

HOUSEMAID

In My Fifties



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HOUSEMAID IN MY FIFTIES!

by Monica Graz

CHAPTER 1

“Oh dear!” my wife said when she heard the news. “This is quite unexpected. Do you try to tell me that as of the 1st of the next month you will be out of work?”

I shifted in my chair a bit uncomfortably and had another sip of my drink, “It is an offer which I seriously consider to accept dear” I answered a bit cautiously, knowing already this was going to be a difficult discussion, “it appears to be a very handsome offer, I already checked it with our lawyer.”

She looked at me in an uncertain way but not without an interest, “tell me about it then” she said.

I was encouraged by her obvious interest and continued rather eagerly, “Well, they offer me a transition period of five years during which I will collect half of my salary without working and when I turn sixty I will collect my full pension, as planned by my pension scheme. In other words the company will pay half my salary for the next five years with the condition that I will not go out in the market to get another job based on my qualifications.”

She looked at me as if I said something incredulous. “You are telling me they are willing to pay you for doing nothing?” she said in a rather abrupt way. “That doesn’t make sense to me, it is simply bad management.”

I looked at her skeptically because initially I thought the same myself, but when the lawyer explained a few things I realized that the Company had some interest in doing that. They would get rid of me and employ some one younger paying the third of my current

senior salary. On the other hand they would benefit with tax cuts when they implement a policy of hiring young people in replacement of senior high ranking administrators. I explained that to Pam my wife and this time she appeared to accept it. In fact she remembered similar cases in the Company she was working.

She looked at me more seriously now and said, "I guess you have a point here. But do you really want to stop working at 55; you will probably be bored to death. And you are not the type with lots of male friends, you are not involved in sports, you don't go out with the guys fishing or whatever an average man of your age would do. In fact, now that I think of it, you enjoy more going out with my girlfriends and they all love you and think that you are a very unusual male, they feel comfortable with you."

That took me by surprise, what on earth her girlfriends have to do with our serious discussion. I didn't make any comment and I decided to continue with some practical matters. "I have been thinking what it actually means to our finances my possible early retirement. I'll lose half my income but you are doing very well at your job and if I remember correctly you are about to get a substantial salary raise. Then our daughter is 22 already earning her own money and there are no mortgages pending or any other financial obligations, don't you agree Pam?"

She looked at me with a renewed interest, "the way you talk Nick is as if you decided already to retire. Yes you are right I am doing well at my work I am already an associate partner receiving extra bonuses and I am about to get a substantial raise and yes our finances are very healthy. So yes again it is true we can face the change financially, but for me the challenge is elsewhere. In fact you didn't answer my question how you are going to use your free time." She stopped and looked at me expectantly for an answer.

I hesitated a bit because I wasn't certain how she would take my next suggestion, but somehow I decided to go ahead and speak my mind, "I must admit I have been doing some thinking myself about that. I am not a fool I know that too much free time can lead to boredom and depression so I want to keep myself busy with activities probably less intellectual but certainly more manual and beneficial for a middle age person's health."

"I can't imagine you starting playing golf at this age and somehow I can't imagine you in a gym running in a tread mill." She said that rather sarcastically and looked at me waiting for an answer.

I decided to continue talking in my even and calm way; I should avoid a fight at this stage at any cost. "No dear, I am not going to become a sport maniac you know it's not my style, but I can become the housekeeper and homemaker in this house." There I said it!

She didn't get angry; instead she looked at me with a rather ironical smile, "So this is what you want? You more or less said in a politically correct term that you want to become the maid and/or housewife in this house. Are you certain you are thinking clearly? I know you will tell me you enjoy housework, we have been through this argument before, but this time is not on an amateur basis, it is like a full time job."

She stopped to look at me in a concerned way this time, I didn't like this look, it meant she wasn't approving; I had to fight more to win this argument. I was about to answer but she continued talking, "and what about Linda, you seem to forget that for the last ten years we employ an excellent housekeeper and the house never looked better. I know she

comes only twice a week but she is a terrific worker and a very organized person." She must have noticed the slightly hurt look on my face because she added rather hastily, "I know, I know darling, you help her quite a lot and you often do the cooking and all sorts of other bits and pieces. I am not blind, I can see your contribution in this house, after all Linda is here twice a week and the other five days you keep an eye to everything."

