

VICTORIANA
PART 1 - DISCIPLINE AND DEVIANTS

CHARLES RYDER

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This electronic book published by Fetish World Books
Fetish World Books is an imprint of Fiction4All
www.fiction4adults.com

Author's Note: All characters in this adult fiction story are at least 18 years of age.

Cover illustration by Formant
<https://www.deviantart.com/0formant0>
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The 3 books of the New Government Trilogy

Chapter 1

Florence stood just as still and quietly as she could. her thighs and her back ached abominably, but she dared not move a muscle. Lady Ponsonby was most insistent when it came to her servants being seen but not heard. Her attempts at immobility were helped by the fact that she'd been strapped into a Grecian Bender earlier that morning by her Ladyship in order to quell her 'natural fidgeting'.

"I'm doing you a favour, Smith," she told Florence. "Rather than dismiss you from my service, I'm actually helping you to be a better under-maid. What do you say to that?"

Thank you, your ladyship. I'm most grateful, your ladyship," Florence managed to reply.

It was a most uncomfortable arrangement. It was the first time she'd had to suffer the indignity of the Bender. It was a framework of some light metal that encouraged better posture, apparently. It made her stand erect but tipped forward at the hips so that her bottom and her breasts were both thrust outwards. Her arms were bound at the wrists and she held a tray in her hands so that she maintained a permanently servile, eyes-down, posture.

The Grecian Bender put an enormous strain on the wearer, but it was still one of her ladyship's favourite methods of control. She had others of course, more painful perhaps, but nothing quite so humiliating as far as the maids were concerned. It was clearly evident, especially to guests and visitors that the maid in question had failed in her daily duties and was being very publicly corrected.

Despite Lady Ponsonby's advanced years, she was one of the cruellest Aristos that Florence had ever come into contact with. She seemed to derive a certain amount of pleasure from ill-treating her very extensive collection of servants. The Ponsonby family, of which she was the matriarch, were extremely wealthy even by the standards of the Aristos.

The family seat that Florence worked in was absolutely huge. She lived there on a semi-permanent basis. She shared a tiny room up in the eaves of the house with one of the other maids. There was a lumpy single mattress on an ancient iron bedstead for them to share. A cupboard, a small set of drawers, and a mirror. The floor was wooden and creaked alarmingly whenever it was walked on.

The room let in a little light via a small window that was set too high in the wall to see out of. In summer it was unbearably hot and humid, and in winter it was bitterly cold. There was a clanking, rattling old radiator on one wall that gave off the approximate heat of one candle. At the end of the draughty hall outside their door was one bathroom which was shared by the other six maids who lived with them on the top floor.

The whole arrangement was, as if they needed it, yet another reminder of their place in the hierarchy of the house. The under-maids were the lowest of the low, even among the dozens of servants that looked after the daily needs of the Ponsonbys. And, despite that, the maids were truly grateful to the aristocratic family that fed them and put a roof over their heads. After all, things could be so much worse. There was always the workhouse.

"Are you listening to me, Smith!?" Bellowed the irascible old woman.

Florence flinched nervously. There she was, dreaming again when she should have been paying attention.

"Yes, your ladyship. I...I'm very sorry your ladyship," Florence was extremely sorry, her inattention would most certainly be punished.

"I declare that you young girls are the flightiest, silliest bunch that it has ever been my misfortune to have to deal with. Put your hands out this minute! I'll teach you to keep your silly little bird-brain on the job in hand."

Florence shuffled awkwardly to a nearby table. Her knees were bound together by a strip of canvas, which effectively hobbled her movement. She carefully placed the tray on it before shuffling back to her mistress and holding out both hands, palms turned upwards as she had been taught. Florence really hated having her hands caned. It was not only a horrible, juvenile, schoolroom-type punishment but it really hurt as well. Especially as she was still required to maintain a firm hold on her tray or the next hour or so.

With a slight, self-pitying sniff, she looked up at Lady Ponsonby. The old woman's eyes shone quite brightly as they often did when she was punishing her staff. Florence feared and disliked her, as all the

maids did. But never in her wildest dreams would she ever consider refusing a direct order from her mistress. She knew from bitter personal experience that any show of dissent would result in Hendry, the dour Scottish head butler, being summoned from his office to deal with her.

Hendry's method of dealing with dissent was always the same, skirt up, knickers down and as much application of his leather belt as he considered necessary to quell the spirits of 'an unruly little girl', as he'd referred to Florence the last time their paths had crossed. He wasn't even a cruel man, she'd decided, just one who was utterly dedicated to the service of his employers. She shuddered, she certainly didn't want another application of the tawse.

The old woman smiled down at her showing a collection of yellowing, slightly decayed teeth. She tapped Florence's right hand gently with the tip of a long cane.

"You know I don't necessarily want to do this, Smith. But I am of the opinion that this sort of thing can only help you improve."

She tapped a little more before raising the stick and bringing it down sharply on Florence's proffered hand. Florence howled, she'd tried ever so hard to forget just how much it hurt to be caned across the delicate palms of her hands.

"What do you say, Smith?" Asked the sadistic old woman as she tapped Florence's left hand.

"Th...thank you, your l...ladyship. For helping me to become a b...better maid."

Five more times the wicked little stick rose and fell, three to each hand. After each one, Florence was required to repeat that humiliating little catechism.

'Thank you, your ladyship. For helping me become a better maid'.

As if somehow, being beaten was good for her. As if Lady Ponsonby was going out of her way to inflict pain on Florence for her benefit. Florence would never have dared raise her eyes to look her mistress in the eyes, and the Bender wouldn't have permitted it anyway, but she could just imagine the old woman's look of gloating pleasure. Punishing her maids seemed to be the only happiness she derived from life nowadays.

When it was over, Florence shuffled back to the table and retrieved her tray. Owwww! Her poor hands stung terribly as she gripped it. There wasn't actually anything on the tray, it was empty. But as she resumed her position with her back to the wall, midway between two doors, she was clearly available. Opposite her and to her right and left were three more under-maids, dressed in an identical fashion to her.

All three of them were also subject to the rigidity of the Grecian Bender. And, like Florence, stood silent but alert waiting for the possibility that they might be called by a family member or a guest to provide whatever sort of service was required. But, more often than not, they were left to stand unnoticed and unused in their respective positions. And there they would stay, immobile, hardly daring to breathe or blink an eye until they were relieved by another under-maid sometime in the unspecified future.

Chapter 2

Julia allowed her eyes to slide sideways to look at the large clock that dominated the room. Ten minutes to seven. Thank goodness, only ten more minutes go. There wasn't much of summer left, but it would be just about light when she got outside. She settled her eyes back down to the form on her desk, checked to make sure that the necessary information was complete and then placed it in her 'out' tray.

She wriggled her toes in her shoes, not long to go now. She daren't risk turning her head and checking the clock again, someone would certainly see her. She picked up another form and carried out the same inspection as the previous one and then laid it carefully, face-down, on the ever-growing pile by her left elbow. Suddenly a bell rang, all around her where sounds of relief and the bustle of people getting up from their chairs.

She collected her little handbag and her hat from the back of her wooden chair and joined the throng on the stairs. She liked Friday evening, two whole days off from work! She heartily detested her job, as did most people she knew. But, at least she had a permanent job, unlike many thousands of other poor souls. She had her precious, officially approved government work contract and as a result was a living, breathing member of the legitimate workforce.

Being a member of the workforce in the current economic climate was absolutely essential. The alternative was unemployment, and of course unemployment meant no money. No money could very easily lead to vagrancy and then destitution and then the dreaded workhouse. It was such a terrible image that Julia immediately blanked it from her mind. Why was she even thinking about things like that on a lovely Friday evening?

Instead she turned her mind to that evening. She'd been paid the previous day and, after her tax and rent had been automatically deducted, she still had the majority of the cash in her small purse, three pounds and five shillings. Ten shillings of that per week would be eaten up by her daily bus fare

It didn't seem a huge amount for her 60 hour week. Still, she could have a couple of glasses of wine at her local pub. That would be something to look forward to. Not too much, obviously, and certainly not alone in the bar. Unaccompanied single women weren't allowed in the bar anyway. Her local, The Swan, had a nice little Ladies Snug as it was referred to. Perhaps her friends would be there as well? At least the ones that lived in with a landlady like she did. Those who still lived with their parents weren't always allowed to go out unaccompanied.

She passed past little groups on the pavement. They were either people of her own social class hurrying home from work, or Aristo's heading in the other direction to nightclubs or parties in the City. The contrast in their appearance was only too apparent at times like this. Both sets of men and women were dressed in a similar fashion. Men in suits, collars and ties and hats, women in long dresses or skirts and blouses, and hats.

The difference was in the style. Aristo women had brightly coloured clothes, beautifully cut and fashionable. Their hair was extravagant and perfectly coiffured. Their hats were dainty and elegant and probably cost more money than Julia made in a month. The men wore suits that didn't look as if they'd been slept in and actual leather shoes, buffed to a shining perfection.

The gulf in class between the two groups was simply enormous. Julia knew she shouldn't be resentful or envious. These people were obviously her superiors, there was simply no doubt of that. But the difference was so stark, it was as if they were from another planet. The two social groups, the Proles and the Aristo's, lived such separate lives, it was almost as if they inhabited a different, parallel universe.

As she scurried around a corner she accidentally bumped into a member of a little group of men and women coming the other way.

"Oh do be careful, you clumsy little whore," drawled a man, lazily.

"Oops, sorry sir," said Julia, immediately stepping into the gutter to let her superiors pass.

The two women in the group paused, looked her up and down and sniggered.

"Shouldn't we call a Constable, Maurice? Asked a tall, dark-haired woman looking down her nose at Julia. "She could easily have hurt you after all."

"Not worth it, Samantha old thing. Dinner in twenty minutes," replied the other man.

"She shouldn't be allowed to get away with assault, though." Declared the woman in a peevish tone.

"What's your name. girl?" Asked the second, red-haired, woman.

"It's Julia Bradfield, miss." Replied Julia with the required little curtsy.

"Well, Julia Bradfield of...Gradgrind & Son," she read Julia's small enamel brooch that she was compelled to wear on the lapel of her blouse. "Don't think that this is the end of the matter."

The four then strolled away, leaving a shaken Julia behind them.

"And did you see her dreadful hat!" She heard one of them women exclaim loud enough for half the street to hear

She managed to squeeze onto the first bus that came, which made a change. Almost immediately a man's hand nipped her backside through the thin material of her long, grey pencil skirt, which was oh so familiar. There was a slightly sour smell on the bus, it was a fairly warm evening and it was jammed with people heading home after a long day's work. Unlike the Aristos, most ordinary people relied on cheap carbolic soap. Plus, in Julia's case at least, a hot shower in her landlady's house cost a shilling. So that was more of a treat than a regular occurrence.

The run in with the four Aristos had quite spoiled her good mood. It was hardly her fault, they had taken up the entire width of the pavement. But that wasn't a defence, as everyone knew. Had that lady called a Constable, which she was quite within her rights to do, it could have turned out quite badly for Julia.

The Constabulary were everywhere nowadays, they ran every town and city and were responsible for public behaviour. They were notoriously heavy-handed, but street crime had fallen to almost zero in the 'respectable' areas that they patrolled. Drunkenness and even slightly anti-social behaviour such as swearing in public was simply not allowed.

And in situations like the one Julia had just experienced, the Constabulary saved everyone's time by automatically believing anything an Aristos said as the plain, unvarnished truth. She wouldn't have stood a chance. No Constable was ever going to believe the word of a Prole against one single Aristos, never mind four of them. Even Julia couldn't imagine such a scenario.

The Constabulary seemed to have unlimited power. She'd often seen Proles, both men and women just like herself, being thrashed in the streets. Simply told to touch their toes in order to have their backsides leathered by one of the fearsome-looking straps that the Constables all carried. And there was never a refusal to carry out an order issued by a Constable. She'd heard of wagons being called to carry away those odd few that didn't conform, but she'd never actually seen one.

The other girls back at her boarding-house had spoken about a girl who used to live there being taken away in the middle of the night for questioning by the Constabulary. Apparently she'd never been heard from again, but her few belongings had been boxed up and taken away by an elderly couple who may have been her parents. Nobody knew the real truth, mainly because nobody wanted to hear it.

There was apparently a Reformatory in each town where those considered by the government to be too non-conformist, those who were beyond a couple of nights in the local prison for example, were sent for the benefit of the community as a whole. Although, as Julia reflected, the idea that dangerous criminals could be kept separated from the law-abiding majority wasn't such a bad one. It meant for instance that she could wander the streets alone, the 'respectable' streets anyway, in complete safety.

She glanced up and saw it was her stop, she rang the bell and then almost had to fight her way off the crowded omnibus, receiving the almost obligatory nip to her backside from a corpulent, older man in a cheap, shiny suit as she did so. He winked at her in a lascivious manner, but she ignored him. He certainly wasn't worth making any sort of fuss over anyway.

