
Praise for Molly Tanzer

“Tanzer’s first novel is a splendid page-turner of a Weird West adventure [...] This hugely entertaining mixture of American steampunk and ghost story is a wonderful yarn with some of the best dialogue around.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *Vermilion*

“Old West steampunk has another appealing heroine in Lou (pair her with the equally winsome female lead of Elizabeth Bear’s *Karen Memory*) to go along with the delightfully over-the-top villains. The pages turn themselves in this debut novel from a small press that deserves a big audience.”

—LIBRARY JOURNAL on *Vermilion*

“Lou is one of the most delightful and charismatic fictional creations in recent memory. Her compelling blend of world-weary wryness and wide-eyed vulnerability makes for some firecracker dialogue, but it also reflects Tanzer’s kaleidoscopic view of the Old West, a place that’s far more dazzling and diverse than most history books have led us to believe. ... *Vermilion* is a unique, heart-thought-provoking romp that rewrites history with a vivacious flourish.”

—NPR on *Vermilion*

“All too infrequently do I encounter a new voice as delightful, compelling, and intelligent as that of Molly Tanzer. Or, for that matter, an author with such a range. But here, in *A Pretty Mouth*, is the shining gem that keeps me sorting through the rubble. If this is only the beginning of her work, I can hardly wait to see where she’s headed!”

—CAITLIN R. KIERNAN on *A Pretty Mouth*

“*A Pretty Mouth* is a fine and stylish collection that pays homage to the tradition of the weird while blazing its own sinister mark. Tanzer’s debut is as sharp and polished as any I’ve seen.”

—LAIRD BARRON on *A Pretty Mouth*

“If Hieronymus Bosch and William Hogarth had together designed a Fabergé egg, the final result could not be more beautifully and deliciously perverse than what awaits the readers of *A Pretty Mouth*. Molly Tanzer’s first novel is a witty history of the centuries-long exploits of one joyfully corrupt Calipash dynasty, a family both cursed and elevated by darkness of the most squamous sort. This is a sly and sparkling jewel of a book, and I can’t recommend it enough—get *A Pretty Mouth* in your hands or tentacles, post-haste, and prepare to be shocked, charmed, and (somewhat moistly) entertained!”

—LIVIA LLEWELLYN on *A Pretty Mouth*

“Molly Tanzer is a prose Edward Gorey, decadent, delicious, and ever so slightly mad.”

—NATHAN LONG on *A Pretty Mouth*

THE
PLEASURE
MERCHANT;
or, The Modern
Pygmalion

Molly Tanzer

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THE
PLEASURE
MERCHANT

*For Sabrina,
and for Lucretia,
and all disappointing Galateas*

Prologue

I have a story to tell you.

It is not a love story, but there is love in it. True love, even.

Neither is it a revenge tale, though it contains plenty of that, too.

It is a story about *pleasure*.

Everyone thinks something different when they think of pleasure.

Most people immediately consider the carnal—‘pleasures of the flesh.’ They imagine bodies pressed against bodies, wriggling or pumping, diddling or caressing, moaning and releasing. Shuddering, trembling encounters, be they sweet or savage, between two lovers in the secret darkness of a boudoir, or shared among many, before onlookers, in a brilliant ballroom, a shadowed schoolroom, a candlelit church... or some place yet more scandalous.

Others, when they think of pleasure contemplate a table, laden—no, *groaning* under the weight of every delicacy. Fruits from all seasons, meats from every creature, spices from the East or from the Indies, sugared treats, piping hot teas from Formosa, coffee from the Americas, the tenderest vegetables, the rarest cheeses; the flakiest pastries and the richest gravies.

Some think of revenge. It is a dark pleasure, yes, but a pleasure nonetheless. That most loathed rivals—how hated are her success; how despised, his triumphs! What many would give to see someone brought low before all and sundry, kneeling, red-faced and humiliated, tears running down their running nose, furious but sorrowful, embarrassed but impotent...

Others still think of freedom. Freedom to, sometimes; other times, freedom *from*.

If there is one thing I know well—*intimately*, even—it is pleasure. It is my trade, as it has been since I was very young indeed. I have made a fortune selling people their pleasure, as my master promised I would—it is how he made his fortune, and his mistress, too. There is money to be made in pleasure, something any courtesan, chef, or crook knows quite well—money to be made in the procurement or someone’s pleasure, and money to be made in keeping the secret of what that person’s pleasure turns out to be.

When one deals in pleasure, one must also deal in the reverse. In pain, in sorrow; in anguish, misery, and despair. I confess I know all of those sensations intimately, as well.

You only truly know a man when you know his pleasure.

That is what my master told me when I decided to become his apprentice, and my extensive experience has proven this statement true. When you know a man’s pleasure, you hold him in the palm of your hand. You know his truest self—his darkest secret and his brightest dream. You have a power over him... which is why my master and I enjoyed safety and security, along with our wealth.

Violate our contract at your peril. Never ours.

But even truer is something my master never said, which accounts for its lack of pithiness (I have exceeded him in various ways, but never in producing *bons mots*):

Sometimes, a man only *thinks* he knows what his pleasure is. And when you know not what a man believes his pleasure to be, but what it truly is, well... then you know him better than he knows himself.

himself.

Ah, but I promised you a story, not pages of rambling, oblique speculation. It is just, now that I have resolved to write down this story, I don't quite know where to begin. I have kept so many secrets for so long—lived a secret life for so many years. It is overwhelming to sit here, putting quill to parchment, to tell, well... any of it.

There is no way to do this without betraying many people, all of whom trusted me. But my master, the only person whom I can say with certainty I have never betrayed, is dead. No harm can come to him. And anyone who recognizes themselves in these pages would do worse damage to the reputation by protesting their depiction—to come forward would only serve to confirm any suspicions that might potentially be aroused.

And yet, I possess such a volume of information about the entire affair that I know not how I shall organize it all into a compelling narrative. Life is not a story. It must be shaped for the page—which is why, in the end, this effort of mine will likely be accused of beggaring belief, possessing as it does similar motifs to popular novels of the day.

But my story, unlike said novels, has the benefit of being true.

Having said all this, it is time to begin in earnest. And I shall begin... in a wig shop.

Part One

Pleasure

Chapter One

It was the peak of that year's season and the entertainments were so constant it seemed at times there was more to be enjoyed than people to enjoy it all. Among the delights to be taken in, *Artaxerxes* was drawing tears from every eye at Covent Garden, and David Garrick was still playing Jaffer in *Venice Preserved* at Drury Lane. Ranelagh Gardens were pleasant enough, in spite of the cold, and on the Strand there was a dancing pig, and a chained giant who would snap whole logs in half, hurl boulders out into the Thames, and drink any man under the table who dared challenge him. Bethlehem Hospital was not wanting for inmates, nor parties for society; the clubs were all packed with gentlemen, and young ladies in London for their first season were popping up everywhere like early roses, their new swains buzzing about them like eager bees.

