The Seventh Servant

KONUMA Rie



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A word from Rie

Recent graduate Sharon Page has got it all. A worthless English degree from a parochial Colorado school. An abusive ex-boyfriend in a Texan prison. A car that is *technically* street legal. To celebrate being dumped by her former English professor for being too 'no longer a student' for her, she's heading back east for a calm and pleasant vacation in Maine.

A car crash on a snowy evening turns Sharon's longed-for journey to recenter herself into a mysterious game, with a strange murder at its core. Miraculously, Sharon is all but unhurt, but she is well stranded. Helping mistress of the house Mme Deux Frondes solve the murder of the Seventh Servant seems as good a use of her time as any.

She does not have a lot to go on, but at least she knows it was not the butler that did it — the butler is, after all, the one who was done.

I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to the *Book Club¸ Or Else* for their feedback and other help in making this book the best it can be. If you would like to be part of the *Book Club¸ Or Else*, please send an email to `book.club+or.else@raven.garden`.

This book contains sexual content, and depictions of consensual BDSM relationships.

Furthermore:

Workers of the world, unite!

Prologue

Welcome, dear reader, to this story of intrigue and interrogation. Our story ends, as these stories must, with a murder, but before we can get to that we must be introduced to the writer of the story, Sharon Page.

This, then, is our villain, the woman who will tear apart the brilliant deception of the murderer, who so cruelly struck down the hero.

So as to ensure you, dear reader, will not be deceived over the course of the book into finding Sharon more interesting than the mystery at hand, little time will be devoted to her background over the course of the book. Instead, I will furnish you with a brief biography here.

Sharon is the second daughter and youngest child of Idahoan potato magnate Charles Page, III. Her older brother is Charles Page, IV, heir apparent to a tremendous potato fortune, and her older sister is potato worm expert Dr. Elizabeth Page. Sharon is nearly 15 years the junior of her sister, and her mother is nearly 20 years younger than Mrs. Page Emeritus, mother of Charles and Elizabeth. Walking in her sister's footsteps, Sharon initially attended Texas A&M. There she met Darren Smith, her now ex-boyfriend who is currently serving 25 years to life in a Texas prison for murder, alongside not unrelated domestic abuse and weapons charges.

In a failed attempt to dodge the lawmen, Darren dragged Sharon off to Colorado, where she finished her education, after a fashion. There, she was given a great deal of attention by author and literature professor Annaliese McKinney, but promises of industry contacts and other publishing help evaporated the moment she graduated, as did the sexual relationship they had been carrying on, having lost its illicit frisson for the professor. With her boyfriend dragged off by US Marshals some time ago, this left Sharon in something of a crisis. Being rid of Darren she had traded in her bleached blond hair for natural browns, and press-on acrylics for simple paint, but shedding who she wasn't hadn't taught her who she is.

Finding a need to recenter herself, she planned a winter getaway to inner Maine, and this is where we find her now. Cutting through the

gathering darkness, she is pulling her old and less than reliable car along a road, deep in a forest somewhere in New England. Around her, the trees are laden with snow, pulling the coniferous branches towards the cold ground, and by the light of the moon glinting off the snow the scene is brighter than you would think, but still quite dark indeed.

In the self-same moment as Sharon's right front wheel makes contact with a large patch of black ice hidden in the darkness, a dagger slides into the flesh of a young woman at a house not too distant, killing her dead in an instant.

As Kine Abel — for such is her name — dies, Sharon's car slides out. Readers who think this kind of thing is important will be saddened to learn Kine is a pretty woman; readers who know this kind of thing is important will be saddened to learn she's a kind woman; readers who concern themselves with the moral worth of fictional people will be saddened to learn that her death came through no fault of her own.

As the murderer flees, Sharon's car slams into the side of the road, where packed snow is piled high. Carrying its momentum forwards, the car cannot go through the snow, so must instead go over. In a display far too grand and far too graceful for a T200, the Chevy pirouettes lazily through the air, coming down with a loud crash against the sturdy brick column of the wrought iron gates at the foot of the long driveway.

Two commotions go up from the house. One is responding to the loud crash at the gate, one is responding to the scream coming from the room under renovation, where the Butler is dead. As the Nurse is called to investigate the body, two vague forms approach Sharon in the car. Their voices run together, blending with the ardent beeping from the car's alarm system, but before she loses consciousness, she finds that they seem to want to help.

Chapter 1

Morning Snow

The soft voices in the room filtered their way into Sharon's consciousness, but what woke her was the pain of the Nurse's soft hands examining her arm.

She gave Sharon a warm smile as she noticed her coming to.

"Hey you. You're finally awake."

As gentle as her touch was, the examination was still quite painful.

A tall woman stood at the foot of the bed, looking down at Sharon.

"That was a nasty crash, you're very lucky to be alive."

Sharon looked down at herself in the bed; her clothes were gone, replaced with some quite nice teal cotton pajamas.

"I've had my Maid take care of your clothes. There was quite a lot of blood, so it may be some time until she has them for you."

Sharon must have looked agitated, because the Nurse was quick to try and calm her down.

"The injury looked a lot worse than it was.

"It was just a superficial brow laceration, thankfully."

"Between the state of your car, the snowfall, and your injuries, I don't see you going anywhere soon."

Making her way to the bedside across from the Nurse, the tall woman sat down and smiled to Sharon, her teeth gleaming white between ruby red lips.

"Fortunately, I believe that puts us in a situation to help one another."

The Nurse prodded her arm again, sending another shot of pain through Sharon. As she yelped, the woman made a gesture at her, and with a polite nod the Nurse stood up and quickly left the room.

"She was only…"

The woman silenced Sharon with a gesture.

"My Nurse has done nothing wrong.

"My name is Jeanette Deux Frondes, and this is my manor, perhaps you have heard of me?"

Sharon shook her head.

"Last night, just before you arrived, there was some excitement.

"My Butler was found stabbed to death, and as you can imagine that has caused some commotion."

"That's terrible!"

"These things happen."

When she first woke up, Sharon had been seeing double, but her vision was beginning to resolve itself, and she could get a good look at Mme Deux Frondes. Apart from her lips, her face seemed strange and impossible to resolve, but her dress was very fine. She was wearing a ruby red dress that matched her lipstick, made of silk and trimmed with black leather. The fabric was thin, and followed her curves perfectly; the dress fit her so well it was nearly obscene, and she was wearing no underwear to interrupt the carefully tailored lines. In the front, the dress was deeply cut, and hanging between her breasts was large ruby teardrop on a simple golden chain.

"I should quite like to know which one of my servants would do such a thing, as I'm sure you can imagine."

Sharon nodded. Mme Deux Frondes reached out to adjust the placket of her pajamas, opening another button. The way the back of her hand brushed against Sharon's breast as she did seemed anything but accidental.

"I can't exactly trust my servants to investigate this for themselves, seeing as one of them is the murderer, but as our guest for the week, you'll be able to get to the bottom of this, I'm sure."

"I'm not a detective, Jea—"

Mme Deux Frondes silenced her again.

"Please, call me madame Deux Frondes.

"And I don't believe such a simple investigation requires a detective, just someone willing to honestly examine the facts available."

Sharon nodded, and Mme Deux Frondes stood up.

"While you attend to this matter I will see about finding you transport, but it may be some time. For now, I will send my Nurse back in with some narcotics, you probably need more sleep.

"Don't be afraid to put whatever demands on my staff you see fit. They serve at my pleasure, and until this issue is resolved, you are acting on my authority.

"In any case, for the duration of the investigation I will be sequestered in the master wing. Please do not call on me unless you have a solution to the conundrum before us."

Sharon nodded weakly, shoots of pain running up her arm again. Moments after Mme Deux Frondes left the room, the Nurse came back in, and quickly found her place at the bedside again.

"She suggested I give you something to help you sleep, is that all right?"

She was picking carefully through a classic doctor's bag sitting on the bedside table, made of brown leather and old enough to be emblazoned with a red cross. The Nurse herself was wearing pale pink scrubs, and her strawberry blonde hair was pulled out of her face into a neat bun.

"Yeah, maybe something light…"

The Nurse soon handed her a white pill, together with a large glass of water from the bedside table. It wasn't until she began drinking Sharon realized how thirsty she had been, and she drank the entire pint in nearly a single pull.

"That is one of my concoctions, for sprains and stretches and other minor injuries around the house."

She took a hold of Sharon's arm again, prodding it gently, gauging her reaction. The pain was already far milder, but still firmly present.

"It works quite well, and doesn't come with a high or with drowsiness, although there are occasionally other side effects."

"Such as?"

Sharon didn't feel so confident that the tablet didn't come with drowsiness, but it would be hard to untangle the exhaustion from the crash with whatever effects the medicine was having.

"It varies, but nothing serious."

Sharon looked at her expectantly.

"Mild hallucinations. Mild headaches. Heightened libido.

"Like I said, nothing serious."

The Nurse returned her attention to the bag, fishing out a simple foam sling for Sharon.

"Your arm is okay, nothing seems broken. You should wear this for now, though, take some weight off it. In a couple of days, you should be doing some PT.

"The Trainer will help you with that, if you're still around."

The Nurse stood up and vanished for a moment into the *en suite*, returning with a fresh glass of cold water and a warm damp towel. Returning to Sharon's bedside, she peeled a bandage off of her brow, and cleaned the wound beneath.

"That's probably going to leave a scar, I'm afraid."

"Chicks dig scars, right?"

The Nurse nodded.

"They do, and the brow slit is very chic."

After applying a fresh bandage, the Nurse offered Sharon the glass of water, and she drained it in another long pull.

"If it's all right with you, I'd like to examine you for pronounced bruising. I couldn't see anything when you were brought in last night, but if there's any internal bleeding…"

Sharon nodded slowly. She could feel the painkillers working, and she wasn't so sure about the lack of drowsiness.

"I'll have to take off your shirt, is that okay?"

"You've already seen everything when you put me in it, right?"

Sharon gave a wan smile.

"It's still good to ask."

The Nurse's fingers were very light as they undid the remaining buttons on the pajama top, and Sharon could hardly feel them through the robust cotton.

With the last button away, the Nurse gently spread open the shirt, and began carefully examining Sharon's torso. With both eyes and fingertips, she traced and searched, carefully seeking out any irregularities, visible or otherwise. First the stomach, then the sides.

"Sit up please?"

Sharon did as she was asked, and the Nurse helped her out of her shirt for easier examination. She carefully searched Sharon's shoulders, her back, her hips.

Between the medicine and the gentle touching, Sharon found herself growing short of breath.

"I'll have to check your legs as well, if that's all right?"

Sharon nodded, and the Nurse pulled back the covers and lifting her up slightly began sliding down her pajama pants. She was not a big woman, but surprisingly strong for her size.

"Well, I'm not seeing any problems."

"Are you sure?"

Sharon felt the question come out more ragged than she had expected.

"With the caveat that I'm not a trauma doctor, yes."

"That's good…"

Sharon pulled the sheets back up and slid back into the pajama pants.

"Let me help you with the shirt."

The Nurse helped Sharon get dressed again, but made no move to begin buttoning up the shirt.

"Are you alright?"

Sharon leaned back, her arm throbbing dully.

"Yeah, I just…"

"Side effects?"

Sharon nodded.

"Do you want me to help?"

The Nurse placed a hand on Sharon's breast, and gently tweaked her nipple.

"It's not exactly professional, but I do know a thing or two about anatomy, you know."

"Yeah…"

"So why don't you just lie back and relax, and let me take care of you."

The Nurse slipped her free hand under the covers, and searched her way into Sharon's pajama pants.

* * *

Between intensive attention from the Nurse, a short nap, and a light meal brought to her bed, Sharon found herself on her feet shortly before noon. After a quick shower, she slipped back into her pajamas, a matching dressing gown, and a pair of bear paw slippers. Only her left arm made it into the dressing gown for now, the other she kept in a sling with her gown draped over it.

Three doors down from the guest room Sharon and the Nurse found a woman standing guard by a door. The Nurse had taken a shower as well, and had let her hair down. At the door, the Nurse introduced Sharon to the Gardener.

"This is our guest, Sharon."

"We've met."

Turning to Sharon with a smile, the Gardener explained.

"I helped carry you up to the house after your accident."

"I thought that was the Trainer and the Cook?"

"No, it was me and—"

The Gardener looked thoughtful for a moment.

"I couldn't tell you, actually. Between the coats and the heavy snow, it could have been either of them carrying… Sharon, was it? Carrying Sharon with me. They were both out there at some point."

Sharon made a mental note. Right after the murder, the Gardener, the Cook and the Trainer were out in the snow.

"In any case, Sharon needs to see the body before we tidy it away."

The Gardener nodded, and stepped aside, before thinking better of it and heading down the hall.

"You know where to find me."

Inside, it was nearly outside. The room was under renovation, and most of the outside wall had yielded to a window frame under construction. Covering the opening was thick clear plastic, tied with blue vinyl

rope to bits of armature jutting out of the wall. Hanging over that, on the outside, was another sheet of clear plastic. Between them, the two layers kept the snow and the animals out, but not the cold — the room was insulated by the snow outside and warmed by the rooms around it, but even so it was certainly no more than a degree or two above 0°C.

Lying in the middle of the room, in a pool of blood, was the Butler.

She was on her back, her shirt open, and a dagger driven into her sternum. The back of her right hand and the palm of her left hand were both covered in blood; the right hand seemed to have been lying in the pool of blood, the left hand as if she was grabbing at something. The dagger was covered in blood as well, all smeared. Her jacket, shirt, and trouser fronts were all covered in blood as well, as if she had been lying face down in the pool of blood.

"I turned her over when the Maid called me.

"It was clear there was no life in her, so we made sure to not do anything else.

"Her left hand was wrapped around the hilt of the dagger when we found her, but her hand fell free when she was rolled."

Sharon's mind was inescapably drawn back to the pictures the marshals who came for Darren had shown her, of Lisa lying on the living room floor, their attempt at convincing her to give up his location. She had been shot, but otherwise this was disturbingly familiar, even if seeing it in the flesh was something else. Sharon did spot one critical difference, however. Lisa's face had been twisted in fear and despair, but the Butler's face was calm, almost serene.

Walking around the large pool of blood, Sharon made her way over to the open window frame. Peering out through the plastic, she could make out the snow-covered garden, but it was quite blurry, and hard to make out any details. Inspecting the ropes, she found that the knots were a wild mix. Most seemed to have been tied from the inside, and most seemed to have been tied over right, but some were tied over left, and some were tied from the outside, with no apparent rhyme or reason to any of it.

Outside in the snow, there were no footprints, but with the heavy snowfall, that hardly meant anything.

"Has the plastic been retied a lot?"

"I think so? The Gardener is always complaining about stuff being brought in and how it affects the bushes and hedges."

In the bottom left corner of the sheet, Sharon found a row of several knots that were tied from the outside, all over right. At a guess, they were made by the same hand, and there were enough of them that someone could perhaps sneak out past the plastic.

"It was snowing heavily last night, right?"

"By the time you were being brought up to the house, yes. But that snowfall came on suddenly."

It was still snowing now, but quite lightly. The Nurse was fretting slightly, still standing uncomfortably by the door.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah, I've been around dead bodies in med school and such, but…

"It's different when it's someone I know, you know?"

Sharon nodded.

Returning her attention to the pool of blood, she found it to be nearly dry by now. There were no footprints in it, nor handprints, nor any evidence that the Butler had been lying face down.