This time I rushed to say something to stop her monologue. "I am pleased you recognize my contribution Pam, all those years I am next to Linda for all sorts of things and now I can tell you something that probably will be news to you. Last Thursday Linda announced to me that she is thinking to retire and go back to her children in Philippines. Don't forget she is my age and she has been working since the age of fifteen. So there is an extra reason to suggest what I suggested before."

She looked at me more skeptically and said, "Do I see a conspiracy here? How come Linda hasn't mentioned anything to me? After all I am the lady of the house!"

She said this last phrase in a rather menacing way. Careful Nick, you might lose your case. One thing that Pam hates is lies and things happening behind her back. She is a very straightforward person and she demands that the others are equally honest with her.

I cleared my throat with a sip of wine and continued cautiously, "I must admit that Linda mentioned that to me because she feels more comfortable talking to me, after all she often says I am her 'assistant' or 'colleague' when I help her with her chores. She is worried how you are going to take it, she doesn't want to let you down, and she respects you too much for that. But I can tell she is tired and she wants to go."

My wife was more accommodating this time, "I see what you mean, but if she feels that way we have to let her go and make sure that she receives a generous bonus. She has been very good all those years. I can't forget how helpful she was with our daughter in her difficult teenage years. Did she tell you when she would like to go?"

"She said that this is up to us to decide. But I understand she would like to be back home for Christmas, which is about eight weeks from now."

"I can see you have a stronger case now; Linda wants to go and you want to retire from your prestigious job and take her place, am I correct Nicky?"

That was a good sign, she called me Nicky and this means that her mood was softening, but I must be extra careful now, one wrong phrase and I'll lose my case.

And I must say here that my case is that I want to become the housekeeper, I love housework and I love all things feminine, I am a repressed cross dresser and for many years now I was very good at keeping my urges under control. Pam knows my tendencies from the very beginning, in fact in our early years we had quite a bit of fun playing roles and often going to role reversal mode but after the birth of our daughter she made me promise to abstain from all those cross dressing activities.

I kept my promise with some exceptions, silently accepted by my spouse, like wearing plain cotton panties at all times, a long T-shirt type nightie in bed and of course my aprons for housework and cooking. The aprons were and still are very plain but not masculine, always bought in ladies wear shops and most preferably in domestic uniform shops.

“Are you day dreaming Nick? I thought we are having a serious conversation here.” My wife brought me back to reality.

“I am so sorry dear, all sorts of thoughts cross my mind at the moment, after all is a big decision to make, something that will change my life and by default yours as well.”

“I know that stupid,” she said impatiently, “this is why I try to sort things out the best way for both of us and ask all those questions. So, I ask you again, do you really want to take Linda’s position and responsibilities in the house?”

“Yes and no,” I answered cautiously again and I continued before she started speaking herself. “What I mean is that I am not Linda, I am a different person and I am your husband, so obviously things will be different in terms of everyday interaction and other activities concerning my obligations and duties in this house, but to be frank with you, yes, I want to take up her responsibilities and do even more because I’ll be like a ‘live in’ person, not the outside help.”

“That’s interesting”, she remarked looking particularly sharp as she was examining me closely, “I can tell, you are quite determined to change course in your life and I must respect that, but I have to consider what that means to me to our daughter, to our friends to our life in general.”

I rushed to answer to that before she could develop her thoughts any further, “I understand what you mean but I can tell you from the very beginning, no dramatic changes will be monitored in our life. I am not the only person being retired in my fifties with a working wife. They will probably call me a ‘househusband’ but I certainly don’t mind that since I am going to be that anyway. Our daughter is not living with us anymore and in the coming year she will be probably getting a job far away from us. As for our friends, you said it yourself before, I don’t have any male friends and your girl friends are my friends as well and I don’t think at all they will be critical of my decision. On the contrary they will consider you lucky that you have someone looking after you on a permanent basis.”

“Jesus! You can argue well when you really want something,” Pam said looking at me rather tired now. “It’s late Nick, past midnight, I am exhausted after a very hectic week. Let’s call it a night. I will sleep with it tonight and tomorrow it’s Saturday and we can continue our discussion over a leisurely breakfast with plenty of fresh coffee and those lovely pancakes you make occasionally.” She came and gave me a quick kiss and said, “I am off to bed, goodnight.”

I stayed behind a bit stunned. Pam was a bit like that, one moment full of energy and the next one exhausted and off to bed. I decided to finish my wine relaxing a bit on my own and thinking about the conversation we just had. She certainly didn’t reject my ideas; she didn’t say a big ‘no’ and she was thinking all the options and I could tell from her reactions so far, I was giving straightforward answers to her.

