

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION



Driven to Distraction by Bea

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by
BEA



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I knew I was in trouble as soon as I saw Maisie's shit-eating grin.

Normally, I'd have answered the phone, but that particular morning she was already at her worktable, poring over advertisements for her upcoming trade show, so just picked up the phone, which was close to her on the first ring. I was just in the process of reading my morning newspaper and, as most of the incoming telephone calls are for my wife anyway, paid no attention once she started chatting and didn't call for me.

I sat enjoying my croissant and sipping on my coffee as Irma, the maid, bustled around tidying away our breakfast dishes. I accepted her offer of more coffee with a gracious smile. As usual, her grim expression didn't alter by one iota - she falls all over herself for Maisie, but you'd think I was some insignificant member of the household the way she normally treated me. Okay, I'll admit it - I had maybe been a little rough on her when I'd first married Maisie - but I wasn't used to having servants. Knew that I wasn't supposed to get too familiar with them, so was probably a little overbearing when I first joined the household. She'd been friendly and polite at the beginning. Seemed genuinely happy that Maisie had finally latched onto a man. That hadn't lasted too long though. Now she was polite as anyone could ask for - but distant and cold towards me, to say the least.

I was too far away from the telephone to hear the conversation that was going on - but something caught my interest. Didn't know what it was, but suddenly found myself very conscious of the pitch of Maisie's voice - or maybe it was a chuckle, I have no idea. Whatever it was, I finally gave up trying to read my paper and looked up. Maisie was looking at me, a look of amusement - a sort of pitying amusement that was widening into a look of unholy glee. She put the telephone back down into its cradle very slowly, her lips turning up at the corners as she fixed her piercing blue eyes on me. Beckoned to me with a forefinger. "Roger dear? That was mummy. She requires a large favor of you. Naturally, I said that you would only be TOO happy to assist her in any way that you possibly could. That's true, isn't it?"

"Something go wrong on her trip?" I asked as I got up and made my way to her. "I thought she was over in France?"

"No darling. Seemingly Mrs. Chalmers - her American friend - has become entranced by Scotland so instead of going over to the continent as planned, they've decided to spend the rest of their time in just gradually

working their way back down south. As I see it, they're a little north of Aberdeen at the moment and will be there for a few days, then going cross country to Oban for a day or so, then spending a little time in Edinburgh before heading back here to London."

"So, what's the problem?" I asked.

"Well, it appears that Elaine - mummy's companion? She's hurt her wrist badly and they'll need a driver. It looks like you're elected darling."

"Oh shit!" I said feelingly. "How long is this going to be for?" "I'd imagine about five or six days. Don't think that Elaine's broken anything - just a bad sprain. But why do you ask? You have anything planned?"

I blushed. "No. Can't say that I do. But how come your mother asked for me? She's not exactly too keen on me at the moment." Maisie's smile broadened. "You can say that again dearie - but she's well aware that you have been effectively unemployed for the last few weeks. Already realizes that you'll probably be after her for seed money for your next venture - whatever it'll be - and, as she says, she feels that she should be getting SOME return on all the money she's invested in you so far - even if it's only your time."

As always, Maisie was making sense. Her mother had loaned me money to start my own business - and I had failed miserably, there was no two ways about it. I was perfectly aware that I was going to have to do *something*, but the thought of approaching the old battle-axe had scared the hell out of me even though it was the only viable solution to my problem. There was no way that Maisie would give me any of her own capital - she was already supporting me one hundred percent. Now? I was already beginning to see the advantages inherent in helping her mother out of her current bind - me becoming the hero to the rescue did promise certain benefits downstream.

"Who's all in the party?" I asked.

Maisie thought for a minute. "Well, there's mummy and Elaine of course. Mrs. Chalmers, the American lady - her name's May, if I remember correctly. Then Anne Smith, mummy's old friend."

"So how long do you think Elaine will be before she rejoins the party?" I wondered out loud.

"Elaine? No dear, she's not leaving the party at all. You're just taking her driving duties over until she can perform them again."

"Five in a car? Jesus, that'll be cozy!" I said.

