

# A Mother's Grace



Also by Rosie Goodwin

The Bad Apple  
No One's Girl  
Dancing Till Midnight  
Tilly Trotter's Legacy  
Moonlight and Ashes  
The Mallen Secret  
Forsaken  
The Sand Dancer  
Yesterday's Shadows  
The Boy from Nowhere  
A Rose Among Thorns  
The Lost Soul  
The Ribbon Weaver  
A Band of Steel  
Whispers  
The Misfit  
The Empty Cradle  
Home Front Girls  
A Mother's Shame  
The Soldier's Daughter  
The Mill Girl  
The Maid's Courage

*The Claire McMullen Series*

Our Little Secret  
Crying Shame

*Dilly's Story Series*

Dilly's Sacrifice

Dilly's Lass

Dilly' Hope

*The Days of The Week Collection*

Mothering Sunday

The Little Angel

A Mother's Grace

*Rosie*  
GOODWIN  
A Mother's  
Grace

ZAFFRE

First published in Great Britain in 2018 by  
ZAFFRE PUBLISHING  
80–81 Wimpole St, London W1G 9RE  
[www.zaffrebooks.co.uk](http://www.zaffrebooks.co.uk)

Copyright © Rosie Goodwin, 2018

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic,  
mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the  
prior written permission of the publisher.

The right of Rosie Goodwin to be identified as Author of this  
work has been asserted by her in accordance with the  
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, events and  
incidents are either the products of the author's  
imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to  
actual persons, living or dead, or actual  
events is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is  
available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-785-76237-6

*also available as an ebook*

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives Plc



Zaffre Publishing is an imprint of Bonnier Zaffre,  
a Bonnier Publishing company  
[www.bonnierzaffre.co.uk](http://www.bonnierzaffre.co.uk)  
[www.bonnierpublishing.co.uk](http://www.bonnierpublishing.co.uk)

*This book is for the very special new member of our family,  
Poppy Victoria, my beautiful little granddaughter.  
Welcome to the world sweetheart xxx*





*Tuesday's child is full of grace*



# Prologue

December 1891

‘You’ll do,’ Gertie remarked cryptically as she tied the ribbons of her niece’s bonnet beneath her chin, but despite her kind words her eyes were concerned. ‘But you *do* know you don’t *have* to do this, don’t you? There will always be a home for you with me.’

Madeline, her niece, smiled. ‘I know that, Aunt Gertie, and I appreciate the offer but I *want* to marry Jacob,’ she assured her as she surveyed herself in the long cheval mirror in her bedroom. Yet despite her brave words her stomach was churning. It was only a few weeks since her beloved father, the vicar of the parish where she had lived all her life, had died. She was still mourning him and yet here she was about to get married. Everything had happened so quickly that she had barely had time to take everything in. But I *will* be happy with Jacob she told herself to quell the little ripple of unease in the pit of her stomach. She hadn’t realised until after her father’s death just how poor they were, in fact, she barely had a penny to her name. But then she shouldn’t have been surprised. Her father had been such a kind man, he would have given a beggar the bread from his own mouth.

She hadn’t known which way to turn when he died, for she wasn’t trained for any kind of work and had no idea what was to become of her, but then Jacob Kettle, who had attended her

father's services for many years, had come forward like a knight on a white charger in the fairy stories she had been so fond of in her childhood. He had expressed sincere feelings for her and had told her that he would be honoured if she would become his wife. Admittedly, Jacob was many years older than herself and she didn't love him but she was sure that this would come with time and he *was* very handsome. She was aware that many of the spinsters in the parish had had their eyes set on him for some long while but he had never responded to any of their advances as far as she was aware and she had been flattered. He was rich too and she knew that she would never have to worry about money again. Surely, she had pondered, Jacob was the answer to all her prayers. And so, in her innocence she had agreed and had quite come to terms with it until Aunt Gertie had appeared.

Aunt Gertie was her father's younger sister and Madeline had spent many happy summers with her on her smallholding in Wales when she was a child so she had been distressed when very soon it became apparent that Gertie and Jacob had not taken to each other. But they will when they get to know each other, she told herself hopefully as she turned her eyes back to the mirror. Jacob had given her money to buy the new gown and bonnet she was wearing despite her protests and it was by far the finest quality gown she had ever owned, although, as Aunt Gertie had pointed out, it was very conservative. Jacob had expressed a wish that she would not buy anything too flamboyant. She had quite agreed, it would have been disrespectful when she was still in mourning for her father and so she had chosen a fine wool dress in a soft green colour edged with black braid. The colour matched her eyes and set off her flaming auburn hair to perfection.

'I *still* think you could have chosen something just a little more stylish,' Aunt Gertie huffed as she lifted a small posy of cream rosebuds and handed them to her. Jacob had had them delivered to her that morning and Madeline thought what a kind gesture it was.

‘This is just right,’ Madeline insisted as she leaned forward to peck her aunt’s cheek. ‘Now come along. I don’t want Jacob to think I’ve jilted him at the altar.’

She paused in the doorway to look back at her bedroom one last time and she had to swallow hard to stop the lump in her throat and blink back tears. All her clothes had been transferred to Jacob’s home the day before and this was the last time she would ever see this small room where she had known such contentment. With a little sigh, she followed her aunt down the stairs and went out to the carriage that Jacob had sent for her. It looked very grand, although Aunt Gertie was clearly unimpressed.

‘Huh! I still can’t believe that you’re not even going to have a proper wedding breakfast,’ she remarked as she clambered in behind her and settled against the leather swabs.

Madeline squeezed her hand. ‘I’ve explained that Jacob and I didn’t think it would be fitting so soon after father . . .’ Her voice faltered, but then pulling herself together with a great effort she went on, ‘At least I shall have you there to give me away and that’s all I want. And I’m sure the meal we shall have back at Jacob’s will be splendid. He tells me his cook is very good.’

‘Well, I just hope it’s something hot,’ Gertie grumbled, wrapping her arms about her waist. ‘The wind’s enough to cut you in two today. I wouldn’t be surprised if it didn’t snow – it’s certainly cold enough. I just hope it holds off till I get back to Wales on the train.’

They lapsed into silence until soon after the carriage pulled up outside St Peter’s Church where the vicar who would be taking over her father’s parish was waiting for them. It felt strange to think that later that day he would also be moving into the vicarage that had always been her home, but she tried as best she could to push the gloomy thoughts away for now. At the door she took her aunt’s arm and they glided down the aisle towards Jacob. He had a broad smile on his face and looked so handsome that her

concerns momentarily faded away. I'll be a good wife to him, she promised herself.

The service was over in the blink of an eye and before she knew it they were back outside. It was not the wedding that Madeline had dreamed of as a little girl. There was no one waiting to shower them with rose petals and rice but she was trembling with a mixture of nervousness and excitement all the same. She was now Mrs Kettle, the wife of a well-respected judge.

