



My Granny Writes Erotica

~ The Original Quickie ~

By Rosen Trevithick

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My Granny Writes Erotica

"I think you've got the wrong house," stuttered Betty Berry.

The tall stranger stormed past her. He was solid-framed but his manner conveyed a certain emptiness, like a walking coffin. Even without the black suit, there would have been something deeply funereal about him. Perhaps it was his dark, greasy hair or those hollow eyes set deep in his angular head.

"Did you hear me? I'm awfully sorry, but I think you've got the wrong house. Possibly even the wrong ... neighbourhood." Betty was typical of the housewives in the area – well spoken, aside from a tendency to Gallicise long English words under the delusion that it sounded posh.

The man-coffin strode past the grandfather clock and into the living room, where he found a floral Laura Ashley sofa on which to perch his bricklike behind. Betty gasped when she realised he still had his outdoor shoes on; the black leather uppers were beautifully polished, but she didn't want to think where those soles had been. At least, thanks to the August heat, the ground was dry.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" Betty offered. The man might be in the wrong house, but she made a point of offering tea to anybody who came through the door – invited or otherwise. *Manners are a virtue*. She looked ruefully at her brown slacks and loose, beige shirt. If she'd known she'd be entertaining, she'd have given them an iron.

Betty had wavy, grey-brown hair that was dyed a shade known as 'suburban chestnut'. She considered herself the perfect balance between plump and fat – enough extra pounds to suggest irresistible culinary skills but not so many that she appeared lazy.

"Is he in?" asked the man. His speech was deep and slow-paced – somewhere between a voice and a thud.

"Who?"

"Rodney."

Betty stiffened. So the man *was* in the right house. But what would a big, boxy, young man wearing a gold chain necklace want with her husband? "No, he's at work."

"Work?" asked the man, evidently surprised.

"Yes, he works nine 'til five. He's an estate agent," she explained, proudly. "How do you know him?"

"Let's just say, we have some business together."

"Business?" Betty knew business wasn't her area. Light refreshments were more her thing. "Can I get you a biscuit? We have chocolate digestives."

"Nice place you have here," remarked the man, ignoring the generous offer of biscuits *with chocolate*. His eyes scanned the furniture, as if taking mental notes. "Very nice," he drawled.

"Thank you," said Betty, glowing with pride. "Do you like the curtains? They're new."

"New?" he asked, with great interest.

"Yes. House of Fraser's finest. I hemmed them myself though. They were six inches too long. My mother-in-law said to leave it, but when you're an estate agent's spouse you want everything to be just so, don't you? What do you think?"

"I think ... this is no time to be spending money on your home."

Betty was taken aback. That was him downgraded to plain biscuits.

"Neither is it a good time to be buying a television," remarked the man, looking at the forty-two-inch plasma screen TV that Betty had picked from John Lewis.

"I'm always telling her that," sneered a high-pitched whining voice from the doorway. Betty found herself grinding her teeth. The mother-in-law was awake. The blissful silence of afternoon naptime had passed and wouldn't happen again for another twenty-two hours.

"Muriel," sounded Betty, through frozen jaws.

"I prefer radio," added Muriel, tottering in. Her skeletal body was dressed in a pressed peach dress and thick cream tights, neither of which she had been wearing when she went up to nap. Her silver permed hair looked bouncier than usual.

"Muriel, this is ..." began Betty.

Muriel ignored her and addressed the coffin. “She watches far too much daytime television, but you wouldn’t know from the state of her cooking.” Then she threw her head back and cackled. You could hear the vertebrae in her neck clicking, one by one.

Betty scowled. Why did Muriel have to show off whenever they had visitors?

“He had a chance to marry a ballet dancer you know ...” began Muriel.

“That was over thirty years ago,” Betty reminded her.

“But he jacked in a life in Paris to marry a failed novelist.”

Betty’s fists clenched. “If he had gone to Paris with Cheryl, who would be here to look after you?”

“Somebody who might actually *warm* my cheese toasties before giving them to me,” Muriel snarled back. Then she turned to the man and gave him a warm smile.

“It was a BLT *sandwich*.” This time, it was Betty’s turn to give their guest a warm smile. *Must let him think it’s harmless banter. Don’t let him know I fantasise about smothering her in the night.*

“You don’t toast lettuce!” frowned the man, forgetting himself for a moment.

“My point exactly,” smirked Betty.

“You *can* toast lettuce,” contested Muriel. “Of course you can toast lettuce.”

“You can’t, it goes all limp and disgusting. Trust me, you would not want to eat toasted lettuce.”

“Evidence!”

“What?”

“Get me evidence. Go and toast me a lettuce sandwich. I wager it will be delicious.”

“I’m not getting up and making you a sandwich! I have enough of being at your beck and call at mealtimes. Besides, you’re bound to say it’s delicious.”

“I’ll be impartial.”

“You’re the least impartial person on the planet.”

“Fine, then we’ll get our guest to judge it.”

The coffin looked up. He was supposed to be there in a purely intimidatory capacity, but he *was* feeling rather peckish. “I wouldn’t say no to a snack – if you’re offering.”

Betty took a sharp breath. She had no idea who this hostile-looking man with alleged business to settle might be, yet she felt compelled to toast him a sandwich, not least because she might finally get confirmation that her mother-in-law was wrong.

“All right. I shall make a lettuce toastie. But I warn you, it will not be up to my usual culinary standards.”

Muriel snorted.

Betty glared.

Once Betty was in the kitchen, Muriel adjusted her teeth and then embarked on trying to make polite conversation with the coffin. “So, how do you know my son?”

“Let’s just say, he owes me.”

Muriel frowned. “Owes you?”

The man thought carefully. He really wanted that sandwich, but sensed that he was losing some of the domineering aura that was essential to his visit. “We have some business to sort out,” he said in a low-pitched drone.

“What sort of business?”

“Private business,” he replied, then cleared his throat.

Muriel churned this over. The suit, the gold chain, the evasive remarks ... This man was bad news, even if he were finally going to provide validation that her daughter-in-law was wrong. She decided a change in tack was necessary. “So, are you married yet?”

The man raised an eyebrow.

“Are you courting?”

He raised the other.

“Casual sex then?” she asked.

The man choked on his own saliva.

Muriel adjusted her horn-rimmed glasses and looked at him with intensity. Her pale blue eyes twinkled. “You live in a very sexy generation.”

“Erm ... right.”

“When I was your age I was already married. But your generation, you can practise shagging for years before you have to settle down.”

“Um ...”

“You can have threesomes, orgies ... You can even do it up the bum.”

The look of horror on the man’s face was a picture. No matter how intimidating a man might be, he can always be derailed by an elderly woman talking about anal sex.

When finally Betty came back into the room carrying a round of toasted BLT, she was surprised to find the man standing up and edging towards the doorway.

“Tell Robert ... um ... I mean Rodney, that I dropped in. And tell him I’m ... um ... not happy.”

“But don’t you want your sandwich?” asked Betty, hurt.

“Another time,” stammered the man. Then he looked at Muriel, who was examining her upper set of teeth in the palm of her hand. He added, “Maybe.” Then he hurried into the hall and once again passed through the front door without the niceties to which the Berry household were accustomed.

Betty turned to Muriel and demanded, “What did you say to him?”

“Nothing,” sang Muriel, with a twinkle in her eye. “Does this mean *I* can have that sandwich?”

* * *

“For ’tis a rose! A Rose!” purred Phyllis Parker, in what Betty hoped was the last line of her poem. “All peachy and pinkish and prickly and perfect,” she continued. Then she sat down. Only to burst up out of her seat once more. “For ’tis a rose.” She reached her arms to their full span and nodded her head.

“Amazing!” June Johnson remarked.

“Flabbergasting!” Shirley Shipman cooed.

Really? Betty thought.

“I loved the alliteration – peachy, pinkish, prickly – oh, it was beautiful.” Shirley touched her heart with a fist.

When not one of the other seven women had a bad word to say about Phyllis’s work, Betty began to feel more positive about her own. She had printed out a segment from *Richmond Tabernacle*, the novel she’d been working on for over twenty years. As the other people in her writers’ group gushed over their chief’s work, she reread the first line. Richmond was such a compelling romantic lead – strong in the office/shy in the bedroom.

“I really think you should publish an anthology of your flower poetry,” June hummed. “I really loved last week’s offering. What was it called again?”

“For ’Tis a Pansy’,” recalled Phyllis, with pride.

The others cooed and smiled.

“But I’m hogging the floor!” chuckled Phyllis, eventually. “Who’s next? Betty?”

“I’ve brought a segment from *Richmond Tabernacle*.”

The others silently looked from one to the other.

“O ... kay,” drawled Phyllis, and bit her lip.

Betty tried to grab her A4 sheet from the table, but she was feeling nervous again. It took three attempts and a lick of spittle before she could finally grasp the paper. “This is from the chapter where May-Marie Tennessee first sees Richmond Tabernacle.”

“Oh yes, five whole chapters in,” sniggered Phyllis.

“That’s right,” acknowledged Betty. She began reading.

“He was taller than she’d imagined – towering even. Yet the power of his intense, dark eyes was not lessened by their elevated distance from her own. His posture was strong and confident, yet his fingers fiddled like a man unwrapping an invisible toffee ...” Betty continued through the remaining side of prose and then turned the page for the final sentence. “May-Marie hurried through the door, desperate to get away. Yet, as soon as she entered the foyer, she felt a burning desire to turn back. Already that man had made an imprint on her soft-fleshed heart.”

Nobody spoke, not even Phyllis.

Betty felt it would be rude to *ask* for feedback. Besides, the stony silence and the mass of eyes focused on the table filled her with a sense of dread. The silence continued for some moments.

Eventually, June ventured, "It was ..." and drifted off.

"Yes, it was ..." offered Shirley.

"Mmm," squeaked June.

"Mmm," mimicked Shirley.

"You don't like it, do you?" challenged Betty, courageously.

"It's not that we don't like it ..." began June.

Suddenly, Phyllis spoke up. "Come on, ladies. We're not doing Betty any favours by being polite."

Betty gulped.

"You've been working on *Richmond Tabernacle* for how long now?" asked Phyllis.

"Twenty-one years," muttered Betty.

"Don't you think it's time to write something new?"

"But it's almost exactly how I want it to be."

"How many publishers have turned it down?"

Eighty-seven. Betty shrugged.

"Phyllis is right. I think it's had its day," June agreed.

"It hasn't had its day yet," Betty pointed out. "It's a good book. I just need to find the right publisher."

More silence.

"Oh come on, what?" asked Betty. "It is a good book."

"Have you thought about writing something other than romance?" asked June. "I mean, you're not getting any younger."

"Meaning?" demanded Betty.

"And your prose is a little ... better suited to technical writing," Shirley offered.

"You mean *bland*?" gasped Betty.

"Not bland," said Phyllis, diplomatically, "just ... insipid."

"Insipid?" echoed Betty. She looked around at her fellow writers – one self-published novelist and seven poets who focused almost exclusively on flowering plants. Not one of them had ever stepped out of England. Not one of them was wearing any clothing that featured a colour more than two shades from beige. If these people thought her work was insipid, she was in serious trouble.

"Do feel free to call me if you need any tips," offered June.

* * *

The cappuccino maker had been on Betty's mind for some time. In a rare deviation from character, Rodney had forbidden Betty to spend money on an unnecessary, luxury item for the kitchen. Unbeknownst to Rodney, by the time he had laid down the law, Betty had already purchased the brushed steel, self-cleaning, top of the range, hot-drink station at over nine hundred pounds.

Like the good little wife that she felt it was important to be, she had tried to send it back as soon as she learnt of her husband's disapproval but had been unsuccessful due to Muriel having already attempted to make herself a deluxe caramel macchiato. Betty believed that dishonesty was bad for a marriage. However, she also believed that spending nine hundred pounds without permission was bad for a marriage. After careful consideration, she decided that hiding the relevant bank statement was a necessary step to protect her family. She put down a double-shot, decaffeinated mocha and looked at the envelope. It was probably the statement she wanted to shred, but she should open it just to check.

At first, Betty thought she must have opened somebody else's post – not a close neighbour's, of course, but perhaps one of those residents a little further down the street where the road narrowed and the houses had no balconies. Nobody in the semis would be fourteen thousand pounds overdrawn.

Then she looked more closely. Holy Spit! This *was* their statement. But that would mean ... But then they would be ... But their savings must be ...

They couldn't possibly be overdrawn; they were members of the National Trust. Betty concluded that Rodney must have moved their money to another account. However, the numerous bank charges suggested that he'd distributed their money most inefficiently. This rang alarm bells in her head. Rodney was not an inefficient man.

Hurriedly, she ascended the stairs. Then she slowed her footsteps so as not to wake Muriel from her afternoon nap. The last thing she wanted was for her judgemental mother-in-law to get wind of financial difficulties. Betty's mind briefly flicked to the coffin man. But the words 'loan shark' had barely approached her mind's white picket perimeter fence when she stubbornly pushed them out of her mind and into a grubby roadside ditch.

She strode over to Rodney's side of the bed, to the cupboard where he kept his secret box. She knew it was his secret box because it was locked with a massive padlock. Betty reached into his top drawer and plucked out his keys, then unlocked the box with ease. He might be secretive but he wasn't very good at it.

Betty took a deep breath. She tried not to picture credit card bills and red reminders but they danced into her mind like unwelcome strippers at a conservative hen party. However, what she found shocked her even more than a brassy Chippendale. At the very top of a pile of papers was a letter informing Rodney of his imminent redundancy.

Betty's heart started pounding. Rodney was going to lose his job? How would they ever hope to pay off their overdraft if he was going to be unemployed?

Then Betty experienced her third and final shock of the day – the letter was dated last year. So where had Rodney been going every day for the past eight months?

* * *

Betty looked at herself in the mirror. In Muriel's plastic, waterproof hood and her daughter's enormous sunglasses, she looked more than a little ridiculous. However, she was almost unrecognisable, which was the primary intention.

She hurried out of the house. Even at this hour of the morning the August air was warm, promising a hot summer's day. She unlocked Rodney's Volvo estate using the spare key. Then, carefully, she attempted to wedge herself in the footwell behind the driver's seat. Her modest layer of fat made it difficult to get both legs into the space. After a few moments adjusting seats, she managed to create a space large enough for her to squeeze into. She grabbed the picnic blanket and pulled it over her head. Fortunately, Rodney's car seemed to be in a similar state to his finances – a mess. She doubted he would notice that one of the back seats and blanket had been moved. Once settled, she used the key fob to lock herself in.

Betty sat, huddled behind the chair, mentally tidying the car. Certainly finding out how her treacherous husband was spending his days was the number one priority, but getting in here with a vacuum cleaner and a black plastic sack came a close second.

Five minutes later, Rodney unlocked the driver's door and climbed into the car. Sure enough, he did not notice anything untoward about the rear of the vehicle. Betty presumed that her slender, silver-haired hubby was wearing a charcoal office suit and carrying a briefcase. That's how he always looked when he left the house at four minutes past eight in the morning.

She heard the key turn in the ignition. Then moments later, the car pulled away. Not being able to see where it was going was a weird sensation. Betty felt turns, brakes and gear changes, but that was hardly enough information to inform her of their whereabouts.

Then, suddenly, the car pulled to a stop. That was odd; they hadn't travelled nearly far enough to get to Rodney's office. But then Betty had known the office was unlikely to be their destination.

Shortly after hearing Rodney get out of the car, Betty peeked up from behind the seat. They appeared to be in some sort of housing estate – nothing nearly as up and coming as their own neighbourhood, but certainly no slum. Betty noticed topiary at the end of the closest drive and heaved. *A swan on a terraced property is just vulgar!*

Still, she must not get distracted. She watched Rodney walk boldly up the garden path, still carrying his briefcase. Then Betty's heart bumped into a brick wall; a *woman*

came to the door. She looked younger than Betty was – perhaps mid-forties. She had lively blonde hair but even from ten metres away, Betty could see that the woman's scraggy neck lacked the firmness of youth. She was wearing a mini dress and cowboy boots. *Floozy*, thought Betty. Then the door closed, veiling Betty's longed for explanation.

Betty hurried out of the car with her heart doing a full gymnastic routine. As she passed through the gate, her heart pulled the splits. It embarked on a few springing jumps as she ran up the path. Then, when she reached the front door, her heart did a complete somersault.

Her trembling finger was hovering in front of the doorbell when she stopped herself. Was announcing her presence really going to get her the answers she needed? Certainly, she'd catch Rodney out of work, but would she find out why he had come here instead?

No, Betty decided it would be far better to peer in the windows. Her daughter's sunglasses made it hard to see inside dingy, unlit rooms, so she took them off and put them in her pocket. Then she continued looking in windows. At first she was careful, but when she failed to spot her husband, she threw caution to the wind and began pressing her nose against the glass. She couldn't see him anywhere.