Chapter 3

When Richard had originally applied for the job, it had seemed quite attractive. The job, under footman, wasn't ideally what he'd have chosen, but it was a permanent post and it was indoors, and he got his food and lodging paid. He's just left school with no qualifications and no real prospects so his choices were fairly limited anyway.

"Boy!, BOY!!" Richard's stomach tightened as he heard the familiar bellowing of his mistress's voice. He hastened to his feet, dropping his cloth and his tin of polish onto the floor. His hands automatically went to check his bow tie but he didn't have time for anything else as he ran from the room and then up a flight of stairs.

Panting, he paused outside a heavy wooden door and knocked on it

"Enter!"

At the far end of the large room was the owner of the loud voice that had summoned him, Miss Helen de Vere. He hurried over and carefully bowed in front of her.

"Where have you been, little Dickie? I've been calling you for ages?" She asked with that familiar, petulant look.

"Begging your pardon, Miss Helen, I came as quickly as possible."

"Not quickly enough, hand me your book."

His book meant his Conduct Book. All the domestics in Hurst Lodge carried one at all times. She snatched it from him and flicked backwards through it before taking up a pen and writing.

'Little Dickie, lazy and insolent. Six strokes. Cane'.

She signed and dated it and then handed it back disdainfully. A heartbeat later she slapped his face very firmly.

"Well? What are you waiting for, you cretin!? Go and fetch me the bloody cane, you stupid oik!"

Richard hurried off again, waiting until he was out of Miss de Vere's sight before rubbing his jaw. Gosh, she was a bitch. There couldn't be any doubt of that. She was on the other hand, fantastically attractive. She was only three or four years older than he was, but clearly she was already something quite special. She was tall and blonde and beautiful, and didn't she just know it?

He shot back down the stairs and into the main hallway. There, hanging on their separate hooks, were the house punishment implements. Paddles, straps, canes, and even an evil-looking birch at one end. He grabbed one of the hateful canes and turned to run back upstairs. As he did so he caught Mary, the junior parlour maid's eye.

She made a sympathetic face at him but said nothing. Fraternising among the servants was not encouraged, which was a pity because Richard was deeply in love with Mary, and she with him. Obviously though, their situation had to be kept secret. If the family discovered they were lovers, one or both of them would be immediately ejected from the house.

Panting he made it back up the stairs and knocked on the imposing door again.

"Enter!" Demanded the bored-sounding, upper class voice.

She was waiting impatiently in the centre of the room, stunning in elegant, brightly coloured evening gown and blue, high-heeled shoes. He hurried over, he knew from very painful experience that Miss Helen didn't like to be kept waiting. She held out a dainty hand and he placed the horribly flexible cane in it.

"Bend."

There was no preamble, no explanation, just the curt command. He knew what to do of course, all the male staff members did. He was to place his hands on the knees of his striped trousers, hollow his back, and stick his arse out just as far as it would go. He knew from the many times he'd witnessed his friends and colleagues being punished that the action made his trousers skin tight against his backside.

The position was a common one, often used in schools and places of further education. But the difference was that in the past when the cane was being administered to him, the person carrying out the

punishment was invariably a man. To present himself to a woman, and especially a woman as young as Miss Helen seemed doubly humiliating somehow.

Swiiish.

Richard gasped but held his position. Christ, that hurt! She may be a slip of a girl, but she could wield a rattan cane with the best of them.

Swiiish.

He gasped again and tried not to wriggle his bottom. She was really letting him feel them.

Swiiish.

"Ohhhh"

She was really in a bad mood, even for her. Probably her time of the month or something.

"Did you say something, little Dickie?"

"No, Miss Helen. Sorry Miss Helen."

She tapped his backside a couple of times.

"I hope for your sake that you didn't? I'd hate to have to start again from zero."

You wouldn't hate it, you sadistic bitch. He thought, mutinously. You'd enjoy it. Wisely he kept that opinion to himself.

Swiiish.

The cane cracked against his thin, skin tight trousers which offered him no protection whatsoever. And then, almost before he could draw breath,

Swiiish.

She'd repeated the stroke. Richard gritted his teeth and refused to give in. Truth be told, he was half expecting her to do that. She'd once caught him out when he was relatively new in the de Vere household with that same trick, making him bellow out in pain and grasp at his wounded bottom.

As a result he'd been ordered to hold out his hands so that she could cane them, two strokes to each soft palm. And then, despite his tears, she'd made him put his hands back on his knees and suffer the entire six strokes once again. She was a cruel little bitch and no mistake. Although after chatting with servants from other households on his rare days off he was quite certain that she was by no means the only cruel mistress in the City.

He felt her tap his bottom again. He was ready for her now, just one more stroke. Richard could bear that if it meant her attentions may be switched to another servant rather than himself

Swiiish!

The last slashing stroke was a vicious one, the hardest of the lot. It cut him across the entire width of his backside, from top right to bottom left. It was an example of what his betters laughingly described as a 'five-barred gate'. Five horizontal weals and one diagonal one to decorate his bottom. Richard fought the urge to move out of position until she graciously allowed him to stand. She handed him the hateful stick without a word. He bowed slightly, as he knew he must, and then scurried from the room to replace the cane from where he'd brought it.

Chapter 4

Sir Philip Carberry adjusted his tie in the hallway mirror. He had servants for that sort of thing of course, but sometimes a gentleman instinctively knew when something was right or wrong. He was about to go out to dinner, as he invariably did on most evenings. He had no real need to impress anyone, but he was a naturally fastidious sort of a chap.

One could tell an awful lot about a chap from the way he tied his tie. The tie knot had to be tight and neat, obviously, but essentially neither too big nor too small. Small details, but that was the sort of thing that separated a gentleman from the vast herd of oiks and trades people one was expected to associate with in one's daily life. Sir Philip had no real interest in the daily rituals of common people, but a man in his position really should set an example.

He'd always tried to do that throughout his life. He'd attended the right schools and then a prestigious university, the usual trajectory for men of his particular social class. It was an amusing diversion, but it made very little difference to his prospects. His father had died five years ago and left him his title, his business interests and a huge amount of money. He'd inherited the house in one of the City's smartest squares and then bought his mother and two younger sisters another, smaller, house not too far away.

His businesses were extremely lucrative. He'd taken his father's advice and paid some intelligent men a great deal of money to run them for him. The result was a very healthy monthly income without the requirement of him having to actually do anything. A perfect situation as far as Sir Philip was concerned. The resultant time and money left him free to pursue his own, rather idiosyncratic, hobbies. Tonight he was due to meet two like-minded friends in order to seek out that evening's entertainment.

An hour or so later the three of them were sat in a cafe. On Sir Philip's right was his good friend, Grenville, and on his left was Sir Quentin Fortescue. He'd known both of them for many years, Maurice Grenville was his oldest friend. They'd first met thirty years ago at their prep school. Fortescue was an old university chum, and a year or two older than Sir Phillip.

The three sat around a table, their regular table in fact. The large, circular one by the window. They all had coffee. Coffee was a ruinously expensive commodity, and was therefore limited to those that could afford it. A plus point as far as the three Aristos were concerned as it kept the riff-raff out of their favourite late afternoon meeting place.

As they chatted there was a barely suppressed air of excitement between the three of them. Fortescue had learned that there was a new serving girl starting today and had invited his friends over for a 'little sport', as he liked to describe it. They'd already spotted their prey, a young, nervous-looking girl who looked quite lost as she shuffled between the tables.

Eventually they could wait no longer, Fortescue raised his arm and clicked his fingers. He caught the girl's eye and she hurried over. She stood as she'd been taught, feet together, bottom pulled in, tits pushed out, and her arms held at her sides. She was quite a cute little thing, thought Carberry. At least she was for a Prole. She was nicely proportioned and had an elfin face with a slightly snub nose and very dark hair cut in a ragged sort of a bob.

"May I help you, sir?" She asked with a nervous lick at her red lips.

Her crisp new uniform was just slightly too large for her slight frame and made her look younger and more vulnerable somehow. She was wearing a pair of glossy black high heels and black stockings, Carberry knew from experience that she had stockings and a matching garter belt on rather than just a pair of tights. She had a knee-length black, pencil skirt, and a neat, white blouse buttoned at collar and cuffs. Tucked into her hair was a scrap of white nylon that served as her cap.

"I think you may well be able to help us, girl," drawled Fortescue. "My friends and I have enjoyed our coffee so much that we'd like to order another one each please, if that isn't too much trouble?"

The girl smiled, relieved that the three elegant looking gentleman weren't as rude or as arrogant as the majority of customers that she'd had to deal with today. Happily she took out her little pad and pen and

carefully wrote down the order. Mr Perry had explained the trouble she'd be in if she got an order wrong in his cafe.

"Yes, sir. Of course, sir. Was there anything else, sir?"

"Yes there is, girl. What's your name by the way? For when we mention your excellent service to Mr Perry."

She smiled again, Mr Perry would be pleased!

"My name's Lizzie, sir. Begging your pardon, sir." She told him while managing to execute a clumsy curtsey.

"Very well erm...Lizzie. My friends and I were wondering if you were wearing knickers this afternoon?"

The colour in the girl's little rosy-cheeked face seem to drain immediately. She looked at him aghast. Of course she was wearing knickers! Every decent woman and girl in the country wore knickers. She wouldn't dare leave the house without hers. Whatever would people say!? What would her parents say?

"Well, girl? Demanded one of the two younger men sat on the other side of the table.

"Do hurry up. you silly little baggage. We don't have all day!" Added the third in the sort of languid, upper-class accent that Lizzie had come to both hate and fear.

She looked around desperately for help, but none was forthcoming. In fact it seemed as if her fellow waitresses were actively avoiding looking over in her direction.

"Last chance, girlie. Before I call Mr Perry over to discuss the matter with you. He won't take kindly to your insolence, I can promise you that."

"Have you ever been birched, little Lizzie?"

"Ever had the skin taken off your backside, girl?"

"I...I am wearing knickers, sir," she managed to whisper.

"Show us, you little hussy!"

"Yes, lift your skirt up and show us," demanded Grenville in his loud, braying voice.

Lizzie began to cry, but her hands went to the waistband of her black skirt. She certainly didn't want an angry Mr Perry to be brought to the table. She'd already seen him thrash a fellow waitress when an elderly woman made some trifling complaint about the girl's alleged misbehaviour. He'd made her bend over a table and then taken an ugly black strap to her tightly-skirted posterior.

It wasn't the actual punishment that upset Lizzie, although it did look to be extremely painful if the girl's shrieking and begging was anything to go by. She'd seen plenty of girls like her punished, and indeed had suffered several of similar punishments herself. But they had been relatively private affairs, her mother or father in the house, a master or mistress in front of her friends at school.

But this was different. The waitress, Liddy was it, had then been punished in public in front of a whole group of strangers! The poor girl must have been mortified having to show herself like that, with her big bottom thrust into the air while the patrons of the cafe watched. Having said that, Lizzie noticed that not all of them even took the time to watch. Some carried on chatting to their friends while others were buried in their newspapers.

Despite her relative innocence, even Lizzie had realised at the time that it could only mean that the punishment of young ladies like herself and her colleagues was not altogether an unusual state of affairs in her new workplace. For some reason, Lizzie had thought that leaving school and moving into the adult world would somehow signal the end of her regular, humiliating punishments. But that didn't appear to be the case at all.

Although she'd hated school and was glad to leave it on her 18th birthday. There had been a certain sense of fun with her friends. Here in the cafe she realised how little she and her kind meant in the scheme of things. She was treated like dirt by the largely wealthy set of customers that she was required to deal with on a daily basis. She was regularly groped or nipped or had her bottom slapped.

It was as if the customers believed that by buying a cup of coffee, they were also buying the services of the attractive young woman who served them. Lizzie knew, of course, that these sort of people were her social superiors. The fact had been drummed into her from her first day of school to the last. It was just that she'd never quite understood the apparent depth of disdain that the Aristo's had for people of her social class.

The three tormenting her at the moment were typical of the type of loud, pompous, overbearing men she had to suffer on a daily basis. They'd never dream of asking a lady of their class if they were wearing underwear. It would be absolutely unheard of. But she apparently was fair game to them and their private school bullying ways.

Slowly she reached to the button on the side of her skirt and undid it. The tightness of the material made it impossible to pull it up to her hips to reveal her knickers. The only solution was to unfasten it and slide it down her hips. She glanced across nervously at the other tables, but fortunately nobody else seemed particularly interested.

She turned again to the three self-satisfied, complacent faces at her table. There was no sympathy there, she understood immediately that the three young men had absolutely no sympathy for her plight and would undoubtedly summon Mr Perry if she didn't surrender to their demands. She felt the tears running down her face, quite spoiling the make-up she'd painstakingly applied that morning.

"Come on, whore. We don't have all day," drawled one of them. A plump, pasty-faced chap who looked like he'd never done a stroke of work in his life.

They were so mean to her. She wasn't a whore. She had no idea why they called her that horrible name. She was a good girl, still a virgin in fact, as were the majority of her friends. Which, she had to admit, was rather down to the lack of opportunity rather than choice. But still, they had no right to be saying such nasty things about her.