When I joined her in bed half an hour later she was already fast asleep. I was lying next to her in my plain cotton nightie, all sorts of thoughts crossing my mind. It took me a long time to go to sleep.

CHAPTER 2

I was up and around before Pam. Usually on Saturdays I was preparing a good breakfast and only then I was calling her to come down. I kept my nightie on and I covered it with one of my many kitchen aprons hanging in the back of the kitchen door, a full blue striped cotton one with white piping all around it, quite plain but definitely a feminine one.

Soon I had everything ready and I decided to be extra accommodating today so I went up to wake her up with a cup of fresh orange juice. I knew she loved that early morning treatment. She said to me on numeral occasions that her eyes were opening instantly after a glass of fresh orange juice.

She was all warm and cozy from her sleep and she looked quite pretty even without her make up on. I left her to her morning ablutions and soon she joined me in the kitchen wearing her tracksuit. It was a normal Saturday scene, me in my nightie and apron serving breakfast to my wife who looked definitely more 'manly' than me.

We were in our second cup of coffee when in her usual manner Pam started speaking, going to the point immediately, "I have been thinking what we were discussing yesterday, I still feel surprised by this early retirement proposal, but I guess it is not a bad offer and if you consider it seriously I have to consider it to. Something else that I just thought also is that we are going to save even more money if we are not going to replace Linda with another cleaner. Than means the loss of income for both of us is really not important."

She stopped for a sip of her coffee and I added, "Yes, I had the same thought, Linda isn't that cheap anymore because we are paying her in a very generous manner."

Pam continued as if she hasn't heard me, "But I think we have to be more specific about your role and tasks in this house".

I was quite intrigued by now; she obviously appeared to agree with my proposal.

"The house is quite big and requires lots of attention. I know we are only the two of us at the moment, but we often have guests and we often entertain. Are you prepared to assume full responsibility on everything?"

I rushed to answer that question, "You know Pam how many different things I do in this house and for this house even now that I work full time. I'll remind you some, the weekly shopping which I will be doing later today when you will be in the Gym, most of the cooking, the washing up the days Linda is not around, some urgent laundry and ironing if needed, and other small tasks that usually go unnoticed."

She looked at me with a new interest, "I must admit that I take so many things for granted in this house that I often forget how much you do. You are right darling, for many years you have been a committed homemaker for me and for our daughter when she was

growing, I would be really blind not to see that, in fact all you are asking me now is to make that role of yours more official and accepted. I am sorry if I offended you before."

"Don't be silly Pam, of course you didn't offend me, I only do what I enjoy doing more and over the years I tried to emphasize that to you."

She looked at me more intensely now, "Of course I am blind sometimes, look at you at this very moment how you are dressed, the epitome of a housewife in a nightie and apron. I am so used seeing you like this that I pay no attention anymore and yet you are yelling it to me, you are telling me in so many ways that you want to become the housekeeper in this home and leave to me the professional breadwinning role. You remind me of our early days when I fell in love with you because you were not a threatening and insecure male; you were always encouraging me to be more assertive and go out in the world and be someone. We both know that the majority of men they want their spouses under their thumb, they want to be in control."

"I am so pleased darling you are thinking that way, I feel like we revert back in time. We used to talk then a lot about roles in the society and stereotypical attitudes and you and I were always a bit different, always more 'avant garde' than all the people we knew at the time. Of course we both are successful in our professional careers and I don't regret that, we produced a lovely child who is now a confident and independent woman and I feel that it is an excellent moment for both of us to redefine our roles, not in any dramatic way, just be ourselves and be comfortable about it."

"You!, you are so clever if you want to achieve something, so full of correct arguments; all right you managed to convince me, I guess we have to talk about some practical issues now." She stopped to finish her coffee and continued, "But we have our morning activities pending, I am off to the Gym, I am meeting Tania there today, she will love to hear the news about the coming change in your life and I gather you have your supermarket shopping to do."

"I am glad you agree Pam, but could you please not tell Tania anything for the time being? We still have to define some practical issues and we better do that before we announce our new plans to the outside world including Tania and our daughter. How about meeting me for late lunch at Mario's at about 2.00pm. By that time we both would be through with our morning chores."

"All right then, lunch at 2.00" she said and rushed out of the room leaving me behind to wash up and tidy up the kitchen."