'I trust you will have time to return to my home for a meal before you have to catch your train?' Jacob addressed Gertie but there was no warmth in his voice.

She was equally as icily polite as he when she answered, 'That would be very pleasant. Thank you.'

And so the newlyweds climbed into the carriage while Gertie followed in a second one with Frederick Marshall, one of the judge's colleagues who had stood as best man for him.

When they arrived at the judge's home, Gertie was forced to admit it was very impressive. Three storeys high and surrounded by low iron railings, she judged that the downstairs alone must be as big as the whole of her cottage put together. Not that she would have swapped it. Gertie had never set much store by material possessions.

The judge ushered them all through a thick oak door into a long hallway and then into a dining room where a large table was set with fine china and crystal glasses for a meal. There was a large fire burning in the grate and Gertie headed for it instantly to warm her cold hands as the judge sent a maid away to fetch them all a tray of tea.

The meal followed shortly after and although it was plain, Gertie was forced to admit that it was wholesome and filling. They were served with leek and potato soup followed by roast beef with all the trimmings and finally a jam roly-poly pudding and custard.

At the end of the meal, Jacob stood and, after the maid had

filled their glasses with wine, he proposed a toast, 'To my lovely new wife!'

It was short and sweet but Madeline was touched none the less. Soon after Gertie glanced at the clock and said reluctantly, 'I'm afraid I should be heading for the station now if I'm to catch my train.'

'I shall have the carriage sent round for you immediately,' Jacob responded and when he bustled away Gertie took Madeline's hands in her own. She still couldn't take to her niece's new husband. There was just something about him that she didn't like. Perhaps it was the way his smile never seemed to quite reach his eyes?

'Now, you know where I am if you need me.' Gertie, never one to show much affection, found that she was choked, especially when Madeline's eyes filled with tears.

'I know . . . but I shall be fine . . . really.'

They exchanged a brief hug and shortly after Gertie took her leave along with Frederick, who was returning to work.

Once alone with her new husband, Madeline felt suddenly shy and her heart sank when he informed her, 'Do excuse me but I too need to go to my office for a few hours. But I'm sure you will find something to do. Perhaps you could help the maid to put your clothes away? I shall be back for dinner this evening.'

Disappointment coursed through her. She had imagined that they would spend the day together but then she knew what a busy man Jacob was and as they had got married on a week day he was bound to have things to do.

'Of course, Jacob.' She forced a smile although she was feeling totally out of her depth. 'You go along, I shall be fine.'

Once he had gone she went upstairs to look for their bedroom. She had only visited the house once before and still didn't know her way around. However, she found it without difficulty and once she entered she found the maid busily emptying the small trunk that held her clothes.

‘Good afternoon, ma’am.’ The maid bobbed her knee and Madeline blushed. She’d never had a maid before and this girl looked barely older than she was.

‘Oh please, call me Madeline,’ she answered but the girl looked horrified at the very suggestion.

‘No, ma’am. I don’t think the judge would like that. He’s told us all to address you as ma’am, but my name is Fanny.’

They worked quietly together and within no time everything was put away apart from the fine lawn nightdress trimmed with lace at the collar and cuffs, which Jacob had also bought for her. Madeline blushed furiously as she saw it laid across the bed and thought of the night ahead. She had never so much as kissed a man let alone lain with one and she wasn’t at all sure what to expect, although she had a rough idea after all the parishioners she had visited with her father. Fanny pottered away leaving Madeline alone with her thoughts. There was a small fire burning in the little grate but the room was still quite chilly and she paced up and down as she waited for Jacob to come home.

He was home for his evening meal as promised and once it was over, he suggested, ‘Why don’t you go up and prepare for bed. It’s been a long day and you must be tired.’

Madeline had hoped that they might sit together and chat for a while but all the same she nodded obediently.

‘Very well . . . I’ll see you shortly.’ Hot colour again flooded into her cheeks as she scuttled from the room.

Fanny was in the hallway as she made her way to the staircase and she grinned at her as she passed causing Madeline to blush yet again. Her new husband must be very keen to consummate their marriage if he was sending her up to bed so early, she thought as she climbed the staircase as sedately as she could. In their room she found that Fanny had filled the jug on the washstand with hot water for her and shrugging out of her wedding outfit as quickly as she could, she hung it neatly away and washed herself thoroughly



from head to foot. She then took the pins from her hair and brushed it until it gleamed and leaped into bed, pulling the covers up to her chin. She lay watching the door with a mixture of nervousness and anticipation. Slowly, the clock on the little shelf above the fireplace ticked away the minutes, then the hours and the house became still. By then Madeline was struggling to keep her eyes open. Perhaps Jacob was not going to come to her this evening after all?

She had almost given up seeing him when the door suddenly barged open and he appeared. Without a word, he crossed to a chair and began to undress. Madeline looked away, deeply embarrassed. She had never seen a man completely naked before but she supposed she would have to get used to it now that she was a married woman. Minutes later, she felt the covers lift and Jacob slid in beside her. She turned her face to him, a shy smile on her face expecting him to kiss her and whisper sweet words but to her horror he tossed the bedclothes back and roughly dragged her nightdress above her waist making her cringe with embarrassment. Then without further ado he straddled her and thrust himself into her making her cry out with pain and distress.

'J-Jacob . . . you're *hurting* me,' she gasped but he took no notice. He was bucking now and Madeline felt as if she were being rent in two. His thrusts became more and more frantic as she lay there feeling dirty and humiliated but then suddenly he stiffened and she felt something hot and sticky between her legs. Jacob seemed to collapse on top of her but then he rose from the bed and dragged his trousers back on. 'B . . . but where are you going?' She was openly crying now.

'To my own room, of course,' he informed her, then without so much as another word he left.

Once he had gone she curled herself into a tight ball and sobbed uncontrollably. She felt defiled and soiled. She crawled from the bed and washed herself with the now cold water but she still felt

dirty. Will I ever feel clean again? she wondered in despair. There had been no tenderness or love in their coming together and she wondered if Aunt Gertie had been right. It seemed there was truth in the old saying, 'Marry in haste repent at leisure!' But it was too late now, the deed was done. She was a married woman for better or worse and, somehow, she was going to have to try and make the best of it.

Slinking back to the bed she pulled the blankets over her head and cried herself to sleep.

# *Chapter One*

*Nuneaton 1892*

‘Our furniture and personal possessions will be delivered over the next few days. Make sure that someone is in at all times to receive them. We shall take up residence a week from today. I will sleep in my late uncle’s room and you will prepare another room for my wife. I also expect the rooms above the stables to be cleared out and made habitable for my groom and two stables made ready for the horses. My meals will be served on time and I do not believe in waste so I expect you to be thrifty with the housekeeping money. Is that quite clear?’ The stern-faced man stared down at the cook-cum-housekeeper who was standing to one side of the front door with the young general maid. She bobbed her knee. Her head was spinning, for he had not stopped barking orders at her since the second he arrived.