She tugged at the black material and shuffled the skirt down awkwardly until the tops of her white knickers came into view. She could already feel herself blushing enormously at the shame of it all. What would her parents think if they saw her like this? Her father would take his belt to her, despite her maturity and the weekly wage she was bringing into the house.

"Don't be shy, girl. Give us all a good look. That's what you want, isn't it?" Asked the man with the rather unfortunate long face.

"Pull that skirt down further or we'll take it off you altogether and throw you out into the street where you belong," added the third, with a smirk.

By now her whimpering had attracted the attention of some other customers seated nearby. She could see an aristocratic middle-aged lady turn her head to see for herself what was going on. What struck Lizzie was that there wasn't a shred of sympathy in any of their faces. Some were amused, some were excited, a few even looked bored. But nobody looked concerned and certainly nobody made any sort of protest.

Hopelessly she pulled the skirt down a little further so that more of her knickers came into view.

"Grey!" Exclaimed the horse-faced man. "Grey, nobody said grey did they?"

Lizzie Cartwright blushed. They weren't grey! They were white! Or at least as white as her mother could make them with cheap carbolic soap rather than washing powder.

"I'm the nearest said the amused looking fair-haired one. "I said white. And they are white...or at least they were once."

"No old chap, a bet's a bet. They're grey. Look at them."

More heads turned, Lizzie could hear a few sniggers and even a tut of disapproval from one of the women.

"What do you think, Fortescue?" Asked horse-face.

"Definitely not white I'm afraid, Carberry. Close, but no cigar."

The fair-haired man laughed.

"Very well chaps. So that means we all take a turn. In that case I claim last."

"You decide, Grenville."

"I'll go first then. If you don't mind old boy."

"Be my guest," replied Sir Quentin Fortescue with a grace that he liked to believe came quite naturally to him.

The horse-faced man took a hold of her dress and pulled Lizzie towards him. He shuffled his chair back a little and then deposited her face down over his knees. She squealed a little, more from surprise than anything else. But she did try and keep the fuss to a minimum. Not everyone in the large, smoke-filled room had noticed what was going on and she wanted to keep it that way.

Suddenly, a large heavy hand slapped her bottom through her skirt. She gasped but didn't make any more noise than that. The echo of his hand striking the taut material that enclosed her backside sounded unnaturally loud to her ears. Her heart sunk, surely everyone in the busy room had heard that?

Before she had time to worry about the spectacle she was making, a second, a third and a fourth slap followed. Solid, open-handed strokes that stung terribly even through the material of her skirt.

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

The spanking continued. Lizzie burst into loud tears, she just couldn't help herself. A small group was slowly gathering around the table. She heard one gentleman use the term, 'capital entertainment', and realised that was all she was for these wealthy, entitled people. A way for them to relieve their boredom on a summer's evening.

It seemed like hours but was probably only minutes. She heard one of the three men, the blonde one probably call out 'time'. Almost immediately she lifted to her feet and her skirt pulled down to her ankles leaving her in just her blouse and knickers. She didn't even have the energy to complain as she was hauled across the plump man's knees, and the painful spanking of her scorched bottom cheeks resumed.

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

The barrage was relentless, and an even bigger crowd seemed to be milling around her. She wasn't sure if it was because she'd lost her skirt or because her bottom was already sore from the previous round of slapping, but this seemed to hurt even more. She howled and kicked, all her determination to not cause a fuss and bring attention to herself had completely evaporated. The relentless tattoo being beaten on her buttocks only ended when she heard the single word, 'time'.

Once more she was hauled to her feet, and this time her knickers joined her skirt pooled around her ankles. Almost in a daze she allowed herself to be draped over the thighs of the tall, blonde man. The crowd was quite vocal now and there seemed to be a certain amount of amusement.

"Thrash the little trollope, she deserves it," called out one woman despite the fact that she clearly had no idea why Lizzie was being punished.

"She's starting to feel it now, governor. Don't go easy on her," shouted a man who was clearly enjoying the spectacle of a waitress having her bare bottom publically spanked.

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

"Ow."

"Owww"

"Oooowww!"

Shrieked Lizzie, keeping good time with the rhythm being beaten out on her scalded buttocks. Every now and then she felt a finger slide along the lips of her cunny. Her face was almost as red as her backside, such was her abject humiliation. She might not know much, but she did know that good girls didn't flaunt their private parts in public cafes. No matter how exclusive the clientele.

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

Slaaap!

Chapter 5

The workhouse was a grim, forbidding sort of place. Its inhabitants were, in the opinion of the honest folk whose taxes paid for it, the lowest of the low and they certainly didn't need or deserve anything better. After all, what was the point in building a rest home for the dregs of society? Surely they didn't need any further invitation to carry on their feckless lifestyle?

No, the workhouse was a notoriously hard and unforgiving for a reason. The Beadle, the man responsible for the day to day running of the place, was a stern-looking, portly gentleman. He was ruddy-faced with great big jowls that seemed to have the effect of making his little, piggy eyes even smaller. He sported a high, stove-pipe hat on his rotund head, perhaps to make up for his distinct lack of inches.

He was always immaculately attired, which was quite an achievement considering his unusual body shape which rendered him almost as round as he was tall. He also carried a stick with him. A solid piece of mahogany with a silver top. It was a symbol of his office, and Malcolm Gladwell, the Beadle, took his office, and himself for that matter, very seriously indeed.

Beneath him he had a veritable web of underlings. Assistant Beadles, assistant to the beadles, senior wardens, and junior wardens. And on the distaff side, Matrons, Assistant Matrons, assistants to the matrons, junior matrons, and matrons in training. All uniformed as benefited their station. All pompous, dignified and full of their own importance in the scheme of things.

All Gladwell's underlings needed paying regularly, and the money he received from the Parish coffers was provided for that very purpose. Unfortunately, as the inhabitants of the workhouse were only too aware, the Beadle controlled a sum of money from which all workhouse costs were subtracted. Therefore he was able to buy his inmates less food, and pay himself a larger salary, for example.

Or as, in the case of young Sarah Carstairs, he'd taken just a few pounds from her uncle (an old army friend) to place her as a junior matron. To pay her wages he'd simply increased production in one of the sheds, with the threat of lower rations if that target wasn't achieved. It was a win-win situation for Mr Gladwell, as most situations within the four black walls of the workhouse were. He was, he realised, quite the entrepreneur. He often wondered why local businesses didn't use his proven methods of improving productivity?

Given the authority, Gladwell would happily have extended his methods of control and discipline even more into the public sphere. Schools and college students could very much do with 'smartening up', in his opinion. Employees, especially female ones, could most definitely be worked harder. He couldn't understand, for example, why employees were simply given a wage. Surely they should have to earn it in some sort of measured way, like a coalminer for instance?

The more he produced, the more he was paid, and rightly so. That made absolute sense as far as Malcolm Gladwell was concerned. Girls in offices should be set quotas to be achieved within a certain time and then paid according to their success, or lack of it. Similarly, salespeople should be paid according to the number or the value of the sales they made. No sales meant no wages, surely that was the correct motivational tool to employ?

Malcolm Gladwell, like many of his friends and acquaintances, felt that somehow the country was going to the dogs. People, especially the feckless, needed more discipline in their lives if they were intent on being a success. That's why his workhouse was so important in the scheme of things. it wasn't a tool to punish, it was a tool to help the lazy to help themselves. That's why above the main entrance to his place of work was the legend, 'Work or the Workhouse!' A little gentle persuasion never harmed anyone.

Chapter 6

Julia tried to stretch her cramped limbs without drawing too much attention to herself. She waited until Mr Laurel's back was turned before reaching her arms skywards. It was really quite intolerable, she thought. The whole group of women had been sat in the same uncomfortable position for nearly four hours, laboriously copying out contracts for their employers.

They sat on high stools which were attached to immovable desks. Laura's back ached from the position she was forced to adopt, and she was quite short. Goodness knew what the taller girls thought about it? As the man's head started to turn in her direction she turned her attention back to the paperwork in front of her.

She knew the script by heart, well she should do considering how many she'd actually written since she'd started work at Gradgrind's. She placed her latest completed one in the out-tray and turned over another piece of paper. She dipped the steel nib of her pen into the inkwell and started to write out the required words. Not long to go now until lunch.

They were allowed a thirty minute break before the whole tedious process started over again in the afternoon. The lack of a morning break and the fact that their lunch-break wasn't paid were just two of the many things that rankled with Laura. Surely the girls worked hard enough to warrant a paid lunch break?

After all, the business was quite profitable. The owners of the business, the Sangster family, lived in a huge house in the quality part of the town. They even had a private car. They certainly weren't short of money. But that's as it ever was, she thought bitterly. The rich had always had money and the poor never had any.

Her own family life was a constant struggle. Her father worked down the docks and her mother took in washing. Once she'd got the job with Gradgrind's, she'd been able to move out of the cramped family home. There were only four rooms in it and an outside lavatory. Even after she'd managed to afford her own place and leave, there were still six people living in the Bradfield house. Her. Despite the fact she loved her family, Julia had no intention of returning to the family home if she could help it, another reason why she just couldn't afford to lose her job, no matter what.

Which the owners of businesses up and down the country knew only too well. Unions were things that she'd heard her father talk about. Apparently some countries had organisations in place which allowed working men and woman to demand, and in some cases actually receive, a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. It seemed obvious to Julia and her friends that something like a union was essential to ensure fairness and responsible management.

But of course, the owners and management of businesses were profoundly opposed to any sort of change, however minor. They certainly wouldn't stand for anything as radical as unions and fair wages. Julia and her friends knew that, which was why their meetings often took place in smoky back rooms in out of the way pubs. She certainly wasn't a radical but she just believed in fairness, however naive that might sound.

The military and the police owned the various towns and villages in the country. And the Aristos owned the military, the police and the judiciary. The Aristos were small in number, maybe 1% of the entire population, but they owned 95% of the land and 95% of the businesses. And despite this there seemed to be very little public condemnation of that enormously unfair arrangement.

People, by and large, seemed content with their lot, a job, a little money to spend on a weekend, and a place to live. That, to Julia's frustration, seemed to be the limit of most people's ambition. and that was pretty much all they had. In return for the security of a job and some sort of lodging, almost no Prole actually owned their own house, the people had given up all claim to self-determination and independence.

Julia sometimes felt as if she lived in a nation of children who were quite happy to be given the occasional treat just to keep them quiet. She could understand their reticence of course. Stepping out of line at work meant almost certain dismissal. And then, if the employer was feeling particularly vindictive,

the dismissed worker's name being added to a government blacklist making it almost impossible to get a job of any kind, much less a position in a similar trade.

No job meant no money for food and no money for lodgings. No money for lodgings meant vagrancy. Vagrancy meant incarceration in the workhouse. Julia knew people who had agitated at work and then ended up in the workhouse. Everyone knew they were terrible places, schools always emphasised that fact. Julia had read plenty of books at school and written several essays on the topic. The people she knew only confirmed the facts that the workhouse was an experience to be avoided at all costs.

The government made the point that workhouses were a deterrent and only the feckless and the workshy need fear them. There was no need to be scared of the Workhouse, in other words, unless you'd done something to deserve being sent to one. But surely the question was a circular one? That's what Julia and her friends believed anyway. People with good jobs almost certainly didn't want to lose them, and those that did were often the victims of some form of prejudice.

Julia knew a man who'd been sacked without references merely because the nubile young daughter of the factory overseer had taken a fancy to him. An assignation that he certainly hadn't encouraged. She knew of one poor young woman currently residing in a workhouse who had been dismissed from her job because someone more influential had a daughter who needed her job and was willing to pay the right people money to ensure that she got it.

The whole thing was monstrously unfair, and something really needed doing about it. However, Julia knew that hers was very much a minority position. Her opposition to the Aristo's and the way the dominated all aspects of the country simply didn't resonate with most people. They were too busy earning enough money to keep their heads above water, to put food on the table, to pay their rent on time every week, to avoid the workhouse at all costs.

There appeared to be simply no way in which the huge majority of Proles could challenge the wealth and privileges' enjoyed by the one percent of the Aristo's....

"Miss Bradfield, Julia!"

Roused from her internal daydreams. Julia blinked in surprise. She realised that by her side, Mr Laurel was trying to draw her attention.

"Do pay attention, young lady. Mr Allen wants to see you in his office at your earliest convenience."

Julia immediately got to her feet. Mr Allen was the general manager at Gradgrind's. It wouldn't do to keep him waiting. She curtsied briefly to Mr Laurel and then scurried away. She was starting to panic a little. Whatever did Mr Allen want with her? She was far too insignificant for him to want anything from her. Had she done something wrong? She didn't think she had, but that was usually why Mr Allen wanted to see one of his employees.

She knocked on his door and waited until she was admitted. He wasn't alone. Seated on his sofa were two other people who turned as she entered the room. Julia looked at them quizzically. They were familiar but she couldn't quite place them.

"Is this the girl in question, ladies."

I believe so, yes. Although girls of her type are so depressingly common," drawled the woman sat nearest to Julia

"In that case, young lady. I think you have some questions to answer," said a stern-faced Mr Allen.