"Darling - they're using mummy's old Rolls Royce - the damn thing is HUGE - you could probably get *another* five in it and hardly notice it!"

"Oh." I said, visualizing the huge beast of a car I was going to be driving. "I guess that's okay. But when am I supposed to get up there?" Maisie grinned again. Looked at her watch. "There'll be a car here in about forty minutes to pick you up. Dennison's Tool Works have their own private airfield about ten miles from here and have a corporate jet in the hanger there. Being on the Board, mummy twisted a few arms and they're going to fly you up to Aberdeen this morning. So darling? If I were you, I'd get my arse in gear and get packed."

I stared at her in some consternation. "Well - that quickly? I don't know. . ."

My voice trailed away as she picked up the phone, her grin diminished, but some derision showing still. "Want me to dial mummy? You can suggest something different perhaps? Maybe explain that you're too busy?"

I gave her a weak grin. "Don't think that'll be necessary. Any suggestions on what clothes I should take?"

She shrugged. "I don't think that the ladies are into anything that will require business clothes - I'd suggest casual wear - but I'd get a move on if I were you. Have you showered yet today? And when did you last shave?"

"No, I'd better shower." I said. "But I don't need a shave yet - it's only been about four or five days since I last shaved. Should be good for another few days at least."

Maisie shrugged again, the smile back on her face. "Whatever." She said. "Want me to have Irma give you a hand to pack?"

I exhaled through puffed cheeks. "No. Don't think so - but thanks. Think I'd better do it myself. God knows what I'd be missing when I got there."

Maisie nodded. "Other than me, darling? I have to admit it; you seem to have a wonderful knack of pissing women off. Yeah, I see your point. Better safe than sorry."

Normally I'd have suggested again that she should reprimand the maid. Get her to show me a little more respect, but it didn't seem to be the place or the time, so I just went and grabbed a few medium sized suitcases then packed, following Maisie's suggestion by taking practically nothing but casual clothes. I looked out an outfit for traveling, then went and showered. I had the suitcases at the front door about ten minutes before the car arrived, which gave me enough time to say my farewells to Maisie. She was preoccupied with her advertisements again, but bade me a fond farewell, the derision muted now - but still there. She gave me a kiss and said, smiling,

"I hope that you manage to get the fright out of your eyes by the time you get there dear. Mummy's not really so bad you know."

I kissed her back and gave her a weak grin. "Easy for you to say. I don't think I'm her favorite son in law."

"You're her ONLY son in law dear," she laughed. "And, unless we get divorced, the only one she's likely to have. So, cheer up! Have a nice time!" With that, she kissed me quickly again and patted my backside in farewell as the chauffeur approached the door. A few minutes later, I was on my way.

I was surprised by the smoothness of the whole operation. We drove onto the airpark, where a white Learjet was sitting going through pre-flight checking. The chauffeur took my luggage to the plane, where an attractive hostess stowed my suitcases, before welcoming me on board. I saw the car drive away and then the stewardess was asking me if I wanted a drink. A little intimidated, I asked for a large Scotch. She took only a minute or so to make my drink and then, she told me to secure my seat belt - and we were taxiing for take-off.

She then moved forward towards the pilot cabin and seated herself -and we were up in the air within a minute.

The flight time was only about three hours or less, but it gave me a chance to think. Gave me some time to try and calm myself, because to tell the truth I was really frightened of my mother-in-law. Yes, I thought

of her as a battle axe - had even referred to her in that fashion once to Maisie - but there was no affection in that term - not in my mind anyway.

I'd met Maisie when I'd installed her personal computer at her home. She's a large, friendly, woman, not particularly good looking - although she can be stunning when she dresses up to the nines and gets her war paint on. On the other hand, I am on the small side - almost dainty. Tend to be shy of women and even though I don't look it, am quite a few years older than my wife, though am often taken to be younger. This doesn't faze Maisie in the slightest. She's aggressive and has once or twice laughingly referred to me as her "trophy husband".

