

# Aunt Meg

And three more short stories by



**BEA**





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# AUNT MEG

**By Bea**

Aunt Meg was one of the worlds great democrats. She was very rich, but that didn't stop her from loving poor people. She wasn't too keen on males, but took me in without a blink when my folks got killed along with Tiffany's – a distant cousin of mine - and made us both orphans. Put us both up, paid for good educations and didn't even get too mad when I dropped out of college my first year.

She had a fairly large house but she kept maids up the ying yang. Far more than the house demanded. I couldn't figure out this plethora of young women until Tiffany explained it to me. She may be younger than me, but is much more observant. "It's like this John," she said. "Around here, out in the boondocks like we are? There aren't too many jobs for young, poorly educated girls. She brings them in here and trains them as maids. Gives them great uniforms to up their self re-

spect and makes sure that they're treated like human beings. Once they learn? They're free to go – and she usually gives them a great reference. That's why!"

As I said, aunt Meg wasn't too keen on males. Never married herself and truthfully? I never saw any hanky panky between her and any girl. Not saying that it didn't happen, mind you, but I never saw it. But it was quite obvious. She never, ever, hired a male if she could help it. Was never anything but wonderful to me and, as such, I was treated like a king by everyone in that house. I hate to use the word *feminine* but the whole house was anything but manly. It shone and sparkled. Everything was always in its place. There were always plenty of girls. Maids they might have been but they were sumptuous in their appearance – and by God – the older ones made absolutely sure that the younger stayed that way out of respect for aunt Meg. She provided room and board for all of them and a very generous amount of time off. Frankly though I don't think any of them took advantage. The grounds were well maintained and the maids could use the tennis court or the swimming pool, - provided there were no guests of course though, to be truthful, I don't think aunt Meg would have cared.

But what's that they say about the mores and principles of top management permeating all levels of an organization under them? It was true there to a certain degree. Aunt Meg didn't really care much for males – so I was *tolerated* by all of the other girls, including Tiffany.. Maybe if I made more use of myself, like her, attending Junior college locally and doing SO well, things might have ended up different. But, let's face it. I was on the indolent side. Tended to think that servants were beneath me. Though that was well hidden from my aunt, it's hard to hide from girls who attend to you. Thus, there was a certain coolness between me

and them. Not that a casual observer would notice mind you – but it was there.

But things had changed once I quit college. There was no real reason for me to do so. I think I was just bored. I know that aunt Meg wasn't too happy about it – she'd been holding up Tiffany and myself as shining examples to the girls as what an education can do – but now I was disappointing her. Naturally though, she never chastised me or anything and just let me laze around, which I didn't mind at all. It took me a while before I realized it, but Beth seemed to have become a power amongst the girls.

She certainly wasn't the biggest – hardly bigger than me if anything – and I'm small. She certainly didn't carry any weight that would give her any authority – again she was lucky if she outweighed me by more than five pounds. But she had a certain something, you know? An aura of confidence, of leadership. When I'd left, she'd just been one of the girls. Once I got back, I realized that she was a force to be reckoned with. But as I was one of the idle rich and she was a servant, I didn't care that much. Found that I was careful around her, but that was about all. So I guess I led an idyllic existence. One drone amongst a bunch of queens. But as happens, things change.

Aunt Meg had a stroke. Scared us all half to death and I'll admit that I wasn't the pleasantest person in the house, wondering what was to become of me. May have set some things in motion? I don't know. At that time, I noticed how adult and mature Tiffany was. She was in no different position than I was, yet showed a consideration for Meg that probably never crossed my mind. I found myself actually being drawn towards her. I was older than she was yet I found myself looking more and more for her comfort and assurances. Strangely enough she started to look on me a different

way too. Almost as if she'd considered me an older brother – and then I'd let her down? Whatever it was, it was almost as if we had reversed roles and *she* were the senior now – and I was just a kid. Actually? I quite liked it. Sort of shucked off responsibility, you know?

But aunt Meg returned in no time and everyone breathed huge sighs of relief. But there WAS an effect. One side of her seemed – not paralyzed – but stiffer. On top of that, she understood everything that went on, but had difficulty in talking. I paid her a great deal of attention at first, but as she seemed okay, gradually went back to my idling. This was another thing that may not have gone over too well with the girls.