‘Perfectly, sir.’ How would they possibly have everything ready in time? The stable block and the rooms above it had stood empty for years and she dreaded to think what a state they would be in. As for being thrifty, she had always prided herself on keeping a good table without being extravagant. Her old master had certainly never had cause for complaint. And how strange that he and his young wife were to sleep apart.

The man’s dark eyebrows beetled into a frown as he eyed her

disdainfully. 'You will address me as Judge Kettle at all times, woman.'

'Yes, si— judge,' she answered trying hard to keep the resentment from her voice. He was an imposing figure – she estimated that he must be well over six feet tall. His enormous frame almost filled the doorway and he had hard, pale blue eyes and steel-grey hair. His nose was large and hooked and she found herself thinking that it would have looked more in place on a boxer.

He glanced over his shoulder then at his young, heavily pregnant wife and barked, 'So what are you waiting for, woman!' She scuttled past him towards the carriage waiting outside, her eyes downcast.

Nodding towards the servants he rammed his hat on and followed her without another word.

'Phew! I'm glad he's gone, that's all I can say, though I dread to think what our lives are goin' to be like when he moves in.' She shook her head sadly as she stared at the mess in the dining room. 'It's hard to believe that him an' our lovely old master were related, ain't it? The old master were a gentle soul but the same can't be said for his nephew. Apparently, he didn't have a lot to do wi' him when he was young. He was an unwanted child an' were packed off to boarding school almost before he were in long trousers.'

Mabel, the maid, nodded in agreement as she blinked back tears. Their master's death had come as a great shock to both of them and she was still struggling to come to terms with the fact that he was gone. He had been so kind and had it not been for him she and her family would have been destitute, for he had given her a job when her father had been injured in a pit fall.

Now she too glanced towards the dining room, which was littered with empty glasses, cups, saucers and plates of discarded food. The last of the mourners from the funeral had left over an hour ago but Judge Kettle had remained, going through paperwork at his late uncle's desk. He had also left them a seemingly endless list of things he wanted doing before he returned and she was

wondering how they were ever going to manage it all in a week.

'I reckon you're right, Batty,' she answered, using the affectionate nickname their late master had given her. 'It's just our hard luck that the dear soul left nearly everything he owned to the judge. It would have been so different if only he and the late mistress had been able to have children of their own. While the men were at the funeral the women were like a pack o' vultures pickin' over who should have what. One of 'em even took the ormolu clock off the mantelpiece. Another went through the china cabinet an' took one of the late mistress's favourite figurines sayin' it had been promised to her years ago. Funerals allus seem to bring out the worst in folks, don' they?' She sighed. 'Anyroad, I dare say we'd best get on wi' the clearin' up. It ain't goin' to do itself.'

Mrs Batley nodded. 'Did you hear how he spoke to his poor wife? She seemed terrified of him. God knows what the poor lass saw in him in the first place. He must be old enough to be her father.'

'Ah well, I heard a bit o' gossip about that an' all,' Mabel confided. 'It seems she met him at church in Leeds where he lived followin' the death of his first wife. She was recently orphaned an' her father had left debts, so the relatives reckon she must have married him for a bit o' security. I bet she's regrettin' it now, though,' she added as she began to pile the dirty pots onto a tray. 'She seems like the sort as wouldn't say boo to a goose!'

'I dare say she is. An' I bet he'll make a few changes to the old master's law business an' all.'

The late Mr Kettle had owned a thriving law practice in the town centre but that too was now the property of Judge Kettle and she foresaw major changes ahead, which she had an idea the late Mr Kettle's colleagues would be none too pleased about, not that they could do anything about it.



It was almost two hours later when Mrs Batley sank into the cosy chair at the side of the inglenook fireplace in the kitchen and eased her swollen feet out of her shoes. Both she and Mabel had already been working for two whole days, cooking and baking for the funeral feast, and they had been up since five that morning laying it out. At Judge Kettle's insistence, only males had attended the funeral service while the female relatives waited for them to return to the large residence in Swan Lane. It was a grand house and Mrs Batley had worked there happily for so long that she almost regarded it as her own. She was a plump, homely soul with silver-grey hair, which she wore in a tight little bun at the nape of her neck, and lively, bright blue eyes.

As Mabel poured them a well-earned cup of tea, she smiled with satisfaction as she looked around. The brass pans suspended along the thick oak beam above the fire gleamed and the flag-stoned floor was so clean that Mabel often teased they could have eaten off it. The large table that took up the centre of the room had been scrubbed until it was almost white – the old master had joined her and Mabel to eat his evening meal there many a time, insisting that it wasn't worth them setting the dining room table just for one. Somehow, she couldn't imagine their new master doing that. She had an idea that he was going to be a stickler for protocol, although his young wife had seemed pleasant enough on the rare occasions she had dared to open her mouth.

Mabel pressed a steaming cup into her hand and she smiled gratefully and pointed to the chair at the other side of the fireplace. 'Sit yourself down for a while, pet. You look fit to drop an' what we ain't managed to do tonight will keep till morning now.'

The young maid willingly did as she was told, holding her feet out to the flickering flames. Then after taking a noisy slurp of her tea she said thoughtfully, 'Well, I suppose it ain't *all* bad. There'll be a new baby in the house soon, which is somethin' to look forward to at least.'

Mrs Batley's head bobbed in agreement as she thought of the nursery the late mistress had prepared all those years ago. Sadly, it had remained empty but now at least it would be used.

'Aye, yer right there, lass. This great house was made to ring to the sounds o' children's laughter. Perhaps when he has a little 'un to love the judge will soften a little.'

Mabel snorted. 'Happen it'd take more than a baby to soften *him*.'

Mrs Batley smiled affectionately at the girl. Mabel was as thin as a beanpole, in spite of all the good food the kindly cook insisted she should eat, and her dull, mousy hair was as straight as a die. But her eyes were a lovely pale grey that sparkled when she smiled. She also had a kind nature and a heart as big as a bucket and Mrs Batley had grown fond of her. They sat together in a companionable silence for a while until Mabel stifled a yawn and said, 'I reckon I might turn in now, Batty, if yer don't mind. I can hardly keep me eyes open. Do yer want me to lock up afore I go to bed?'

'No, pet, you go on up. I'll see to it.' Mrs Batley smiled as Mabel trudged wearily across the flagstones then, bending, she scooped a large ginger cat onto her lap and stroked him affectionately. She had taken in Ginger some years ago when he had come begging for scraps at the kitchen door.

'Are you missin' yer master too?' she whispered as the cat arched his back with pleasure. He meowed in response and she sighed as she absent-mindedly stroked him. So very much was about to change.