Suddenly it came to Julia. The haughty dark haired woman was in the group of people that she'd accidentally bumped into a couple of nights ago. And the red-head by her side was the one who'd demanded her name. She swallowed nervously. What was all this about?

"This...girl of yours assaulted my fiancé in broad daylight on Friday evening. She virtually barged him into the gutter."

"And then she had the temerity to laugh and to tell us that we should have looked where we were going!" Added her red-haired friend.

Reginald Allen slowly shook his head. Really, this was too much! He looked after his girls very well, in his opinion and this is how they rewarded him!

"You know darling Maurice of course, Reggie? He's such a gentleman that he refused to call a Constable. But after a great deal of thought, Miss Hughes and I thought it only proper that you should be informed. After all, the girl does represent your company and by extension you and your good name."

"You are most kind, Miss Crossland. I thank you and Miss Hughes for bringing this matter to my attention. This is a most unfortunate occurrence. I shall deal with the miscreant, you should have no doubt on that score."

Julia opened and closed her mouth. That was a complete untruth! Both the two haughty Aristo's were lying simply to cause trouble for her.

"Do you have anything to say young lady? Something that may mitigate the sentence I'm about to pass?"

She was so angry that it took Julia a second to realise that Mr Allen was talking to her. He hadn't even asked for her view of the incident. That was because he didn't care what her opinion was, she realised. He'd just accepted the lies that the two women had told him as fact. Helped no doubt that the three of them seemed to already know each other socially. But then didn't all the Aristo's know each other socially, she asked herself. That was a part of the reason why they held so much power, every Aristo family seemed to be intertwined somehow with every other Aristo family.

She realised that Mr Allen was waiting for her to answer. There hardly seemed to be any point, he'd already decided that she was guilty of an imaginary crime. But on the other hand if she didn't say something, her punishment would be all the harsher. She cleared her throat.

"I'm sorry if my behaviour caused any offence. I apologise if my words may have been misconstrued."

"Misconstrued?" Demanded the older of the two. "Misconstrued!? Are you accusing us of lying now, you cheap little trollop?"

Julia blushed at the insult.

"I didn't mean to imply that the words were untrue, madam. Merely that you may have misheard them perhaps?"

"How dare you!?" Exclaimed her red-haired companion. "We know perfectly well what you said and what you did! If only Maurice had called a Constable at the time."

"Ladies, please," exclaimed Reginald Allen, taking out a pristine white handkerchief to mop his brow.

He levered himself to his feet and went to the tall thin cabinet in the corner. Julia's eyes followed him across the room. She knew very well what was in that cupboard. Surely the old man didn't mean to cane her in front of two other women? With a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach, she realised that he did. He gave the stick that he'd chosen a couple of experimental sweeps through the air. She grimaced slightly at the evil hissing sound that the cane made

"Bend over my desk, Miss Bradfield. I'm afraid that this is going to hurt."

As she stepped forwards obediently, Julia saw the two women exchange amused glances.

"Hold onto the far side of the desk and keep your nose to the wood, if you please," instructed Mr Allen. An order he had given to so many hapless employees.

Miss Samantha Crossland leaned forward eagerly in her seat. She had considered asking dear old Reggie to increase the girl's humiliation by pulling up skirt and revealing her underwear before he applied the cane to her, but she thought that may be somewhat untoward. Instead she settled herself to watch the entertainment. Marina and her had discussed the situation late on Saturday evening when they were both a little drunk.

If she was honest, Samantha had already forgotten the incident in the street with the little shopgirl. However when Marina reminded her about it, she remembered that dear Reggie was the general manager at Gradgrind's. Wouldn't it be capital entertainment if she was to call him and ask that the Bradfield person be punished? How the two of them had laughed at the idea. It would probably do the girl some good as well, teach her what her real place was.

Without much ado, Reginald Allen measured the target by tapping his cane in the dead centre of Julia's bottom, before drawing his arm back and then whipping it forward so that it landed with a resounding whack against the seat of her tight, grey skirt. Sending up a little puff of dust as it did so. For a second Julia was relieved, it didn't hurt quite so much as she remembered. But then the sting of the stroke slowly radiated through her backside.

As second and a third followed, making her gasp and squeal. Much to the evident amusement of the two haughty women by her side.

"Owwwow," The fourth bit into the meat of her bottom cheeks making her cry out for the first time. The fifth, just as hard and just as accurate, made her cry. And then the sixth made her howl and beg for mercy. She'd forgotten, or at least her mind had forgotten, just how much a caning from Mr Allen hurt. despite his rather avuncular appearance, he was an expert with that particular item of correction.

"Up you get, girl."

She wiped her tears from her cheeks as she stood up.

"Turn and face the ladies."

She did as she was told, her face suffused with the heat of her shame.

"Apologise to Miss Crossland."

Haltingly, Julia apologised for her misbehaviour, trying to ignore the smirk of pleasure on the face of her accuser.

"And now apologise to Miss Hughes."

Julia repeated what she'd said about how sorry she was and how it wouldn't happen again. She wasn't sure what hurt her pride the most, the caning in front of an audience, or her humiliating, grovelling apology for her non-existent crime. At least it was over and she could go to the restroom and cry. That was until Mr Allen's horrid cane tapped on the desk.

"Nose here, young lady, if you please. We haven't finished yet."

Mr Allen was true to his word. Another six searing strokes followed. An extension of her punishment he explained during a finger-wagging lecture, for not immediately apologising to the two ladies and for her disgraceful accusation regarding the veracity of their explanation. She had to curtsy to each of the ladies in turn and beg their pardon before finally being allowed to scurry to the bathroom to cry and then tidy herself up before resuming her uncomfortable wooden stool for the rest of the afternoon.

Chapter 7

Miss Helen de Vere examined herself carefully in her full length mirror. She was about to go riding for the afternoon and everything about her appearance had to be immaculate. The de Vere's were the leading family in the area and as such, she had a responsibility to set an example for the very many number of local families that looked up to hers. It could be an irksome duty at times, but Miss de Vere considered herself equal to the challenge.

Her black, leather riding boots had been buffed to a mirror sheen. A fact that hardly registered, as all her leather footwear was treated in a similar fashion. Her skin-tight jodhpurs weren't merely white. They were a particular shade of gleaming white. Similarly her starched, white blouse had that look of brand new about it. That was because Miss de Vere never used the same riding shirt twice. Every single one was simply discarded after one use. To complete her equestrienne look, her red and yellow pony club tie was knotted just so. The tip of it hung just above the waistband of her jodhpurs.

She looked at herself from the front and then in profile. Yes, so far so good. Her trousers showed off her well-rounded backside to perfection and, of course, were ideally suited to her. Her shirt was fitted to emphasise her pert little breasts. When she was quite satisfied, she held out her hand behind her. Immediately her personal maid, Polly, shuffled forward and handed her mistress her red, hunting jacket.

The girl took it without a word and examined it closely. Polly watched her nervously. This was where the young mistress often found fault with her work. She hadn't been with Miss Helen long. In fact nobody seemed to stay with Miss Helen for very long. It wasn't even a job that Polly actually wanted, but who on earth would be interested in her opinion?

Mrs Linton, the housekeeper, had simply told Polly that she was relieved of her parlour maid duties and should report to Miss Helen immediately. Polly could remember that feeling of dread when she heard the instruction. But she could hardly refuse, she valued her job too much for that. Miss Helen turned out to be even worse than Polly had thought she might be.

She was the de Vere's youngest child and was, as Polly's mother would have said, spoiled rotten. She had the very best of everything, and her parents were indescribably rich. And yet her default expression seemed to be one of petulant annoyance. Nothing, as far as Polly could see, made her happy. She was arrogant and rude, and never had a good word for anyone. That wasn't unusual for an Aristo, but Miss de Vere seemed to elevate her own behaviour to a different level.

She was admittedly quite pretty with her blonde hair tied up in ringlets and her bright blue eyes. Her skin was pleasingly pale with just a hint of red in her cheeks. She was tall, but extremely thin and had a nice pair of breasts that pushed alluringly against the front of whatever elegant creation she had chosen to wear that day. She was always perfectly attired for any occasion.

And that was where Polly came in. Her duty was to her mistress, specifically the appearance of her mistress. Miss de Vere was astonishingly vain and considered any hint of imperfection to be an insult. Thus the concentration on her shoes and her makeup and her hair and her costumes. Miss de Vere had her own hairdresser of course, and her own beautician and her own miliner, and a personal dress designer. But the culmination of all those things and how she appeared, particularly in public, was Polly's responsibility.

Any failure on her part, or more particularly any perceived failure, would invariably result in some sort of punishment for Polly. A slapped face, a tweaked earlobe, a spanking or a strapping, and quite regularly, a caning. Miss de Vere seemed to revel in her power over Polly. Despite their similar ages and even appearance, Polly was a green-eyed blonde but not as tall or as buxom as her mistress, Helen de Vere never passed up the opportunity to chastise her personal maid.

Polly had quickly learned to fear her and her volcanic outbursts of temper. There was absolutely no limit to Helen de Vere's behaviour. The only person she paid attention to was her father, and in his eyes she could absolutely do no wrong. Sometimes as she lay in her little bed on a night, exhausted and in pain from her latest thrashing, she asked herself what had become of Miss de Vere's former personal maids.

Her predecessor, a beautiful young red-haired, freckle-faced girl called Anna, had simply disappeared from Hurst Lodge. She was there one day and gone the next. Nobody seemed to know why, at least none of the servants had any idea. She'd been sent packing according to some, or she'd just run away. Polly's friend, Mary the parlour maid who'd taken on her role, thought that she'd got pregnant by one of the footmen or even perhaps His Lordship and as a result had been sent away to have her baby somewhere.

Polly had laughed along with Mary at the idea of their elderly master screwing a servant girl, but underneath she had a more worrying feeling. Perhaps Miss de Vere had beaten Anna so badly that she'd been taken to a hospital somewhere so that her wounds could heal? She had a sudden vision of Anna's face battered and bruised and of her delicate pale skin covered in weals and stripes from the many canings delivered to her by Miss de Vere.

Was that going to be her fate? Was she...

Slaaap!

Polly's hand immediately went to her face in an attempt to alleviate the sting in her cheek.

"Pay attention, you dreadful little harlot! I don't pay you good money to have you standing around staring aimlessly into space!"

Slaaap!

A second blow made her head ring for a few seconds.

"No, Miss Helen. Sorry, Miss Helen."

She dipped her knees as apologetically as she could considering that they were hobbled together beneath her sheath dress. The long black skirt and her high-heeled black shoes were quite normal attire for a servant. Similarly the starched little white apron and the rather humiliating cap perched on her blonde curls were copied in most homes up and down the country.

Where the de Vere house differed from most was the fact that all of the maids had an area of their dress cut out so that their breasts were quite visible. The fact that none of them were allowed to wear a bra either made their appearance terribly humiliating, especially when there were visitors to the de Vere residence. Even routine chores, such as answering the door to the postman, had the potential to add to their shame.

"I was preparing to congratulate you for once, young lady. My clothes are finally at the standard that I require. However this sort of inattention simply can't go unpunished. Hand me my crop."

Polly could feel the flush rising up her neck. She was going to be punished yet again! Despite her best efforts, despite her carrying out her duties to the very best of her abilities she was about to be chastised for what seemed the hundredth time! But there was one thing that Polly had learned during her relatively brief stint as Miss Helen's personal maid. And that was never protest and never beg for forgiveness. Neither was acceptable.

Instead, she went over to the table and gathered up the horrible, plaited leather crop. Her mistress, who had just finished fastening the last button on her red jacket, slowed pulled on her beautiful, black leather gloves and then flexed her fingers. Polly handed her the riding crop and then stood waiting further instructions.

"I think I'll have you touching your toes, girl. Let's get that fat backside nice and rounded shall we?"

Polly didn't like adopting any sort of punishment position, but touching her toes was one of the most difficult. First, she was wearing heels, second, her dress was very tight, and third her corset was extremely constricting even around her slim waist. Not that any of that bothered her mistress. The little bitch probably enjoyed watching her struggle, she thought bitterly.

Even when Polly was finally settled in position, Miss Helen didn't hurry. The crop stroked up and down her exposed backside, gently tapping here and there. Polly was panting a little, her strictly tied corset was squeezed against her diaphragm making it difficult to catch her breath in that undignified position. The crop stopped its tapping to be replaced by her mistress's dainty little hand. Polly flinched automatically at the unexpected touch.

It wasn't as if Miss Helen wasn't at liberty to do anything she wanted to one of her servants. Out in the centre of the courtyard was a heavy, wooden birching hurdle that had been bolted to the floor. It wasn't unusual to see one of Polly's fellow servants buckled to it and having their breeches lowered or their skirts lifted as Miss Helen retrieved a wicked looking birch from a bucket of brine.

But in this instance her touch was quite unexpected. In fact it was probably the first time her mistress had touched her without causing her some sort of pain. It was really quite unnerving, Polly felt herself almost wishing that her punishment might start, if only to alleviate the sudden tension in the room.

