

# Chapter One

*While men of the East may still choose nubile maidens from their harems and slave markets, English gentlemen are more limited in their selection of pleasure slave. The Author recommends experience over youth; an experienced slave will cause less trouble to you than one who will need training.*

*On The Art Of Slavery, by An English Gentleman*



*The London to Birmingham line, September 1880.*

“Penny for your thoughts?”

Faith jerked back to reality, drawn out of the misery of her thoughts by the elegantly dressed, petite blonde woman who sat opposite to her in the train carriage.

“I—I beg your pardon?” she asked, looking properly at the other occupant of the carriage that was steadily making its way from London north into the countryside.

Faith had been forced onto it in the very early hours of the morning by her former employer, his stern face thin-lipped as he had handed her an envelope containing a few pounds severance pay and her first-class ticket. Faith had never travelled in a first-class carriage in her life; perhaps, she thought bitterly, it was in some way an apology for her hasty dismissal. Or perhaps Sir Harold Bateman, sugar magnate, had forgotten that there was a third class carriage. Rich people, in Faith’s experience, often had no idea how poorer people lived.

Other passengers had come and gone as the train made its way through the countryside outside of London, but Faith couldn’t remember when the lady sitting opposite her had joined. This was not an express, but a train that stopped at every station along the line, making the journey long and exhausting.

“Penny for your thoughts, dear,” the woman said again, kindly. “This train doesn’t stop until Northampton. We’re all the company that we have for a few hours yet. We may as well pass the time together. You look troubled. Are you quite well?”

“I’m afraid that I am not very good company at the moment,” Faith said hesitantly. “I— I—”

To her horror, she started to cry. She hadn’t cried once since she and Peter had been discovered in her bed, high up in the attics of the house where governesses were expected to sleep alone. She hadn’t cried when his angry father had pulled him away from her, exposing her nakedness to all the servants who had crowded around the door to her room, eager to watch her disgrace. She hadn’t cried when, instead of telling his father that he loved her and wanted to marry her, like he had told *her* so many times, Peter had turned his back on her without another word. She hadn’t cried when she had been marched out of the house at four o’clock in the morning and made to sit alone on the railway station until she could get on the first train back to Birmingham.

But now, after a few kind words from a stranger, the shock of discovering that the man she loved had seen her only as a plaything, and the dissolution of her life in London came crashing down on her, she burst into tears.

“Oh, my dear, take this,” the woman said firmly, producing a clean, white handkerchief from her travelling bag and handing it to Faith.

She moved to sit next to her, and put an arm around Faith’s shaking shoulders. That small act of kindness undid Faith, who sobbed helplessly into the handkerchief. The woman pulled her towards her shoulder and let Faith cry while she rubbed her arm in a comforting manner.

“I’m so sorry,” Faith managed to say, after the crying jag seemed to have passed. “I’m a complete stranger, and you’ve been so kind.”

“Nonsense,” the woman said softly but firmly. “You look like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders. Please, if there is anything I can do to help.” She paused, and shook her head in exasperation. “All of this, and you don’t even know my name!” she said, giving Faith’s shoulders one last squeeze before returning to her previous seat in the small but elegant carriage.

“My name is Mrs Monkton,” she told Faith, who was still mopping her face with the fine cotton handkerchief.

The handkerchief was decorated with a small but finely worked monogram of HM in the corner. It clearly belonged to a woman of some wealth. Faith compared her rather drab brown gown to the luxuriously rich green silk that Mrs Monkton was wearing.

“I’m Faith. Miss Halstead,” Faith told her. “You’ve been so kind,” she said gratefully. “Thank you. I’m sorry if my crying has damaged your gown.”

Faith’s eyes anxiously flicked to the shoulder of Mrs Monkton’s dress, where there were, indeed, some small tearstains marring the fabric. Mrs Monkton glanced at the stained silk and shrugged her shoulders.

“I have other gowns far nicer than this one,” she said dismissively. “It is of no great importance.”

Mrs Monkton’s sharp eyes took in Faith’s much cheaper dress, noted the inexpertly sewn seams and Faith’s lack of jewellery and ornamentation. Faith watched her examine the faded bonnet sitting on the seat, and compare it to the exquisite confection that Mrs Monkton had accessorised her outfit with.

“What happened, my dear?” Mrs Monkton asked gently. “Are you running away?”