A week later, on the evening before their new master and mistress were due to arrive, they sat together in the kitchen enjoying a cup of warm milk. The week had been long and busy with new furniture being delivered, and more cleaning and tidying than she could

ever remember doing, but finally Mrs Batley was satisfied that the house was spotless and just as the judge had ordered it to be.

It was a bitterly cold night and outside the wind was howling as rain lashed at the windows.

‘It were on a night just such as this some years ago that the old master came into the kitchen to me to wish me goodnight,’ Mrs Batley said reminiscently. ‘He allus stuck his head round the door to say goodnight afore he went to bed but on this night I were feelin’ right poorly. I’d had a terrible cough an’ cold that I couldn’t seem to shift an’ on this particular night he noticed that I’d not bothered to wash the dinner pots an’ the fire was burnin’ low.’ Her eyes welled with tears as the memories flooded back. ‘Bless him. He came in and rolled his sleeves up and did the pots himself before makin’ the fire up, then he fetched me a blanket and made me tea sayin’ I was to stay down here in the warm fer the night. I can’t see the new master doin’ that, can you?’

Mabel looked troubled when Mrs Batley smiled at her. ‘Don’t get frettin’, pet. Perhaps it won’t be as bad as we’re expectin’.’

‘Perhaps not,’ Mabel agreed, although secretly she didn’t quite believe it.



## *Chapter Two*

It was mid-afternoon on a frosty November day when a fine carriage drawn by two matching black stallions drew up outside the house in Swan Lane.

‘This is it, then,’ Mrs Batley muttered as she peeped round the snow-white lace curtain that hung at the hall window. ‘Straighten your mob cap and smooth your apron, Mabel,’ she said as she hurried to open the door. Judge Kettle climbed down from the carriage and strode towards her, leaving the coachman to help his wife alight.

Some gentleman he is, Mrs Batley thought, but she fixed a smile to her face and bobbed her knee. ‘Good afternoon, judge. Welcome to your new home.’

He completely ignored her, sweeping past and unbuttoning his coat, which he almost threw at Mabel along with his hat.

‘Did all our possessions arrive?’ he asked shortly.

‘Yes, judge. And they’ve all been put away in the correct places, although they can always be rearranged if anythin’s not to yer likin’.’ Mrs Batley was still doing her best to get off to a good start with him but felt as if she was failing dismally.

He nodded. ‘And have you a meal ready? My wife and I have had a long journey and we’re tired and hungry.’

‘There’s a lovely piece of pork roastin’ this very minute. I can have the meal on the table in half an hour,’ she assured him. ‘But

first, perhaps you and your wife would like to freshen up? I'll get Mabel to bring you some hot water and a tray of tea up to your rooms right away.'

Mrs Kettle entered the hall then and Mabel rushed to help her off with her cloak and bonnet as the judge went on an inspection of the house. He paused halfway down the hall to run his hand across the top of the console table on which stood a vase of holly, clearly looking for dust. Mrs Batley bristled.

'I think you'll find everything is in order,' she told him in a clipped voice, and he continued on his way without even glancing in her direction.

'Eeh, Mrs Kettle, yer look worn out,' Mabel said kindly once she had hung the woman's outdoor clothes on the tall coat stand. 'Would yer like to go to your room fer a rest or I could bring yer a tray o' tea into the drawin' room?'

'A cup of tea sounds lovely, and I'll have it down here if it's no trouble,' the woman said gratefully.

Mabel hurried away to prepare it while Mrs Batley led her towards the drawing room.

'I think you'll find all your things in place,' she told her as she guided her to the fireside chair. 'But if there's anythin' as yer want changin' me an' Mabel can swap it about in a jiffy.'

'No, everywhere looks wonderful, Mrs Batley. Thank you.'

As the woman sank onto the chair, Mrs Batley smiled. At least the new mistress seemed a nice enough soul, which was one blessing.

She found Mabel in the kitchen preparing two trays and remarked, 'We'd best take a drink over to the groom an' all. No doubt the chap will be glad o' one when he's settled the horses.'

Mabel nodded in agreement and once they had delivered the trays to the new master and mistress, she prepared another one.

'You take it across,' Mrs Batley urged. 'I want to get this dinner dished up. While yer over there show him his rooms an' ask if he

has everythin' he needs, then bring him back here to eat wi' us. It's too cold to take his meals over there.'

Minutes later fifteen-year-old Mabel was gingerly picking her way across the treacherously slippery cobblestones towards the stables. She noticed that the carriage had already been put away in the small coach house so she headed for the stables where she guessed he'd be. She found him brushing down one of the horses who had a thick blanket slung across his back and his nose buried in a nose bag and said shyly, 'Hello, I'm Mabel. I've brought you a warm drink.'

He turned and gave her a smile that made the colour flame into her cheeks. He had blonde hair and deep blue eyes and looked to be not much older than her. It was only when he moved towards her that she noticed that he was very bandy-legged and had quite a severe limp.

What a shame, he'd be really handsome if it wasn't for that, she found herself thinking and then blushed an even deeper shade of red.

'Thank you. Er . . . I'm Harry. Harry Grimes, miss.'

'You don't have to call me miss.' Mabel giggled, making her plain face look almost pretty. 'I'm just a maid here.' She handed him the mug. 'Would you like me to show you your rooms? They're up that ladder there.' She gestured towards the far wall beyond the small tack room. 'I've done the best I can with them and put extra blankets on the bed for you, although I'm afraid it may be rather cold up there.'

'I'm sure they'll be very comfortable, thanks.' He shuffled from foot to foot self-consciously but when Mabel set off towards the ladder he followed her up. It was a large room divided by a heavy curtain. Against one wall was a brass bed piled high with blankets and there was a small table and chair beneath a window where Mabel had hung bright floral curtains in an attempt to make it look a bit homelier. There was also a rather dilapidated wardrobe

and a mismatched chest of drawers, which Mabel had polished until they gleamed. Beyond the curtain was a washstand on which stood a large jug and bowl but other than that it was empty. It was, as Mabel had warned, bitterly cold up there, and their breath hung on the air in front of them. Even so, Harry seemed pleased with what he saw.

‘You’ve made it really cosy for me,’ he observed and she grinned.

‘Well, perhaps it won’t be so bad. I dare say you’ll be busy throughout the day and in the evenin’ yer can spend yer time in the kitchen where it’s warm wi’ me an’ Mrs Batley till it’s time fer bed. Mrs Batley is the cook-cum-housekeeper . . . Oh, an’ she said to tell yer that you’ll be eatin’ in there wi’ us, an’ all,’ she ended lamely as she ran out of things to say. Then turning about, she rushed off down the ladder so fast that she almost fell.

Perhaps there would be advantages to having a new master after all.

