



Kate Merchant

**A
MAN'S
WORLD**

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"I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives"

- Jane Austen

Chapter 1: A Gut Instinct...

1964 - New York City – Manhattan - Central Park West

The clock read 8:00 PM. I had been staring at it for the last two hours, willing my husband Gregory to come home. We had been married for a year and a half and in all that time Gregory had never made it home on time unless there was a family function to go to. My gut instinct told me where he was, but I was too scared to do anything about it. What could I do? Divorce didn't happen in my circle; not ever.

Gregory was ten years older than me; thirty to my almost twenty years. We met a handful of times before we had gotten married. Our marriage was as close to an arranged marriage as you could get these days. My parents had started introducing me to society the day I turned sixteen. Gregory had been older, but my mother was definitely thrilled when I caught his attention.

Gregory made his intentions clear on our first date and while I considered other young men, my parents had pushed me to choose Gregory. It was easy to understand why. On paper, Gregory was the perfect specimen –handsome, graduate of Harvard Law, could trace his ancestry off the Mayflower. He was already a partner at his law firm and his father had political connections and was interested a possible run for governor of New York.

The reality fell short of the fantasy. In public, Gregory was the perfect husband. He was attentive to my needs, caring, and polite. In private, well, there wasn't much to say. We barely spoke to each other and he was never home except when he needed to present the perfect family to his colleagues. And sex? I could count the number of times on one hand and the experience didn't live up to what I had read in books.

So, here I was, 19, staring at a clock and wondering how much longer I would wait until I gave up and went to bed.

Tonight, something was different. I wanted to know what he was doing. I needed to know. My need reminded me of a mosquito bite or having chicken pox; you had the need to scratch, but you knew if you did there'd be a scar left behind. Once you scratched hard enough you would feel better for a moment, but the scar would always be there. For once in my life, the scar didn't frighten me.

Little did I know I would be able to relive this night in vivid detail for years to come.

It was pathetic, but I kept up the appearance of the perfect stylish wife. I put on my new Chanel spring coat and grabbed my matching handbag. Once I was downstairs, I decided against taking a cab as the doorman suggested. I had a feeling that he would call Gregory to warn him I was on my way and the last thing I wanted was for Gregory to have any warning. Instead I told him I was going to the movie theater around the block. That wasn't an unusual thing for me to do.

I walked one block over, out of sight of my doorman, and used the subway. I stood out like a sore thumb standing there in my designer clothes, but I didn't care. All the travelers were staring at me as they got on and off, but again, I didn't care. I had a goal and no one could deter me from seeing it through.

Finally, Gregory's office stop came and I got off the subway; almost on autopilot.

Calmly, I signed into the office building with security, explaining that I was one of the senior partner's daughter. He obviously didn't care and he didn't ask for my ID.

I watched the dial, waiting for the elevator door to open. When it arrived, I pushed the button and watched the floors pass by. The atmosphere of this place was starting to wear on my nerves. Stuffy, dark and pretentious.

When the door opened, I saw the rich elegance of the reception area. Dark wood with oriental rugs and pompous paintings and decor. Muted light made it more ominous.

I walked down the hallway, all the past and present partners' faces looking at me from their portraits, begging me to go back, telling me I could still have my charmed life, not to open Pandora's Box. But I had come too far and I couldn't resist, the apple was beckoning. When I got closer to the end of the hall, I could hear noises coming from Gregory's office, confirming what I had long suspected.

Taking a deep breath, I walked to his door and peeked inside. On his desk was his secretary, Cynthia, spread out naked, except for her gartered stockings, with my husband's head buried between her thighs. Her white blond hair was hanging off the edge, while she grabbed his head, moaning loudly.

It was erotic, it was also something I had only read about in forbidden Harlequin novels. I could see she was enjoying it, if her moaning was any indication. As I stood there I didn't feel angry but cheated because the few times we had sex it was nothing like this. Gregory was on me for a minute and right back off. There were no loving caresses, no passion, no moaning or hair pulling like I was currently watching. It was also confirming what Gregory had always told me - I was frigid and undesirable.

There was no need for me to stay any longer, I had gotten the confirmation I had been looking for about my husband's "work activities", but before I could turn and leave, Gregory looked up from his perch, getting ready to stick his penis in her.

"Lillian!" he hissed, spotting me by the door.

Cynthia squealed trying to cover her breasts while Gregory seethed at me. I didn't wait to see what he would say and turned on my heel to leave. I ran down the hallway, past the portraits, frowning as my heels clicked down on the hardwood floor. Who knew I could run in Chanel?

I made it to the elevators, hitting the buttons, willing the elevator to come before Gregory could catch up to me. But he had been following me since I took off.

"Lillian!" he yelled, buttoning his pants. "What are you doing here?" He was furious, but I didn't care anymore.

"What am I doing? I came to visit my husband who neglected to tell me he would be late, yet again. I thought I would come by and ask if you would like me to keep dinner on the table," I yelled, no longer caring about pretenses.

"Keep your voice down," he hissed, grabbing my shoulder so hard I could feel the bruises start to form. "Well, Lillian, what do you expect? You're horrible in bed."

"Maybe I just need a better teacher," I retorted, finding my courage for a moment, then regretted it immediately.

Gregory turned beet red and grabbed my shoulder tighter. "Watch your mouth," he demanded. "I'm your husband."