I'd never been used to money - and certainly not at the level of wealth that Maisie and her mother - Doris - enjoyed so, from the very beginning was somewhat intimidated by their wealth and confidence. I think that Maisie had actually been shy around men, but when I had appeared on the scene, she must have been getting fed up with her single status -or saw me as easy meat. Regardless, she simply gobbled me up. Naturally, her mother was NOT happy - seeing me as (decidedly) of a lower class and, what is worse, lacking in any form of charismatic or leadership capacities as a son in law. Treated me with a bored condescension at best - an icy disdain at other times.

Doris was a damned attractive woman. Took excellent care of herself. Kept herself in shape by playing tennis and golf regularly. Dressed with taste at all times. Seemed to be thought of as an outgoing, friendly person, by just about everyone - except me. Elaine was her personal confidante and had been for a year or two now. I wasn't sure how to describe the true relationship - it was a friendly one of that there was no doubt, but Elaine handled her correspondence and performed other secretarial functions, while also performing such mundane tasks as taking to, and picking up, clothes from the dry cleaners and suchlike. Accordingly, she WAS a servant. I'd only met her once or twice and found her pleasant, but quiet. Seemed to consider me an equal.

I was served a very nice lunch on the plane, and had a nice glass of Merlot along with it. Still a little scared of what the next few days would bring, I was nevertheless relaxed when we touched down at Dyce airpark, just north of Aberdeen. I was decidedly happy, and pleasantly surprised to find Elaine waiting for me. She gave me a sympathetic smile. "Oh, you

poor thing. It looks as if I've got you into trouble. My sincere apologies. Here, let me take one of your cases."

As I'd been struggling with the load, I was grateful for her offer. Her right hand had a lightweight cast, but she took one of my cases in her left hand, with surprisingly little effort. "I've got a taxi waiting for us," she explained as I puffed alongside her. "I had to go down to the doctor's in Aberdeen to let him have another look at my wrist, so everyone thought it a good idea for me to kill two birds with one stone by providing you with a guide back to the cottage. I also thought it would give me a chance to fill you in on what the ladies are expecting of you. Okay?"

The taxi driver had opened the trunk, so I let him put my case in. Elaine just demurred his offer of service and heaved my other case in there with absolutely no effort. I was quite impressed. She and I are almost exactly the same size and physique - as a matter of fact, we had been taken for brother and sister a few times - twins on occasion. I knew that my cases weren't heavy, but I'm not very strong so had had a little difficulty. To make matters worse, I was pretty sure that she'd had the heavier case of the two.

On the way to the house, she explained that she'd simply tripped and fallen awkwardly on her hand two days before. It had swollen badly, and ice had been applied immediately, but it turned out to be a very bad sprain. Despite her protestations, no one in the party would hear of her driving. May Chalmers was an accomplished driver but being an American categorically refused to drive anything, professing terror at the idea of driving on the 'Brit' side of the road. Anne Smith was too damn dithery, by her own admission, to drive anything but a golf cart and Doris declined. "Just as well," Elaine laughed. "She's scary driving. Feels that the bloody road belongs to her and that everyone else is just driving on HER road as a deliberate aggravation."

Then she added. "I thought that it might be helpful too, if I had a chance to give you some of the scoop on what's facing you. Maybe offer some advice?"

"I'd be very grateful for that." I answered honestly.

"Okay then. May Chalmers first. She does NOT like men for starters. Being Doris's guest though, I think she'll be more inclined to ignore you than anything else. She's a tough cookie, but very pleasant on

the whole."

"I'm glad you told me that." I said. "Now I know not to try and win her over with my manly charms, huh?"

Elaine smiled. "I don't think so." She paused. "She's already made quite a play for me."

I was surprised. "Oh, you mean that she's a lesbian?"

"Yes. I guess that's what she is. But she's nice. The minute I let her know I wasn't interested, she backed off."

Okay, that's one down," I said. "But what is Anne Smith like?"

"Annie? A delightful lady. Loves to fool around-just a barrel of fun. Not a mean bone in her body. You'll like here - guaranteed."

"I wish I could say the same for my mother-in-law." I sighed.