Eventually, she admitted that her husband and the floozy were nowhere on the ground floor. This did not bode well. She made her way around to the side of the house and was delighted to find a ladder.

She swung the ladder to the front of the house, where it almost smashed a bedroom window. Then, with all the care she could muster in this heart-gymnastics moment, pressed it carefully against the wall.

Up she climbed, one fearful rung after another. By now, almost ten minutes had passed since she first arrived on the premises. Misdemeanours could be in full swing. However, nothing could prepare Betty for what she saw. Her heart performed a manoeuvre previously unknown to man.

Rodney was naked, but for a giant, white, fluffy nappy.

At first, in her naivety, Betty thought that perhaps her husband had an incontinence problem. No wonder he had kept it from her.

However, when the floozy arrived, dressed in just a gingham apron and carrying a whip, Betty's denial was smashed like a fragile mirror encountering a spiky, stone, bondage hammer.

Poor Betty didn't know what to process first – the fact that her husband was engaging in sexual liaisons with another woman, or the fact that those liaisons involved a nappy and a whip. Why hadn't he told her about this revolting perversion?

Suddenly, the floozy spotted Betty. Betty tried to duck and lost control of the ladder. Slowly, it began to tip. Then, just as Rodney looked up, it picked up speed.

Thud. Betty landed on the front lawn. *Smack.* The ladder landed on top of her.

She needed a few moments to check that she wasn't dead. It was quite some fall and by all probability, she'd have some nasty injuries – Betty just couldn't feel them yet. The summer sun had baked the lawn and it was nowhere near as forgiving as it would have been during a wetter month. She wiggled the toes on each foot. Then she wiggled the fingers on each hand. She didn't *feel* like she'd been crippled for life. However, she was pinned between the ladder and the lawn. In her fragile and dazed state, she didn't feel able to free herself.

Her only comfort was that this humiliating accident had happened in a neighbourhood in which she was unlikely to be recognised, especially in Muriel's plastic rain hood.

Just then, Rodney came running out of the house. He was still wearing the nappy. His scrawny legs sprung from the enormous, white fuzz. His grey chest hair, which was scattered over prominent ribs, caught the sunlight. Further rays bounced off the top of his head. The layers of skin hanging from his armpits told of less scraggy times. The wrinkles lining his neck told of younger times. It was fair to say that this wasn't Rodney Berry's finest hour.

"Betty? Betty – is that you? Are you okay?" he asked, rushing towards her.

Betty looked up in horror. The sight was even more tasteless than the topiary had been. "It's not me!" she cried. "I'm not Betty."

"Is everything all right?" asked a man, stopping his bicycle to enquire. He blinked a few times.

It was then that Rodney realised that he, a grown man, was standing in full view of the street, wearing a fluffy nappy. He looked down and threw his hands up in horror. Deeply embarrassed, he grabbed the enormous safety pin that held it together and squeezed. The nappy fell to the ground revealing his withered cock for all the neighbourhood to see. It looked like a sugar-dusted prune. "Everything is quite all right," blustered Rodney, giving a wave.

Then he rushed to free Betty of the ladder. She dragged herself up. Her body ached and she felt an urge to lie back down. But she simply could not have the neighbours, whoever they might be, seeing her conversing with a naked man, even if he *was* her husband. She reached into her pocket for her daughter's sunglasses, but they had broken in the fall. She crawled towards the path, grabbed the nappy and held it in front of her face. Then she stood up and hurried towards the car.

"I'm not having an affair!" shouted Rodney. "Betty! I'm not having an affair! Scarlett is just a prostitute! Betty! Betty ..."

By now, Betty was inside the Volvo. She sat at the wheel in a state of utter mortification. Debt, redundancy and infidelity were one thing, but humiliating her in a residential area was a whole new level of mortification.

She felt in her pocket, found her set of car keys, and started the car. She drove until she found a faceless car park then pulled to a stop.

She sat in the driver's seat with her forehead resting on the steering wheel. Beneath the humiliation was one horrible fact: her marriage was irretrievably broken.

She grabbed her phone and called Rodney. It rang five times and then went to voicemail. Presumably, she thought bitterly, he was busy getting into some clothes – or worse still, into Scarlett.

"I'm sorry but I'm unable to come to the phone at the moment ..." came Rodney's nasal drones.

When the message finally ended, Betty left one of her own. "Our marriage is over. You have one hour to collect your things. Be gone before I get back. And *don't* forget your mother."

The gymnast in her chest was now unconscious, being dragged off on a stretcher.

* * *

Betty was not in the mood for dealing with her daughter. She loved Joanne but found her hard work. Usually, the joy of seeing her granddaughter, Ava, would be enough to compensate for Joanne's colourful temper and judgemental manner. However, even getting to hang out with your cute three-year-old grandchild couldn't take the edge off finding your husband wearing a giant nappy, about to be whipped by a giant whore.

"Is it true?" demanded Joanne.

"Is what true?" retorted Betty. The last twenty-four hours had brought too many revelations to count.

"Have you kicked Dad out?"

"I asked him to leave, yes."

"Why?" ordered Joanne, hands on hips.

"Let's not do this in front of Ava," suggested Betty.

"Fine." Joanne picked up her toddling daughter, carefully plonked her in the conservatory with a draught excluder that bore a slight resemblance to a toy snake, and shut the adjoining door. "Why have you kicked him out?"

Joanne's physical presence always made Betty feel minute. Joanne was only three inches taller and a little slimmer but had broad shoulders, childbearing hips and a rigid posture. She wore her long, straight brown hair in a tight ponytail, adding to her authoritarian quality.

Even if it weren't for the fact that Betty was too mortified to tell another living soul what she had seen, she didn't feel it was fair to tell Joanne what her father had done. It would ruin their relationship forever. "We had differences," offered Betty.

"Differences?" scoffed Joanne. "You've always had differences. What makes this difference different?"

"Let's just say he's pushed me too far."

"Was he being childish again?" asked Joanne.

Betty pictured the nappy. "In a manner of speaking."

"He'll come around. He'll walk through that door any moment with a bunch of flowers and his tail between his legs."

"I sincerely hope he won't."

"I cannot believe that you would just give up on a relationship like this. There are children involved."

"You're thirty-three!"

"So? I still find this traumatic."

"All right, that's enough, Joanne. I appreciate you coming over, but I really just want to have a quiet evening, alone."

"Oh. Also, I'm moving in."

"*You're what?*"

"Just temporarily."

"That's really nice of you, Jo, but I'll be fine."

"It's not for *you*. I've left Trevor."

"*What?*" gasped Betty. "Why?"

"He's boring."

"*Boring?*" asked Betty, unimpressed.

"You don't know what it's like, Mum. He was *really* boring. I mean so boring that I could cry."

"But he hasn't made you cry?"

"No."

"And you left him anyway?"

"Yes!" cried Joanne, as if it were obvious.

Betty frowned. Joanne had left Trevor numerous times and she always realised which side her bread was buttered within a week. She felt sure this would be no different.

However, the one pleasant thing about kicking Rodney out had been the promise of *space* – some alone time just for her. She could eat chilli, which he didn't like; and wear jeans, which his mother didn't like; and whistle, which neither of them liked.

Betty looked at Jo. Perhaps it would be nice having her daughter around. Jo wouldn't stop her eating chilli, wearing jeans or whistling. Some girl time might be just what they both needed.

"How do you fancy chilli con carne for dinner?" suggested Betty.

"Sounds perfect," smiled Joanne.

"Chilli con carne it is then!" declared Betty, feeling unexpectedly positive.

Suddenly, a head popped around the door. "When's my tea?" It was Muriel.

Betty screamed. "Why are you still here?"

* * *

Betty woke up at seven in the morning and made her way down the stairs. Her head was all of a fuzz; she felt as if her brains had been taken out, blended in a food processor, scrambled on a low heat, sprinkled with pain, and reinserted. She seemed to recall that she'd kicked her husband out and kept his mother. But that would have been insane.

With sleep still in her eyes, she stumbled into the kitchen. It was then that she remembered Joanne. Little Ava was sitting at the breakfast bar giggling. She was a lovely child, brown hair like her mother, clipped back with ladybird hair slides. She had a pretty, bubbly face and an infectious laugh. Betty instantly softened. *Every cloud had its silver lining*. Then she noticed that Ava was enjoying her extremely expensive, luxury muesli. *And silver doesn't come cheap*.

"You can't give my muesli to a toddler," gasped Betty.

"It's fine, I checked and there are no nuts."

"That's not what I ..."

"I've just put on some tea. Would you like some?"

Actually, Betty did rather want some tea. In fact, it was exactly what she needed. Perhaps, after establishing a few ground rules, she and Joanne could achieve some sort of mutual harmony.

Smash!

Betty looked at the floor with horror. Her extremely expensive, blue china teapot was in pieces. "Joanne!"

"Calm down, it was an accident."

"Can you be more careful, please?"

"Sorry. But I don't know why you're looking quite so horrified. It didn't have sentimental value – you only bought it last month."

Betty scowled. "It was expensive."

"Don't be so tight fisted. You've got enough money to replace the teapot ten thousand times over."

Betty gulped. A visit to the bank manager was near the top of her list of things to do. As things stood, she couldn't be sure that she could afford to replace the teapot *once* over.

She decided to change the subject. "I suppose I'll have to think about getting Muriel's breakfast in a minute."

"It's fine, I already took her some breakfast."

"You did?" asked Betty, feeling warmth for her daughter once again.

"Sure. I took her some smoked salmon about half an hour ago."

"Salmon?" asked Betty, gulping. "That was meant for our dinner."

"Ah, it's fine. We can have a takeaway tonight."

"Are you paying?"

"I don't actually have any cash until I get paid, but sure, I'll pay you back."

Betty scowled. She was half inclined to tell Joanne and Muriel the truth about their finances, but there would be no use worrying them prematurely. For all she knew, she might be able to move some money around.

"What time do you start work?" asked Betty.

"Nine," replied Joanne, without looking up. "Can you watch Ava for me?"

"Of course."

"Thanks."

Betty walked over to Ava and held her little hands. "We can play together while Mummy gets ready for work, can't we?"

"I don't think you understand," said Joanne. "I meant: please can you mind Ava while I'm at work."

Betty inhaled, sharply. "While you're at work *all day*?"

"Yes. That's all right, isn't it?"

"Actually, *no*. I've got to be somewhere."

"Where?"

The bank. "Never you mind."

"I thought you would *want* to spend time with your granddaughter."

"I would love to, just not today. You'll have to make other childcare arrangements."

"You mean get a nanny?" snapped Joanne, defensively.

"I didn't say that."

"No, but that's what you implied. You're always trying to undermine me – trying to find ways to say I can't cope. You've always been trying to push me into getting a nanny."

"I meant make other childcare arrangements *today*."

"I'll just have to take a day off."

"A day off? Jo, you don't want to risk losing your job."

"They can't sack me over childcare. Anyway, I'm going to quit."

Betty frowned. "And do what?"

"Dunno. I fancy having some 'me time'."

"What will you do for money? You might not get Job Seeker's if you just quit."

"Ah, JSA is only pennies anyway."

Betty felt that she might strangle her daughter if she didn't change the subject once again. So, instead she pointed to the book on the counter, a dark grey paperback with a silver tie on the cover. Betty casually asked, "What are you reading?"

Joanne snatched the book. "It's erotica mother. Get over it."

Then she looked at Ava and put the book down again. Joanne scooped up the toddler and, leaving their dirty dishes on the counter, took her upstairs scolding her about being messy.

It was then that Betty noticed that the post had arrived. Joanne had kindly popped the envelopes on the counter for her. Betty grabbed the pile. She saw that a circular from the local supermarket had been opened. Joanne must have rifled through looking for vouchers. Betty wasn't sure why; she doubted that Joanne would set foot in a supermarket once during her stay.

Then Betty came across an official-looking window envelope. It was addressed to Rodney but she decided it was best to open it anyway – she needed all the information she could get. Opening somebody else's mail seemed like a minor indiscretion compared with hiding a redundancy and frittering away their joint savings on floozies with swan topiary.

As soon as Betty opened the letter, she wished she hadn't. It was a credit card bill – a credit card bill for twelve thousand pounds. Betty's head fell into her hands. Every new piece of information was like the fresh stroke of an artist on a canvas of despair and destruction.

She had no job, no husband, mounting debts, a dependent mother-in-law, an irresponsible daughter and a virtually helpless granddaughter. This wasn't the life she'd planned. She was supposed to exist in a pretty watercolour landscape, not this acrylic mess with mounting layers of ugliness. She shopped at Waitrose for goodness sake.

None of this would have happened if *Richmond Tabernacle* had experienced the success it deserved. She'd be respected, independent and rich; debt would be the last thing on her mind.

Betty briefly flirted with the idea of sending her revised synopsis to some of the publishers who'd previously turned her down, but she felt despondent. Not even Muriel had read *Richmond Tabernacle*, despite Betty having lovingly printed her a copy – and she was housebound! Perhaps Phyllis Parker and the others were right; perhaps it was time to try something new.

Then her eyes fell on the book Joanne had been reading. She recognised the title, *Fifty Shades of Grey*. She'd read somewhere that the author was now a millionaire. If only *Richmond Tabernacle* had enjoyed the same success ...

Intrigued, Betty opened the book. She wanted to know what today's bestselling fiction really looked like. She read a couple of lines: 'Oh, he's affected all right – and my very small inner goddess sways in a gentle victorious samba.'

Betty nodded. Fair enough. The imagery was a little showy but she didn't entirely dislike it. It was colourful.

She flicked ahead. 'My inner goddess is doing the merengue with some salsa moves.' *Oh, so the inner goddess is a running theme. That's a good idea.* Betty continued to flick. Her eyes homed in on: 'My inner goddess sits in the lotus position looking serene except for the sly, self-congratulatory smile on her face.'

How funny that my eyes keep falling on the paragraphs with 'inner goddess' in them.

'My inner goddess nods in silent zen-like agreement with her.'

Wait a minute ...

Betty continued flicking. The inner goddess became a Russian Olympian, did a little painting, roared, had her ice cream snatched. "But this is codswallop," muttered Betty. "Utter codswallop. Anybody could write repetitive, over the top imagery ... and this made the author rich?"

And then Betty saw her solution. It struck her like an artist dabbing his brush in a little magenta, and sloshing a dash of colour onto the dark, craggy canvas.

She didn't have to find a publisher who could recognise the brilliance of *Richmond Tabernacle*; she needed to write a new novel – a rumpy-pumpy novel.

All she had to do was set up a romantic couple, get them to enjoy a little hanky-panky, spout out some ridiculous imagery and, Bob's your uncle, she'd have a bestseller ready to go.

Then Betty felt her heart sink. She remembered the arduous process of getting publishers to look at *Richmond Tabernacle*. These publishing 'experts' clearly could not recognise brilliance. Could she bear to go through the rejection process all over again?

Betty found herself thinking two words she never thought she'd consider – self-publishing. She had always looked down on self-published authors, convinced that the traditional route was the only route worth pursuing. However, if the goal was purely to get herself and her family out of debt, she could cut corners. If she were going to make the risqué move of writing a rumpy-pumpy novel, there would be no point being overly principled about who should publish it.

She knew a little about publishing an eBook – enough to know that it was relatively straightforward. June Johnson had excitedly gushed about the process at their writers' group, encouraging others to do the same – at least, she had done until Phyllis Parker slammed her with a newspaper article criticising 'vanity publishing'. After that, June had kept her suggestions to herself.

Betty began to get excited. She could use a pen name and self-publish, leaving her potential reputation as a conventional literary author intact.

Betty began thinking up storylines – moonlit strolls along the seafront, cheeky trips to M&S to buy a flirtatious brassiere ...

Her heart sank when the reality of trying to plot rumpy-pumpy dawned on her. She'd only ever been with one man – Rodney.

Until this morning, she'd considered him something of a conservative in the bedroom. She only knew two ways to make a man butter his crumpet – that was hardly enough to pen an entire naughty novel. But then she remembered the nappy; she *had* had an insight into the world of kinky bedroom practices and it hadn't looked particularly tricky.

Surely ... what was the acronym she was looking for? Bondage ... Sadism ... BSE – that was it. Surely, BSE wouldn't be too difficult to pick up.

* * *

The following afternoon, Betty sat at her desk surrounded by notes. All she needed was a romantic male lead and a romantic female lead. How difficult could it be to come up with two characters? She'd been a romance novelist all her life – not a published one, but a romance novelist none the less. Mind you, she *had* been working on the same book for twenty-one years; perhaps that was why coming up with new characters was so difficult.