Even with so much to occupy the crowds, there was one soir e that stood out among all the rest; half the rumors proved true, it would be the affair of the century. Lord Chandoss's imminent fancy dress party was discussed daily in parlors and bedrooms, courtyards and mews, and everywhere else you might imagine. Every tailor, draper, milliner, and costumier was completely booked up until the day of the grand event. Those who waited too long or were of lesser means had to sew or embroider anything that was wanted—and out of whatever they had on hand, for nothing of worth could be purchased in shops, not a scrap of lace nor a nicely-trimmed feather. It seemed that everything had been bought by those with invitations for a wild night spent among highwaymen and angels, harems of girls and savage devils, pirates, bacchantes, knights, caesars, bards and queens.

Busier than usual, too, were the wig-shops—shops such as Dray's, a small but exclusive barber-cum-wiggery in St. Martin's Lane. Dray's had received so many orders that Tom, Mr. Dray's almost-nephew and journeyman apprentice, wondered at the sheer volume of hair they had lying about. Given the trade at the back door of the shop, he was convinced none of the prostitutes in St. James, St. Giles, or Marylebone could possibly be wearing their own hair; it wasn't only Dray's paying three times the usual rate for locks of any quality and any color. Add to that all the women who were a few inches short of making ends meet and you had yourself a city of bald-headed females, and for the sake of one night.

The wig upon which Tom currently labored was, at least in terms of volume, the grandest of the recent orders. Mr. Robert Mauntell was attending Lord Chandoss's party as John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, and Wilmot had certainly been a bigwig in his day. Thrilled to be in charge of such a grand commission, Tom had spent hours in the back room of the shop, painstakingly dying every luscious lock a shade of winsome oak-brown before curling them with hot irons. The finished ringlets he had affixed with the special proprietary serum designed by Mr. Dray to help hair keep its shape. It also made the whole affair shine and glimmer—under candlelight, it would be spectacular.

That morning, Tom was dusting the curls with scented powder. He was alone in the shop; Mr. Dray, Mrs. Dray, and their daughter Hizziah were still upstairs, enjoying their breakfast, but Tom didn't mind working while they lingered over their rolls and tea. He liked being alone in the shop. It meant he could talk to his wigs.

"You're a beauty," he said. "You look soft as a kitten and natural as mother's milk. What a shame you'll be worn once and discarded. Taken off halfway through the night, given your weight, I'd wage

A few hours gracing the head of Mr. Mauntell and *pouf!* You'll be torn off and tossed on the back a..."

A knock at the front door startled him, for it was early yet. Dusting off his hands and hanging up his apron, he hurried to the front of the shop. A youth in a wide-skirted coat and a tricorne hovered in the street, craning his neck to try to see in past the glare of the shop-window. Tom hoped it was someone coming by to check on a current order instead of another last-minute party guest trying to squeeze in a request; yesterday, Mr. Dray had said they must turn away any new clients needing work done before Saturday. The responses of those who had called afterwards ranged from disappointed to irate.

As he reached the door the youth knocked again.

"Just a moment," called Tom as he unlocked the door; opening it, he bowed. "Welcome to Dray's. How may I be of help?"

"Shockingly enough, I need a wig." The boy winked at him as he swept off his hat; he was cheerful and smiling and handsome a fellow as Tom had ever seen in his life. "I *do* hope that's all right? Ah, but how rude of me—I am Callow Bewit. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance."

"The pleasure is mine, Master Callow," said Tom, for he reckoned the boy at ages with him, around sixteen—though it was hard to tell, with all that powder and rouge. "My name is Tom. I'm Mr. Dray's apprentice."

"Very good. Well! About this wig—you make all kinds?"

"Yes, we do... but Master Callow, if I might ask... how soon would you need this wig?" Better to let him down quickly, if he wanted something for Lord Chandoss's ball.

"Saturday. Is that a problem?"

Tom winced. "I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid we're not able to accommodate any more commissions at this time."

"Damn." Callow sucked his teeth and leaned on his stick. "That's what I get for waiting until the last minute. And it was such a good idea for a costume..."

"What are you going as?" Tom had been cataloguing all the different customer's notions.

"A woman."

"What?" Tom knew his tone was impertinent, but he was just so surprised. "Really?"

Master Callow pursed his lips together, making them appear fuller, as he raised his shoulder coquettishly. "With some false bubbies it should look all right. I think I can pull it off—don't you?"

"Well..."

"Come on—tell me honest."

Tom chuckled. "I fear you have me at a disadvantage, Master Callow, for I do not know whether it would be more polite to agree or disagree."

Callow laughed merrily. "I see! Ah, it doesn't really matter, I suppose, it will make people laugh either way. Oh, if only I hadn't forgotten about the wig! I have everything else at hand, even the bubbies. The dress is so lovely, it would have been sensational... but I can't go wearing my own hair. It's too short."

A quick inspection of Callow's waving chestnut locks inspired Tom. "Actually, perhaps we *can* help you, Master Callow..."

"Oh?"

"Most ladies don't wear wigs," he said. "They just wear locks of false hair dressed into their own, lightly powdered to make it all the same color."

"I say, really?" Callow looked impressed. "I'd no idea."

"In France, women will often wear full wigs, but that style is a bit too European for most English girls of good breeding and taste. False locks create the illusion of fullness without being so vulgar."

"Clever creatures, aren't they—the fairer sex, I mean? They'd dupe us all with their wiles... if

weren't for the honest tradesmen willing to betray their secrets."

"~~Too true, sir! But, I mention this because a lady just yesterday returned three pieces. She~~ overbought, and knew we were wanting for hair. Mr. Dray hasn't decided what to use them for, but they're of a distinctive shade, but it's not too far off from your own. If you bought a bit of... let's say pink-tinted wig-powder, it should do you all right for a fancy-dress party if you've a lady's maid to pin it all for you."

"I do; my aunt's," said Callow thoughtfully. "She'd agreed to cinch my corset-strings and whatever else, so surely she can help with my hair. Yes, that's just the thing! I'll take the hair and the powder both. Thank you very much—you've saved me!"

"You are most welcome, I'm glad we could help. Excuse me a moment, and I'll fetch them for you." With a bow, Tom repaired to the back room. Retrieving the locks from the shelf where the thick braids sat coiled like serpents, he swaddled them in tissue, tied it all with a ribbon, and then wrapped the parcel and the wig-powder together in brown paper, tying it with twine.

"I say. Look at the size of that wig!"

Master Callow had followed him; he was peeking into the workroom and staring at the massive hairpiece on the stand. Tom opened his mouth to request that he leave—customers were not typically allowed in the back room—but bit off his protest, afraid of seeming rude.

"Is the owner going as Charles the Second?"

"No, John Wilmot," said Tom absently as he tied the knot on the parcel. "Mr. Maun—ah, the gentleman's tastes run to the poetic rather than the political. But, I say, would you mind not... Callow was thoughtfully fingering one of the perfect curls he'd been laboring over, and it took a Tom's willpower not to strike the boy's soft hand away from it. The nerve! Even though he could see no harm had been done, it annoyed Tom that the young scoundrel had put his hands on it in the first place.

