

CONDITONS EMPLOYMENT



CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

By BEA



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I looked around the recreation center. The Japanese lanterns reflected softly on the water of the swimming pool and well-dressed men and women - well, mostly women - stood around, drinks in hand chatting or wandered around the gardens in small groups. It was so romantic! I sighed happily. As president of the condo association, I had brought off another great party! I just knew that I would be getting accolades from all of the association members - especially from the board of trustees - "My girls" as I liked to call them.

The girls Fizzie had supplied as hostesses were, as always, doing a wonderful job. I watched their lithe bodies weave through the guests, drinks and canapes always at the ready, smiles for everyone. Idly, I wondered how she got these girls to volunteer their services. I stood there, drink in hand, supremely happy. Looking back? I know it was the ultimate high point of my life. Things started going awry immediately thereafter.

"Hello Charles!" I heard Gloria's deep contralto voice at my back, and a hand landed on my shoulder. "Wonderful party! Don't know how you do it! Absolutely marvelous taste - right Paula?" I smiled and turned around to meet Gloria Matson and her daughter Paula who were standing next to me.

"Why thank you Gloria! What a wonderful compliment! How are you? And you, Paula? Enjoying yourself I hope?"

Gloria is a fine looking woman - somewhere in her late forties. I knew she owned some kind of clothing boutique and that she'd recently joined the association board. Other than that? Nothing much. Her daughter, Paula - a few years younger than me, and a little taller - but always seemed to have a sulky petulant look about her. I'd snapped at her once about something, and we seemed to have developed a bad chemistry between us ever since - not that I cared that much.

"Got a minute Charles?" Gloria asked quietly. "Some association business?"

I laughed lightly. "You don't think this party is association business Gloria?"

"Charles?" she said seriously. "There's a few empty conference rooms available. I think we need to talk. Now!" I'll admit, I intimidate easily, and this woman's look and tone of voice were more than enough to

get my compliance. I'll even admit that my voice may have trembled as I replied.

"Okay Gloria! As you wish! But Paula? Don't you want something else to do? It sounds as if this'll be really boring for you.?"

She considered what I'd said for a second or so then shot me a baleful look. "No. Don't think so. I want to hear what mom has to say."

I swallowed nervously, then managed to get out, "Ha ha ladies! Well? If it's that serious? Let's get down to business." With that, I led them into the center and down to a vacant conference room, opened the door and ushered them in. As she passed the door, Gloria changed the "Vacant" sign to "Occupied"

"Is that really necessary dear?" I asked, pausing in the still open doorway.

"I am not your 'dear' Charles," She said forthrightly. "I consider you a crook and an embezzler. Now shut that door, come in here, and sit down. You have some reparations to make to the association. After we leave this room, you will announce your immediate resignation as President. Depending on how you act here I will announce why you have resigned. If you behave properly, I will stay quiet."

I know I turned pale as she started to speak. Nervously, I closed the door and stumbled to a chair. "Gloria? Let me explain..." I stammered nervously.

She held a hand up imperiously. "Be quiet Charles. By my reckoning, over the last four years you have embezzled eighteen thousand, six hundred and forty seven dollars and sixty three cents. If you can write a check for that amount right now, your resignation will be sufficient to keep me quiet. If you can't? We will have to come to some other arrangement." She stopped and stared at me waiting for my response.

I licked my lips, knowing full well that guilt was written all over my face. "It's not as much as that, surely? Eighteen thousand? But surely you know that I spent it on events for the association? I never took a dime for myself."

She shook her head. "I do tend to believe you. Whatever possessed you to be such an idiot? That money is for making necessary repairs to

the complex - not your private funds for "Affairs" like tonight. Tell me. If you went to the board right now and told them this, can you possibly think that they wouldn't file criminal charges? Think they wouldn't put you in jail? Even if what you say is absolutely true?" "I... I... Don't know." I mumbled.

"Can you pay us back? Immediately?"

"I'd have to sell my condo, Gloria. It's all I have. I don't have any bank account worth talking about."

"I can't understand why you want to stay here anyway. This has almost become a woman's complex. Haven't you seen the transition happening Charles? All these single stewardesses, all these lesbians? Single men and married couples gradually disappearing? Can't you see what's happening? Don't you think you'd be better off moving out?"

"I CAN'T!" I replied. "I was left the place by my aunt when she died. I own it outright, but my credit record is bad and I don't have a regular job, so it might be very difficult for me to qualify for a house loan..."

"You're a temp bookkeeper, aren't you?" Gloria asked. "That pays pretty good, doesn't it?"

"Just my living expenses. It's not steady enough."

"I thought it had to be something like that," she said. "You spent the associations money on a bunch of parties, and you don't have the funds to pay us back, unless you sell your house. Is that right?"

"Yes Gloria." I answered meekly.

"Do you want to sell your place?"

"Not if I don't have to." I answered, sensing that there might be an alternative in her mind. There was.

She leaned forward in her chair. "Here's the way I see it," she started. "If I make this public, it'll only damage the association and I like this place too much to take a chance on that. You'd end up in jail, and we'd have to force a sale on your place to get the money - which I'm not even sure we have the legal right to do. If I let you try and sell it, there's a good chance that it would take a long time. Condos don't sell too quickly these days and there's always the chance that some other board member could

stumble over this mess before you sell. If that happened, she'd maybe raise a hullabaloo and we'd have too many variables for me to forecast what might happen."

She paused, her eyes locking on mine. "Here's what I'm proposing. I'll pay off the amount immediately and you'll write me an IOU for that amount at eight percent interest, compounded."