## *Chapter Three*

‘Phew, well that’s the first day over wi’,’ Mrs Batley remarked late that evening. ‘You did remember to make the fires up in their bedrooms an’ put the hot bricks in their beds didn’t yer?’

Mabel nodded. ‘I did an’ I helped Mrs Kettle wi’ her undressin’ as well. She was struggling with the buttons on the back of her dress.’ She shook her head. ‘She seems such a nice lady. I don’t understand why the judge is so harsh with her.’

‘I know. And have yer seen the way he talks down to her.’ Mrs Batley snorted as she poured herself a tiny glass of gin. It was her nightly treat before bedtime. ‘But that red hair an’ those green eyes of hers are glorious, ain’t they? Admittedly she’s only a little slip of a thing an’ not particularly pretty but those features make yer look at her.’

Mabel nodded in agreement. ‘They certainly do. She was so tired that I talked her into letting me brush her hair for her an’ when she released it from the pins it spilled right down her back in a riot o’ curls.’ She sighed enviously as she fingered a lock of her own mousy hair that had escaped from her mob cap. Then her face brightened as she thought of Harry. ‘Harry’s nice too, ain’t he?’

Mrs Batley gave a wry smile. If she wasn’t very much mistaken young Mabel was smitten.

‘Yes, he is nice,’ she agreed. ‘Although he didn’t have much to say fer himself when he joined us, did he?’

‘He’s probably just shy. I’m sure he’ll come out of his shell when he gets to know us,’ Mabel answered, then she frowned. ‘I wonder what the master wants to see us about tomorrow? Yer don’t think we’ve done summat wrong already do yer?’

‘Course we haven’t. He asked to see the household ledger I keep; I dare say he’s just goin’ to discuss the monthly outgoins.’

Mrs Batley had always been a stickler for keeping the ledger up to date so she had no qualms whatsoever about showing it to Judge Kettle. She downed the rest of her drink and stifled a yawn, then after wishing Mabel goodnight she pottered away to her room.

Sometime later, after laying the fires ready to light the next morning, Mabel drew her curtains and smiled when she saw a candle glowing in Harry’s room across the courtyard.



Mrs Batley and Mabel were in the kitchen the following morning preparing lunch when Judge Kettle appeared in the doorway. Mabel stopped her merry humming and glanced at him nervously. His large frame cast a shadow across the floor and his eyes were as cold as a fish’s.

‘A word if you please, cook.’

Mrs Batley hurriedly threw a damp towel across the dough she had been kneading and laid it on the hearth to rise before following him to his office.

At a glance, she saw that he had the housekeeping ledger open on the desk in front of him and she smiled as she wiped her floury hands on her apron. His first words wiped the smile from her face.

‘I have been going over the household accounts and feel that there are cuts to be made.’ Sitting in the worn leather chair, he steeped his fingers and peered at her over the top of them, making her feel like a naughty schoolgirl called up in front of the headmaster.

Mrs Batley bristled with indignation. 'What do you mean? I'm very thrifty wi' the housekeepin' money an' every single penny I spend is accounted for in there!'

He sniffed and stabbed his finger towards the coal bill. 'We could save here for a start. I notice that there are fires lit in the bedrooms as well as the drawing room and the day room each day. An unnecessary extravagance, I believe. In future, a small fire in the day room will suffice unless we are entertaining. My wife can spend her time in there. It's a smaller room and won't cost so much to heat. And the fires in the bedrooms need not be lit until shortly before we retire.'

As Mrs Batley's lips tightened, he went on, 'And the food bill. I'm sure you could save on that. Tea and sugar are extravagances, I think we could halve the weekly bill.'

Mrs Batley was beginning to bubble with rage. The late Mr Kettle had never questioned her like this. On the contrary, he had always praised her for keeping such a good table and had trusted her implicitly.

'The butcher's bill,' he went on. 'We can manage perfectly well on cheaper cuts. A good cook should be capable of making tasty meals out of scrag ends and we can certainly cut down on the breakfast menu. There was an awful lot returned to the kitchen this morning, I noticed.' She had served him thick, crispy rashers of back bacon, juicy sausages and sizzling kidneys, which had been slow cooked in butter, as well as devilled eggs, toast and a pot of home-made marmalade.

Mrs Batley contained her anger with an effort. The food that wasn't eaten by the master had always fed herself and Mabel, then Mabel usually delivered what was left to her mother who was always glad of anything. They were feeding Harry too now and she wondered what they were supposed to dine on if she was only allowed to cook enough for the master and mistress. Not that, going by this morning, Mrs Kettle ate much, bless her. Mrs Batley

supposed it was because she was having a baby. But did this arrogant man think that servants could exist on fresh air?

He went on to suggest other places where she might make savings before adding, 'And Mr Grimes. From now on, when he is not attending to my horses or chauffeuring me about, he will attend to the gardens and do any jobs that need doing about the house. I am sure we will find enough to keep him fully occupied and that will do away with the need to employ tradesmen. Idle hands make work for the devil is the saying and I don't believe in squandering hard-earned money.' He slammed the ledger shut and handed it to Mrs Batley. 'That will be all for now. Go about your business.'

'Just one thing, judge.' Mrs Batley forced herself to stay calm. 'I can't help but notice that your wife is very close to her time . . . for givin' birth, I mean, an' I was wonderin' if yer'd like me to speak to the doctor an' the midwife for her to have 'em on standby?'

'Thank you, Mrs Batley. The midwife perhaps, but I see no need to waste money on a doctor's fee unless it is absolutely necessary. My wife is young and healthy so I foresee no complications.'

'But what if there are? Your wife is very dainty.'

He waved his hand dismissively. 'We'll cross that bridge if and when we come to it. And now, if you wouldn't mind, I would like to get the rest of my uncle's affairs in order before I go into town to look at my new business. I shall only require a light lunch before I go out and then dinner will be served promptly each evening at six p.m.'

'Yes, judge.' Gripping the ledger so tightly that her knuckles turned white, Mrs Batley turned and almost flounced from the room. She hadn't expected the judge to be as kind a master as the late Mr Kettle but it appeared that he was going to be even harder to work for than she had feared.

When she got back to the kitchen she relayed to Mabel what the judge had said. Mabel chewed her lip nervously.



‘You don’t think he’ll dismiss me, do yer, Batty? With him tryin’ to cut down on household costs, I mean. He might decide that I’m not needed.’

‘Huh! I’d soon tell him if he tried,’ Mrs Batley responded heatedly but the conversation was stopped from going any further when Harry Grimes popped his head round the kitchen door, letting in a blast of icy air.

‘Sorry to disturb you but you did say to come in at eleven o’clock for a tea break.’

Mabel flushed prettily as Mrs Batley glanced at the kitchen clock and started. ‘Goodness, I hadn’t realised it were that time already. Come on in, lad, an’ you, Mabel, get the trays ready fer the master an’ mistress. We don’t want to give him anythin’ else to moan about.’