It didn't take long until aunt Meg got back into one of her old habits. She felt that by treating the maids as equals, she increased their self confidence and self worth. So about every afternoon, she'd sit there in a very high chair and hold a sort of court, while all the girls who weren't doing something important sat around her feet and did girl things. Talked, played little games, made each other up. I had to admit that they made a very pretty picture. We all laughingly referred to it as her 'Happy Hour'. But I made it known to Tiffany that I considered it a waste of time – I'd have had them doing housework instead. I remember that she shook her head laughing. "It's great fun John! Honest! I can't be there all the time because of my studies – but I try and make it when I can." I shook my head at her stupidity.

Then one morning I had just had a swim. Was lounging on a chaise lounge when I called one of the maids to bring me an iced tea.. Felt a little superior to tell the truth when Beth came down. Iced tea on a doily on a tray. She resplendent in a black and white satin apron with a pure white apron and one of those flounced little caps. I thanked her perfunctorily when

she set the drink down. But then looked in surprise as she sat down in a chair beside me. "Mind if we talk a minute John?" she said, smiling confidently at me.

I wanted to say I was busy – but couldn't. Objected to her familiarity in calling me John, but that was another bad habit taken by Meg. Wanted the girls to call us by our first names. Not that SHE was ever called that of course, the girls had far too much respect – but Tiffany and I got first names, although it was always "Miss Tiffany" whereas I was just plain old John.

So I put on a reasonable demeanor. Smiled down at her, even though she was still somewhat above me. "Of course Beth! What's on your mind?"

"It's about Mistress, John. The girls and I have been talking and think she's missing you a lot. Never says anything of course, but we can see it."

I immediately felt on the defensive. "I don't know what you think I can do about it. She always seems to be surrounded by you girls."

She didn't take offense. "That's because we all love her so – but she talks about you regularly."

"She doesn't talk about Tiffany?" I said, almost sneering.

"Miss Tiffany John? Oh, we all know that she's SO busy with her studying, but she still finds time. You, on the other hand don't seem to do much of anything – but never come to see her."

I felt like a little school kid, being lectured.. Probably made me even stupider. "That's another thing Beth! How come it's always MISS Tiffany, whereas I'm just called John?"

Her eyes narrowed, but she spoke with measured assurance. "Oh? None of us thought that that might bother you. Shall I tell them to call you Miss John?"

I couldn't catch my breath for her cheek! Then, to my horror, found myself blushing a fiery shade of red. She saw this and leaned forward confidentially "Is that what you would like? *Miss John*?" She was whispering now, and smiling, lots of meaning in her tone and her eyes searching mine – though I couldn't hold her gaze.

"No Beth! Th . Th . . That's *not* what I mean! There's nothing I could do! I certainly can't go and join her happy hour with you girls!" For some reason I was panting She shrugged indolently. "Frankly? That wouldn't be a bad idea, but it's not exactly what I had in mind."

"You have something in mind?" I asked slowly.

"Yes. Quite simple really. Just an idea to get you in to her. You wouldn't need to stay *amongst us girls*" she added scornfully, "But it might help to give you a way to reach out to her in public. She'd like that."

"What are you talkin' about?" I asked.

"She's always talking about that time you and Tiffany made cookies – and how yours were better! Must have told that story a *billion* times!"

"So?" I asked.

"What's to stop you doing it again? Maybe a few times during her Happy hour? Share them out with the girls. She'd be SO pleased!"

"C'mon!" I protested. "I haven't remembered how to make cookies. That was a long time ago."

"Nothing to it. And she'd be SO grateful! Just think of how surprised she'd be! You could make an awful lot of brownie points?" she added shrewdly.

This made sense. "Okay. When would be a good time?" I asked.





“No time like the present. Why don’t you go and change. I’ll get the stuff ready for you in the kitchen.”

Could I have stopped it there? Probably. When I got to the kitchen and found her and the cook waiting for me – with a white half apron? Probably. Could I have objected to the pretty tiers in the apron, or the fact that Beth and cook over rode my verbal objections with the half laughing verbal statements that aunt Megs wishes were sacrosanct, Everybody wore an apron in the kitchen! Definitely I could then – but I remembered aunt Meg demanding that I wear an apron that time years ago – and stood there uncomfortable as hell as Beth made sure that my bow was nicely tied at the back.

And looking back? I see that from the time I donned that lovely apron and was tied in with a pretty bow, I became Beth’s creature. I didn’t know it then of course. Thought I was still a man. The realizations of what I was and what I was to become, came later.

