

ONE

A reception room of a well-appointed Belgravia mansion. MOTHER, POLLY and MOLLY sit opposite GEMMA. MAGDA, a maidservant, is in attendance on one side of the room.

MOTHER: Are you married, Gemma? Or have you ever been?

GEMMA: No. I've never found the right man, I don't suppose.

POLLY: Is that a polite way of saying you're a lesbian?

GEMMA: No. It isn't. It's a polite way of saying I've never found a man that I loved enough. Or who loved me enough.

MOLLY: So you'd only get married for love? Not for anything else?

GEMMA: Don't get me wrong. Money's great. You can't eat love or wear it or pay your bills with it. But if I ever get married, it'll be because I truly want them and they truly want me.

MOTHER, POLLY and MOLLY look at each other and all make notes.

MOTHER: Thankyou. I hope you don't mind us asking.

GEMMA: I do, a little bit. I've never been asked questions like that

when I've been seen for any of my previous positions.

MOTHER: Yes... Your references are tremendously impressive, but they only tell us so much. I don't know any of the families personally myself, you understand, and so it's hard for one to form a complete assessment of your character.

GEMMA: No, Mrs. Allenby, I don't suppose you would. After all, they're not old money. They're all new Essex money.

POLLY: Oh my God, like, TOWIE Essex?

GEMMA: Yes, Miss Polly. That's where I'm from. That's my part of the world.

MOLLY: Oh my God, so, do you actually know Joey Essex?

GEMMA: I wouldn't say as I know him, but yes, I met him a few times in the past, before he got famous.

MOLLY: I think Joey Essex is gorgeous! And you know, his net worth is, like, four point five million now or something—!

POLLY: Oh no, he'd well bore me out.

MOLLY: Joey Essex is well reem! He'd make a great husband!

GEMMA: The Joey Essex I knew was definitely not suitable marriage material, Miss Molly — not for the girls back home, and if I can speak frankly, absolutely not for a young lady such as yourself. And having four and a half million pounds in the bank doesn't automatically make anyone respectful, considerate, loving... Or faithful.

POLLY (aside): Money certainly hasn't made Daddy any of those things...

MOTHER: Polly!!

Silence. GEMMA smiles politely. MOTHER is obliged to explain herself.

MOTHER: Mr. Allenby — the girls' father — and I are... We're currently... What I mean to say is—

GEMMA: Really, Mrs. Allenby, there's no need for you to say—

MOTHER: I wish that were the case, Gemma, but as painful as it is for me to discuss it, facts are facts and must be faced. And the fact is that my husband finds himself irresistibly drawn to younger women. It is also a fact that he has recently had his fingers badly burned — not to mention his bank account severely depleted — after being irresistibly drawn into a deeply unpleasant dalliance with the previous incumbent of the role of housekeeper. And so I hope you will understand

why it's necessary for me to find out precisely what kind of woman I might be bringing into this house.

GEMMA: I understand. In an ideal world, you'd like some unattractive overweight mute dyke with a hair lip and a limp to look after the house and wait on you hand and foot, all without running the risk of your husband having something else to get irresistibly drawn to. That sound about right?

MOTHER: Well... I wouldn't put it quite in those terms, but...

GEMMA stands up, suddenly, and towers over the women.

GEMMA: Well, I would. I'll put it in a few more terms for you. I'm young, reasonably good-looking, totally single, totally straight, I like men and I like sex, and I want a nice life with nice things, but I do it by my rules and I work hard to earn my own money. I'm not looking to lie back and live off someone else's. I'm not looking to be kept. And I'm certainly not gonna lower myself to steal somebody's else's man to get where I want to go. Do I make myself clear?

Silence, for a moment. The women all look at her with wide eyes.

POLLY / MOLLY (together): Hundred cent!

MOTHER: When can you start?

Time passes and the stage readjusts. GEMMA is now in post. She watches as MOTHER supervises MAGDA, who is helping POLLY and MOLLY to try on various pairs of high-heeled shoes.

POLLY: No, Magda! Not those! Get me some different ones!

MAGDA: I'm sorry, Miss Polly.

MOLLY: These are no good, either! Bring me some different ones!

MAGDA: I'm sorry, Miss Molly.

MAGDA provides more shoes. She helps POLLY into a new pair as MOLLY sees to herself.

POLLY: Ow! Magda! That's too tight around my toes! Get it off!

MOLLY: Oh, Magda, you idiot! These are pinching my heel!

POLLY pushes MAGDA back with her foot. MOLLY throws her shoe at MAGDA and narrowly misses hitting her.

POLLY / MOLLY (together): Bring us more shoes!

Close to tears, MAGDA looks at GEMMA, who simply nods to her. MAGDA scoops up an armful of shoes and hurries out of the room.