When she was gone I stayed for a few moments to finish my coffee, all excited; things were going as I more or less planned them. And Tania was our closest friend, the one who knew more about me and my inner thoughts, the one who would understand more than my wife my inner need to play that role in the house, she knew both my cross dressing tendencies and my love for housework, but I wanted to conclude our conversation with Pam before any announcement.

I was quite hungry and in a great mood when I arrived at Mario's restaurant a bit after two in the afternoon. I found Pam sitting in a corner table and sipping her favorite char-donnay. "Hi darling", she said cheerfully, "You are a bit late, have you finished your chores?"

"Yes I did Pam, the supermarket was a zoo this morning, all those mothers with their screaming children, but I managed to get all we need for the coming week."

"You know Nick, starting next month you will be able to plan your supermarket shopping in the middle of the week like a good housekeeper and avoid Saturday shopping; leave that day for the full time working people."

I was slightly hurt but also thrilled with her remark. She was already forming in her head my new situation. She started seeing me already as the house help.

We had our favorite pasta with plenty of wine and we were both a bit tipsy when we resumed our morning conversation. Pam had the tendency to get bolder when slightly drunk and often speaks her mind more openly. Her voice also tends to become sexier and I feel I can be more open with her.

"You must lose weight darling, you have to lose your executive bulges around your waist. Now you are going to do more menial work you have to look the part; and it will be healthier for you."

"I agree, I have been thinking that myself. The menial work will be good for me, it will be my gym" and getting bolder I added, "and probably my aprons will fit better then."

"I know you love your pinnies darling, I know you have a huge collection stashed somewhere together with your 'other clothes'. Now you will have the opportunity to wear them, your aprons I mean, much more often and yes if you lose some weight they will look better on you."

She mentioned my 'other clothes' without any further comment but it is a good sign; she acknowledges their existence together with my pinnies.

"But lets' get a bit more serious here," she continued making an effort to hide her slight drunkenness, "You think that you are familiar with housework, you think you know how to manage a house because you have been doing various chores around this house for years now. But let me tell you this. It is not going to be easy for you, it is going to be repetitive, tiring and time consuming and on top of that you know me, I am a perfectionist and I demand a perfect job. Do you understand what I mean?"

I felt a bit uncomfortable then but I managed to answer in a convincing way, "Of course I understand Pam, I know what a fuss pot you are and I want to be a competent housekeeper. In fact and if you agree with me I am going to ask Linda to show me some of her tricks. For instance she has a way of doing the floors and also the cleaning of our five bathrooms is another issue and..."

She interrupted me rather abruptly, "before you continue I must add something to you. If you are going to do this job, I want you to do a market research and start using eco friendly products as cleaning materials, I disagree with the stuff Linda is using, it is very harmful for the environment and you know how concerned I am for the whole global warming issue. So you should be. That's why you shouldn't bother to ask her, simply do your own research."

I was a bit surprised by her mean tone of voice, but I also felt peculiarly excited. My dormant submissiveness was awake. I could here a potential employer giving firm instructions to her future employee. I managed to say, "Yes Pam you are right, this is a great idea,

and I'll do my research. And then feeling a bit bold again I added, "and of course I must get used to receive instructions from you; strictly speaking you will be my employer in the future."

"Now Nicky you put ideas in my head!" Pam said in a slightly drunken voice, "I probably will be acting as your employer in those terms, after all you are going to be my domestic employee but I don't want to lose my witty husband, I want you to be able to adapt to your new rather subordinate role without losing your personality and your ability to act as my equal partner, will you be able to do that?"

I sensed danger here, Pam was sort of accepting my new role in the house, but her female instinct was warning her that the relation would probably take a different turn and she wasn't prepared for that. I had to reassure her instantly.

"I am not going to change Pam; I am going to be very much the same person you know all those years. I will be probably less stressed, housework and cooking are not exactly a CEO's job but I reassure you once again that I abandon my professional life with no remorse at all. In fact my concern is that you will be working as hard as ever and I will be feeling a bit guilty having all that extra time in my hands."

She answered in a relieved manner, "I am glad to hear that, though I am not certain how we will be feeling in a few months from now, life plays funny games sometimes." She stopped for a wine sip and continued more firmly now, "as for my work I must clear it here and now, don't feel guilty or worried about me, I love my job, I love my creative role in the company, I am 48 and I am looking forward to at least another 10 years of a very active professional life."

I looked at her skeptically, she was quite perceptive, she was right; it is true a new phase in our relationship was about to start and we certainly couldn't tell which way would go. Deep in my subconscious I was hoping for a relationship that would enable me to bring out my dormant, for many years, more feminine and submissive side. Would I be able to do that?"

