

I sat quietly while Sir Wilfred read the terms of August's will to his nephew. "I appoint you guardian of Miss Carlotta Pendergast. Take care of my darling Lottie. The annual income from the estate is to be used to support her in the manner to which she is accustomed. Any remainder is yours to do with as you choose. If you outlive her..."

Sir Wilfred stopped reading and said directly to August's nephew, "And I wouldn't be too sure of that based on your current rate of dissipation, young man."

"...the principal becomes yours outright."

He added, "If Miss Pendergast outlives you, Mr. Marcus, the estate goes into a lifetime trust for her maintenance. Mr. Pendergast named me her trustee in that case, as I was an old friend as well as his solicitor, and if called upon I shall endeavor to carry out his wishes." August had known that like most ladies of our era, I had no understanding of money and could not manage the fortune myself. One had trustees to see that one was well kept.

"Don't call her Miss Pendergast. You need not bow and scrape as though she were the Queen. It was presumptive of Uncle to name her after Grandmama. Plain Lottie is more fitting for her station."

Station, indeed! It was August who had plucked me from the chill fog of London. Who had provided the only home I had ever known and the only name to which I had ever answered. My mother had died, and my brothers and sisters could not care for me. August had named me Carlotta Pendergast after his own mother. Only he and our intimates might call me Lottie. We allowed the servants to use "Miss Carlotta," but it was only proper that everyone else say "Miss Pendergast"—including the presumptuous Mr. Marcus. I sent an imploring look to Sir Wilfred to defend me against this indignity, but he only smoothed his muttonchops and patted me on the head as though I were a child.

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Commented [E1]: Okay, this was a very confusing paragraph. You have Sir Wilfred reading, then you said "he concluded" but then he kept reading from the will? I took out he "concluded" because it's confusing to say a character concluded talking and then have them keep talking. Next you have Sir Wilfred interrupt himself reading to talk to the nephew. It was very difficult to discern what was going on without looking closely at the quotation marks. I set aside his aside as it's own paragraph and added an explanatory sentence so it's clear what's going on. Feel free to rewrite that as you see fit. I also replaced the em dashes with ellipses because it felt more appropriate.

Finally I added a space between the double and single quotation marks because CMOS 6.11 says you can do that to aid legibility/clarity. If you don't like it and want to change it back that's fine.

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Commented [E2]: This seems like an odd thing to say, it kind of implies she has foreknowledge that this won't always be the case and knows the reader lives in a more advanced time. Consider rephrasing or taking this out.

"...known that like most ladies I had no understanding of money and could not manage the fortune myself."

This would show Lottie's internalization of the times sexist worldviews.

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Sir Wilfred took his leave. The butler, Hastings, announced breakfast, and we sat down. |
“Great Scott, Hastings, are you trying to ruin me? This creature doesn’t need Dover sole.”

I most certainly did. August and I had always shared it, with cambric tea — our favorites.
I watched eagerly while Hastings deboned the delicacy with his customary skill.

“Give that to me, Hastings, and serve the kedgerec. Lottie can make do with tinned kippers, and she’s lucky I don’t make her eat them in the kitchen. You’ve lost your lofty position, my little charity case,” he sneered. “Now I make the rules.”

The rules apparently did not apply to Mr. Marcus’ appearance— ablutions imperfect, cravat askew, cigarette ash on his lapel. August had always been proud of my own fastidious grooming.

The kippers were unacceptable. Nasty, smoky things; one could hardly taste the fish. I |
quitted the table after one bite and glided out of the breakfast room, projecting, I hoped, a disdain too great for words.

I came upon him that evening in the snug. The Persian rug was strewn about with racing forms, drips from a glass of porter—August’s special vintage—and crumbs from a plate of biscuits.

The brass of him! To degrade August’s meticulous house with his nasty ways. To disrupt the cozy tranquility of my home. To overrule me on every side as if he were the master.

He saw my face darken. “No good sulking, you spoilt little beast. I’m here to stay. There’s nothing you can do about it.”

What had he called me—! And where was he sitting—!

In my chair.

In my special place by the fireside.

Commented [E3]: This semicolon is incorrect. A semicolon connects two related but independent clauses. I would replace this with either a period and make this two sentences or an em dash.

Commented [E4]: It occurs to me that you might be using British English for this story. If you’re going to do that you need to do it consistently. British English uses single quotation for quotes and double quotations for quotes within quotes. You were not doing this initially but then you switched when Lottie was talking about her names. Then you switched back to American English for the dinner scene.

Now you’re spelling “cozy” the British way.

All of this is to say if you want to write in British English to reflect the time period and setting go for it but be consistent about it.

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Commented [E5]: I have a feeling this might be a British thing but I can’t find anything about it online.

I would suggest just having question+exclamation marks here. CMOS discourages this in formal prose but this is first person so I think you can get away with it.

With his boots smearing city soot on my cushion.

When I sat there, with my black hair and green eyes against the purple velvet, August used to call me his fey princess.

“Quite a comedown, isn’t it?” The layabout lolled back and helped himself to one of August’s cigars.

“Do not stare at me, miss. Your kind never seem to know their place. I’m the grandson of a baronet. Even if you could reach the ears of everyone in the Empire, no one would champion you against me.”

He glanced at the door to be sure the domestics were out of earshot.

“You’ve guessed that I killed Uncle August, I suppose? It wasn’t so difficult. I found his will and saw that only you and he stood between me and my fortune. I can’t kill you just yet. If you died right away it might look suspicious to old Wilfie. But you just mind yourself or you may be reunited with Uncle August sooner than you expect.”

I bristled with disgust. This brute had killed August! He had threatened my life! And what could I do about it?

The authorities would not charge him. Sir Wilfred would not confront him.

There was nothing for it.

I must kill him.

On Christmas Eve, I secreted myself amidst the decorations on the main landing. He staggered in at midnight, full of bonhomie and Smoking Bishop. After he struggled up the grand staircase, I mewled plaintively to distract his attention from his footing. Then, I wound between his feet to upset him.

Mr. Marcus teetered, groped for the top step, and missed it.

Commented [E6]: You really know your stuff!

Commented [E7]: Well done, did not see this coming. You had me fooled.

I dashed beneath the Christmas tree before anyone else saw me. Our eyes locked and he had one infinite instant of sobriety.

And he knew.

“No! Oh, no!” He missed his mad grab for the banister and tumbled backward down all thirty-nine stairs with a terrific crash.

He had been right. It wasn't so difficult.

His kind never seem to land on their feet.