MOTHER: Stop your tantrums, you two! It took more effort and more dinner parties than I can stomach to get Prince Casper invited to this party! I've had to make myself seriously beholden to some of my most toxic well-connected friends in order to get him here, so the least you can do is look your very best when he comes!

POLLY: But he's not going to care what shoes we're wearing!

MOLLY: He won't even see them under our dresses!

MOTHER: I...have it on good authority that Prince Casper is very...partial to women's high-heeled shoes...and to...strong women who wear them...

MOLLY: You mean he's a foot perv? Oh, Christ, Mummy! You want one of us to get married to the Pervy Prince?

MOTHER: Just pretend you're in Fifty Shades of Grey, or something...

POLLY: What do you know about Fifty Shades of Grey?!

MOTHER: Oh, do shut up! The point is, he is very eligible and very

available. But he won't be available for long, believe me.

He's close to being sent overseas on a stint with the Navy, and it could be years before he's back. If you miss this chance, there will not be another one.

MOLLY: We haven't got any shoes that are good enough, Mummy!

MOTHER: You listen to me — both of you! If the Prince likes high-heeled shoes, and putting a nice pair on is all it will take, you'd better find a pair that's good enough and you'd better make sure he does see you in them, hadn't you?!

MAGDA comes back through the door with another armful of shoes.

MOTHER / POLLY / MOLLY (together): Not those ones, Magda!

Time passes and the stage readjusts. GEMMA's bedroom. She is trying on various pairs of high-heeled shoes. MAGDA is helping her.

GEMMA: Could you pass me another pair, please, Magda?

MAGDA: Yes, Miss Gemma.

GEMMA: Oh, Magda, please stop calling me Miss all the time. I'm not one of them. I'm no different to you.

MAGDA: Oh, yes, you are, Miss. You're not like any of us. The way you treat them. And the way they treat you. It's not like us.

GEMMA: I think they've learned that I can see them for what they are, and they know it. That's all. Just because they're paying my wages, it doesn't mean they're any better than me. Or you. Or any of us. Could I swap these, please?

MAGDA: They don't see it like that. They think we are scum.

MAGDA kneels to take GEMMA's shoes off.

GEMMA: Oh, Magda, no! Don't get on your hands and knees for me! It kills me when I see you all doing it for them!

MAGDA: I don't mind for you, Miss. I am happy to do it. They think their money and their fancy things make them ladies but they're not. You are a lady. A real lady. Not like them.

GEMMA: Standing here trying on their old shoes. Some lady I am.

MAGDA: They don't need them. Don't want them. Never wear them. They don't even know how many shoes they've got. So one pair, they won't miss.

GEMMA: One pair is all I need. And I think this is the one.

MAGDA: You're wearing them for him, aren't you? To impress him?
So he'll marry you and take you away? Do you think he
will? Do you really think he's different to any of them?

GEMMA: Mummy says the Prince likes strong women. Those two
upstairs are about as strong as a stale breadstick. So I'm
going to give him exactly what he wants. And with any luck,
I'll be away from here and away from them in no time.

MAGDA looks disappointed.

GEMMA: Don't worry, Magda. I won't leave any of you behind.

MAGDA: You told them in your interview that you would only get
married for love. Was that all a lie?

GEMMA pauses and gives this some thought. She smiles at MAGDA.

GEMMA: Maybe I'm a lot more like them than you think.

*Time passes and the stage readjusts. The party is in full swing. GEMMA is
having a sit down and a smoke, helping herself to some champagne while no-
one is around. PRINCE CASPER, a bit tipsy, stumbles around the corner.*

GEMMA: Alright? You look a bit lost.

PRINCE: I am, rather... Trying to find somewhere to have a piss. I can never find the loo in these places. Everything's always so tastefully concealed. Pretty doors and secret panels.

GEMMA: Beautiful surfaces, carefully styled to disguise the basic human desires that lie beneath.

PRINCE: To hide the fact that we all need to pee. I was once so desperate for a piss at one of these things that I pissed into what turned out to be an urn full of the host's dog's ashes. Charming first impression I must be giving of myself. I'm—

GEMMA: I know who you are. A Prince Charming first impression, you should have said. D'you want a drink, or a drag?

PRINCE: Nothing to drink, not yet. Have they got a loo nearby, do you know?

GEMMA: Over there.

GEMMA extends a leg and points with her foot, which is encased in a magnificent high-heeled shoe. The PRINCE's eyes sparkle.

PRINCE: Thankyou... I couldn't help noticing those fab shoes you're wearing.

GEMMA: Good boy. You were meant to notice. I wore them for you to notice.

PRINCE: Did you, now...? And why would that be?