Fifteen minutes later, when the trays had been delivered, the three of them sat down to snatch a cup of tea for themselves.

‘This is one o’ the things he told me we’ve to cut down on,’ Mrs Batley grumbled as she spooned sugar into three cups.

‘Well, I don’t mind doing without sugar,’ Mabel piped up.

Mrs Batley shook her head. ‘You’ll do no such thing, me girl. We work hard an’ the way I see it we’s entitled to a cuppa when we feel like it.’ She glanced at Harry and asked tentatively, ‘Is the judge always this difficult?’

He flushed to the roots of his hair. ‘I, er . . . yes, I suppose he is.’

‘So why did you leave Leeds an’ your family to come here wi’ him then?’ Mrs Batley was curious.

‘I don’t have a family,’ Harry confessed. ‘Me ma died some years ago an’ I never knew me dad. I was the eldest an’ the young ones were all taken into the workhouse. They would have taken me too but I managed to avoid it and after that I lived on the streets any way I could. I got rickets then, which is why me legs are as they are an’ things got harder.’

Mrs Batley clucked her tongue sympathetically. In the squalid courts around Abbey Street where Mabel had been raised, rickets was rife, caused by poor diet, and now she understood why Harry's legs were so deformed.

Harry went on, 'The master found me in a shop doorway one day an' offered me a job working in his stables. That was about two years ago, and I've been with him ever since.'

Mrs Batley would have liked to think that the judge had done this out of the kindness of his heart but already she guessed that he would have probably worked poor Harry almost into the ground. His next words confirmed it.

'He can be a bit harsh . . . very harsh, really, an' he's whipped me on more than one occasion if I haven't done something exactly as he told me to but at least I ain't on the streets anymore. Anythin' is better than havin' to go back to that. And the mistress is kind . . . when he ain't about, that is.'

'Is she afraid of him then?' Mabel asked, appalled.

He shrugged. 'I'm not sure to be honest. I've never known him to raise his hand to her, but I don't think he lets her ever forget that he rescued her when her father left her penniless, poor thing. I know she has an aunt who offered to take her in at the time, she lives somewhere in Wales, but I think the mistress was too proud to take her up on her offer.'

He clammed up then, no doubt worried that he'd already said too much and Mabel and Mrs Batley wisely didn't push him for any more information.



After his light lunch, the judge left for the town in his smart carriage and Mabel and Mrs Batley breathed a sigh of relief.

'Phew, he ain't even been here fer a whole day yet an' already I'm glad to see the back o' him,' Mrs Batley remarked, then she

started when she glanced up to see the young mistress standing in the kitchen doorway.

‘Oh, I’m *so* sorry, missus,’ she muttered, red-faced, but Mrs Kettle merely smiled.

‘I was wondering, would one of you have time to show me where the nursery is located? I don’t wish to disturb your work.’

‘I’ll take you up there,’ Mrs Batley offered. ‘You carry on preparin’ them vegetables for dinner would yer, pet?’

Mabel nodded and Mrs Batley led her new mistress towards the staircase. ‘The nursery is right up on the top floor,’ she wheezed as she puffed her way up the stairs, her plump face red with exertion. ‘It’s never been used, more’s the pity, so it’ll need a good airin’. In fact, it might possibly need redecoratin’ after all these years.’

At last she flung open a door and the mistress stepped past her into the room. Mrs Batley hurried forward and began to whisk the dustsheets off the furniture. She secretly hated this floor, for it always brought back sad memories of her former mistress who had chosen every stick of furniture up there with such loving care for the children that had never come along.

‘Oh, that’s quite beautiful,’ Mrs Kettle exclaimed as a wooden swinging crib was revealed.

‘The moths have got into the little blankets,’ Mrs Batley said regretfully as she stroked them and they crumbled to dust. ‘But the crib is still in fine condition by the looks of it. Just as soon as we have any spare time me an’ Mabel will come up here an’ give the whole place a good scrub fer you. There’s a small bedroom next door for a nanny an’ the other door leads to what was to be the schoolroom.’

‘How sad that it was never needed,’ Mrs Kettle said softly, her voice heavy with tears as she thought of the heartache Jacob’s aunt must have suffered. Her hand then fell protectively to her swollen stomach. Hopefully this little one would breathe life into the empty rooms.

'I could come up and help you, Mrs Batley,' she offered, but the older woman shook her head vigorously.

'You'll do no such thing so close to your time . . . beggin' your pardon, ma'am. No offence intended.'

Mrs Kettle smiled and her whole face was transformed. 'None taken.'

Mrs Batley cleared her throat then before asking, 'Do yer mind me enquirin' when the baby's due, ma'am? Only I were sayin' to yer husband earlier that we should be preparin' the midwife to be on standby.'

'Early in the New Year.' The woman smiled. 'But I won't be needing a nanny. I shall be looking after the baby myself and would prefer to have it in my room with me for the first few months.'

Mrs Batley made no comment although she still found it strange that a married couple should wish to sleep apart after the birth of their baby. She had supposed that the judge had taken his own room so that his wife could rest but it appeared that this wasn't the case, not that it was any of her business, she reminded herself silently.

'Perhaps I could get young Harry up here to give the place a coat of limewash for when the baby does move upstairs?' she suggested tactfully, and Mrs Kettle nodded in agreement.

'It would certainly brighten the place up,' she agreed. 'Meantime, a little closer to my time, perhaps we could have the crib carried down into my bedroom?'

'That would be no trouble at all. Me an' Mabel could do that. Have you got together any baby things yet? Blankets and night-dresses and such?'

'Oh yes. I've made most of them myself. My mother taught me to sew, she was a very fine needlewoman.' Mrs Kettle's face clouded. 'I wish that she and my father were still alive to meet their first grandchild but my mother died when I was twelve. Father was

never quite the same after that but we were very close. He was such a kind, gentle man.'

Mrs Batley squeezed her arm sympathetically, feeling the young woman's pain.

'My father was a vicar,' Mrs Kettle said and Mrs Batley's eyebrows rose in surprise. She'd had no idea.

'He had his own parish in Leeds. We lived in a lovely old vicarage attached to the church but I'm afraid he was rather too generous to people in need for his own good, which is why I found myself almost penniless when he passed away. And by the way, my first name is Madeline. It was my grandmother's name and I'm quite happy for you to address me as such.'

'Why, that's a lovely name but I fear the judge wouldn't think it seemly,' Mrs Batley pointed out.

The young woman seemed to think on her words for a moment then slowly nodded. 'Perhaps you're right. Jacob is quite strict about such things. But maybe sometimes when we're alone we need not be quite so formal?'

'We'll see.' Mrs Batley patted her hand. 'But now I really ought to be getting back to work. I don't want to end up in the master's bad books on his first full day here.'

