

# Mistress Adelaide & Her Travelling Gimp Circus



A Steam-Punk Tale

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## Mistress Adelaide's World

Adelaide Spencer lives in a Britain not so different from our own, but one in which the only form of locomotion is based on steam and in which electricity plays only a small part. There are no telephones and of course, no computers. Morals and values largely reflect those of Victorian England but in Adelaide's Britain it is the members of the female sex that are the decision makers, the owners of property and the leaders.

Men have a lower status in society, are not free to make decisions such as their choice of career and are expected to be of use to women. Over the years it is women that have been the inventors, the entrepreneurs and the artists. Men have become used to living in their shadow and one group has turned the act of male servitude into a high art. Gimps are a caste that are recognised for their devotion to the role of the submissive male, who seek to exemplify that role in everything that they do and who train (or are trained) for years in some cases to achieve the highest abilities in the service of women. Gimps can be found in the houses of the wealthy, in Gimp Houses where their services are available by the hour or the day and, in one exceptional circumstance, in a travelling Gimp Circus that displays their skills to those that would otherwise never be able to afford to encounter them.

Considered by some as little better than prostitutes, Mistress Adelaide's circus Gimps offend those who see Gimp culture as elite and those that view travelling entertainments as a trivial diversion of the working classes. Adelaide Spencer disagrees.

This is the story of one visit, to one village on their recent tour.

## The Hasebury Road

For the buzzard scouting the air currents over the Radway ridge, the sight below on the Hasebury Road was something not seen before. A convoy of four steam traction engines, belching smoke with their efforts to climb the hill, was being driven along the road towards Hasebury. Caravans and trucks were coupled behind each engine. The whole road train, over 100 yards long, moved forward slowly at little more than walking pace but relentlessly.

The convoy breasted the top of the hill. The hard-working beat of the steam engines eased. In the van towed by the third engine, James Hinter, leant forward as far as the chain from his collar to the back of his cage would allow. By peering out through the vents in the side of the van, he could just see the Warwickshire Plain stretched out before him; a patchwork of fields and woodlands, criss-crossed by winding lanes. Apart from the ruler-straight scar of the London to Birmingham Railway testifying to the modern era of steam locomotion it was a scene that Anne Shakespeare might have used as a backdrop to one of her plays. As the sound of the engines eased, James heard alarm cries from birds as the vehicles passed by, disturbing their roosting, and then a curious clattering noise which he finally realised was the sound of a hill-top semaphore messaging tower.

The traction engines had pulled steadily up the slope. Now the convoy's destination could be seen under the combination of a pall of smoke from the nearby towns and factories and the lowering clouds of a threatening thunderstorm. James, sensing that the journey, and his confinement, was coming to its end, sat back on the floor of his cage.

The sun glinted off the words "Morgan le Fay" on the polished brass of the nameplate of the first engine. In the driving cab, Jane Corby pushed the goggles she wore to guard against sparks from the engine up from

her eyes. She pointed towards a church spire not far ahead. "That's our stop tonight - Hasebury Under Whittonbank," she announced to Allison, her stoker and co-driver.

"I'll tell them," Allison said and stepped out of the cab, edging her way back around the traction engine's coal bunker, swinging from one of the barley-sugar twist brass pillars that held up the engine's canopy. Jane watched her go – she was as impressed by her agility as by her strength with the shovel. Allison sprang across the coupling to the van that their engine was pulling, stood on the van's balcony and tapped on the engraved glass window of the caravan. The smiling face of a middle-aged woman appeared from behind velvet drapes. She wore a Chinese silk dressing gown and her hair was piled up on her head and wrapped in a turban. "Hasebury is in sight, Miss Adelaide," she announced.

"Thank you, Allison," the woman responded with a smile. Adelaide was pleased. All was going to time. They would be able to give the gimps a chance to get out of their cages soon. She returned to the desk that was set up at one end of her caravan and opened a green leather bound ledger. She looked down the list of names and across at the list of exercises that the Gimps had demonstrated their capabilities in. She was pleased with the current troupe. Their dedication to their art and the skills they could show were a credit to their caste.

The engine began to follow the downward slope from the Radway ridge. The Morgan Le Fay and its caravan was followed by the rest of the convoy. The journey down was almost as slow as the ascent; the engines braking to avoid running away and with drag brakes dropped from the vans so that they would not try to overtake the engines. In his cage, James felt every bump and rut in the poorly made-up road.

Eventually the convoy came to halt on the edge of a small green between Hasebury church, the village hall and the local public house. Jane pointed to the poster on the old oak tree at one corner of the green. "At least we're expected!

"For Two Nights Only," the poster announced in large colourful lettering with the following two days' dates, "On Hasebury Green by kind permission of the Village Council and Lady Henderby: Mistress Adelaide's Travelling Gimp Circus."

The circus was well known. Travelling shows of all kinds were a great tradition in the countryside but this had its own, very specific reputation. Without animal acts or clowns (Adelaide secretly felt that they were disturbing and unnatural); without a freak show or other side shows, without high wire or trapeze acts; the Circus existed purely to display the skills and capabilities of the Gimps.

With a practised routine, the drivers positioned their trailers. Miss Adelaide's van was parked to one side. The second trailer and its accompanying caravan, less ornate than Miss Adelaide's, was manoeuvred into the middle of the green and the third and fourth parked alongside. The four engines, "Morgan Le Fay", "Lady Macbeth", "Clytemnestra" and "Lizzie Borden" were lined up next to each other. The green became a small village within the village.

The arrival of the convoy was as much an event for the local people as the circus itself. It was a farming community with little for the way of entertainment save the village cricket and soccer teams and a social life that centred around the pub. The men of the village were still hard at work on the farms but within minutes a small crowd of women was gathering, watching as the locomotive drivers opened the doors on the side of the third trailer. As the doors were folded back, the watching crowd caught their first glimpse of Mistress Adelaide's performing Gimps, peering out of their small cages, blinking in the late afternoon light.

From the second caravan, a woman clad in a long black riding habit, with a black top hat and veil, climbed down. She strode purposefully across to the Gimp cages and freed four of the occupants, waving them across to the second trailer, under the threat of a long riding whip.

Jane Corby and Allison leaned back against their engine, resting after their day's efforts. They were joined by the crew of the other traction engines; all eight girls in their blue overalls, sweat-streaked and coal-dirty from their journey. Allison took a colourful, decorated enamel jug from a shelf in the cab of her locomotive and filled it with boiling water from a brightly polished brass tap on the side of the locomotive's boiler. "Tea?" she suggested. Each of the girls gratefully filled a mug with the refreshing brew, keen to take the taste of coal dust from their throats.

"Vesta hasn't wasted any time getting the boys to work," Allison said nodding towards the woman in black. The group watched as the men were set to unpacking and erecting the tent that would house the coming performances. "Best to get it done while there's still light." said Jane looking at the darkening sky.

James Hinter, one of the four chosen for the work, stared back at the traction engine crews as he bent to pick up one of the heavy wooden posts that would support the tent.

"Not thinking lustful thoughts, are you James," the woman in black called to him with a flick of the whip's tail just close enough to remind him that he should be paying attention to his work. There was little brutality in their handling of the Gimps but convention demanded they be reminded of their status by such gestures.