“No,” Faith said, shaking her head.

“I wouldn’t blame you if you were,” Mrs Monkton said, smiling at Faith. “Sometimes leaving a dangerous or unpleasant situation is a woman’s only recourse.”

“No, I’m not running away,” Faith said, clutching at the handkerchief tightly with her clenched fists. She did not want to tell the truth about her situation to this kind, rich woman. She might call for the conductor and have her removed from the carriage if she knew that Faith was a fallen woman.

Mrs Monkton stared at Faith for a few moments, her clear blue eyes taking in Faith’s long, dark hair, hastily bundled up this morning and now escaping from its pins, and her deep brown eyes, now reddened and swollen from crying.

“A man,” Mrs Monkton said eventually. “A man has forced you to leave London, hasn’t he?”

Faith jerked in surprise, and the look on her face must have been comical because the other woman let out a short, cynical laugh.

“My dear, one thing you will learn when you are as old as I am is that whenever a woman cries, a man is the cause of it.”

“You are not old!” Faith blurted out, and the woman laughed again, this time a little more freely.

“Well, thank you for that,” Mrs Monkton said good-naturedly. “It’s good to know that all the cosmetics I waste my money on are doing me some good.”

Faith looked again at Mrs Monkton and realised that, despite the carefully applied cosmetics and the youthful fashion of her clothing, the woman was older than she appeared—definitely in her thirties, perhaps even forty, if she had good skin.

“So, then, a man,” Mrs Monkton continued. “Let me guess. You are a young woman of good family, yes? You speak well. Your father is a—doctor, perhaps. Or a businessman?”

“A vicar,” Faith said, giving in to the sapphire stare from across the carriage.

“Ah, yes, of course, a man of the cloth. A second son?”

“The second son of a third son,” Faith sighed. “There is a family fortune, but we have no share in it, and no contact with the more important members of the family.”

“A title?” Mrs Monkton asked shrewdly.

“A title,” Faith agreed. “But not for my father or my grandfather. They were left to fend for themselves, and they joined the clergy.”

“So, a clergyman’s daughter in London. You’re not from London. You don’t have much of an accent, but it’s not London. So you worked in London. A good family background, a clergyman father and—you will excuse me, my dear, a rather awful dress—you are a governess?”

“You are very observant,” Faith remarked, a little stung at the remark about the dress.

She longed for bright colours and fine materials, but her salary did not stretch much further than a collection of bright ribbons bought from street-sellers on her half-days to alleviate the boring browns and greys of her clothes.

“A governess, then,” Mrs Monkton said thoughtfully. “But you’re on a train headed out of London, and you’ve been as serious as the grave since I joined the train. Have you lost your position, my dear?”

Silently, Faith nodded her head.

“Because of your employer?” Mrs Monkton asked. “Did he—” She paused, looking for a delicate phrasing. “Did he take liberties?” she finished.

Faith couldn't help but let out a small laugh. The idea of Sir Harold in her bed instead of his son was ridiculous. Balding, thin and stoop-shouldered, Sir Harold was nothing like Peter, who had a thick head of chocolate-brown hair, soulful, dark eyes, and skin tanned from the hot sun of the Caribbean. He had just returned from the family plantations there, learning the business that his father would leave him one day. Faith had fallen in love the first time she had seen him. Never had she seen such masculine beauty. He looked like some angel in a Renaissance painting. Peter had soon taken to accompanying his much younger half-sisters on their walk with their governess, which had led to illicit meetings on Faith's half-days, which had led to promises of love and marriage whispered in the darkness of her attic bedroom.

God, she had been a fool.

"So, not the father. A footman? An older son? Ah! There we have it."

Faith's expression must have given her away. She would need to change that when she faced her father again. If he ever found out that she was a fallen woman, she would find very little Christian charity in his cold vicarage.

"Did he tell you that he loved you?" Mrs Monkton asked, not unkindly.

Faith nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

"Did he say that he would marry you?" she went on.

Again, Faith nodded, looking down at her lap.

"You were discovered, and he suddenly forgot his promises," Mrs Monkton finished, sounding more resigned than disapproving.

"I thought— I thought that he was a good man," Faith said quietly.

Mrs Monkton shook her head. "The only good man is a dead one," she said firmly. "A rich, dead one," she added, after a moment's thought.

Faith looked at her, shocked.