"Did anyone step in the blood when you found her?"

"I did, yeah, when I was turning her over. Do you need to see the clothes I was wearing?"

Sharon shook her head, and made a mental note. The body was discovered very soon after the murder.

She then turned her attention to the various renovation tools and home goods.

"Who brings this stuff in, and takes it out?"

"Mostly the Driver, but the Gardener, the Cook, and the Trainer all help with heavy stuff."

"And did you kill the Butler?"

"Of course not! I could never— I *would* never."

Sharon nodded, while looking over the home goods. Nothing seemed germane to the issue at hand; there was nothing to indicate that the Butler had been engaged with the renovation work at all when she was killed.

"How long has the renovations been going on here, anyway?"

"Winter has made the work slow down, I'm afraid. The tradesmen doing the work haven't been around for almost two weeks, and probably won't be around for another month.

"They've been at it for maybe six months?"

Sharon made her way around the pool of blood again.

"Is there a photo of the scene?"

The Nurse nodded.

"Only after she was turned, mind."

"That will have to do. I don't think the room can tell me much more, now."

"I'll tell the Maid to start cleaning."

As the Nurse opened the door to return to the hallway, the blast of warm air hit Sharon hard. She had been doing all right on her feet, but it had taken more out of her than she thought. The Nurse was immediately attentive to her stumbling, and quickly helped her back to the guest room.

On the way, they chanced to pass another servant; Sharon was getting too woozy to tell who. The Nurse asked the other woman to tell the Maid to get cleaning, and that was that.

Back in bed, the Nurse offered her another painkiller tab, and another tall glass of water. Sharon gratefully accepted both, and found herself sinking more restfully into the mattress as the pain in her arm receded.

"You should take another nap. Do you want something for sleep, as well as for the pain?"

"I don't think I need it."

With a smile, the Nurse gently squeezed Sharon's leg as she got to her feet and made for the door, sending shivers running through her body.

"Sleep well."

Chapter 2

Meeting the Gardener

Before Sharon could fall asleep, the Gardener let herself into the room with only a perfunctory knock at the door.

When Sharon had met her earlier, the Gardener had been wearing a light flannel shirt; she had discarded that in favor of a simple black tank top. She was a fairly short woman, compact and muscular, her body honed not by workouts but by manual labor. Her arms, shoulders, collar and neck were also covered in tattoos; many-colored roses on a thorned tangle of vines.

"May I come in?"

Before Sharon could answer, the Gardener had already made her way to her bedside and taken a seat.

"I figured you would want to talk to me sooner or later, so why not get it out of the way?"

Sharon nodded. Her body was still aching, but she was not particularly tired. She was, however, somewhat dismayed to see that she was suffering the side effects of the painkillers; to her eyes the roses along the Gardener's arms were moving, petals slowly rotating this way and that.

The Gardener must have noticed her staring.

"You like these?"

She flexed a little for Sharon, turning her arms around to show off more of the elaborate line work; pulling down her tank top a little she also showed Sharon that the tattoo was covering more of both her chest and her back.

"They're very nice, were they painful to get?"

"These ones, not so much."

The Gardener pulled up the hem of her tank top to show off the tattoos covering her belly and hips.

"These ones— a little.

"I can show you the rest later."

Sharon tried to lift her gaze to meet the Gardener's eyes, but found herself drifting down her body again as they spoke. The side effects may have been mild, but they sure were distracting.

"Do you remember what time the body was found yesterday?"

"Sure, it was right after six, right around the time we heard your car crash."

Sharon nodded.

"Could you give an accounting of the entire evening, starting the last time you saw the Butler alive?"

"Sure.

"All eight of us, Mme Deux Frondes included, were gathered for dinner at three precisely. The lady is very particular about her meal times, and everyone is there, always."

"What did you have?"

"Lamb casserole, with a side of freshly baked garlic bread.

"As last night was Tuesday, Mme Deux Frondes was joined by the Driver for her after-dinner entertainment, and I joined the Cook in the kitchen to help her clean.

"By the time we had cleaned, fucked, and showered, it was a little before five. After that, I ran into the Nurse; she also wanted a lay, so I spent an hour or so in bed with her.

"Then we heard the car crash, and so I ran out to help. The Cook came out as well, and the Trainer was already out for a walk. By the time we were down by the gate there were only two of us, but as I said — between the snow and the winter clothes, I couldn't tell you who was there with me.

"Back at the house, me and the Nurse got you into bed, and it was when she greeted me in the hallway — covered in blood, mind — that I learned that the Butler was dead."

Sharon's eyes had come to rest on a particularly vivid rose, a large red one at the top of the Gardener's sternum, the slow, hypnotic rotation of the petals drawing her in.

"Should I go on?"

"No, no— that's fine."

Sharon once again tried and failed to meet the Gardener's gaze.

"So you slept with both—"

"Fucked."

"So you fucked both the Cook and the Nurse?"

"Yeah, if I don't have sex two or three times in a day I get real antsy. On Fridays, that's what Mme Deux Frondes wants from me, but the rest of the week I focus on taking care of myself."

"Why Fridays?"

"Every day, after dinner, each of the servants service Mme Deux Frondes. The Driver on Tuesdays, the Trainer on Wednesdays, the Butler on Thursdays, and so on. My day is Friday, and she likes me all worked up.

"That said, since Mme Deux Frondes is sequestered, I expect she won't be taking company either. Bad luck for the Trainer, but maybe you can solve this before Friday?"

"I can't make any promises, I'm afraid."

The gardener placed a hand under Sharon's chin and tilted her head up to meet her gaze.

"Maybe it would help if you kept your attention on the matter at hand?"

The Gardener regarded Sharon's eyes closely, and grinned.

"Oh, you've been taking meds from the Nurse."

"For the pain."

"Yeah, I'm familiar with her painkiller mixtures.

"How about we take a little break from the interrogation, and I'll help you regain your focus?

"I've been busy all day making sure nobody intrudes on the crime scene, so I haven't exactly been able to take care of myself, and you seem like you need a bit of grounding."

Sharon tried to reply, but words did not spring readily to mind.

"I'll be right back."

Before Sharon could protest, the Gardener was on her feet and out of the room. She returned not five minutes later, carrying a small bag somewhat reminiscent of the Nurse's medical kit; it was clearly a pastiche of the classic doctor's bag, but white and emblazoned with a bold pink heart.

"Now, I have all sorts of fun stuff here, and I'm not picky. But I'm guessing that you'd prefer something low-effort, right? On your part, I mean."

Sharon looked over at the bag, and shook her head — not to reject the Gardener, not really, but she was trying to shake her thoughts loose. Words were not coming easily to her. Concern crept into the Gardener's voice as she tried to discern the gestures.

"No? I can go, if you'd like."

Sharon shook her head again.

"You want me to stay?"

Sharon nodded, and the Gardener pulled out a harness from the bag, with a large purple dildo set in it.

"You want me to just pin you down and fuck you?"

Sharon nodded again, more eagerly this time, and the Gardener wasted no time. Pulling the sheets back, she balled them up, and grabbing both Sharon and the pair of large pillows she stacked everything up at the foot of the bed. With Sharon's ass raised to hip height, her face was pushed artlessly into the mattress, and without ceremony the Gardener pulled down her pajama pants and began vigorously fucking her.

* * *

By the time she had come a couple of times, Sharon's head was well cleared. Before the Gardener borrowed her shower, she helped Sharon back into bed, straightening up the sheets and pillows and tucking her in, but neglecting to help her back into her pajamas. With as soft as the sheets were, Sharon hardly minded.

When she returned from the showers, the Gardener was in no rush to get back into her clothes, and Sharon took the opportunity to take in her tattoos more holistically. Aside from her back and arms, the vines covered most of the Gardener's leg as well, all of them giving the impression of growing out of her cunt in the front and her ass in the back. Standing in the doorway to the *en suite*, leaning on the frame, she struck an impressive figure, in spite of her stature.

"Feeling better?"

Sitting herself up in bed, Sharon nodded, although her arm was beginning to throb again.

"Did you have any more questions for me?"

"Yeah, just the one.

"Do you have any idea who would want to kill the Butler?"

"Not really, we all get along pretty well.

"The Butler could be pretty fierce with her opinions sometimes, we certainly got into it about the garden every now and then, and I know she's been pretty outspoken about getting rid of the cars and pressuring the county for better public transit options.

"The Driver might have felt threatened by that, but to go as far as murder?"

"What about professional motives?"

"I guess the Cook might be due a promotion now, if she wants it. She complains about the kitchen being hard work sometimes, but I don't see her killing to get out of it."

"What about personal motives and jealousy?"

"Like I said, we all get along pretty well, so I don't know — I suppose the Maid has been getting into it with the Butler lately, the two of them playing around with the idea of competing for my attention.

"But every 'fight' about who gets to be with me ends with a threesome, so I think it was all in good fun.

"I suppose it might have soured, but murder's drastic."

"You certainly are popular around the servants quarter."

The Gardener ambled over from the bathroom door and hopped onto the bed, straddling Sharon's lap.

"I don't know how much clearer I can make this, but when I say that we all get along pretty well, what I *mean*…"

She pressed her body against Sharon's, taking care to rub their nipples together. Leaning in for a nibble at Sharon's ear, she clarified further.

"You're not going to find anyone in this house who didn't fuck everyone else in the last week. I really don't think jealousy is the motive."

"I'll keep that in mind."

Leaving Sharon with a light kiss, the Gardener got back on her feet. When she reëmerged from the bathroom she was dressed, and grabbing the bag of toys she made for the door. Before she left, she seemed to remember the reason she was there in the first place.

"Dinner service is suspended until this matter is resolved, but the Cook asked me to let you know that she'll be bringing up dinner for you in your room."

"Will she be wanting to fuck me as well?"

"Almost certainly, and you should let her. She— well, you'll see."

Alone again, Sharon retreated under the covers and tried for a nap once more.

* * *

Sharon had dozed off only briefly. Between the brighter winter sun outside and lingering smell of both the Nurse and the Gardener she found it hard to settle, and her arm was still bothering her. She also realized she hadn't had a proper wash since the crash; from what the Nurse had said about blood someone must have cleaned her up a little, but she was suddenly feeling quite grimy.

In the *en suite* she found the shower in the corner an interesting design. One wall was normal, with the plumbing and the baskets of toiletries — all seemingly fresh but for the Gardener's use of them — all against white and light blue ceramic checkerboard tile, and the wall against the bedroom had the same tiling. The wall out against the bathroom with the door in it was frosted glass, but the real point of interest was the final wall. Instead of the more traditional tile, it instead had a full-wall mirror.

The shower itself was quite roomy, something Sharon appreciated greatly. The pain in her arm made it awkward to move around, and the generous size of the shower made it a lot easier.

Washing herself, Sharon became quite distracted by the mirror. It was an unusual design, and would usually have made her quite uncomfortable, but whether it was the lingering effects of the painkillers or the afterglow imparted by the Gardener, she found herself not just tolerating the mirror, but even appreciating it.

After cleaning herself, Sharon spent some time following the Nurse's lead, inspecting herself for new cuts and bruises. Other than the cut across her brow, she seemed to be all but unhurt. The Nurse had been too polite to comment on the scars Darren had left her with, but Sharon still found them hard to ignore.

Focusing her resolve, she tried imagining what she'd look like with tattoos like the Gardener's, and was surprised at how easily they sprang to mind, appearing vividly on her body in the mirror. Allowing her imagination to carry her, she tried imagining a few other looks as well. Maybe tattoos were the way to go.

Getting caught up in the fantasy, trying to strike a pose she flexed her arm, and the sharp stab of pained pulled her out of the moment with red hot immediacy.

The hot water had helped a little, but her arm was still tremendously sore. She carefully inspected it for herself, prodding and poking, gritting her teeth through the pain. She could neither see nor feel any serious changes, so put it down to a simple sprain.

Looking at herself in the mirror again, she suddenly seemed a lot less vibrant, a lot less—

A lot less.

When she returned to the bedroom, Sharon found that the Maid had been by while she had been in the shower; the bed had been made, and the pajamas had been replaced with a fresh set as well. The freshly laundered cotton was cool on her newly washed skin as she slipped into the jammies, and she left the shirt unbuttoned to let her skin air dry a little more.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, she tried to remember where it was she was driving to, or if she needed to call off a reservation somehow, but she found herself unable.

Outside, the snow was still falling, heavier now.

Chapter 3

Dinner Belle

When changing the sheets, the Maid had also furnished the end table with a large pitcher of ice water with large bits of lemon floating in it. The Nurse had also left behind a bottle of painkillers; rather than a standard orange container, the bottle was of a classic design of thick blue glass, with a small label tied around the neck.

for pain, take as needed, max 4/d

Sharon considered the bottle for a while, her arm putting forth an excellent argument. One tablet had not proven to be as effective as she might have liked, so she popped two, washing them down with a large glass of crisp lemon water.

While waiting for the meds to kick in, she examined the contents of the end table. She had not seen her cell phone — nor any of her stuff — since she arrived, and considered the possibility that it might simply have been unpacked for her.

If it had, it certainly wasn't in the end table. The nook of it was empty, and the drawer was neatly divided into two equal compartments. One compartment contained hotel-sized portions of sundry goods; night cream, a sleep mask, small packages of both tampons and pads. The other compartment had intimate goods; a strip of condoms, two vibrators — one wand and one egg — and a bottle of lube.

Next to the end table was a wastepaper basket, with a fresh lining. There was not a lot in it, just some bloodied gauze, a few discarded medical gloves, and a small can of mechanical lubricant.

There was an armoire in the room as well, and checking it out Sharon found that it only contained several different styles of sleepwear. Some were variations on the simple cotton pajamas she had thus far been fur-

nished with, others were night gowns, and the selection included silk rompers and chemises as well, all with matching robes.

Arranged along the bottom of the closet were a series of slippers with different levels of seriousness. Ranging from simple beige house slippers to full-foot animal paw slippers, the selection was impressive. Sharon found the matching robe for her pink pajamas, and resolved to keep the bear paw slippers she had been given initially.

Searching the end table more carefully, she found something she had missed among the sundries; a couple of notebooks, and a couple of different writing implements to go with them. She picked out a ruled notebook and a fineliner pen, and sat down to try and note down what she had discovered so far. Her arm was not as angry now, and she managed to get the writing she wanted down, even if the handwriting turned out a bit wobbly.

Each of the six remaining servants of the house got a spread in the book, and Sharon noted down what she had observed thus far.[1] As far as she was able, she also sketched out the crime scene — both as described and as found — and the layout of the house as she had seen it thus far, leaving room to fill in whatever details she would encounter later. Finally, in the back of the book she made herself a couple of little check lists; one for who among the servants she had actually spoken to, and, anticipating further encounters, who she had fucked.

As she sat debating with herself whether the Nurse should get a full tick, or some other partial mark, and whether it was worth pursuing a full tick, there was a knock at the door. The Cook did not wait for a reply before she swung the door open, and pushed a serving cart into the room. The look she gave Sharon was piercing, and reminded her sharply that she had left her pajama shirt hanging open.

Sharon had been with trans girls before. Often, in fact, and eagerly. Soft, quiet girls in possession of carefully practiced femininity, honed against a dangerous outside world and revealed only slowly and carefully to trusted partners deemed worthy of what they thought a shameful past. Sharon loved trans girls, loved finding her way past their walls and shields, drawing them out, letting them give themselves to her with an eagerness found nowhere else in this world.

