

The Cleaning Company



Jenny Winters

An "Adult TV" Novel

Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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By Jenny Winters

I didn't think I'd be this nervous. My hair was perfect and the makeup artist had just left. My nails were my usual deep red talons. Yes, I'd gotten used to them.

I'd slipped the solitaire from the ring finger of my left hand to my right so that the finger was bare. In a few minutes Paulo was going to slip a wedding band there.

I looked at my reflection and turned as I realised I was no longer alone.

"I'm so pleased that you chose to wear my old wedding dress. I only got to wear it once, not that I wanted to wear it again, but it stayed in my dressing room all those years."

"You must miss him so much," I said softly.

"I do, every day." She dabbed a tissue to her eye. "But having you to look after has been my salvation."

I'm so grateful to you for making my life so interesting when I thought it was all passing me by."

"You saved me," I said truthfully. "I was on the path to goodness knows what before I was sent to work for you."

"That was such a fateful day. I can remember every minute and then when you disappeared for a while, I thought I'd done something wrong."

"You've been so good..." I felt a tear and that would never do after all the makeup girl's skills.

"I do love that dress," she said, smoothing a sleeve and then the skirt. "The way it clings to the hips and shimmers as you walk is a vision of perfection."

"And do my breasts look okay?" I wasn't used to them; not really although it was my decision to have the implants. "I still can't believe what I've done."

"You look lovely, even if I'd have suggested bigger ones for you."

I was scared of the surgery to get these," I said, looking down my new cleavage. "I keep asking myself if I've done the right thing."

"You've promised yourself to a good man and I'm delighted to be giving you away."

I heard the music from the other room. We looked at each other and stood. We walked forwards and each opened our side of the double doors.

I stepped forwards with my benefactor at my side to be united in a way that I'd never thought possible.

I hated the job but it was the only one I could get to tide me over. I'd graduated that year and was saving hard and hoping to get a scholarship.

An applied biological science was my subject area and I was hoping to get into something really cutting edge and challenging. What did I get? Nothing quite

like that; I worked for a cleaning company. We did get a lot of biological decontamination work but that wasn't part of my master plan for life.

I think my stepmother who owned the firm thought it a great joke. We cleaned crime scenes, specialising in the hideous and horrible, the stinking and the unhygienic. Blood and gore, bits of brains and flesh remnants; we cleaned and decontaminated them all.

Fortunately for my sanity, I was usually teamed with Maria and Rosalind. They'd been doing the work for some years and didn't seem to notice things which turned my stomach. They looked after me like a pair of benevolent older sisters. It was because we were a team that I didn't walk off the job.

We had all the equipment, the protective clothing and the masks, the breathing apparatus for where the smells were impossible. It wasn't nice work, but it paid. It paid even though my stepmother seemed to resent paying the 'dirt' money which went with the jobs.

Then Maria left; I think she'd had enough and Rosalind went East to work for her sister who'd started a similar company. I was a team of one, which was awful, even though I didn't get the worst of the jobs.

Then just as fortunately, Oliver joined the company after I'd been working alone for a couple of months. He was endlessly cheerful, with a sense of humour that kept us both sane. Like me, he'd graduated and not been able to get a job, possibly because he'd majored in psychodynamic applications, and no, I don't understand what that means either.

I liked working with Oliver. He was always cheerful, funny, and could make the most awful scenes bearable with his 'get on with it' attitude. He also worked so hard, even though, like me, he wasn't the biggest or the strongest guy in the company.

We made a matched pair really and that made us the butt of many jokes. We were both skinny and under average height; we both wore our hair long. I told

him to catch up; mine was about six inches longer than his. In our protective boots and overalls, we must have looked a bit comical.

We were good friends away from work. We went to the beach, sailed on the lake, and tried to pick up the hottest girls in the bars during the weekend evenings. We weren't very good at that, but it was fun trying.

After a year or so, Oliver started to take days off and I got partnered with whoever was available. I thought the pressure of work and the awful scenes we saw most weeks were preying on his mind. He seemed distracted and we went out less frequently. Then abruptly, he left the company.

I was sad not to have a regular work partner. It made the work harder and it was hard enough. I couldn't understand why Oliver seemed to have dumped me as a drinking buddy either, so I called him one day.

"You're through to Paradise Walk."