"I beg your pardon!" Callow dropped it and raised his hands, backing away slowly, making a show of it. "Well, it's a very fine piece; I imagine it will cost him a pretty penny. Speaking of which, how much will my odds and ends be?"

"The hairpieces? Altogether, ten guineas, with the powder."

"*Ten guineas?* I bought myself a decent enough wig for seven pounds just last month!"

"Hair is very dear right now..."

Master Callow sighed. "I suppose it serves me right. Well... I only have five on me..."

"Does Mr. Bewit have an account here?"

"I expect we'll open one as you've been so kind in my time of need. Will five be enough to..."

Tom hesitated. Mr. Dray did not like to extend credit to strangers, but neither would he want Tom to refuse service to gentlefolk. "Of course, Master Callow."

"Good, good."

Tom thought the lad was reaching for his coin purse, but instead he withdrew a fine pocket watch. It was silver, with a rose inlaid in what looked like carnelian and jade. Callow checked the time.

"How nice, I'll be early for my next appointment," he said, sounding most satisfied. He noticed Tom looking at the watch. "Pretty little thing, isn't it? It was made in Versailles, for my mother."

"It's exquisite."

"Inside and out." Callow opened the watch to show the face. The silver backing caught the early morning sunlight streaming through the window, catching Tom square in the eyes.

"I find its sound most soothing, don't you?"

Callow Bewit seemed unaware he kept blinding Tom with flashes of light. Between that and listening to the ticking Tom began to feel queer and a bit sick, like the time he'd lost his breakfast on the Thames during a windy crossing. He felt his heart beating in his ears, he was going to faint...

“Steady now!”

~~Callow helped him into a chair, and he had just settled himself when Mr. Dray’s daughter Hizziah~~ came into the room. Even feeling as queasy as he did, he noticed she was looking particularly lovely in a pale blue morning gown trimmed with foamy white lace. Her light brown hair tumbled naturally all about her rose-pink cheeks, curling around her neck.

“Tom? Oh, I *do* beg your pardon,” she said, dipping into a curtsey. Callow left Tom’s side, looking at Hizziah with considerable interest.

“It is I who should beg *your* pardon, madam,” said Master Callow, bowing gracefully to the young lady. Hizziah blushed to be addressed so familiarly by the young stranger.

“Is he—are you quite all right, Tom?”

“He just came over queer all of a sudden,” supplied Callow.

“Yes, I’m fine now, Hizzy—Miss Dray,” he said. Indeed, just as suddenly as it had come upon him Tom’s nausea and disorientation were gone; he couldn’t even remember what had precipitated it. He and Callow had been concluding their transaction, and then...

“You don’t look fine.” Hizzy came over and put her cool hand on his warm forehead.

“Really, I’m all right.”

Tom had loved Hizziah Dray since the morning he had first seen her, as he stood awkwardly on Mr. Dray’s doorstep while the woman from the Foundling Hospital explained their almost-bloody connection, practically begging Mr. Dray to take Tom in due to the crowding at the orphanage. He had been so grateful when Mr. Dray agreed to make him an apprentice, and he was grateful to Mr. Dray’s daughter, now, for her concern... but his mood soured when, after declaring his health, her attention immediately turned to Callow. She was clearly quite taken with the lad.

Though he did not consider himself a jealous person, Tom felt something stirring inside him, a green serpent writhing deep within his stomach. He did not like seeing her so interested in this Callow Bewit. She was beautiful enough to be a lord’s consort, but Hizzy also had a fine head for figures; she was the ideal shopkeeper’s wife. A month ago he’d grown bold enough to ask if one day she would like to be such, and her shy but undeniably favorable response had given him high hopes for the future—higher than a mere orphan with no connections in the world could reasonably expect. The notion that some good-looking young gentleman with dashing manners might snatch all that away disturbed Tom deeply. How could Hizzy fail to see that a man like that would jilt her and leave her with bitter regrets and a bigger belly?

“So you are *Miss Dray*?” asked Callow, looking Hizzy over with obvious approval. “I see that Mr. Dray produces as fine daughters as he does wigs.”

Hizzy laughed. “My father makes the best wigs, so I shall take that as a compliment, Master...”

“Callow Bewit,” he said, with another of his ridiculous bows.

Though still a bit dizzy, Tom stood, and handed over the gentleman’s parcel—he felt he ought to put himself between them, lest Hizzy lie down on the work-table and lift up her skirts right then and there for this fop.

“My apologies for the inconvenience, Master Callow,” said Tom, trying not to let his irritation show, “but as I am sufficiently recovered, allow me to complete our exchange.”

The lad put his five guineas on the table. “I’ll let you get back to dressing your wig, then. I really can’t thank you enough. And as for *you*, madam,” he turned to Hizzy, “please give my father my *personal* regards to Mr. Dray, and pray tell him we’ll be opening an account here very soon.” The callow had the gall to wink at her!

“Thank you, Master Callow,” said Hizzy, demurely lowering her eyes.

Tom coughed into his fist. “May I show you out?”

“No no, I can find my way.” Callow winked at him, this time. It made Tom feel queer for some

reason he couldn't quite identify...

~~“What a nice young man,” said Hizzy, after Callow had gone. Tom frowned at her. “What? He was charming!”~~

“I wonder if you'd like him if you saw him Saturday night,” he remarked. “He's going to Lord Chandoss's party dressed as a woman.”

Hizzy giggled. “Those lips! Painted and powdered he'll look beautiful.”

Tom felt as if a wasp had stung him on the heart. He opened his mouth to say something cutting, but then Mr. Dray came down into the workroom.

“Who will look beautiful?” he asked.

“One of Lord Chandoss's guests,” said Hizzy, as if nothing at all had happened. Resentment made Tom turn away, lest master or daughter notice. “Callow Bewit, he said his name was. A young gentleman.”

“Never you mind about young gentlemen, Hizzy,” said Mr. Dray, not unkindly. “Go on and help your mother with the chores, and this afternoon we'll go over the books from last week. I want you to check my maths.”

Hizzy curtseyed to her father before scurrying upstairs. Tom watched her go, feeling even more of sorts until she blew him a kiss from behind her father's back. That cheered him up considerably.

“Goodness, my boy,” said Mr. Dray, admiring the Wilmot wig on the stand. “You've done a fine job with this one. I doubt Rochester himself could find a thing wrong with it.”

“Thank you very much, sir.” Mr. Dray was a kind father, a good master, and a better wigmaker. Working alongside him was a privilege as well as a pleasure. His compliments meant the world to Tom.

“Anything new? Hizzy said there'd been a customer?”

“Yes... I sold those three hairpieces to the young gentleman.” Tom saw annoyance flit across Mr. Dray's face, to his surprise. “I apologize if I erred,” he said quickly, “but the lad needed a few locks of hair, for the party, and I hated to disappoint him. He paid five guineas for it all, and promised five more, plus an account.”