"And I'm your wife! How long, Gregory? How many?" I asked, the sadness creeping up, the fight going out of me. Why couldn't he show that kind of passion with me? Maybe I was broken, like a shattered vase you can't repair no matter how hard you try.

Gregory got very quiet for a moment, regret briefly flitted across his blue-grey eyes. His eyes had always reminded me of the ocean by Martha's Vineyard during a storm. Cool, calculating and sorrowful.

"The number is irrelevant Lillian," he stated after a moment.

"Then why, Gregory? I would have done whatever you wanted." I cried, the adrenalin that had been fueling this caper was now gone and left a deep pain in its place.

Gregory scowled at me and grabbed my shoulder again. "What I do, Lillian, is none of your business. Now you listen to me. You're going to go home and forget what you saw here. You will do as you're told. You are my wife and you will play the part. When it's time for us to have a child, then we will spend more time in bed, but until then I don't want to ever see your frigid ass back here!" He dug his fingers in harder.

"Let go of me, you're leaving marks on my shoulder and people will see," I told him quietly.

Gregory was all about appearances and could see the start of bruises where my shirt opened at the top. Suddenly I got a vision of how my future would be if I stayed and it made me sick.

"No," I said, surprising both of us, "I don't think so."

Gregory started to howl with laughter. "Really? Lillian, what are you going to do? Go to your parents?" He laughed cynically. "You go ahead and do that. See how far you'll get."

"Thank you for the suggestion, Gregory," I told him, barely keeping my tears at bay. I felt so humiliated. My parents would take me back. I was their daughter after all.

Gregory's cruel laughter haunted me as the elevator operator opened the door. This time as I exited the building, I allowed the doorman to hail me a cab. My earlier bravado had exited my body with the revelations I discovered. I could feel myself turning into that meek girl who was denying what was happening in her marriage.

For some reason, I had a feeling that Gregory was right about my parents, but I didn't want to believe it. My parents could be cold, but surely they wouldn't turn away their oldest daughter? Right?

When the cab arrived, I gathered my wits and walked into my parents' apartment building, walking past the doorman, Mr. Lynch, who nodded and smiled at me. He had known me since I was three. As a small child, I thought he was Santa Claus.

"Miss Lillian," he said, looking at me.

"Mr. Lynch," I replied shakily.

"Are you alright, Miss Lillian? I can call for your father or brother," he replied concerned, realizing it was too late for a social call.

"No, thank you Mr. Lynch, I need to speak with my parents," I told him.

"Alright, I'll get the elevator for you," he said pressing the elevator button.

For the second time this evening, I could feel this was a bad idea, but I soldiered on once again. Using my key in the lock, I was surprised to see my parents waiting for me. I wondered if Gregory had called them, but he had looked too confident in assumptions to warn my parents about my impending arrival.

"Mother, Father," I said, a little startled.

"Lillian," my mother greeted me, "Mr. Lynch notified us you were coming up."

"Why did he do that?" I asked, confused. This had been my home for eighteen years.

"He always does that when we have a guest. You should be glad he let you up without notifying us first. That would have been embarrassing; almost as embarrassing as the reason why you're here, Lillian," my mother said, dropping some of the ash from her cigarette into her ashtray.

I guess Gregory decided to call my parents after our encounter. "I'm assuming Gregory called you?"

"Yes, he did, Lillian," my mother said. "What we don't understand is why you are here. You should be at home with your husband. A wife's place is at home."

"But he's having an affair with his secretary. Did Gregory tell you that?" I stuttered.

"And?" my father asked, lighting up his own cigarette.

"It's wrong and it goes against our martial vows," I retorted.

"Lillian, this is not a reason to leave your husband," my mother replied. "You must have done something to make your husband stray. Go home and fix it."

"But this is my home," I replied quietly, my throat was so tight it felt like I was trying to swallow a boulder.

"No, Lillian, your home is with your husband. This is just a misunderstanding," my father said, in what I would describe as his gentle voice. "Many husbands have relationships with their secretaries. When you have a child, you will feel better and have something to focus on."

"To have a child, Father, one must have sex," I replied, enjoying the shocked expression on my parents' faces. "I'm not having a lot of that. Gregory's secretary has a better chance of having a baby than I do."

My mother took a deep breath, "You should leave now, Lillian, and please call before you come again."

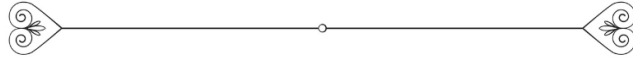
I nodded, realizing that this would never be my home again. Briefly I glanced at the picture of myself, my brother Mike and my sister Kitty, on the mantel. Mike was two years older than me and our sister was 14. I shuddered to think what would happen to Kitty in a few years.

I left my parents opting to walk back to Gregory's apartment.

On the way back, I realized I was trapped. I didn't have any marketable skills and I knew that if I got a divorce I would be a social pariah. No one wanted to associate with someone who was ostracized in my circle.

I had no choices. It was a small wonder why so many women in my social circle lived off gin and tonics. I wondered how many of them were in my situation.

When I got to the apartment I had the sudden urge to pawn my jewelry and go to the Greyhound station and get on the first bus to wherever it was headed. Looking up at the opulent building, I wondered if I could do that.... Just leave.



Also By Kate Merchant

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New Direction. (*A Long Journey Book 2*)

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