"No, Ma'am, Miss Vesta," James responded. It was less than the truth. His eyes had been caught by the sight of one of the girls, Sasha, - auburn hair piled on her head under a knotted scarf, her arms muscled from her work firing her engine. As she lent back against one of the Lizzie Borden's great wheels, half as high again as herself, the fastening of her overall open to the waist and nothing beneath, the sight of her was, to say the least, distracting. He felt the consequences of his distraction as his cock tightened against the constraint of the locked cage her wore between his legs as a chastity preserver. An essential feature of Gimp culture was the subjugation of sexual desire to the control of others but even the best of them needed this mechanical aid to control. He winced with discomfort. Vesta smiled, recognising he had been appropriately reminded of the need to subdue his cravings. With Vesta's admonishment, and a tight sensation in his cock he turned back to his task.

James' view of the girl Sasha had been shared by another from a little further away. Outside the pub that overlooked the green, Tim, the pub's bar-boy, saw the girl by the engine too as he stacked up crates of empty bottles from the previous night. He was immediately smitten.

Erecting the tent was hard work for the four men. Hefting the heavy poles, fixing the guy ropes, hammering the pegs that held them taut, rigging the heavy canvas panels of the sides of the tent; all needed effort and cooperation. When they came to pull the canvas roof up they had the help of a cable and a winch on one of the engines but they were all soon sweating. Vesta kept them hard at work but they had done it many times before and tonight at least the weather was still dry – handling the ropes and canvas in the wet was far worse. The threat of the storm seemed to have passed and now the end of the day's sunlight streamed across Hasebury Green. They took perhaps two hours until the tent was erected, the performance arena within laid out, benches installed, and a small booth for the sales of tickets erected.

It was beginning to get dark. The warm glow of oil lamps shone out from the two caravans. Beside Jane's engine there were the red glowing tips of the crews' cigarettes as they enjoyed an end of day smoke. To the Gimps, their supervisor announced "Good boys," and told them, "Now back in your trailer." The four men trudged off, happy enough to go back to their cages with the promise of some hour's rest and a meal.

For Jane and the others, there were the engines to shut down. Just one would remain in steam, it's boiler proving hot water for the vans and its simple generator providing the power for the few incandescent bulbs that glowed over the entrance to the performance tent. They weren't bright but for most people, used to oil lamps and candles, the light in these glass balls was little short of a miracle; an attraction in their own right.

Miss Adelaide herself saw that the men were fed and watered and settled for the night. For James, her words of encouragement as she brought his food bowl each night were one of his greatest pleasures. Her smile and the pat of her hand on his head would be sufficient to sustain his dreams in the night ahead.

As night fell, the three little communities that made up the Circus, settled down to sleep; the engineers in their tents beside their machines, Miss Adelaide in her van and her performers in their own. The eight circus Gimps made themselves as comfortable as they could in their cages.

James had spent six months now with the circus. Some of the others had spent many more time than six years. It had been strange when he finished his schooling at eighteen to be told that this would be his future life. It was normal for a male child to be directed into some form of employment or other by the matriarch of his family but James's family had no previous connections with the Gimps and he never had discovered why this route was chosen for him. He felt he had responded to the challenge but he had found the training hard. It was nothing that most men did not have to do, but it had to be done with the precision and regard for tradition that the Gimps were renowned for. There had been beatings, but in conscience none as bad as those he had received at school. He had been bound, restrained, silenced and locked in chastity. He had been chained so his body could learn the poses. He had learned to provide sexual service and to accept the control of his own sexual activity. In time he had learned the duties of service and of obedience and had learned how to carry himself in the approved manner, providing the recognised acts of acknowledgement and respect for his female betters. And, for now at least, he had the opportunity to display his skills; to help as Mistress Adelaide put it 'increase the understanding of the strength that can be shown in submission, the empowerment that comes from surrender'. As part of the Circus he was helping to spread the awareness of Gimp culture to the wider community. Had he been sent to a Gimp House, providing the highest class of service to those who could pay, he would have no doubt had a more comfortable life and the opportunity to find a woman that would take him on permanently but he preferred his life on the road. The trainers were fair, the work was hard but not onerous and the satisfaction from a successful show filled him with pride. Now, he couldn't imagine another life.

## The Hasebury Nag

The White Horse Inn by Hasebury Green had been known as "The Hasebury Nag" for as long as Jennifer could remember and she had lived in the village all her life. It was small, though large enough for the village's needs and though the building's twisted wooden frame made it look ramshackle it showed every sign of standing for as many years as it had already.

Jennifer was standing at the bar, enjoying a pint of the landlady's own beer, along with three of her friends, Janice, Aimee and Nisha. The bar-boy, Tim, had just served them and was wiping up some spills on the counter. Jan Adams, the landlady was busy cleaning glasses at the other end of the bar.

"It's been good of her Ladyship to sponsor this," Jennifer nodded towards the green. "Can't say I recall anything like this here before." She fumbled in her leather jerkin for a cigarette. It was starting to get dark but they could still see the activity on the green as the circus tent was being erected. The landlady turned up the oil lamps that stood behind the bar; their warm light gave the bar a cosy feel.

Janice chimed in, "Well, you know how she is. Always up for anything 'educational', in't she? Probably hoping to pick up a few tricks to keep that man of hers in order."

"I'm not sure she needs any new tricks from what I hear from my Jack when he's had to do stuff up at the Hall. She's pretty used to getting what she wants. Don't take no nonsense, no more than the rest of us do."

Aimee shook her head. "Well, there's some as could learn a thing or two, I'm sure. That new young couple up at Ivy Cottage, Nancy is it? – she lets him out regular without a leash on. I even caught him talking to my Terry, taking his mind of his work. Had to have a word with her, I did. Claimed she hadn't realised he was off on his own."

Jennifer took a sip of her beer and shook her head. That wasn't the sort of thing you expected around here, it was a traditional village with traditional ways. Men should know their place and women should make sure they went on knowing it. Maybe the circus would help remind folk how things were meant to be. "Your Terry wouldn't pick up any ways like that though, would he? He's a good lad, knows how things are."

"Yes, good as gold. Even when it comes to lapping the love groove."

"Aimee!" Nisha was sometimes a little prudish. It wasn't the sort of remark she would make, even in a pub.

"Well, you won't find me complaining about my Jack, either. He's very good like that. Always happy to oblige when I fancy a bit. I mean, I know it's a married woman's right and all..."

"Well, any woman really."

"Aimee!!"

"I know it's a woman's right and all but it's nice that he doesn't need to be bullied into it. Like I said, he's good like that."

"So, what do you know about the show? I've just seen the poster and they were putting the tent up this afternoon, three of the men – big strong lads by the look of them."

"Listen to her! You'll be running off to join them. Think they'd be good lapping the love groove?"

Even Aimee blushed at this. "I hear as how Miss Adelaide was the principal tutor in domestic discipline at Cheltenham Ladies College, taught some of the finest in the land how to manage their men. There were rumours of her and one of the Princes – suggestions that she held greater sway over him than did his wife which wasn't considered proper at Court. I hear as how she shows off just what you can get men to do, if you try hard enough."

"I'm not sure it's worth the trouble. Most nights I'm happy just to get to sleep. The farm's as much work as anyone wants to have to worry about. Anyway do you want to try your bossy ways with Tim. I think we all need another drink."

