



Reluctant Press

Desperate Measures

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. DIAMOND

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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DESPERATE MEASURES

By Maggie Finson

Recipes, Cures, and Changes

**Being a compendium of formulas for better living and fulfillment
of desires
through the use of potions created with
common, easily obtainable ingredients
simply combined to achieve complete and
satisfactory results.**

The large, leather bound volume had long since given up the gilt filling from its title, and had been gathering dust for years while hidden away on the back shelves of a used book store specializing in oddities. Innocuous beyond its size, comparable to a large city's telephone directory, and largely ignored by the patrons and owners of the store alike, it had seemed destined to remain forgotten for years to come.

Until two curious, bored young women puzzled out its title and began turning pages.

"Why on earth did we ever buy this dusty old thing?" Annette, a petite blonde with unremarkably pretty features carefully flipped through several pages of the volume. "Potions for God's sake. Those are something out of a fantasy or horror novel, they don't work in real life."

Rachel, Annette's cousin, a tall, statuesque, stunningly beautiful woman with flame red hair, piercing green eyes, peered over her cousin's shoulder as pages continued to be turned. "Guess we're getting desperate?"

Grinning to show that was meant as a joke, she continued watching Annette turn pages. "But it has to be some kind of collector's item and couldn't really hurt anything to try some of these formulas out. None of the ingredients I've seen so far are toxic or

difficult to find, and we could use our husbands as guinea pigs with the things. At worst, it'll only make them a little sick."

Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble," Annette chuckled. "I never thought I'd be thinking of becoming a witch, but I'm willing to try some of these out if you are."

"What have we got to lose?" Rachel laughed with little real humor. You got anything going that would be interrupted by mixing up a few of these and trying them out? We could be both use a bit of extra entertainment just about now and this would at least be diverting for a while."

The pair had nearly grown up together, gone through school to graduation from university with each other, gotten married within days of each other, and born daughters on the same day. To say the cousins were closer than many sisters would be no exaggeration of the truth, and both were presently quite frustrated.

Both were extremely bright, and ambitious, starting a joint venture in independent consulting through computer aided fashion design and presentation for a wide range of clients with many different needs. Their small company, run out of a tiny office nearby, had achieved a gratifying word of mouth reputation for being able to provide personal service and see to the requirements of almost any client who came to them with a legitimate need.

The cousins had seemed well on the road to very successful business careers, and were both very happy with their lives. Until they had their babies.

With husbands working in their own financial consulting firm, a business demanding a high degree of stability, and very demanding of time as the business was slowly built, it had appeared as if their financial futures would be extremely comfortable, with satisfying careers on both sides.

But husbands away for long periods of time during the days began demanding that the women remain home with the children and take care of things there rather than work. Each man cited the fact that their own business was easily worth enough to support their families in a great deal of comfort without their wives earning extra money through their own business.

In an effort to maintain peace at home, the cousins had temporarily closed down most of their business, handling only the occasional steady client, and trying to spend more time at home with their children. Neither had minded in the beginning, but after three months, they were beginning to go crazy from boredom without more than housework and the children to fill their time.

Both had tried reasoning with their men, even begging at times, with no response other than they shouldn't worry, everything was going very well. Possibly for Mike, Annette's husband, and Rachel's spouse, Bill. But not for the two women who foresaw demands that they scrap their own business completely in favor of being the traditional housewives and mothers their husbands seemed to want them to become.

Worse, left to themselves so often with the household chores in the huge, rambling duplex they shared finished and the babies sleeping quietly, the women turned to each other for more than solace. They began experimenting with sex, and had found each other's company far more satisfying than that of their husbands, which added a lot to

the growing sensation of being trapped in a situation neither one of them liked but knowing that their husbands would never consider so much as a separation, let alone a divorce.

Not that either man was a complete louse, or insensitive. They agreed that their wives were entitled to have a business of their own. Provided it would not interfere with child care and basic housekeeping duties in their shared home.

Each man was just more traditionally minded than the norm these days, and so wrapped up in their own affairs they failed to perceive their wife's very real anguish. Or to realize they were the root cause of that.

Bill, Rachel's husband, standing at six foot four, weighing an easy two hundred pounds of mostly well kept muscle, ruggedly chiseled features and direct blue eyes was just about every woman's version of a real hunk. Personable, gentle in spite of his size and strength, and given to periods of quiet introspection, he was the understanding one of the two, and less demanding than Annette's husband.

Still, he really did want a wife who stayed at home to keep house and care for the children, while being available to help entertain clients when needed. Without openly pressuring he managed to make his wishes known to Rachel.