The Cook was not a trans girl. The Cook was a trans woman.

Overflowing with unguarded femininity, the Cook made no secret of who she was, and no apologies. Her makeup was not an attempt at hiding

[1] I will not discuss the contents of her notes in detail here, but rest assured that everything she notes down is elsewhere on the pages of this book, including a summary in the Intermission.

a chiseled jaw that would put a Hollywood leading man to shame, but bold red lipstick and unsubtle eyeliner. Her clothes were not pink frills to hide her shape, but simple workwear befitting any chef. The size of the outline of her womanhood against her slacks raised the question of whether she *could* tuck, but certainly made it clear that she *didn't*, and when she spoke, her voice was dark, and exquisitely her own.

"Dinner time."

The Cook parked the serving cart next to the small dining table in the corner of the room.

"Thank you…"

Sharon found herself looking the Cook up and down. Her mind was suddenly far away from the idea of food; whether it was the side effects of the painkillers or just the way the Cook carried herself, she had entirely different things on her mind.

"Staring is one thing, but drooling?"

Sharon realized her mouth had been hanging open. She closed it, she thought.

"I, uh— would like to talk to you, if I could.

"About the murder. And, uh, you know. Things."

"Things."

Sharon nodded. At a gesture from the Cook, she closed her mouth again, she thought.

"Well, I'm not going to be telling you about things — murder things or otherwise — when you're lounging around in bed half naked."

Sharon moved to button her pajama top, but the Cook motioned for her to stop.

"Nono. You've started down this path, now you get to finish it."

Nodding, Sharon slipped out of her pajamas. The pain in her arm was all but forgotten as she wriggled out of her shirt, and sliding off her pants was easy enough with the soft cotton.

With a click of her fingers, the Cook gestured to the floor; Sharon didn't quite understand what she was doing, until she spoke to her in a tone of voice she had only ever heard directed at dogs.

"Down."

Sharon did as she was bid.

"If you insist on playing the drooling dope, I think it'd be best to put your mouth to some productive use, don't you?"

From her awkward position on the floor, Sharon nodded meekly. She failed to close her mouth yet again, but this time at least knew about it.

"Knees."

At the Cook's direction, Sharon got on her knees in front of her, the cold parquet floor sending shivers up her spine.

"Since you seem unable to formulate your thoughts at the moment, allow me to try and anticipate your questions."

The Cook unzipped her slacks, and let her gock out for Sharon. It was even bigger than the outline against the cloth had indicated. The Cook was already getting hard, of course, but even so the size of it was shocking. It was easily the second biggest penis Sharon had ever seen, at least in person.

"First, and most obviously, yes, you may."

Sharon reached out for it, and began stroking it. The warmth of it was intoxicating, as was the smell. The Cook was clean, but there was a musk about her that told the story of hours spent in a warm kitchen. Tiring quickly of Sharon's fumbling, the Cook reached down and made clear what she wanted. Without preparations, only the tip fit in Sharon's mouth, but understanding the assignment she set about reading both the cock and herself for a fuller suck.

"Yesterday, I last saw the Butler at dinner, same as everyone else.

"I had spent several hours in the kitchen making dinner, and then another while cleaning. The Gardener was kind enough to help me clean, and to help me unwind a bit. She actually knows how to suck a dick, but I suppose in fairness she has known me for longer.

"After the Gardener had her dessert, I retired to my room for a nap, as I do most days after dinner. The sound of your car wreck woke me up.

"My room is on the third floor, so I got a good view of your car after the wreck, and I ran out with the Gardener to see to you. Outside, we met the Trainer, who was having a walk after dinner.

"Sometime between dinner and when I returned to my room after hoofing you up to the house, the Maid was by my room for a light tidy. She didn't wake me, but if she was there while I was napping, she can confirm where I was.

"Even if not, everyone knows I have a nap after dinner most days."

By now, Sharon was getting close to taking the whole cock in, but there was still some ways to go. The Cook filtered her fingers through Sharon's hair, and with a firm grip helped her along.

"As to motive, I'm sure some people will have spun a yarn about how I was after the Butler's job.

"Aside from the fact that I'm happy in the kitchen, it just doesn't work like that. You don't go from cook to butler, and certainly not suddenly because the butler is dead.

"No, I have — had, I guess — a close working relationship with the Butler. If you want a motive, I'll tell you who to look to.

"The Nurse has got it in the head that there's too much wine being served in the house, for people's health, and she's morally flexible enough to justify murder to herself, I'm sure.

"Just look at what she's done to you, with her experimentation, turning you into a desperate slut, gagging on a stranger's cock."

Sharon pulled all the way back to catch her breath. The Cook was fully erect now, and getting hard to wrangle. With a single heroic effort, she swallowed it all up, thrusting the Cook down her throat until she was kissing her belly.

"Case in point."

If the Cook was enjoying herself, she was hiding it well. Sharon could feel her gock twitch and move of its own accord, but the Cook stood as firmly planted as when she entered, and her voice gave no sign that she was moved at all.

"The Nurse, or the Trainer. She's always talking about the health stuff too, pushing for wines that are more conducive to workouts, like she wants the Butler to stock isotonic sports wines or something.

"That said, I don't see her resorting to murder, but she could maybe be talked into it."

A conspiracy? Even through the haze of lust the idea seemed too far fetched to be worth considering. She was taking all of the Cook with every thrust now, and still she showed no signs of getting closer to cumming.

The Cook grabbed a hold of Sharon's hair again, and pressed her close to her body. The cock down her throat and the fabric pressed against her face made it hard to breathe, and she could feel the Cook's body straining. It was just a few seconds, but it felt like an eternity.

Sharon knew this move well, and she expected the Cook to blow her load down her throat at this point, but the load never came. Instead, the Cook pulled Sharon off her cock, and upsetting her balance let her tumble to the floor. Stepping over Sharon's trembling form, she made her way over to the serving cart. Removing one of the cloches, she revealed a plate of creamy tomato bisque, and with a quiet moan, she came on the soup.

"Knees."

As she got back on her knees, Sharon could hear that the Cook was breathing ever so slightly more heavily, but her discipline was truly a marvel.

When she returned to Sharon with the plate of soup, she had zipped up, and she had neatly arranged the soup, topping the bisque with cum and fresh leaves. The leaves must have arrived separately, sitting as they did on top of the cum.

"The secret ingredient, as with all my food, is love."

Sharon nodded, and looked around for the spoon. Eating on the floor was one thing, but surely…

The Cook pulled off her neckerchief, and grabbing both of Sharon's hands tied them together behind her back. The painkillers were really working, or maybe she was too distracted to care, but she barely felt the arm hurting now.

Having tied Sharon's wrists, she sat down on the bed, out of sight.

"*Bon appétit*.

"I want to see you eat every drop, now. To do otherwise would be rude, *non*?"

Sharon looked down at the bowl of soup in front of her. She didn't much mind cum, but usually she encountered it in the moment; fresh from the source, so to speak. A bowl of soup topped with jizz was something quite other, and something she didn't really have any experience with.

Behind her, she could feel the Cook's gaze drill into her.

Bending down, she found it hard to balance, but she managed somehow. The soup was still warm, but not so warm that getting it all over her chin was a problem, and the taste of tomato and the texture of bisque was far more present than the jizz ever could be.

It was not a large bowl of soup, a light appetizer before the main course, but half eating and half drinking it with her face in the bowl still took Sharon a good while.

The Cook, for as long as she was eating, did not say a word, but finally she seemed to have decided she was done eating. Pulling her to her feet, she dragged her into the bathroom, and confronted her with the mirror in the shower.

"Look at yourself."

Sharon look at her self in the mirror, her eyes unfocused, her mouth hanging open, her chin dripping with bisque and cum. Standing behind her, the Cook grinned.

"This is the brave detective, is it, that will solve this murder?"

Sharon nodded weakly, and the Cook gave her ear a light nibble.

"Well, then, Ms Detective, let me let you in on a little secret."

She slipped a couple of fingers into the folds of her cunt, wetting them before bringing them up to her lips for Sharon to taste herself.

"Those painkillers that the Nurse is so proud of? Her secret mixture with the dramatic side effects?"

Sharon nodded weakly again, as the Cook untied her hands.

"They're just paracetamol and ibuprofen. This? This is all you."

Pressing her fingers into Sharon's mouth, the Cook entreated her to taste herself. She was whispering, now.

"How you could even begin to imagine that you needed any kind of help to descend into this kind of desperate sluttery is beyond me."

Letting her cock out again, she thrust into Sharon. Her grin unfaltering, she held her up with one hand and controlled her head with the other, forcing Sharon to look into her own desperate, pleading eyes as the Cook fucked her.

It didn't take long for the Cook to come again, and her discipline remained ironclad. A brief fluttering of her eyes was the only sign anything had even happened, save for the hot jet of cum filling Sharon's cunt.

When the Cook let go of her, Sharon sank to the floor, exhausted. Squatting next to her, the Cook once again lifted her face to force her to look at herself.

"What are we looking at here?"

Sharon had no idea what the Cook wanted to hear, she could only shake her head weakly.

"That's not an answer."

The Cook straightened out her head again, bringing Sharon back into her own view.

"I don't know…"

"I bet you do."

The Cook grabbed her hair again, into a tight, painful grip.

"A dumb slut…"

The Cook tightened her grip.

"That's obvious, you can do better."

"A desperate whore…"

The Cook tightened her grip even more, making the pain more real than demonstrative.

"I should be so lucky. A desperate whore would know how to suck a dick."

Sharon looked to the Cook's grin, and back to her own desperate face.

"A bitch and a chaser…"

The Cook's wicked grin reformed into a smug smile, and she loosened her grip on Sharon's hair.

"See, now *that* sounds about right.

"The problem with you, Ms Detective, is that you're like a dog chasing cars. The chase is well and good, but what would you ever do if you caught one?"

* * *

The Cook had left her in the shower, and when some time later Sharon emerged from the bathroom after her second shower of the day, she found that the serving cart was gone. She had left the entrée behind, with silverware and everything, and a bottle of red wine.

Outside, it was already getting dark, and instead of returning to the pink cotton pajamas Sharon headed to the closet, where she found a black silk chemise with matching robe, although she opted to keep the bear paw slippers.

The food was still warm enough to eat, but Sharon was paying for the time she took getting showered. The Cook had paid little attention to Sharon's needs, or rather, had favored working her up, so Sharon had needed to finish herself off in the shower. In an unfamiliar place, with the unfamiliar feel of having herself in the mirror, it had taken a while.

As she ate, Sharon pondered what the Cook had been telling her. She didn't really get all her questions answered, but maybe enough for now. Staring at the bottle of wine, Sharon tried to make sense of what the Cook had been telling her about the meds. She was fairly confident that the wheel of the illustration of a water mill on the label wasn't *actually* turning, but was she… imagining that she was hallucinating?

Sharon poured herself another glass of wine.

In addition to the Cook's accounting of her evening, she had learned a couple of important things. For one, the Maid had been working after dinner yesterday, which would be how she discovered the body. But the Cook wouldn't be able to corroborate that, perhaps someone else would?

Further to that, the Gardener would have to have fucked first the Cook and then the Nurse, all within just a couple of hours. She was certainly a flirt, but that's a lot of fucking. The Gardener had said the same, but she would have to check with the Nurse.

Finally, there was the suggestion of a conspiracy. Just as she had earlier, Sharon put it out of her mind. With the tools she had access to, supposing that two people could be covering for one another would simply render the matter unsolvable, so she decided to dismiss the possibility out of hand.

Looking over her notes, Sharon found that she was only really happy with one conversation she had had, the one with the Gardener, although she saw that she had probably gotten as much out of the Cook as she could for now. She hadn't really had much of a chance to properly talk with the Nurse, and the rest of the staff she had not even met.

After finishing dinner, it didn't take her long to finish off the bottle of wine as well. As she nestled into bed, her head was swimming, and between the wine, the meds, and her exhaustion, her dreams were vivid, but strange.

Chapter 4

Maid to Serve

Sharon woke to find the Maid quietly clearing the small dining table. The room was quite dark, with only a small lamp on the Maid's cart providing a bit of light for her work, and the dim moonlight filtering in through the lace curtains.

It wasn't until she approached the end table to refresh the pitcher of water that the Maid noticed that Sharon was awake.

"My apologies, Ms Detective, I didn't mean to wake you."

She gave a small curtsy.

Sharon hadn't lived in a house with servants since she was a child, but the Maid was much more reflective of the attitude she was used to than was the Gardener or the Cook, or even the Nurse.

"What time is it?"

"A little past nine, Ms."

"You work quite late."

"The needs of the house are unceasing, Ms, but this is my last task for the evening."

"Since I am awake anyway, I would like to speak to you about last night."

"Of course."

The Maid gave another small curtsy.

"But I will have to finish my work first; I will return as soon as I have brought the cart down, if that's alright?"

"Of course."

"Oh, and I'll take this off to laundry for you as well."

The Maid had collected the silk robe that went with Sharon's chemise from the floor, and was gesturing to her now.

"Oh, this was fresh from the closet."

The Maid smiled politely, her teeth glinting in the moonlight.

"Well, it's been on the floor, so it's best to clean it, Ms.

"And I'd like to wash the robe and the chemise together."

* * *

Sharon fell asleep waiting for the Maid to return, and didn't wake until she was sitting on the side of her bed, gently picking her hair out of her face.

"You wanted to talk?"

The Maid had changed quite drastically in the short time since last Sharon saw her; the classic maid's dress was gone, replaced with cotton pajama pants and a loose tank top, and her gesture and tone had transformed as well.

"You're back…"

"Yeah, sorry it took a minute, I had to deal with some shit."

"How long—"

"A couple of hours, sorry, but I'm here now."

Sharon nodded weakly, and started sitting herself up, but the Maid admonished her to stay down.

"Don't get up on my account, please."

Springing to her feet, she quickly stripped off her pajamas, and slipped in under the covers next to Sharon.

"Oh, um…"

"I've been on my feet all day, and I could really use a cuddle."

The Maid wrapped herself around Sharon from behind.

"You don't mind, do you?"

"No, that's… no, I don't mind."

"The Moon's pretty tonight."

Sharon looked up and out of the window, at the full moon hanging high in the dark night sky.

She could also feel the Maid's hand gently wrap around her throat.

"I found your little checklist."

"Oh…"

"I hope you don't think me a snoop, you *did* leave your notebook open."

Sharon could see it in the moonlight, lying on the end table, and not where she had left it on the dining table.

"The Cook was bragging about being pretty mean to you, and I thought that seemed undeserved.

"At first."

Sharon shivered as the Maid's grip tightened.

"Aren't you going to protest that the list was about something else?

"Suspects, or theories, or alibis, or whatever?

"How the term 'Intercourse' is ambiguous when placed next to the word 'Conversation'?"

Sharon shook her head meekly.

"Or are you hoping that if you're a good girl I'll go easy on you?"

Sharon shook her head again, she wasn't sure what else to do.

"Let's get the questions then, yeah?"

"Yes, the questions…"

Sharon's head was still swimming, and she found the Maid's presence deeply intoxicating. Still, she managed to sort through her thoughts to arrive at what she wanted to know.

"Can you account for your day, yesterday, starting with dinner?"

"Of course."