The answering machine replied in a girl's voice I didn't recognise, before asking the usual questions and asking the caller to leave a message. I double checked that I had the right number and then mumbled something about asking Oliver to call me.

"It's me, Oliver. I'm returning your call."

"Hi," I mumbled. "What time is it?"

"Oh, sorry, it's four in the morning. I'm just home from work and picked up your message. I forget that not everyone works the same hours."

"It's okay, I'm awake now." I lied there. "I've missed having a regular workmate and I really miss someone to hang about with. Could we get a drink together one evening... that is if you haven't found a girlfriend by now?"

“No, I don’t have a girlfriend,” he said slowly. “A drink would be good. I’ll call you at the weekend.”

We talked a little more and then rang off. It was two weeks later that he called and we met on a Friday evening in what used to be one of our regular hang-outs.

Our conversation wasn’t as easy as I remembered. I guess the lack of those shared experiences when we worked together made it a little slow. Oliver seemed different too. I couldn’t describe what made me think he’d changed.

It wasn’t really his clothes or his hair, although it did look glossier and smoother than before. He wore it loose over his shoulders, which was why it took me a moment to realise that it was him sitting where we used to sit. I’d been used to seeing him with it tied back in a low pony tail.

Soon it seemed that we were talking like old friends who hadn’t seen each other for a while. He asked about my work and I described the usual trail of messes and disasters I’d been clearing up. When it came to his work, he was vague.

“I’m still in cleaning,” he said. “The company I work for does specialist cleaning for private clients. I can’t say anything more because they have very strict confidentiality rules.”

“Does it pay any better?” I asked.

“Sometimes it’s harder to please a client,” he replied enigmatically.

He kept chatting but afterwards I understood that I had no idea what he was doing now. Whatever it was, he seemed to be better paid than I was. When he paid for our tab, waving away my protests, I saw the number of cards there and the cash tucked away in the billfold.

His clothes were much newer than I remembered and much more in fashion. I didn’t ask but there were probably a few expensive designer labels there.

We hugged as he left, pleading a busy day on the Saturday.

I watched him walk away. Something incongruous stayed with me. His hips swayed and his shoes were like Cuban heeled boots; higher heeled Cuban heel boots.

It was a month or so later when Oliver called and invited me to join him, again on a Friday evening.

“It’s my treat,” he announced. “I have a meal for two at Campiglio’s Restaurant. I won the voucher and there’s no one else I could take.”

“You’re still short of a girlfriend?” I joked.

“You could be right,” he laughed as he ended the call.

Campiglio’s Restaurant was one of the fanciest in our town. There was no doubt that it was top quality and equally no doubt that it was way out of my usual price range. We arranged to meet in the bar there.

I knew I wasn’t going to be able to dress for the place. I couldn’t afford it. As I approached the door in my best chinos and neatly pressed shirt, I felt decidedly outclassed by the great and the good of our town arriving in their Mercedes and BMW’s.

“Are you in the right place, sir?” The doorman didn’t hold the door for me as he had for those in front.

“I’m meeting a friend,” I stuttered, feeling quite intimidated. “It’s Oliver...”

I stopped as if suddenly struck dumb. I’d worked with him for ages but I had no idea of his surname.

“That’s all right, sir.” He opened the door and stood to the side. “You’ll find him in the bar to your left.”

It was the hair that I saw first. It was far longer than anyone else in the room and with the lighting



and all the mirrors and glittering decoration it seemed to shimmer too as if it was highlighted. He was talking animatedly to an older man in a suit.

“I stood quietly by his side and coughed discretely to signal that I’d arrived. Oliver turned to me and his face broke into a wide smile. His eyes widened and his lips parted, showing perfect white teeth. He put an arm around to hug me.

I returned the hug, slipping my arm around him too. I remember feeling something I didn’t expect as my hand reached the middle of his slender back. I didn’t give it any real thought as I was more impressed by his black silk shirt with a subtle silver thread in the weave and a decorated statement collar.

“I think they’ve a table ready for us,” he said. “I picked a nice one where we can see everyone.”

He raised an arm to signal to someone behind me. I saw the cuff on his sleeve was decorated too and that the actual cuff was wider than seemed normal. I guessed it was another designer fashion.