"Why, my dear, you don't think that I could afford a beautiful gown like this on my own, do you?" Mrs Monkton said, displaying the beautiful embroidery on the skirts of her dress. "One of my protectors paid for this, God bless his miserable soul, and the hundreds of others I bought after he died and left me a lot of his lovely, lovely money."

Faith couldn't find any words to say. This had been a very stressful and trying day, and her current situation wasn't helping very much.

“You will learn, my dear, that the rules of our society are prejudiced against women. It is our duty to make sure that we profit in life, despite these rules. While men have the law on their side, we women have a much deadlier weapon in our arsenal, if we know how to deploy it correctly.”

“I’m not sure that I’m following you, Mrs Monkton,” Faith said weakly, fairly sure that she *was* following her, and didn’t want to.

“Our bodies, my dear,” Mrs Monkton said bluntly. “Men want them, and we can let them have them. We just have to make sure that we negotiate a good enough price.”

Faith sat back in her seat, overwhelmed.

“You mean— You mean that you are—”

“A mistress,” Mrs Monkton said breezily. “A professional one, and even though I say it myself, quite successful.”

“Gosh,” Faith said into the silence, unable to say more.

“Oh, I know. I am a woman of loose morals and therefore unsuitable to go out into society,” Mrs Monkton said dismissively. “A stain on the moral fabric of the nation, and all of that rot. But do you know something? I’m rich. I own a nice house, with servants. I have accounts at all the best shops in Bond Street. I have enough money put away to support me very comfortably in my old age, and God hasn’t struck me down yet.”

“And Mr Monkton?”

“A suitable fiction,” Mrs Monkton said, waving her hand to indicate how little she thought of her non-existent husband. The hand wore a thick golden wedding band and an engagement ring with a considerable diamond embedded in it. She noticed Faith’s observation of the diamond. “I wear these when I’m travelling,” she said. “People are politer to married women than to single ones. I have no earthly idea why, do you? As if spinsterhood is some sort of communicable disease.”

Mrs Monkton shuddered at the very idea.

“Why are you telling me this?” Faith asked suddenly. “Why are you telling me these things about you? We are strangers. I am nothing to you.”

“Because I remember another young girl, too many years ago, who put her trust in an unworthy man, and who was cast out onto the streets with nothing but the clothes on her back,” Mrs Monkton replied grimly. “It’s not an easy life for a ruined woman, my dear. You have two

choices. One is to try and pretend it never happened, which time and nature have a way of spoiling, if you haven't been careful. The other is to embrace it, learn from it, and profit by it."

"You mean become a—"

Faith wasn't sure she could get the words out.

"A mistress," Mrs Monkton said firmly. "A courtesan, in refined circles. Or a whore, if you prefer plain speaking."

"I'm not sure that I do," Faith said faintly.

"It's your choice, of course," Mrs Monkton said, smiling. "I know many women who have been able to hide their past from their families and their husbands, but some just don't have that option." Mrs Monkton looked Faith up and down again. "You're not a natural beauty," she said critically, "but you do have something about you. You look like you are a wild spirit kept tamed by corsets and hairpins, just ready to break free. Men like that in a mistress. Your colouring is good – dark hair and eyes against pale skin. Very attractive. With a few better dresses, you could find yourself a protector quite quickly, if you knew where to look."

"I'm not sure that I want to look," Faith said, unable to meet Mrs Monkton's frank gaze.

Mrs Monkton laughed, somewhat bitterly. "Not many do, at the beginning," she said. "But they soon change their minds when families throw them out and friends close their doors."

Faith thought of her stern father, with his rigid, unbending morality and impatience with sinners. Concocting a lie to explain her sudden return from London was bad enough. What if Sir Harold Bateman wrote to him to expose his daughter's mistakes? What would she do then? Where would she go?

She had very few friends back in Birmingham, none of them the sort who could afford to take her in if her father threw her out of the house. Her savings were meagre, and she had been dismissed without a reference. How could she get another job without exposing how she had been dismissed from her last? No respectable family would have her. No respectable man would, either, if he learned of how she had willingly and wantonly given herself up to Peter's kisses and caresses.

Mrs Monkton rummaged in her bag and took out an engraved silver card case. "Here," she said, presenting her with a calling card. "It has my name and my London address. I will be absent from the city for a week, and if all goes well, a full month. If you decide that you would like some help securing a future for yourself, please come to my house."