It was late in the afternoon when we arrived back home; we collapsed in the living room sofas for a much needed siesta after all that wine. To our great surprise we made love after a long time in the middle of the living room.

CHAPTER 3

The next couple of weeks were quite hectic. I announced immediately my decision to retire and the count down started at once. I had to work very hard and overtime to bring up to date all the files and projects I was handling, in order to pass them on to the person who were going to replace me.

I also announced to Linda our cleaner that we would let her go at the beginning of next month. She had mixed feelings. She was leaving us after many years but she felt relieved, she would be able to go back to her family in Philippines. She was also extra pleased with the generous bonus we gave her.

She was quite skeptical when I announced to her that I was going to take over the care of the house. She knew of course my inclination for housework and all related matters but

she repeated what Pam said to me, "It is going to be quite hard Nick, it is not just doing a few chores now and then or some cooking, you have to be constantly committed and involved." It was indicative that for many years she was using my first name to address me, but she always called my wife 'Ma'am or Mrs. Pam'.

Somehow I had to calm her down, "It's all right Linda, I'll try it for sometime and if I see I can't manage the house, or I am getting bored doing repetitive things all day long I'll go out in the market and get another cleaner for part time work."

She immediately added to that, "I will leave with you the phone number of a Filipino colleague who runs a domestic agency in town; she will be able to find someone suitable for your house. She knows of you, I talked to her a lot over the years about what a wonderful family you have and how good you are with housework. Her name is Annie de Laurentis."

I thanked her for that and I reassured her that I would ask for her assistance if needed.

A week before my final departure from work I had to be present with Pam to a 'farewell' reception. All my colleagues were very warm and some of them openly jealous for my early retirement. They all called me a 'lucky person'. Very few asked me though what I was going to do from now on. My answer to that was vague. I was telling everybody that for the time being I'll rest and try to organize my thoughts before any future movements. I deliberately didn't mention anything about my new role in the house.

The people though who knew about my new role in the house were Pam's three closest friends, Tania of course and then Melissa and Eva. Tania, as I expected was very enthusiastic. "Oh, Nicky, I am so pleased for you," she said when we met for drink, waiting for Pam to join us. And she continued, "I always knew that someday you would be able to do what you love most, take care of your gorgeous house without the restraints and obligations of a professional life. You will be able now to organize your life the way you always wanted and more important with the blessings of Pam; isn't that wonderful?"

Tania was so sweet and always full of enthusiasm. I answered back in a controlled way barely able to hide my excitement, "You are right honey." Tania was always 'honey' to me. "It happened so quickly; in a week from today I am 'home alone' for endless hours; I hope I will not be bored."

"I know you well enough to tell you won't be bored. It is not only the housework that you love anyway, you have endless other tasks which they will appear in front of you in a few days. And of course you will be able to wear your favorites clothes, Am I right?"

For the first time I blushed, "it is too early to say that Tania, you know me I have to be very careful with Pam I don't want to hurt her, I have to be moving with small steps."

"It sounds to me that you already decided which way to go, it is simply a matter of time to express yourself more freely," Tania said and added hastily because she saw Pam approaching us, "but I totally agree with you, nothing behind Pam's back, you have to win her with your attitude."

We all had then a very jolly drink, Tania was unique in lifting up spirits and Pam was extra pleased with developments at work. As I was sipping my chardonnay, sitting between those two charming ladies, I couldn't stop thinking how would love to be part of

their feminine world, not knowing exactly how, but even that vague thought was intriguing.

The rest of the week went so quickly that I didn't even have time to think. I simply moved like an automaton, trying to close all my open issues. Three days before my departure I met my replacement, a lady in her thirties from another department whom I knew only in face. She was very accommodating and full of respect and concern about my departure. But deep inside me I could tell that she was looking forward to take over my office. For her I already was a retiree.

Finally on a Friday afternoon I put all my personal belongings to a cardboard box, such a familiar pictures from endless movies and after I said a final goodbye to all my immediate colleagues I went down to the garage and drove off in my expensive executive Volvo. At this particular moment I felt emptiness in my stomach, everything finished so quickly; nearly 25 years of work in the same company vanished in two short weeks. For the first time since I decided to retire I felt a certain uneasiness. Was it a correct decision or I was going to regret it. I was going to be one of the many from now on, not Mr. High executive. I even felt that the car I was driving was not appropriate for me anymore.

