

HOSTAGE TO FORTUNE

Rosemary Parker's murder sent shockwaves through the ranks of the PR Company for which she had been the marketing director. She had been found at home, lying on her bed in the sheerest of *négligées*, strangled by a pair of silk stockings.

When the ripples subsided, Heather Wilson was aware of an atmosphere of jubilation. She had only joined the company the week before, as Junior Marketing Manager so knew little of the lack of regard with which the dead woman had been held. Out of curiosity, she questioned one of the admin staff.

“She'd only been a Director for a couple of months and didn't she think she was something. Before that she used to go for anything in trousers,” she was told with a hushed giggle, “You know, she'd been picked up that many times by reps and the like, she had handles on her hips! Everyone hated her – and it was so unfair that Mr Fleming didn't get the job. ”

Heather soon had the full picture. Bill Fleming had worked for the company since he left school and had worked his way slowly but steadily up from office junior to Marketing Manager. He was a very popular man, respected by everyone both above and below his grade. It had been a forgone conclusion that when the Marketing Director retired, Bill would step into his shoes. When that time came, Bill applied. However, unexpectedly, a second applicant appeared.

Rosemary Parker had been the Marketing Director's PA and it was believed that they had been having a torrid affair and that that affair had contributed to the heart attacks that had eventually forced his early retirement. Rumour had it that she had coaxed him into putting her forward as her replacement. It seemed that she had improved her odds by seducing the Chair, the MD and head of Human Resources too.

When news broke that she was the successful candidate, Bill was devastated. It became the office joke that she has gone from bedroom to boardroom in one jump. Heather looked across at him now, his handsome face in repose as he read through the papers on his desk. She smiled as he glanced up at her, "I hear the position of Marketing Director is vacant again Bill."

He frowned, “Not under very nice circumstances though Heather.”

“Are you applying again?”

Bill nodded, “They’re insisting.” He flashed a smile and her heart flipped as it always did. She’d had a crush on him since the first time those deep blue eyes had crinkled into a smile on her first day. He was single, that much she knew, but he didn’t speak about his personal life much and had never suggested that he found her appealing.

She looked down at her desk. Now wasn’t the time to tell him that she was applying for the post too.

The day before the interviews, as she was getting ready to go home, Bill approached her desk, “I’ve just found out that you’ve got an interview too.”

Heather started that looked him in the eye, “Yes I am. I don’t want any bad feelings Bill. I’m well qualified for the position although you have more experience in the company. Can we shake hands and come out fighting on the day?”

He studied her silently for a moment then suddenly smiled and held out his hand, “You’re right of course Heather. You have every right to apply. I’ve seen your CV and it’s very impressive. I wish you luck!”

Heather shook his hand, feeling a ripple of pleasure at his touch. Bill kept hold of it, “I’ve always wanted to ask you and this seems an opportune moment - would you like to meet for a drink tonight?”

“Oh!” Heather flushed with delight, “I never realised you wanted to...” She smiled, “That would be lovely. Where would you like to meet?”

Bill thought for a moment then his face lit up, “I know – why not at yours? We can relax and ... if we want to take it a step further we are in the perfect place.” His fingers moved delicately over the inside of her wrist.

Heather felt faint with desire. It had to be tonight or never. She wouldn’t dream of doing anything with him once she was a director. She could not be seen to fraternise with staff.

“Would eight o’clock be OK?”

She nodded, “I’ll put the wine on ice”

At eight o'clock on the dot, Heather's doorbell rang. Bill caught his breath when she opened it. She was wearing the sheerest of negligees. He walked in and she guided him into the lounge, "Drink?"

He nodded and took the glass she offered. "You look sensational. Stunning."

Heather smiled and purred, "You do too. Why don't we take our drinks into the bedroom?" She stood and held out her hand. Bill took it and let her lead him through the hall and into the softly lit room. She led him to the bed and sat him down, "Don't say anything. We both know why we're here. Whatever happens tomorrow is for tomorrow. Let's just have fun tonight. We're all hostages to fortune."

Bill smiled, "You're right. By the way, I bought you a present, a good-luck token for tomorrow."

Heather smiled back, "How kind. What is it?"

Bill kissed her lips. "Close your eyes."

She obeyed and shivered at the touch of his hand on the nape of her neck, “Is it a necklace?” He wrapped something soft around her neck, Getting impatient, she made another guess, “A scarf?”

His breath fanned her ear, “Remember Heather, we’re all hostages to fortune.”

As she felt the materiel tighten around her neck, she started struggling to breathe. She tried to loosen it and as her fingers plucked vainly at her throat, she realised what Bill had bought her.

A pair of silk stockings.