The Maid slid in even closer, and delivered the entire description of her evening straight into Sharon's ear in a low, breathy voice, occasionally punctuating this point or that with a nibble.

"After dinner, I still had work to do, as usual.

"Clearing the table is usually my job, but the Gardener was kind enough to take that off my hands. Getting fucked by the Cook after dinner is also my job, and I think she took that as well.

"For my part, I instead made the rounds to collect laundry, clearing first the Driver's room, and then the Trainer's room.

"While I didn't get a good fucking from the Cook, the Trainer was feeling pretty horny by the time I got to her room, and god can that girl move. Have you ever been held upside down against the wall and had your cunt eaten, Ms Detective?"

Sharon shook her head. Focusing on what the Maid was saying was quite difficult, made worse by the fact that her hand was idly brushing back and forth her belly, going lower and lower.

"After the Trainer was finished with me, I went to clear the rest of the rooms. I did see the Cook in her room; she was taking a nap, as she always does after dinner, so I wasn't able to change her sheets.

"Then I went to the Nurse's room, to see if I could get her sheets, but she was fucking the Gardener, so no luck.

"That did make it easy to clean the Gardener's room, tho', which is where I went next, up in the attic.

"Finally, I went to sweep up in the empty room. The open wall means there's more detritus in there than in the other rooms, like leaves and shit, so it requires more cleaning.

"There I found the Butler, dead.

"I don't really remember much after that. I screamed, I think. The Driver came running, as did the Nurse, and that's when we heard the crash down by the gate.

"After we checked the Butler for signs of life, the Nurse took me to my room, and she gave me some sedatives, I don't remember anything after that."

"What did the Driver do?"

"I don't— I don't remember if the Driver was there, actually."

The Maid's hands tightened, and the positioning was unfortunate; she had gotten so far as teasing Sharon's cunt, and her slender fingertips now painfully pressed down on her clit.

"After dinner, how lo—"

"God, shut the fuck up."

The Maid stuck a pair of fingers into her mouth, pressing down on Sharon's tongue and keeping it in place.

"I've told you all I know, now it's my turn.

"If you think the Cook was mean, let me tell you, you're in for a treat."

The Maid shored up her grip on Sharon's jaw, and kept roughly manipulating her cunt.

"You know that niggling sense that you have when fucking in a hotel room? That sense that you're making more work for someone if you really ruin the sheets?

"Let me tell you something about cleaning ruined sheets. I'm a professional at it, a fucking master. I do not have that sense, and I do not mind making the work for myself."

Sharon was helpless under the Maid's forceful grip. Her hands were free, but they didn't feel it; all she could do was grasp aimlessly at the air, or tangle herself in the sheets.

"So we're going to have some fun."

The Maid's grip on her face was inescapable, and the with her other hand she was giving Sharon an intense lesson in the difference between 'pleasure' and 'stimulation'. She was not looking to make Sharon feel good, she was just looking to make her *feel*; not to give her release, but to *force* an orgasm on her.

The Maid was wearing the same subtle floral scent as the Nurse did, and the contrast between the two of them could not be made clearer than this. Where the Nurse's touch had been delicate and searching, the Maid's touch was ardent and deliberate. When the Nurse had brought Sharon to orgasm, she had eased her over the peak and wrapped her in kisses and warm bedsheets; when the Maid had forced the first orgasm on Sharon she celebrated by firmly digging her teeth into her shoulder.

She did not stop, of course.

Her grip on Sharon's face only tightened, her fingering only grew more forceful. The orgasm she was left with was not a sudden release

of tension, but a broken and frustrating shudder, like a toboggan down a cobblestone street. The second orgasm was no better.

The Maid's teeth were digging harder into her shoulder as well, and Sharon could feel her sharp canines piercing her flesh, drawing blood.

Finally, after the third orgasm was forced on her and ruined, the Maid let her go. Throwing back the sheets, she sat heavily on Sharon's chest, her pale naked skin illuminated by the moonlight. Between her breasts, Sharon could feel a small, warm pool of juices leaking from the Maid, and the mix of drool and blood dripping from her half open mouth landed between her eyes, obscuring her vision.

"God, you're such a loser."

Sharon couldn't see the Maid, now, and she didn't dare wipe her eyes, but she could hear the smile on her lips.

She waited with bated breath for the next sally, but it never came. Instead, she could feel the Maid's fingers gently tracing the outlines of old scars, her breath falling, her body cooling. Then she rose, lifting the weight from Sharon's chest, and she got out of bed.

With a quiet rustle of fabric, the Maid was gone.

* * *

The Nurse didn't say anything when she arrived a little later, wearing a thin pink négligée rather than her scrubs. Sharon was exhausted and nearly asleep, and didn't register much more than the fact that the Nurse was gently tending to her shoulder in silence.

Chapter 5

Driven

It was still dark when Sharon awoke.

There was no clock in her room, and her phone still hadn't gotten back to her, but by the sliver of the Moon still visible through the trees she estimated the time to be around five, maybe six in the morning.

Stepping into the bathroom, she caught a brief shock as she saw her own bloodied face in the mirror. A scarlet butterfly was spreading its wings across the bridge of her nose, but with a bit of scrubbing it was soon away.

After a quick shower and finding herself a pajama set, she briefly went over her notes again. The Maid got a half tick on both lists — she would need to speak to her again — and she made a few other notes as well. The Maid hadn't offered her any new information, but she had contextualized some things she already knew.

Putting on the sling and draping herself with a robe, Sharon stepped out into the hallway to poke around the house. Her arm was feeling better, but she was keeping the weight off it for another day as the Nurse had instructed. She popped a couple of painkillers as well, keeping the pain in her arm down.

The house was dark and quiet, and not knowing what door led where Sharon had little inclination to stick her head in random rooms.

She found, at least, that the front of the house was broadly symmetrical. Leading away from the hallway were two long corridors along the front of the house, leading off to different rooms. On her side there was a pair of small closets, the murder scene, and another room of unknown disposition. On the other side, she could only see two doors leading onto the main hallway.

There was also a door on the far wall that had no matching partner

at the other end of the hallway. It appeared to be a retro-fit of sorts, and Sharon guessed — correctly — that it led onto the garage.

Returning from her exploration of the hallway, near the entrance hall, she met the Driver, who greeted her with an easy smile.

"Good morning."

The Driver was returning from a morning bath, and had not seen fit to dress for the occasion; all she had with her was a small towel casually slung over her shoulder.

"Good morning, you're the Driver, right?"

"I sure am.

"I'm guessing you need to talk to me?"

Sharon nodded, and the Driver gestured for her to follow. Her room was at the end of the hallway, by the door to the garage, and had its own retro-fitted door to the garage inside.

Unlike the guest room, where all the facilities were somewhat crammed inside, the Driver's room was more akin to a small apartment. The door from the hallway led onto a front room, and a second door inside led onto her bedroom.

The Driver's front room was simply decorated, with a large couch sitting under the courtyard window, and a round coffee table placed in front of it. The corner by the garage wall was given over to a large L-shaped tool bench, laden with a dizzying variety of automotive maintenance and customization tools alongside fine tools for working on camera equipment, and the corner across from it had a large plastic plant in it.

The Driver didn't give Sharon a lot of time to take in the front room, and instead ushered her into the bedroom.

The Driver's bedroom was as odd as her front room was ordinary.

Her bed was large, and round, and stood right in the center of the room. A large mirror was hanging above it, two and a half meters across at least, and the walls were festooned with posters. Each of the dozens and dozens of posters plastering the walls was the same, each an A1 photograph of Mme Deux Frondes. The specific photo on every poster was different, but the theme was identical. In each poster, Mme Deux Frondes was standing, central to the image, and attended by one of her servants. In many, the servant was naked, and in most Mme Deux Frondes was not, instead she was showing off a variety of gowns, négligées and even a suit, all in the same scarlet. Even where Mme Deux Frondes was nude, she was never naked.

The Driver sat down on the bed, throwing her towel vaguely in the direction of the bathroom door.

"Do you like my photography?"

"It's very interesting.

"Is it part of your job?"

"Yeah, after a fashion.

"Most of us do different things around the house; apart from driving and maintaining the cars, I also do other kinds of maintenance around the house. Plumbing, electrical work, that sort of thing."

Sharon had already found both the Gardener and the Nurse in the photographs, as well as the Butler and the Cook, but every single poster had a different servant.

"So, you had some questions?"

"Yes, … yes, questions."

Sharon pulled her attention away from the posters, and sat down on the bed next to the Driver.

"Can you account for the day the Butler was killed, starting at dinner?"

"Sure, it's not very interesting.

"I saw the Butler at dinner, of course, and it being Tuesday, I joined Mme Deux Frondes for dessert.

"We were busy until we heard the screaming and the crashing and whatever else. Mme Deux Frondes was out of there like a shot, but I was pretty exhausted by then, so it took me a bit to get on my feet."

"Dinner was at three, and the crash and everything was at around six, right?

"That's three hours, you spent all that time with Mme Deux Frondes?"

"Yeah, sounds about right.

"She is *ravenous*, anyone will tell you that. She probably could have gone for another hour, maybe two."

"All right, then what?"

"Then I got dressed, and headed down to the car wreck to try and recover any luggage. I was heading down with… the Trainer, I think? It's hard to tell with the winter coats."

"So the Trainer was up at the house?"

"Yes, you were brought up to the house by the Trainer, the Cook and the Gardener together, I think. It was *really* snowing hard."

"Anyway, I have some bad news for you regarding the luggage.

"The wreck was total, and I'm afraid nothing really survived fire.

"You really should have had a better car, but it's a bit late for that now, of course."

"Of course."

Sharon tried to make a mental inventory of what she had with her on her vacation, but drew a blank. A total loss was certainly not good.

"Do you have any idea who could have wanted to kill the Butler?"

"A couple, yeah.

"The Maid certainly could have done it; she's got a real violent streak, and the Butler was so pliable. It would have been easy as nothing for the Maid to get the Butler to come along for some help tidying up the empty room or something, and being shocked at finding the body doesn't need to look much different from the shock of making it. She mentioned wanting to clean the empty room at dinner, I think, so nobody would have thought much of being invited to help.

"Her, or the Nurse. The Nurse has been getting into it with the Butler for weeks over how much wine she is serving. The Nurse knows where everyone is at all times, she's obsessive about that, and I'm sure she could get the Butler along to help her go through the paints being used or whatever. She would know when the Maid was turning up, and she's certainly the kind that would do away with the Butler if she thought it helped the rest of us in the long term."

"She has a certain moral flexibility?"

"Yeah, that's a good term for it."

"You say the Maid could have killed the Butler, but you didn't say why."

"Oh, yeah, I couldn't tell you why. All I know is that she's certainly capable."

"I see. Anyone else?"

"I mean, some people might want to point the finger at me, something about me and the Butler arguing, but that was all in good fun."

"Unlike with the Nurse."

"Yeah.

"And unlike with the Trainer. I suppose she could have done it as well, that girl does not know her own strength. But I don't think her arguments with the Butler were nearly as serious as those with the Nurse. She always takes a walk after dinner, but with the open wall it would be easy enough for her to arrange a rendezvous for a workout or whatever, and then sneak in and out via the tarp."

Sharon thought about this. A big enough gap in the tarp certainly could have been retied from the outside to let a person in or out, the snow outside would have obscured any footsteps, and the blood inside would have eaten up any snow left behind in the room.

The Driver got to her feet, and looked through her posters, before waving Sharon over.

"I always try to capture the essence of my subjects when photographing them, and I think this really captures the Maid."

Sharon hadn't spotted the Maid when she was looking over the posters before, because she was not very easy to recognize. In the photo poster the Driver had hung, Mme Deux Frondes was in the same dispassionate

imperious pose as in every other photo, wearing a short silk chemise, with the same ruby necklace hanging around her neck as in every other photo.

The Maid, on the other hand, sat naked on all fours at her feet. She was wearing a collar and a muzzle, held on a narrow leather leash by Mme Deux Frondes. Blood — simulated blood, probably — was dripping from her bared, grinning teeth.

"I heard a little about last night."

The Driver gently put a hand on Sharon's good shoulder, giving the distinct impression that she could feel the marks the Maid had left through the fabric.

Sharon returned to the bed and sat back down, and the Driver sat down next to her. Sharon could feel the warmth of her body through her clothes, especially when she leaned in to whisper a question.

"Does that answer your questions?"

Sharon nodded. Her head was going swimmy again. If the Nurse *was* the murderer, what was in those painkillers? Was she trying to divert her attention by drugging her?

Sharon asked the Driver something, but what exactly was unclear to her.

"If you insist."

Gently, the Driver began unbuttoning her pajama top. Thought fled from Sharon, all she could bring to her attention were the burning hot touches of the Driver's fingertips against her skin. Soon the robe was on the floor, and her top, and the sling, and her pajama pants.

Looking up, Sharon could see herself lying in the middle of the Driver's strange bed, naked now. Her mouth lolled open, and her naked body was being slowly revealed as the Driver kissed her way down it. Neck. Collar. Breasts. Belly.

Sharon was already seeing double in the mirror, and when the Driver's lips made contact with her cunt, she could see herself going cross eyed.

The Driver began lightly, covering Sharon with light kisses, but she was soon biting, groping, fingering and sucking as hard as anything Sharon had ever experienced. In the mirror above, Sharon could see her own body, convulsing and incoherent with pleasure.

The Driver let her cum two or three times before she climbed back up, giving her a taste of her own cunt from her wet lips.

She was far from done.

* * *

Returning to her room some time later, Sharon was still dizzy.

She found a light breakfast placed on the small dining table, and alongside it she found a note written on a business-card sized piece of card.

The front of it had ‘Sorry’ emblazoned on it in swirling cursive letters, painted over with a fresh kiss mark in the Maid’s lipstick color.

On the back was a brief note from the Maid.

‘The clothes from the crash are unsalvageable, searching for suitable replacements’

Aside from the card, someone had also left Sharon’s drivers license. The fire had entirely ruined it. The lamination was peeling off, the photo was burnt nearly entirely out, and the text was barely legible. This, it seemed, was the only thing that had been possible to salvage from the car.

After breakfast, Sharon made sure to note down what she had learned from the Driver. She found that she very much needed to speak to the Maid again. Still, she had yet to even speak to the Trainer, so that would have to happen first.

Before she had left the Driver’s room, what little sense remained to Sharon had driven her to ask about where the staff rooms were, throughout the building.

On the first floor, the east wing had the guest room — where Sharon was staying — and the empty room, as well as a small parlor at the end of the hallway. Opposite was the Maid’s apartment, the Driver’s apartment, and the garage. On the second floor, the east wing had the Butler’s apartment near the hall, and an empty servant’s apartment at the end of the hallway. Opposite was the Nurse’s apartment near the hall, and the Trainer’s apartment by the entrance to the master wing, with the master wing situated above the garage.

The dining room was behind the hall on the first floor, and above it was the veranda; the attic had an empty apartment in the east and the Gardener’s apartment in the west, and the cellar had the baths, the kitchen, the Cook’s apartment, and some storerooms and such.

A grand house by any measure, and the presence of shared baths would explain why a house of this stature only had showers in the *en suite* bathrooms, and not bathtubs.

The sketches in her notebook ended up a bit wobbly, but good enough for Sharon to orient herself.

With breakfast out of the way, Sharon ditched her pajamas and bear paw slippers in favor of a terrycloth bathrobe and some simpler footwear, and struck out for the baths.