She looked at the paper: Ted, the cutthroat lawyer who only has a soul when he's in love, Pedro the Spanish immigrant who can't speak a word of English and Larry the boring librarian who comes alive when he wears a fluffy nappy. They were all pathetic. Not one of them was even half as compelling as *Richmond Tabernacle* (strong in the office/shy in the bedroom). In fact, it was hard to imagine herself working with a romantic lead who wasn't the towering, dark-eyed *Richmond*. She felt like she was cheating on him even to imagine dreaming up another man.

Using the Internet, she briefly studied the blurbs of bestselling rumpy-pumpy novels – or 'erotica' as the bookshops like to call them. Her first three finds informed her that popular naughty novels involve a billionaire and a virgin. Betty Berry had never read erotica, but even she could tell that that was a cliché. Not satisfied with her research, she checked a further six bestselling erotica titles. Finally, Betty admitted defeat; clichés were what people wanted. She began planning female leads.

However, after half an hour, Betty's doe-eyed virgins had successfully bored her senseless. Not one of them had an inch of depth or a satisfying back-story that could explain a sudden transition from virginity to hard-core BSE. Not one of the scribbled heroines was anywhere near as realistic and lovely as *May-Marie Tennessee*.

Betty thought about it. If she was honest with herself, the only characters she wanted to write about were *Richmond* and *May-Marie*.

Then she had a brainwave. What if, instead of writing a brand new erotic novel, she spiced up *Richmond Tabernacle*? The idea filled her with excitement. Perhaps that was exactly what her novel needed – to move with the times. Perhaps, a few heaving bosoms and bulging codpieces were all that was needed for *Richmond Tabernacle* to become the next *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

But then she remembered that the *Fifty Shades* trilogy was codswallop. She kept trying to read it but found herself too frustrated with the quality to get through very much of it at all.

‘His voice is warm and husky like dark melted chocolate fudge caramel ... or something.’

Goodness gracious woman! If you’re going to use a nonsensical simile, at least commit to it.

Still, she’d read odd pages. She knew that erotica tended to include ‘oozing’ and ‘grinding’ and ‘rock hard ...’ She shuddered. She could not write about Richmond Tabernacle’s stiffy. Poor Richmond would die of embarrassment.

And then there was ‘kinky fuckery’ – or ‘kinky malarkey’ as Betty quickly renamed it. Her research had led her to realise that kinky malarkey was a key part of an erotic novel. She didn’t know exactly what it was yet, but she felt sure that an upstanding member of the community like Richmond Tabernacle would not approve.

No, she could not eroticise the novel she’d been working on for over twenty years – she’d be selling out. So, instead, she decided to write a new novel about a tall dark chap known as Ricardo Haberdasher and his soul mate, Jay-Maria Virginia.

And, instead of being a strong, dominant line manager, Ricardo would be a billionaire who ran an entire stationery company. Instead of being a headstrong, experienced woman who would eventually lead Ricardo out of his romantic cocoon, Jay-Maria would be a virgin without any prospects besides the inevitable consequences of her colossal good looks.

Betty opened *Richmond Tabernacle* and saved it as a new file, so as not to risk overwriting the most recent edition of her masterpiece with her new bonkbuster. Then she ran a ‘Find’ and ‘Replace’ for every instance of her lead characters’ names.

Next, she took out her best glasses, and began scanning through the first page looking for ways to spice it up. Already she was flummoxed.

But then she remembered a useful article on erotica in *Good Authoring* magazine. At the time, she had been horrified that such a prestigious publication would stoop so low, and had quickly turned the pages until she found a much more pleasing article on the semicolon. Now, she sincerely hoped that she’d kept that issue.

Betty was an organised lady and her writing magazines were filed neatly. As long as it wasn’t one that Muriel had pinched to do the puzzles, it would be there. Betty flicked through three issues before she finally found the one she was looking for, boasting an article on ‘How to Write an Erotic Novel’. Betty found herself blushing, but she had to push through the embarrassment – there were mouths to feed.

The very first point in the article suggested that an erotic novel should have something sexy in the first chapter – not necessarily a full-scale romp, but something that would give a clue as to what was to come.

But what was to come? Once again, Betty was stumped. She did an Internet search for ‘kinky malarkey’. She didn’t find anything even remotely sexy – just an image of a woman tied up with some rope and another that simply read, ‘Keep Calm and Munch Some Rug’.

It was then that Betty remembered something she’d once heard: you can get pornography on the Internet. *Should* she get pornography on the Internet?

Betty flushed redder still. She had never watched a pornographic movie in her life. She wasn’t necessarily opposed to that particular genre of film; she just felt that alternative cinema was best left to students and the working classes, not the wives of estate agents.

Still, she wasn’t the wife of an estate agent anymore. She might still have Rodney’s name but she was, to all intents and purposes, a single woman. Stuff it! She wasn’t just a single woman; she was a single erotica writer. Why shouldn’t she research her genre?

Betty giggled to herself. She really hoped this wouldn't be one of the days when the Internet was on the blink. She wondered where she should begin. Gingerly, she typed: 'I would like to watch a pornographic movie, please'.

Betty looked at the top of the page with shock, '157,000,000 results'. Wow! *So you really can get pornography on the Internet.*

Poor Betty didn't know where to begin. She instantly became paranoid. Could the neighbours listen in on her Internet line? She wedged a chair against the door. Muriel was supposed to be having an afternoon nap, but she couldn't be too careful. Rodney might not be Betty's partner anymore, but that didn't mean that she wanted his mother to walk in on her watching two strangers making love.

She glanced down the list of search results. There was certainly a lot of choice. Then she remembered her financial situation and her heart sank. Presumably pornographic movies were jolly expensive, given what the actors were asked to do.

What she really needed was a free pornographic movie. She knew it was a long shot but a free movie would stop the rental showing up on her bank statements.

Yesterday morning, the bank manager had told her that she was jointly responsible for over one hundred thousand pounds worth of debt. Not only that, but Rodney had borrowed money against their house. At the time, she had thought it impossible to be any more humiliated than she was at the moment. However, glancing at an item advertised on the Internet, she felt that a credit card item stating 'Banging Bangkok Boy Babes' might just top that.

Betty sighed, 'Banging Bangkok Boy Babes' didn't sound like her kind of thing, although she did appreciate the alliteration. She wasn't racist, but she preferred British men. She wondered if she was being too specific. Could you get British porn?

She adjusted her search query. 'I would like to watch a free British pornographic movie, please'. Amazingly, there were 77,300,000 search results. How on God's green earth was she going to narrow it down to something that might actually be educational?

The top result was 'Snoop Dogg filmography'. Snoop *Dogg*? She didn't like the sound of that one bit. She doubted any human on the planet would be sick enough to film animals making love for titillation purposes, but if they had, she wanted no part of it.

After a further half hour of browsing, Betty finally found a pornographic movie that was both free and featured British men – at least, they *looked* British. It was hard to tell when they were covered in so much oil. She tried not to look at the women – she hadn't been a lesbian in her sixty-five years on the planet, so she saw no need to start now.

Betty waited for the movie to download. Then, making sure that the headphones were plugged in, she clicked 'Play'.

Immediately, she realised that there had been some sort of mistake; the film had started near the end. Three seconds in and the woman was already naked and enjoying what appeared to be the climax of the action. *Darn you, modern technology.* Betty fiddled around with the movie player. *That's odd. The slider is near the beginning.* Betty closed the rectangle in which film was playing and reopened it. Yet, again, it started with a completely naked man making love to a completely naked woman, and from the sounds of it, they had been enjoying copulation for quite some time.

That's odd. Where's the build up? They haven't set the scene yet. Betty watched a few moments of the lovemaking. She knew this one – it was called 'cowgirl'. She had learnt it from one of Joanne's teenage magazines, years ago. In fact, she'd had a rather wild night with Rodney the week that *More* magazine featured the 'doggy style'.

Betty frowned; thinking of Rodney made her sad. She looked at the screen. The plot did nothing to take her mind off her separation; the two leads had been doing the same repetitive plunging for several minutes.

Betty skipped again, hoping to find something that explained who the characters were, and what they were doing in a hayloft. However, instead of finding the much-desired context, she ended up finding a couple making love in a boat. She looked closely. *Isn't that the man from the opening scene?* It certainly wasn't the same woman. This one was brunette and her bosoms were even more cosmetically enhanced than the first. *Is he cheating on his girlfriend or did they break up already?*

She spent the next ten minutes skipping backwards and forwards, trying to make some sense of the film. Instead, she found a confusing montage of lovemaking. Characters switched sexual partners for no apparent reason, before returning to their original lovers without any consequences. Even when girlfriends walked in on their partner's indiscretions, the men were not held accountable for their actions (in some cases, they actually appeared to get rewarded!).

Finally, she found all three female characters in the same scene. They were all naked, all bent over, and all had their hands on a wall. She recognised them from their improbably bouncy, chemically treated hair. *Finally, they'll discuss their cheating lover.* Betty waited for the showdown. Instead, out of nowhere, a cowboy who hadn't appeared anywhere else in the film, marched onto the set with an enormous – *Oh my!* – and began caressing the first one's boobs.

Then, in a thick Wild West accent, he announced, "I'm gonna fuck your tight little booties one by one." The camera panned down to his crotchless chaps and ...

Betty gasped. "Oh my goodness! This isn't really a British film."

She closed the film rectangle. She took a few moments to collect herself. She had never seen such a poor example of storytelling. She felt deflated. Her reputation and self-image had been subject to some serious risks yet she had learnt nothing.

She forced herself to sit down and write *something*. She had to get started. She already knew three lovemaking positions. That was plenty to be getting on with ... No, she couldn't just launch in there with full intercourse. Even with Rodney as a lover, she knew there was such a thing as foreplay – but she couldn't put blowing the hairy hornpipe in chapter one.

In fact, as things stood Jay-Maria didn't even meet Ricardo until chapter five. Betty knew from *Good Authoring* that erotica heroes and heroines had to meet much sooner. She would have to reduce the build-up. Betty felt her heart break – her lovely build-up!

With a tear in her eye, she removed the back-story about Ricardo's dead dog, even though it gave him depth and sensitivity. She picked up the cross-stitch depiction of Richmond Tabernacle that she kept on her desk. *I'm sorry, Richmond.*

Then she removed the flashbacks to Jay-Maria's past. Betty's hand hovered over the delete key – would the story have the same power if the reader didn't know that their heroine had once got her foot stuck in a storm drain? Betty took a deep breath and resigned herself to the fact that she would need to sacrifice depth for hanky-panky, if she were to sell millions of copies.

When, finally, she had massacred five chapters and stuck the pieces back together like Frankenstein's monster, she was back to the original question. *How do I suggest sex in the very first chapter?*

She thought back to the pornographic movie. Most of it had been full lovemaking, but she did remember one moment without any intimate contact.

At a loss for anything else to write, she edited her existing text: "Jay-Marie hurried through the door, desperate to get away. Yet, as soon as she entered the foyer, she felt a burning desire to turn back. So she did turn back. She walked across the room, pulled her pants down and bent over, resting her hands against the wall."

"Perfect," muttered Betty. But she knew it was anything but.

* * *

Scarlett Genovese was checking her Sex Syrup account to find out what the hell had happened to her nipple clamps. She'd ordered them five days ago and they still hadn't arrived. She wouldn't normally mind, but one of her highest tipping submissives was due tomorrow.

Then she heard the doorbell ring. *That's odd; I don't have anything in my diary this afternoon.* Scarlett looked in the mirror. Fortunately, she still had her face on. Usually her makeup needed a bit of a touch up after an appointment but the morning's client had been in and out in ten minutes. She hadn't had time to build up a sweat.

Scarlett opened the door. Before her stood a tall, boxy man. He had broad shoulders and wore a black suit. The cheap gold chain around his neck suggested that he thought he was more important than he actually was. Scarlett smiled flirtatiously.

She could see a black BMW parked in the road, which suggested he was the type to splash the cash.

Rather surprisingly, the man took a step forward, attempting to force his way into the house. Scarlett stepped into his path and aggressively grabbed his crotch.

The man yelped in pain.

Scarlett used her other hand to reach for the pepper spray that she kept in a pot plant by the door.

“Let go of me.”

“Take a step back, and I shall.”

The man snarled. He was accustomed to being in control. He had no idea why this woman was more proficient in defending herself than most of the women he visited, but he did not like it one bit. Reluctantly, he took a step backwards. However, he wore an expression of hostility in a vain attempt to hold onto a shred of dignity.

“Right. Now who are you and what the hell do you think you’re doing trying to barge into my house?”

“We have business,” he said in a shifty, intimidating tone.

“Yes. Well, it’s not very helpful if you don’t tell me what business, is it?”

“Just business.”

“Being intimidating really is much more effective if you get to the point.”

“You owe me money.”

Scarlett inhaled sharply. Her cool façade began to quiver. “I’ve never met you.”

“I work for Bozzo.”

“Bozzo?” she asked, getting impatient.

“Boris Smedley.”

“Oh, Boris. Right. You are correct. I did take out a loan with a broker called Boris.”

“Right, so hand it over.”

“I’m sorry, but exactly who and what are you?”

“It’s obvious, innit?”

“Not really.”

“Look,” he said, leaning in close and snarling down at her. “You owe me a grand and I want four hundred now.”

“Oh, I love it when a man gets all masterful,” teased Scarlett, with a wicked twinkle in her eye. She reached out and ran a hand down his chest.

The man shivered, involuntarily.

Then Scarlett grabbed him by his shirt and dragged him into her house.

The man had experienced this approach before, although not by anybody quite as forward. Usually, when a woman offered an eyelid flutter in lieu of payment, he would grab her, pull her close and then laugh in her face. However, something about Scarlett enthralled him. She was much older than he was but had something about her that the women his own age lacked. She was frank, confident and clearly not a stranger to seduction.

* * *

The man stood beside Scarlett’s bed buttoning up his crisp white shirt. He caught a glimpse of himself in the full-length mirror and puffed out his chest. His lips automatically formed a smug grin. Boy did he have skills! He had managed to seduce a woman without even saying one nice thing to her. This bird just couldn’t get enough of him.

He pulled on his tailored black trousers, taking a quick look at his cock before he put it away. *You did good for me today, boy.* He smirked again. Then he sat down on Scarlett’s satin sheets and began putting on his shiny, black leather shoes.

He glanced at Scarlett. Even from behind she looked elegant – a perfectly smooth, graceful back, curved like a cello. He could tell he’d pulled one seriously classy bird; her garden even had topiary in it. His eyes twinkled the way they always did when he looked at a woman he’d had, and, man, had he *had* her. He’d be down the pub tonight, telling his mates how he banged her so hard she couldn’t walk.

“You still owe me the money,” he told her, smirking. “This doesn’t change a thing.”

Scarlett didn’t look up. She was too busy scribbling something with a pen.

“That had better be a cheque,” he told her.

Still, she didn’t look up.

When, eventually, Scarlett had finished writing, she turned to face him, still completely naked. She passed him the piece of paper, smiling.

“Now, *this* is how I like to get paid,” he grinned. Then his jaw dropped. He demanded, “Hang on, what’s this?”

“It’s my invoice,” she explained.

His mouth dropped open.

“You were here for seventy-two minutes and I charge by the hour, so that’s two hours at two hundred pounds each. That makes four hundred. Then I’ve added an extra fifty because I had to use my strap-on to get you off, which is not included.”

He tried to speak, but no sound came out.

“But you did cry a little afterwards, so I’ll knock off ten percent to sweeten the deal.”

The man’s jaw was now resting on his chain necklace.

“So let’s just call it a round four hundred, shall we?” She grinned, widely. “Wait a minute? Isn’t four hundred exactly what I owe Boris this week?”

Finally, the man found his tongue. “You bitch.”

* * *

Betty was stuck on chapter two. Despite having read three articles on writing erotica, she still felt ill-equipped to construct even the most basic erotic plot. She had attempted to read two further erotic novels. Finding herself utterly distracted by the atrocious grammar, she had abandoned them – having learned only that the correct acronym was BDSM, not BSE!

“This is no good,” she mumbled. “It could take me months to write a whole novel – years even. I need to pay the bills *now*.”

Betty wondered if she could get away with anything shorter than a novel. Was there a market for an erotic novella? She did a quick Internet search for, ‘Could you find me an erotic novella, please.’

She found herself taken to a store dedicated to erotica. *Gosh! It really is a popular genre*. She scrolled through ‘Tina’s Training’, ‘Figging Felicity’ and ‘The Submission of Peter Pen’.

Then she noticed something even more odd. ‘The Cellar of Pain – Part 54’. *Part 54? Surely, there couldn’t be fifty-four Cellar of Pain books. Even if they were novellas, you’d have to be ancient to have written over fifty of them.*

She opened the product page for ‘Part 54’ and was taken to a blurb, which boasted that this part was over 2,000 words long. *But 2,000 words is nothing*. Her first chapter alone was over 2,000 words long.

Then Betty realised what she had to do – an idea that would allow her to start paying off her debts before she’d finished her novel. She had to serialise *Ricardo Haberdasher*.

