject the pair of you, I know, for what he did to me for love of you." She studied my hair, my jewels and my dress then, then looked at the dark red, high-heeled slippers that I wore. "But I can see why any man would love a woman like you."

"We are to be re-instated," Albert said to me sourly as we left in our carriage. His arm was about me, my head on his shoulder. "So I shall be a prince again. But only, I told mama, if you are my princess. I didn't think she would agree but she called my bluff. She says that it will be arranged, Princess Katherine. The only thing is that they want me back at sea. That means that I must be separate from you for as long as two months at a time. I don't think that I can bear that."

"It's all right, darling," I whispered to him. "I'll enlist as your cabin boy and you'll never have to want for intimate relations at sea. It will be a lot of fun, won't it?"

My husband spoiled my attempt to seduce him by laughing at me. "Darling Katherine, my princess," Albert told me. "There is no way," he touched my breasts that were always so tender and aroused so easily by him, "that you could pass the physical to become a cabin boy. We are not so liberal a fleet, either, to allow cabin girls. No, you know that there is only one rightful position for you, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, my lord and master," I sighed meekly. The servants grinned behind our backs, I'm sure, as Albert hurried me to the bedroom.

Once there, I proved to him again and again that I was his adoring wife and his most willing woman. "You grow more beautiful each day," he whispered to me. "I called Lord Douglas Moore an evil man for what he did to you, you know. Now, I am grateful to him. If he hadn't made you into Katherine, I would never have known and loved you, would I?"

"I should thank him when I see him again?" I asked him archly from beneath his active, moving body.

"I already have," said Albert. I gasped at him and he teased my breasts with one of my hair ribbons. "It was the least I could do, Princess Katherine."

And in my girlish heart, I knew it was true. I forgave Lord Douglas and Sarah Lubbock as well for what they had done to me. As my husband made love to me again, I knew that I would not have my life any other way.

*****end*****