

RED CHRYSANTHEMUM

PUNISHING  
*Miss Primrose*

PART I

EM BROWN

# **PUNISHING MISS PRIMROSE**

## **PARTS I - V**

*A story in the Red Chrysanthemum series*

**By Em Brown**

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Master vs. Mistress

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## Punishing Miss Primrose, Part I

FROM HIS CHAIR in the far corner of Madame Devereaux's dim and tawdry parlor, Spencer Edelton, the third Marquess of Carey, observed the unhappy flutter of Miss Primrose's eyelashes as she stood before Madame Devereaux. When first he had set eyes upon Miss Primrose, he had been surprised to find she possessed none of the classic beauty he would have expected of a woman rumored to have had as many conquests as she. No rounded cheeks, delicate lips, or slender nose adorned her countenance. Despite her Scottish surname, her darker complexion and ebony hair suggested a mixed heritage—Moor, perhaps. He frowned to think that both his brother, Nicholas, and his cousin, William, had been bested by such a strumpet.

"I am most sincere when I say I require a respite," Miss Primrose said, her voice coming from a deeper part of the throat than most women. "My last spell as a mistress proved rather wearisome."

Mistress. Spencer narrowed his eyes. His grasp tightened about the gloves he held as he recalled the contents of a letter he had discovered in Nicholas' bedchamber. *Mistress Primrose*, it had begun.

To calm himself, he turned his attention to the fake Persian carpet, the heavy damask curtains draped about the lone window, the tarnished candelabras tacked upon walls covered in worn dull silk, and a longcase clock that had arms that did not move. The surroundings reminded him of how remiss he had been in looking after his younger brother. He ought to have placed a tighter rein upon poor Nicholas and limited the latter's friendship with William, a dubious influence.

"This *gentleman* you speak of will be far happier with another choice," Miss Primrose added when she had received no response from her employer. She had not noticed or chose to ignore his presence in the room.

"My dear Beatrice," the older proprietress attempted, "with your

skills—”

“Libby is far prettier.”

Madame Devreaux relented. “The gentleman requested you by name. Apparently he has heard tell of your reputation.”

“Molly is adept with the dominant role.”

“Perhaps he is partial to a more exotic experience. Our patrons are not exactly men of ordinary tastes, are they? Moreover, the price is more than right.”

“The buggler has money then,” Miss Primrose said, unimpressed.

“Money and peerage, I suspect.”

The information only made Miss Primrose frown more.

“You would be well compensated for your time,” Madame Devreaux coaxed.

“Have you the money?”

“He advanced us fifty quid. And another fifty will be paid upon satisfaction.”

The amount seemed to give Miss Primrose pause. Nonetheless, she replied firmly, “No. I have done with fancy bastards.”

Spencer shifted in his seat at this unexpected response. How could money fail to persuade? Was it not the sole objective of whoring? Granted, she had already exacted a grand sum from Nicholas and William, neither of whom were particularly frugal or discrete with their funds. But she could have had more. She could have aspired to a courtesan and leave the pitiful brothel that Madame Devreaux kept, though the patroness insisted that the Inn of the Red Chrysanthemum was not a whorehouse but a club where members indulged their penchant for taboo pleasures.

When Spencer had confronted his brother, Nicholas had admitted to patronizing the Red Chrysanthemum, and claimed he was in love with Miss Primrose and had hoped to tempt her away from the place with all that a woman of her situation could ever hope for and more: a townhome, servants, and an allowance for gowns and baubles. Spencer had never seen the poor boy so desperate, yet *she* had cast off *him*, refusing to ever see him or William again. Perhaps Miss Primrose was not in possession of all her senses. Or perhaps she played a game, as

many women were wont to do, withholding her favors to encourage an even greater offer, though Nicholas had already promised her more than his means. At least Nicholas had enough sense not to propose the ultimate prize: marriage.

But Spencer, unsure that his brother would not eventually succumb to such a misstep, had his uncle take the two young men to Spain, hoping time and distance would remove the influence of Miss Primrose. William—easily pleased with wine, women, cards, and horseflesh—was more likely to recover. Nicholas, however, possessed a more delicate constitution. Spencer had never seen a man look as despondent, beaten, and woeful. His younger brother was a mere shell of a man. Spencer did not doubt that, given the chance and despite her treatment of him, Nicholas would crawl, like a pathetic little puppy, back to Miss Primrose.