Betty felt excitement coursing through her veins. Chapter one was a mere proofread away from being ready to publish. If she put her mind to it, she could finish the final draft tonight and give it to the Internet before bedtime.

* * *

Betty woke up bright and early the following morning. How could she possibly sleep in – now that she was a published author? The birds were singing and Muriel hadn’t even begun dropping barbed hints about breakfast. By the sounds of it, Joanne and Ava were still asleep. The August sun was already streaming through the curtains. It was the perfect setting for Betty to discover that she was a bestselling erotic novelist.

She hurried into the study. It was twelve whole hours since she’d self-published her eBook, ‘*Ricardo Haberdasher – Chapter One*’. She wondered how many she would have sold. Hundreds? *Thousands?*

Betty had decided to publish under a pen name. She read in *Good Authoring* that an erotic novelist’s name should sound young, fresh and sexy, so she saw no problem with Betty. However, she didn’t want her friends and family to know that she was

writing about rumpy-pumpy – particularly not those judgemental witches at her writers’ group. Betty Berry – housewife, gardener, queen of the bonkbuster. What *would* the neighbours think?

So, instead, she had decided to pick a pen name. Lost for inspiration, she decided to use her maiden name, Brown. Still lost for inspiration, she considered using her middle name, Fiona. But wasn’t there a Fiona Brown in Coronation Street? Betty didn’t want to cause confusion. She had pondered some more. Fiona had been Betty’s grandmother’s name, but she’d been known to everybody as Figgy. ‘Figgy Brown’ – it sounded perfect.

In what she considered a moment of genius, she had set up a new email account in the name of ‘Figgy Brown’. She had marvelled at how quick it was to create a new identity. With her internet skills improving by the day, it had only taken her half an hour.

Betty wedged a broom between the door and the filing cabinet. Then she warmed up the computer. Her heart juddered against her ribs as she logged into her eBook accounts page. She began mentally multiplying her royalty by the number of copies she imagined a quality introduction such as hers would have sold.

Eventually, the eBook accounts loaded.

What? But this couldn’t be right ...

Betty was horrified to discover that she hadn’t sold a single copy!

It made no sense – the first chapter of a brand new erotic novel had been released and not one person wanted to read it. But erotica was the ‘in thing’.

She felt cheated. Her first chapter was every bit as good as any of the extracts she’d read from *Fifty Shades*. In fact, hers was better because it didn’t have a bizarrely aerobic inner goddess leaping all over the place. In fact, Betty’s chapter was sexier than the beginning of *Fifty Shades*; E. L James hadn’t written about a woman leaning against a wall with her knickers around her ankles in the *very first chapter*, had she?

But then nobody knew about the absence of an inner goddess or the wall leaning, because nobody had read it.

Betty re-read her blurb:

‘She was a pretty, virginal flower waiting to bloom and he was a dashing billionaire waiting to unwrap her petals. Chapter one sees the beginning of a lovingly crafted romance with a hint of racy rumpy-pumpy to set the flavour for some later naughty-naughty.’

Nothing wrong with that.

Betty turned off the computer feeling thoroughly disgruntled. If she’d wanted to be ignored, she would have continued sending *Richmond Tabernacle* to publishers.

I’ve sold out, and I still haven’t made a penny.

“Betty! Betty!” called a shrill voice. “Are you there?”

Betty’s teeth ground together; there was little enamel left.

“Are you going to burn my breakfast again, or is it going to be something I can actually eat?”

More than anything, Betty wanted to scream, ‘Shut up you cantankerous old bat. I’m busy contemplating the future of my new career as a writer of hardcentre erotic fiction.’ But she knew it would do nothing to ease their relationship. If only Muriel would do something as morally reprehensible as her son had done, then she could kick her out without a conscience. But the image flashed up of Muriel having sex – making Betty feel a little sick. She was glad that she hadn’t yet had any breakfast. Instead, she muttered, “I’m just about to grill you a broomstick,” and walked into the kitchen to prepare some porridge.

As she heated the milk, Betty thought about June Johnson. June had self-published her trilogy, *Flowers for Flora*. It had been quite the scandal, rebelling against the ethos of their writers’ group. At the time, Betty, buying into Phyllis’s argument, had judged June a ‘vanity publisher’. She had felt that June was embarrassing herself by selling work that wasn’t good enough for a publisher. Now, however, Betty saw things quite differently. Thanks to self-publishing, she finally had work on sale. Granted, nobody had bought it, but at least it was out there.

Betty gulped when she realised that even *Flowers for Flora* had sold some copies. June's epic trilogy was the story of a florist in love with a funeral director who is dying of AIDS. However, aliens offer to take him to a planet where they can cure AIDS, but they can only take people who are HIV positive, and there is no return. The florist has to choose between infecting herself or losing the funeral director forever. *Surely* if people wanted to read *that*, the setup to Ricardo and Jay-Maria's beautiful romance would be flying off the shelves.

Then one word slapped Betty across the face – marketing. June Johnson knew how to market. Betty, on the other hand, would rather be seen in dirty breeches on a Sunday than tell anybody that she was writing an erotic novel.

After serving Muriel's porridge, which she had been asked to reheat, then leave to cool, and then reheat, Betty decided to give June Johnson a call.

She wondered how much she should tell June. They'd seen each other every week for many years, yet she wasn't sure that she could call June a friend – at least not the sort that she could trust with a phenomenal secret.

"Good morning?" came June's deep, thick voice.

"Good morning, is that June?"

"Yes, speaking. To whom do I have the pleasure?"

"It's me, Betty."

"Oh, good morning Betty! It's going to be at The Jolly Teapot this week."

"I'm not calling to find out where the meeting is."

"Oh. Um ..."

"I called to pick your brains about self-publishing."

"Self-publishing?" asked June. "I thought you said it was *vanity* publishing."

"It's not for me, it's for a friend."

"Right, so you still think that self-published novels are a blight on the face of literature?"

"I don't think I put it quite like that, June."

"You put it *just* like that, Betty."

"Well ... I can only apologise. I did not think it through."

"Right," agreed June, frostily.

"I'm calling for advice. How much more of a retraction do you want?"

"Are you going to self-publish *Richmond Tabernacle*?"

"Um ... no."

"Perhaps you should; the market has become flooded with cheap, rip-off erotica. It would be nice to see a real romance."

"You think *Richmond Tabernacle* is a real romance?"

"It's better than all those copycat bonkbusters."

"Yes," chuckled Betty, forcing laughter. "We don't want any more of those."

"So, what would you like to know?"

"You've sold a few hundred copies of your books, haven't you?"

"Three hundred and seven, yes."

"How did you do it? How did you get people to know about your book?"

"It's a secret," replied June, smugly.

"Come on June, from one writer to another ..."

"You said that self-publishing *Flowers For Flora* would be like squeezing my career into a coffin and lowering it into the ground."

"I did?"

"Yes."

"And you said that the introduction of aliens undermined Flora and Damien's entire romance."

Well, it did. "I'm sorry. I was wrong."

"So you think the aliens work?"

No. "Undoubtedly. Who wouldn't want to mix AIDS and aliens?"

"That means a lot to me, Betty, it really does."

"I am glad. Now, you said something about a secret."

"Oh yes, the secret."

"Well?"

“Free books.”

“Free books?”

“Yes. You offer the first book for free, hook people in, and then you charge them for the sequels.”

Betty felt excitement bubbling within, and it wasn't just the thrice-reheated porridge. “You're a genius June! A blooming genius!”

“Your ‘friend’ will be pleased.”

“Um ... yes. She will. Thank you, June.”

“Anytime, Betty. I'm always happy to help a less-experienced author.”

Betty was too excited to care about the sneaky gibe. This was brilliant advice. Of course people would be reluctant to pay for work by a new author. However, trying a free book by a new author was a different matter altogether. All she had to do was give away chapter one and then charge for chapter two.

Bugger. I'm going to need to finish writing chapter two.

* * *

Scarlett Genovese opened her front door with the chain securely attached. Thanks to the spy hole, she knew exactly who was waiting on the step and they had not parted on good terms.

“Yes?” she asked, coolly.

The debt collector shuffled, awkwardly, staring at the floor. Scarlett knew he wasn't there to collect money.

He cleared his throat and asked, “How much would it cost to be mummified?”

* * *

Betty was busy clearing up the lunch dishes. As she ran the taps, she contemplated the future of her writing career.

She had given up on pornography. She had found many free videos online, but they always failed to adhere to basic storytelling protocol. Occasionally a uniform would establish context, but then the heroes would break character within seconds.

She had also given up on erotic novels. After trying to get into a further four titles, she found herself losing the will to live. *Why on earth would she get in that cage in the first place? What's her motivation?* Still, Betty picked up plenty of tips on how *not* to write a naughty novel.

She knew that she was a better writer than E.L. James or any of these James wannabes. All she lacked was bedroom experience. But with pornographic movies and erotic novels off the list, where could Betty possibly get the knowledge she needed to finish her erotic novel?

Then Betty remembered something that she'd once heard about on the radio – there was such a thing as a sex shop. Perhaps she could buy experience? She remembered Rodney and his prostitute and her heart did a cartwheel. The betrayal stung like getting caught inside a rotary washing line with a swarm of bees. But throwing herself into her new book would be a good way to take her mind off her treacherous hubbie.

She didn't want to hire a prostitute, of course. But perhaps she could acquaint herself with some of those objects she'd encountered during her brief foray into pornographic movies. It was one thing knowing what a handcuff looked like, but how could she describe the experience of feeling a pair clamped against her wrists if she'd never touched one?

Betty was familiar with the experience of counting down the moments until Muriel went up for her afternoon nap, but it wasn't usually so that she could browse intimate toys on the Internet. At least with Joanne and Ava out shopping, she would have a couple of hours to herself. If she was incredibly lucky, Joanne's shopping trip might be characterised by buying some food so she could stop eating Betty out of house and home – literally. But Betty knew not to expect miracles.

Eventually, Muriel announced, “I think I shall have a nap.”

Betty smiled. “That sounds like a good idea.” She waited impatiently while Muriel slowly peeled her skeletal, frail body from her chair and made her way to the stairs.

When, finally, Betty heard Muriel's bedroom door close, she hurried into the study.

Even though Muriel had gone upstairs, Betty felt the necessity to go through her ritual door-broom barricading strategy. It was one thing her family walking in while she was writing about knicker-removal in size 11pt font. It would be somewhat harder to hide a photograph of some handcuffs or a – what was the noun she'd learnt recently? – *vibrator*.

Mind you, she doubted that Muriel would be able to identify a vibrator. Betty would struggle and she'd been researching kinky malarkey for days.

Betty typed, 'I'd like to buy a toy of a sexual nature, please' into the Internet. The search returned 2,440,000 results. *How on earth am I going to narrow this down?* She clicked on the shopping section.

Crikey! What is that?

Before her eyes was a rubbery item that looked like two willies melded together at their bases. It was flesh-coloured, bobbly and enormous. *What on earth is it? And what use would it be to anybody?* She wondered if it were a novelty rolling pin.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang. Betty jumped feet. She hadn't been expecting any visitors. Quickly, she turned off the computer monitor. She removed the broom and brushed herself off.

As she approached the door, she saw the outline of a suit – it must be somebody professional. She checked her hair in the mirror and opened the door with a broad smile.

Her smile evaporated. "Oh, it's you."

There on the doorstep was the man-coffin. He did not look friendly. In fact, his expression was decidedly hostile. Betty wondered if he'd forgotten that she'd previously offered him tea, biscuits *and* a sandwich.

"Is Rodney in?"

"No, he ..." Betty thought about it. She might have told her family that she'd separated from her husband, but she was not ready to reveal to *society* that she was soon to be a divorced woman. "He's at work," she lied.

The coffin looked unconvinced. "When will he be back?"

Never, if I have anything to do with it. "I couldn't tell you."

"I need to see him urgently."

"I could pass on a message ..."

"You tell him that Bozzo wants his money," the man sneered.

Suddenly, it all fell into place. The coffin wasn't a business associate; he was a debt collector. Not only were they in serious debt, but there were some seriously ill-mannered people pursuing the money.

"My husband and I have always kept our financial affairs very separate," she fibbed. "I'm afraid I cannot help you."

The man took a step forward. For a moment, Betty thought he was going to barge into the house again. Instead, he stopped and pressed his face close to hers. "Fine. But I might not be as understanding next time." And then he spat – actually *spat* in Betty's face.

Betty stared back in horror, saliva dripping down her nasal bridge. Nobody spat in this neighbourhood. She grabbed a lavender tissue from her pocket and dabbed her nose. She had a good mind to put this man at the bottom of her priority list for such unimaginable rudeness. But the menacing glare in his eyes told her that paying him should be at the *top* of her priority list, no matter how ill-versed he might be in acceptable behaviour. *Heaven only knows what a man capable of spitting on a person might do.*

"How much does he owe you?" she asked, bravely.

"Today? Twenty thousand. Tomorrow? Who knows ...?"

"Twenty thousand?" she stuttered. "Pence?" she squeaked, optimistically.

The man scoffed. "That'll do for today's payment."

"I don't have any money on me *now!*"

"Fine," he said.

"Really?"

“Sure. If I don’t get my two hundred today, it’ll be two *thousand* next time,” he sneered.

He took one last aggressive stare at Betty’s crinkly, innocent, blue eyes, then turned and walked away. Betty saw him climb into an ink-black BMW with darkened windows, and pull away.

Gordon Bennett.

Betty steadied herself against the wotnot. For a brief moment, she wondered what she was going to do. But the solution quickly became obvious. *I need that double-ended bobbly willy thing, and I need it now.*

She had to finish her novel, and she had to finish it fast.

Betty returned to her computer with a new sense of urgency. She turned the screen back on. The long, disturbing willy thing filled the screen.

What is that?

Did anybody really fantasise about severed willies joined at their bases?

Then Betty saw the price: one hundred pounds!

One hundred pounds for a rubber sausage with two helmets? Blimey. I could buy a cucumber for less than a pound.

Betty began scrolling through the other shopping results. *Love eggs? What is a love egg?* Betty imagined that perhaps it might be a bit like Kinder Surprise – you could open one up and there would be a treat inside. Although, why they were two of them joined together on a piece of string, she wasn’t quite sure. Then she noticed that the eggs cost thirty-five pounds. *What on earth could be inside them for thirty-five pounds?*

She moved onto the next item – cock rings. It appeared to be a three pack, with different sized hoops. Betty was all in favour of foreplay but she didn’t feel that willy hoopla would be very erotic.

But what *was* erotic? Betty had once thought she had known but now, scrolling through suction pumps and dripping candles, she wasn’t so sure.

The one thing of which she was sure was that getting a sex toy education was not going to be cheap.

It was then that Betty’s eyes fell on an advert – an advert for sex toy reviewers. Betty certainly knew how to write a review. She’d reviewed everything from feather dusters down to smoothie machines, via garden hoses and oven gloves. She felt certain she’d be able to find a few words to say about a double-ended, bobbly willy thing.

Betty wasn’t sure what to do – signing up to become a sex toy reviewer would certainly save her money, but was becoming a sex toy reviewer really a path she wanted to go down? If she went down that road, she certainly wouldn’t feel comfortable at the next church fete. But then she reminded herself that things had already gone too far for her to feel comfortable bumping elbows with people of faith.

Another concern was that signing up would mean sex toys would turn up at her home address. This was a respectable neighbourhood. What if, God forbid, one of these bizarre egg toys got sent to the wrong house and nosey Norman from number thirty-five decided to open it? For all she knew, those eggs could be filled with something very dirty indeed – like g-string knickers or massage oil. And then there was the fact that the shop was called ‘Sex Syrup’. Did they use Royal Mail or did they have their own vehicles with ‘Sex Syrup’ written on the side?

She opened *Ricardo Haberdasher*. It was in a sorry state – one chapter in which the heroine inexplicably strips and leans against a wall, then a second chapter in which nothing sexy happens at all. If she could just learn about one sex toy, then her hero could give her heroine a suggestive present and that would help build the sexual intrigue until she knew what she wanted to say about lovemaking.

Betty found herself entering her details on the Sex Syrup website – or at least, Figgy Brown’s details. That way, if the items went to the wrong house, she could deny all knowledge.

And so, ten minutes later, Betty Berry was a member of the Sexy Sirens Reviewing Harem. She had never been called a sexy siren before. She twiddled her suburban-chestnut hair and smiled to herself. Her life was changing and, in many ways, she rather liked it.

* * *

Two days later, Betty looked at the small bottle in her hand. Of all the sexual aids in the world, Sex Syrup had sent her the one thing with which she was familiar – intimate lubricant.

She frowned. Yes, Ricardo Haberdasher *could* give Jay-Maria a bottle of water-based lube, but she didn't really feel that it would add the depth of colour that she was aiming for.