I arrived home before Pam and I fixed a drink for myself, then I decided to ring her in her mobile and ask her out to dinner, I didn't feel like cooking. She answered in her usual busy tone, she must have been in the middle of a meeting because she was very abrupt, she simply said that she would be late tonight, something urgent came up and she would like to eat something light and go to bed. After all it was Friday and she usually was exhausted at the end of the week. I tried to be understanding as I put the phone down.

I couldn't stop thinking again that this is another sample of my life from now on. I will be the one at home waiting for my hard working spouse to come back. Another small blow to my already fragile ego.

Then I tried to 'pull myself together'. I pushed for this early retirement option, I wanted to become the house partner, I wanted to take up all the house responsibilities and I have to act accordingly from now on.

I prepared a nice green salad and some smoked salmon on brown bread, a very healthy and light meal and I waited patiently for my wife to come home.

The weekend was very uneventful. We followed our Saturday routine and we spent a very quiet Sunday at home eating eggs and bacon brunch and reading our Sunday papers. Pam was very sweet and asked me about my last day at work and if I was still positive about my retirement decision. I insisted that I felt great and I was looking forward to the next few weeks, which we both called adaptation period. In fact we spent sometime on Sunday talking about various chores in the house nobody did for a long time, like spring cleaning of cupboards in the kitchen, all bathrooms and all bedrooms excluding our daughter's bedroom which still was 'untouchable'. We agreed that in a few days I would present a timetable for those extra jobs to Pam for 'employer's approval' as she called it half jokingly.

Linda was going to come for another two days next week (Tuesday and Thursday) and then she was on her way as well, back home after many years.

Monday was an unusual day for me; I haven't stayed home in a weekday in years and the feeling was weird, in particular after Pam gave me a quick kiss and departed hastily for work. I tried to gather my thoughts with another cup of strong coffee. I decided that I would move slowly this week in order to adapt. After all Linda would be coming tomorrow and Thursday and I would be joining her for some housework. She said that she would try to give me the 'housekeeping' guided tour those two days.

I did the basics like tidying up our bedroom and bathroom; I noticed that Pam leaved behind her a bigger mess than usually, towels in the bathroom floor, her dirty underwear next to the bed and her nightdress thrown in the back of a chair. Is she feeling already the presence of a maid in the house, even subconsciously?

I tidied up the kitchen afterwards and I decided to go out for some shopping. I wandered aimlessly in the nearby shopping center for a couple of hours, I had a light lunch and back to the house to do some cooking for this evening. I prepared a fairly elaborate dinner and at about 6.00 o'clock I sat down to a cup of tea waiting for Pam to come home.

She arrived a bit after 7.00pm. I heard the garage door and I let her in wearing one of my many aprons, a clean one though, over my house pants and shirt. I wanted to slightly emphasize my new role in the house. She said a quick hello, kicked her high heels and collapsed in the sofa. Knowing her I followed with a glass of white wine. She thanked me, had a sip and gave a big sigh, "My feet are killing me today, those shoes are quite uncomfortable, probably you could learn to give me a foot rub occasionally." She said it in such a natural way that it took me a few seconds to take it in.

I was quite excited from what I heard and I answered spontaneously, "Yes, darling, I'd love to do that and I don't think I have to be particularly experienced, I guess all I need is some proper ointment and gentle hands."

"Not really, it's not that simple, you have to do a bit of homework there, I'll get you a book on that subject, do you agree?" She stopped and looked at me for the first time seriously. She smiled and said, "Look at you in your pinny, the picture of domesticity, did you enjoy your first day at home?"

I told her what I did and I explained to her that I was going to move slowly this week, catch up with Linda's suggestions and then tackle the house seriously starting next Monday.

She didn't object to that, but she repeated that she expected me to search for organic cleaning products. She seemed to take this issue quite seriously. I reassured her that tomorrow I would do a Google search.

She then added with an edge in her voice, "All of a sudden I am famished what we have for dinner?"

We went to bed quite early that night, we were both quite exhausted.

CHAPTER 4

Tuesday morning I found Linda already in the kitchen, making breakfast. As usually she let herself in with her own key. I should remember to get this key back on Thursday. I joined her for a cup of coffee and I waited for Pam to come down.