Faith reached out for the card and took it, feeling the expensive card stock between her fingers. She should have declined it, she knew, but it was a sincere overture of friendship, and she had the feeling that there would be very few of those in her future.

“You are visiting friends?” Faith asked, trying to turn the conversation back onto a more socially acceptable track.

“No, my dear, I am being auditioned!” Mrs Monkton said, laughing at the novelty of it.

“You are an actress?” Faith asked, confused.

“Hardly, dear child, no,” Mrs Monkton said, waving the hand with the huge diamond on it. “I am to audition for a very grand nobleman, to see if I am suitable for his needs.” She winked at Faith, who blushed. “If I am found suitable, I am to be engaged for a month, and very handsomely rewarded for it. If I am not, then I am to be paid incredibly well for my discretion and sent back home.”

“Men—men *audition* their mistresses?” Faith asked, shocked. The *demi-monde*, the half-world of the kept woman, was a complete mystery to her.

“Not all, no,” Mrs Monkton informed her. “I am not at liberty to discuss particulars. I signed a confidential document with an agent for this man in London that prohibits me discussing the nature of my, ah, employment. I think it safe to say that this gentleman – who is among the very highest in the country, and whose name is very famous indeed – has certain requirements that go beyond the usual. Finding a woman who is willing to satisfy them and who can maintain discretion is not easy. I was previously the companion of another gentleman who has similar interests. After our *liaison* had concluded, he told me that he knew of another, who might be interested in what I had to offer.”

Faith stared at her blankly. “There are requirements beyond the usual?” she asked, mystified. Although she and Peter had not spent many nights together, their lovemaking seemed to run on a pre-organised routine that Peter stuck to rigidly.

Mrs Monkton smiled at her. “I will not break the terms of my agreement,” she reminded Faith. “But suffice it to say that there are many ways to enjoy the act of love, and not all of them are commonplace.”

“I see,” Faith said weakly.

“I would wager that you do not,” Mrs Monkton said, amused. “And there is no reason for you ever to do so, unless you wish to make your living in that way.”



“I am sure that I do not,” Faith replied.

Mrs Monkton opened her mouth to speak again, but there was a tremendous shudder as the train suddenly slowed. Faith nearly lost her seat, and the calling card Mrs Monkton had given her fell to the floor. The train ground to a halt with a terrible screech of metal against metal, and all along the first class carriage people were raising their voices and opening and closing their compartment doors, determined to find out what was going on.

Mrs Monkton lifted the shade that covered the window and looked out. It was dark now, with thunderous clouds looming overhead, but she could see a group of people starting to cluster around the front of the train.

“What is it?” Faith asked, settling herself in her seat. “Can you see?”

“I can see what it *was*,” Mrs Monkton replied. “Cows. A herd of them, I think. There are parts everywhere. Don’t look, my dear. It’s like a slaughterhouse out there.”

Soon, a harried-looking conductor arrived at their compartment to give them official confirmation of the reason for their sudden stop.

“Some farmer hadn’t maintained his fencing, and a herd got out and onto the line,” the conductor said, clearly annoyed at the negligent farmer. “We tried to stop, but we were going at top speed. Half the herd is in pieces on the line, the other half is milling about, blocking it.”

“Can we continue?” Mrs Monkton asked, looking worried. “I was supposed to meet somebody at Northampton station.”

The conductor looked doubtful. “We’ve sent the engineer out to look for the farmer, madam, but we don’t know whose cows they were, or how to shift the ones who are still alive. The last time something like this happened, we had to send to the nearest station for carriages to transport passengers.”

He left to continue spreading the bad news. Rain started to lightly tap against the window. As they waited for more news on the delay, the rain got heavier and the sky darkened further. About an hour after the train had halted, the conductor arrived back in their compartment to inform them that carriages for the first class passengers had arrived to take them on to Northampton. They had to disembark onto the rail line, itself, and walk in the rain to the nearest accessible point where they could scramble up the bank and onto the road. Faith’s dress, already brown, hid the worst of the mud fairly well, but Mrs Monkton’s beautiful green silk was ruined, a fact that did not make her happy.

“I was going to change clothes in the railway hotel,” she told Faith unhappily. “But now I don’t think I’ll have time before I’m due to meet the d—” She stopped herself before finishing her sentence, but Faith wasn’t completely stupid, despite her mistaken belief in Peter’s true feelings for her.