Still, Betty had to write a review, otherwise she wouldn't get the next item to test. But how on earth was she going to find five hundred words to say about a lubricant? 'It reduces friction' – riveting.

Betty sat down and got to work. The sooner she wrote her review of the lubricant, the sooner she could receive a product that was more suitable for spicing up her erotic fiction. She began to describe it.

'It comes in a blue bottle, which is pleasing to the eye. However, I really don't understand why it needs such a long nozzle. The bottle itself is only about four inches tall, yet the nozzle is a further three inches. It seems to pose an unnecessary blocking risk.'

After one hundred words, she was stumped. She supposed she could describe its texture. She'd used intimate lubricants before, but words were escaping her today. So she removed the shrink-wrap and squirted a liberal amount onto her fingers. *Ah yes, cool.* She wiped the lube onto a lavender tissue.

But then something peculiar happened. As Betty typed, the tips of her fingers began to feel ... numb. *Jeepers – that was no ordinary lube.*

Betty felt puzzled by the experience. Of course, she knew that you could get more than one kind of lubricant. During her many years of experience, she had sampled both *regular* and *strawberry*. However, this was something different altogether; it wasn't a flavour – it was a sensation.

The tingling stopped and her fingertips became more and more numb. Betty found the experience rather disconcerting. Why would anybody want to numb the sensation of making love? But then it hit her – if the female were a virgin! And Jay-Maria Virginia was just that.

"This is perfect!" cried Betty. She opened the manuscript for a story and began editing chapter two. This would add that sexual intrigue she had been hoping for, and would also show Ricardo's caring nature.

Betty described the little bottle in detail, right down to its long nozzle and promise of anesthesising properties.

'Ricardo Haberdasher took the small paper bag containing the intimate lubricant to Jay-Maria. Without taking her hands off the wall, she looked inside. He told her, in deep, smouldering tones, "Because what I'm going to do to you may be a little uncomfortable."'

* * *

Betty Berry awoke with a stuffy nose. She hated waking up with blocked sinuses. It was bad enough that her eyes were crunchy in the mornings, without being robbed of her sense of smell. She reached into the top drawer by her bed – a few squirts of her nasal inhaler and she'd be fine.

Of course, instead of being met by the soothing, aromatic mist of a nasal inhaler, Betty found her nostrils filled with a cool, jelly-like substance. *What?* She forced herself to open her crispy eyes.

Flaming Nora! It's that intimate lubricant.

She begin snorting it out as she fumbled around for tissues, but already she could feel the sensitive walls of her nostrils beginning to tingle as the numbing process began. She began picking at her inner nose, hoping to rid it of intimate lubricant before she lost all feeling in her septum.

The day was already going badly and it hadn't even featured Muriel yet. Any moment now and the breakfast orders would begin, followed by Joanne and Ava helping themselves to generous quantities of food that they would never contribute

towards. Perhaps, if she were lucky, she'd get ten minutes to check her sales figures before the chaos began.

Betty booted up the computer. As she waited, she tested her nose by sniffing vigorously. She could not sense the air passing through her nostrils. She wondered how long it would take to pass off; were nostrils different from fingertips in that respect?

The woman had learnt not to expect great things when she opened her eBook accounts. Still, perhaps now that she'd uploaded chapter two and offered chapter one for free, there'd be a little more interest than she'd first experienced.

To Betty's total astonishment, her download count had leapt into triple figures. Excitedly, she inspected further. Her free initial chapter had been downloaded six hundred times. In fact, people had even started downloading chapter two, and that cost twenty pence.

Naturally, Betty was delighted by this development, but she was somewhat puzzled. Fortunately, the website provided a summary of where readers had come from. It appeared that ninety percent of the sales had originated from one link. Intrigued, she clicked on it.

"Oh!" gasped Betty when an enormous, thonged, lady's behind filled her screen. She checked that the door was broomed shut and then scrolled down.

The website appeared to be called 'Ass Lovin'. Betty found herself blushing. Her initial reaction was that she did not wish to be associated with such a vulgar title – she was an associate member of a country club, for goodness sake.

Then Betty thought about it. She was an erotica writer now. These things were bound to happen. In fact, they should be encouraged because they would help her to sell books.

I suppose there is nothing wrong with appreciating the human form. The rear end is an attractive piece of the anatomy, admired by many members of the human race.

Betty vowed to write a poetic description of Jay-Maria's behind. Perhaps she could compare it to two soft clingstone peaches ... If her readers liked bottoms then she would describe one for them.

She found herself energised by the prospect of reacting to readers' demands. Writing *Richmond Tabernacle* had been a lonely experience characterised by very little feedback. Writing *Ricardo Haberdasher* however, had immersed her in readers' experiences. She could respond to demands as and when they arose.

She wondered how best to describe Jay-Maria's rear end – probably through the eyes of her lover, Ricardo. And so, she began writing chapter three.

'Ricardo looked at her beautiful figure. Her shoulders were fine with a fragile femininity. Her waist was slender. He admired the curve of her spine as it led down to her beautiful bottom. It was smooth and round like two soft clingstone peaches and made him want her with the most animal hunger known to man.'

Betty looked at the text and smiled. It really showed how much Ricardo desired to take her virginity. It was perfect.

* * *

Betty excitedly scurried into the study carrying the second delivery from Sex Syrup. Muriel wasn't even asleep yet, but Betty was desperate to find out what they had sent her. Would it be something she could use in her book? Now that she had proper paying customers, she really felt that she was getting the hang of this erotica lark.

Added to which, she'd got carried away commenting on earlier chapters and promised her adoring fans a new instalment of *Ricardo Haberdasher* this very night. That gave her only eight hours to finish her chapter – several of which would no doubt be spent cooking other people's dinner.

After securing her surroundings, she began pulling at the brown paper packaging. She tore and she tore. Then – bubble wrap. It was like a frustrating game of pass the parcel. Once she'd removed the bubble wrap, she was left with a purple velvet bag. With her blood pumping, Betty reached inside and pulled out the item.

What the ...

The item appeared to have strands of rainbow-coloured hair. Had they sent her a doll? Then she carefully removed the item from its pouch. She was baffled. It had what appeared to be a tapered glass handle and rainbow hair. Was it some kind of whip?

Betty held the item by its handle, and gently slapped her hand with the hair. It didn't hurt in the slightest. In fact, it tickled. *Perhaps it's a tickling device ...*

Betty rummaged around for instructions but there was nothing, just the purple velvet bag and a note saying that the product was suitable for vegans. She rifled through the packaging until she found the delivery note – 'My Ickle Pony Tail'.

So it's a hairpiece? Betty knew that there were certain fetish cultures, in which people wore strange outfits. Perhaps one such clique liked rainbow hair. Still holding its hard, tapered handle, she pressed it up to her wavy, suburban chestnut hair, where a ponytail would fall. It certainly wasn't the right look for her, nor Jay-Maria. Besides, with such a bulky, heavy handle, it was hardly a practical hairpiece. It had to be something else.

Not knowing what the item was for was an unsettling experience. Betty would have to do a little research. She turned on the computer monitor. She opened her Internet rectangle and typed, 'I would like to know what to do with a My Ickle Pony Tail, please'.

However, to Betty's dismay, the Internet appeared to be on the blink. *What? But I have important research to be getting on with.*

Dinner that day was not a comfortable affair. Betty had one question on her mind, and one question only: *What do you do with a My Ickle Pony Tail?*

She looked at Muriel – despite her healthy tongue, she was physically frail. Asking her about peculiar practices might just stop her heart.

As Betty watched Muriel picking over the fresh pancakes she had painstakingly prepared, she wondered if a heart attack might not be such a bad thing ...

Then there was Ava. If she mentioned the item in the presence of her three-year-old granddaughter, she might very well ask to play with it. Betty just could not have a budding member of the Berry family mixing her Barbies with an intimate aid. Letting toddlers handle adult goods could very well be the cause of serial killers.

Betty briefly considered asking Joanne. Her daughter was, after all, the person who had brought *Fifty Shades of Grey* into her house and begun this whole chain reaction.

She imagined approaching the subject. "Darling, have you ever heard of a sex toy with hair?" Yuck. She just couldn't do it. If the answer were 'yes', she'd never be able to look her daughter in the eye again. If the answer were 'no', her daughter would never be able to look *her* in the eye again.

The evening went by with very little progress. The Internet stayed broken. Betty remained unprepared to ask her family about her predicament. She looked at the item over and over again, but became more and more confused.

Eventually, after the rest of the family had gone to bed, Betty returned to her writing study, none the wiser about what this strange apparatus might be for.

She had promised her fans a new chapter tonight. If the Internet were down, how would she possibly deliver? The best she could do would be to prepare the chapter, so that it was ready if the Internet came back on. But how could she prepare the chapter without knowing what the item was for? She needed to buy some time.

Eventually, Betty formulated a plan. She didn't like it, but she had few options left. She would repeat the plot of chapter two – Ricardo Haberdasher gives Jay-Maria Virginia another present. The repetition felt lazy and haphazard, but *Good Authoring* had advised that build-up was key to writing effective erotica. Chapter two had proven very popular, so she knew it was a formula that worked.

Betty carefully crafted chapter three. "Ricardo handed Jay-Maria the purple velvet pouch. "Because you are so special, my fragile, gentle foal." Betty was pleased with the imagery.

Then she realised, to her delight, that the Internet was back on. "Brilliant! I'll upload the new chapter right away."

* * *

“Hells bells!” cried Betty. “One thousand downloads.” Chapter three had proven the most popular yet. Not only were sales unexpectedly high but twenty-five people had left comments!

Betty looked at the referrals. Most were from *Ass Lovin'*, once again, but two other sites featured heavily, *Bold Behind* and *Backdoor's Best*. Betty was puzzled by the latter but assumed that 'Backdoor' was another word for self-published author, like the popularly used term 'indie'.

She began reading the comments.

'Simply brilliant. I can't wait to see what happens,' said a commentator calling himself 'Uphill Gardener'.

A gardener. Now that sounds like my type of person.

Another comment read, 'My Ickle Pony Tail – love it. That sweet little virgin won't know what's hit her.'

'I love the way Brown sexualises standing with hands on the wall. The juxtaposition of such a mild act and the promise of the hard core pony tail is superb.'

Wow! They really feel the passion within Ricardo Haberdasher. I've really connected with these people. Betty smiled to herself. *I always knew I was good at characterisation.*

'After reading *Fifty Shades*, I was looking for something kinkier, and this is it.'

So kinky malarkey is not about weird and outlandish activities, it's just creating real characters in meaningful relationships.

All she had to do now was write their very first sexual encounter. Betty visualised candles, classical music and a lilac rug. Of course, it would help if she knew what the My Ickle Pony Tail was for. Evidently, it was so-named because it looked like the tail of a My Little Pony toy, but what was its intended use?

Fortunately, because the Internet was back on, Betty was able to do a search for 'I'd still like to know what a My Ickle Pony Tail is for, please'.

However, to her surprise, she couldn't find any pages about the item. This was most puzzling.

Then Betty remembered that she was part of the Sexy Sirens Reviewing Harem. She probably received items before they even went on sale. This realisation was momentarily uplifting – *I'm special!* – but soon lost its appeal. If the product wasn't on sale yet, how on God's green earth was she going to find out how it was meant to be used?

Betty briefly contemplated calling June Johnson but remembered, with chills, their last conversation, in which she'd had to pretend that an alien AIDS story was a good idea. She couldn't go through that again. More importantly, she couldn't let June think she was penning a 'cheap copycat bonkbuster'.

However, with Muriel, Joanne, Ava and June all unsuitable confidants, who could she call? She didn't know any women who were well versed in sexual matters.

Then Betty remembered that she *had* encountered a woman who was well versed in sexual matters – incredibly well versed, as it happened.

But could she do it? Could she call the prostitute who had dressed her husband in a giant, fluffy nappy and whipped him? A big part of her felt that she never wanted to see that woman again as long as she lived. But on the other hand, with her literary career at stake, perhaps she could make an exception.

She opened her Internet rectangle. 'I'm looking for a sex worker called Scarlett who lives on the Honey Oaks Estate, please.'

* * *

“Don't hang up but ...”

How often had Scarlett heard those words? It was always one of the wives. They were always so desperate for answers that they started the conversation politely. But Scarlett knew from bitter experience that the exchange would end with middle-class expletives like, 'bloody hussy', 'flaming witch' and 'jolly rotten woman'. Cheated on, often stolen from, and still these women couldn't bring themselves to swear.

“I'm just about to go out,” she lied. She wasn't in the mood to be insulted by another housewife for the indiscretions of her husband.

“Please, I need to talk to you,” begged the caller.

“I’m sure you do, but ...”

“I’ve got a hairy sex toy with a glass handle and I need to know what it’s for.”

“Even so, I ... Hang on, *what?*”

“It’s from a website called Sex Syrup, do you know them?”

“Yes.”

“They sent me a sex toy to review and I haven’t a clue what to do with it.”

Scarlett found herself smiling; she was intrigued. “What does it look like?”

“I can call back later if you have to go out ...”

“I’m not really going out. I just lied because I thought you might be somebody whose husband paid me for sex.”

“I am.”

“Oh.”

“Betty Berry. I came to your house.”

“Um ...” *Could be one of a number of women.*

“I caught you about to whip my husband.”

“Um ...” *Still doesn’t narrow it down.*

“I was up a ladder ...”

“Oh yes! Are you all right? That looked like a fucker of a fall.”

“Um ... It was a ... Yes. I am all right. Just a little bruised. I kicked Rodney out though.”

“Most of them do, at first.”

“Oh, he’s not coming back.”

Scarlett had heard this before, many times. The husband would turn up a few times without his wedding ring but six months later, it’d be back on his finger. “Tell me more about this sex toy.”

“It has about twelve inches of rainbow coloured hair ...”

“Rainbow coloured?”

“Yes.”

“O-kay ...”

“A glass handle, shaped a bit like a doorknob but slightly more pointy ...”

Scarlett found herself grinning with amusement. She knew exactly what the item was for and was not at all surprised that Betty did not.

Suddenly, Betty shrieked.

“What is it? What’s the matter?” asked Scarlett.

Betty started to laugh. “It plays music.”

“It *what?*”

“I was just handling it, and it started playing music.”

Scarlett was baffled. She’d never heard of a sex toy that played music before. Perhaps she had this all wrong. “What sort of music?”

“It’s tinny and high-pitched, like the sort of jingle you get in a birthday card.”

“Put it next to the phone?” suggested Scarlett. And then she heard it: squeaky music. “Are you sure this is a sex toy?” asked Scarlett. “It sounds more like a kids’ toy.”

“It came from Sex Syrup.”

Scarlett was quiet for a few moments. Despite its exceedingly poor quality, she thought she recognised the music. Yes – she definitely did. She found herself remembering the lyrics, ‘She shall have music wherever she goes ...’ “It’s the tune ‘Ride a Cock Horse!’” cried Scarlett, with excitement. Then she burst out laughing.

“Yes, it is,” agreed Betty, dryly. “Why are you laughing? Do you know what the toy is for?”

“I could hazard a guess, but I’ve never heard of a sex toy that played music. Can you send me a picture?”

“I don’t think so. Rodney has taken the camera.”

“Snap one on your phone.”

“I don’t think it can do pictures. Just tell me what you think it is.”

Scarlett grinned. This was the best aggrieved-wife phone call ever. She couldn’t imagine the circumstances that had led to this situation, but there was nowt so queer as folk. “Well, don’t put it up your ass until I’ve checked, but ...”

“What?” gasped Betty.
 “Don’t take my word for it, but ...”
 “Up my ...?”
 “I think it’s a horse tail butt plug.”
 Scarlett heard a thud.
 She called, “Hello? Mrs ... er ... Mrs Rodney? Are you all right?”
 A few seconds passed.
 “Mrs Rodney?”
 “I’m terribly sorry, I dropped the phone.”
 “Did you hear what I said?”
 “I’m not sure. It sounded like you said ‘horse tail ...’” Betty trailed off.
 “Horse tail butt plug, yes – tail-length hair attached to a knob – sounds like a horse tail butt plug to me.”
 “But what on earth is a ... what you said?”
 “It’s a tail, which you fasten to your body by pushing the glass bit up your bum.”
 Betty choked.
 “Mrs Rodney? Are you still there?”
 “But why would anybody ... Blimey. Oh my God! Jay-Maria Virginia!”
 “‘Jay-Maria Virginia?’ That’s a curse I haven’t heard before.”
 “It’s not a curse, it’s the name of my character.”
 “Right ...”
 “She’s ... she’s a virgin in my novel.”
 “You’re writing a novel?” *How very middle class.*
 “Yes, an erotic novel.”
 Scarlett was stunned. Rodney’s wife certainly didn’t look the type to be writing erotica. The men with imaginative wives didn’t usually come to her. But judging by their conversation, it didn’t sound like Betty *was* imaginative. “What’s it about?” asked Scarlett, trying to stop herself laughing.
 “I don’t know yet. I’ve been serialising it. I’ve already mentioned the ... item because I assumed it would be used for something ... nice. But it’s not, it’s vulgar! And now hundreds of people are going to expect me to describe it in use!”
 “Right,” said Scarlett, a combination of baffled and deeply amused.
 “Would you help me for a small fee?” offered Betty, still sounding mortified.
 “You want to hire me?”
 “On a literary matter!” Betty added quickly. “I’m an erotic novelist not some sort of pervert.”