Pam said a quick good morning and moved to the dining room for breakfast. When Linda was in the house we took breakfast in a more formal way in the dining room. The other days it was the kitchen table. I joined her and we chatted amicably for ten minutes. As she was getting up to go she said to me, "Don't take everything that Linda tells you at face value. She is a willing and kind person but not necessarily the best cleaner. I often find dust in very obvious places, you must have noticed that yourself. I expect you to be a much better cleaner than her; after all you claim that you enjoy that sort of work. She is an excellent ironer though and there you will need some coaching from her, ask her on Thursday when she does her ironing." She stopped and looked at her watch, "It's getting late, I better go, good bye darling." And she left before I had the chance to answer.

I gathered the breakfast things in a tray and moved them to the kitchen. I had to join Linda in her morning activities. She had a routine and she didn't like to deviate as she was a creature of habits, but I couldn't do much at that point. I simply watched her and asked the occasional question. I mentioned to her though Pam's suggestion about an 'ironing lesson'. She agreed to show me some tricks, as she called them, on Thursday.

It was midday and I was preparing sandwiches and coffee for a quick lunch when I heard the front door bell ringing, then Linda's voice from the hall, "I'll get it Nicky."

A few moments later I heard voices coming towards the kitchen. My hands were greasy and I had my apron on. Not enough time to react. I turned grabbing a tea towel to wipe my hands when Linda entered the kitchen followed by a 'petite' very pretty Asian lady.

"May I introduce to you Miss Annie de Laurentis Nicky? She said using her polite voice, "She is the lady I mentioned to you the other day who runs the domestic agency. She was in the neighborhood and I asked her in for a cup of coffee. I wanted you very much to meet her."

I was taken completely off guard. I managed to say a "Nice to meet you Miss, I am about to make some coffee, would you like some?"

"Please call me Annie; yes please I would love some coffee."

"Let's sit here around the kitchen table it's quite comfortable" Linda said and offered Annie a seat and she sat opposite leaving me making the coffee still with my apron on. For a moment I wondered who is the boss and who is the maid in that case, but I secretly started to enjoy this encounter, the first one in my so called 'new position' in the house.

Soon we all sat around the kitchen table sipping our coffee. I realized that Annie was not only very pretty but also impeccably dressed in a very elegant manner. I guessed at that moment that her job was to deal with the rich and famous if she was providing domestic staff for them and she had to be always dressed accordingly.

She must have read my thoughts because she said quite amicably, "I was visiting a house a couple of blocks from here because they were asking me for a live in maid. I always check the premises of where my girls are going to work. I want to be certain what kind of people are hiring them." She paused for a moment to have a sip of her coffee and continued, "Linda announced to me that she finally took the decision to go back home and at the same time you retire and want to assume some house responsibilities, I find that very remarkable and unusual and I wanted to meet this brave man who is able to do that."

I felt a bit embarrassed and slightly annoyed with Linda, she shouldn't be talking to strangers about my situation. She must understand that because she rushed to speak, "Don't take it wrongly Nicky, it only came naturally in our conversation because when I announced to Annie that I am going back home, the first thing she asked me is if my employers would need a replacement and then I had to say the truth, that you intended to assume housekeeping responsibilities to start with. I don't go around gossiping about my employers, in particular dear ones like you and Mrs. Pam".

"It's all right Linda, there is nothing to hide, you know how I feel about housework I enjoy doing it and I enjoy all sorts of other house activities. It might be unusual and not very 'manly' but that's the way I feel."

"Fair enough", Annie said "I truly admire you for that and if I can assist to anything in your new activities please let me know. And if in the future you decide that you need some outside domestic help let me know again."

Then it dawned on me, probably I could have an answer here, "In fact I could ask you for something since you are in the housekeeping field. My wife made a request or should I call it an employer's demand. She asked me to do some research and start using eco friendly cleaning products. Do you have any idea where to find them?"

Annie with a broad smile answered, "You came to the right person Nicky, could I call you Nicky?"

"Of course you could" I said waiting eagerly for her answer.

"I represent in this town a Swedish Firm which specializes in eco friendly products. They are the best in the market, I'll tell you the brand name and you can Google them."

"That's very interesting" I said more eagerly now, "Could you make a suggestion of cleaning products for this house?"

"Of course I can. In fact I know quite well this house, Linda described it to me quite well over the years, and probably she told you that our friendship extends many years back. I met Linda when I was a young domestic myself over twenty years ago. I was lucky enough to climb the social ladder after that." She said the last phrase in a rather modest tone of voice but I could tell she was quite proud for her professional achievements. Good for her!