Chapter 6

The Cellar

Finding the way to the baths was simple enough — Sharon could see the glass doors leading into the showers from where she arrived in the basement — but getting there proved more difficult. Walking down the hallway brought her past the Cook's apartment, and as she drew close she found the door ajar. From inside she could hear the wet noise of flesh on flesh, and the Gardener's enthusiastic opinions on the Cook's fucking. She found it hard to walk past, but not long after she stopped next to the door, the noises from inside stopped.

Before Sharon could bring herself back into motion, the Cook threw the door open.

"A rat, is it?"

She grabbed Sharon by the lapel and pulled her into the room, slamming the door behind her.

"Good morning, Ms Detective."

The Gardener tried to sound amused, but her voice was tinged with frustration. She was sitting on the Cook's couch, her legs spread, her body still trembling.

"More questions?"

The Cook sounded unamused.

"No, I was just heading to the baths—"

"And you figured you'd do a bit of spying?"

Sharon shook her head meekly.

"So how did I catch you spying?"

"I was just—"

The Cook pushed her to the floor in front of the Gardener. The floor was covered in black carpet, but the carpet was not very thick, and the padding below was not very soft.

"Shut up.

"I'm not interested in your weak excuses. Whatever the reason for your spying, you did interrupt, so now you get to make it up the Gardener."

The Cook squatted behind Sharon and pulled her robe open. Untying the belt, she manipulated the fabric into makeshift bindings to tie Sharon's arm together behind her back. Sharon winced in anticipation as the Cook pulled her arm back, but the painkillers meant it didn't hurt.

With a firm grasp on Sharon's hair, the Cook shoved her face into the Gardener's cunt. The Gardener soon took over, first wrapping her thighs around Sharon's head, then burying both her hands into Sharon's hair and clenching her fists. She had already been well ready for Sharon, and as Sharon began hungrily eating her out the noises that had been interrupted just a few moments ago returned with gusto.

The Cook had taken a step back, but Sharon could feel her eyes boring into the back of her skull.

"So she's good for something after all."

"Yeah—"

The juices were flowing generously from the Gardener's cunt, and she tasted like nectar from the flowers tattooed on her skin.

It didn't take Sharon long to bring her to orgasm.

The Cook was quick to pull Sharon off of her, and threw her to the floor.

"You don't have to pretend on this bitch's account."

"I wasn't—"

The Gardener was panting.

The Cook pushed Sharon over on her back. Climbing off of the sofa, the Gardener sat on top of her, and Sharon got a tremendous view as the Cook began fucking her face.

"Be nice and share, now."

It didn't take the Cook long at all to cum. The amount was tremendous, and the Gardener could barely contain it. Coughing, a few drops escaped from her nose, dripping onto Sharon's face.

The Cook pulled her cock out to let the Gardener breathe, and a few more drops fell on Sharon.

"Say aah."

Prompted by the Cook, the Gardener grabbed Sharon's jaw, pushing her mouth open. From above, she was nice and shared, dropping a thick glob of cum and spit into Sharon's face, mostly hitting her mouth.

Neither the Gardener nor the Cook were satisfied at this point, and it would be another hour until Sharon managed to make her way to the baths.

Chapter 7

Next to Godliness

The hallway from the Cook's apartment to the baths was long.

Before sending her on her way, the Cook had confiscated Sharon's robe and slippers, leaving her the most naked she had ever been. The air in the apartment had been still, but the corridor had something of a draft; the air cooled the thick mix of Sharon's grool, the Cook's cum and the Gardener's spittle slicking her inner thighs, telling Sharon how exposed she was.

The blast of warm air that enveloped Sharon as she stepped into the shower room was welcome relief.

The showers were built in the Japanese style, with wooden stools sitting in front of low shower fixtures. The room had four bays, each of them with a set of institutional bottles of shower lotion and shampoo, along with a few smaller bottles in different styles. Looking at what was sitting around, Sharon tried to intuit what bay the Butler had a habit of using.

As she sat trying to figure out how to use the shower, Sharon was surprised by the noise of another stool being pulled up behind her.

"So you're our guest, then?"

The Trainer's voice was dark and slow, and her body was warm as she pulled her stool up behind Sharon, pushing the both of them closer to the shower fixtures.

"Let me help you with that."

With gentle hands, she guided Sharon to the shower fixtures; they were somewhat different than she was used to, but not too hard to operate now that she knew how.

"And you must be the Trainer."

"Indeed.

"Let me help you with that."

The trainer fished out a couple of bottles from the small collection that was sitting in the shower bay.

"A fun coïncidence that you should like the same stuff as the Butler did, no?"

Sharon nodded.

"And not just the soaps, either."

The Trainer ran a couple of fingers over Sharon's cunt, picking up the mixture of juices. Bringing them up to Sharon's mouth, she entreated her to taste them.

"The Butler liked to play with the Cook, too.

"She did anything she was asked, such devotion."

With how sweet the Cook tasted on her, Sharon could see why.

"Not just the Cook, but any of us."

With one hand wrapped around Sharon's jaw, the Trainer kept her mouth open and her tongue pulled out with a strong pair of fingers, while her other hand continued fingering her cunt.

"You would have liked her, Ms Detective.

"She was nearly as submissive a slut as you."

Pressing her body against Sharon from behind, the Trainer expertly brought her to orgasm. The Cook and the Gardener had given little thought to Sharon's pleasure; she hadn't minded, not really, but it had put her on a hair trigger, and the Trainer had found it quick as anything.

After she was done, the Trainer moved on to washing Sharon, starting with shampooing her hair.

"I'm sure you have questions for me?"

"I do."

Sharon was surprised at how tremulous her voice was when she spoke.

"Can you— can you account for your whereabouts the day before last, starting with dinner?"

"Of course."

The Trainer continued washing Sharon as she spoke, moving on to cleaning her body after the thorough scalp massage.

"On the day the Butler was murdered, we all saw each other at dinner.

"Being that it was a Tuesday, Mme Deux Frondes had the Driver for dessert, and the rest of us went about our evening.

"I spent some time in my room preparing my laundry for pickup, and when the Maid arrived we spent some time together before she moved on.

"At about half five I was out the door for my after-dinner walk. The walk usually takes an hour or so, but the snow makes it somewhat slower.

I was nearly back at the house when the crash brought me to increase my pace.

"I helped get you up to the house, alongside the Cook and the Gardener, and then returned to the wreck to see if anything could be salvaged.

"Unfortunately, your car was fully ablaze at that point."

The way the Trainer washed Sharon was not entirely focused, her approach shifting seamlessly from moment to moment between focused cleaning efforts and groping searches of her body.

"After that, I believe you know the rest."

Sharon nodded.

"One of the windows in the— in the empty room is gone, and there is a tarp there instead. Could anyone—"

The Trainer's efforts made the question hard to get out, but she seemed to get the gist of it.

"Over the course of clearing out the room prior to the rebuilding, and as we've been rebuilding it, we've been using that tarp to move things in and out, yes.

"There was a delivery of paints just a few days ago that were brought in through there, I handled it myself.

"Much better to untie the tarp for a bit than to track mud and snow through the house.

"And it's easy enough to get in and out, too."

As if to demonstrate the point about the ease of entering and leaving, the Trainer slipped two fingers into Sharon's cunt.

Clasping her other hand over Sharon's mouth, she muffled her with floral scents as she brought her to orgasm again. When she was done, she once again gave Sharon a taste of the Cook, whose cum was still generously filling Sharon up.

"I think a specialized tool might be required here."

Sharon had little to add, and instead tried to get out another question.

"There, uh— something about the wines, you were angry about them?"

Her head was swimming, and the tool the Trainer had brought out didn't make things easier on her. From a nearby bucket, she had fished out a strange ridged implement, covered in hot pink silicone. Covered with a clear gel and turned on, it vibrated intensely as the Trainer began cleaning Sharon's insides with it.

"I had no problem with the Butler, wine-related or otherwise.

"I know there are those who would claim I was disappointed with the wine selection, but it's nonsense. I don't drink much myself, and Mme Deux Frondes, whose health is *actually* my job to see to, doesn't drink much wine either.

"The other servants can do as they please, and I would never begrudge them their diets."

The Trainer lifted Sharon up into her lap, to better access her nethers, and left the first cleaning wand in as she produced a second one. The Cook had not spared Sharon's ass, and the Trainer wouldn't either.

"And I'm sure people have suggested that the Gardener and the Butler had some kind of a beef as well, but let me tell you this.

"Those two girls are — well, *were* — all about riling each other up. Getting each other bothered, angry, upset, and then fucking about it.

"You've seen the Butler's room, you know how she is."

Sharon shook her head weakly. She'd not seen the Butler's room yet, but would want to when — when she could…

She screamed into the strong hand still clasped over her mouth as another intense orgasm rattled her body to the bones.

"Oh, you haven't? Well, you're in for a treat."

* * *

Sharon had not found it in her to ask any more questions while the Trainer helped her shower. The Trainer had taken her time, but at length she was satisfied with Sharon's cleanliness. Carrying her, the Trainer brought her into the large soaking tub in the next room.

Sitting across from her in the tub, Sharon got her first real look at the Trainer.

She was a lot more ordinary-looking than Sharon had imagined. She was not a tall woman, and her body was not one of rippling muscle. Sharon knew she was *strong*, but she didn't show it. No tattoos, no scars, just supple golden skin and dirty blonde hair.

Sharon leaned back into the piping hot water.

"I did have another question.

"How long does Mme Deux Frondes usually spend with the staff after dinner?"

"It varies.

"Dessert can be a kiss on the cheek, or Mme Deux Frondes can keep a girl until she has to get dressed for dinner again.

"A couple of hours is the usual, though, if it's everyday dessert."

"Everyday dessert?"

"Just Mme Deux Frondes and a single girl, like every day.

"On special occasions she arranges for more elaborate desserts, every other week or so."

"She'll probably do something to celebrate this mystery being solved, so you can look forward to that."

"Well, once I solve this I'm gone, so…"

The Trainer shrugged.

"Why do you ask how long dessert takes?"

"When the Butler was found, the Driver could still be in— still be having dessert, right?"

The Trainer briefly gave this some thought, before nodding.

"With dinner at three, dessert at four, and the body found at around half six, yeah, that seems likely."

The Trainer gestured for Sharon to come closer, and obediently she ambled across the water.

"It's your turn."

As she spoke, the Trainer's voice slid into a low growl.

"What do you want to know?"

"You misunderstand."

The Trainer filtered her fingers through Sharon's wet hair, grabbing it tight with both hands.

"The Maid told me about your little checklist.

"I don't know what you count for completion there, but just in case… it's your turn."

As the trainer dunked her head into the water and pressed her mouth against her cunt, Sharon apprehended her meaning.

The water was blindingly hot and tasted of sulfur, like it came from a hot spring. The Trainers cunt had a taste too, sweet, and subtle, and largely overpowered by the water. The heat of the water, the pressure from the Trainer's thighs and the warmth of her cunt all made it hard to concentrate, but Sharon did her best to return the favor from the shower.

She had not had a chance to take a deep breath before going down, and quickly found herself running out of air.

As her hands groped blindly against the Trainer's legs, her head was pulled out of the water, and with a deep painful rasp she drew a grateful breath. A look from the Trainer told her in no uncertain terms that she was not done, but as she was dunked again she was more prepared.

She was not pulled back out of the water until the Trainer came.

Even with her eyes closed, Sharon could see the edge of her vision blackening as she ran out of air.

Back in her room, Sharon spread a couple of large bath towels out over her bed, and lay herself out to air dry. She had taken a couple of tablets of the Nurse's concoction, and ticked off the Trainer in her notebook, twice. The conversation column still had a couple of half marks, but the intercourse column was complete but for the half mark on the Nurse.

She was soon asleep, and didn't wake up until the Sun pierced the thin curtains to force the issue.

Chapter 8

Examination

When she woke up, Sharon returned to her simple cotton pajamas and matching robe. When the Nurse arrived with a tray laden with breakfast, she was still going over her notes once again.

"How goes the investigation, Ms Detective?"

Placing the tray on the table, the Nurse slipped up behind Sharon. Feeling her eyes roaming the page, Sharon snapped the notebook shut.

The breakfast was quite simple; a bowl of granola, some yogurt, and about half an orange cut into wedges. The Nurse sat quietly on the bed and watched as Sharon ate it.

She was back in her scrubs, now, with her hair put up in a tight bun.

"Did you need something else?"

The Nurse nodded.

"I was thinking you'd like to examine the body."

"We did that, didn't we?"

"In situ, sure, but I meant more in detail."

Sharon thoughtfully stripped the flesh from an orange wedge.

* * *

Down in the cellar, the morgue was opposite from the baths. Geographically, it lay at the other end of the corridor, but it was opposite in other respects as well. Where the baths were warm, damp and lively, clad in soft white tiles lit by soft white light, the charnel was built from stark white tiles lit by stark white light, and the room was cold, dry and dead.

When she and Sharon arrived, the Nurse was quick to open one of the two hatches in the wall, and drew out a steel drawer. Lying on it was the Butler.

She was naked, and her corpse had been cleaned and drained of blood. The bright overhead lighting drew out every bump, scratch and

imperfection on her white skin. Her body was covered with familiar marks, a long history of edge and cudgel writ upon her flesh.

She had never seen a dead body before, not in the flesh, and she was surprised at how ordinary it felt. How much she looked as if she was merely asleep, and how much she looked as if she was not merely asleep.

Sharon had never met the Butler in life, but running her fingers along a scar on her abdomen, she felt a certain kinship with her.

"She did always like it rough, but I don't think she *actually* wanted to be stabbed to death."

The Nurse's voice brought Sharon back to reality. She hadn't known the Butler at all, and looking down at her body again, she could see the patterns in the scars now. Their deliberate, coöperative nature.

She was putting too much of herself into the investigation.

"No, of course…"

Trying to collect herself, Sharon brought her attention to the mortal wound. It was a single injury to the left central sternum, slipping between two ribs and piercing the heart. With the blood washed away, she could see that the wound was deep, but clean.

"I spent a lot of time patching her up after she'd been with the Trainer, or the Driver, or the Maid…

"Sometimes even after evenings with Mme Deux Frondes."

"What about the Gardener?"

"Neither she nor the Cook got into that kind of stuff with the Butler."

"And you?"

"I don't have it in me to wound anyone, even for fun."

Sharon slowly slid the drawer back into the wall cooler. Both steel and flesh were terribly heavy.

"Is the weapon here?"

The Nurse nodded and produced a plastic bin full of the Butler's clothes and effects. The clothes had been allowed to dry, but had not been washed, and atop the folded garments lay the dagger.

"Do we know where it comes from?"

"Yes, it's one of hers."

The Nurse pointed to the wall cooler.

Sharon put the dagger aside and started going through the clothes. Black boyshorts, a matching sports bra, a simple white shirt, alongside black slacks and a matching dinner jacket. The blood didn't show well on the black garments, but the shirt front was utterly soaked in it, and examining the clothes carefully Sharon found that the entire front of the outfit was too. Sharon found that all the shirt buttons were intact, and there were no holes in the fabric.

"Her shirt was open when she was found, right?"

The Nurse nodded, and Sharon continued.

"She wasn't stabbed *through* the shirt, she had it open for her attacker."

"I'm not entirely familiar with how she got off, but that seems consistent, right?

"She was doing some kind of edge play, and then…"

"Yeah.