A duke? With *requirements beyond the usual*? No wonder Mrs Monkton was anxious to look her best!

“You never know,” Faith said as cheerfully as she could. “This rain may have delayed your gentleman, as well.”

“Perhaps,” Mrs Monkton said fretfully, and returned her anxious gaze to the window.

Northampton railway station had clearly been warned ahead of their arrival, as porters were waiting to help passengers down from their carriages and start the process of matching luggage to its respective owners. After some frantic telegraph communication, the manager of the railway station came over to the by now thoroughly wet and bedraggled passengers to inform them that rooms had been arranged for most of them in the railway hotel next to the station. All except those passengers going to Birmingham, however. They would be taken by carriage to a small halt farther up the line, where another train would make an unscheduled stop to pick them up. They would be able to finish their journey tonight, delayed only by two or three hours.

“Your gentleman has not arrived?” Faith asked Mrs Monkton.

“No, not yet. I have left word for him to go to the hotel to find me. If I’m lucky, I will have time to clear up before he gets here. Will you be all right travelling on to Birmingham?” Mrs Monkton asked, clearly torn between helping Faith and wanting to dash away and clean herself up.

“I will be fine,” Faith assured her. “Thank you for your kindness today,” she added. “Not many would have been so good to a complete stranger.”

“You have my card?” Mrs Monkton asked. “Remember, I will definitely be home at the end of the month, if not earlier.”

“I have it, although I hope you will not be offended if I choose not to use it,” Faith said awkwardly.

“My dear, I hope that you never have to,” Mrs Monkton said sincerely. “But if you must, you have a friend to help you.”

Mrs Monkton pecked her on the cheek, smiled at her and bustled off to find a porter to bring her luggage to the railway hotel. Faith stood in the foyer of the station, waiting to hear the call for the carriage to take her to the train that would eventually deposit her in Birmingham.

The rain outside had been falling heavily and steadily, and now seemed to be coming down in even stronger torrents. The front of the station was lit with gas lamps, but they provided very little light to cut through the dark of the night. From some miles away there was a low growl of thunder and soon huge flashes of lightning lit the sky. Faith shuddered, unhappy at travelling in such weather. Carriages were coming in and out of the front of the station, their drivers hunched over their reins and bundled up against the terrible storm. They were bringing the rest of the passengers from the stricken train, and soon the front of the station was a confusion of sodden horses and upset people, all shouting to each other over the noise of the rain.

“Ham!”

Faith turned her head to find the source of the noise. Had they been calling for Birmingham?

“B—ham!”

A particularly aggrieved horse had chosen that moment to protest loudly about the weather, but she was sure that she had heard a man shout Birmingham. It must have been her carriage.

“Here!” she called, waving her arm in the direction of the shout. “I’m waiting for the carriage to Birmingham!”

A loud roll of thunder crashed almost directly overhead as she shouted. A short, stocky man pushed himself through the crowd to her.

“I’ll take your bags, miss,” he said, picking up her trunk with remarkably little effort and holding out his hand for her valise. “Carriage is this way. Sorry about not getting closer, but all these people got in the way.”

They hurried out into the rain towards a very fine looking carriage. It was too dark to see many details, but it was large and well equipped, pulled by four huge horses that were standing silently in their traces, not at all bothered by the tumult of people and weather around them. A driver sat up on the box, and nodded to her as he got down and handed her into the carriage. After the door was shut firmly behind her, she heard a thud from the roof that indicated that her

bags had been securely fastened there. Moments later the carriage lurched forwards, and they were off.

Faith was surprised that she was the only passenger going directly to Birmingham from London; she had expected to be crammed into the carriage with a dozen other people, but she was alone. The carriage was far nicer than she had expected, too; public coaches were usually travel-stained and unpleasant but this carriage was nothing short of luxurious. It was lit with solid beeswax candles sitting safely in lamps attached to the walls, so she had some kind of light, even if it was dim. The seats were well sprung and comfortable, lined in deep maroon velvet that was in pristine condition. Even the floor of the carriage was carpeted.

It seemed odd that the railway would own a carriage like this, but she was tired. It was now night, and she had been travelling for over sixteen hours. The softness of the seats and the comforting light of the candles made her drowsy. Finally, she closed her eyes and slept.