I’d naturally forgotten how to make cookies, but this time cook stood over me and made sure that my ingredients came close as well as the time and temperature. Another go/no go point was reached when Beth and cook laughingly informed me that I should do my own clean up. I could say that I protested here, but it did seem logical. Then once that was done, I didn’t have too much time to wait until the cookies were done. I didn’t even complain too much when Beth chided me a little for dirtying my apron – and suggested that, as I was presenting the cookies to Miss Meg that I should make sure that I had a clean apron on. I thought this was a bit much, and said so. Both women pooh-poohed me and I was in another apron – with a nice bow before I knew it.

Naturally, it was to be a surprise and it wasn’t until I heard Beth announce me as a ‘Special Surprise’ to

aunt Meg that I felt truly embarrassed. Let's face it. I was bringing in a set of cookies that I'd made myself – to a group of ladies – with me being the only male. Yet? I was wearing an apron identical to that worn by most of the group. Somehow or other, I was on a par with them. My face was flaming as I presented myself – and my tray of cookies – to aunt Meg and the group.

Aunt Meg was delighted! What a wonderful surprise! Made me serve up the tray to everyone, after taking a few for herself of course. THEN she had me sit down – and join the group! She didn't seem to notice, though some did I'm sure, that here I am in my nice apron going around a bunch of women – in similar aprons – with ME acting as the server while they graciously accept a cookie from my tray. Then, once I have finished, two of them smilingly move their position to create a space between them. I didn't know what else to do and with aunt Meg beaming at me, felt that I had to sit in the space,

It can't be helped I know, but I was well aware of the looks that flashed between some of the girls as I naturally smoothed my apron and smiled at my companions as I joined the group by sitting in the space required. Naturally, everyone followed aunt Meg's lead as she made yummy noises about how good my cookies tasted.

And I was there until the group broke up, helplessly sitting amongst women as they discussed all sorts of things feminine. It wasn't too bad at first as when a subject came up that was deemed effeminate that aunt Meg would smilingly remind them all that they had a male in their midst and they shouldn't embarrass me, but that only lasted for a short while and then they were back to subjects like cooking, sewing and lingerie – that kind of thing. There were also a few thinly veiled cracks about men in general while they smiled at my

embarrassment. But finally it was over. Aunt Meg thanked me effusively and commented on how nice it had been to see me – and that my cookies were delightful. I escaped with a huge sigh of relief. Handed in my apron to Beth who took it with a smile. “See? That wasn’t so bad after all, was it? You fitted right in!” Then she laughed at my embarrassed flush.

So life went back to normal. Okay, there was a twinkle in the eyes of all the maids now when they’d pass me in the hall. I even got asked a few times when I was going to make another batch of cookies. Naturally, I ignored this low grade humor, but there were a few times I’d hear a snigger or two in the passageway behind me.

Then one day it was Tiffany and Beth that cornered me. I can’t say that there was anything menacing about either one. After casual greetings, Tiffany said “Well?”

“Well, what?” I grinned.

“When are you going back to see aunt Meg? She really misses you, you know.”

“Wasn’t really thinking about that.” I shrugged. “I DO see her on a regular basis you know.”

“That’s not what Miss Tiffany means,” Beth broke in. “Mistress Meg got SUCH a kick out of you coming to visit her at the Happy Hour. We just thought . . .”

“I don’t really care what you thought.” I said haughtily. “You asked me to make some cookies and visit aunt Meg – and I did it. What else could you ask for?”

“To visit aunt Meg again – during Happy Hour. That’s when she’s talking about.” Tiffany said.

“Aw C’mon Tiffany!” I said. “That’s a bunch of girls. I don’t feel right.”

"Didn't seem to bother you before," she said. "From what I heard, you fitted in real well?" she said.

I flushed. "That was just *acting* on my part!"

"Well, couldn't you act some more?" she asked.

"No. I was asked. Done what I was asked. That's IT!" I said grandly.

"May I talk to Miss John?" Beth asked Tiffany politely.

"WHO? MISS John? Wherever did you get that!" Tiffany laughed..

"A slip of the tongue – and I'm sorry," Beth said to me. "But can we talk – please?"

Her tone wasn't particularly humble, but there was a look in her eye that made me consider. "Oh, okay. When?" I said carelessly.

"Now would be okay with me," Tiffany said and, before I could think of a way to stop her, she'd left the room. Beth smiled at me. "I'm very fond of Mistress Meg, you know that, don't you?"