'Oh, of course. How thoughtless of me. I'll come down with you.'

Mrs Batley smiled to herself. The young mistress was a lovely person and soon there would be a baby in the house.

## *Chapter Four*

A week later, Mrs Batley was once again summoned to the master's office to present the household accounts.

'Hmm . . .' He ran his finger down the page of the week's expenses. 'I see you have managed to save a few pence on the coal bill by following my orders, although the food bill doesn't look to be much improved.' When he stared up at her she felt as if his cold eyes were boring right through her.

Mrs Batley straightened her back, ashamed to find that her hands were trembling slightly. 'I've changed the menus so that for three days a week we have fish instead of meat and that's saved a bit,' she objected defensively. 'But it's hard to cut down on certain other things. Vegetables tend to be expensive at this time of year, and so is tea, even though Mabel goes to market and looks for the best prices she can.'

His eyebrows drew together as he continued to examine the accounts. It was clear that he intended to see that every single penny was accounted for.

At last he opened a drawer and carefully counted out a sum of money. 'That is the housekeeping allowance for next week,' he told her and she saw at a glance that it was vastly reduced. Right, she thought angrily. She'd certainly make cuts, starting with his wine bill, and see if he was still so keen to keep her short of funds this time next week. His wife would never be so mean,

she was sure of it. Only that day she had commented that Mrs Kettle's clothes looked dangerously tight on her and suggested that she should approach her husband to ask him for some new ones, but the young woman had shaken her head and flown into a panic.

'Oh no, there'll be no need for that,' Madeline had gabbled. 'I'm sure I can let the ones I have out just a little more, then I can take them all in again once the baby is born.'

Mrs Batley had stared at the tight, plain bombazine gown her mistress was wearing and sighed. Madeline Kettle would never be classed as a beauty, admittedly, but with her striking hair and lovely eyes, Mrs Batley was sure she could be very attractive were she able to dress in more fashionable clothes. The judge, on the other hand, was always immaculately dressed in fine waistcoats and smart suits.

Now she simply took the money, dropped it into the pocket of her apron and strode from the room. He wanted cuts? Well, she would make sure he got them.

That evening, as Mabel was about to go up to light the fires in the master and mistress's bedrooms, Mrs Batley told her, 'Don't light the fire in the judge's room, pet. He wants us to cut down on household expenses.'

The judge had gone out in his carriage over an hour before, and goodness knew what time he would roll in. Already they had discovered that he went out in the evenings a great deal, often not returning till long after they were in bed. A couple of times Mrs Batley had tentatively questioned Harry about where the master went but each time Harry had closed up like a clam.

'But, Mrs Batley, it will be freezing up there!' Mabel looked concerned but Mrs Batley merely grinned and went back to her knitting. She'd bought some wool from a shop in town and was making a little matinee coat for the new arrival.

‘Let me worry about that if he complains,’ she answered complacently. ‘You just go and see as the mistress’s room is nice and warm for her.’



The next morning when Mabel placed the serving dishes on the sideboard at breakfast, the judge stared down at the measly few rashers of bacon and two eggs and asked, ‘Where are the sausages?’

‘I’ve no idea, judge. Mrs Batley just asked me to bring it through.’ Mabel gulped nervously as the colour rose in his cheeks.

‘Send her in to me *immediately*,’ he roared and Mabel scuttled away so quickly she almost tripped over her skirts.

‘Batty, the master wants to see yer this instant,’ Mabel gasped as she burst into the kitchen. ‘An’ I should warn yer, he ain’t in the best o’ moods.’

Mrs Batley wiped her hands on a length of huckaback and headed towards the door. She’d been expecting this and was ready for him. Deep down she had come to fear him almost as much as Mabel did but she would have died rather than admit it to anyone.

She found Mrs Kettle seated at the dining room table with her head bowed while her husband stood with his hands clasped behind his back rocking backwards and forwards on his heels.

‘Yes, judge, yer wished to see me?’

‘What is the meaning of this?’ he spluttered. ‘How is a man supposed to do an honest day’s work on such a meagre meal?’ He had now taken up his role as a judge in the law courts in Coventry where he went each day on the steam train from Trent Valley railway station.

‘But, sir, I was just doin’ what you told me an’ cuttin’ back,’ Mrs Batley replied innocently. Despite her calm countenance, her heart was thumping painfully. She was sure, just for a moment, that she saw a shadow of a grin flit across his wife’s face.



*'Cutting back!* Go to the kitchen and get me a proper meal, woman,' he ordered through clenched teeth.

Mrs Batley calmly shook her head. 'I'm afraid I can't do that. I cut sausages off the shoppin' list, see?'

He seemed to swell to twice his size but then, controlling himself with an effort, he told her, 'I don't have time to wait about for you to cook anything else anyway or I shall be late for my train but see that you do better in the morning! And by the way, my room was freezing when I went up to bed last night. The maid clearly forgot to light the fire.'

'I told her not to,' she told him boldly. 'After all, yer did reduce the housekeepin' money an' I have to make cuts somewhere. I thought yer'd approve.' And she strutted away with a sweet smile on her face.

Entering the kitchen, she blew out a breath and said shakily, 'I'll show the bugger, you just see if I don't! I wouldn't dream o' walkin' into his court an' tellin' him how to do his job an' I'll be blowed if I'll let him come in here tellin' *me* how to do mine!' She felt as if she and Judge Kettle were engaged in a battle of wills.

Mabel was sitting at the kitchen table with Harry enjoying a cup of tea and they grinned at each other as Mrs Batley went to pour one for herself.

'I reckon the master don't know what he's taken on wi' our Mrs Batley,' she whispered. 'She can be as stubborn as a mule when she has a mind to be.'

Harry nodded but made no comment. He himself had no complaints whatsoever since coming to live in Swan Lane. Mabel had even begun to put warm bricks into his bed each night and he had never eaten so well. Already the waistbands on his trousers felt a little tighter and although his room above the stable was cold, it was his and he loved the peace and quiet of it.

'I'd best be off,' he said, glancing at the clock. 'I have to get

the carriage out and the horses harnessed in time to get the judge to the railway station otherwise he'll have me guts for garters.'

Mrs Batley tutted. Why the judge couldn't get himself to the station she had no idea. It was only around the corner, less than a ten-minute walk away. Harry swallowed the rest of his drink in a gulp and seconds later he was gone, leaving Mabel to stare after him with a dreamy look in her eyes.

'I reckon someone not a million miles away has got a soft spot for a certain young man,' she teased.

Mabel flushed and rose to carry the dirty pots to the sink. 'I don't know what yer talkin' about,' she snapped a little too quickly.

Mrs Batley let the subject drop, for now at least.



The judge arrived home as usual at five thirty that evening. He appeared to be in a particularly ill humour as his wife went to meet him in the hall.