"Get up, girl. I don't have time to waste on you at the moment."

Astonished, but thankful, Polly raised herself up. Her face flushed and ruddy with exertion.

"But don't think you're getting off easily. I want to see you in my room tonight after supper."

"Yes, Miss Helen."

Miss Helen de Vere reached for her riding hat and left the room without another word. Polly curtsied and kept the position until the noise of her mistresses boots had receded down the corridor.

Chapter 8

Sir Phillip Carberry sighed as he took out his pocket watch. Good Lord, what was keeping the girl? A flutter of brightly coloured skirts caught his eye. Here she was at last, although he had to admit that her time had been well spent. His youngest sister, Lucinda, looked an absolute picture as she descended the stairs towards him. Tall with dark hair and dark eyes. She was dressed in a beautiful shimmering blue gown that emphasised her generous buttocks and breasts.

He smiled despite her late arrival.

"Lucinda, darling, you look absolutely scrumptious. That is, if a gentleman may refer to his sister in such a forward way?"

She smiled back at him and curtsied slightly.

"Off course you may, sir. I am indeed honoured ."

"Come, let's make haste. Town, I think first in order to buy your present and then maybe a show and perhaps afterwards, some dinner?"

"That sounds marvellous, Phillip."

She held out her hand for him to take and he escorted her out to the waiting cab.

Two hours later, Sir Phillip was not quite so sanguine. Lucinda was an avid shopper, and she'd dragged him from emporium to emporium in the search for that elusive new fashionable blouse that she just had to have. He was becoming bored, and when he was bored he became restless. He took out a slim cigar and looked around to find some sort of entertainment.

His eye was drawn to an elegant looking woman serving behind a nearby counter. My word but she was an attractive filly! Not as young as his usual target, much nearer his own age in fact. But she had the sort of self-confidence that wasn't really appropriate for her Prole appearance. That was enough on its own to attract Sir Phillip's attention. If there was one thing that he didn't like, it was Proles who didn't know their place.

He sauntered over and stood watching her. Yes, nice tits beneath her shop uniform. A brunette as well with strong features and a firm, no-nonsense expression on her heavily made-up face. He could tell from experience that she'd seen him and registered his appearance. He was used to that sort of thing, tall, manly-looking, handsome even in his own way, clearly ex-army. But also impeccably dressed and turned out. Clearly he was a wealthy man with taste.

He took a couple of steps nearer and listened as she advised an Aristo mother and her daughter just what would and wouldn't suit the younger woman. She was rather forthright, he realised. Her well-modulated voice didn't quite have that tone of submissive deference that he liked to hear from Proles. Here, in fact, was a young woman who didn't appear to know her place.

He watched for a while until she'd finished dealing with her clients and then took himself over to her counter

"Your name?" He demanded, without any sort of preamble.

He could see her name tag pinned to the front of her store uniform, but he just wanted to hear her say it.

"Henrietta Ward, sir"

He turned and walked away. That name sounded vaguely familiar, although the very idea of him having met her socially was obviously risible. Lucinda rejoined him and then steered him back to Henrietta Ward's counter.

"I need underwear, darling. Clearly I don't need you to choose it for me. But if you could just hover and then pay the bill, that would be marvellous?"

She smiled sweetly at him and he was powerless to resist. He watched as the two ladies chatted a little before Lucinda bought two or three frivolous items which would, no doubt, cost him a small fortune.

"Do you know that woman, Lucinda. She seems oddly familiar to me?"

"Oh her, that's Hettie Parsons, silly. Don't you recognise her? The girl who tried to divorce her husband! You must remember? It was in all the newspapers."

By God! He did recognise her! He'd seen her at parties when they were both younger. No wonder he'd been attracted to her. She was an Aristo by birth. He dimly recalled how she'd gone to the law to try and rid herself of her legal husband. Some nonsense about spousal abuse, as if that was a real thing. As opposed to some fantasy largely made up by hysterical women.

She'd failed of course. Her husband, Jack Parsons, had retaliated by divorcing her and keeping all her money. At the same time her family had disowned her and she'd disappeared from Aristo society. And now here she was, reinvented as a Prole. Working away behind a counter quite shamelessly. He shook his head. Sir Phillip was, by birth and upbringing, a most traditional man. This sort of thing, a woman trying to abandon her legally wedded husband on some pretence, needed nipping in the bud.

He steered Lucinda by the elbow towards the coffee shop while he explained what he wished her to do next.

Refreshed, he returned to her counter and rapped his cane on the desk. Henrietta Ward turned and this time he could tell that she recognised him.

"Call me the manager, young woman. I have a complaint."

Henrietta pursed her lips. She'd recognised him straight away. Nasty, cruel Phillip Carberry. The sort of man that women should be warned about. And that was his dimwit sister with him. She had little choice however and left her post to find Mr Jordan, her immediate manager.

"How may I help, sir?" Asked the small, thin little man, nervously sweeping his thinning hair back over his scalp.

"My name is Phillip Carberry, *Sir* Phillip Carberry," he added in case the hapless oik wasn't aware of his rank, "and I have a serious complaint regarding this young woman," he indicated Henrietta with his walking cane.

"If you could let me know the details, sir?" Asked the man, unctuously. It never did to aggravate an Aristo.

This person has stolen my sister's silk handkerchief. Miss Carberry left it on the counter for a second and when she returned it was gone. What do you intend to do about it, my good man? Is it necessary for me to summon a Constable?"

Nigel Jordan swallowed nervously and adjusted his collar. This sort of thing put him in a damn awkward position. He glanced across at Miss Ward, whose face had turned a particular shade of white.

"I'm sure there's been some sort of misunderstanding sir, Miss Ward here is one of our best employees and I'm..."

"I don't give a damn! She's a common thief and she needs a good whipping!" Exclaimed Sir Phillip Carberry, loudly.

Mr Jordan swallowed again. People, attracted by the noise, were beginning to drift across towards the little group gathered by the counter. This sort of commotion in his area was really most unhelpful.

"I say, Phillip, why not call this wretched little man's supervisor?" Asked Lucinda Carberry.

"That won't be necessary, Miss...erm, Carberry. I'm sure we can resolve this problem between ourselves."

Out of the corner of his eye, Jordan could see the crowd swelling with customers interested in the scene playing out in front of their eyes. Senior management took a very dim view of this sort of thing. He needed to act.

"Miss Ward, can you explain these accusations?"

Now Henrietta was in a difficult position. She knew very well how the system worked. To simply deny the obvious lies made by the Carberry's would simply be unthinkable for a woman in her position. Now that she had been cut off without a penny by her family, she was a Prole now, rather than an Aristo. To accuse the two of them of lying, especially in front of an audience, would probably invite criminal proceedings against her. Something she would find impossible to defend.

On the other hand passive acceptance of their lies would be like admitting that she'd stolen the non-existence handkerchief. Which would most likely end in a criminal conviction. From the look on the face of Phillip Carberry's face, she could tell that he knew her dilemma very well. In fact it was just the sort of cowardly thing that a bully like him would do. Henrietta had no doubt that his shrew of a sister had informed him of her personal situation and the fact she was estranged from her family.

"Perhaps the lady is mistaken, Mr Jordan? Maybe the handkerchief in question may still be laying unnoticed in her pocket. Or it may have fallen off the counter onto the floor. I'll take a look and see."

She did as she said and, obviously, found nothing. Lucinda Carberry made a show of patting her clothes and searching her pocket and, similarly, found nothing. The crowd were buzzing now. Clearly something unusual was afoot. Sir Phillip glanced around at the throng, perhaps now was the time?

"So, what do you propose now, you silly little man?" Asked Lucinda, in her charming way.

Nigel Jordan looked around nervously until his eyes rested pleadingly on Sir Phillip.

"I may have a solution, Mr...erm..."

"Yes, sir?" asked Jordan hopefully, ignoring the fact that the gentleman had apparently already forgotten his name.

Henrietta was aghast when she heard Sir Phillip's proposal. He wanted her to strip down to her underwear to prove that she hadn't stolen an imaginary handkerchief!? Was the man quite mad? And not only strip off, but to do so in public? In a crowded City emporium? She felt faint with a mixture of humiliation and rage, but her options were strictly limited. If she refused, she'd be judged as having something to hide. If she agreed, she could prove her innocence...but oh, the shame!

Nor would he accept that she removed her clothes somewhere privately. He wanted it done right there by her counter, in full view of the customers! Mr Jordan, who had always been a reasonable man, at least had the grace to look embarrassed for her. Elsewhere sympathy for her plight was harder to find. Nevertheless she reluctantly acquiesced, she had to. There was really no other option. She needed her job badly, just to keep her head above water.

Her hands went to her head to unpin the company hat from her auburn tresses. Then slowly to the small, pearl buttons on the front of her grey blouse. Then she unzipped the fastening of her black, calf-length skirt. She looked despairingly at her tormentor, but his smug, superior expression told her that appealing to his better nature would be futile. With a slight sob, she lowered her skirt and stepped out of it.

There was a low mumble of appreciation from the male members of the assembled throng. She was wearing smoke-grey, fully-fashioned stockings supported by a black garter belt, and underneath a pair of royal blue knickers. Her slightly plump, buxom frame complimented her choice of clothing wonderfully well. Trying to ignore the stares from the crowd, Henrietta's hands opened the front of the blouse and slowly removed it before depositing it with the skirt.

Her bra was royal blue as well, nicely matching her knickers. The buzz increased as more of the men appreciated the swell of her magnificent breasts. But that was mixed with the sound of laughter as more people noticed that a woman had been made to strip to her underwear in one of the main avenues of the emporium.

"And the rest, young woman," demanded Sir Phillip, feeling the swell of his cock against his tweed trousers.

"But sir," replied a red-faced Mr Jordan, "surely you can see that Miss Ward doesn't have the handkerchief on her person?"

"She's a common little tart, Phillip. It's probably stuffed into her bra or down her knickers," replied Lucinda Carberry.

Sir Phillip smiled at the look of abject shame on Henrietta's face.

"My sister is right, Mr ...erm...Jones."

Jordan was too agitated to notice the rude ignorance of his name.

"But sir..."

"Panties and bra off, girl! Either that or I shall call a Constable." demanded Sir Phillip Carberry.

With a little sob, Henrietta's hands went to the fastening of her wired silk bra. Only when she was utterly naked in front of a quickly growing crowd did Sir Phillip desist. After all, the tart's humiliation was largely for the benefit of himself and his sister, rather than this burgeoning collection of lower-class oiks.

"As you can see, sir. There's been some sort of mistake. Miss Ward is clearly not in possession of any sort of handkerchief."

Grumpily, Sir Phillip conceded that his morning's sport was at an end. Without another word he turned and held out his for his sister to take. The two strode from the counter as if the incident had absolutely nothing to do with them.

"Rather capital entertainment, Phillip, thank you so much."

"Consider it yet another birthday present, dear sister of mine."

"Oh darling Phillip, you're too kind. I have to declare that I do like this emporium, and their lingerie counter in particular. I do hope we can visit again soon?"

"I see no reason why not, dear Lucinda."

Chapter 9

Malcolm Gladwell rocked gently backwards and forwards on his feet as he surveyed the scene in front of him, his hands tucked comfortably behind his back. The exercise yard was busy, as it generally was at 8 o'clock in the morning. The inmates on yard duty scurried around trying desperately not to attract the attention of any of his staff. It was a veritable hive of activity, and if Gladwell liked anything at all, it was activity. He couldn't bear idleness or laziness. Unfortunately a great number of his inmates were guilty of those two crimes.

And that, essentially, was why he had been appointed as the chief overseer of the recently commissioned town workhouse for women. He'd gradually worked his way up from basic guard up to where he was now, and he was justifiably proud of his achievements. That unpleasant business when he'd been required to resign from the police service now but a distant memory. He glanced to his left where the young girl stood to attention holding a tray with his steaming mug of tea on it.

She was dressed in the usual inmate manner, a thin white shirt buttoned at the collar and wrists, a short, grey, pleated skirt, and a pair of black, rubber plimsolls. It was quite a cool morning and he could see her neat little nipples pushing against the fabric of her shirt. She wasn't allowed a bra, she was what the regulations described as 'underdeveloped - brassiere not necessary'. She was cute though, in a girl next door sort of way. That's why she had the privilege of holding his drink for him.

Down below on the parade ground, the fifty women who weren't so privileged were engaged in the process of moving large rocks from one area to another using heavy wheelbarrows. First they had to manhandle, or maybe that should be womanhandle, he smiled briefly at his own unaccustomed wit, the stones off the floor where they'd been dumped and into their barrows. That took two or three, or however many women it was necessary to use, to do it. Then they had to be wheeled 200 feet or so, taken out and placed back on the floor.

Later that day, another group of women would break up the collection of rocks using small hammers until they were no bigger than their fists. Later, or maybe the morning after, a third group would load the broken stones into other wheelbarrows and then transport them to another spot, roughly 200 feet away where they were unloaded and placed upon the floor. Backbreaking work, and utterly pointless, men with proper tools could have done the work in a tenth of the time. But perfect, on the other hand, for introducing a work ethic into the minds of his backsliding female inmates.