GEMMA: Because I know who you are, Prince Charming, and I also know what you are. What you are and what you like.

GEMMA crosses her legs and taps her foot. The cigarette smoke drifts.

PRINCE: I see... Okay...

Sensing danger, the PRINCE backs off.

GEMMA: Where you going? I thought you were dying for a piss.

PRINCE: I think maybe I better find another bathroom somewhere...

GEMMA: Alright. Please yourself.

PRINCE: I just— I'm not in any kind of position to be doing whatever I like with strangers at parties—

GEMMA: Of course you are.

PRINCE: I've got expectations on me. Responsibilities, you know?

GEMMA: And a whole lot of pressure as well. I do know.

GEMMA gets up and moves purposefully towards the PRINCE.

GEMMA: And I also know how important it is to be able to let go of all that pressure, all that responsibility... Free yourself from those expectations. Put someone else in charge sometimes. Let someone else take charge. You get me?

PRINCE: I get you. But—

GEMMA: So I am now going to head upstairs. And you're going to use the bathroom, and then you're going to come upstairs, too. Two floors up. End of the landing. The door will be open. I will be waiting for you.

GEMMA moves away.

PRINCE: Where...?

GEMMA turns back to look over her shoulder.

GEMMA: My room.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. Next morning. GEMMA's bedroom.

GEMMA is getting dressed for work. The PRINCE lies in the bed.

PRINCE: Do you really have to go? This early?

GEMMA: I do. You're not the only one with responsibilities.

PRINCE: Like what? What responsibilities can you possibly have?

GEMMA: Responsibilities which are my business, and not yours.

PRINCE: I wish you'd tell me more about yourself. Let me in a bit.

GEMMA: This is what's so nice about you being you and me being me. I get to know all I need to know about you. And you only know what I see fit to tell you about me.

PRINCE: Is that you taking charge again?

GEMMA: Something like that. There. All done. And now to breakfast.

PRINCE: Great. Where shall we go?

GEMMA: You can go wherever you like. I have to be somewhere. Those responsibilities I was telling you about begin at breakfast time.

PRINCE: Well, we can have something here, can't we, together?

GEMMA: I don't have time for breakfast this early. I'm going downstairs for a quick coffee, but that's all. I usually grab something later in the mornings, if I can. And you don't have time, either. Because now, you need to go.

PRINCE: Dismissed, just like that?

GEMMA: You'll have to go down the fire escape. It leads out to the mews behind the houses. And then you can summon the Rolls or the helicopter or whatever.

PRINCE: Sneaking me out the back door to protect my reputation?

GEMMA: Not really. More to make my life easier, to be honest. I really do have to go.

PRINCE: Have you seen my dickie?

GEMMA: Still tied to the bedframe. Where I left it.

GEMMA starts to head out.

PRINCE: Well— Can I call you? Or see you again...?

GEMMA: I'll be in touch. Be quiet when you go. There are still other people in the house. You're not in any kind of position to be

doing whatever you like with strangers, remember?

GEMMA goes out. The PRINCE unties his bow tie from the bedframe.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. A short time later, downstairs. MOTHER, POLLY and MOLLY, in the breakfast room.

POLLY: I keep telling you, I don't know where he went. Nobody knows where he went. He must have been having such a miserable time that he just left, early.

MOLLY: He must be sick of being ambushed at parties by grasping people like you, Mummy, thrusting their daughters at him in the most ridiculous drag queen shoes they can squeeze into. It was a total embarrassment from start to finish.

MOTHER: How we are ever going to live this down, I do not know! The two of you barely able to walk in heels, let alone dance in them, and barely able to string a sentence of decent conversation together! God knows how I'll survive the shame if we ever see him again!

As if on cue, there is a tap on the door. It opens and the PRINCE appears.

PRINCE: Knock knock...

MOTHER: Oh my goodness! I mean, Your Highness! I mean—

PRINCE: Sorry to barge in on your breakfast time—

MOTHER: Not at all, Your Highness! Girls, get up, up!

The women all get up, very much flustered.

PRINCE: I just... Erm... I seem to have spent the night here, and—

MOTHER: Spent the night? Here? In my house? Oh, what an honour!

POLLY (to MOLLY) / MOLLY (to POLLY): With you?

MOTHER: With one of my daughters? Oh, what an honour!

PRINCE: No, the other one. Ooh — sorry! That didn't come out quite the way it should have. What I mean is, I did spend the night here, with one of your daughters, but she's not here — she had somewhere to be — she said she would have time for a coffee before she left, so I took it upon myself to come down unannounced... Very bad of me.

MOTHER / POLLY / MOLLY: What other one?!

PRINCE: I beg your pardon?

MOTHER: I only have two daughters.