“I see,” said Mr. Dray, looking more content. “I do wish you'd gotten it all, but I understand how it goes with the young men these days. We'll see if he really does come back... but for now, I must see to Mr. Sedley's barrister's wig. I was going to use those pieces you sold, but I suppose I can eke it out with horse-hair. It'll all be powdered white anyways...”

Tom breathed a bit easier after Mr. Dray turned to his work. He was unhappy to have incurred a rebuke, even a mild one. It didn't happen often, given Tom's diligence and obedience, but it always made him a bit nervous. It was within Mr. Dray's rights to terminate Tom's apprenticeship at any time... not that Tom really thought he would. Still, it never hurt to be cautious—to be dismissed at this juncture would be nothing short of disastrous. All his future plans, professional and personal, depended on completing his apprenticeship.

They were very busy the rest of the day. By the time they closed the shop, hours later than usual, Tom had forgotten all about Master Callow Bewit. But the night of the party, when he was in his attic room, reading by himself, Tom remembered.

What a time Callow Bewit must be having! Rumor had it that fifty cases of champagne had been imported for the event, along with twenty pounds of caviar, and seventeen Wiltshire hams. Someone had declared the kitchens had prepared forty gallons of white soup, and as for the volume of cream, eggs, milk, and flour ordered for fancy puddings—why, it was more food, and finer, than Mrs. Dray bought in a year. The fishmonger had claimed Lord Chandoss's cook had demanded twelve enormous pikes to be cured for the event, and Jordan, the milliner's errand-boy, had reported a troupe of gypsies. Actors had been hired for an entertainment, as well as three different ensembles for musical interludes.

Tom couldn't begin to imagine the spectacle, and he very much doubted he would ever to see anything like it.

A low knock at the door drew Tom's mind away from these musings.

"Tom?" It was Hizzy. With a sharp snap Tom shut *Robinson Crusoe* and threw it on the bed as he leaped off it. Only once before had Hizzy dared to sneak up to his room, and his memory of the encounter made his heart beat the quicker as he opened the door for her.

"Come in," he whispered, taking care to shut the door softly. Mr. Dray might be fond of his foundling apprentice, but not fond enough to overlook his trifling with his only daughter.

"I couldn't sleep," she said. "I kept thinking about the party."

"Me too," admitted Tom.

"That boy," she said, coloring slightly, "how do you think he looked? As a woman, I mean?"

Forgotten jealousy welled inside Tom like black blood in a wound. "He had a womanish look to him already," he said acidly. "Though you seemed to like him well enough."

Hizzy seemed a bit taken aback. "I was only being polite," she said softly.

"Were you?" Tom sniffed and turned his back on her, all his former excitement gone. "You warmed to his advances quicker than you did to mine—but I suppose it's to be expected. A pretty young gentleman will naturally command more respect from the ladies than lowly orphans."

"It's not about respect," said Hizzy. The girl had the nerve to sound exasperated! "I'm not sneaking out to meet *him* late at night, am I?"

"I suppose not," Tom allowed.

"Don't be cross," she murmured, stepping closer and taking his hand in hers. She was so very beautiful, standing there in her white shift in the dim candlelight, eyes shining. Her shell-pink tongue snaked out, moistening her parted lips so that they gleamed. "I can't believe you would think I preferred a coxcomb like that to you, Tom."

Tom's resentment cooled and softened as something else stiffened and grew hot. He let go of his hand and kissed the back of her hand. "You're good as gold, Hizzy." He drew her closer. "Warmer though... and you smell better..."

"Gold can't return a kiss, either," she said, pressing her lips under his ear, which sent a thrill of pleasure straight to his tight groin.

"Oh, Hizzy," he groaned. "Don't, you're making it ache so."

"You don't think I'd leave you in such a state?" Her fingers brushed his cock through his breeches and he almost came right there. "Did you mean it, Tom? Last time, after we... when you asked if I would want to be a wife one day? Your wife?"

"Of course," he said, thrusting into her palm. "Christ, Hizzy, I've loved you since... since... since God, *don't*..." She'd unbuttoned him, and snaked a hand down to cup his balls with just the right amount of firmness. "I'll..."

"Not yet," she said, leading him by the twist to his bed.

He sat down in something like a daze, as she knelt between his legs. Pushing him back she freed his prick, which sprang free with such force the little dewdrop clinging to the tip splattered her cheek. With a giggle, she wiped it off with a slender finger and sucked it clean.

"Will you..." he licked his lips. Last time, she'd satisfied him with her hand, but he was eager to know more of his future bride. "Will you put it in your mouth?" he asked, all in a rush.

Slowly, delicately, she lowered her lips and kissed it. Pleasure like he'd never known overwhelmed him, took possession of him, and he hauled her up onto the narrow bed. Throwing her shift over her head he buried his face in the hairy patch between her legs. Her strong but not unpleasant odor stiffened him further, and for a moment he considered taking her then and there, satisfying himself inside her. But he still had two years left of his apprenticeship; a pregnancy would ruin all his plans.

He contented himself with running a finger around the small pink opening and teasing her a bit, darting it in and out as he kissed the small protuberance above.

“Tom,” she mewled in her kitten-voice. “Oh!”

He licked her there, and after a while she returned the favor, climbing atop him so they could satisfy one another at the same time. She spent first, all over his face, which excited him so much he spent her mouth, unable to even gasp a warning beyond, “Hizzy!”

Afterwards, as she dabbed at her lips with one of his soiled shirts, Tom stammered out copious professions of love, fidelity, and his ultimate desire: that they spend their lives together, he making wigs, she keeping his books and tending to the house and any children they might have. She agreed to it all, eagerly, before insisting she had lingered too long, leaving him with only the memory of a warm girl beside him.

Tom laughed as he blew out the candle, exhausted but happy. He was certain he'd had a far better time that night than any of Lord Chandoss's guests.

The next day, Hizzy looked radiant sitting across from him at the table as they broke their fast before church. Gazing at her surreptitiously between sips of tea and bites of bread, he knew he would never want for anything more than to tend to his wigs during the day and have Hizzy, sweet Hizzy, tend to at night. Tom resolved to forget all about Master Callow Bewit and Lord Chandoss's party. And he did... until mid-morning, the following Monday.

Chapter Two

The wig-shop looked strangely desolate come Monday, with all the commissions gone and bare wigs on stands everywhere. Without hair framing their painted faces the mannequins looked forlorn; only the three models in the front window retained their crowning glories.

Mr. Dray had gone out early, so Tom set to straightening up the back room and making the front tidy. It didn't take long. There wasn't much to be done to the echoing, empty space, but Tom wasn't the sort of apprentice to laze about while his master was absent. He decided to busy himself with grinding pigments to tint wig-powder. It was not the most interesting of tasks, and he was just considering sneaking upstairs to see if Hizzy was about when Mr. Dray returned.