Something had to be done about her. The quality of her speech suggested she had not been raised in the lower classes, but at best, she was of the bourgeoisie. For her to trifle with men of superior position showed tremendous insolence, a flagrant audacity that was not to be tolerated. Miss Beatrice Primrose required a set-down. She needed to be taught a lesson.

“Beatrice, please,” Madame Devereaux implored, lowering her voice. “How often does fifty quid—in advance, mind you—come our way?”

“I did more than fifty quid for you by way of Nicholas Edelton and that craven cousin of his.”

A muscle tensed along Spencer’s jaw. Nicholas had admitted that, once his own allowance had been exhausted, he had taken to borrowing from friends to sustain Miss Primrose. Spencer briefly wondered that the woman, with all that she had swindled from Nicholas and William, had not procured herself a better frock than the one she currently wore. The fabric was wearing thin and the hem repaired in several places.

“For which I am eternally grateful,” Madame Devereaux said. “If you accept this occasion, I will have no need to call upon you for a long, long time. You may enjoy your well-earned reprieve, free of concerns. Allow yourself an indulgence. Perhaps take yourself and James to Bath.”

James. She had a lover. Perhaps this fellow was why Miss Primrose had dismissed Nicholas, Spencer thought.

“But the man wants a whole sennight?” Miss Primrose replied with a shake of the head. “What sort of man asks for a bloody sennight?”

“A lonely one.”

“A lecher.”

Madame Devereaux arched her brows. “Do we service any other kind of patron?”

Miss Primrose curled her lips. “And I am to travel to his abode? Why does he not come here?”

“He does not reside in town. It would be an inconvenience.”

“My equipment is here.”

“He has offered to transport most of it and make a carriage available to you.”

Miss Primrose contemplated in silence, then crossed her arms. “A hundred quid you say?”

“He is flush in the purse. If he is pleased, perhaps an additional perquisite will come our way.”

“A hundred quid be a lot to pay for any wench. He must be homely as the devil. Is he an albino like the one that made Jane retch?”

“On the contrary, he is by far the most handsome man to walk through our doors. You’re right lucky, Beatrice. Any number of girls would stumble over themselves to lift her skirts for him—gratis.”

“Then what’s wrong with the fellow? If he is as endowed in body and funds as you claim, he would have no need to come to us.”

“You forget he has a specific interest in *you*.”

“What of me interests him?”

Madame Devereaux sighed and put a hand to her temple. Sensing the proprietress was on the verge of relenting, Spencer rose from his chair and advanced till he had the attention of both women. He stood behind Madame Devereaux and allowed Miss Primrose a moment to assess what she saw. Her gaze took in his rugged build, which he knew to be well accentuated by his talented tailors. Blessed in countenance and form, he expected Miss Primrose to be pleased with what she saw, and her frown did dissipate, but it was fleeting.

“Do you require assistance, sir?” she asked.

“I am the patron being discussed,” he supplied, his manners compelling him to make her a bow though she deserved none of it.

She remained collected. “And you are?”

“My name would serve you no purpose.”

“But you have heard of mine?”

“Nicholas Edelton spoke of you with great...admiration.”

He forced the word, trying his best to contain his anger. He risked revealing his relation by speaking the name of his brother, but the two bore little resemblance, almost as if they had been born of different parents.

“You are a friend of his?”

“No.”

The answer lessened her frown.

“Nonetheless, the vehemence with which he spoke caught my attention. He seemed quite taken by you.”

“And you pay Nicholas Edelton such regard that you would lay down fifty quid for me?”

Spencer straightened. It was clear she did not hold Nicholas in much esteem. He did not fault her for lacking much admiration for Nicholas, who struggled in the shadow of his older brother, but it made her actions far more callous that she bore no goodwill toward him.

“I once attended an impressive performance of *Anthony and Cleopatra*,” he said. “The Queen of Egypt is a remarkable vision. It has been a desire of mine to seek her likeness.”

Madame Devereaux looked at Miss Primrose as if to say, “There you have it.”

Miss Primrose studied him a while longer as if to make him flinch beneath her gaze. He did not.

“Advance a hundred quid, another hundred upon completion, and perhaps I will consider your proposition.”

He suppressed the urge to choke—or ring her neck. The harlot was beyond insolent, though her greed should not have surprised him.