I had to smile. "All you girls are, I think."

She nodded. "True. Miss Tiffany is as well, don't you think?"

I could see where she was going. Didn't really like having a real conversation with a servant, but thought I'd try. "Look. I know that you think I don't love aunt Meg. That's not true. It's just that you all want me to show her affection in the way that YOU do!"

"Very true!" she said, some surprise in her voice. "So what's the problem?"

"You all surround her and act like girls. Well? *I'm* a man."

"A man?" she said, with some surprise in her voice. "You mean one of those thoughtless, miserable

bastards? My dad was a *man*. You trying to tell me that you're the same as him? You don't come across that way."

Her eyes narrowed and she looked positively dangerous. "Do me a favor, huh? Flex your right arm. Make a muscle. Okay?"

"Like this?" I said, doing as she said.

"Exactly. Now feel how hard and strong it feels, okay?"

"No need," I said, unflexing my arm quickly.

She stepped right in front of my face and flexed her arm. "Feel this," she commanded.

Her dress was feminine and short sleeved, but even then I could see the whipcord upper arm she had. Swallowed. "Don't want to!" I said.

She took a threatening pace towards me. "Want to aggravate me?" she said angrily. "I said, *feel it!*"

"If you must!" I said weakly and felt her muscle. It was decidedly hard – and much stronger than mine.

"There's not much difference in our ages," she said. "But I know that I'm a lot stronger than you. I also think the world of Mistress because she's been good to me. You owe her a lot too. I just want you to *show* it. Is that asking too much?"

I swallowed, seeing the ferocity in her eyes. "Not really, I guess."

She relaxed again a little. "So you're going to show up at Happy Hour today again? Put on a nice apron like you did before? Join us girls?"

I looked at my watch. "It's okay me showing up Beth, but I don't have time to make cookies, so I don't have to wear an apron, do I?"

She thought, but not for very long. "I'm not sure. But I think Mistress likes us all in aprons – males especially – so it's one way of you making her feel good. You can say that you've been helping me make beds or something. If it turns out that she doesn't like it or doesn't care? I suppose that you could stop – but I want to be sure first."

"But Beth!" I said, some desperation creeping in. "I don't really . . ."

"Hush!" she said. "Come and see me just before Happy Hour and I'll have a nice apron ready for you." She flexed her arm and smiled dangerously. "But come here a second," she said conversationally crooking her fingers at me.

"What for?" I asked weakly.

"Want to refuse?" she asked, a smile on her face, confidence simply oozing out of her now.

"Not exactly. But what for?" I hated the weak, faltering sounds that came out of my mouth.

"I want you to thank me. Thank me nicely for showing you how to make your aunt feel good."

I took a step forward, but couldn't keep my eyes up. Found myself staring at the carpet instead. "Thank you Beth for suggesting how I can please my aunt Meg."

"Lovely!" she said and then her hand had snaked out with her palm under my chin lifting my head until my shame filled face was looking submissively into her eyes. "And you don't mind wearing a pretty apron – just like the other girls?" she asked softly.

I couldn't shift my gaze. I felt my soft and docile eyes look into her confident smile. "No Beth," I said weakly.

“Good! I think I’ll look you out a nice long one this time, huh? Lot’s of flounces – just like the upstairs maids use. Won’t that be FUN?”

My smile was a parody. “Yes Beth,” I managed.

She took her hand away and my eyes immediately dropped. “Just you wait and SEE,” she laughed. “You might like an apron so much that it’ll be hard to get one of your back! Off you go then. Don’t forget to see me in the kitchen about fifteen minutes before Happy Hour!”

There was no doubt about aunt Megs reaction when Beth and I swished in to join the other girls during Happy Hour. A great big smile crossed Megs face and though she couldn’t speak too well, she clapped her hands like a happy child and then used her fingers in a ‘turnaround’ motion to me I felt such an idiot, twirling around, my apron belling about me while the women all smiled approval. To make matters worse, Tiffany was sitting amongst the group, though her face had a sort of contemptuous look as she took in my frilled apron and the perfect bow that tied me in at the back.

“Well, well aunt Meg! Look who’s here! And doesn’t he look nice dressed like that! So natural! Adorable!”

I could have kicked her but with Beth beside me I knew better. Then I saw a chance. “But aunt Meg? Tiffany isn’t wearing an apron! Maybe you don’t like them THAT much?”