Mike, at five foot seven, took great pains to be aggressively masculine in everything he did. Working out, participating in competitive sports, whatever. He was openly unhappy with anything less than undisputed first place in anything concerning him and was often abrasive enough to have Annette in tears over some really inconsequential matter.

Cursed with a slight frame, fine bone structure, and facial features more delicate than he cared for, Mike compensated with a thick mustache he carefully cultivated along with the image of being a real man. Derisive of males who appeared the least bit feminine, or acted that way, Mike wanted a large family, a wife who stayed home and did as he told her, and was very vocal regarding those ideas.

All in all, both young women were close to doing something really desperate just to get some breathing space. The odd old volume they had discovered while researching background for a new, retro fashion trend appeared to provide a harmless method of venting their frustrations before those built to a very critical stage.

Elixir of Feminine Beauty

This sweet tasting brew will guarantee to any who partake of it, the smooth, soft skin, beauty of face and body, delicate hands and feet, and thick, lustrous hair men find so appealing. It will also insure properly feminine grace of motion and demeanor in all situations. This potion eradicates unsightly body hair and blemishes while giving the user a pleasingly sweet voice. Whoever drinks of this will absolutely be found exceptionally pleasing in the eyes of men.

Potion of Masculine Virtues

This mixture will bring out the best of manliness in even the most reluctant. The user will become manly in all things, thoughts, actions, and appearance without fail. Strength of body and mind, confidence in business and home, firmness of purpose in all endeavors and sexual prowess as a male will result.

“Okay, so who gets to be the girl?” Rachel's eyes danced with barely suppressed mirth. The thought of either one of their husbands becoming femininely beautiful was something she still found hilarious. The pair had discovered that obtaining needed ingredients and getting the mix done properly was easier than baking a cake.

“Why Mike, of course,” Annette grinned back. “Not that I really expect this stuff to work as advertised, but having him reduced to something other men would consider sexy is more than I can resist. It would certainly be justice, don't you think?”

“Let him find out first hand what the kind of girls he likes have to go through in life,” Rachel agreed happily. “Provided it does work, that is.”

“What if it really does?” Annette actually sounded hopeful as she asked, and a little wistful.

"Then we do up some more," Rachel shrugged. "And make real sure Mike gets that traditional marriage and family life he seems so adamant about having. Only he'll be the pretty, dutiful wife and mother instead of you."

Returning her cousin's wicked smile with one of her own, Annette chuckled at that idea. "Oh, he'll just adore that."

"If this should work, which I doubt." Rachel returned. "We aren't going to give the little darling much choice in the matter, are we, Hon?"

"Nope," Annette finished her final mix with an odd little grin. "When shall we test these out?"

"Why not tonight, while the brews are still fresh?" The redhead suggested. "At the very least, it might make Mike ill enough to leave you alone for one night."

"Even if it doesn't." Annette sighed. "It sure has been fun playing with this stuff and fantasizing about how things would be if..."

"Has at that, cousin." Rachel exchanged nervous smiles with her smaller cousin, then both burst into laughter over being so ridiculous as to have actually mixed the silly things up then plot to get their husbands to drink them.

Still, plans were carefully laid out to the tiniest detail, including extra special care for their own appearances as well as the house, and lavish meals prepared for their men. Both fixed all the guy's favorite foods, set out their good china, candles for mood, chilled wine, and assured there would be no interruptions by sending the babies to a trusted friend for an overnight stay.

The explanation that each wanted a private, special evening at home with their husbands was more than feasible, and would very likely end up with both men being more amenable about what the girls wanted than they had been recently. There was nothing like a wonderful, home cooked meal, candle light, and a good night of sex to make a man happy.

In the extremely unlikely event that the potions actually did something, a possibility neither woman really believed would happen, the evening would be even more productive. Instead of simply softening up their men, it would change the focus on many of the family problems they had recently gone through.

Drastically.

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Mike vented a happy sigh of pure satisfaction. He had been moderately surprised on getting home to discover Annette had put a lot of effort into cleaning the house, and fixing a very special dinner for the two of them. The wine was excellent, the food better, and his wife's company more congenial than it had been in several months.

On top of that, Annette had been surprisingly affectionate with him, leading up on her own to some of the best sex play he had experienced in a long time on the rug in front of their living room fireplace. Wrapped in a robe, with a chilled drink in his hand

and Annette curled up beside him, he considered doing it all over again but decided he was far too comfortable for much more than thinking about it. Just now.