'Have you had a good day, dear?' she questioned with a perfunctory peck on the cheek as she helped him off with his hat and coat. It was raining cats and dogs outside, freezing rain with a promise of snow in it.

'Not particularly.' He glanced down at her swollen stomach with a look of repugnance. What men found attractive in pregnant women he would never understand.

'Never mind, come through to the day room. There's a bright fire in there and you can get warm. Mrs Batley has the dinner almost ready.'

He did as he was asked and once inside he crossed to the small table where the whisky was kept and poured himself a generous tot. He scowled at the almost-empty decanter.

Soon they were summoned to the dining room and when Mabel placed a pie in the centre of the table, he frowned. 'What do you

call this? It's working men's fare. Where is the joint of meat? Send Batley to me *at once!*'

Mabel scuttled away as fast as her legs would take her.

'He wants you in the dining room right now,' she informed the cook the second she set foot in the kitchen and the older woman nodded.

'What the *hell* do you do you call *this*, woman?' growled the judge when she entered the room. Disgusted, he stabbed a finger towards the offending pie as she stared innocently back at him.

'Why, it's a steak an' kidney pie. Is it not to your likin'?'

'I expect a *proper* meal when I've been working all day,' he thundered. 'Especially after the measly meal you served me at breakfast.'

'I-I'm sure it will be delicious, Jacob,' Madeline ventured timidly, hoping to calm him, but her words only seemed to incense him further.

'Speak when you are spoken to, woman!' He cast her a withering look and she seemed to shrink in her seat.

'*Well?*' He turned his attention back to Mrs Batley who returned his stare calmly.

'I can only make the reduced housekeeping money stretch so far,' she pointed out. 'An' you *did* tell me to cut down on the butcher's bill, if I remember correctly. I cut the wine order in half as well, you'll be pleased to know. After all there's two extra mouths to feed now to what there were when the old master were alive an' I was managin' on the same money as he always gave me. But now . . .' She spread her hands and shrugged as his face turned puce.

'We will discuss this later,' he told her abruptly. He sliced into the pie and placed a generous portion on his plate. 'Oh, and by the way, I shall be having a dinner party here next Thursday for my colleagues from the law courts. There will be eight of us dining that evening and I shall expect something special served.'

‘Huh! Not on the housekeepin’ you give me there won’t be,’ she said bluntly and turning about she left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

When she recounted what had been said to Mabel, the girl was appalled. ‘Eeh, yer never did,’ she gasped.

Mrs Batley nodded. ‘I did, true as I’m standin’ here.’ She puffed her chest out. ‘There’s only one way to treat bullies an’ that’s to give as good as yer get an’ that man in there is a bully, all right! Why, even his own little wife is afraid o’ him, bless her. But he’ll not get the better o’ me, you just mark my words. If he wants a warm house an’ good food on the table then he’ll have to pay for it.’

Harry joined them then and unlike Judge Kettle’s, his eyes lit up at the sight of the steak and kidney pie Mrs Batley placed on the table with a dish of vegetables.

He smiled at Mabel and took a seat. ‘Oh, that smells lovely,’ he said appreciatively.

Mrs Batley’s face brightened. It was nice to cook for someone who appreciated it and she piled the young man’s plate high, much to his delight.

When they’d eaten, Mabel served the judge and his wife with apple pie and thick creamy custard – at least he didn’t moan about that – then hurried back to the kitchen to have hers. No one could cook an apple pie like Mrs Batley, as far as Mabel was concerned.

When the meal was over, the judge went to his room to get ready to go out as he did most evenings, while his wife retired to the day room to read for a while before going to bed.

‘Where the hell does he find to go to?’ Mrs Batley mused as she put her feet up at the side of the fire while Mabel tackled the dirty dishes.

Harry just stared into the dancing flames and pretended he hadn’t heard her so she wisely didn’t push the point.



When Mrs Batley went to present the weekly accounts to the judge later that week, he hastily read through them and pushed a pile of coins across the desk to her.

‘You will find some extra there,’ he told her as if he were bestowing her with some great gift. ‘Please make sure that my dinner guests are presented with a good meal. My wife will discuss the menus with you.’

‘Right y’are, judge.’ She pocketed the money and left the room with a smile on her face. Happen he wouldn’t be such a skinflint in future.

Mrs Batley went to discuss the menu with Madeline later that day, and the poor young woman flew into a flap.

‘But I haven’t a *clue* what to suggest,’ she told the older woman truthfully. ‘My father and I dined very simply and I have no idea what Jacob would like.’

‘It’s all right, pet,’ Mrs Batley soothed. ‘The old master had a few posh dinner parties himself from time to time so I’m happy to make suggestions. What about a nice melon for starters, something fresh for the palate? Then we could have beef with a red wine sauce – my sauces are quite tasty I’m told – followed by a fresh cream trifle an’ a selection o’ cheese an’ biscuits?’

Madeline clapped her hands with relief. ‘Oh yes. That all sounds wonderful . . . but won’t it make rather a lot of work for you?’

‘Don’t you get frettin’ about that, lass. I enjoy cookin’ an’ I’ve got Mabel to help me.’

Madeline looked relieved. ‘Thank you, you are so kind.’

Mrs Batley gave her a crafty wink. ‘If the master should ask I’ll tell him you came up with the menu, eh? That’ll put you in his good books.’

Madeline giggled, totally transforming her usual serious features and Mrs Batley was saddened. She was such a nice young lass and deserved to be married to a man that appreciated her.



The dinner party was a huge success, although Mrs Batley suspected that Madeline didn't enjoy it. The judge had invited two lawyers, another judge and their wives. The other women looked like multi-coloured butterflies in their silks and satins, and Madeline felt dull and dowdy by comparison.

'As you can see, my wife is in a somewhat delicate condition,' the judge apologised as he introduced them to her in the hallway while Mabel took their cloaks and bonnets. 'So please excuse her for not looking her best.'

Poor Madeline seemed to shrivel as she pulled her shawl about her and blushed, and the evening got no better for her as they sat down to the meal. One of the women present had known Jacob's first wife and without even thinking how it might make Madeline feel she commented, 'I do *so* miss, Julia, Jacob. We were such good friends and she was *such* a beautiful person. How sad that she should die giving birth to your child. Still' – she glanced towards Madeline – 'at least you are about to become a father now. How clever of you it was to marry a younger woman. I'm sure she will not have to endure losing one child after another as Julia did.'

The conversation moved on to other things but for Madeline the night was ruined. Had Jacob married her simply because he hoped she could bear him a child? She thought it more than likely. After their disastrous wedding night, Jacob had only come to her rarely, and when he did the act was over in seconds. He had seemed relieved when she'd told him she was with child and had not attempted to touch her since, for which she was grateful.

But now was not the time for such thoughts, so she fixed a false smile to her lips and tried desperately to get through the rest of the evening.