* * *

Betty filled the biscuit tin with jam sandwich creams. She had never had a lady of the night over for tea before and wasn’t sure what they liked to eat. She assumed they liked fancy biscuits – if you’ve already ruined yourself, what would be the point of scrimping in the biscuit department?

She straightened the cushions, assuming that stuffed furnishings were an area in which ladies of the night must be familiar, given that they spend so many of their working hours in bed.

Inviting Scarlett into her home had not been an easy decision. However, she was reluctant to carry the intimate item outside the home. What if she suffered a road-traffic accident whilst carrying an item of an intimate nature? If she were to meet an untimely end under a number seven bus, she didn’t need the added humiliation of being found with a horse tail butt plug in her handbag.

Betty had requested that Scarlett follow specific instructions on how to dress so as not to arouse the suspicions of her neighbours. She was to wear a hat; Betty wasn’t entirely happy with the platinum hue of Scarlett’s hair but felt that hiding the roots would make its peroxide origins a little less obvious. Scarlett was to cover her legs and entire bosom. Stiletto heels and all forms of animal print were banned.

Betty turned on the air conditioning. She didn’t want her guest to feel uncomfortable.

There was a bleep. Betty received a text to say that Scarlett was about to arrive. She had asked her not to ring the doorbell so as to avoid waking Muriel from her afternoon nap. Of course, Betty had given Scarlett a back-story in case she were to come face to face with any member of her family, but Betty would prefer her not to have to use it.

Betty opened the front door and checked Scarlett from head to toe. As instructed, she was dressed in a modest fashion – loose fitted denim jeans and a white t-shirt.

“Did you have to buy those specially?” asked Betty.

“No,” replied Scarlett, fighting back a smile.

Even though Scarlett was dressed to order, Betty did a quick scan of the neighbourhood. She didn’t think anybody from this street would recognise a woman of the night, but then she hadn’t thought Rodney would fraternise with such types, and he clearly had.

“So where’s the toy?” asked Scarlett.

“Shhh! Keep your voice down!” hushed Betty, ushering Scarlett into the living room. “Would you like anything to drink? I’m afraid I don’t have any gin.”

“A cup of tea would be lovely, please.”

“Oh. How many sugars?”

“None, thank you.”

Betty was surprised. “Would you like a biscuit?” she offered, grabbing the tin. “I got these ones especially because you have the look of a lady who likes them cream filled.”

Scarlett appeared to be holding back laughter but Betty didn’t understand why.

“No, thank you.” Scarlett looked around. “You have a lovely place here. I particularly like these cushions.”

“Funny you should mention those. I just fluffed them especially because I guessed you would be somebody who would notice cushions.”

“Why is that?”

“In your line of work you must need to be comfortable, so would appreciate good stuffing.”

Scarlett ceased trying to hide her laughter. She chuckled loudly. “Relax, Betty.”

Betty just gawped.

“Are you going to show me the item I came here to see?” asked Scarlett.

“Yes, yes. But we have to go into the study because there’s nothing to wedge the broom against in here.”

“Er ... I see.”

After fetching Scarlett a cup of tea, Betty ushered her out of the living room. She urged Scarlett to whisper in the hallway so as not to wake Muriel.

“Couldn’t you have invited me when she was out?” asked Scarlett.

“She never goes out,” replied Betty, grimacing.

“I see.”

Betty broom-locked them in the study and indicated for Scarlett to sit down. Then she reached into her handbag for her keys. She unlocked Rodney’s safe, and then carefully put on rubber gloves – she had used the gloves ever since the item’s true nature had been suggested. She retrieved the purple velvet pouch from the safe and passed it to Scarlett.

Scarlett pulled the item from the bag and took one look at it. “Butt plug.”

“How can you be so sure?” asked Betty.

“See how the glass is tapered at the top?”

“Yes.”

“That’s for easy insertion ...”

Betty was speechless.

“And the flared base, well that’s to stop the butt sucking it up.”

“Sucking ... it ... up?”

“Yep. The anal cavity has a habit of sucking things up.”

“Golly! And what about all the rainbow hair?”

“Definitely a tail.”

“Why on earth ... Why would anybody ... A butt plug ... A tail ... *What?*”

“It’s for horse play.”

“Horse play?” gasped Betty. She needed to sit down.

“Yup.”

“Is that ... what it sounds like?”

“Exactly, sweet cheeks,” smiled Scarlett.

Scarlett’s manner made Betty uneasy. “So it’s for people who are ... who like ... people who want to ... with a horse?”

“Not necessarily.”

“I don’t follow.”

“It could be used by people with an animal fetish, but it’s more likely to be used in control games.”

“What games?”

“Control games. One person is the dominant. The other is the submissive.”

“And who’s the horse?”

Scarlett smiled. “Probably the submissive. The dominant dresses the submissive as a horse, to humiliate and thus demonstrate superior power. Then the submissive trots around like a horse, to show submission.”

“And people ... like this?”

“You’d be amazed what people like.”

“But why does it play ‘Ride a cock horse’? Oh.”

“Admittedly, the music is unusual. I imagine it’s to add to the humiliation. Looking like a My Little Pony is one thing, sounding like one is even more ridiculous.”

“Ridiculous – exactly.”

“It’s all about showing control.”

“And is that why you dressed my husband in a nappy? To show control?”

Scarlett looked away. “I don’t think we should discuss Rodney.”

Betty nodded in agreement. Publishing *Ricardo Haberdasher* was a way out for her – a way to undo at least some of the harm Rodney had done to her and her family. Giving that nappy even a moment’s thought made her heart leap off a cliff like a lemming from folklore.

“I don’t know what to do,” admitted Betty. “I’ve already mentioned the tail. I’ve set the scene, I’ve created the characters ...”

“Who are the characters?”

“Well there’s Richmond ... I mean, Ricardo – strong in the office but shy in the bedroom.”

“Brilliant, well he’s your submissive.”

“But Jay-Maria’s a virgin.”

“Ah. Um ...”

“What am I going to do?”

“If only you hadn’t already mentioned the pony tail,” said Scarlett, in a pitying voice.

Betty buried her head in her hands. Then she looked up, optimistically. “Perhaps nobody else will know what it is. I mean the tail isn’t on sale yet ...”

“Betty, in the context of erotica, there’s not much else that a My Ickle Pony Tail could be.”

She buried her head again. “I’m so stupid.”

“Not necessarily. How many downloads did you say you’ve had so far?”

Betty loaded the eBook rectangle. “Almost ten thousand.”

“Ten thousand downloads of three chapters?” gasped Scarlett, looking at the screen with disbelief. “That’s a hell of a lot for a book that hasn’t been written yet.”

“A couple of websites picked up on it, and it sort of went ... plague!”

“Viral?”

“Yes!”

“What websites?”

“Um ... let me think ...” Suddenly, Betty exclaimed, “Oh my goodness!”

“What?”

“I just thought it was for people who appreciated the aesthetic beauty of the female backside.”

“What was it called?”

“Ass Lovin’,” replied Betty, mortified.

Scarlett laughed out loud.

“What am I going to do?”

“You have two options. You either pull the story and disappoint your adoring fans

...”

“Or?”

“Or, you embrace the butt and let me help you write the next chapter.”

“Couldn’t I just pretend it’s something else? I know! It can be a joke present. In chapter four, Ricardo gives Jay-Maria the real present – a scented candle.”

“Way to kill a good book.”

“Why would that kill it?”

“You can’t promise kinky power play and then deliver scented candles and the missionary position. You’ll let everybody down.”

“What about girl on top?”

“Not unless she’s riding around on his cock with a pony tail up her arse.”

Betty felt sick. This was a disaster. The novelist career she’d always wanted was within reach, but she had to write about bottom sex to get it. It was a classic sell out versus poverty dilemma.

She thought about her family and the debt they were in. Joanne was greedy, selfish and insensitive and Muriel was bitter, cruel and exhausting. But they were family. If she didn’t give them a home, who knew what might become of them and her gorgeous granddaughter, Ava. For all their faults, she liked having them close, even Muriel. She liked being able to help in their hour of need and for that, she needed money.

But this was Betty’s hour of need too. Her husband was gone, she owed money left, right and centre, and a nasty bailiff kept turning up at her house. She couldn’t bear to be spat at again, but was writing about putting things up the bottom really an upgrade?

“Maybe Jay-Maria could fasten the pony tail some other way? Maybe she could sticky tape ...”

“No.”

“What about gaffer tape?”

“No.”

“Perhaps she could just hold it, and make a noise like a horse.”

“No.”

“This isn’t what I signed up for!” wailed Betty.

“Well, what exactly did you think you were signing up for when you decided to become an author of erotic fiction?”

“I don’t know. Not this.”

“You’d better delete the first chapters if you’re not going to finish the book,” said Scarlett, reaching for the keyboard.

“No!” cried Betty.

“No?” asked Scarlett, smiling at her easy reverse-psychology success.

“All right. I’ll do it. I’ll write about the ... tail.” Betty snapped. Then suddenly, she started to laugh.

“What?”

“No wonder my readers thought chapter three was colourful.”

Scarlett giggled. Before long, they found that they were both in fits of laughter.

* * *

After an hour-long writing session, Betty found that co-authoring was not as bad as she imagined. Admittedly, there had been moments where Scarlett had wanted Ricardo to say things like ‘Shake that cute little ass for your master, slave!’ and Betty had had to rephrase it to be more in keeping with the voice of the character (‘If you don’t mind, would you please wiggle your hips just a little. Thank you ever so much, my angel.’) All in all, it was a positive working relationship.

Finally, it was time to break for a well-deserved pot of tea. The two intrepid writers scurried into the kitchen.

"I'm really glad I used a pen name," vocalised Betty. Then she whispered, "Imagine if the vicar knew that I'd written 'he eased it in, allowing her firm cheeks to adjust to the cold'."

"Actually, *you* didn't," Scarlett pointed out.

"I *will* pay you for your help," Betty promised her. Then she gasped. "That doesn't mean I'm your client does it?"

Scarlett laughed. "Not in the regular sense." Then Betty noticed that Scarlett was holding the My Ickle Pony Tail. She raised it up. "Look, when the glass catches the light – it's really pretty."

"You can't bring that in here!" gasped Betty, throwing her hands up in horror. "This is where I prepare food!"

"It hasn't actually been up anybody's butt," Scarlett pointed out. Then she looked at it closely. "Has it?"

"No, of course not!" snapped Betty, trying to snatch it.

Suddenly, they heard footsteps on the stairs. Betty's brain jammed. The stress of trying to work out what to do with a butt plug in a lady of the night's hand in her own kitchen froze her neurons.

Fortunately, Scarlett was more proactive. She lifted the lid off the slow cooker and dropped in the pony tail. It wasn't until after she'd let go of the tail, that she caught a whiff of stewing meat.

"What are you doing?" gasped Betty.

"Sorry. I didn't know there was food in there."

"Lamb casserole," mumbled Betty. "Or rather, it was going to be," she grunted, begrudgingly.

The door opened. In walked Muriel, sniffing the air. "Oh good, today's dinner involves preparation."

"I always *prepare* your dinner," seethed Betty, "from scratch."

Muriel turned to Scarlett. "And who might you be?"

"The decorator!" cried Betty and Scarlett, in unison.

"Ooh? Which room?" asked Muriel. "Obviously this room needs a complete overhaul, but so many of them need work that it's hard for me to guess."

Betty scowled. She personally retouched the paintwork in every room twice a year and as often as she felt necessary beyond that.

"I've been doing some work in the study," said Scarlett, truthfully.

"Long overdue if you ask me. I keep telling Betty that that room is far too cold with its white paint. It needs a warmer shade, like cream."

"Really?" replied Scarlett. "It felt sizzling hot in there to me." Then she winked at Betty.

Betty shuffled, feeling awkward.

"Can I see the work you've done so far?" asked Muriel. Immediately, she turned towards the door.

"No!" cried Betty, knowing that Ricardo and Jay-Maria's anal tryst was still open on the computer. "Wait," added Betty, feigning nonchalance. "Wouldn't you like a cup of tea?"

"No," replied Muriel, curtly.

Just then, the front door opened. "It's me-ee!" yelled Joanne, slamming the door so that there could be no doubt. "I just found the most amazing brogues."

She barged into the kitchen. Her bags of shopping barricaded Muriel in the kitchen. Ava peered up from behind a Debenhams carrier. When Joanne saw Scarlett she demanded, "Who are you?"

"The decorator," the two chorused, again.

Muriel turned back to the slow cooker and walked over to the counter. "It's not gristle again is it?" asked Muriel. She turned to Scarlett. "I hate it when she serves me gristle."

"When do I ever serve you gristle?" demanded Betty.

But then, before anybody could stop her, Muriel reached out her hand and began to lift the lid of the slow cooker.

"No!" cried Betty, lunging towards her.

Muriel stopped in her tracks. “Whatever is the matter?”

“If you remove the lid, you’ll let all the pressure out and the dinner won’t cook.”

“Oh,” replied Muriel, “*that’s* why the casseroles are the way they are.”

“And what way is that?” asked Betty. Perhaps she could deal with snipes from her mother-in-law if they distracted her from looking inside the slow cooker. “What else don’t you like about my cooking?” she asked, knowing that this would be a long conversation.

“Well, since you asked ...”

Just then, a quiet, but definite, high-pitched squeak came from the slow cooker.

“What was that?” asked Muriel.

“Nothing, I didn’t hear anything,” said Betty. It was faint, but she could hear ‘Ride a Cock Horse’ jingling away. She just had to keep talking. “Is there anything you don’t like about my ironing?”

“I can hear music,” remarked Muriel.

Betty wondered how it was that her mother-in-law needed the telly on full blast yet could identify the quiet, high-pitched jingle of an enclosed butt plug. “Perhaps there’s ringing in your ears,” suggested Betty.

“It’s coming from the slow cooker,” said Muriel, her arm reaching out once again.

“Stop!” cried Betty.

It was too late. Muriel was already stretching and lifting the lid. She gazed into the cooker. “There seems to be something in here, Betty.”

“Have you got one of those glass things that helps distribute the heat?” asked Scarlett, thinking on her feet.

“Why so much string?” asked Muriel. “Actually, it looks more like hair. What the ...”

Betty waited with baited breath.

“Goodness!” gasped Muriel. “I think Ava’s put one of her toys in the casserole.”

“What?” asked Betty, faking surprise. “Is there something colourful in the dinner?”

“One of my toys?” asked Ava, with concern.

Joanne strode forward. “Out of my way!” she demanded. Before Betty or Scarlett could stop her, she looked down into the cooker. “Oh yes, it does seem to be one of her toys. I’m not sure which ...” She reached for the oven gloves.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Betty, grabbing the gloves. “The dinner’s already ruined.”

“I don’t know, it might be salvageable,” remarked Joanne, snatching a tea towel.

“Just leave it, *please*.”

“That’s odd ...” remarked Joanne, looking down at her towelled hand.

“What?” asked Betty and Scarlett, in unison.

“It looks like it’s made of glass. None of Ava’s toys are made of ...” Joanne began lifting the item from the cooker. The rainbow hair was stained by the brown casserole but the glass component was undamaged. Suddenly, Joanne screamed, and dropped the pony tail back into the lamb. “What the fuck?”

“Joanne, please, there’s a child present!” gasped Betty.

Her daughter dropped the tea towel and hurried over to Ava. “Darling, why don’t you go and play in the conservatory?”

“What’s going on?” asked Muriel, with the predatory excitement she showed every time she thought she might be about to witness something mildly scandalous.

“Nothing,” said Joanne. “Just one of Ava’s toys. I don’t want her to see it.”

“One of my toys?” asked Ava, welling up.

“Look – now you’re upsetting Ava,” said Betty, moving to pick up her grandchild.

Joanne barged in front on her. “I *can* comfort my own child you know. I *can* cope!”

“You’re not still fixating on that child minding comment, are you?”

Joanne scowled. She bent down and picked up her daughter. She gave her a brief hug. “Don’t worry, darling. It wasn’t one of your toys after all.” She headed over to the door. Then she turned back and glared at Betty. “I haven’t finished talking to you yet.”

“I should go,” said Scarlett.

Betty thought about it. They hadn't quite concluded writing their lovemaking scene (if you could call it that) but she had enough information to have a go at finishing the chapter by herself.