The drink itself was some fancy concoction foisted off on him by his suddenly attentive young wife, and almost sickly syrupy. But comfortable as he was, and with all the trouble she had gone to this evening, it would seem particularly churlish of him to complain about one drink being too sweet.

He just hoped Annette wouldn't spoil the mood by once again bringing up the subject of her own independent career. Not that he wasn't a little suspicious, and expected something of that nature to be brought up before the night was over. But he hoped it wouldn't. Things now were as good as they had been right after the couple had been married and he wanted to savor the nice feeling a while longer.

Business had been very good recently at the small firm he and Bill had started from nothing and built into something capable of being truly dynamic. They were finally getting respect from local financial circles and their investment consulting company was becoming a going, and growing, concern.

They had landed some real monied clients, kept them happy, and now had prospects for picking up business from some of the area's really heavy hitters. Should things go as their conservative projections showed, neither Bill, Mike, or their wives would ever need to work again within a few years. Thanks to careful planning and hard work, the firm of Peterson and Foster was getting a fine reputation in the financial industry. With a name that was beginning to pay dividends for the co-owners and operators.

Leaning over to give Annette a gentle kiss on the forehead, he couldn't keep himself from thinking that this was the way things should be for them all the time. If only she would see reason and stay home for just a few years while little Jennifer was young enough to really be enjoyable things would work themselves out.

Though he had often roared at her, reducing his wife to tears about wanting her to be a more traditionally minded spouse he really did love Annette. Even when she screamed back that maybe he should quit his job, stay home and take care of the house and baby since he was so concerned about things like that.

Their household had been greatly disturbed by some tremendous rows over that subject in the past. Now neither one of them seemed even slightly inclined to begin another one and ruin the soft, loving mood they had achieved. In fact, they had somehow reached a mutually unspoken agreement not to bring such things up and wreck what had been a wonderful evening. He had truly enjoyed it so far, though her work had only reinforced his own expectations, wishes, and attitudes.

Having been raised in a very old fashioned family group, Mike firmly believed that it was his duty to go out and earn a living for his family, fix things around the house that required it, do the yardwork, and be as good a husband, father, and provider as his own father had been.

He was also convinced it was the wife's obligation to raise their children in the home, keep the house clean and straight, while making certain she was keeping him

happy. Unfortunately, his version of a happy, obedient wife did not sit well with Annette, or that firebrand of a cousin his partner had married.

He privately thought it was largely Rachel's influence that kept his own pretty wife from knuckling under to his demands and had considered moving to another residence in order to distance the pair.

Even Bill, his long time friend, and present partner had told him that his views of a perfect homelife were not only unrealistic in this day and age, but highly offensive to more than just women at times.

Well, that was one badly chewed up bone he chose not to worry for the night. There was no sense in stirring up trouble when things had not only remained tranquil, but had reached a state of near bliss that he had only dreamed of during the past six or seven months.

Genetics, upbringing, and the realities of life would swing things his way in time if he could only remain patient. Annette would eventually see how silly it was for her to work when his own income would provide more than either one of them, with ten children thrown in, could ever manage to spend in their lifetimes.

Meanwhile, all he wanted was to maintain the present tranquillity, enjoy the evening, and do nothing to spoil it for either one of them. He was truly comfortable in his wife's company for the first time in several months and was reluctant for that to end.

"Honey?" Annette's silky contralto stroked his ears, but raised the beginnings of alarm bells at the back of his mind. Something in her tone of voice hinted that she was about to broach an unwelcome subject again. "We really need to talk about a few things."

Stiffening, while overcome with a sense of loss for the night, he suppressed his brief flash of anger and tried redirecting things before another fight could start. "Let's not get into the usual argument tonight, Annie."

Pulling her unresisting form closer, he went on cautiously. "We've had such a peaceful evening. A really good one for a change, and I'd hate to ruin it now."

"I wasn't planning to argue," Pursing her mouth in a way that meant she was searching for a proper way to phrase something, Annette really turned him on with that pouty little pooch of her lips.

"I've really been thinking hard about how badly you want a traditional type marriage and relationship, you know?" She went on slowly, snuggling closer as she did. "I'm trying to look at things from your viewpoint and see how they look from there."

"And?" Wary of booby traps in that line of reasoning, Mike prompted her to go on with uncharacteristic caution.

"I have considered leaving you if we aren't able to settle our differences." Forestalling his indignant outcry with a gentle tug at his central anatomy and a light kiss she looked up into his face with an almost sad expression.

"But that doesn't seem to be the answer either one of us is really looking for, is it?"