I think I ate too much; I certainly drank too much. Oliver seemed to have a way with the place and behaved easily. He was friendly with the waiters and waved to several of the other diners. I kept my head down. I knew that I’d be tongue-tied and awkward if I had to make small talk with any of them.

I went home that night after Oliver put me in an Uber and handed a couple of notes to the driver. Next day, I knew I’d had a good time, but I couldn’t remember much... and my head hurt.

“I didn’t recognise your voice,” I apologised when Oliver called a few days later.

“I wanted to thank you for coming with me the other night,” he said. “I hope you enjoyed it.”

“I really did,” I replied. “Your winning voucher must have entitled you to the best of everything.”

“I have my moments.” He laughed.

We arranged to meet the following Sunday evening at a bar we used to hang around in when we were working together. I got there first and was nursing a beer when Oliver arrived.

I saw him and so, it seemed, did everyone else in the bar. His hair again made everyone look twice, including me. This time, I’d no doubt that he’d had it lightened and styled. It hung perfectly and swayed in style as he moved.

He sat opposite me, put an elbow on the table and his fingers under his chin, looked at me and smiled. That’s when I noticed his fingernails. They were manicured without a doubt.

They weren’t obtrusive and they weren’t painted any colour, but they were too long, too shaped and perfectly natural looking in a way that shouted that they weren’t natural. He saw me looking.

“It’s my new job,” he said, withdrawing his hand from view. “I have to be very clean and very precise. It’s all to do with hygiene.”

“I remember that you said some of your company’s clients were hard to please.”

“That’s right; they’re private clients and it’s about personal service rather than what I used to do when I was working with you.”

“We got some awful jobs in hideous places,” I agreed. “I used to think it was useful experience but now I’m stuck in a routine.”

“You sound as if you could do with a change.”

“It’s my stepmother’s company. If I don’t work for her, she’ll probably tell me to move out of the house.”

That seemed to end that part of our conversation. From there, we spoke about movies we’d seen and

drifted into reminiscence as the drinks came and went.

This time, it was only a couple of blocks to walk home. Once there, I flopped, fully clothed, onto the bed.

A month later, we met again. This time, Oliver had invited me to his local bar in a part of town that I hardly knew. I didn't realise he lived over there. It was for the fashionable and well-heeled, not really for people like me but if Oliver was there, maybe I'd misread my friend.

I felt out of place as soon as I walked through the door. It was like the restaurant all over again. This place was way beyond my budget. I should have declined the invitation but I liked Oliver and hadn't many other friends anyway.

He must have been looking out for me because he came over as soon as I was through the door. We shook hands and half-hugged as old friends do. I noticed at once that he was wearing a perfume; a light and sweet scent. This time his hair was definitely lighter.

"You're looking good," I said. "I can hardly believe the change in you since we worked together. Your hair, your hands, even the way you dress and walk seem to have changed."

"I had to change my image to fit in with the job," he replied. "It's important that the clients like you."

"I've some news too," I said. "I got a room of my own; it's tiny, but it's a one-bed apartment all of my own."

"So are you going to look for a new job too?"

"Do you know of one?"

"I might." He smiled. "Let's sit where we can talk."

We took our drinks over to a booth to the side where the noise of the crowd was less intrusive.”

“Are you wearing makeup?” I blurted out, seeing something I didn’t expect.

“I was but I thought I’d cleaned it all off,” Oliver replied. “Where is it?”

“It’s your left eye,” I replied. “It looks as if there’s some eyeliner or mascara.”

He opened a bag which I hadn’t noticed was over his shoulder. He held a small mirror and dabbed at the eye with a tissue.

“It’s for Halloween,” he said, his face reddening at having been caught.

“This is April,” I pointed out. “It’s a long way from Halloween. Were you being early or having a late celebration?”

“Okay.” He shrugged. “It’s the job.”

“You’ll have to explain.”

“I’ll show you.” He took a wallet from the bag and pulled out a card and a handbill.

“Don’t let your house cleaning be a drag,” the handbill said in big colourful letters. “Call the Housework Queen for a quote.” There was a telephone number, the usual Facebook page and web address, and a few indistinct pictures of girls cleaning things.

The focus wasn’t on their cleaning skills, more on their dress, their legs, their heels and hair. I looked and thought about it. I must have been slow because when I looked up, Oliver was grinning at me like I was stupid.