At the mention of his name, Tim, the bar-boy looked up and smiled. It was always good to keep the regulars happy. They were all talk, of course. If you believed half of what was said in the bar he have been bent across the lap of each of them every week for the two years he had been working here. The truth was that, while he had a steady job, the sort of relationship with a strong minded woman that any sensible lad would aspire to hadn't come his way. He wasn't a virgin, what man of working age was? You got used to the casual assumption of being sexually available in a job like his and sometimes it was impossible to avoid. Even so he yearned for a strong woman to be a lifetime partner to. He felt he would never find it in Hasebury. In fact it was quite the reverse, with the nearest thing that he had to a sex life here, he thought. He stared out across the bar and out through the window to the village green where the circus was setting up. What would it be like to be part of that travelling community he wondered. What would it be like to be one of the troupe of performers?

Aimee turned towards him. "Don't mind them, Tim Farracut," she said. "They mean no harm."

"That's all right Miss Aimee, I know. What can I get you?"

“The same again for us all. Four pints of best.”

Tim lined up the glasses and set to on the beer pump. There was a skill in the slow pull needed to fill the glass with just the right amount of head and he took pleasure in the way that all four glasses settled to just the same level. Aimee pushed some coins across the bar. She said, “Will you be watching the show, Tim?”

He blushed, uncertain whether she had seen into his head. “I’m not sure. I doubt if Miss Adams will give me time off.”

“You should ask her. The pub will be empty anyway while the show is on – everyone will be over in that tent.”

Among the women the talk turned to the traction engines that the circus had come with and how they were so much grander and more finely decorated than the ones they used on their own farms and how maybe a night out seeing how the Gimps were treated might encourage their own men to behave a little better. And they sat with their beer in the warmth of the pub with the glow of the lamps and thought that the world could be no better than it was.

## In The Outhouse

Two nights before, Tim Farragut had just finished work for the evening. The chairs had been stacked on the tables. The glasses were all clean and set back on the shelves behind the bar. Miss Adams had long gone to bed and now it was time for him to do the same. As he made his way across the yard at the back of the pub towards the outhouse where his own room was, he heard a noise coming from the stack of barrels in one corner.

The figure of a woman, a long cloak reaching the ground with a hood that reached up over her head and shadowed her face emerged. Tim stopped. “Hullo,” the figure said.

He knew what the woman wanted, without knowing her identity. It had been a regular occurrence, every four weeks, for the last few months. Each encounter had left him puzzled, confused and ashamed. “I suppose you want...”

“Yes. You understand. I have my needs.”

“But...”

“I’ve explained, before. It’s not much to ask and in return you have your home here without problems. Lady Henderby might not look kindly on a bar-boy that thought himself able to ignore the calls of his betters. Besides, from my recollection, you have not been unwilling in our previous encounters.”

It was true, Tim thought to himself. When he had first been approached by this mysterious woman with her half-enticing, half-threatening seduction he had been flattered and had lost his virginity to her without a care. He had enjoyed their physical entanglements, delighting in the lessons that this woman had given him in the arts of love. But now, her repeated returns, the continuing mystery of her identity, the combination of threats and enticement, the fact that she always kept her face veiled throughout their carnal encounters left him feeling used. Although it wasn’t clear to him what influence Lady Henderby might have on his fate, he didn’t feel able to risk the threat.

The woman seemed to sense his acceptance and led Tim by the hand into his own room. She shook her head at it’s untidy state but pulled the bed covers back and pushed Tim down on his back. “Shh, stay still, pet,” she said quietly reaching for his belt buckle, unfastening it and pulling his trousers and pants down as far as his knees.



She knelt astride him. She pushed the hood of her cloak back and Tim could see that her face was, as ever, veiled. With one gloved hand she felt for his cock and began to squeeze. Steadily it became erect. "Good boy," the woman said. "Very good indeed. You will soon be ready. This needn't take long."

For Tim, that assurance was both a comfort and a curse. The squeeze of her hand was a delight and he would be happy for it to be indefinitely prolonged but to be here on his own bed, being ridden to orgasm by this veiled woman was a humiliation, that climax would bring to an end in a way both pleasurable and shameful.

The woman eased herself down onto Tim's erect shaft. He could not see the expression on her face hidden behind her veil. He saw nothing of her body, her long skirt hiding the fact that she was wearing no undergarments, but the ease with which she accommodated him told of her arousal. She slid herself forward against him, pressing herself against him and pulling back in turn until her quiet mutters of pleasure became more vocal and louder. The animal-like nature of their coupling ensured Tim's continued tumescence until he could control it no longer and his orgasm broke.

The woman stayed in place, leaning forward against Tim's chest, her veiled face close to his ear. "There," she whispered. "That was very good. You are very good."

And then, as quickly as she had arrived, she had gone.

## Henderby Hall

The gates of Henderby Hall were perhaps two hundred yards from the Hasebury Nag but it was a world away in every other respect. The Hall was by far the grandest house for miles; a Tudor brick mansion built into the ruins of an abbey that was at least as old again. Alicia Vance, fifth Lady Henderby, felt it had been a great good fortune that her forebears had been unable to remodel the house in more recent times. The house retained its small rooms, open fires and twisting passages. Of course, that had made the installation of modern conveniences such as piped water, gas lighting and heating a challenge and they still did not extend far into the house, but that was more of an inconvenience for the staff than it was for her.

She had made one concession to modernity. The stables, although still holding the horses needed to run the estate, had been extended with a similarly styled block that held her pride and joy, the Stanley Steam Sports, the car that she so delighted in driving at a ferocious pace around the local roads.

This evening, the Stanley had been readied by Alicia's head groom at short notice. She had dashed back from somewhere, declared that she needed the steamer and he had needed to work quickly to get it ready. He tipped his cap as she strode across to the garage, resplendent in a long driving coat, hat, veil and gauntlets. "All ready, your Ladyship. Full pressure and plenty of water.

"Efficient as ever, Boscoe," she said with a smile taking her place behind the steamer's steering tiller. The Steamer's iron clad wheels were soon crunching their way down the gravel drive as Alicia Vance headed off at speed, drawing cries from the hall's peacocks as she sped past them through the gates of the estate.

From a window on the first floor Harold, her husband, watched her leave. He hoped it heralded a quiet night, one where he would not be troubled by her quest for a child to continue the female line. It was hardly his fault, he thought, that so far he had only been able to sire sons.

His hopes were soon dashed though. There was a knock at the door. Without waiting for a word from him, her Ladyship's housekeeper entered.

"She left strict instructions, I'm afraid, sir.

It was humiliating. The housekeeper produced a small, dark, lacquered box that contained the device that she had to lock around Harold's cock. He had been forced to wear this whenever her Ladyship was not around, ever since his wife had discovered a cartomancer who claimed to predict exactly where in her cycle her Ladyship would be most likely to conceive a girl. It would prevent, she said "unnecessary dilution of such fertility as may be needed at the critical moment."

Now their sex lives were ruled by the fall of tarot cards. The empress, the sun and the three of cups, showed that her Ladyship was fertile; the ace of cups that she would give birth to a girl. The combination of all cards drawn together would mean that Harold could expect a strenuous evening's sexual activity and his member had better be ready for it. It was surprising how often the Tarot fell that way. He was begin to suspect from the cartomancer's sniggers at the sessions that she insisted he attend with his wife that she might be influencing the fall of the cards at his expense.

"The trousers, Sir." His housekeeper's words were less a request than a command but he did as asked, unfastened them and allowed them to fall to the floor. "And hands." Harold was never sure why he needed to put his hands behind his head for the fitting but he complied.