“The original offer is not rich enough that you must double it?”

“If you could part with a hundred, two hundred would be of little

difference for a man of your means.”

He struggled to maintain his composure at her impudence, then reminded himself that it was a small price to pay for the chance to avenge his brother. He took a deep breath.

“Very well, Miss Primrose. We are agreed.”

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Beatrice shook her head as she mended the tear in her petticoat with needle and thread. The man had to be mad, though his eyes had gleamed with intelligence and his speech had been articulate and collected. Not even Nicholas Edelton would have been inane enough to offer two hundred quid to bed a strumpet. While wealth allowed men to indulge in the ridiculous, her instinct told her something was not right about the situation. For a man who desired her enough to pay an absurd amount of money, he seemed to have little interest in seducing her. No libidinous smiles, no compliments dripping with lust, no attempts to win her with wine and song.

“Perhaps he is merely awkward with women,” Devereaux had suggested when she had shown Beatrice the hundred quid that had been delivered the following day.

“Or he supposes money sufficient to move mountains,” Beatrice had thought aloud.

“Does it not? And if you’ve plenty to spare, why not bandy it about?”

Beatrice was fairly certain she had affronted the man with her demand for twice the initial amount. He was a fool to agree to it, but might she be an equal fool to refuse such a sum? She thought of James and how quickly the boy was growing. It seemed his great-aunt was always writing about how he needed new shoes and new clothes. Soon he would need schooling, too. The expenses would only increase.

“And boys’ll eat your day’s wages in one meal,” Libby, with whom she shared a room at the Inn, told her. “I saw your gent. Wouldn’t mind a tumble with that one, I tell you.”

Beatrice did not disagree that the man was fine to behold, but she

had no intentions of lifting her skirts for him. That was the beauty in being a Mistress and not a submissive. She possessed the libidinous urgings of a healthy woman, to be sure—having reached the age of three and twenty, those desires had only intensified over time—but she had not joined the Red Chrysanthemum to fulfill her prurient interests. Her mentor, a member of the Red Chrysanthemum known as Mistress Scarlet, had taught her that a Mistress must never relinquish control, and, by withholding her own body, she may increase her dominance.

But in the small interaction she had had with this new patron in Madame Devereaux's parlor yesterday, Beatrice had not detected any indications that he would truly enjoy playing the role of the subservient. Granted, she had seen men of great standing, from ruthless businessmen to military generals, whimper like a kitten beneath the whip or boot of a proper Mistress. The Red Chrysanthemum had certainly shown her that the bedchamber was capable of coaxing different temperaments and behaviors from the most straightforward of characters.

“Have you once *enjoyed* yourself in your time here?” Libby asked.

“You've forgotten Jonathan.”

“Jonathan? You used him to make Nicholas jealous.”

“True,” Beatrice admitted.

Libby shook her head. “You're an odd one, Bea.”

Beatrice said nothing. She had told no one that her only reason for patronizing the Red Chrysanthemum was to exact revenge upon Nicholas Edelton and his cousin William for what they had done to her sister, Charlotte. And with each passing day, the likeness James bore to his father only deepened.

“If I had a chance at your gentleman,” Libby said, “I would make a right good time of it. Even if he proved a pitiful lover, if his cock be decent, I should have no problem fucking him at all. I be wet just thinkin' on it.”

Watching Libby fan herself, Beatrice allowed herself a chuckle. Perhaps Libby was right. She had accomplished her mission of retribution. While she could have exacted more penance and thrown him deeper in debt by becoming his mistress, she did not think she could tolerate Nicholas much longer. His presence fueled an anger and pain

that proved, over time, exhausting. Perhaps she needed to bury the fury and the sorrow. Surely Charlotte would not have wanted her untimely death to extinguish her sister's own chance of happiness.

"A decent lover would suit," Beatrice allowed.

Libby brightened. "Or he might be a superbly skilled lover! If that be the case, you must let me have a turn with him. What a lucky bit of skirt you are!"

Beatrice recalled the gentleman's tall, wide brow, the wave of his lush light brown hair, and the line of his sensuous lips. Though she was taller than the average woman, he still stood a head taller than she, and she liked the length and strength of his frame. Perhaps she had come across a bit of luck and ought to have a little fun with it and make use of the Red Chrysanthemum's true purpose.