Gladwell had inherited the system from his predecessor at the workhouse and was pleased with it as far as it went. However, like all true visionaries, he'd added little personal touches to mark the idea as his own. This morning, for example, he'd made a race out of it. The women were split into two teams and were racing to transport their own large pile of rocks from the far end of the parade ground to a spot just in front of him.

He watched as the women sweated and strained to heave their wheelbarrows towards him. Unlike his pretty little blonde tray-bearer he had no doubt that they were no longer feeling that nip in the early-autumn air. Quite the opposite in fact, he could see them wiping the sweat from their eyes as they struggled. Some of the barrows had a woman on each handle, some had a third pushing as well. The beadle liked to see women sweat, it was just one of his many...interests. That's why he'd applied to join the female workhouse in the first place, rather than the men's.

He could quite understand their urgency, the penalty for the losing team was a brisk skirt-down, bare-arsed strapping in the middle of the parade ground. But that's what these work-shy women needed sometimes, a certain incentive to put their backs into it. Why else had they been consigned to the workhouse? Gladwell had no doubts as to the legitimacy of his job. An impartial court had decided the guilt of these women and it was his duty to enforce that decision.

His personal feelings didn't come in to it, although he was totally in favour of workhouses for the feckless. That was the official term used in correspondence, the feckless. Those who, for one reason or another, either didn't have a job or were reluctant to work. He'd heard stories about people being unnecessarily sacked or thrown out of their accommodation for no good reason. But that wasn't his

business and therefore of no interest to him. And he knew he wasn't alone in that opinion. Actual, honest employed people simply wouldn't put up with those who didn't pull their weight.

Well, the fifty beneath his balcony were certainly learning how to pull weight. He turned to his left again.

"Eyeglasses."

The single word was enough to send his designated serving-girl scurrying off to fetch his optical lenses. He held his hand out without looking at her and she placed the eyeglasses carefully into it. He focussed on the group nearest him, moving to the various women in it. There was a wide selection of ages, body types and skin colours. Laziness, as Gladwell had discovered, knew no bounds. There were attractive, perky little 18 year olds, like the blonde currently shivering by his side, and there were middle-aged matrons with floppy tits and sagging buttocks.

All of humanity in fact, and that's how Gladwell liked it. It was right that a cross-section of Prole society were being punished and thus been seen to be reformed via his workhouse. The message was clear, there was no favouritism. If you were an upstanding, working member of the community and paid your taxes, you had nothing to fear. If, on other hand, you were merely a leech on society then you should be very aware that you could be consigned to the workhouse. It was a lesson that every Prole needed to learn.

A little chattering noise alerted him to the fact that the girl stood attentively by his side was feeling the cold. He himself was wearing a thick greatcoat over his uniform and that was on top of his woollen underwear. He had a pair of leather gloves and on his head he wore a thick, woollen hat.

"Did you say something, young lady?"

Her teeth chattered involuntarily again.

"N...no, sir. S...sorry, sir."

Absent-mindedly he reached over and stroked an erect nipple through her thin, almost see-through white blouse.

"You're not cold are you? Because, if you are, that could be easily rectified ."

"No, s...sir," she lied, trying to stifle a little shiver.

He looked at her carefully. She was fairly new, not quite in tune with his methods. He decided to cut her a little slack.

"What's your name, girl?"

"N...Natalie, sir."

"This tea's gone cold, N...Natalie. Go and make me another one."

"Yes, sir. Right away, sir."

She turned almost ran back indoors towards the warmth of the kitchen.

A loud crack, the familiar noise of leather striking bare female flesh quickly brought his head back around. Just below him one of his warder's had just taken his arm back to deliver another stroke of the strap to some lackadaisical female rump. He watched the technique admiringly. He had some very good men under his command, former policemen and soldiers for the main part. The sound of the slap echoed off the high walls surrounding the parade ground.

Gladwell focussed his binoculars on the scene. Just by chance the woman turned her head towards him, she was wearing spectacles and he could see the tears running down her cheeks. That was enough for him to edge his free hand down towards the swelling bulge in his pants. He did so enjoy situations like this. Free loaders such as this woman being taught, very publically, the error of her ways.

Thwaack!

The sound echoed up to him, he looked at the officer, Wilson, if he wasn't mistaken. Perhaps he should enquire as to the identity of the person he was leathering. Short, cropped black hair and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, mid-twenties, she shouldn't be too hard to remember. He made a mental note to make enquiries. Three strokes like that were the usual minimum tariff in his workhouse. Sure enough he watched as the broad-shouldered man re-hooked the strap back onto his belt before sending the sobbing woman back to work.

Behind him he heard a slight rustling sound as young Natalie brought him out a fresh cup . She didn't dare interrupt him of course and stood at attention holding her tray. But by then, Malcolm had seen enough. The inmates would be slaving away for another thirty minutes or so by his estimation and his

breakfast was waiting for him. Plus it wasn't as if he hadn't seen the same exhibition a hundred times or more.

In fact if he wanted to see which team lost all he had to do was to go downstairs to the large gang-showers and study the thighs and the backsides on display. He took the mug and held it in his hands for a few seconds, enjoying the warmth of it through his gloves. Behind him he heard another loud report,

Thwaack!

The sound of stout leather meeting another piece of bare female flesh reminded him of the woman with the spectacles which in turn made his cock swell pleasantly.

"Come with me, young N...Natalie. I have a new job for you which will keep us both warm."

Chapter 10

The two of them had been summoned to Miss de Vere's massive office and placed in small, matching cages. Cages that were too low to stand and too narrow to do anything but kneel up with their hands bound behind their backs. They'd been in them since early morning and it was just after lunch time. Miss Helen had finally appeared in front of them. The very fact that they'd both been called to her presence together could only mean one thing, that she knew the truth about their relationship.

From the cage on his left, Richard could hear Mary's quiet sobbing. To be honest he felt a little tearful himself. Like him she was stark naked. What was going to become of them? The little bitch seated in front of them hadn't given any indication yet, merely stared at them with that look on her cruel face.

"So, you two. It seems as if we have a problem?"

Richard kept his head down, while Mary's sobs increased in volume. He could tell that Miss Helen was enjoying herself, just another opportunity for her to cause misery to her servants.

"I asked you a question, little Dickie, do we or do we not have a problem?"

He raised his head of his chest.

"Y...yes, Miss Helen. We do have a problem," he admitted. What was the point of denying such an obvious truth? Clearly she knew about how they felt for each other.

"Mary, do you have anything to say?"

"No Miss Helen...only that I'm v...very sorry, Miss Helen. And it won't happen again."

"What won't happen again? Don't tell me that little Dickie here is fucking you?"

Mary blushed horribly. Nice girls like her didn't use that sort of language.

"Well!?"

"No, Miss Helen."

"Haha, what are you two actually doing together then?"

"We kiss, and we talk together, that's all," Mary added with a little flash of defiance.

"That's all is it? Are my servants allowed to have secret girlfriends, little Dickie?"

"No, Miss Helen," there wasn't anything else Richard could say. He knew the rules in the de Vere house well.

"Are my under maids allowed to have boyfriends without my express permission, Mary?"

"N...no, Miss Helen."

"So both of you knew the rules and yet both of you decided to defy me. Have I understood that correctly?"

"Yes, Miss Helen," they chorused in ragged unison.

"In that case I'm afraid it's necessary to give you both an exemplary punishment. Just to remind my other servants what will happen to them if they step out of line."

Helen de Vere was as good as her word, well one had to be firm with servants.

The two of them were left in their tiny cages without food or drink until the working day was almost done. The servants were summoned to the courtyard and were made to watch first Mary, and then Richard being removed from their cages and then fastened over the heavy whipping hurdle so they were side by side with their heads almost touching, which Miss de Vere considered to be most appropriate in their case.

Sometimes, Miss Helen liked to gag the slave she was punishing, this time she decided against it. She wanted her servants to hear the guilty suffer. And suffer they did. Taking a bundle of long birch rods and swishing them through the air to rid them of most of the brine was a terrible noise to hear. But the pain the green saplings brought to Mary's bare bottom was even worse. The dreadful swish as they bit into her naked flesh made her shriek in pain.

Taking her time, Miss de Vere slowly walked Mary's wildly gyrating buttock cheeks to go and stand alongside Richard. She could hear him babbling something about mercy, but obviously she had no intention of dealing out any mercy to insubordinate servants. She drew her slim arm back and then brought it whistling forwards with all the power at her command. This time it was Richard's turn to feel the cut of the birch across his up thrust backside, and then to bellow in agony.

Helen de Vere did enjoy using the birch. It was such a light instrument and yet the pain it delivered was self evidently well out of proportion to its weight. She walked back around to where the little harlot was still waggling her backside. It was already covered in a interesting little patchworks of angry, red-looking weals. She took a stance and then delivered a swishing, back-handed stroke which wrapped around her left buttock cheek this time. The girl's shrieking didn't deter her in the slightest, indeed it was evidence, if evidence was required, that her punishment was having the desired effect.

Another unhurried stroll brought her back around to little Dickie's bright red backside. She didn't really like little Dickie, she'd decided. Going behind her back like that was a typically underhand thing for him to do. He was quite well built, for a man at least, and somehow she expected more from him. More resilience, more resistance to her demands, but instead all she received was his pathetic grovelling. She was, in all honesty, a little disappointed with him.

Determined to make him suffer, she gave him her full-force forehand stroke. That really brought him up onto his toes! She could see the muscles in his arms and legs straining against the leather bindings that bound him to the hurdle. She had no doubt that he wouldn't be able to break free. She'd punished far bigger, stronger men than little Dickie and nobody, not one person had ever escaped their rightful punishment.

She slowly wandered back to stand alongside Mary. From where she was she could see the majority of her fifty or so servants. They were watching her with various levels of horror. Some of the younger girls were crying, but some of the men were fascinated by the spectacle. Her eyes searched out and found those of her new personal maid, pretty little Polly. She was standing on the stairs leading up to the imposing front door with her hand to her mouth. Helen smiled a little and turned her attention to the task in hand.

Another stroke of the birch for each of the miscreants, then another, and then another. Twenty each, forty in total, delivered unhurriedly but with extreme force. Mary had to be revived twice with smelling salts before her punishment could recommence, both servants howled and begged but Miss de Vere was implacable. Indeed she could barely comprehend the attitude of the two of them. They had both admitted to transgressing her rules, and now were being suitably punished. How could they possibly argue with that decision?

Chapter 11

Emma Harrison stood as ordered with her knees bent and her hands holding up her short skirt. From behind her she could hear some sort of appreciative grunt from the Beadle. She couldn't help twitch as his rough hand stroked across one cheek of her bottom.

"Stings a bit does it, girly?"

The actual pain in her backside had died down in the several hours since she'd been leathered by that brute of a warder in the exercise yard. He'd accused her of being a lazy tart and a backslider, but the truth was that she was just so unaccustomed to such work. She was an office worker rather than a labourer. She'd tried, she really had, but moving rocks around was really tiring. Even having her backside leathered in such an undignified, demeaning way couldn't give her any more strength

"Y...yes, sir." she managed to whisper. As that seemed like the answer that he wanted to hear.

She pushed her spectacles back on to the bridge of her nose taking care to keep her dress held up at the same time. The Workhouse had been a huge shock to Emma's system. She'd heard the whispers and the stories of course, everyone had. But even so, she was quite unprepared for the harsh reality of the horrible place. The discipline was unrelenting, from the very first moment she was loaded into the wagon that made its slow but relentless journey to the huge iron gate that guarded the entrance.

Two rough, aggressive men had manhandled her onto the cart, slapped her, dragged her by the collar of her blouse, called her a slattern and a whore, and then cuffed her hands behind her. One had driven, while the other mauled and squeezed her breasts before forcing his calloused hand under her skirt and cupping her mound through her thick knickers. The shock of it seemed to freeze her in her place. She simply sat and allowed him to molest her, too scared even to shout out, never mind fight back.

Once behind the iron gate, she was dragged by her hair out of the carriage and had to scurry to keep up with the man up two flights of stairs. Her name had been taken and then written into a huge register by a sour-faced man who then ordered her captor to take her to the matrons. Once handed over to two grim-faced older women she was frogmarched down a long, dark corridor until eventually she was bundled into an office.

There she was stripped by the matrons and given her workhouse uniform which didn't take long as it comprised just five items, a pair of canvas shoes, a pair of white knickers that had seen better days. A scandalously short, grey skirt, and a white blouse that was slightly too small for her. When she was foolish enough to bring that to the attention of the matrons, one of them simply bent her over and held her in place while her colleague thrashed Emma's bottom with her short, leather strap.

Although she howled and screamed at being treated in such a cruel way, the two women seemed completely unconcerned. Similarly the fat old woman who'd given her the shameful uniform actually yawned as if seeing a young woman leathered in such a humiliating way was commonplace. It was only afterwards, when she had time to think, that Emma realised that the spectacle of seeing another inmate punished in such a way was indeed a regular occurrence as far as the staff of the workhouse were concerned.