The housekeeper knelt down in front of Harold and drew his pants down, exposing his genitals. The air in the room was cool and the touch of the metal cage as it was slid into place colder still. The housekeeper reached for the bunch of keys that hung from a chain at her waist and selected one from amongst the others that secured such as the wine cellar, the pantry, her mistress's closet and desk. She used it to fasten the lock that held Harold's cage in place. Her work done, she stood up. "Thanks you, Sir. I've finished. Now, if you'll excuse me. I need to take delivery of today's provisions."

"Yes, of course," said Harold, standing with his trousers on the floor and pants about his knees until she had left the room.

No sooner had the house keeper finished her ministrations than Harold heard the sound of the front door bell. Moments later, the downstairs maid appeared, holding a tray with a visiting card upon it.

"A caller for her Ladyship., sir, but she won't be back for an hour. We think as how you should speak with her in the meantime. She is in the drawing room."

Harold looked at the card. 'Adelaide Spencer', it announced, 'Travelling Theatrical Events'. She was, Harold assumed, something to do with the circus that had set up on the green. He was used to going along with the suggestions of the female staff. He went downstairs.

The sight of Mistress Adelaide Spencer was not one most men would wish to experience when their membrum virile was enclosed within a rigid and unrelenting steel cage as Harold's was. She wore, as was the fashion, a long skirted dress with a pronounced bustle, high neck and sleeves that were fuller above the elbow and tight on the forearm. Where her outfit differed from that which might be seen at the more fashionable local events was not only in the fact that Miss Adelaide was more stiffly and severely corseted and her bosom more strongly underpinned but that her dress was made from a fine black leather.

That, together with the look of disdain that she wore, apparently from having to be met by a man, were sufficient to power Harold's innate submissive and fetishistic desires. It was easy for him to see how she had conceived, established and now ran the Circus. "I'm sorry," he began apologetically drawing a raised eyebrow from the caller that seemed to suggest his response was only to be expected. "My wife will return shortly, I believe." The woman put her head on one side and smiled indulgently as if to say, "I know you don't have the least idea where she is but thank you for trying to be polite." Harold, uncomfortable at the way the woman seemed to see into his mind, suggested that they sit.

As they did so, Miss Adelaide crossed her legs. Harold caught a glimpse of the shining toe of a highly polished boot peeping out from under the hem of her skirt. The momentary look of appreciation, the consequent twinge as his cock stiffened against its cage and his resulting sharp intake of breath drew an amused look from Adelaide. She was used to such responses.

"I hope the arrangements on the village green were adequate."

"Yes, perfectly, thank you, but please do not feel obliged to make small talk. I am quite happy to wait for Alicia."

Harold fell silent and was irritated that this seemed to improve Adelaide's mood as she looked around the room taking in the décor and ornamentation that his wife's family had spent so much effort on over the years. "Amusing pictures," she remarked to no one in particular and certainly not to Harold, as she got to her feet and walked to the fireplace. On either side hung two large canvases of mythological scenes by the renowned Saskia Rembrandt. To the left was a scene entitled "Europa Confounding Zeus" in which a naked woman was in the act of castrating a black bull against a Mediterranean landscape, while to the right, "Penelope and the Suitors" showed a woman sliding a body, wrapped in a cloth of her own weaving, into the waters. A blood stained sword stands beside her while the other suitors, bound, watch on in trepidation. On the horizon a small boat heralded the return of her husband Odysseus. Harold found they both gave him a deep sense of unease, especially the "Penelope" which showed the heroine addressing her task with relish.

"Adelaide!" The voice of Harold's wife from the door brought an end to his discomfort. "I'm so sorry I was late. A problem with the Stanley."

"Not at all. Your husband has made great efforts to entertain me."

"Oh dear, then I must apologise for that as well," Alicia laughed. She turned to her husband. "Thank you Harold, I shall take care of my guest now." Harold, clear that he was no longer needed, nodded and took one last look at Adelaide in her corseted leather dress and boots. He regretted it instantly as his caged cock responded and, with a whimper, left the two women to their talk.

## **Tim & The Cage Van**

While Alicia and Adelaide were talking, Tim Farracut was helping to shut up the pub for the night. Looking out across the village green, he could see the lights around the vans. As the landlady grunted and headed off to her room he stared at the warm glow of lights from the vans, wistfully. He turned the last of the bar stools upside down on the tables. The floor would be swept and new sawdust put down in the morning.

His work done, he felt himself drawn to the cluster of tents and vans. Somehow he found himself standing next to the van where the Gimps were kept in their cages. Two of the cages were empty but the others were occupied. He'd never seen one close up, still less six like this. In a world where men were generally subject to women, the Gimps were legends; quintessential men, skilled in demonstrating the arts of service and obedience. The six were all shackled, all naked apart from the black leather hoods that was the badge of their calling. In some ways the shackles were merely conventional – they were solid enough of course but a Gimp wore his cuffs and collar as badges of honour amongst his caste. The hoods they wore, although practical in allowing sight or speech to be restricted marked them out as members of a submissive elite. Tim could see that they were obviously content in their chains; some sitting quietly in their cages staring out, others already sleeping. Tim was fascinated by the sense of calm, the sense that if the shackles or the cage bars were gone, the Gimps would remain. One raised his head and turned it towards him. Tim went to back away.

A voice behind him said, "Don't worry he can't see you. The zips in his hood, over his eyes, are closed."

Startled, Tim turned around to be confronted by the auburn haired girl he had seen earlier. Where her hair had been tucked up under a scarf before, now it was loose, hanging down straight behind her almost to her waist. "I'm sorry, I wasn't doing ... I suppose I shouldn't be here..."

"You're all right. You won't open those cages unless you're a master locksmith and besides they wouldn't leave. The Circus is their life. There aren't many places for a performing Gimp and we look after them well. Don't we boys?"

Her question was answered by a murmuring of assent from those awake in the cages.

Tim looked at her. She was smoking a thin hand rolled cigarette, taking slow deep pulls on it that seemed to burn away a quarter of it each time. As she finished it she pinched out the end and trod it out under her boot. She half turned, a shaft of light from a van nearby fell across her. He saw that around her neck she wore a gold necklace with the name 'Sasha'. She caught his look as his gaze travelled down from the necklace to the gap in her overalls. She smiled again and shook her head. "You boys. All the same. But you have someone who looks after you, I am sure. You are not free to do as you choose, that I know."

Tim shook his head. "I work in the pub. In return, the landlady gives me lodgings but that's as far as it goes."

"So you do as you choose? But like our Gimps you stay in your cage?"

Tim wasn't sure why he said what he said next. "How do you get to join the circus?"

Sasha looked at him for a moment. There was something about the boy that encouraged her mischievousness. "Let me tell you," she said, quietly, circling around until she was standing behind him. She grabbed his arms and pulled him back against her – the strength she had gained from her stoking duties allowing her to easily overpower him. She put her hand over his mouth stifling any cry. As she pulled him back, Tim was pressed close against her. "You wait around behind these vans until you feel your arms pinned behind you with rope and a gloved hand over your mouth. Then, when you wake up, you find that you are part of our troop."

Tim struggled against her and she released him, laughing.

"You're teasing me."

"Yes," she said. "It's fun." Pulling him close to her she kissed him full on the lips while he, startled by the intimacy, found himself coyly resisting. He tasted tobacco and smelled coal dust and grease. She laughed again and let him go. "I have to work. But you kiss nicely, for a boy, in case nobody has told you."

"I didn't do anything."

"That's right. Too many boys try too hard. You don't have to."

It was only after that he thought, 'for a boy?' Did that mean she kissed girls too?