"Ah, Tom—always busy, aren't you?" he remarked approvingly. Tom felt the briefest twinge of guilt over betraying the man's trust, but he would make an honest woman out of Hizzy soon enough. "Not only that, it seems you've anticipated my thoughts." From the pocket of his coat Mr. Dray produced a fragrant sachet, waggling it at Tom before dropping it on the work-table. "Lavender," he said. "Orange peel," as he let fall a second, "and orris root." There went the third. "The orris is particularly fine. Use our best starch and tint it... light blue. I haven't seen much blue this season. We can sell it as an exclusive."

"Stand out from the crowd with a daring mid-season change of style?"

"That's good," said Mr. Dray, nodding. "Write it under the price, and make sure the illiterate ones know what it says."

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "If you like, I'll also make a display for the window. It looks like we're closing up shop. Permanently, I mean."

"I know, it's ghastly. But I told everyone who bought wigs for the party that we'd buy them back at the price of the hair, so it's possible we'll get some returns today. Ah—and there's the door," said Mr. Dray. He looked in the glass, patting the sides of his already-impeccably groomed and powdered peruke, and went to answer it.

The sound of heavy boots on the floor and the rough hellos didn't sound to Tom like a pack of eager customers selling back their wigs. Something was wrong. He had just decided to go and listen at the door when Mr. Dray came into the back, looking pale.

"Come along, Tom, and speak with these gentlemen."

Tom's stomach fluttered. "What's this all about?" he asked, hanging up his apron.

"I'm sure it's all a mistake," said Mr. Dray, but Tom noticed his master wouldn't meet his eyes. "I'll let them explain."

There were three men in the front room. Two were Bow Street Runners, officers of the law; the third man, taller and thinner, was Mr. Robert Mauntell. He looked far less jovial than he had when he'd come in to order his John Wilmot wig.

"That's the boy," he said, pointing at Tom like an Irish setter after a pheasant. "He's the one!"

"I beg your pardon?" Tom said with as much dignity as he could muster. "Is something wrong?"

"Wrong? *Wrong?*" Mr. Mauntell went from angry to furious, and Tom took a step back, lest the man strike him. "I was up for Brooks's, you *scum*, and you've gone and ruined me! I'll pelt you myself with every rotten apple in London when they take you to the stocks, to say nothing of what I'll do

whoever put you up to it. Mark my—”

“My apprentice has not even been formally accused, much less sentenced,” interjected Mr. Dray.

“Of what am I accused, formally or otherwise?” asked Tom.

“You know very well what!” Mr. Mauntell’s face had taken on the same plum shade of his coat.

“Mr. Mauntell,” said one of the officers, a warning in his tone.

The gentleman took a deep breath, and began more calmly. “Come clean now, and things will be much better for you,” he said. “I am sure someone put you up to it, for why would you wish to see my chances for Brooks’s ruined?”

“No one has put me up to anything!” Tom looked from Mr. Mauntell to Mr. Dray, but he saw nothing encouraging in his master’s expression. “Please—will you not tell me what I’m said to have done?”

“You sold me a trick wig!” Mr. Mauntell almost shouted it. “You *rigged* it!”

Though even more confused, Tom was also relieved—he was innocent of “rigging a wig,” which meant it all must be a mistake. “How would I do such a thing? And why?”

Mr. Mauntell uttered a horrible sound, something between a grunt and a scream. “Deliver me from liars and enemies!” he cried, and stormed out of the shop. One of the officers followed him, whereupon they began speaking animatedly in the street—much to the amusement of several dustmen who began to jeer and point at the sight of a gentleman throwing a fit.

“Would you be so good as to explain?” prompted Mr. Dray, after a few moments. The remaining officer seemed fascinated by the scene outside.

“Right. Sorry,” he said. “Ah, so the gentleman says he was at a ball last Saturday night, playing cards, and just as things were getting hot, a whole mess of cards—extra cards, you see—they... well, they fell from his wig. Great ruddy thing, there were quite a lot of them in there, aces and court cards mostly.”

“In his wig?”

“Yes, as if he’d hidden them there. To cheat,” explained the officer, “*at cards*.”

So that was why Mr. Mauntell was so very upset. Even the accusation of cheating at cards would ruin a man’s reputation, and if said man was up for Brooks’s, where card-playing was *the* preferred pastime, he would almost certainly be considered unclubbable.

“He’s claiming he didn’t put them there,” said the officer. “Says they must have been planted by his enemies.”

“His enemies? Does he have them?” Tom had always thought Mr. Mauntell an affable enough fellow. Many men equal to his rank came into Dray’s like the floor wasn’t fit to touch their shoes, but Mr. Mauntell was always warm and friendly.

“Every rich man’s got enemies,” said the officer, drawing a disapproving frown from Mr. Dray. “Says the boy, did you do it? Say it now if you did, it’ll be better for you.”

“I most certainly did not! I have no reason to injure Mr. Mauntell—and even if I did, I would never compromise my craft or my morals by doing such a thing.”

Mr. Dray seemed to relax, some of his former ease returning. “See there?” he said. “I told you the boy would not have done it.”

“Well, was there anything unusual about the wig?” The officer glanced out at the street, where Mr. Mauntell was still gesticulating and shouting. “Something strange in its construction? Or in its delivery?”

“No, not at all.”

“Did anyone else work on the wig?”

“Tom alone was responsible for the commission. *I* certainly did not work on it.”

Mr. Dray’s tone surprised Tom, until he realized the man was taking care to distance himself from

whatever was happening. Tom felt a sudden chill, though the room was warm enough, but before he could dwell on it, the door opened to allow Mr. Mauntell and his escort back inside. The gentleman was substantially more composed.

“Could anyone else have gotten at it?” asked the officer.

Tom shook his head. “The only other person who even saw it was a young man who came in a few days before the party, just to ask after a wig of his own... he followed me into the back room. But he never even got near the wig. I’d know—I was with him the entire time.”

“Who was this young man?” Mr. Mauntell was suddenly very interested. “Did he give his name?”

“Yes, sir. Callow Bewit.”

“Bewit!” The name was a curse in Mr. Mauntell’s mouth. “I should have known! Tiercel Bewit would give *anything* to see me discredited—and rumor has it he’s also up for Brooks’s. He has a son, Callow. Young fellow, and said to be a bit of a fop, just like his father.” Tom would have laughed under different circumstances—Mr. Mauntell spent a hundred pounds a year on clothes, if his tailor’s apprentice was to be believed. “Yes, Bewit’s at the heart of it... he *must* be. Why didn’t I see him before? You, boy! What happened, *exactly*, when he came by?”

“Nothing, sir.” Tom swallowed, aware his master was as acutely interested as Mr. Mauntell. “I mean... he came in, asking after a wig—for himself, I mean—but we were so booked up we couldn’t help him. Then I remembered I had some hair-pieces, and as he was going as a woman—”

“Ha!” snorted Mr. Mauntell derisively.

“—I sold him some extra locks... oh, and some wig-powder. He came into the back but didn’t so much as notice your wig. He certainly didn’t... comment on it... or touch it...”