“I’m one of the girls,” he said with a huge smile.

“That’s crazy. You’re joking.” I looked at him, but his face told me that it wasn’t a joke.

“When I finished working with you, I went to a house cleaning company. It was easier and much less smelly and, to be honest, much less gut

wrenchingly bad.” Oliver paused. “Then something I heard made me seek out this company. They don’t advertise. They send out the leaflet you saw only to people who ask for it.”

“You’ll have to explain.” I shook my head. “I don’t get it.”

“Cleaning isn’t a big part of the job. I do a bit of washing dishes here, some vacuuming there, and maybe even get some laundry to do.”

“So there’s not much heavy work.”

“I don’t get my hands dirty and I don’t break a nail.” He held out a hand with perfectly shaped and obviously manicured nails for me to inspect. “Of course when I’m working, these are painted in some spectacularly fashionable colour.”

“And I guess the makeup was left over from work?”

“I was later than I expected.” He smiled. “There was something extra that the client wanted me to do, so I didn’t have time to clean my makeup off properly. I was careless.”

“You were wearing makeup?”

“Look at the leaflet again.” Oliver sighed. “All the cleaners are boys, but they all dress up as girls to do the cleaning.”

“You mean they’re like French maids.”

“There’s a thought.” Oliver laughed. “I’ve only been a French maid once. I can do the accent, look confused as if I don’t understand, and wave a feather duster like the best of them.

“You are joking.”

“No, it was great fun.” Oliver reached for his mobile. “I think I have a picture somewhere. I had on a blonde wig and I remember doing heavy black eyeliner and shiny red lips.”

“Did you have to wear the dress as well?” I asked incredulously.

“The dress was tight and low-cut. The skirts were just to thigh length with several petticoats to make them stick out. The showed my bum and suspenders whenever I moved. Of course, moving was quite delicate. Six-inch spike heels are difficult; don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

“I can’t believe this.”

“Here’s the picture.”

“That’s never you,” I scoffed. “She’s slimmer by a long way and she has breasts.”

“What makes you think I don’t?” Oliver’s face was serious. “And a tight corset can be effective even on the slimmest of figures.”

“Now I know you’re kidding.” I shook my head. “You don’t have breasts.”

“I thought you’d discovered my secret ages ago.” Oliver blushed. “I remember that your hand went round me and you could feel something I was wearing under my shirt.”

“I remember,” I said slowly.

“That was the bottom of something binding my breasts flat so that they don’t show when I’m dressed as a boy.”

“But why on earth...?”

“I asked myself that question a lot,” he said. “Then I decided to get some small implants. I thought I could hide them easily but when I wanted to show them off, they’d fit in one of those bras designed to make little girls look like big girls.”

“This is too much to take in.” I was struggling to accept it all.

“You don’t believe me?” he asked. “Let’s go to dinner next week, your treat this time. I’ll be your date and if you think I’m a mess, I’ll go home and I promise not to embarrass you.”

“Okay, I’ll call you.” I wondered what I was letting myself in for as I said that.

I think we’d run out of things to say and we left soon afterwards.

I’d chosen a bar about half way between Oliver’s last choice and where I lived. I didn’t have the best feeling about what was to come, so I chose somewhere to be anonymous.

It was a nice place; healthy cuisine was the advertising tag and it looked neither too far upmarket nor too far downmarket. It was a place for young professionals and I thought I could stretch to that for once.

“Let’s meet in the bar,” Oliver suggested when I called him with the arrangements.

So there I was, sitting in the bar early for once, watching the time on my mobile slipping past the appointed time.

“I guess he’s thought better of it,” I thought as I turned to the entrance for about the twentieth time in a few minutes.

Then I saw him... or should I say I saw *her*. The hair was unmistakable; very blonde and striking, hanging loosely down her back. She came through the door, waved and smiled my way, then she was walking towards me.

I can still picture her as she looked then. She wore a tight red dress with straps and a square neckline with the tops of breasts showing. The skirt was short and clung to her thighs as she came towards me, walking effortlessly on red spike heels with gave her a height advantage over me.

I could see male eyes turning to watch her as she held out her arms to me. She pulled in for a hug, with her red purse in one hand going round my back. She pulled me in for a quick peck on the lips, then pulled back and smiled.