## **Alicia's Discussion**

Once her husband had left the room, Alicia turned towards Adelaide and leant forward with a conspiratorial air. "I need to confide in you," she said, her voice at once breathy and tense. "Can I count on your discretion?"

"Of course," Adelaide responded. The two had a long history of shared confidences from when Alicia had been studying at Cheltenham and Adelaide had started teaching there. As senior girl, Alicia had helped

Adelaide a great deal, she acknowledged. Cheltenham girls could be as cruel to their teachers as most women were to their men but the teacher and student had formed a bond. Alicia had sensed that Adelaide had extraordinary talents in her field and had made it possible for Adelaide to fit in quickly at the College, to the benefit of all. Adelaide knew that Alicia's help had been invaluable in the successful development of her career and the two had shared a friendship ever since. Alicia admired Adelaide's independent spirit and her understanding. Adelaide admired Alicia's faithfulness to her; she had been ever grateful for the loyalty Alicia had given her when she left Cheltenham. Plenty of others had not done the same.

"It concerns my reason for being late. I have just returned from a reading."

"A reading?"

"The Tarot. I find it an infallible guide. I have been using it to chart my chance of conceiving an heir. And I have had good news. It seems I am carrying a daughter. The Ace of Cups declares it."

Adelaide was sceptical of such arts but said nothing to discourage Alicia. "You must be so pleased. From your past confinements, I had thought Harold was not capable of it."

"That is a point of view I share. To solve it, I have been making alternative arrangements. I keep Harold caged and only make use of him at such times as I have already bedded another. My technique is such that Harold's sperm has no chance of fertilising but without his suspecting. He is grateful enough to be able to come! He has no idea that he will not be the father of another child of mine. Two boys are more than enough! Anyway, it seems from my reading that my attempt a month ago was successful. Harold will only recall that he was released from his cage and permitted to bed me at around the right time. I will let him know the happy news soon."

"And the true father? He will make no claim upon you? He will not try to contact Harold?"

"That is what I want to discuss with you. I think the father is unlikely to cause trouble but he is unlike my husband physically. It worries me that the child might be recognised as his by others. It might be better if the father were not to remain in the village."

Adelaide thought she had a good idea of what was coming next as Alicia went on, "I wondered if you could find some way to have him accompany your troupe? A new life away from here might well be the making of him."

Adelaide found Alicia's request surprising but not disturbingly so. She assumed the father would be from Alicia's household, perhaps a tenant or perhaps from the village. In her experience the landed gentry of the country had little sentiment when it came to the lives of those that lived on their estates. Besides, it was the natural way of things that men should fall into line with the needs of women when it came to matters as important as the succession of a land-owning line. She would, of course, help her friend, if she could.

"Perhaps. Do you think he is amenable to being persuaded to join us?"

"Persuaded or perhaps compelled. After all didn't you teach us that persuasion by words or compulsion with ropes are only two sides of the same coin when it comes to bending the will of a male?"

Adelaide could not contradict Alicia, she had obviously remembered her classes well. "Well, I will see. I need to explore the possibility with my trainers, I cannot just foist another Gimp on them, you understand, especially one that is, am I right, completely untrained?"

Alicia nodded her agreement. "Untrained, yes, but biddable, I am sure."

"And evidently fertile," laughed Adelaide, "though that is less of requirement from my perspective."

"My needs were different," Alicia smiled patting her belly. "But thank you, I am sure you will do what you can. You can find him at the pub. He works there. A tall young man with long blonde hair."

"Does he have a name?"

"Yes, I'm sure he does but for the moment I have quite forgotten it." She changed the subject. "Now, you must tell me how is life on the road? It must be very different from Cheltenham."

Adelaide nodded. She still wasn't sure why she had chosen her current career path, exchanging working with the daughters of privilege for the uncertainty of the travelling troupe she now ran. Staying at Cheltenham hadn't been an option after the problem with the Palace, of course, but the circus? Where had that idea even come from?

"We are a close family, my performers, my road team and the Gimps. The audiences are kind to us. We take our homes with us and, as long as the weather is not too cruel, we have a comfortable life. We see the country and, perhaps, we help a few people along the way."

"I know you helped our class at Cheltenham. Did you not think of setting up in consulting rooms? I am sure that many would have sought you out."

"Perhaps and maybe in the future. For now, I must confess, I enjoy the travelling life and I suspect I get to help more than could ever afford private consultations. I cannot pretend to altruism, though, there is an excitement each time we put on a show."

"I can see that. But do not downplay the importance of your talents. Without your guidance, life with Harold would be much more difficult."

"Well, just because it is the norm for women to take the leading role, doesn't mean they are magically equipped to do it. It may be our destiny but sometimes destiny needs a little help."

"Talking of destiny, I could arrange a reading from my cartomancer, if you liked. To see if this idea of mine will benefit the circus."

"Thank you, but no. For this I have to trust the judgement of my troupe."

## **The Girls In The Van**

In the performers' caravan, Christa, Ginny, Sophie and Eleni were playing cards, resting before it was time to get ready for the show. Vesta was sitting reading. Two of the Gimps, Henry and James had been brought in to provide such services as the girls might need. There was a tap on the van's door. Vesta answered it to see Sasha, one of the engine stokers, standing outside. Ginny watched as the two had what seemed to be an urgent discussion before Vesta went outside. Ginny carried on with her card game.

"What's happening?" Sophie asked.

"I don't know. A problem with one of the engine's perhaps. Or maybe one of the Gimps, I suppose."

"I thought that Miss Adelaide had settled them in for the night?"

"Yes. So probably not that. She'll tell us if it's anything to worry about, I'm sure."

Ginny turned to where Henry was standing waiting quietly. "Henry, drinks please."

"Yes, Miss" He gave the slow nod of acknowledgement that was almost the first gesture that all Gimps were trained in. He turned to the cabinet at the side of the van and poured five measures of a clear liquor. Placing them on a tray he carried them the few feet across the van to where the girls were sitting, knelt holding the

tray out. He became perfectly still, the most difficult of all Gimp skills. James watched him as he waited holding the tray. Although he had been trained to perform it too, he felt Henry managed to make stillness a suspension of self in the space that he could only aspire to achieve. Although he was not moving he had nothing to compare to Henry's stillness.

Sophie saw him looking. "Oh, James, don't despair," she said. Training Gimps gave her a deep insight into their insecurities. "Come here," she gesturing in front of her. He knelt down. She put her hand on the back of his neck and guided his head to between her thighs as she pulled her skirt up with her other hand. Sophie knew that a Gimp's need to serve was obsessive. James was soon lost in submission to her demands, his tongue busy on her crotch, forgetting his own concerns.

Vesta had rapped on Miss Adelaide's caravan door, insisting on talking to her urgently. She was eagerly telling of Sasha's encounter and how the two of them thought he might be pressed into the service of the circus. "He'd be a good asset. I'm sure he could be trained. Sasha found him by the Cage Van."

Miss Adelaide was stretched out on the couch in the main saloon of her caravan. She cocked her head to one side and peered over half moon glasses. "Vesta, you really can't keep picking up strays. He must belong to someone." She held up her hand at the Gimp that was kneeling alongside on her couch and he paused from massaging her back. After Alicia's request this was just another complication, she felt.

"Sasha says that he doesn't. Or at least that's what he told her. Besides, Hinter worked out all right didn't he?"