Elaine shook her head. "You two have problems with each other, but do you mind if I give my opinion as to why?"

"Fire away!" I said gallantly. "I'd appreciate any sensible insight into the problems that Doris has with me."

Elaine shot me a look that I couldn't read too well. Sniffed. "Frankly? I think you make a mistake by not standing up to her."

I tapped myself on the chest. "ME? Stand up to HER? You must be joking! She'd run over me like a tank."

She shook her head a little. "Honestly? I think that's most of the problem right there. You show that you're scared of her - and she only respects people who stand up to her. Trust me, you and she will get on much better if you tell her to get stuffed now and again." I blanched at the very thought of such a thing. Elaine laughed sympathetically and patted my knee gently. "Honest? Doris is a NICE person! This will be a good chance for you two to get to know each other. A week or so? You'll be so friendly .."

"A week or WHAT?" I interrupted, dumbfounded. "I thought it was only for four or five DAYS!"

She blinked. Shook her head a little. "Well, I don't know where you got that idea. Even before I went to the doctor again this morning it was

known that my wrist was going to be out of commission for four days to a week. Just found out this morning that now that the X-rays have been evaluated, it'll probably be longer than that even."

I made a prodigious sigh, remembering the amusement on Maisie's face. "Oh grief! Looks like I'm in for it! Now I think on it, my wife probably got a great deal of amusement from setting me up."

Elaine smiled sympathetically. "Oh, it won't be THAT bad. Squirring four attractive women about on a fun vacation? Tennis, golf, all expenses paid? You can grouch all you want, but you're sure to have a wonderful time". She looked out of the taxi window and spoke to the driver. "A right turn at this driveway coming up driver. The house is well set back from the road." She turned her attention back to me. "Well at least you'll have a few days to settle in. Maybe get used to the car? We'll be heading for the West coast in a few days."

"No specific schedule or itinerary then?"

"No. We're just playing it by ear - the only thing is that we've got to end up in Edinburgh before we head South, back into England. May has something she wants to attend there."

I had intended to respond and let her know that I hadn't brought my golf clubs or tennis racquet, but had the words driven out of my mouth by the sight of my mother-in-law and her two friends come out of the front door in an informal welcoming committee. The day was rather gloomy, but the trio made a very attractive display. Doris and one of the other women wore pant suits, the other wore a sleeveless yellow linen dress with white piping and sandals to match. They all looked immaculate and colorful, standing out in stark contrast to the gray clouds above.

As soon as the taxi stopped, Doris moved forward and as soon as the driver got out, paid him off - with a very generous tip, if his reaction was anything to go by. He practically ran to the trunk and pulled my suitcases out then, smiling wide thanks, he got back into the car and drove off.

I was welcomed. A trifle formally I thought but for once, Doris wasn't glowering contemptuously at me as she did normally. As a matter of fact, she was quite pleasant as she introduced me to May Chalmers - the other woman wearing a pant suit - and to Anne Smith, she of the yellow

linen dress.

I don't know how to describe the three women. They were all completely different, yet I would swear that they were all cut from the same cookie cutter. Doris - brunette - about five foot eight inches. May a little taller - auburn hair, glowing hazel eyes, and a tan that never came from any tanning salon. Anne, maybe an inch shorter - bright and blonde. Blue eyes shining with mischief and a face a little on the plump side. Now, when I say her face was plump? It's in relationship to the other two women only.

So, what have I described - a blonde, a brunette, and a redhead. All similar in height but with differing skin tones and eye color. Yet they were all alike in one important aspect - a money-glow. I knew that Doris was in her late forties and assumed that her companions were in the same age bracket. But that was strictly logical thinking, because it's amazing what adhering to strict diets, personal trainers, exercise, and beauty salon experts can do for a woman's appearance. None of the three would have had the slightest problem in passing for mid to late thirties.

I'd been flattered by the fact that the women had come out to meet me - though that dissipated quickly when I discovered that they were more interested in what had transpired with Elaine's visit to the doctor. The looks of disappointment when they discovered that she was going to be disabled for even longer than they'd thought that morning, evidenced their liking for her. It brought their interest back to me again though.