She was physically exhausted after her first session of breaking rocks that morning, but there was no respite. After that punishing three hour test of endurance, she'd been led back inside and then given some sort of thin gruel and a small piece of bread she had to scrape the mould off before she could eat it. And then, with her back aching and all the nails on her hands broken, taken to the Beadle's office.

He was a fat, toad of a man. But as far as she was concerned he was currently the central figure in her life. She was an intelligent woman, an office manager no less, and she understood that nothing could be gained by antagonising the horrible little man. But even so, standing as she was like some sort of recalcitrant schoolgirl showing him her backside was mortifying. She could already feel the shameful heat building up in her cheeks.

"Perhaps a good leathering is what you needed? Something to get your little brain into gear maybe?"

He did like talking down to grown women like this. Especially the snooty arrogant kind who clearly still had an over-inflated opinion of their own worth. Outside his Workhouse, Malcolm Gladwell might

well be an uninspiring chap, but within these walls he was literally the master of all he surveyed. And right now he was surveying one of his latest acquisitions.

"Y...yes, sir," she trembled as she gave the only possible response.

"It says in your file that you were insolent to a senior employee, one Emmanuel Carrick. How do you explain that, Miss Harrison?"

He took a handful of her sore flesh and gave a little squeeze.

Emma took a deep breath. Emmanuel bloody Carrick had become the bane of her life ever since he became her manager at work. He was tall and handsome, and he could probably have had any woman on the shop floor. But for some unfathomable reason he'd chosen Emma, who was not only engaged to be married, but who also hated him with a passion.

He was such a smug, self-satisfied sort of man with an apparently unshakeable belief in his own superiority. He'd started flirting with her despite the fact he knew she was in a relationship. When she made that point to him it was as if it was a challenge to his manhood, and he pursued her all the more actively. Her rejection seemed to spur him on even more. Eventually even he'd given up, but then concentrated on trying to manage her out of the business.

When they'd argued yet again, she'd made the mistake of slapping him on the shop floor in front of all her fellow workers. He'd been furious and had involved senior management. Rather than face trial and a possible jail sentence for assault, she accepted being committed to the Workhouse for 30 days. Emma thought that just keeping her head down and working would be enough. Better than jail and the loss of her job anyway, something that Carrick had assured her he could arrange.

But now, after just one terrible day, she was far from sure that she'd made the right decision. She wasn't afraid of hard work, anyone would confirm that. That's why she was the office manager. It was just that she hadn't anticipated it being quite such hard work. Every muscle and joint in her entire body ached with the unaccustomed effort. Nobody told her that she'd be breaking rocks. She was just a woman, for God's sake!

And that strap! Wrapped around her bottom in full view of everyone. Even now the shame of it made her blush. James, her fiancé, would be appalled if he ever found out. Perhaps that strapping was just to frighten her on her first day? Surely she wouldn't be beaten anymore? She was a respectable woman after all, not some sort of derelict who couldn't support herself.

"I...erm...Mr Carrick and I had a difference of opinion. That's about all really."

"Turn around."

She did as instructed, glad to let her skirt cover her brief, grubby knickers again.

"Mr Carrick describes you as...what was it now? Ah yes, here it is 'a disruptive, insolent girl intent on undermining my authority'. Is that true, Emma?"

It most certainly was not! They'd briefly argued. He'd called her a whore, and she'd slapped his face. As she would do to virtually any man who addressed her in such an uncivil way.

"No, sir. He abused me and I responded in kind."

Gladwell felt his cock twitch a little. She was such a snooty cow that it was going to be a pleasure to deal with her.

"And that was the reason you assaulted him?"

"He...he deserved it sir. It was ungentlemanly."

"How old are you, Emma?"

"I'm 26, sir."

"So hardly a girl, and yet you apparently still haven't learned to mind your manners?"

Emma bit her lip angrily. This was an argument she just couldn't win. The Beadle was just another uglier, smaller version of her tormentor, Emmanuel Carrick.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"I can promise you that you'll be both sore and very, very sorry before you leave my establishment, Harrison."

Gladwell was true to his word, after their meeting her workload seemed to increase. She was often on duty in the yard carrying and breaking rocks. When she wasn't doing that she was working in the laundry or scrubbing one of the many concrete floors within the walls of the Workhouse. At the end of

her third week however, she was called back to the Beadle's office where a surprise awaited her. Stretched out in an armchair was her nemesis, Emmanuel Carrick.

She bobbed a little curtsy as she knew she must, while he eyed her up and down with a derisive smirk on his lips.

"How nice to see you again, Miss Harrison. My you have lost some weight. You used to be quite a tubby little thing didn't you? And yet look at you now, all skin and bones."

It was true, the manual labour and the lack of sleep in her crowded dormitory and the terrible food had all conspired to make her feel, and no doubt look, quite horrible.

"Your uniform suits you, I have to say. You look quite the penitent schoolgirl. How has the workhouse been treating you by the way?"

Emma glanced quickly at the Beadle who was staring straight at her.

"Erm...very well, thank you sir,"

Calling all males 'sir' now seemed to come naturally to her.

"And you're looking forward to coming home soon, I imagine. Seeing darling James and all your family again?"

Something in his voice was starting to worry her.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sorry for assaulting me now, you arrogant bitch?"

The casual insult was upsetting, but she had to manage her temper.

"Yes, sir. That was a mistake and I'm so sorry."

Carrick's only response was to slowly remove a thin, silver cigar case from his breast pocket and to offer a smoke to the Beadle before taking one for himself. He lit both of them and then inhaled before laying back in his chair and exhaling luxuriously.

"How sorry are you?" He asked eventually.

"I...I'm not sure what you mean, sir?"

"Sorry enough to suck my cock, do you think?"

She looked at him angrily, but she knew that he meant it. The Beadle's silence made it clear to her that her subjugation and degradation had already been spoken of and agreed. Emma was beaten, and she was smart enough to know it.

"I suppose so," she admitted.

"You suppose so? I think you should be begging to suck my cock. Don't you agree, Mr Gladwell?"

"An honour, Mr Carrick, a singular honour."

Emma sighed to herself. There was no way in which she could escape her fate.

"May I please..."

"On your knees, Miss Harrison. Like a true supplicant," he interrupted.

Slowly, resignedly she slipped to her knees so that she was looking up at him.

"Please may I suck your cock, sir?"

He smiled at her as he unbuttoned his trousers.

"Of course you may, you shameless whore."

His tumescent penis sprung into view as he eased it out of his pants. He took her by an ear and made her shuffle between his knees.

"Open up whore, I want you to think about darling James all the while you're sucking on my cock. Whatever would he say if he could see his fiancé right now, do you think?"

It was a purely rhetorical question, Emma realised. With his thick cock pushed between her lips she wasn't in any position to respond to him. He shoved in and out, caring little for her comfort. He took her by both ears thrusting himself into her until she gagged. She could feel her spectacles crushed against her face and fought to try and alleviate the pressure.

But he was far too strong and too excited. She felt a little twitch and knew that he was about to ejaculate, but rather than just do it down her throat as she was expecting him to do, he pulled out of her mouth with a loud plop before squirting his vile seed all over her face and her spectacles. To her side she heard the Beadle chortling with amusement and realised, to her shame, that she must look quite ridiculous.

"I always knew you were a whore, Miss Harrison. Even beneath that prim and proper exterior I always knew there beat the heart of a slut," he panted.

Once Carrick had emptied himself over her and then wiped his dripping cock on her hair, she was inevitably passed along to the Beadle. Mr Gladwell was surprisingly gentle in contrast to Carrick, probably because he was more interested in sexual pleasure rather than sexual domination, she guessed. After all, he was the Beadle. he could order any woman in the workhouse to suck his cock at any time of the day or night. Having his cock sucked by a reluctant woman couldn't possibly have been an unusual occurrence for him.

As she knelt on the rug, coughing and spluttering, she could hear that terrible man, Carrick, taking his leave.

"Same time next week, Mr Carrick?"

"Oh, I think so. And for the foreseeable future as well."

Emma paused from trying to wipe his horrible mess from her glasses. What did he mean by that? her sentence was almost complete. She'd be going home next week sometime, to her family and to James.

Emmanuel Carrick paused by the door to adjust his hat. He smiled at her evident confusion.

"Your sentence was 30 days wasn't it Emma? And that's nearly up, is that what you're thinking?"

She nodded, that familiar icy feel in her stomach had returned.

"Silly girl, that was a minimum of 30 days dependent on the good will of the Beadle. If only you'd listened more carefully. See you next week, Miss Harrison. Oh and by the way, I'd advise you to brush up on your cock-sucking skills before I return. I won't be so lenient with you next time if you give me another poor effort."

The door banged and he was gone. Slowly Emma turned to face Malcolm Gladwell.

"Don't worry, girly. I'm here to see that you get lots of practise in that particular department."

Chapter 12

Polly shivered slightly and quickly wiped the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. The events of the last couple of hours had left her shaken and anxious. She'd watched her mistress birch those two poor servants merely for being with love with each other as far as she could tell. She'd lost count of the number of strokes they'd received but all that she knew was that they were both left with flayed buttocks and thighs.

But even that wasn't the worst of it. Once Miss Helen had explained to the assembled servants just why the two had been thrashed, she went on to say that she'd decided that temptation must be immediately removed. Therefore the girl, Mary, was to be sent away to one of her farms somewhere in the North. But before she was despatched, Miss Helen had one, final gift for her.

At a signal one of the brutish Coachmen was summoned to the birching hurdle. Without a word he stripped off his trousers revealing the fact that he his thick, veined penis was standing proudly erect. He seized the girl's ravaged buttocks before separating them and thrusting inside her. By her head, Richard begged for him to leave go of the girl, but it was too late. Mary's shrieks coupled with the man's aggressive thrusting told him all he needed to know. His darling, innocent Mary had been taken right in front of his eyes. Plundered in a bestial way on the whim of their apparently unconcerned mistress.

Now it was Polly's turn to be scared. Standing naked and ashamed with her nose thrust into the corner of her mistress's room, dwelling on her forthcoming punishment. And there could be no doubt that she was about to be punished. Miss de Vere had told her as much as she stripped her of her uniform. She'd whispered horrible things into her ear, things she was going to do to her. And then she'd left the room, leaving Polly terrified and alone.

The door opened with a crash, enough to almost make Polly lose control of her bladder. Thankfully she managed to hold on, God only knew what her mistress might do if she found her stood in a pool of her own urine. She felt her heart start to race as she heard the heels of Miss de Vere's boots echo on the wooden floor.

"So, now to deal with my naughty little personal maid."

Polly shivered again

"Did you enjoy that thrashing in the yard earlier, Polly? I know I did. They made quite a fuss didn't they? That weak excuse for a man, little Dickie, and his pretty little girlfriend," she almost spat the last word.

Helen de Vere moved to stand within touching distance of her maid.

"She's gone to the farm now though, which is bad news for the little trollop, but only what she deserves. And more importantly it will concentrate little Dick's mind on what is truly important in his miserable life, his service to me and to me alone."

She leaned forward slightly and stroked the nape of Polly's neck with a finger.

You want to service me, don't you Polly?" She whispered. "You want to make me happy?"

Polly flinched and swallowed nervously at both the unexpected touch from her mistress and her words.

"Y...yes, Miss Helen. Of course, Miss Helen."

The hand slipped from her neck, over her shoulder and made its way down her naked back until it settled possessively on one of her taut, young buttock cheeks. Polly tried desperately not to squirm and made her herself keep her hands on her head.

"There's a good pretty Polly," whispered Miss de Vere before gently licking Polly's ear.

"P...please, M...Miss Helen...I..." Stuttered Polly, nervously.

"Please what, little Miss Polly? I do hope there isn't going to be a problem?"

"No, Miss."

"Because if there was a problem, I imagine it could be resolved quite easily by arranging another trip to the farm. I can just see you and Mary yoked together pulling a plough perhaps, that would keep the boys up there very happy."

Helen ran her nail down Polly's bottom, tracing the vague outlines of weals that she'd given her previously. Her caning technique was quite exemplary, even though she said so herself.

"Wouldn't you agree?"

Polly squealed as her mistresses' hand suddenly gripped her backside.

"Y...yes, Miss Helen. I agree, Miss Helen."

Miss de Vere squeezed even more firmly before letting go and then stroking Polly's bruised cheeks. For her part, Polly realised with an awful clarity that poor Mary's punishment had been arranged mainly for her benefit rather than the rest of the servants. Miss de Vere had birched Mary and then had her violated partly for her own perverse pleasure, but also as a dreadful warning to Polly regarding her own future behaviour.

Just the thought of it made her feel sick to her stomach, but she had to admit that it certainly had the desired effect. She would do anything now, absolutely anything to avoid Mary's fate.

"Turn around. Keep your hands on your head and turn around."