"Yes, he did, that's true. It took a lot of effort though. I know how hard Sophie has worked with him. And we don't need another do we? It's one more mouth to feed, one more boy to worry about." Adelaide rolled over on to her back and gestured once more. The Gimp turned his attention to her feet and ankles, but Adelaide had lost patience. She sat up and waved him away. He bowed his head, got to his feet and left the two women together.

Adelaide leant over and filled two cups of tea from the samovar that stood beside the couch. She passed one to Vesta.

Vesta took it gratefully. It had been a busy day and the evening performance would begin soon. She really needed to be getting ready but she had promised Sasha to discuss this with Adelaide. "I might say the more Gimps we have the better the spectacle. You must agree with that, surely. And besides, Henry will need to be retired soon. Surely we should be training one up to take his place?"

That was true, Adelaide thought and that would be a whole new problem. Poor Henry. What do you do with a performing Gimp that has reached an age when he is too stiff to jump, too arthritic to kneel?

"So who is this aspiring member of our troop?"

"I'm not sure of his name. He's a tall, thin lad. Long blonde hair. Works as a bar-boy at the pub, according to Sasha."

Adelaide smiled. That *was* a convenient coincidence, she thought. It would offer a solution to the Henry problem *and* it allowed her to perform a favour for her friend. She went to her desk and took out the ledger in which she kept the circus's accounts and records. She studied them, assessing what she knew would be the cost of the newcomer, looking at the timing of their future engagements to assess whether they had a window to bring another Gimp up to the standard of the others.

It was, she thought, a possibility. If the new recruit showed aptitude she could see how it could be made to work. She had faith in her team and their experience in training Gimps was second to none. Even better, she

thought, perhaps Lady Henderby could find a role for Henry somewhere on her estate. A Gimp would be an asset in any case but Henry had learned a lot about engines from the drivers, perhaps Lady Henderby could find him a place maintaining her Sports Steamer. In any case, Vesta was right; he probably did not have another season in the arena in him. He would not be happy to be stopped from performing but it would be the fairest thing to do, for him for the others and for the audiences. It was a decision she needed to take for the benefit of the circus.

## The Performance

Adelaide counted the last of the day's takings into the cash box. She locked it and slid the box into the safe in her caravan. She was pleased. The tent would be full again tonight and that was good for the audience, for the performers pockets and for the Gimps too; she knew how they hated to perform in front of a half-empty house. She turned to the wardrobe. It was time to get ready.

In their own van the other performers were already preparing. The show was, they knew, as much about the glitter and razzmatazz that they provided as it was about anything the Gimps could be persuaded to do.

As the last of the audience crowded into the tent to take their seats, Vesta, already prepared for the show, went down to the cage van to ready the Gimps for their entrance. They had of course, done the show many times and were completely ready but custom demanded that one of the trainers appear, dressed in some intimidating fashion, to provide incentive for the work ahead. "Are you ready boys?" she asked.

A muttered chorus of "Yes, Miss Vesta," answered her.

"Remember my long tail whip and my leather paddle will be keen to help any that fail tonight."

"Yes, Miss Vesta."

"Then let us begin." She unlocked the cages in turn and unfastened the shackles of the Gimp within. Freed from confinement, each climbed down to the floor, pressed his lips against each of Vesta's booted feet, and then knelt silently. They were ready to perform.

Vesta pretended not to notice a shadowy figure hiding in the dark behind the cage van. Aimee had been right Miss Adams from the Hasebury Nag had closed the pub when it became obvious the entire village would be at the show. Tim, the bar-boy, had noticed her walking across the green to join the rest and had slipped out. He was determined to catch a glimpse of the show from near the gateway where the performers entered and left the arena. He held his breath hoping not to be seen as Vesta unlocked each of the cages in turn and encouraged the Gimps down to the ground ready to go in to perform. Unnoticed, he managed to get himself to a place where he could hold back a flap of canvas and see into the arena.

Inside the tent, the space was divided up between the seats for the audience and the central performing circle. The best seats stood immediately opposite the entrance to the arena. Here sat Alicia and her less than willing husband, members of the Parish Council and one or two of the larger landowners. On either side on less comfortable benches were arrayed others of the village, mostly women but in a few cases with their men in tow too. Aimee and the rest of the girls from the pub were together. She could see across the ring that Nancy from Ivy Cottage was there with her husband. At least she has him on a leash tonight, she thought. Perhaps they would fit in with the village after all.

The lights in the tent began to dim and a quiet fell across the auditorium, The audience could tell that a figure had stepped forward into the arena. A moment later a limelight shot a bright shaft into the arena, highlighting Mistress Adelaide, finely attired in scarlet coat, fishnet tights and a dramatically tilted top – hat. She called for their attention.



“Your Ladyship, Members of the Council, Ladies & those you have brought along - Welcome! Tonight you will see what dedication to obedience can bring. Each and every one of those performing tonight has been brought to their level of skill by a regime of direction, correction, reward and reinforcement that any of you ladies here tonight can follow.” At this some of the men in the audience looked nervous. “So, now, for your instruction but most of all for your very great amusement and entertainment, I present to you, Mistress Adelaide’s Travelling Gimp Circus!”

Out of sight, near the entrance to the arena, a small band made up of two of the engine drivers and two of the stokers struck up a dramatic fanfare on trumpet, trombone and drums as Vesta led the eight men into the arena.

In contrast to Adelaide’s theatrical outfit, Vesta’s appearance was almost menacing. She wore a long, dark, high-necked cloak, that flew open as she walked to reveal a close fitting outfit of leather and long boots beneath. She carried a whip. Its tail slid behind her across the arena, flicking into life, like a snake, with each twist of her wrist. She took up her place in the centre of the arena, the whip still moving, flicking up little clouds of sawdust as the men paraded around the edge of the arena. They were equally fetishistically attired wearing leather harnesses over their naked bodies, wrist and ankle cuffs, and small leather pouches over their genitals, together with their status-defining leather hoods that masked their identities.

The applause of the audience at Vesta and the men’s appearance gave way to cat calls from a few of the villagers, much to the disapproval of some of the Council members. Mistress Adelaide seemed to not mind their raucous enthusiasm but cautioned them to “Please not lean forward too far, in order to avoid distracting or disturbing the performers.”

“Just getting ‘em to walk in step’s impressive enough,” Janice said to Aimee. The group of friends from the Hasebury Nag were all sitting together.

“There’s some specimens there though – look how the light glints on the oil on their bodies. You’d slide off them in bed!” Nisha blushed at Aimee’s suggestion but she couldn’t help admiring the physique of the Gimp standing nearest to her.

“Not sure I think oiling up Terry would be a good idea, from what you say he’s hard enough to get hold of at the best of times!” Jennifer chipped in.

“Maybe not, but the harness and cuffs is another matter.” The girls laughed as the men paraded past for several circuits until Vesta gave a single crack of the whip and the men turned as one and ran out through the entrance way.

“So,” Adelaide took the stage again, “you have seen our company. It is time to see what they can do. Can I ask, who here uses horses?”

A chorus of “I do!” rang out from almost all present. In their farming community the horse was still the main source of power, whether for ploughing, driving grindstones, or hauling produce to market.

“Then you will want to see our Gimp Pony Dressage!”

Adelaide’s engagement with the audience had given time for three of the Gimps to be fitted with head harnesses, steel bits and blinkers. Sophie, in pristine riding boots, spotless jodhpurs, riding coat and stock, came into the ring holding the reins of the Gimps in one hand and a long carriage driving whip in the other. She spaced the three evenly around the perimeter of the arena and made great show of checking the bits, bridles and blinkers of each in turn as they stood passively waiting. Then returning to the centre of the ring she took up their reins and called, “Walk On!”