Her face fell a little and she mumbled something. But one of the girls near her, translated. “She says that Tiffany is here just for a little while and has to go to school soon. You – on the other hand? She hopes you want to stay a while?”

A sickly smile crossed my face. “Oh? Of *course* I’m going to stay!”



Her face brightened immediately and she pointed to a small group of maids. One of the girls translated. "She's suggesting that you join those girls in a game of Parcheesi? They're a girl short?"

I had no other choice. I smoothed out my apron and got down on the floor in a group of three girls. Everyone smiled – I was now a member of the Happy Hour.

Truthfully? It wasn't that bad. I felt a lot of shame while Tiffany was there but it diminished when she wished us all a cheery goodbye and took off. I played Parcheesi wit the girls and though I didn't win, I did not bad, Saw one of the girls work on another's hair, and some of the others discussing a magazine. It was all very low key and I think that Meg had a little nap. I looked at Beth to see if it was okay for me to go then, but her eyes didn't divulge that, so I stayed. Meg woke up later on and thanked us all most graciously for coming before taking off for a proper nap. Beth motioned me and I followed her to a hallway.

"You did very nicely," she said graciously, pulling some white stuff from a cabinet. "These will be your other aprons, so that you'll always have a nice clean one on." She smiled ferally at me. "I can be a bit of a pain about dirty aprons, I know. But please try and have a nice clean one on every day. One of these is a half apron like you had on the other day. Then there's a pretty full lace one – just for a change of pace."

I took them from her and took a deep sigh at my own cowardice. Even thanked her as I turned to go, but then I heard, "John? Oh John I almost forgot these."

I turned and she was holding some lacy white things out towards me. I knew that they weren't aprons because they were far too small "What are these Beth?" I asked, taking them from her.

“Why caps silly!” she laughed. “But I don’t have proper pins for them and I doubt if you have any bobbi pins in your room?”

“No, I don’t have any bobbi pins – and what do I need a cap for?” I asked.

“Never can tell. Might come in handy some day. Makes your uniform more complete – sort of *finished*, you know? All the girls wear them!” She laughed. “When you ask Alice to show you how to iron the aprons properly, you can ask her for some pins – and how to put the caps on.”

“I don’t GET this?” I asked numbly. “You want ME to iron those aprons?”

Her eyes widened in a sort of mirth. “Who else? They’re *yours* now honey bun. Up to you to come to one – just one – Happy Hour and dispense Mistress. After I’d talk to you, I don’t think you’ll want to do it again. Understand?”

Her meaning was perfectly clear. “Alice?” I asked meekly, admitting defeat.

She knew she’d won again. “Oh dear. *Any* of the girls will be glad to show you, but I recommend Alice because she’s the absolute best.”

\* \* \*

Alice looked at me with scorn in her eyes and shook her pretty blonde hair. “You’re what? Almost twenty and you can’t iron an apron? What have you been doing, huh?”

“It’s to please aunt Meg, ” I pleaded in my rehearsed subservient tone.

“Well. Okay. That makes sense. But what will you give ME? I’ve too much to do today to be fooling

around with you, showing you how to do things that every girl can do in her sleep!"

I looked at her helplessly. "I don't have much money, Alice."

She gave me a sly look. "Don't need your money. Help me to make the beds first and then I'll show you how to wash then iron those aprons of yours. Okay? Otherwise, no deal." She looked at me with humor in her eyes. "Of course, you could always do them yourself? Though you'd better be good – that Beth can have a mean temper if we don't look right. Feels that an untidy apron is showing disrespect for the Mistress."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to do that!" I said, trying to hide my horror. "Though I don't think I'm any good at making beds."

She shook her head sorrowfully, though her eyes glistened. "About time you learned then, is it not? C'mon then, let's get your apron on. I'll lend you one of mine."

"An apron?" I said weakly. "Do I really need one of those?"

"Stop being silly, and stand still!" she said bossily.

Being aproned by Beth in the semi-privacy of the kitchen was one thing. Standing passively as a lower echelon maid put an apron over my head and tied me in – while viewed by other, grinning, maids was something else. My spirits hit absolute zero though when she grinned and came at me with a little gauzy ribbon. "Let's get your pretty hat on then Miss John!"

"Please Alice!" I mewled. "Don't"

"Just shush dear! Don't you need to learn how to put a nice maids cap on?"

"Well, maybe?" I said, suddenly mindful of Beth. "But not right now, surely?"