POLLY: This one—

MOLLY: —and this one!

MOTHER: There is no other one!

PRINCE: She said she lived here... I stayed in her room. Top floor.
And she was wearing these very fetching shoes...

The PRINCE produces the high heels from behind his back with a cheeky grin.

MOLLY: They're mine!

PRINCE: But you're definitely not who was wearing them last night!

POLLY: Top floor? Top floor?!

MOTHER: The servants' quarters?!

PRINCE: Her hair was different. Blonde. And her voice. Definitely not
like yours, either.

MOLLY: Oh my God, he's spent the night with—

GEMMA appears at the entrance to the room.

GEMMA: Me.

PRINCE: Yes! Hello again! What's going on here?

GEMMA: Nothing's going on. But I did tell you not to come down here. This is precisely what I wanted to avoid. For both our sakes.

MOTHER: I'll tell you what's going on, Your Highness. I very much regret to inform you that you have been tricked, drugged or somehow otherwise seduced into spending the night with the woman who supervises my domestic staff!

MOLLY: The sneaky little bitch! In my shoes! My shoes!

GEMMA: Nobody's been tricked and nobody's been drugged!

PRINCE: But I'll admit, I was otherwise seduced...

GEMMA: So what if I am one of the staff? You met me, you liked me, and the rest is history. You didn't ask too many questions last night. What difference does it make now?

The PRINCE looks at her, dumbfounded.

GEMMA: I said, what difference does it make now? Have I changed, now I'm serving the coffee and wearing boring shoes instead of swilling champagne and wearing those shoes?

MOLLY: My shoes! My shoes!

MOTHER: Evidently, my dear Gemma, in the cold light of day, it does indeed make a difference to His Highness.

PRINCE (slowly): I'm sorry, but... It kind of does... When I thought you were like... That was fine. And fun. But now... I mean... I'm... And you're... We are very, very different... I mean...

Unable to find any more words, the PRINCE holds the shoes out at GEMMA.

MOLLY rushes to take them from him.

MOLLY: My shoes, thank you very much! Touched by a Prince, now!

GEMMA: It's not just his touch that's all over them, I can tell you now!

MOTHER: Get out! Do you hear me! Leave this house immediately!

PRINCE: I will — I'm sorry — I'm going —

MOTHER: Oh no, no, Your Highness — not you — her!

GEMMA: What?!

PRINCE: No — no — I should be — I need to —

And with that, he is gone, out of the door.

POLLY / MOLLY: Don't go! Stay a bit longer! We're not like her! Stay with us!
We've got loads more shoes where these came from!

POLLY and MOLLY hurry out after the PRINCE.

MOTHER: I said, get out of this house, at once! I only hope for all our
sakes that nobody else does know he spent the night here!
What you've done is probably illegal — we could all go to
prison for this! We could be hanged for treason!

GEMMA: What I've done is no different to what you wanted one — or
both! — of those two stupid stuck-up cows to do to him!
You're just pissed off because they didn't have the balls to
do it — and I did!

MOTHER: You won't get away with—

GEMMA: Don't interrupt! You think because they've got the best of
everything, it makes them the best! And you look down on
people like me because you think having nothing makes us

nothing. I've spent years of my life working for people like you, waiting on you hand and foot—

MOTHER: Because that's all you're good for! People like you exist to serve people like us. Without us, you are nothing. Nothing!

GEMMA: Thankyou, Mrs. Allenby. I accept your kind offer of redundancy and the generous financial package that goes with it, which won't be anything greedy, but will be enough to tide me over until I find a new situation, and enough to ensure that nobody finds out about a Crown Prince of the Realm getting screwed by the staff in your loft conversion!

MOTHER slaps GEMMA around the face. GEMMA glowers at her.

GEMMA: Thankyou, Mrs. Allenby. You just added a zero to my cheque. That's the last time you'll raise that hand to me.

GEMMA takes a croissant from the table and eats it as she breezes out.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. Sometime later. MAGDA is going about her work. She puts a heavily laden tray down and knocks on a door.

MAGDA: I've brought your tea, Mrs. Allenby...

There is no reply. MAGDA knocks again.

MAGDA: Your tea, Mrs. Allenby...?

Still, no reply. MAGDA picks up the tray and goes inside. Scrawled on the wall in large wet red letters is the sentence: I PROMISED I'D WAIT ON YOUR HAND AND FOOT

MOTHER is slumped in a chair. She has been gagged. One of her hands has been removed — and nailed up on the wall below the writing. POLLY and MOLLY are also there, tied up and gagged on the floor. They have each had one of their feet removed. The feet are also nailed up on the wall.

MAGDA takes all of this in, opens her mouth, screams and drops the tray.

END OF SECTION