What followed was a virtuoso demonstration of the equestrienne's art as Sophie had the three walking, trotting, high-stepping, stopping, bowing and turning in perfect synchronicity, using only the tip of her whip to direct them. Finally the three trotted into and out of the arena centre, each following a looping track until somehow, seemingly miraculously the three arrived together side-by-side, facing into the audience with their backs to the arena entrance to take a bow. The crowd, impressed by the precision of their performance applauded enthusiastically as Sophie led her three from the ring.

The pony Gimps were just the start of the evening's fun as each entrance into the ring drew increasingly enthusiastic applause from the crowd.

An acrobatic performance led by Ginny had two Gimps showing how they could tumble, leap and display on the parallel bars. Ginny in her bright green satin leotard cut high on her hips was dressed to distract her Gimps and the men in the audience too. She directed the performance with a long cane, using it mainly to show, with a tap, what she wanted done next, although also, on occasion, using it to bring a Gimp's attention back to the task in hand with a quick blow across the buttocks. Some less broad minded members of the audience might have found the positions that Ginny managed to encourage her performers into a little racy but the majority laughed and roared their encouragement as one of the Gimps completed a somersault to find himself with his face pressed against Ginny's backside.

Next Eleni entered the ring. Dressed in a rainbow coloured costume but with her face obscured by a featureless white mask, her strange appearance silenced the audience. She held a finger to her lips and then span around to beckon two Gimps forward into the arena. As they reached the centre of the ring, Eleni held her hand up, palm towards them. They stopped.

From that followed an intriguing demonstration of control without words. Eleni would gesture. One or other of the Gimps would take on a position or pose. Eleni would gesture again. The Gimps would change position. Eleni's gestures were balletic, the whole display conducted in complete silence with the audience watching with rapt attention. At only one point did the flow of the performance falter when one of the Gimps appeared to miss his balance as he changed position. There was a quiet, sympathetic intake of breath from the audience but the Gimp regained his stance and Eleni continued as though nothing had happened. A final flourish of her hands brought the two Gimps to their knees with their heads to the floor beside her feet. Eleni turned in triumph to the audience, took her bow and, tapping each of the Gimps on the shoulder and, pointing to the exit from the ring, ended her noiseless presentation.

Moments later, accompanied by another fanfare from the band, Christa led three of the other Gimps out into the arena. She tossed a pair of Indian clubs to the first of them, initiating a display of juggling which had the heavy clubs spinning back and forth across the ring, with her in the middle. It wasn't clear which was more impressive; the skill of the Gimps in their throwing and catching or the trust shown by Christa as she stood motionless with the clubs passing inches from her.

The show lasted for almost two hours. Some might say that the circus trivialised Gimp culture by making a spectacle of it but Adelaide knew that this would be the only chance that women like this would have to experience the skills and dedication of the Gimp at close hand. She made no apology for presenting a popular performance. Quite the reverse, she revelled in it.

Display followed display. Of course, the more personal services that Gimps provide could not be presented in a public show but every other skill was presented. The show drew to its conclusion. Finally each of Adelaide's trainers paraded into the ring before the Gimps entered, one kneeling in front of each of the trainers. The girls took their seats on the Gimps' backs and waved to acknowledge the applause of the crowd as Adelaide stood by in triumph and the remaining Gimps turned cartwheels around the ring.

The crowd got to their feet cheering as Christa, Vesta, Eleni, Sophie and Ginny waved to the crowd and led the Gimps out of the arena to end the show. Adelaide took her bow, thanked the audience for coming and hoped they had all enjoyed their evening. The cheers she received confirmed that they had.

## After The Shows

The second night's performance was no less successful than the first. Word had got around and the audience turned up from nearby villages too.

Finally, though, the applause for that show too had faded. The audience, for the most part, had gone. A few, specially invited patrons remained or returned, the guests of Mistress Adelaide for a celebratory drink. Alicia two other local landowners and the chair, vice-chair and clerk of the village council were seated at a tables set up in the performance arena of the big tent.

Also at the table were Mistress Adelaide's trainers, helping to entertain their guests. The Gimps were pressed into service as waiters, dispensing wine and canapés to the assembled group, each act of service precisely performed. Adelaide and her performers were all still in the costumes they had worn for the show. The Gimps were in their hoods and harnesses and, in accordance with normal custom, all wore silencing gags, symbolic of their surrender of control.

Adelaide had found that these after-show parties were an excellent way to thank the communities that gave the circus hospitality. She had made sure that she was seated alongside Alicia and took the opportunity to talk to her about her request. "Our discussion yesterday," Adelaide said. "I believe I can assist."

"That will be a great relief. And it will save Harold a deal of heart searching too, I am sure."

"Good. Then it will be taken care of."

One of the Gimps passed by refilling wine glasses as he went. "They really are so well trained, Adelaide. You must be so proud of your girls."

"Yes, of course, but I am proud of the boys too. You cannot make good pots without good clay."

"Wasn't that what you used to teach us? 'Or a good furnace,' isn't that how it ends?"

Adelaide nodded pleased by Alicia's recollections of her teaching. "Yes. I want to talk to you about one of my 'pots', though. An old pot one that is no longer up to the load it is expected to carry, one that needs a place for a quieter life."

Alicia could sense the direction of the conversation. "So, is this the price of my disappearing lover?"

"No. That is a favour I agreed. Between friends. Freely given. I have put that matter in hand already. This is another. They happen to coincide but it is chance. If you cannot help then I shall not be upset. Let me explain. You see the man on his knees beside the Chair of the Council?"

"Yes. He performed well this evening. A talented juggler, I recall. And now it seems as though he is an able fellow when it comes to providing a soothing foot massage. Although, from the complaints our good Chair makes about her feet as a result of squeezing them into those most unsuitable shoes, I suspect he has his work cut out."

Adelaide laughed. It was often the case that she had to ask her Gimps to look after those who did not always do such a good job of looking after themselves. "He needs to retire from the circus. He does not know it yet but we can see his reactions are slowing. His body takes more time to recover from the stunts

and trials of performing. It is not fair to keep him here. Nor is it fair to simply set him loose. He is not adapted for a life alone. I am sure you will appreciate.”

“Yes. The same is true of my house staff. They become dependant upon a structured, well-ordered environment.”

“I am sure. That is why I wondered if you could find him a place. He has useful skills – besides the ones you might expect from his current employment. Your Stanley Sports Steamer, for example.”

“The cause of my late arrival yesterday.”

“Exactly. This Gimp has spent time with my engineers. I think you will find he possesses useful mechanical skills that could help avoid such difficulties.”

“His other skills would seem worthwhile too, if I believe the look of delight on the face of Madame Chair of Council. And to have a resident Gimp at Henderby Hall – well, I can imagine some that might be a little jealous. All right, Adelaide, I will find him a place. Speak to him and send him to the Hall tomorrow when you leave.”

After her guests had left, Adelaide retired to her caravan. As was usual after a show she felt the need to unwind. She had taken James with her leading him by his collar from the tent as the other Gimps looked on jealously. At her request, he helped her take off her ring mistress’s costume, placing it neatly on its hangar for its next use. Averting his eyes from her nakedness, he held her silk dressing robe as she put it on.

“How long have you been with us?” Adelaide was reclining on her couch.