"So she had to have been with someone who would do that with her."

The Nurse nodded again.

"Unless, of course, the Cook had a change of heart when it came to blood."

"That doesn't seem likely, but I suppose it's possible."

"Now, neither the Maid nor the Trainer have a solid alibi, and they would both happily lure her to her death, right?"

"They would both happily engage in knife play, I don't think they'd kill her…"

"Can you think of anyone who *would*?"

The Nurse shook her head.

"But someone *did*, so whether you can think of anyone isn't really anything."

"I suppose…"

Sharon returned her attention the knife. The blade was coated in blood, and there was a little bit of blood on the pommel, but where the Butler had gripped it tightly there was none.

"Did you have that photo?"

The Nurse nodded and fished a polaroid out of the bin.

Looking at it, Sharon reminded herself of the scene she had seen. The Butler, on the floor, in a large puddle of blood. Head towards the open wall, legs towards the hallway door. Her arm outstretched by her side, her palm free of blood, the rest of her front covered in it. Around the pool of blood was only the scratched and worn old floor.

Sharon carelessly threw the clothes back into the bin, but when time came to return the knife, she paused.

"You said this was *one* of hers?"

* * *

As the door to the Butler's apartment swung open, Sharon was shocked at the scene before her. Where the Cook's front room had been a fairly ordinary sitting room, and the Driver's front room had been a workshop of sorts, the Butler's front room had been made into a grotesque art gallery.

Painted on the wall, wrapping around the edge of the room, was a scene of Gehenna. Under red skies lit by too many suns shining through dark clouds, hundreds of naked women were being sexually tortured by

a half-dozen demons. Many were pinned to the ground by spears, or tied down with razor wire, or simply melted to the floor. All of them were covered in bleeding cuts and deep wounds. Whether their twisted expressions were those of pleasure or pain was impossible to say.

The demons, for their part, were tall women with red, purple or violet skin, one of them sporting a massive cock, all of them with great leathern wings, robust tails and gnarled, twisted horns.

Hanging from the center of the ceiling was a short chain ending in a wrought iron hook; hanging from the hook were a set of manacles. The room was only dimly lit, and the source of the light was unclear. Even in the low light, Sharon could tell that the floor below the hook was discolored and bloodied.

Some of the demons painted on the wall were life sized, and Sharon realized that their hands pushed "through" the wall, holding their demonic implements out to the room. Two whips were being proffered, as was a spear, and some sort of baton. Taking one of them from the wall, Sharon realized that the handles were in the shape of lovingly detailed cocks.

In a corner of the room, there was a chest, painted to look like a stone altar, and inside was a series of other implements; dildos with ridges and barbs, vibrators, clamps, chains, razors and knives, all in addition to more restraints of various kinds, as well as gags and blindfolds.

"She certainly knew what she liked."

The Nurse nodded.

"She painted all of this herself.

"I think the paint probably incorporates a fair bit of her blood, knowing her."

"She even painted herself into the mural."

"She did?"

Sharon pointed out a painting of the Butler in the scene of roiling flesh, the sharp tip of a demon's tail piercing her chest.

"That's so creepy.

"It's even right where she got stabbed."

Sharon nodded, and turned her attention to the toys in the chest.

"These knives are all quite functional-looking, the dagger was a lot more ostentatious."

"Tour's not done yet.

"This isn't even what I wanted to show you."

The Nurse stepped over to a black basalt obelisk painted into the scene on the wall, and opened it. Beyond lay the Butler's bedroom.

The scene inside was an odd continuation of the hellish scene outside.

There was only a single demon decorating this room, the lower half of a giant face set into the wall, partially painted and partially sculpted. The bed, such as it was, sat under this face, built to resemble a giant forked tongue, sitting partway into the gaping mouth on the wall.

The texture of it was odd as well; not soft linen or silk, but warm and slightly squishy.

At first glance, the room was otherwise empty, until Sharon turned around to see the wall behind her.

Covering it, from end to end, was an incredibly dense collection of weapons. Staffs and spears, shields and targes, hatchets, axes and maces; there were weapons of kinds Sharon had never seen before, and at least fifteen different kinds of swords and just as many daggers.

She quickly found the spot where the murder weapon was missing. It was an empty hook, sitting next to a sword in a similar style.

"So it's definitely one of hers."

The Nurse nodded.

"Which has to mean she brought it herself, right?

"Unless the Maid picked it up while cleaning, or something."

"The Maid doesn't clean here, so that doesn't seem likely."

"Who else has access to this room?"

"Well, everyone has *access*, there aren't really locked doors in this house, outside of Mme Deux Frondes' wing."

"So anyone could in principle have come here and taken it."

"I suppose."

Sharon stepped back, and moved to have a seat on the bed to think, but the Nurse intercepted her.

"I wouldn't.

"If you need a seat, we can head over to my apartment."

* * *

While the Nurse's apartment was not as disquieting as the Butler's apartment had been, it was odd in its own way. It was the same size as any of the other apartments, more or less, but it was built very differently. Where each of the other apartments had been divided into three rooms — the front room, the bedroom, and the bathroom — the Nurse's apartment had no walls. Only a narrow strip of rubber edging separated the bathroom tile from the general parquet floor, and the shower was built of transparent glass as well. The privacy that was afforded by any part of the room was a quarter wall next to the toilet, and thin muslin curtains on the Nurse's large four-poster bed.

The back wall of the room was covered with shelves, containing hundreds of medical textbooks, bins of scrubs, various drugs and tinctures, and various gauzes, syringes and other tools of the trade. The remaining

walls were covered by posters; at first glance they looked like medical diagrams, but it seemed odd that they would be quite so artistic in that case. In the middle of what would have been the front room stood what resembled a dentists chair, but without the drills and other accouterments one might expect.

With a press of a button, the Nurse put the chair into sofa mode, lowering it to the ground and stretching its various pieces out straight, allowing Sharon to sit down.

"So I don't think I heard it from you.

"Can you account for your whereabouts the day the Butler was murdered, starting with dinner."

"Of course.

"We sat down for lamb casserole at three, as I'm sure you know, and dinner was done by about four. The Driver went for dessert with Mme Deux Frondes, and the rest of us went about our day.

"Personally, I headed to the baths, which turned out to be… not a mistake, as such, but I spent forty-five minutes listening to the Gardener and the Cook fucking down the hall, which got me pretty excited.

"When they were done, I managed to nab the Gardener on her way to the baths, and brought her up to my room for a shower and a fuck instead, where we spent the next hour or so, until we heard the crash.

"The Gardener ran right out to help, and I was about to follow her when I heard the Maid scream, and the rest you know."

"Tell me anyway."

"Well, I went to see what she was screaming about, of course, and found the Butler, dead.

"I turned her over, checked for life signs, and made quit of the room."

"Stepping in the blood."

The Nurse nodded.

"But she must still have been bleeding at that point, right? Because there were no footprints in the blood when we looked at the scene in the morning."

"I suppose she must have, yes, which makes sense."

"Why do you say that?"

"It's not without reason the Butler was into knives.

"She had a blood disorder, quite rare, quite treatable — chronic hypervolumic sanguinosis.

"Basically, her body produced too much blood. It can be treated with dietary adjustments or medication, or a combination, but the best treatment is regular bloodletting.

"Well, best if you don't mind the mess. Leeches are usually used in a clinical setting, but anything that gets the blood out will work."

"Fascinating.

"You sure know a lot about everyone in the house. Their medical histories, their likes and dislikes, their schedules, all that stuff."

"Yeah, it's kind of my job."

"And people getting pickled in wine makes your job harder, right?"

"I suppose it might, yeah."

"So with the butler gone and the cellar in disarray…"

"You think my job would be easier. Easier enough that I'd kill her."

"It crossed my mind."

"Nonsense. Pure garbage.

"Now I get to play grief councilor on top of everything else, that doesn't make my job easier. And there's the issue of integrating a new servant, getting to learn all of her medical history and likes and dislikes and all that stuff.

"Makes my job easier my foot."

"Honestly, it's been puzzling me that people don't seem too broken up about the Butler's death."

"Yeah, well, because I've been playing grief councilor. I happen to be good at my job."

"Fair enough."

Sharon jumped off of the couch mode chair and rose too quickly to her feet. As her head began to swim the Nurse's surprised yelp turned to mush in her ears.

When Sharon came to, she was still in the medical chair. It was no longer in sofa mode, but shaped more as a traditional chair. Sharon found herself waking up naked and restrained, and the Nurse had found the time to change her clothes as well. Her scrubs were gone, replaced with a racy nurse's dress that was riding the line between slutty Hallowe'en costume and porn wardrobe department offcuts.

"How long was I out for?"

"Not long. No longer than necessary, anyway, that's super bad for you."

"Why the restraints?"

"Since you fainted, it would be irresponsible of me, as a medical professional, not to carry out a complete examination of your sympathetic autonomic nervous system response tone. The restraints are there to prevent somatic crosstalk."

"I think I just stood up too quickly, I'm fine, really."

"Probably, but I think we should err on the side of caution, *n'est-ce pas*?"

"I guess, but—"

The Nurse forcefully grabbed Sharon's jaw, gripping it tightly.

"The portion of the examination where you talk has concluded.

"Say aah."

Sharon did as she was bid. From a tray of tools, the Nurse produced a strange gag. The front of it was a normal enough ball gag, but the back was a massive schlong. Lubing it up with a familiar-smelling clear gel, she gently crammed it into Sharon's gullet.

The Nurse gave Sharon little in terms of explanation as she proceeded to apply the rest of the items from her tray, and restrained Sharon could not see what she was doing. What she could do was feel what was being affixed to her body; medical silicone implements securely fastened to her skin with medical tape, small electric pads giving off small electric pulses, nipple clamps, and a tight choker to accentuate the rubbery cock shoved down her throat.

Sharon was fairly experienced in anal play, but even so the plug the Nurse introduced her to was quite large, as was the intricately shaped implement she shoved in her cunt. The vibrator held fast against Sharon's clit was small, but intense. Not even her hands and fingers went undecorated, with odd rings attached to several fingers and toes.

After a round of testing every vibrating and electrifying element, the Nurse gave Sharon a warm smile.

"All set.

"This setup will stress test your system, and reveal any problems with your response tone.

"Or, hopefully, show that you're right when you say you're fine, really."

With a warm smile, the Nurse held up two hands with her fingers crossed for luck.

"The test consists of escalating cycles, and will take an hour and a half to conclude.

"*Bon courage!*"

The Nurse gave Sharon a light kiss on the nose, and put a heavy black blindfold on her. Before the equipment kicked into action, Sharon could feel a needle pierce her arm, and the careful action of a syringe injecting something into her. Finally, a pair of headphones were placed over her ears, playing strange, droning melodies.

Sharon tried counting the cycles, she tried keeping time, but her head had started swimmy, and by the time she was halfway through the third level she had come twice, and had forgotten the concept of numbers.

Chapter 9

Cleaning Up

By the time Sharon found her way back to consciousness, the sun was setting outside of her window. She was back in the guest room bed, still naked. After a quick shower, she found a teal silk romper in the wardrobe, along with a matching robe and a pair of sandals. A cloche had been left on her small dining table, and inside was her dinner; a simple salad, both croutons and dressing waiting on the side for her to add.

While eating, she went through her notes, writing down what she could remember the Nurse telling her.

The biggest revelation had been that the murder was definitively premeditated. As Sharon sat looking over her notes, the case felt so graspable, but she still had lingering questions.

Having finished her dinner, she braved the hallways yet again, and found her way to the Maid's apartment. When she knocked on the door, the Maid was quick to answer, and brought her inside.

The Maid's front room was a lot more ordinary than the apartments Sharon had seen so far. The bulk of the room was taken up by a large oak table, with eight chairs around it; a hexagonal pattern was carved into the surface of the wood, and in the shelves along the wall the Maid had plenty of tabletop roleplaying game books and figurines. Apart from the game table, the room was simply decorated. A dozen or so prints were hung on the wall, depictions of sapphic vampires in Victorian dress, blood dripping from bared fangs. They put Sharon in mind of nothing so much as a high school classmate, who had a very similar design sensibility.

The Maid herself was comparatively underdressed, in her cotton shorts and loose tank top.

Inviting Sharon in, she didn't linger in the front room, and instead brought her into her bedroom. Quite plain by comparison, the room had

flat white walls and little in it but the Maid's plain queen size bed and a chest of drawers.

The Maid tumbled into bed, and lying on her back she looked up at Sharon from her vantage point at the foot of the bed.

"More questions?"

"A few, yes."

Sharon sat down on the bed, next to the Maid's face.

"After dinner the night the Butler was killed, you were working, right?"

The Maid nodded.

"And you found the Cook having a nap after dinner, correct?"

The Maid nodded again.

"And you found the Nurse fucking the Gardener."

Yet again she nodded.

"And then you found the Butler, of course."

"Of course."

"Quite a shock, I'm sure. But… so would killing her have been, no?"

"I don't know, I guess?

"I mean, I know it was a shock, I was there. I don't know how shocking killing someone would be, having never done it."

Sharon put a gentle hand on the Maid's face. With a gentle tug, she opened her mouth.

"Never? With teeth like these?"

The Maid clenched her teeth and growled at Sharon.

"Did you tend to the guest room?"

The Maid shook her head.

"When was the last time you cleaned it?"

"That would have been a couple of weeks ago. Tossed the entire room, cleaned out expired condoms and soap, basically rebuilt the whole concept."

"That's a fun coïncidence, to do that just before a guest arrived?"

"I guess?"

The Maid shrugged.

"How badly were the hinges squeaking when you were cleaning the room out?"

"Not too badly, the door didn't stick or anything, and it was pretty quiet.

"You could hear it, I guess, but that's doors, you know?"

Sharon nodded.

"Then I think I know what happened."

Intermission

Dear reader, we come now to the part of the book where your attention to detail is put to the test. Sharon has solved the mystery — hopefully! — and if all is well, you have too.

In this little intermission, I've summarized most of the clues from across the book, but hopefully not so many that the identity of the killer is obvious; I wouldn't want to deprive you of the joy of puzzling it out yourself, this is merely a small study aid. Besides, I wouldn't want this summary to be so rich that the puzzle could be solved without reading the rest of the book!

Once you've looked over the timeline, the motives, and the alibis, be sure to make a decision for yourself as to who you think the murderer is!