Wait—was that true? Tom thought about it for a moment, but he possessed no memory of Callow even looking at the piece—only that he had wanted to pay, and then Tom had begun to feel all queer and dizzy. As queer and dizzy as he was currently feeling, all of a sudden... but the sensation passed so quickly, leaving behind only the slightest of headaches, that Tom assumed he must just be feeling the pressure from being scrutinized by a gentleman and his master.

“I’m sure of it, sir,” he said, confident once more. “He was in there but a moment, only long enough time for me to package up his purchases.” And flirt with his future bride—but Tom didn’t add that. There was no need to bring Hizzy’s name into this.

“Hmph. Well... I shall certainly go there and speak with him. And I’ll bring the boy with me.”

“I beg your pardon?” asked Mr. Dray.

“When confronted with the sight of him, if Mr. Bewit is to blame, he—or his son—will no doubt display some surprise or alarm, whether this boy was knowingly an accomplice or not.”

“True,” admitted the one of the officers. “Well, Mr. Dray, will you lend us your apprentice for a few hours?”

“I’ll come along, too, if you don’t mind.” Mr. Dray’s tone was grim. Tom felt another shiver of apprehension; he couldn’t tell if Mr. Dray was annoyed with him, or the situation. He didn’t want to go—all he wanted to do was go and have a bit of a lie-down until his head ceased to ache.

“Of course,” said the officer.

“But make it snappy,” said Mr. Mauntell. He had recovered his spirits, and was keen to be off.

“Just give me a moment,” said Mr. Dray. “I must ask my daughter to mind the shop while we’re gone.” And with that, he disappeared into the back room.

They stood in silence as footsteps thudded overhead. When Mr. Bewit returned, it was with Hizzy in tow. Her eyes went wide to see officers standing about Tom, but he gave her an encouraging smile as they took their leave.

Tom knew he’d done nothing wrong, but as they climbed into a coach and clattered over the icy rimed cobblestones he could not help but worry. Mr. Dray, sober as a judge, said nothing to him.

during the entire drive. Tom didn't press him; instead, he looked out at the streets beyond. It was a cold morning, and early, but even the pink-tinted morning sunlight could not make the shabby people who were out and about look any less miserable as they slipped in frozen shit and mud. Tom wished he was back in the wig shop, behind clean walls, where everything smelled nice. It was never lost on him, when he ventured outside, that but for Mr. Dray's kindness he might have been one of those people, dressed all in rags and bits of wool, filth sloshing in worn-out shoes as they walked hither and yon on some dreadful errand.

The Bewits lived in a terraced home with a fine view of Bloomsbury Square—very posh, as was the footman who answered the door sporting an elaborate hunter-green livery, adorned with silver hawk. But, in spite of his formal elegance, he could not help but betray a moment of surprise at finding two Bow Street Runners, a gentleman, a tradesman, and an apprentice waiting for him on Mr. Bewit's stoop.

"Good morning," he said. "How may I be of service?"

"Where is your master? I must speak to him at once." Mr. Mauntell elbowed his way to the front of the pack. "Tell him Robert Mauntell is here, and will brook no delays. I am here for justice, and shall have it!"

"Yes, sir," said the flunky, with impressive composure. "Please, come in. You may wait in the parlor... Mr. Bewit is still breakfasting, but I will let him—"

"I'd as soon speak to him with his lying mouth full of bacon and eggs as empty of them," cried Mr. Mauntell, pushing past the footman and into the hall. "Step aside—I know the way, I've suffered through more than one evening here."

"Mr. Mauntell!" protested the footman, trailing after, the rest of them hot on the men's heels. Privately, Tom felt that whatever else happened this day, it would prove worth it to see one gentleman storm into the house of another, shrieking like a fishwife and ignoring the entreaties of servants private and civil alike. Never in his life had he witnessed such a spectacle.

Mr. Dray, however, was not in the least amused by hurrying down corridors and through various rooms of the fine house. It was clear from Tom's master's expression that this—whatever *this* was—simply would not do. If word of the incident got out, it would likely tarnish Dray's sterling reputation.

Barreling ahead of them, Mr. Mauntell savagely twisted a chryselephantine doorknob, throwing open the door and barging inside in one motion. Those in his wake all crowded in after to find a small household at table. They appeared, in a word, alarmed.

Seeing the ghost of young Callow in his more mature features, Tom assumed the man at the head of the table was Mr. Bewit. Then again, the fellow to his right might be the father, given the strong family resemblance. The only other person in the room, apart from the startled servants, was a beautiful but nervous-looking woman hovering on the edge of her chair. Pale though she wore no powder, and golden-haired, she would have looked just like an angel but for a rather prominent nose and her queer morning-dress, which looked more like a penitent's sackcloth than the usual attire sported by a wealthy young wife.

Notably, there was no sign of Master Callow. There was not even a place laid for him, nor an empty dish implying he had breakfasted early.

"Bewit!" Mr. Mauntell seized Tom by his collars and thrust him forward, much to Tom's mortification. "Look here! I have brought to you the leaf, but I know *you* are the root of this treachery!"

"I beg your pardon?" The gentleman at the head of the table rose with dignity. He was a handsome man of perhaps five and forty, dressed finely but not extravagantly. It being morning, he wore no wig; his glorious head of chestnut curls, the same rich shade and texture as Callow's, were neatly tied back with an emerald ribbon. "Why have you invaded my house at this early hour, and with these men? I

have your names, the two of you,” he pointed at the two officers, “and report you for harassment to the Blind Beak of Bow Street himself, Mr. John Fielding. He and I are old friends; I can’t imagine he’ll be pleased to hear two of his finest assisted an unjustified home invasion.”

“Don’t be an ass,” snapped Mr. Mauntell. “John’s my friend, too. And as for *unjustified*—this boy has already given you up as the snake who has poisoned my ambitions with a jape unworthy of the lowest scoundrel. Do not deny it, Bewit! The lad has no reason to lie.”

“He must, for I’ve never seen him before in my life.”

“Please, cousin—do excuse us,” said the other gentleman, who was also possessed of those distinctive waving locks. His, however, draped greasily over his face in an artfully unkempt manner, and his clothes, while finely made, were wrinkled and unbrushed. “This dispute does not concern us, and Mrs. Dryden cannot bear all this shouting.” Indeed, the pale woman was trembling, and her appearance had shifted from the angelic to the ghostly.

“Of course, Mr. Dryden. I can handle a blowhard and a coward by myself—even if he puffs himself up with an entourage.”

The lady rose as Mr. Mauntell fumed, but he respectfully held his tongue as she toddled away on unsteady legs, supported by her husband’s arm. Mr. Bewit waited until she was out of sight before sitting back down.

“At last, we are alone and can speak frankly.” Reclining in the chair, he tented his fingers over his stomach. “Well, Robert? Out with it. You’ve been here so long already I’d be within my rights to collect rent from you.”

“I know you conspired with this boy to ruin my chances at Brooks’s,” announced Mr. Mauntell. “You secreted playing cards in my wig and did *something* which caused them to fall during a crucial hand, making me look a cheat. Why are you shaking your head? Do you deny it?”

“I do.”