"May I use your bathroom before I go?" asked Scarlett.

"Of course. Just cross the hall and it's on the right."

"Thank you."

No sooner had Scarlett left the room, than Joanne returned, having persuaded Ava to play in the conservatory with the draught excluder, once again. "Mother!" she cried. "What the hell is going on?"

Just then, they heard the front door open once more. Betty panicked, hoping it wasn't the coffin. But the door couldn't be opened without a key. *That's odd; we're all here.* Betty felt a sinking feeling in her tummy.

Seconds later, there in the kitchen doorway, bold as brass, was Rodney. His posture was awkward, like a naughty schoolboy who had been caught smuggling marbles into class, not a grown man who'd been caught paying for sex. He had a stupid grin on his face.

"Dad!" cried Joanne, lavishing a hug on him.

"You're back," said Muriel, coolly.

Rodney tried to hug his mother.

"You left me here," she remarked, standing rigid.

"Well, I'm back now," he assured her.

"Are you now?" asked Betty, hands on hips.

Rodney looked at his wife. He held out his arms but she backed away. "Can we talk?" he asked, using his best puppy dog eyes, which looked more like a squinting budgie.

"Anything you've got to say to me, you can say in front of the family," asserted Betty.

"I really think we should talk in private," Rodney said, trying to stroke his wife's cheek with the backs of his fingers.

Betty angrily snapped him away. "As you can see, it's a bit busy around here."

"It's okay, Mum. We can give you privacy," offered Joanne.

"Do not move an inch!" Betty ordered.

"Betty, Honeytoes ..." cooed Rodney.

"Ugh!" hissed Joanne, stepping toward the door.

"Not an inch!" yelled Betty.

Joanne jumped and reversed back into the room.

"I just wanted to say ..." began Rodney, then trailed off.

"I'm listening," Betty told him. "We're *all* listening."

Rodney looked around at his mother and daughter, then back to his wife. "Please, Betty ..."

"Spit it out, we don't have all day."

"I just wanted to say that if I did anything I shouldn't have ..."

"If?" scoffed Betty.

"About the thing you think I did ..." stuttered Rodney.

"And what thing would that be?" demanded Betty.

"What thing?" echoed Joanne.

Rodney continued, "I just want to say, *if* I did something wrong, I'll never do it again."

There was the sound of a toilet flushing. Betty didn't know whether to smirk or panic as she heard footsteps crossing the hall. Then in she came – Scarlett.

Rodney's jaw dropped. "Nanny!" exclaimed Rodney, before he had time to think.

"Nanny?" asked Muriel. "I thought she was the decorator."

"I knew it!" cried Joanne. "You think I can't look after my own child."

"Calm down," Betty warned her. "Scarlett *is* a decorator, *isn't she* Rodney?"

Rodney had lost complete control of his lower jaw. It hung open and wobbled like a jelly suspended from the top half of a blushing egg. What was his prostitute doing in his kitchen with his mother, wife and daughter? Eventually, he managed to say, "I suppose she must be the decorator. What is she doing here?"

“She’s been helping Betty with her warm cream,” explained Muriel.

“What?” he stammered.

“Helping me choose a paint colour for the study,” Betty added, quickly.

“Well, I’d rather she didn’t!” he demanded.

“Not exactly your decision, is it?” Betty pointed out. “Besides, who would you rather helped me with the decorating, Scarlett or our friend with the suit and BMW?”

Rodney looked like he’d been smacked in the face.

“What friend?” asked Joanne, confused.

Betty gave Rodney an ultimatum. “Would you like to explain to your daughter or shall I?”

“Won’t anyone cut me some slack around here?” he shouted. Then he stormed out of the kitchen.

“Dad, wait ...” cried Joanne.

But it was too late. There was the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall and then the front door slammed shut.

For a moment, Betty thought that Joanne was going to go after him but instead, she said firmly, “Mother, we need to talk.”

“Now is not a good time,” explained Betty. “As you can see, I need to think of something else for us to have for dinner.”

“It’s the spoilt dinner that I need to talk to you about,” she said, glaring at the slow cooker.

Muriel chipped in. “I will be getting dinner, won’t I? I don’t want to go hungry ...”

“When have you ever ...” began Betty. Then she realised that she couldn’t have two arguments at once. Both Muriel and Joanne were fierce fighters. “You won’t go hungry,” she said, forcing a smile. “Why don’t you go and watch some telly? It must be time for *Countdown*.”

“I’ll stay and listen if it’s all the same to you,” said Muriel, not even bothering to disguise her nosiness.

“You’re just making excuses so you can stay and listen!” snapped Betty, before she’d finished processing Muriel’s comment. When she’d caught up, she added, “Well, you can’t. This is between me and my daughter.”

“It’s about *my* son.”

“Telly – *now!*” barked Betty.

Muriel shot her a furious glare. “All right. If that’s my worth in this household.” She walked into the living room with exaggerated frailty.

“I’m going to go now,” said Scarlett, finally finding an opportunity to speak.

“Thanks for coming,” Betty thanked her, politely.

“It was my pleasure,” she replied. “Good luck with the ... paint job.”

“Thanks, I’ll let you know how the ... paint job ... goes.”

Betty knew that it would be rude not to show a guest to the door, but she was under a lot of pressure. She didn’t want to leave Joanne alone with the slow cooker any longer, just in case there was any chance that she hadn’t quite identified the full horror of the My Ickle Pony Tail.

When finally they were alone, Joanne said in a condescending tone, “It’s okay mum, I’ve worked out what is going on here.”

“You have?”

“Yes.”

“Are you going to enlighten me?”

“You’ve been having an affair, haven’t you? That’s why you don’t want Dad back, even after his apology – you’ve replaced him.”

“What?” cried Betty.

“Don’t act all shocked!” sneered Joanne. “I saw how you were trying to talk in riddles around me. The man in the suit with a bimber – you’ve been screwing him.”

“I most certainly have not!”

“Aren’t you a bit old for an affair?”

“I’m not having ...”

“It all makes sense – the secret evenings spent in the study, presumably Skyping him ...”

“I don’t know what that is, but I can assure you that I haven’t been ‘Skyping’ anybody.”

“Then there’s the disgusting item in the slow cooker ... Honestly mother, I’d have thought you’d have more taste!”

“That’s nothing to do with my taste!” protested Betty.

“Did he choose it then? The man you’ve been Skyping?”

“I’ve been in the study writing.”

“Oh please! Comma pushing *Richmond Tabernacle* so that you don’t have to admit you haven’t had a fresh idea in years.”

“Don’t you insult my literary career!”

“What literary career?”

“I won’t be spoken to like this!”

“And then, to top it all off, you were screening a nanny behind my back!”

“I was not screening her. That woman is not a child minder and that man is not my lover!”

“Why won’t you take Dad back then?”

“Grown up lives are complicated, Jo,” sighed Betty.

“Er, I know! I am one!” she retorted.

“Then start acting like one!”

“Why are you being so mean to Dad?”

“Things have happened that pushed us apart,” explained Betty, as softly as she could so soon after having her career belittled.

“Then pull yourselves together!” demanded Joanne.

“If only it were that simple.”

“It is that simple. He apologised – he clearly wants you back.”

“Perhaps *I* don’t want *him* back.”

“So that’s it?” asked Joanne, looking deflated and personally aggrieved. “You’re breaking up this family?”

“Breaking up?” gasped Betty. “Who do you think’s been keeping us altogether? I’ve provided a home for you, Ava, Muriel ...”

“You’ve got a god complex!” barked Joanne.

“Right. That’s it!” said Betty, reaching her wits’ end. “From now on I want you to pay rent.”

Joanne gasped.

* * *

Betty was really beginning to enjoy her habitual early morning creep down to the study. Five whole minutes without her daughter hounding her to get back with her adulterous father. Five whole minutes in which she could survey her secret empire. This morning’s secret trip to the study was the best yet.

Chapter four had already been downloaded fifteen thousand times.

This is amazing! People love my erotica!

But then she remembered, with a sinking feeling, that it was not strictly *her* erotica. It was Scarlett’s erotica. In fact, no part of her had wanted to write about Ricardo Haberdasher easing a lump of glass into poor Jay-Maria’s delicate, peachy rear end.

Still, fifteen thousand readers were fifteen thousand readers.

But then again, who were these people? Who were these brutes who thought that interfering with the posterior constituted entertainment? Presumably, they were punks and goths – the sort of people she avoided in the street in case they spat on her shoes.

Then she read one of the comments: ‘This is amazing! I love it! I love it! I love it!’

Well, I suppose I did have a hand in writing it. Scarlett may have told me what needed to happen, but they were my fingers on the keyboard. Those are my words!

‘You can see how much Ricardo loves and respects Jay-Maria. It’s great to see high profile erotica that portrays people enjoying BDSM within a trusting and loving consensual relationship.’

They understand the character dynamics! The kinky malarkey might not have been my first choice, but finally, my love story is out there and people get it.

Next comment: 'Where can I get me one of them butt plugs?'

Hmm.

Then Betty realised that Figgy had a new email. 'Good afternoon, Figgy,' it read. 'I represent S & Emma, the company who make the My Ickle Pony Tail. We cannot thank you enough for creating pre-launch buzz about our product. To show our gratitude, we've linked to *Ricardo Haberdasher* from our homepage. We would really like to discuss the possibility of sponsoring you to mention another of our products later in your book.'

Betty gasped. A sponsorship deal would really help with the mortgage, but it might mean having to write another scene that made her decidedly uncomfortable.

She thought about describing the rectal insertion – the way her sphincter had tightened as she began her description and the difficulty she'd had unclenching for hours afterwards. Could she go through that again?

Thousands of people were now reading the story of Richmond Tabernacle. Perhaps giving him a botty fetish was a small price to pay for getting her novel out there. But what corruption would she have to apply to her poor hero if she took a sponsorship deal?

She supposed her decision would depend on how much S & Emma were offering to pay her. It would be lovely to get some of those red reminders paid. It would be better still to get that horrible debt collector off their backs for good.

But what if they sent her another sex toy that she had no idea how to use? She didn't want to make a regular habit of inviting ladies of the night into her home.

Then Betty heard footsteps on the stairs. Her peace and quiet was over once again.

* * *

That afternoon, Betty sneaked into the study to check her sales. She was gobsmacked to discover that they had doubled since the morning.

A little research revealed that S & Emma were a multinational sex toy manufacturer. Featuring *Ricardo Haberdasher* on their homepage brought thousands of readers every hour. Betty watched with astonishment as the download counter increased by ten or twenty sales every time she reloaded the rectangle.

She read the comments on the story and noticed one or two links to national news articles! Her heart started pounding like a big bass drum being whacked with a rhino.

A national newspaper described the book and said: 'I never thought I'd find a musical, rainbow horse tail sexy, but Brown's vivid and sensual descriptions have quite won me over.'

Then a second paper speculated about her identity. 'Adult toy manufacturer, S & Emma are taking credit for the pony tail mentioned in *Ricardo Haberdasher*. The My Ickle Pony Tail, as they call it, has been manufactured but is not available for general sale yet. Only a small number of people have handled one. Find the butt plug and you'll almost certainly find the writer.'

Betty worried that Sex Syrup might out her, but she'd received the items before the name Figgy Brown became infamous, so hopefully nobody would make the connection.

Yet another paper declared: 'Our resident psychologist has profiled the author. From the emotional content, we can tell she is female. And, whilst the book deals with some very advanced sexual practices, there are signs of naivety, suggesting that she's no older than thirty.'

Betty grinned.

Meanwhile a fourth paper was making a challenge of it, 'Do you know who Figgy Brown is?' and offered a phone number for members of the public to call if they had any information.

Betty didn't know whether to be delighted or terrified. On the one hand, recognition for her work was something of which she'd always dreamed. On the other hand, if her identity got out she would never be able to set foot in the country club again.

She spent the next hour in a daze, reading article after article about what the papers termed 'Second Wave Mainstream Erotica'.

It was hard to take it all in. Betty wondered if it was all one big wind up, but there were just too many comments and news sources for it to be anything less than an entirely genuine Internet sensation. She'd heard of the term 'going viral', but she'd never quite appreciated what it meant.

Betty twiddled the My Ickle Pony Tail in her hands. It hadn't been quite the same since its liaison with a lamb casserole, but it had scrubbed up reasonably well. She stroked the smooth surface of the glass with her finger. Was it really as hideous as it had first seemed? Thousands of people seemed to think it was heavenly.

Betty was interrupted by the sound of the doorbell. Concerned that it would wake Muriel from her nap, she hurried out of the study. She noticed with irritation that there were footprints on the carpet. She'd told Joanne not to put her shoes on until she was at the door itself. Busy focusing on the mess, she neglected to look through the patterned glass.

As soon as Betty turned the latch, the door swung open violently, knocking her backwards.

"Where's my money?" immediately demanded the coffin.

"Actually, I do have a plan," stuttered Betty.

He shoved her up against the wall. "A plan to give it to me within the next five minutes?"

"Well, no ..."

"Then perhaps you'd like me to hurt somebody in your family?"

"What? ... Why? ... You wouldn't!"

His expression conveyed he meant it.

"Hurt *me!*" shouted Betty. "If you're going to hurt anybody, hurt *me!*"

The coffin grabbed Betty by the neck, jamming her against the wall. She couldn't breathe. "Perhaps I will!" he breathed.

Betty was petrified. All thoughts of butt plugs and royalty cheques fell from her mind, displaced by raw terror.

At first, she thought he was just trying to scare her, but his hand remained firmly wedged against her neck and she became desperate for breath. Struggling to kick him she found he was as solid as if really made from thick wood.

Betty pictured Joanne coming home and finding her suffocated on the floor. She couldn't bear the thought of little Ava looking at her lifeless body. She had to do something.

But what? Her face was already prickling as the circulation to her head dwindled.

Then all of a sudden, the coffin let go. He seemed to sway for a moment, and then he flopped to the ground.

Betty looked up. There beside her was Muriel. She was clutching the My Ickle Pony Tail by the end of its manky, rainbow hair. Her frail mother-in-law had inflicted a terrific whack on the intruder with a butt plug.

Disorientated, Betty looked back to the floor. Blood was seeping into the carpet around the coffin's head. Her jaw dropped.

"You all right?" asked Muriel.

Betty nodded, unable to speak.

"Is he dead?" Muriel asked, peering over the body.

Betty managed a slight shoulder raise. When eventually, her power of speech returned, she could only say, "You hit him!"

"Of course," said Muriel, patting her weapon.

"With that?" asked Betty, looking at the pony tail.

"With your butt plug, yes."

Oh my God. Betty found herself dropping to the floor. Where should she even begin?

My mother-in-law has killed a debt collector ... There is a dead debt-collector on my hall floor ... My mother-in-law knows I have a butt plug ... My callous mother-in-law just saved my life.

"It's an ideal weapon for me," explained Muriel. "The tail meant I could get in a good swing and thus hit him with quite some force."

"Um ..."

“Shall I call an ambulance?” asked Muriel.

Betty reached out and grabbed the man’s arm. She couldn’t find a pulse. She stood up slowly, preparing herself to break the news. “I’m not sure an ambulance will be much use to him.”

Muriel raised her hands to her lips. Her eyes widened as she began to realise what she had done. “Oops,” she said.

“Oops?”

“I’d better call the police,” she decided, walking towards the phone.

Betty could see how frail she actually was. It was hard to grasp that such an old woman *could* kill such a strong, young man. Yet evidently, she had. “Wait!” called Betty. “Don’t.”

“I have to,” said Muriel. “I just killed a man.”

“If you call the police, they will have to arrest you.”

“Even if I was defending you?”

“They will still want to question you, almost certainly at the station.”

Betty thought about it. Freedom from Muriel was something she’d dreamt of for three years, ever since the infuriating, cantankerous, old bat had moved in. However, that infuriating, cantankerous, old bat had just saved her life.

Muriel looked frightened. “I couldn’t face prison.”

Betty tried to weigh up the situation. If she let Muriel call the police, then a frail, elderly woman might be arrested. Muriel hadn’t left this house in months. Such a change might even kill her. Even if the police interviewed her at home, it would be a big shock for the elderly woman. However, if they didn’t call the police, they would have a dead debt collector on their hallway floor, and nobody to take him away.

Betty pondered for a moment. She didn’t want Muriel to be arrested, but could she really hide a dead body for her?

It was then that something important occurred to Betty. The only person in possession of a My Ickle Pony Tail, was the elusive Figgy Brown. Were the police to release details of the murder weapon, the public would soon put two and two together – work out the address of the author of *Ricardo Haberdasher*. Betty would be identified as the nation’s champion of bottom sex. She would almost certainly lose her country club membership.

She looked at the dead body on her floor and wondered how it had come to this – having to choose between covering up the slaughter of another human being and being exposed as the mystery wordsmith of botty bonkbusters.