Both Anne and May had shook hands as we were introduced. As May was wearing flats, she was just a little taller than me. Anne, however, was wearing heels with her dress and looked down on me with an amused smile as she shook my hand. "My! You're a tiny little thing, aren't you? You must have *something* going for you," she said insinuatingly. "Or else, why would a big girl like Maisie see anything in you?"

"Now *there's* a question for the ages!" Doris said grimly.

"Oh Doris! Don't be such a grouch." Anne laughed. "Leave the poor boy alone! He's doing us a favor, remember? Don't be scaring him off before we even get started."

Doris snorted, but her expression softened as she looked at her friend. "Well - I'll try." She said. "Though what Maisie ever saw in . . ."

"Doris! Behave!" Anne said firmly.

"Yeah-yeah. I'm sorry Roger. Thanks for coming so quickly." Doris apologized to me, nearly knocking me over with surprise.

May advanced on me, examining me openly, her eyes assessing me calmly as she also shook my hand. Like Anne, she had a firm grip, though there was no merriment evident in her eyes. Just a sort of distance - or disinterest. It was hard to tell. She was a damn fine-looking woman though. We muttered politely at each other, then the group looked as if it were heading into the house

I went and picked up my two suitcases, one with each hand and started to follow the ladies into the house, struggling a little with the weight.

"Here. Let me give you a hand." Elaine said, taking one of them in her left hand.

"What are you doing Elaine?" Doris asked. "He's a big boy. Surely he can handle a few tiny suitcases? And you should be taking care of yourself, not.."

"Doris? I'm not a bloody invalid!" Elaine said tartly. "I'm just being friendly is all. Roger must be tired and I thought I'd help. Okay?"

Again, I was surprised. Elaine talked to Doris as if she were an equal and walked in through the door. Elaine smiled at me. "See what I mean?" she said softly. "She's fine. All you have to do is stand up for yourself."

I nodded but knew damn well that I still wasn't altogether convinced.

I had a nice room with an adjoining bathroom. I had just finished unpacking when a knock came to the door. "Yes?" I called out.

"It's me Roger. Doris. I'd like a word with you if I may?"

"Of course. Please come in." I replied.

She opened the door and entered, closing it quietly behind her. "Before I say what I wanted. I thought to give my apologies if I was rude to you when you arrived Roger. I meant no offense."

"None taken, Doris. No need to apologize." I said.

She practically ignored my reply, looking around her. "Room alright? Any problems with it?"

"No. It's very nice. Thank you."

"Good." Then she turned her attention back fully on me. "I hope that requesting your assistance is not an imposition on your good will, but you seemed the logical choice. You are currently unemployed, so have time on your hands. You can drive an automobile, and I believe that you can play golf and tennis. Is this true?"

There was no friendship in her voice. I was being addressed as if I was a servant. I remembered Elaine's advice and for a second, thought of telling her this - and that I objected to it. Nevertheless, I could feel my fear of her choking down any thought I had of showing rebellion.

I grinned inanely. "All correct Doris. Though I haven't played much of anything in the last six months. I may be out of practice."

She sighed softly. "Well, we'll see. Elaine isn't that good either but we play mostly for fun, and a foursome makes for more sense than three. But what I wanted to cover with you?" She paused, expectantly.

"Yes Doris?"

She shook her head sharply. "But before I start. First things first Roger! From now on? I think you should start calling me 'mummy'. For some reason it aggravates me and I react negatively every time you address me by my given name."

"You want me to call you 'mummy'? But I'd feel like a little kid!" I protested, laughing. "That's what Maisie calls you."

Her stare got icy. "Are you insinuating that my daughter is childish?"

"Oh God, no!" I panted, visions of a furious Maisie riding through my head.

"Well then?" She said, her eyes still cold.

"I guess that it'd be okay . . . mummy?" I capitulated.

She smiled at my surrender. "That's *much* better Roger!" then she came and wrapped her right arm around my shoulders. "Now, here's what mummy wants. Okay?"