“Then at least admit you asked your son to do it for you!”

“My son?” Mr. Bewit frowned. “What has Callow to do with this?”

“Tell him,” hissed Mr. Mauntell, staring right at Tom.

“I beg both your pardons,” said Tom, looking from one gentleman to the other, “but all I said was that the only other person who saw Mr. Mauntell’s wig before Lord Chandoss’s party was your son, Callow Bewit. He followed me into the back room when I was packing up some hairpieces for him, for his costume.” Tom’s slight headache was back, but he scarcely noticed it, so interested was he in the outcome of this meeting.

“I see.” Mr. Bewit nodded. “Just what did this boy look like?”

“Like you, sir... he had the same color hair, at least. He was about my height, pleasant, dressed smartly, and well-mannered.”

“Then he wasn’t my son,” said Mr. Bewit decisively. “You might have described Callow’s appearance, but no one has ever called the boy *pleasant*.”

“An act, then!” Mr. Mauntell would not be put off. “He was trying to deceive the boy, wasn’t he?”

“By telling him his real name?” Mr. Bewit chuckled. “That would be foolish, even for Callow. Regardless, it couldn’t have been him. He’s abroad, away on his tour. Spending my money in ways just as silly as hairpieces for a party, no doubt.” He smiled thinly at Mr. Mauntell. “If indeed you were the victim of a prank, and you’re not simply a cheat with a flair for the dramatic, you’ve been duped twice, I’m sorry to say. This alleged proxy who was sent to this man’s shop to tamper with your costume... he must have known using Callow’s name would have you jumping to the worst conclusions about me.” He shrugged. “You may apply to my solicitor to find out whether or not I am lying regarding my son’s absence if you like, but I’d suggest wasting your time more pleasantly.”

Mr. Mauntell gawped at Mr. Bewit.

“What...” he recovered himself, “what’s to say you didn’t hire someone to impersonate Callow?” I managed to sputter.

Mr. Bewit laughed. “After my son proved to be such a rotten investment do you really think I’m so silly as to pay for a copy?”

“This is no laughing matter! A crime has been committed!”

“Because a wig shop sold you a wig?” Mr. Bewit shook his head. “Do you Bow Street Runner really have nothing better to do? Was no one murdered last night? Were no maidens raped, no widows robbed, that you may safely spend your morning indulging the specious accusations of a man whose only complaint is he was embarrassed in front of his friends?”

Mr. Bewit had won. The constabulary looked abashed, and Mr. Mauntell’s sails were clearly wanting for the slightest breath of wind. Only Mr. Dray looked as somber as he had five minutes before.

“Mr. Mauntell...” said one of the officers.

“I’m not giving up,” he spat. “I know you’re at the bottom of this!”

“And there’s a man in Bedlam who know’s he’s Julius Caesar.” Mr. Bewit pushed away from the table and stood again. “I, however, know only that I am hungry. My breakfast was interrupted, you see. May I show you out?”

“I know the way,” muttered Mr. Mauntell.

“I insist,” said Mr. Bewit.

It was a quieter party that made their way through the townhouse to the front door. Only Mr. Bewit smiled as he shooed away a footman to open the grand front door himself.

“May your collective days end more satisfactorily than they began,” he said, bowing to them all.

“Very sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Bewit,” said one of the officers, as Mr. Mauntell stormed down the steps. “And you, Mr. Dray. Glad to hear your apprentice is innocent of any wrongdoing. Must be a real relief.”

“Not exactly,” said Mr. Dray. “I feel I can no longer employ Tom as my apprentice.”

“What?”

Tom, the remaining Bow Street Runner, and Mr. Bewit all said it at once.

“But Mr. Dray,” he managed, after a long horrifying moment during which it seemed like he saw his whole life flash before his eyes. “Please, I—”

His master held up his hand. “Dray’s cannot afford such slights to its reputation. This matter has been an embarrassment that will likely cost me one of my most reliable customers. Scandal has never before darkened our door, and I will do what I must to see it never does again.”

“Surely this won’t be seen as a stain on your shop’s reputation,” said Mr. Bewit kindly. “The boy is innocent!”

“My apprentice has not been cleared of wrongdoing simply because you have convinced everyone that *you* are not to blame.” Mr. Bewit looked rather taken aback at Mr. Dray’s bluntness. “At the very least, Tom allowed a stranger into our back room, which is what began this sordid affair.” Mr. Dray sighed. “Good day, gentlemen. Tom—come along. We will settle the matter between us, back at the shop.”

Tom, fit to burst, exclaimed, “Mr. Dray, no! I love making wigs—I love working with you! Ever since I came to live with you I have had no other ambition in life! And Hizzy and I, we—”

“What has my daughter to do with any of this?” Mr. Dray became instantly livid, and Tom realized he had erred in thinking that announcing his promises to Hizziah would sway his master’s inclination in his favor. “Never mind—I won’t have her name brought into this, before strangers!” He took a deep breath. “Perhaps you should not return home with me. Here,” he counted several sovereigns out of his pocket. “This should get you lodgings and keep you fed until you can find other work—send word

where you end up, and I shall have your money and things sent to you.” He dropped the coins in Tom’s shaking hand. “To think that my charity to you should be repaid with such—such villainy!”

“By Jove! That’s a harsh thing. Won’t you reconsider?” said Mr. Bewit, who had become visibly upset.

“Trust me, I have duly considered how best to preserve the reputation of my business and my daughter. Good day, Mr. Bewit—Tom.” And with that, Mr. Dray took his leave of them. He did not look back.

Mr. Bewit was clearly not accustomed to being contradicted; he stood there in silence as the icy winter air whirled into his home. Tom, too, watched his master’s retreat without a word. There would be no arguing with Mr. Dray. He’d known the man long enough to read his moods, and his master—*former* master, rather—had made up his mind.

It was the end of everything. Tom would never be a wigmaker. He would never open his own shop, much less with Hizzy by his side. He could scarce contemplate the enormity of what had just happened. Everything had seemed so assured. Now, he could not see any future for himself, save becoming one of those ragged street-people...

“My poor boy...” Mr. Bewit at last shut the door. “I owe you the most sincere of apologies.”

Tom looked up at him. “Sir?”

“The rivalry between myself and Mr. Mauntell is... long-standing, and to be fair, absurd.” He looked almost sheepish. “I cannot even recall why it began, only that it has grown out of all proportion. We have both acted foolishly because of it... but until today it had only ever been a quarrel between ourselves.” Tom didn’t understand what the man was driving at. “What I am trying to say is that it pains me that you’ve lost your living all because of a silly prank.”

“You mean... you *did* send your son to our shop?”

“Certainly not. Callow is in Geneva, just as I said.”

“Oh. I see.”

“What I am saying is that you were unwittingly caught in a web woven by others,” Mr. Bewit continued, “and for that I am sorry—Tom, was it? *Tom*. You seem like a good boy. Are you? A good boy, I mean?”