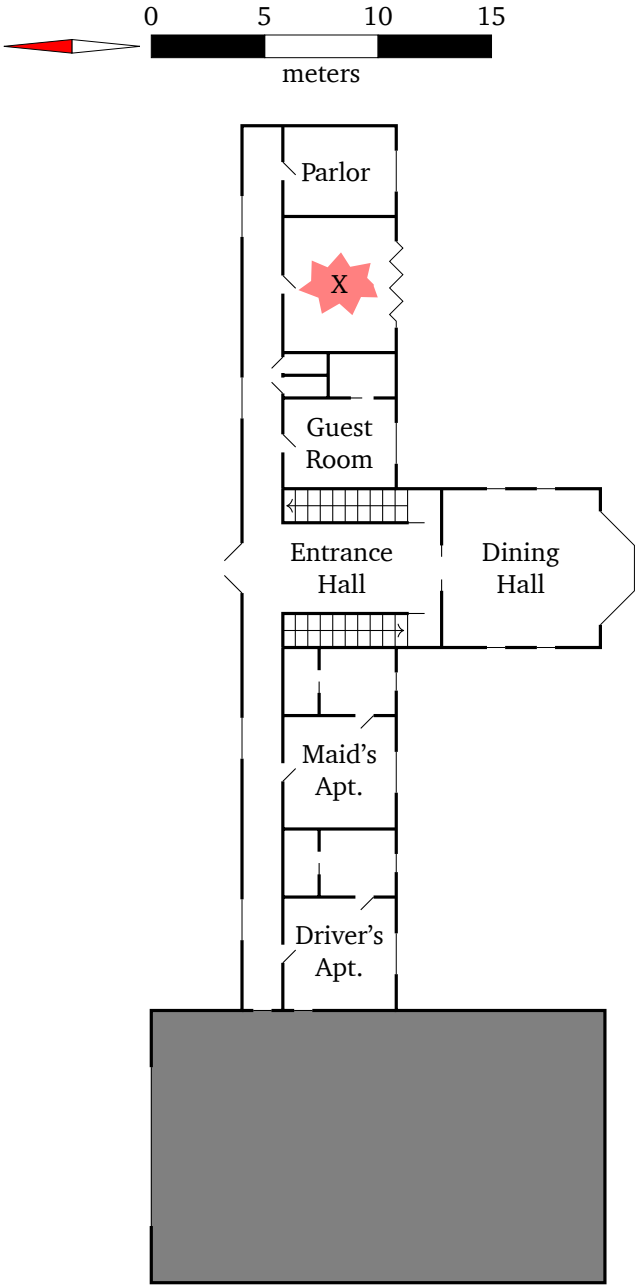
The Timeline

In Jeanette's house, dinner is served at 15:00, on the dot, every single day. All the staff were present at dinner, and for many it was the last time they saw the Butler alive. After dinner was done, around 16:00, the staff went about their evening, until a little before 18:00, when the Maid screamed bloody murder from the empty room under renovation (X on the map opposite).

In looking at the blood, Sharon discovered that the murder happened very shortly before the discovery of the body, and in looking at the choice of weapon, she discovered that the murder was certainly premeditated; whoever the murderer was, she arranged to have the Butler to bring the weapon to the murder scene.

More or less at the same time as the murder happened, Sharon's car crashed, and she was brought into the house and put up in the guest room, where she has been staying since.

In investigating the murder, Sharon decided — correctly — that there was no conspiracy: A single murderer, acting alone, without aid or support.


0
5
10
15
meters
Parlor
X
Guest
Room
Entrance
Hall
Dining
Hall
Maid's
Apt.
Driver's
Apt.

The Motives

The Cook is in charge of the kitchen, and with the Butler gone, the job of selecting wines would go to her, a clear promotion. For her part, she denied that she wants this responsibility, and even if she wanted the job, it would not go to her, automatically or otherwise.

The Driver found the Butler's views on private automobilism (foursquare against it) intolerable, and a threat to her job as chauffeur. She and others suggested, however, that the Butler liked to argue, and it was all in good fun.

The Gardener was locked in a disagreement with the Butler over how to apportion new ground in the garden; the Gardener wanted roses, the Butler wanted grapes. The Gardener does claim the arguing was all professionally grounded and with no real heat. Everything indicates that if the Gardener is sticking something in you, it's not a knife.

The Maid was warring with the Butler for the Gardener's affection, to hear the Gardener tell it. The Maid has a violent streak, to be sure, and she's not one to shy away from blood and carnage. It has been suggested that she could be covering the real shock of a kill with the feigned shock of discovering the body.

The Nurse takes her responsibility for the health of Jeanette and her servants seriously, and so might be driven to staunch the flow of wine, trading the life of one for the well-being of many. For a medical professional to develop idiosyncratic moral views is certainly not unheard of.

The Trainer wanted certain wines stocked, and the Butler was unwilling to meet her demands. A suggestion, then, is that she tried more vigorously to convince the Butler, and things got out of hand.

The Alibis

The Cook first cleared the table and fucked the Gardener in the kitchen, before retiring to her apartment and having a nap. Here she was not long before the murder by the Maid, who corroborated her alibi. Unfortunately, having been asleep the Cook could not return the favor.

The Driver joined Jeanette for a lay after dinner, and leaving the table with the madame was the last time anyone saw her before the body was found. For Jeanette to keep her servants for hours after dinner is fairly typical.

The Gardener helped the Cook clean up after dinner, and was rewarded with a dessert of her own, in the kitchen. Afterwards, she joined the Nurse for an after-fuck cooldown fuck. The Cook and the Maid could both corroborate her time in the kitchen, and the Nurse corroborated her time with the Nurse.

The Maid spent the time after dinner cleaning the servant's quarters, collecting laundry and changing the beds. She ran into several other servants during this time, but they were largely unaware of her presence, other than the Trainer, who kept her in bed for some time right after dinner, more than an hour and a half before the murder.

The Nurse headed to the baths after dinner, and then took the Gardener back to her apartment. As such, the Maid and the Gardener can both speak to where she was at the time of the murder.

The Trainer spent some time right after dinner fucking the Maid, and is the only one able to speak certainly to where the Maid was at any point in time. The inverse is also true; after she was done with the Maid, the Trainer headed out for an after-dinner walk, allegedly taking nearly an hour and a half and returning to the house right around the time of the murder. The Gardener and the Cook can confirm that she was outside of the house in her winter clothes when she helped with the car crash, but nothing else.

Chapter 10

Revelation

Night had fallen by the time the house was gathered in the parlor. Between the bookshelves, the seating and the coffee table, the little room on the corner of the house was quite cramped, especially with eight people in it. The air inside was hot, and thick with anticipation; warm and wet enough to gather on the cold window panes as dew.

On her way to the parlor, Sharon had stopped by the guest room to leave behind the sandals; they weren't very comfortable, and the floors were heated. In the parlor, there was also a high shag rug spread out over the floor, and the fur was nice on her naked feet.

The seats had room for about four people between them, so the servants were all piled high. One sofa had the Trainer and the Gardener in it, with the Nurse and the Maid in their laps. The Cook was draped over the lesser chair, with the Driver straddling her. In the grand chair, the only person with a seat of her own was sitting, regarding Sharon coolly.

The servants were all in nightclothes, and all looked rather plain next to Mme Deux Frondes in her ruby red lingerie. She wore the same lipstick as she had when Sharon first met her, and the same ruby pendant on the same simple gold chain, but her clothes were much the opposite of the dress she had been wearing. Her robe was entirely sheer, trimmed with simple red and gold, and her matching panties and bra were of lace so fine as to be transparent, and at the end of her long, pale legs, sat a pair of high heeled sandals.

Sharon had seen the outfit in one of the Driver's photos, but seeing it in the flesh was something quite other. Her own teal silk romper was quite nice, and the matching robe made it feel a bit more ostentatious, but next to Mme Deux Frondes Sharon felt entirely underdressed.

Mme Deux Frondes was the first to speak.

"So, Ms Detective, I understand you have solved our little problem?"

"I have, Mme."

"Quicker than I had expected, you are very diligent."

"Thank you."

Sharon's cheeks grew hot. She felt more that the killer had been sloppy than anything else, but surely the Mme knows better?

Mme Deux Frondes gestured for Sharon to begin, and she did.

"First, let me say that your staff has been very helpful. My success is in no small part down to their forthrightness.

"Your Nurse and your Gardener, for example, were both able to support each others alibis, as they were happy to tell me they were entwined in bed when the murder occurred. Your Driver, too, could tell me tales of how you enjoy dessert, and your Trainer was happy to furnish me with further details.

"That leaves only three people — only half the staff — without solid alibis.

"Your Trainer, your Cook, and your Maid.

"Let's start with your Cook, because it's the easiest to explain. According to herself, supported by your Maid, she was asleep in her room some time before the body was found, but not long enough to rule out being the murderer. The body was discovered very shortly after the murder, so during the…"

Sharon gestured to the Maid.

"Fifteen, maybe twenty minutes?"

"So during the fifteen, maybe twenty minutes between seeing your Cook and discovering the body, your Cook could have woken up and carried out the murder."

Sharon pivoted on her heels and turned to the Cook. She was unconcerned about the accusation.

"However! Another thing I learned thanks to the help of your Nurse was that the murder was definitely premeditated. Now, this might just be me, but I don't think I could have slept so soundly before carrying out a murder plot. Your Cook looks cold, but she cares more than that, I know.

"There was also some confusion about exactly how many people were out in the snow carrying out a rescue operation after I crashed, and I think the source of the confusion is clear.

"Your Cook was soundly asleep, and it took her longer to get outside and join than she would have liked to admit, leading to a lack of clarity on the issue."

The Cook glared at Sharon. Knowing that it was false, she hadn't minded the murder allegation, but knowing that it was true she was unhappy to be called out on her slow response to the crash.

"Next, your Trainer was out for an evening walk after dinner, as she always is."

The Trainer nodded.

"Now, that's a pretty weak alibi, I have to say. She could have returned to the house at any point, but we do know this: She went straight from the walk to the rescue effort, still in her snow boots.

"At first I thought she could have entered the empty room by way of the tarp tied over the hole in the wall, and tied it back up on her way out, but that has a couple of problems.

"For one, a photo was taken right after the body was found, and there was no snow or other debris. Your Trainer could not have entered the room without at least tracking in some snow, and probably some dirt besides. She could have killed your Butler and then *left* by the tarp, but the timeline doesn't work. Your Butler had not been dead for an hour when she was found, and we do know when your Trainer left the house; after fucking your Maid.

"For another we know the murder was premeditated, and what I hadn't mentioned was that it was arranged as a *rendez-vous* for some edge play. Your Butler would surely have been surprised by your Trainer entering by the tarp, or at any rate by the thick coat. Probably surprised enough to wonder what the hell was going on, and probably too surprised to actually get it on.

"Correct? You all were the ones to know her."

Sharon swept her gaze over the gathered crowd, and they all gave general murmurs of agreement.

"So that leaves your Maid."

Sharon turned gravely to the couch, where she could see the Trainer and the Gardener lightly grabbing hold of the Maid's arms.

"Your quiet Maid. Your mousy Maid. Your gentle, freaky, bitey, violent Maid."

The grip was tightening.

"The silent knower of the house. Moving about, seeing all, right?"

"You're wrong! I'd never do something like that to her!"

Sharon grabbed the Maid's jaw, pressing her mouth open.

"With fangs like these? Are you sure?"

The Maid fixed her eyes on Sharon's own, and stared at her in impotent rage. She was held fast by the two strong women on the couch, now, and under the watchful gaze of Mme Deux Frondes…

Sharon let go of her jaw. Out of the corner of her eye she could see a smile playing on the edges of the killer's mouth.

"But let's think about this for a moment.

"Remember what I said about the murder being premeditated. Remember what I said about your Cook surely not being able to sleep if she was planning a murder.

"Your Maid doesn't have a strong alibi, sure, but wouldn't you?"

Sharon swept her gaze over the crowd again, again to general murmurs of agreement. She made sure to spike the Cook, and could only hope that she caught on.

"If you were planning a murder, wouldn't you want a cast iron alibi?

"Now, there aren't a lot of people in this house that can manufacture a cast iron alibi, but I can think of two.

"Your Nurse has plenty of drugs and tinctures, and narcotics, and I'm sure that if she wanted to, she could easily convince your Gardener that fifteen minutes of fucking and forty-five minutes of being sedated could be an hour of fucking. In fact, I can attest to this, she can certainly control your perception of time.

"But of course, we know your Gardener wasn't sedated. When my car crashed, she was out there like a shot. Your Nurse weren't to know that the car crash was about to happen, and there would have been no need to involve her in the body being discovered. In fact, there *was* no need — she was happily out in the snow fetching me! If she had been sedated, she might well have been in a stupor even now!"

Sharon turned to loom over the Driver. The Cook *had* caught on, and she was holding the Driver tighter now.

"Which leaves your Driver. The murderer."

As the Driver tried to raise her arms, she found that the Cook was restraining her.

"Here's what I think happened, and you'll have to correct me if I'm wrong at any point.

"Some time ago you hatched this little plan. How much time you spent with the Butler planning the final performance I don't know, nor does it really matter, but a fair bit of time, I'm sure.

"I expect you made her comfortable with playing in the empty room, perhaps appealing to a sense of exhibitionism?"

The Driver impassively stared up at Sharon.

"Whatever the case, she learned to expect your presence there.

"A week or two ago, you started your final preparations, and this is where you really stepped in it, by the way. Or… well, not really, I suppose, if hadn't been for the car crash.

"One of your last steps of preparation was oiling the hinges of the guest room door. You finished the can of oil, and absently, unthinkingly, you threw it in the trash. Who wouldn't, right?

"And that room doesn't get a lot of traffic, so if it had been found weeks from now, nobody would have thought to connect it to the murder. But I did, and I did.

"And so, night before last, you put your plan into motion. You arranged for the Butler to meet you some time after dinner, knowing that you would be able to play any time spent with Mme Deux Frondes as however much time you needed.

"You knew it was a laundry night, too. The Maid does the sheets the same day every week, I'm sure."

Sharon turned to the Maid, who nodded sullenly.

"Was this week even the first time you tried to carry off your plan? I'm sure if there were previous attempts they could have been aborted at the last moment, if you were seen, or heard… how long have you been trying?"

The Driver said nothing.

"So you excuse yourself from Mme Deux Frondes, you wait for the Maid to head up to the attic to change the Gardener's sheets, and you make your way downstairs. The Butler is waiting for you, with her dagger.

"She loves a knife. Lusts after it. And you're more than happy to provide.

"When you wrap her hand in yours, curling it around the hilt, she thinks nothing of it. She thinks you want her to feel both sides when you carve into her flesh. Like you've done before, I'm sure.

"But then, instead of a cut or a nick, you plunge the dagger into her heart.

"What does it feel like? Killing a woman?"

The Driver's eyes were downcast, now, staring at the floor. The Cook's grip on her had tightened.

"The Butler would have died instantly, essentially. Hypovolumic shock would have rendered her unconscious… probably before the pain signal from her flesh being pierced reached her brain, right?"

Sharon turned to the Nurse for confirmation, and she half shrugged, half nodded.

"Certainly before she could become aware of it in any meaningful sense."

The Nurse nodded more self-assuredly, and Sharon turned back to the Driver.

"The dagger tamped the wound for long enough to let you step away before being covered in blood, and only when she hit the floor would the internal bleeding have become external, right?

"Or did you even have the stomach to stay and watch the carnage unfold?

"*No*, right?

"Besides, you would have been in a hurry.

"Out of the room, and through the freshly oiled door into the guest room, where a couple of minutes later you would have heard the Maid scream.

"In the confusion, you were able to sneak into the scrum around the body, and, well, the rest is history."

The Cook pulled the Driver's head back, forcing her to look up into Sharon's face.

"This is the part where you tell us how much she deserved it, isn't it? How much it was the only way? Or even just how good it felt?"

"You don't know anything, Ms Detective."

"I know what you did, and that's plenty."

The Driver had nothing more to say, and Sharon turned back to Mme Deux Frondes.

"There you have it. Your Driver killed your Butler. So… what happens now? The police?"

"No."

Mme Deux Frondes stood up. Even without heels she was tall, and in them she towered over Sharon.

"I'm afraid my Driver… well, my… something."

Mme Deux Frondes took a long look at the Driver.

"For now, my Doll.