“I’ll have to hide the body,” concluded Betty, aloud.

“You’d do that for me?” asked Muriel, clearly moved.

You and the country club’s heated outdoor swimming pool.

“What about his car?” Muriel pointed out.

Betty began to panic. Covering up a death was proving harder than she had first imagined. Getting this enormous body out of her house was going to be near impossible. She wasn’t a tall woman, nor was she a strong one. Moving his car would be harder still. Nothing would be more conspicuous than a woman of Betty Berry’s social standing getting into the driver’s seat of a BMW with blacked-out windows.

Betty found herself back on familiar ground – resenting the amount she had to do for her mother-in-law.

A sudden groan made both women jump.

Betty cautiously leaned forwards. “He’s alive?” she murmured. She reached for his wrist again. She couldn’t find a pulse right away – her hands were shaking – but eventually located a very weak pulse.

“Trust you not to have checked properly!” Muriel said scornfully. Betty’s teeth began to grind, but then Betty realised that Muriel was smiling. There’s something about discovering that you haven’t killed a man that really bonds mother and daughter-in-law.

There was another groan. Both women stepped away. Even in a semi-conscious, flat-on-the-floor state, the coffin was terrifying.

“Go and get him a cup of tea!” Betty found herself suggesting.

“Good idea.” Muriel gave the prone figure a cautious look and then disappeared into the kitchen.

“And some cake!” Betty called after her.

The coffin opened his eyes. “Whiskey ...” he muttered.

“We don’t have any whiskey,” explained Betty. “But Muriel does make a lovely cup of tea.”

Betty nipped into the living room and grabbed a cushion with which she helped the man raise his head.

A few moments later, Muriel returned with a cup of tea. “I’ve brewed a whole pot, so if this doesn’t do the trick, there’s plenty more. Do you take sugar?”

The coffin looked completely confused, but he took the mug in his quivering hand. Though spilling a little on his shirt, he eventually managed to bring the mug to his lips. He took a sip and then groaned again. “W-what happened?”

Muriel and Betty exchanged glances. Was it wise to tell a violent man that an old woman had knocked him unconscious with an anal arouser?

“You got a bump on the head,” explained Betty.

“H-how?”

“Is there somebody we can call for you?” Betty asked quickly. “You can’t stay here and you really don’t seem well enough to drive.”

The man groaned yet again.

“Is this a good idea?” asked Muriel. “Should we really be inviting any of his cronies into our home?”

Betty reached into the man’s jacket and pulled out his mobile. She looked through. ‘Jonno’, ‘Roddo’, ‘Bozzo’, ‘Stevo’ ... Muriel was right. Those did not sound like people she wanted in her house. But then her eyes fell on a name that afforded her heavy mind a breeze of relief – ‘Scarlett Genovese’.

Betty beamed. She didn’t know Scarlett well, but she did like her. She got a sense that Scarlett was somebody who would know what to do about an injured gangster type lying semi-conscious on your hall carpet.

She didn’t want to call Scarlett in front of Muriel but neither did she want to leave that frail lady alone with the coffin. Then Betty remembered that this was the same frail lady that had previously bludgeoned him with a glass butt plug, and she felt somewhat happier about leaving the room.

Betty hurried into the living room and shut the door. *Come on. Pick up, pick up, pick up ...*

“Hello there, sugar,” came Scarlett’s husky tones.

“It’s me, Betty.”

“Betty?” asked Scarlett. “Are you kidding me? It says ‘Cedric’.”

Cedric? That brick is called Cedric? “I’m using somebody else’s phone. He’s a tall man, funereal-looking. Does that sound like Cedric to you?”

“What’s going on?”

“Here’s the thing ... Muriel whacked him over the head with the pony tail ...”

“What?”

“He was trying to strangle me at the time.”

“Call the police, not me!”

“I don’t want Muriel to be arrested. So I thought perhaps if I called somebody who cares about him ...”

“Cares about him? He’s a client! Well, kind of. He’s not a very nice man at all. It’s a shame your mother-in-law didn’t finish the job.”

“Do it for me, *please?*”

“Do what?”

“Come and collect him. Take him and his car somewhere far, far away.”

“Look Betty, I was happy to help you with the musical sex toy, but this is way, way beyond that.”

“I’ll pay you!”

“You’ll pay me to clean up your crime scene?”

“No, I’ll pay you to work for me on my book. You can be my adviser.”

“Can you afford to pay me?”

"It might have to be three months in arrears, but yes, I can pay you."

"I'm used to getting paid upfront ..."

"S & Emma have offered to pay me to write about another of their sex toys and my royalties are ..."

"Wait, *S & Emma*?"

"You've heard of them?"

"Of course I've heard of them. They're massive."

"They made the My Ickle Pony Tail."

"I thought it seemed well made ..."

"Do you want the job, or not?"

"As your adviser?"

"Yes."

"Do I have to remove the injured heavy to get the job?"

"Erm ... no, but please, Scarlett, you'd be doing me a massive favour."

Scarlett was silent for a few moments. Then she took a deep breath and said, "I'll be right there."

* * *

Betty poured Muriel her fifth cup of tea. The old woman might have been physically capable of walloping a heavy, but it had taken an enormous toll on her psyche.

"Are you sure he won't go to the police?" Muriel asked.

"We've been over this. That man is a criminal. He was in our house trying to strangle me. The last thing he's going to do is call the police," Betty told her, trying not to sound impatient. "Besides, I'm not entirely sure that he knows what happened."

"What if your decorator friend takes him to hospital?"

"Hopefully that's exactly what she's doing."

"Won't the doctors and nurses ask questions?"

"They may well do, but he won't give them any answers, not if he knows what's good for him."

"But what if ..."

"Muriel, we've been over and over this. We can't be sure of anything, but it seems very unlikely that he'll report us because it would mean confessing his own misdemeanours. I really think we should talk about something else." Betty helped herself to a generous glug of tea.

Muriel looked pensive. Then she suggested, "Here's a subject change ... How about we talk about your porno novel?"

Betty spat out her mouthful of tea. "What?"

"The one you've been sealing yourself in the study to produce."

"Have you been spying on me?"

"No."

"Really?"

"I read it on my Kobo."

"I bought you that so you could read the classics!"

"Oh please. I'm eighty-three. I've read all the classics."

"But how did you get hold of my novel?"

"I saw it on sale and I thought it looked colourful. All my Facebook friends are reading it."

Betty took a few moments to regain control of her mouth. "You're on Facebook?" she stuttered. And then onto the more important question, "But how did you know Figgy Brown was me?"

"Because it's your Richmond Tabernacle book, *obviously*."

"Wait? You've read *Richmond Tabernacle*?"

"You printed it out for me, last year."

"Yes, but I didn't think you'd actually *read* it."

"Of course I read it."

Betty blinked a few times, quite certain that she was dreaming. But when she opened her eyes, the room and Muriel were still there.

“Now, what’s going to happen in chapter five?” asked the frail old lady. “Is she going to get back at him for claiming her ass, or will he continue to be her master?”

Betty’s eyes popped out of her head, like two synchronised ping-pong balls fresh from the bat. She was speechless.

* * *

Betty had resigned herself to the fact that she would have to tell her daughter about her new career. With the full force of British tabloid journalism behind the quest to identify Figgy Brown, time was not on her side.

She waited until one evening when Trevor was looking after Ava, and made her daughter a fresh jug of elderflower pressé and a plate of cookies. The more relaxed she could make her daughter, the better she might take the news.

Even in the August heat, Joanne was wearing a trouser suit. As usual, her hair was scraped back tightly. Betty, on the other hand, had dug out a lilac, floral frock that she’d last worn in the eighties.

Betty waited for Joanne to look comfortable, but even after two glasses of pressé, she still looked uptight. Eventually Betty realised there would never be a perfect time to break the news.

“Jo, dear ...”

“Yes.”

“I need to talk to you about something.”

An expression of horror washed over Jo. “You’re not dying are you?”

“What? No. Why would I be dying?”

“The jug, the cookies ...”

“No, I’m not dying.”

“Thank goodness for that.”

“The thing is ... Do you remember when you brought home that book, *Fifty Shades of Grey*?”

Joanne nodded, looking decidedly uncomfortable.

“At that time your father and I ... To cut a long story short. The thing is ... Sometimes even women my age can ...”

“Are you trying to tell me that you *are* having an affair? I was right, wasn’t I? It’s that bloody man with the bimmer ...”

“No. He was a debt collector.”

“Okay, now I know that you’re lying. What would a debt collector want with you?”

“We *are* in debt. That’s what I’m trying to tell you.”

“You?” Joanne asked, and laughed.

“Yes.”

“No, seriously, what is this about?”

“We are in debt. Well, we *were*.”

Joanne looked puzzled. “*How*?”

“Your father ... among other things, lost his job. Then he made matters worse by not telling us he’d lost his job and, well ... the long and the short of it is that we were in danger of losing the house.”

Joanne looked at her mother with suspicion. “Is that why you chucked him out, because he lost his job?”

“Jo, he borrowed against the house without telling us. You do understand that that’s very serious, don’t you?”

Joanne inhaled deeply, looking annoyed. Then after a pause, she slowly nodded.

Betty continued, “And because we were going to lose the house, I had to do ... something.”

“So you chucked Dad out.”

“No. I mean, I *did*. But then I did something else, to make some money.”

“Right ...” drawled Joanne. She looked at her mother with suspicion. “What did you do?”

“Here’s the thing ...”

Joanne raised an enquiring eyebrow.

“I had a bash at writing an erotic novel.”

Joanne made a sound that was somewhere between a splutter and a gasp. This was followed by the manner of coughing fit that might follow a serious choking incident. When finally, she had managed to compose herself, she said, "You can't just bash out an erotic novel. It needs to be ... erotic."

Betty raised an eyebrow.

"Promise me you won't try to publish it."

Betty raised the other eyebrow.

"You didn't?" gasped Joanna.

Betty nodded, smiling.

"But nobody bought it, right?" she asked, looking deeply concerned.

Betty took a deep breath. "It's *Ricardo Haberdasher*."

"*Ricardo* ..." Joanne started laughing. She threw her head back and hooted with all her belly. Then eventually, she fell silent. "Oh my God, you're not joking."

"I'm not joking."

"But *Ricardo Haberdasher* is filthy."

Betty looked away and began to whistle.

"There's no way you wrote that."

"It's erotica darling. Get over it," said Betty, with a cheeky smile.

"This is mortifying!" Joanne cried, springing up from the table. "This is the worst thing you could ever do to me."

"Would you rather I *was* dying?" asked Betty, flippantly.

"How many people know about this?"

"Me, your gran ..."

"Grandma knows that you wrote that filth?"

"Yes. She's been helping me with the concluding chapters."

Joanne sat down again, feeling giddy. Her eyes were wide and blinking rapidly.

"I had to do something to get that nasty debt collector off our backs. It wasn't easy for me having to brutalise my life's work."

"Your life's work? Wait, *Ricardo Haberdasher* was based on *Richmond Tabernacle*?"

"I'm afraid so."

Joanne took a moment to take it in, then showed a moment of compassion. She reached out and touched her mother's hand. She asked softly, "You had to rewrite *Richmond Tabernacle* to get out of debt?"

Betty nodded.

Joanne snatched her hand away. "Why didn't you tell me things had got so bad?"

"You had your own problems."

"And the nanny in the kitchen? Who was she?"

"A ... My researcher."

"So she wasn't a child minder?"

"I told you that at the time."

"So you *do* think I can look after Ava by myself?"

"Of course. I think you *can* look after Ava by yourself. I just don't think that you *should*."

Joanne scowled and folded her arms.

"I think you should raise her with Trevor."

"Trevor?"

"Yes, Trevor. You do remember your husband?"

"But he's ..."

"Boring, I know."

"So boring."

"Has he lied to you about losing his job? No. Has he secretly re-mortgaged your house? No. Has he lied repeatedly for months? No. I tell you, Jo, after what I've been through with your father, I'd take boring any day of the week."

Joanne looked thoughtful. "But I'm just so ... bored."

"Then find something to do that excites you. Something that's just for you."

"Like what?"

"I don't know. An exercise class – or a hobby. Hell, write an erotic novel if you want to. Just do something that makes you happy."

"Well," began Joanne. "I have always wanted to try pole dancing classes."

"Pole dancing?" demanded Betty, shocked. "Don't you want to do something with a bit more class?"

* * *

It had been a peculiar summer for Betty Berry. She'd gained a book deal and a meaningful relationship with her mother-in-law but she'd lost a husband and her ability to look her daughter in the eye.

While Joanne patched up her marriage to Trevor, Betty began divorce proceedings against Rodney. She sought legal advice to protect her forthcoming fortune from her financially irresponsible husband.

After reading *Ricardo Haberdasher*, Rodney had begged Betty to take him back, stating that he wouldn't need to stray now that he knew she wasn't a sexually void prude. Naturally, these sentiments did nothing to help his cause.

With the paperback launch of *Ricardo Haberdasher* imminent, Betty knew there was one more thing she had to do.

* * *

"For 'tis a tulip! A Tulip!" purred Phyllis Parker, in what Betty hoped was the last line of her poem. "All graceful and glowing and glimmering and gorgeous," she continued. Then she sat down. Only to burst up again. "For 'tis a tulip." She reached her arms to their full span and nodded her head.

"Exquisite!" gushed Shirley Shipman.

"Divine!" admired June Johnson.

"I thought it was a bit bland," said Betty.

All eyes turned to Betty. Phyllis pursed her lips and breathed in slowly through her nose. "Well!" she scoffed. "I see we have a difference of opinion."

Betty continued, "No, not bland ... *insipid*."

Phyllis glared. "Have *you* brought anything to contribute?" she demanded.

"Actually, I have," replied Betty, smiling and reaching into her bag. She pulled out a pile of papers. "I've been re-working *Richmond Tabernacle*."

This revelation was met with a chorus of groans.

"Have you not given up on that droning epic?" asked Phyllis.

"Actually, I'm trying out a new direction."

"Let's hear it then?" she snapped, rolling her eyes and slipping Shirley Shipman a snide smile.

"All right, this is a section from the middle of chapter four."

"We've heard chapter four before," Shirley pointed out, suppressing a snigger.

Betty cleared her throat and then began. "He stroked his growing cock with his left hand as his right brought the anal plug closer and closer to her peachy, virginal behind. Slowly, he massaged its glass tip into the crease of her buttocks. *Any moment now*, she thought. *Any moment now he is going to ...*"

Phyllis cleared her throat loudly.

"*Any moment now he is going to shove that ...*"

"I think we've heard quite enough," announced Phyllis.

Betty put down her paper and smiled wickedly. "Any feedback?" she asked.

"Mmm," squeaked Shirley Shipman.

"Right," murmured June Johnson.

"Sell out," muttered Phyllis. "You can't cash in on the new craze for cheeky stories by just adding a few choice words to an otherwise totally insipid story. It still has to be good."

"Actually, I've got an announcement to make," grinned Betty.

"Really?" sighed Phyllis. "We all know about you getting a divorce. And frankly, this cry for help is disturbing."

"I'm about to be published."

"*Self*-published," corrected Shirley.

“No, *published* published.”

“Typical!” laughed Phyllis. “Publishers are trying to jump on the *Ricardo Haberdasher* bandwagon with any old knock-off smut.”

“Not the *Ricardo Haberdasher* bandwagon. This is *Ricardo Haberdasher*.”

“But *Ricardo Haberdasher* is a filthy romp widely considered the dirtiest mainstream book of the last hundred years.”

“That’s right,” beamed Betty. Then she collected her things together and stood up. “Do feel free to call me if you need any tips. I’m always happy to help a less experienced author.”

Then she walked away, ready to embrace her future as a published author and millionaire.

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About Rosen Trevithick

Rosen was born in Cornwall and grew up on Restronguet Creek. She studied Experimental Psychology at St Catherine's College, Oxford, before moving back to the West Country. She now lives in Falmouth with two imaginary cats, fantasising about getting a real one.

In 2011 Rosen was an aspiring author. Writing was a hobby. The following January sales of her books took off. Readers have now downloaded over a quarter of a million copies of her books.

Rosen has a variety of books in print including *My Granny Writes Erotica - Threesome*, *Pompomberry House* and two *Seesaw* collections, as well as over a dozen digital titles.

In 2013 she founded the Smelly Troll series – children's chapter books written by Rosen and illustrated by Katie W. Stewart. The series, which begins with *The Troll Trap*, has inspired hundreds of children to get involved in creative writing.

Rosen writes in a variety of genres with a strong leaning towards comedy. She has also dabbled in psychological fiction and mystery writing.

She loves wild swimming, interesting boots, quiffs, 'sampling' chocolate and cooking tasty treats. She dislikes house spiders, seagulls making a racket and doing laundry.