Putting aside her misgivings, Beatrice resolved that she would allow herself to be selfish and indulge her carnal desires with the handsome gentleman. The exchange of money meant she was no different than a common whore, but she had long come to terms with what she did or there should be no support for James. Their aunt could not otherwise afford him, and the thought of James in an orphan asylum was something Beatrice would not entertain.

Pulling out a portmanteau from beneath her bed, Beatrice began to pack.

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Several hours from London and with two stops at posting inns between, the carriage pulled up before a two-storied dwelling built of Bath stone. Given how he had parted with a hundred quid with relative ease, Beatrice had expected to find a house like the many palaces of Chelsea and was surprised to find a more modest manor. Nonetheless, she counted twelve windows in its façade and the hedges growing between them had been neatly trimmed.

"Blimey," said Allison, the newer servant girl Madame Devereux had been willing to part with to serve as Beatrice's abigail. Spending a sennight with a stranger was no small matter, and Beatrice could not help

the feeling that she could not trust the man entirely.

“You landed a rich one, miss,” Allison continued as she stepped from the carriage.

Allison hailed from the country and had been but a fortnight in London. She stood in awe of almost everything she saw.

A footman took their baggage and placed them in their perspective rooms. As it was nearly the time for supper, Allison first assisted Beatrice into her evening dress. Beatrice chose her best gown, a fine muslin with short sleeves and a ribbon at the waist. The women of more polite society would deem the simple white dress ordinary, but it draped well upon her body. As she had put on a little weight since the dress was first sewn, the wide neckline displayed the swell of her breasts more than she would have liked for there was no need to call further attention to the fact that she was here on wanton purposes. She wrapped a colorful Turkish shawl about her at an attempt for more modesty. A bandeau secured her thick hair, and a few short curls framing her face softened the look. A pair of earrings would have finished off her ensemble, but she owned no jewelry.

The gentleman stood waiting for her at the dinner table. He seemed taken aback by her appearance; she supposed she must not have appeared particularly alluring that day he had visited the Inn of the Red Chrysanthemum, but by his current pause, his opinion of her might have improved. Now that she felt more receptive to her sojourn with him, he improved easily in her eyes. He looked quite dapper in his black tailcoat, ivory waistcoat, and layered neckcloth.

“Miss Primrose,” he greeted stiffly and pulled her chair for her.

“Mistress Primrose,” she corrected.

To her surprise, he frowned and the muscle along his jaw tightened. Without word, he went to sit at his end of the table.

*Perhaps he only plays the submissive in the bedchamber,* she reasoned to herself. The long table made conversation a little difficult. As he was the host, she expected him to begin the dialogue, which he could have easily done by inquiring after her trip or the condition of the roads, but he was silent as the servants poured the wine and set the first course, a rabbit stew, before them.

“My compliments to your cook,” she said after several spoonfuls. She had never tasted such freshness.

He only nodded. They finished the soup in silence. Despite the distance, she could sense his tenseness. Was it the presence of the servants that made him taciturn? Was he, by nature, timid? But he had asserted himself without hesitation at the Red Chrysanthemum. It almost seemed as if he were *displeased*, but Beatrice could hardly guess why, save that perhaps he now harbored second thoughts about their agreement.

“The weather is bit cool for summer,” she tried when they were halfway through the second course.

He waited until the servant had finished refilling his wineglass before replying, “There is no need to attempt a *tête-à-tête*, Miss Primrose. You are not being compensated for conversation.”

She stiffened at his brusque words but decided not to take offense. In truth, she was not here for his colloquy either.

“Indeed,” she agreed. “My services are of a much more *exceptional* nature.”

He did not share her mirth and simply resumed his repast.

*What an odd fellow*, she thought to herself as she tasted the third course, venison with stewed apples. At least the dinner was enjoyable, being one of the finer meals she had ever consumed. The lack of dialogue made for an awkward time, but she granted he had no need to impress or entertain her. His hundred pounds had permitted that. But for a man who was about to have his carnal desires fulfilled, he looked remarkably gloomy.

“You have the benefit of my name, but I know not how to address you,” she said at another attempt at civility.

“Your lordship’ will suffice,” he replied without looking up.

She raised a brow. “At all times?”

“Yes.”

“Including the... when we...”

This time he looked at her. “Yes.”

Her mouth dropped. This was not what she would have expected from a man who wanted to submit himself to a Mistress.

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