Tom shrugged. “I tried to be. I did all that was asked of me and more, for six years.” He fought to keep the bitterness from his voice, but was not entirely successful. “I loved making wigs, sir, and I wanted to do it all my life. With Mr. Dray’s daughter beside me... that’s all I meant when I mentioned her. I never harmed the girl, we had only talked about... such matters.” It was close enough to the truth.

Mr. Bewit made a grave, pained sound. “I see. Well then, I don’t really have a choice, do I?”

“A choice, sir?” Tom was growing more perplexed by the moment. “What are you choosing?”

“Actually, it’s *you* who will be doing the choosing, my boy.” Mr. Bewit gave him a warm, lopsided smile. “All I’m going to do is offer you a job. It’s up to you whether or not you take it.”

Chapter Three

Whatever Mr. Bewit might believe, Tom didn't *really* have a choice, being so suddenly without food, shelter, or wages. As to what he would be doing to earn said food, shelter, and wages... well, Mr. Bewit had called the position 'cup-bearer,' but promised, chuckling, that he would not 'make Ganymede' of Tom, whatever *that* meant. Tom hadn't asked; he felt so fortunate to be offered the job in the first place that he could think of no task he would balk at performing.

As far as Tom could tell from Mr. Bewit's brief discussion with his housekeeper, Tom would be running little errands and fetching things—basically, whatever Holland, Mr. Bewit's valet, didn't feel like doing at any given moment. That didn't sound like such a bad job... in fact, it seemed like his days would be far easier than those spent laboring in Mr. Dray's shop.

Even so, Tom couldn't help but feel bitter over his time as a wig-maker coming to such an abrupt end. As he wrote to Mr. Dray telling him of his new lodgings, and where to send on his effects, more than once he wiped his eyes. He had slept in the same bed every night for close to half his life, had eaten his breakfast at the very same table every morning, labored the same hours, and so on. The mattress in his new closet felt strange beneath his bottom, and being idle at this hour of the day felt *wrong*. But what could he do? He'd been shoved into this room by the busy but unflustered housekeeper, Mrs. Jervis, and told to wait there until she had a moment to show him around the house and teach him his duties.

I beg you, do not judge Tom too harshly for his melancholy thoughts, or for his fear. Changing from one thing into another is never easy. Ask any butterfly.

Or you might take my word for it. Over the course of my life, I, like Tom, have changed dramatically—multiple times, actually—and while it was always painful, it was always rewarding.

Tom knew he was being terribly ungrateful, sitting on his bed, moping. Mr. Bewit had offered him more than a job—he had offered him the opportunity to save himself from the treadmill or the poorhouse. The wages promised by Mr. Bewit were thoroughly decent, and Tom would live in the household with the rest of the servants, meaning he would sleep more comfortably, eat better, and be more entertained than he had while apprenticed to Mr. Dray. Mr. Bewit would even buy all of Tom's clothes, not just his livery, so he could save virtually all of what he made.

Still, it troubled him that in all likelihood he would never again craft another peruke; never feel the joy of seeing disparate locks come together as one seamless head of hair; never tint a box of wig powder the perfect shade of shell-pink; never experience the thrill of seeing something he made with his own hands gracing the head of a gentleman. No... even if he managed to save every guinea he earned serving Mr. Bewit it wasn't likely he'd ever have enough to open his own shop, to say nothing of how he'd be run out of any town if the wigmaker's guild found out he was trying to do business without having completed his apprenticeship.

A brief knock and a quiet "Hello Tom?" alerted Tom that Mrs. Jervis had come for him. A handsome woman in her mid-fifties, with steel-grey hair and a jaw that looked like it could batter in a door, she exuded strength and competence; it was obvious that it would be to her that he answered.

He stood quickly. "Good morning—afternoon," he said, hoping his face wasn't too puffy and red. "How would you like to see the house?"

“Very much, madam.”

“You may call me Mrs. Jervis,” she said firmly. “You’re not a shop boy now, Tom Dawne.”—

“Yes, mad—yes ma’am. Yes, Mrs. Jervis.” Tom felt a pang—he had always been praised for his manners; it was disheartening to say the least, realizing that yet another skill he had worked so hard to perfect was now worthless.

“You’ll figure it out,” she said, smiling. “Come along with me.”

12 Bloomsbury Square was a grand townhouse. The servant’s quarters alone were larger than the apartment above Mr. Dray’s shop, and as for the rest... well, Tom was extremely grateful Mrs. Jervis gave him such a thorough tour—especially the attention she paid to showing him the ways that he, as a servant, should move through the house as unobtrusively as possible.

“I’ll let Holland tell you about Mr. Bewit’s habits,” she said, as she showed him into his new master’s study. “He’s a very simple man, though, and keeps regular hours except for nights when he goes to his club, so you oughtn’t have much trouble about it.”

“Brooks’s?” asked Tom absently. He was paying more attention to the room. Large windows looked down on the tree-lined street below; two walls were entirely taken up with books, and the other two with portraits and paintings. A desk sat in the center of the room, covered in papers. It was not as grand as he might imagine, but perfectly serviceable. “Is that his club, I mean?”

“No,” said Mrs. Jervis. “Mr. Bewit is a member of Waddles’s, though what it is to you, I don’t know. If he takes you along, you’ll be waiting on him, not gambling or drinking—not that Mr. Bewit does so much of that, mind. Now, come along, this way is—”

“Pray—a moment,” said Tom. One of the portraits had caught his eye, a full-length painting of a young man. Entranced, Tom stood before it.

In spite of Mr. Bewit’s protests, the boy in the picture looked uncannily like the lad who had come into Dray’s claiming to be Callow Bewit. He had the same posture, the same height and build, and was dressed in a similar fashion. Even his face was the same, save for a hardness to his gaze, and a weakness in his mouth and chin. The artist had clearly tried his best to make his subject seem lordly and commanding; unfortunately, the lad looked petulant and demanding, and thus strangely unlike the boy from the shop.

“That’s young Master Callow,” said Mrs. Jervis, coming over beside Tom. “He’s away in Geneva. That was painted very recently though—after he graduated from Eton, before he set off on his tour.”

“So he really is in Geneva?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Jervis, sounding confused. “Why wouldn’t he be?”

“Oh, I only meant...” Tom scrambled, “he’s there now? As in, he’s... arrived?”

“I should hope so. He left three months ago.”

Tom looked a little more at the picture; tried to divine something, *anything*, from the portrait’s cold gaze.

“Master Callow is about your age, I believe,” said Mrs. Jervis. “Sixteen this last March.”

“And this must be him as a baby,” said Tom, turning to another portrait, a pretty young woman with sparkling blue eyes and a lighthearted, laughing expression. She was holding a swaddled, chestnut-headed infant in her lap, cradling it with one arm as she held a book in the other. She was richly attired and bejeweled, gems shining in her ears and glistening at her wrists; she even had a beautiful pocket watch depending from the sash at her waist, inlaid with a rose of jade and carnelian. Tom stared at it—he was certain he had seen that design somewhere before... but then Mrs. Jervis interrupted his thoughts with a heavy sigh.

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