"Could you please?" I said quite expectantly now, "If you e-mail me a list by tomorrow with a cost I can discuss it with Pam and place an order which I can pick probably on Friday so I can have them all for next Monday, my first day really as a housekeeper in this house."

"Consider it done," she said quickly "in fact I would love you to come over to my Agency on Friday. I have an adjoining shop with all sorts of house products including housekeeping uniforms. You might find something that interests you, I stock quite nice unisex cleaning uniforms and of course traditional maids' dresses." She stopped and looked at my apron that I insisted having it on, "And you might find some practical aprons for housework, you know the ones that protect you well."

Linda then added looking at me in a mischievous way but really addressing Annie, "You can tell that Nicky loves his aprons, he has quite a collection, I know them all, after all I have been washing them for years."

I was blushing all over by that stage knowing that she was washing not only my aprons, but my panties and my nighties, she knew quite a bit about my proclivities. But I managed to keep my cool and said, "It's true I love my aprons I can't hide that, Linda knows, Pam my wife knows, our daughter knows and some of our friends know. It is one of my weaknesses I am afraid, a harmless one I hope."

Annie smiled warmly and said, "It is not only harmless it is more than that it is beneficial for the people you love, like your wife. The apron will be a very useful piece of clothing for you in the future, and you will be having the chance to wear it a lot. How lucky your wife is; she has someone to look after her the moment she is out there pushing her professional career." She looked at her elegant wrist watch and added, "I am afraid I have to go I have to pay another house visit, see you on Friday Nicky."

She left very quickly. Linda took her to the door and hugged her dearly, she clearly loved this woman.

Linda came back and we sat down to eat our sandwiches. I was curious about Annie and asked about her. She was quite eager to tell me her story. She was born in this country from Filipino parents. She started to work as a maid at the age of 17 but she managed to finish high school and she took college classes by correspondence. She was very bright and she used cleverly and ruthlessly the system to create her own business at the age of thirty. After that she never looked back. She imports maids to be from SE Asia but she is very protective of



them. In the few cases the maids were abused she took the employers to the court. She has a very good name in the market.

At dinner that night I said all my news to Pam, presumably very mundane news for her high executive life, I knew that, I was at that level only days ago. But she was quite eager to listen and quite intrigued when I said that I was going to visit Annie's premises on Friday to collect all the cleaning material.

"Before you go to buy this material shouldn't I agree first?" she asked in a rather sweet tone. And she continued, "We should probably look at that material together," then she paused to think and added "No, probably not, you look at it yourself, do your home work and if you are convinced let me know and we'll go ahead. Now that I have a housekeeper I don't have to kill myself with unnecessary decisions."

"I think this is better Pam, you don't have to be involved with decisions that your housekeeper can take, and after all I am here for those chores from now on. You have to give the guidelines and general instructions like any employer and of course if you notice something you are not happy with, you have to mention it to me."

"Of course I'll mention it to you, in fact it will be easier for me to reprimand you than say Linda or another servant, you are closer to me and I feel that I have that option."

I looked at her. For the first time since we started this new arrangement she referred to me as a servant even if it was an indirect remark. In her head I was replacing her servant so this is what I was. I quite liked that, at least my submissive part liked it, but I was a bit scared as well. Pam was moving faster than I thought and the next few sentences confirmed that.

"I have been thinking Nicky about your Volvo car it is too executive and serious for your current status. Would you consider swapping cars? During the week I can take the Volvo to work, I love driving that car and you take my smaller VW Golf, much more convenient for shopping and running your errands outside the house." She stopped and looked at me waiting for an answer.

"It's funny you mention it, I have been thinking the same myself. Volvo is too serious for me at the moment. I can't really go to the super market with that car and on Friday when I go to pick my eco friendly cleaning materials, I would feel silly driving it. In other words yes, I agree."

She looked quite pleased with my answer; it was easier than she anticipated. She knew how I loved this car so she thought of adding something more soothing, "In fact during the weekends when we go out together I'll let you driving it." She said it as she was doing a concession to me, as she already owned this car. Human nature and character never ceased to surprise me; it was amazing how Pam was adapting to a more authoritarian role towards me. But it was equally amazing that I was giving her very willingly that option, I was putting myself under her authority in a quick but still quite subtle way. I was curious how far I could go myself in that direction. It was new to me as well. The only certain thing was that an 'inner force' if I can use that word was driving me towards that direction. Her next phrase brought me back to reality and confirmed my theory, Pam was moving fast now.