James, adopting the Gimp pose of attendance, was kneeling by her side, hands on the tops of his thighs, palms upwards. Adelaide realised that his mouth was still filled with the solid rubber ball that had been strapped in place gagging him. She unfastened the strap and pulled the ball clear. James gave a quiet grunt of relief that a more experienced Gimp would have suppressed. “Six months, Mistress,” he responded.

“You’ve done well in a short time.” Adelaide knew that encouragement was by far the best way to develop her Gimps. Correction could be applied for specific failings but praise was the most effective driver of progress. “Please, fetch me a drink. The bottle is there,” she gestured towards the nearby cabinet where a champagne bottle sat in an ice bucket. Two glasses stood alongside. “And pour one for yourself.”

That was unusual. Gimps never drank alcohol by choice and James could not remember the last time he had been offered some.

“We shall celebrate this successful event and your six month with us.” Adelaide raised her glass. “To your very good health.”

Uncertain how to respond to the unusual familiarity, James nodded and took a drink.

“Now come and sit beside me.”

As he lowered himself onto the couch, Adelaide stretched out resting her head on his thigh. “I assume your training has gone further than juggling and acrobatics in the ring,” she said reaching for the fastening of the leather pouch that covered his cock.

“Yes, Mistress,” he responded, his voice a little more husky than before.

Adelaide giggled. “I know this is unexpected, James,” she said, “but sometimes I enjoy something a little different.” She reached over running her finger nails along the length of the underside of his cock. It stiffened appreciably although James sat motionless. “Drink your wine.”

James sipped at his champagne. A part of his training had been to experience sexual teasing, keeping his cock engorged and on the edge of orgasm for long periods of time. Adelaide though seemed set on something that was to be shared between them. He found it disconcerting. He was used to being the provider of pleasure; whether it was by giving massages or oral pleasuring. He was used to being the recipient of pain for sometimes the girls took amusement in using nipple clamps, painfully restrictive bondage or simply the spiked heels of shoes to torment him. This though was different, Adelaide seemed intent on causing him pleasure and yet he found it hard to let go of the state of passive quiet that was the Gimp's normal condition. Was she doing this from some deviant desire to taunt him into a response that contradicted his training or was she simply embarked on causing pleasure for the pleasure it gave her. He found the mental conflict confusing.

"Relax," Adelaide said. "This is not a test. Here, lay back." She put her hand on his chest and pressed him back on the couch. "It is a pleasure for me to do this." She ran her tongue down his naked chest and down to his belly, probing it into his navel and then pulling at the hairs on his belly with her teeth. She reached up and teased one nipple between her fingers. James, used to the pinch of clamps winced in anticipation of pain that didn't come. Adelaide laughed. "It is all right. And now, please, I am not going to bite you."

She dropped her head and took his cock in her mouth, circling its swollen shaft with her lips. Such composure as James had managed to retain dropped away as he lifted his hips and pressed back against her. She gave a satisfied, but cock-muffled, "Mmmm," as he did so. She continued to fellate him with tongue and teeth and lips and when he came she was happy to take his jism, until, laughing, she sat back her robe open and a trickle of grey cum dripping down her chin from one corner of her mouth to fall upon a naked breast.

"And now you must go," Adelaide said, "reaching down and fastening James's cock covering back in place. "Tomorrow we move on again and there will be more work to do but tonight you must rest."

James got up and nodded. Should he thank her? Should he say anything at all? Should he simply go?

In the end he decided that the right thing was what he had always been taught were the words to say on leaving. It wasn't complicated. It wasn't contrived. It was simple. "Good night, Mistress," he said and stepped out of Adelaide's caravan to return to his cage.

The door of the cage fastened behind him with a comforting "clunk". As he fastened his own chain to his collar he felt the comfort of a familiar situation.

## Departure

It was the morning after the final show at Hasebury. The girls had taken the Gimps from their cages. They worked together to strike the performance tent and take down the ticket booth so that all could be put back into the trailers. Somehow it all came down much more quickly than it had gone up.

It was a cold morning but they were used to being exercised in just their harnesses and hoods and were happy to make the most of the chance to move freely before, as they knew they would be, being returned to their cages for the upcoming journey.

Adelaide took Henry to one side. This was not a conversation she was looking forward to but equally it was not one could ask any of the others to have, nor one that could be delayed. "These were good shows, Henry," she began.

"Thank you Mistress," he responded. "Although I made some errors, on the first night especially."

He had always been modest and self-critical, Adelaide thought. In some ways that made this harder. "I am sure none were noticed. But what I have noticed is that you seem less comfortable with your time in the cage. Perhaps the shackles and straps are too much of an encumbrance?"

"I've known nothing else these last five years. It's true I'm stiffer than I was but I expect no special treatment."

Of course you don't thought Adelaide. "Maybe not, but you deserve a quieter life. I have arranged a place for you with Lady Henderby. This show was your last. Perhaps your best, but certainly your last." She wasn't sure what to expect. She was certain that the best approach was to be quite clear and quite definite. He would accept what she said of course, but would he be angry for being rejected? Resistant to her decision? Uncomprehending?

Henry stood quietly for a moment, thinking. He nodded. "You've always been fair, Mistress," he said. "I'd rather go on but if that is what you have decided then I will accept it. I shall miss the circus but I am sure that this is for the best, if you say so."

"I'm sure it is. We shall all miss you too, Henry." In an uncharacteristic display of emotion she reached out her arms and drew him into her, hugging him tightly. She sensed that he was uncomfortable with the show of affection. It hardly chimed with the normal Mistress-Gimp relationship. She released him and stood back. "So, I will ask Vesta to take you up to the Hall, I believe she has worked with you the most?"

"Yes, that's right Mistress. Thank you."

"Good luck." Adelaide said, thinking that the exchange had gone better than she could have hoped.

When Vesta returned from the Hall she was subdued and quiet. She had hated her task but she would have hated it more if Adelaide had asked any of the others. She set to her tasks, readying things for departure. She didn't speaking much to the other girls.

Adelaide knew Vesta was upset by the decision to leave Henry behind, even if (or perhaps because) she had been the one to suggest it. She would overcome her sadness Adelaide was sure because she would soon have plenty to occupy her. But first Sasha had to completed the task that Adelaide had set for her.

Tim Farracut noticed the smoke across the village green as the first of the traction engines was getting up steam. He hadn't expected them to leave until later in the day but it looked like they would soon be on their way and the circus would be gone forever.

He was determined to take one last look at Miss Adelaide's collection of Gimps. He left the pub and headed across the green. He squeezed between two of the other vans to get to where the cage van stood, waiting to be connected up to its towing engine. Five of the Gimps were curled up, asleep or resting on the floor of their cages, the chains to their neck collars laying across or alongside them. One sat staring sightlessly, his eyes covered by his leather hood. Another looked straight back at Tim but said nothing. One set of chains and a collar hung in an empty cage.

Tim stood for a moment wondering where they would perform next and how the lives of the Gimps and the performers would play out. He wondered why one of the cages was empty. Whatever the answers, he envied them their lives; the performances, their work with the trainers, the travel and romance of the road.

He stood and looked at the van.

Did his mind go back to his encounter with Sasha in that instant when he thought he heard a sound behind him? Or when he thought he caught the scent of coal and grease on the air? Whether or not he remembered her words he didn't move until a gloved hand clamped a pad over his mouth and nose and he

felt himself losing consciousness as his wrists were dragged behind his back and pinioned there with rope. He would be far away before he woke again, unaware of the child he had fathered, but at the start of a new life.

**THE END**