"I'm afraid my Doll is correct.

"You don't know anything, Ms Detective."

Sharon looked around in puzzlement. The staff was just staring at her.

"Nothing happens in my house that escapes my notice, but your work in figuring this out was quite impressive.

"I may not have my Driver or my Butler anymore, but at least I have, until new jobs can be appointed, my Doll, and my Pet."

Her Pet looked up at her Mistress in confusion.

"Today would ordinarily have been for my Butler, but she is quite famously dead; it is a little later than I would normally have liked, but needs must."

Addressing the room, her Mistress instructed her staff.

"See to my Doll.

"I will be spending the evening inducting my seventh servant."

Epilogue

There is a series of specific, exacting steps required to induct a servant into the Bliss.

Jeanette knew these steps well, and practiced them often enough that they sprang readily to mind.

The first step was at once the easiest and the hardest. The new servant needed to *want* to be inducted.

Over the course of centuries, Jeanette had found a great many methods for bringing about this desire; threats, promises, gifts, bribes, they were all valid paths.

With her Pet, however, no such effort was necessary. A lifetime of being told had readied the girl for Jeanette to turn her to her every whim. She would have to fortify her mind, over time, Jeanette had little use for a mindless thrall, or a simple doll.

At least not on a permanent basis. As her fingers danced lightly over the front of her Pet's romper, she allowed herself to gaze into her Doll's mind. She could feel the weight of her Maid's body across her shoulders, pinning her to the table. The girth of her Cook's cock shoved down her Doll's throat. Curses and words of derision being flung at her.

Slipping the silk off of her Pet's shoulders, she closed her mind to it. She needed to focus, now. Her staff would treat her Doll to everything she deserved, she could be sure of that.

Jeanette had seen her Pet's scars before; she had traced them with the hand of her Maid and her Nurse.

"Are these scars important to you?"

Her Pet shook her head weakly. Not 'No.'; 'I don't know.'

"Are you ready to begin your service?"

Her Pet nodded, now, just as weakly. 'Yes.' enough for the ritual.

The second step was much simpler, and Jeanette had a system for it. The new servant needed to sacrifice something, and Jeanette had all her servants sacrifice the same thing.

"I'm going to need your name."

"It's Sha—"

Jeanette grabbed her Pet by the throat, silencing her. Lifting her up, she stretched out her spine, and lifted her heels just half a millimeter off of the floor.

"You misunderstand. I'm going to need to *take* your name."

Her Pet tried nodding. Jeanette could feel her muscles tense under her grip, but she could not move.

Jeanette let go.

"You are no longer Sharon George Page, you are simply my Pet. And when I find a new job for you, you will be my whatever my situation demands."

Her Pet nodded weakly. Her legs were giving out from under her, and she sank to the floor. Yanking her by her bad arm, Jeanette pulled her halfway back to her feet with a pained yelp.

"Did I give you permission to sit?"

Her Pet shook her head again; 'I don't know.' again. Jeanette threw her to the ground.

Her Pet was pliable, but not obedient. She would have to work on that.

The third step was more technical than it was challenging. The runes.

Jeanette found her emerald chalk, and began drawing on the black floor. First, two concentric circles, the smallest comfortably large enough for her Pet to sit inside. Then, the runes, incorporating the nature and substance of the sacrifice, the words of power for the Bliss, the counterweights and flourishes. Jeanette's own name. Jeanette's own price for entry.

Then, the candles. Seven of them, placed around the circle, seven candles on nine equidistant points around the circle, the two missing spots permitting entry.

The candles were made of black wax, cast as organic shapes, and their wicks enriched with a mix of mineral salts that made them burn with an eerie emerald flame.

Jeanette gestured for her Pet to enter the circle. It took her some time to understand, and some more time to crawl the short distance across the floor.

She was tired, Jeanette could tell. She had been through much in the last few days, sure, but nevertheless her stamina and resilience needed work, too.

"Sit up straight."

Her Pet did as she was told, at length.

The fourth step, the blood.

Jeanette had an obsidian chalice for just such an occasion. Her Nurse had been able to collect a decent amount of blood from her Butler, certainly enough for a number of rituals. Jeanette filled the chalice; half of it was wine, and the balance was her Butler's blood. To complete the sacrifice, she pricked her finger with a ruby needle and let a few drops of her own blood join.

She stirred it slowly with a silver rod, and placed it before her Pet.

Before continuing the ritual, she disrobed, letting her scarlet lace mingle with her Pet's discarded teal silk.

The fifth step was next, the connection.

Jeanette drew another emerald circle next to the circle of runes, larger, but just a simple line, and sat in it herself.

She brought her Pet's attention back, now, locking eyes with her.

Once again she gazed into the minds of her staff. She began with her Trainer. They had moved from the parlor, and dragged her Doll up the stairs, to her Butler's room. There, her Doll hung from the ceiling, suspended by her wrists. She was gagged and blindfolded, and her Maid was whipping her with a broad belt.

Her Gardener was standing there as well, and Jeanette expanded her gaze to include her. She could always trust her Gardener to be overflowing with lust. The amount of restraint she could feel as her Gardener tensed her body with every strike of the belt was tremendous.

Expanding her gaze to include her Nurse, Jeanette found her in conversation with her Cook. The two of them were standing in her Nurse's apartment, discussing what implements were best applied to her Doll. Some of the implements were chemical, others electronic, other still steel or rubber. Expanding her gaze to include her Cook, Jeanette could feel her Doll's cooling drool slicking her rock hard cock.

Next, Jeanette joined in her Maid's senses. With every strike of the belt she could feel the rage at being made a suspect, the fury at having her Butler taken from her, the pain of betrayal; the Bliss was not entirely one way, not entirely Jeanette seeing through the eyes of her staff. She could feel her Maid becoming aware of her Trainer and her Gardener watching her, but that did not slow her down. Even as her Maid realized that her Doll was about to be joined as well, her strikes only grew more sure and strident.

Finally, Jeanette folded in her Doll. Her senses were tremendously constrained; Jeanette had seen the blindfold, but had not noticed the earplugs. All she had was the metallic smell of her Butler's front room, the shackles digging into her wrists, and the belt falling across her back at uneven intervals. Her Doll could not scream in pain, but Jeanette could. Her Maid could, all her servants could. Her Pet was tremendously startled

to hear Jeanette suddenly squeal in pain. Of the staff, only her Maid was emotional enough to be brought to screams by the crosstalk.

Still, her whipping did not stop.

Between her Gardener's excitement, her Maid's fury and her Doll's pain, it took a dozen lashes for Jeanette to be able to absorb them without screaming, and nearly another dozen for her to be able to do anything other than focus.

When she finally managed to look up, she found her Pet staring at her with eyes like saucers.

"Drink up."

Jeanette's voice was unsteady, her breath was ragged. This was not the hardest she had had to work for a ritual, but it was up there.

Her Pet lifted the chalice to her lips and attempted to drink. She did not manage a large sip before slamming the chalice back down, coughing and sputtering, spilling nearly half of what she had drunk on the floor in front of her.

"I said drink up, not spit up."

At this admonishment, her Pet returned to the chalice. She got a little deeper this time, but not a great deal more successful in keeping the wine down.

"You will drink up, even if it means…"

Focusing on both her Pet and her staff at once was no small task.

"Even if it means licking it off the floor."

Her Pet drank again, and again she failed. Doubled over, she heaved and retched, and clumsily she upturned the chalice. To Jeanette's eye, only about a third of the blood was in her Pet; another third had been spit up on the floor, and the remaining third had poured from the toppling chalice.

"What did I just say?"

"I… It's so… I can't…"

Only the drop of Jeanette's blood in the chalice mattered at all, and it was mixed well enough into the bulk that her Pet had certainly taken it. Jeanette debated briefly with herself as to whether she would force the issue at this juncture, but decided against it.

She would have a long, *long* time to inculcate a sense of obedience and a taste for blood in her Pet. Pushing it here had no purpose.

"I'm sorry…"

Her Pet was weeping. The fear in her voice was palpable.

Trying to put her at ease was hard in this state, especially with the falls of the belt across her Doll's back. A surprisingly strong one drew another scream from Jeanette. Her Pet would have to do it scared.

The sixth step was the words of power.

Between halting breaths, occasionally interrupted by screams, Jeanette uttered the ancient words, each syllable greeted with a heart-rending thump through her body. She could see her Pet through a haze of tears, staring in disbelief and trepidation, made weak and unsteady by words that predate both gods and men.

Finally, the last word was out.

Just as her Nurse thrust one of her odd implements into her Doll's cunt, Jeanette passed the connection with her staff to her Pet. Her Pet's first scream could have been an expression of shock and surprise, but the second scream told Jeanette that the connection had been successfully passed, and the third scream told her that it was holding.

The ritual was not done yet, but Jeanette already knew it had worked perfectly.

Her Pet was entirely overwhelmed with the sensations of the Bliss.

Writhing, she kicked over one of the candles, but the black slate floor had nothing to burn, and there was no rush to put anything out.

The seventh and final step was ready to commence. The seal.

Jeanette's mind was completely her own now, or rather, it was no longer intruded upon by her staff. Those voices had been passed to her Pet, and instead she was buffeted by voice from below; most familiar to her, some new. Her mother was among the voices, and her hundred hundred sisters, congratulating her on her newest conquest, drinking in the lingering pain she had harvested from her Doll, the rage she had harvested from her Maid, even the fear she had harvested from her Pet.

She could feel one of her sisters approach, now, joining with her, helping her assert her true body in the mortal realm.

Her pale, soft flesh strained and split. First along the long ridges; her legs, her shins, her arms and her back. Droplets of blood were flung into the room, spattering her Pet and extinguishing two of the candles. Below, the skin was ruby red; covered in ridges and cratered with pockmarks.

Disguised — mortal — Jeanette Deux Frondes was smooth and round, muscles refusing to show themselves. Her true body was much different. Her legs and arms were strong, and they showed it. Bulging muscles jutting from thick bones, covered in rough skin that seemed too tight.

Her shoulders and neck split next, and her feet burst into gore as wide hooves stampeded through some fault line in reality. Standing up, she stomped out the fallen candle. When pretending to be human, Jeanette Deux Frondes was a head and a half taller than her pet; in her true form, she was nearly twice her height. For precisely this reason the master wing had no attic, just tall eaves above the ritual room.

As Jeanette curled her fingers around her Pet's bad arm to pull her to her feet, her skin burst open, and her soft manicured hands gave way to

gnarled red claws with sharp black nails.

Returning to the Bliss, she looked up at herself through her Pet's eyes. The strikes of the belt were nothing on her; they wouldn't be even if they were falling on her own skin, but certainly what was happening to her Doll had no effect on Jeanette now.

The remainder of her false flesh was falling away. Spun copper hair gave way to a wild black mane, her delicate breasts were replaced with massive tits, nipples pierced with heavy golden rings that would look big in the nose of a bull, and her cunt had yielded to a massive cock.

Sprouting from her back, her massive leathern wings reached nearly to the tall ceiling, still dripping with the gore from her false form.

Her yellow eyes stared into her Pet's, boring into her soul.

Jeanette place a broad hand on her Pet's ass, taking the weight off of her bad arm and guiding her cunt to the tip of her cock.

"It's…"

Her Pet attempted to speak between screams.

"too big…

"too much…"

She was incoherent with pain and pleasure. Jeanette corrected her misapprehension.

"No."

Opening her mouth wide, Jeanette stretched out her long, black tongue, wrapping it twice around her Pet's neck before thrusting it down her throat.

Ordinary flesh would be torn asunder and ruined by Jeanette sliding her cock into it, to be sure, but the ritual had furnished her Pet with marvelous protective wards. As the cock slid into her, she was able to experience it pushing through the length of her torso, without being harmed by it. Much.

Feeling mortal flesh being carved into meat by her cock was one of Jeanette's greatest pleasures. Feeling it tear the body asunder as if it was her own, feeling the flesh tightening around her as she thrust into it again and again; resonating with the pain her Doll was feeling, as well as the pleasure as her Gardener finally gave in to her desires and began sucking her cunt to really confuse matters for the restrained sinner.

It did not take Jeanette long to orgasm; not long enough at all.

The amount of cum was tremendous, and with her cock still buried deep in her Pet, she vomited the cum onto her chest, mixed with blood and wine, leaving her gasping for air.

The taste was exquisite.

The Pet awoke in the guest room to sunlight streaming through the thin curtains.

The night before seemed like a million miles away, and turning the events over in her mind, she found herself doubting that they ever happened.

Soon, however, the rest of her body woke up, and on her lips she could feel the taste of cum, and blood, and wine, and sulfur. Her whole body was aching as if she had been shredded by a cock the size of a fence post, and her arm was hurting as bad as it had been since the crash.

Most of all, the thing that told her last night really happened was the cacophony of whispers invading her mind. She could feel Mme Deux Frondes' eyes staring through her own, a hundred hundred voices whispering commentary in languages she did not understand.

The Pet found it hard to move from bed, and she lay there for a while, just feeling her body. As much as it was her body, now.

She could feel Mme Deux Frondes' hands, too, seeking to move her own hands. Questing down her body, a pair of fingers slipping into the folds of her cunt.

Before she could complete it, her morning ritual was disrupted by the Maid knocking on the door, and rather than waiting for a reply, she let herself in. She was wearing her classic maid's dress again, and looked quite cheerful.

"Good morning, Pet!"

"Good morning."

"It took some doing, but I managed to wrangle some clothes for you."

The Pet pushed herself up in bed, letting the covers fall away. To her eye, the Maid hadn't *brought* anything.

Striding up to the bed, the Maid pulled a thin strip of silk out of a pocket. Leaning over the Pet, she fastened the choker around her neck, and gave her a kiss as she pulled away.

"You taste good."

"If you say so.

"It's quite revealing, isn't it?"

The Maid nodded.

"It suits you, I think.

"And it suits your job, such as it is."

The Pet sank back into bed.

"Yeah, what exactly does 'pet' entail?"

With a gentle hand, the Maid cupped one of the Pet's breasts, before changing course and tweaking it roughly.

“Why don’t I show you?

fin.

About This Book

This book was written on an ailing Apple Mac Pro (Late 2013) by an ailing Trans Woman (Late 1986). It is written, typeset and published using predominantly free software. The text is written in GNU Emacs and typeset using LaTeX 2_ε, specifically using GNU Make, latexmk, xelatex, and xdvipdfmx. The source archive for this book is serialized using bsdtar, and compressed using bzip2. The text is set in Charter Roman, and is dimensioned for printing on ISO A5 paper. It uses the memoir document class for the bulk of its formatting.

This book is, as far as is possible, written without the use of so-called "AI". This includes, obviously, LLMs to generate text, but also all the less obvious ways in which so-called "AI" intrudes on the creative process. Spell checking of this book is done without the use of "enhanced" spell checkers, and is done instead using GNU Aspell; grammar checking is done without the use of "enhanced" grammar checkers, and is instead dutifully done by hand. Research is done, as far as is possible, without the use of large scale search engines, and instead using Wikipedia's and Wiktionary's text search. This research process is also supplemented with the time-honored tradition of making shit the fuck up.

Finally, the writing and finalization of this book is aided by the author masking every day to help keep both herself and those around her healthy. None of us are free until all of us are free, and "all of us" includes disabled and immunocompromised people.

Be kind. Be nice. Be honest. Be good.

Fuck AI. Embrace Human Creativity.