Polly obeyed, she had no other choice. She couldn't help but give an involuntary little gasp. Her mistress had divested herself of her long skirt and her silk blouse. She still wore her long, black leather boots, but all she wore apart from them was a pair of tiny black knickers and an exquisite black bra that looked to be made of leather and was doing a manful job of keeping her large breasts in some sort of order.

Between her small, perfectly manicured, hands she flexed her plaited leather crop.

"Like what you see, pretty Polly?"

Polly nodded her head, she'd never been with another woman and she'd never even been vaguely attracted to one, but what was she to say? That she wasn't interested in her mistress? A woman who had such power over her. A woman that could have her placed over the birching hurdle and thrashed to within an inch of her life on a whim?

Miss Helen smiled delightedly, showing her small, even, white teeth.

"What is it you particularly like?" She asked stroking at Polly's nipple with the leather tab of her crop.

Polly's green eyes started to fill with tears. What did her mistress want her to say? If only Miss Helen would give her some sort of clue?

"I...I...erm...like your breasts. They're so big and...nice," she finished, lamely.

Her mistress glared at her for a second before bursting into delighted laughter.

"Oh dear, oh dear! You really are a novice aren't you?"

Polly looked at her, bewildered. What did she mean?

"You're so new to this that it's going to be a pleasure to corrupt you."

Polly smiled uncertainly, at least Miss Helen wasn't angry. As far as she could tell anyway. She tried not to step back as the woman stepped nearer to her. Near enough in fact to push her hand between Polly's thighs and to cup her neatly shaved little Mons.

Oh God, oh God! That's what she meant! That's what she wanted. She sobbed quietly as Miss Helen's finger rolled down the length of her labial lips.

"Hmmm, this is why I chose you, you know, " Miss Helen whispered conversationally. "I wanted someone innocent. Your predecessor, Anna, was excited by my interest in her. But she was already an experienced lesbian before she worked for me, which meant that she wasn't quite as much fun as you're going to be."

She suddenly twisted her fingers and pulled at Polly's blonde pubic hair, making her squeal in fright.

"You are going to be a good girl aren't you, Polly?"

"Yes, Miss Helen," she hissed.

"Because if you're not a good little girl....Can you guess what will happen if you're not a good little girl, Polly. If you don't try your very hardest to please me?"

"I...I think so Miss Helen."

Helen de Vere's finger inserted itself into her new plaything.

"And what will happen, do you think."

Polly started to sob and the tears ran down her cheeks.

"You might b...birch me...I suppose."

Miss de Vere smiled again.

"Oh, there's no suppose about it. pretty Polly."

Miss de Vere's knowing hand had found Polly's little nubbin and was gently playing with it.

"When Anna stopped pleasing me, she found out that she made me unhappy. She started to think of herself as something more than a servant, a slave. She started to get ideas above her station. She suggested that unless I gave her money and her freedom that she was going to tell my father and her friends all about me. Now, I couldn't let that happen could I?"

Polly shook her head mutely, despite the pleasurable feelings that were starting to flood into her she was terrified of her mistress.

"So now she's in a place that makes Mary's destination seem like a pleasure. I didn't want to kill her of course or anything like that, just to make sure that her remaining days on the earth were a living hell."

Looking into her mistress's cold, baby-blue eyes, Polly had absolutely no doubt that what Miss de Vere said was true and vowed to herself that she would try her very, very best to make her happy.

Chapter 13

"Eek!"

Florence just couldn't help herself give a little half-muffled squeak as the hand slipped between her thighs.

"Did you say something, Smith?" Asked her mistress, Lady Ponsonby, in a deceptively conversational tone.

"N...no, your ladyship. Sorry, your ladyship," Florence mumbled in reply.

Florence's face was almost scarlet with humiliation, a colour that almost but not quite matched that of her bare backside.

"My, my she's fidgety little thing isn't she, Georgina?" Asked Lady Ponsonby's particular friend, Alice Cooper-Black, the Duchess of Larne.

"I'm afraid she still is, despite my best efforts, Alice dear," agreed Lady Ponsonby.

The duchess returned her hand to stroking Florence's warm, recently chastised buttocks.

"Perhaps the girl needs more discipline? My girl Molly, for example, wouldn't dream of making such a fuss."

"Perhaps you're right, dear. Smith is certainly one of my least attractive, least obedient little girls."

"She is eminently forgettable, that's true. But surely her lack of beauty shouldn't be reflected in her lack of manners?"

Florence should have been offended of course. She knew that she wasn't unattractive and that her dreadful mistress and her even more elderly and dreadful friend were simply tormenting her for their own perverse amusement. But dressed as she was, or rather undressed as she was, she was in no position to take offence. The horrible, wizened old duchess had asked for a demonstration as to how the Grecian Bender worked, and her mistress had been only too happy to help.

First, Florence had been stripped and then strapped back into the Bender. The only piece of clothing that she was permitted was her rather shameful cap which was perched back onto her blonde curls and then tied under her chin with a piece of ribbon. So she was, in effect, naked. Her arms were folded and bound behind her back and her knees, rather than being hobbled together had been spread with a bar so that from behind, as she was bent forward by the device, every nook and personal cranny was exposed to the interested observer.

And she had been left in no doubt whatsoever that the Duchess of Larne was a particularly interested observer. She sat in a chair directly behind Florence, near enough to touch her in fact. Then as Florence squirmed and tried to avoid making a sound, she'd been subject to a rather personal, intimate investigation at the gnarled hands of the old woman who was at least forty years older than she was.

Once she'd inserted one of her bony fingers into Florence's cunny and then up her bottom, and stroked her labial lips for a while, the duchess then proceeded to spank her thighs and her backside until they were almost shiny with heat, all the while remarking how ill-disciplined and restless Florence was and how she needed 'smartening up'.

Just across from her, Florence took in the sight of her mistress watching her debasement at the hands of her friend, avidly. Lady Ponsonby's own hand had disappeared up the short skirt of a young woman that stood shamefaced by her side. This was Molly, the duchess's 'little girl' who she'd brought with her that morning to the Ponsonby mansion. Molly was a cute little thing with a heart-shaped, doll like face and slightly red hair that had been tied into two short pigtails with lengths of bright yellow ribbons.

She was wearing brown, leather sandals, tiny, white ankle socks, and a pretty, short-sleeved, yellow gingham pinafore that matched her ribbons. The dress however, despite its evident quality and expense, was scandalously short, no longer than mid thigh and wouldn't have been suitable for a schoolgirl never mind a woman who was clearly in her late twenties if not older. When she'd first arrived, Molly had also worn white gloves, a brown blazer trimmed in yellow and a straw hat with yet more ribbons.

Now Molly was wearing just her dress. Her mistress had decreed that she wasn't mature enough to be allowed either bra or knickers and thus she had to suffer the indignity of having her bottom groped by yet another of the duchess's ancient, perverted friends. Molly knew better than to make a fuss, much better in

fact. The duchess was no stranger to the cane or even the horsewhip. Despite her advanced years she still had a strong right arm and she very much enjoyed teaching Molly the error of her ways.

Molly had been employed as a maid originally, but had gradually fallen more and more under the control of the duchess who did so enjoy playing her perverted games. Now Molly had to play the part of her niece or of her granddaughter or whatever role amused the duchess on any particular day. The whole humiliating exercise was bad enough when played out within the relative privacy of the duchess's own estate, but when strangers were involved, as they were this morning, it was even more mortifying.

And now this perverse old woman was cupping her buttock cheek in her elderly, claw-like hand. She had got off lightly so far. Just a bit of fondling and fingering from the woman while both of them got to watch the duchess strap that poor maid's bottom to that particular rosy hue that Molly herself recognised only too well. In fact it was the anticipation that was making Molly even more nervous, surely her mistress wasn't going to let her go unpunished? Not when she had the opportunity to humiliate her in front of others?

That's presumably why she'd been dressed that morning in this particularly ludicrous manner? And then walked into town hand in hand with her mistress, with every man in the city's eyes on her so that the duchess could buy her a lollipop in the sweetshop. Molly had thought that she might die of shame, especially when a gentleman in the street had described her to her mistress as a 'pretty little girl'.

And now here she was, trembling with nerves, almost unaware of the old woman's finger sliding nearer and nearer to her cunny.

"No, perhaps you're right, Alice?" Said Lady Ponsonby. "Perhaps my girl does need her manners correcting?"

"In that case, maybe I could be of some assistance? Take my girl, Molly for example. See how she obeys you, how she doesn't resist?"

Lady Ponsonby inserted a wizened old fingertip into Molly's cunny before answering.

"I have to admit that she seems to be a very well-behaved little girl. And her dress is just so darling."

"Exactly, and that's not by chance. A great deal of work and training has gone into my Molly."

Georgina Ponsonby thought she detected a certain amount of undue pride in her friend's voice, but let it pass.

"So what do you propose with regard to Smith here? Is she too intractable to be reformed? Is she beyond all hope?"

Lady Ponsonby inserted her finger further into the girl standing by her side, feeling the girl repress a little shudder as she did so.

"Oh my word how innocent you are, Georgina! No serving girl is beyond redemption! Especially when I have my cane and my birch to hand. My proposal is this, simply loan Florence to me for a period of time and I'll return her to you, reformed and entirely biddable."

"And were I to do so, I'd be light by one housemaid?"

The Duchess of Larne smiled, showing her rather unpleasant teeth.

"But of course, you must take my Molly in return. She will display her subservience to you on a daily basis, and I would very much like to see her introduced to the Grecian Bender."

Molly felt a tear roll down her cheek. She was being bartered like some sort of farmyard animal to a woman she'd never met before. And like some dumb animal, her opinion wasn't needed or expected.

"I think that we may have an arrangement, my darling Alice," smiled her new owner.

"Excellent, and in the meantime I spy a patch of skin in that fold between Smith's buttocks and the top of her thighs that has somehow escaped by earlier attention. May I attend to her?"

"Please do, my dear, please do."

Molly felt herself tugged across Lady Ponsonby's thighs and her short skirt lifted.

"In the meantime I shall initiate Molly here into what I expect of her now that she's a guest in my house."

Chapter 14

Julia was still smarting a few days after her humiliating beating in front of those two smirking Aristo bitches in Mr Allen's office. Her bottom had healed quickly enough, but her pride was still horribly bruised. She accepted that the Aristo's were her social superiors, that was self-evident. But did that also give them the right to lie in order to get her into trouble?

There didn't seem to be any restriction on their behaviour. They could evidently fabricate any story, secure in the knowledge that they'd be believed by the Constabulary and their Aristo friends. It didn't seem right somehow. She couldn't help thinking that something should be done about it. She wouldn't call herself a rebel exactly, most of her activist friends were far more radical for example. But that still didn't prevent her from thinking that there must be a better system than the one she lived under at the moment?

Mr Allen had told her later in the day that he was going to keep a close eye on her, and instruct Mr Laurel to do the same. If she was foolish enough to step out of line again, he would be forced to dismiss her from her post. She'd cried after that news, sacked from her job because of lies! How could that possibly be fair? At the next meeting with her friends that she attended, she couldn't help herself. She stood up, and for the first time, poured out her heart regarding the disgraceful way she'd been treated by the two Aristo's and by her employer. She didn't hold back, even describing her humiliating caning.

Afterwards an older man sought her out and told her how brave she was for speaking out about the injustices perpetrated by the Aristo's. Julia was flattered, nobody had ever described her as brave before, especially not a man as attractive as her new found admirer. They talked at some length about the various injustices they'd witnessed. He told her his name and asked if they could meet up again. She told him hers and agreed, shyly that the two should meet again to exchange opinions. She walked home, a great deal happier than when she'd set off to her meeting earlier that morning.

The following Monday she was still in a good mood, Even her almost obligatory daily groping on the omnibus couldn't dampen her spirits. Hugh was such a nice chap, she'd agreed to let him escort her to her local pub, the Swan, later that evening. Even work seemed less onerous than usual. She settled herself down and tried to concentrate.

She was so engrossed in her work that a cough at her elbow startled her. Mr Laurel stood to one side of her.

"Miss Bradfield, Mr Allen would like to see you in his office."

She hurriedly got to her feet. Whatever was the problem now? Checking her clothing she went upstairs and knocked on his door. When she entered, her heart lurched into her stomach. The look on Mr Allen's face told her that there was something seriously amiss. The two uniformed Constables stood just inside the doorway confirmed her worst fears.

"Is this the girl?" Demanded the first Constable, a great brute of a fellow.

Mr Allen nodded.

"Julia Bradfield. You are hereby charged with the grievous crime of sedition and plotting against the legitimate authority of the Crown," said the second Constable, a tall, thin, sallow-faced man.

Julia felt the cold chill of fear radiate through her. The first Constable took her by the arm and turned her around so that he could handcuff her hands behind her back. As she started to protest, the second took out a ball gag and roughly inserted it in her mouth before buckling it behind her head. Then she was half lead and half carried down the stairs as she struggled against her bindings.

Dimly she was aware of her surroundings and the looks of shock on the faces of her colleagues as she was frogmarched through the building and out towards the waiting Constabulary wagon. Would she ever see any of them again, she couldn't help but wonder?

The End