"That's VERY generous Gloria. I don't know what to say..." I broke in, happily.

"I'm not finished, Charles. Just listen, would you?" I blushed at the reprimand.

"Sorry."

She nodded acceptance, then continued. "You will give up your house and rent it out..."

"But Gloria! I can't..."

"SHUT UP! You're beginning to annoy me! You will move out of your house and rent it out. The amount you receive less twenty percent - for my commission - will go against your debt to me. You will move into my house and rent a room for a nominal sum. You will work for me, and I will pay you for your time. This should be enough to enable you to buy whatever you need in the way of fundamentals until you have paid off the loan. Now! Any questions?"

"What kind of work do you mean Gloria?" I asked meekly.

"I need you for two things," she replied. "Working in my shop and staying home giving Paula a hand with the housework. You won't be worked too hard in either case, but I'll let you call your preference now. Four days in the shop, two with Paula - or - four with Paula, two in the shop. One day off, regardless."

"What would I be doing in the shop?" I asked. "Bookkeeping?"

"Yes - well at least a little. I have one of my girls, Andrea, do it right now. She's a very bright girl but she's had no formal training other than learning the software, but you could always audit what she does. I'm always needing someone in back with taking care of the inventory. Roberta, my fitter, is always looking for a girl to help her measure and

suchlike, and I'm often short of saleswomen on the floor."

"But don't you sell wedding dresses?" I asked. "I don't know anything about that business."

"I make, and sell, a helluva lot more than just wedding dresses!" she retorted sharply. "Outfits for bridesmaids, prom dresses, all sorts of formal dresses and accessories! And? Are you saying you can't learn?"

"I suppose I could," I answered helplessly. "But what does giving Paula a hand entail? I don't quite understand."

"Probably getting in my way!" Paula snapped. "Mom? I think you're crazy! I don't need anyone to give me a hand for four days. One day to do the housework is all I need him for!"

Gloria shook her head. "Paula? Sometimes you've no sense. You bitch about being left by yourself and that you don't know many people. Charles here knows just about every single woman in this whole complex and could probably introduce you to a lot of girls - could also help, maybe, sell some of my stuff?"

She turned back to me. "I'm not unfair. My clothes are expensive and anything you help sell here in the condo, I'll give you ten percent commission which you can use to write off against your debt or add to your wages."

"Can I ask about wages?" I said, an idea starting to form.

"Sure! The hours you do my bookkeeping? Twenty bucks an hour. Anything else you do in the shop - minimum wage - although you'd get the same commission as the other girls on anything you sold. Working with Paula? Minimum wage - though I'll allow her to give you raises if you work out and please her.

The last part gave me pause because I was already seeing some advantages to being Paula's companion. For one thing, I did my own housework and, although my place was a bit smaller than theirs, I was a more than competent housekeeper and knew that I'd need less than one full days work doing the necessary work. On top of that? I'd be getting PAID for work that I wasn't compensated for at the present. In addition, and most agreeable? Paula didn't seem to want me! A little smile hovered around in my brain, which I was too shrewd to show on my face. I could

really enjoy making her life a bit of a misery! I saw the ill-concealed temper showing on her face.

Couldn't resist. "Well Gloria? It seems I could be a bigger help working with Paula. I'm used to housework, and I don't know anything about women's clothes, so it seems best...."

As Paula shook her head angrily, Gloria produced a paper from her purse. "Okay Charles, here's the IOU I want you to sign. It has all the conditions we just discussed - except in that space? Just put a '4' and in the other, a '2', that will show how your days are to be allocated. I'll also warn you that it is a legally binding document so, if you don't perform in a satisfactory manner, I can sue you for damages in a civil court as well as bringing criminal charges against you for the embezzlement."

She pulled a pen from her bag and gave it to me. I read the document thoroughly. It looked like it had been drawn up by a lawyer. I sighed, and signed it.

"I'll start advertising for renters right away." I said. "You don't need to worry about that." Gloria said. "I've already got a nice couple all signed up. They're paying you twelve hundred and fifty a month and giving you an eighteen month lease. That's more than the going rate, so you should have no complaints there. I'd suggest that you pack any personal belongings you won't need in boxes and put them in storage. Bring your clothes over to our house when you wish. Okay?"

"How long do I have, Gloria?" I asked.

"Six days. That should be plenty." She took her pen back, checked my signature, then put the paper back in her purse, then stood up. "Come on Paula. I think that Charles may want to think a while."

She turned back to me. "I'll give you fifteen minutes to dream up your resignation speech. Then you'd better get out and make it.

Understand?"

"Yes Gloria." I mumbled.

With a disgusted expression on her face, Paula shoved her chair back from the table and got up. "Jesus!" was all she said. The two of them left, closing the door behind them.

Paula

The last morning of my move was mostly spent with me moving the last of my clothes into my new home. My room seemed very pleasant, though somewhat feminine in decor. Walls in ivory with pink undertones. Canopied bed in pastel shades of blue and pink. Dolls with satin dresses lying on the bedspread. Big closets and a chest of drawers. An easy chair and coffee table. A writing desk.

Paula wasn't much help, wandering about, her face a mask of petulant disinterest. Occasionally, she'd wander into the room, pick up one of my unpacked belongings, look at it with an expression of almost total boredom, put it down again.

About twelve, she seemed to wake up. "Lunchtime" she said with relish. "Think I'd like a ham and cheese sandwich - a little lettuce if we have any. I like butter, no mayo. A cup of tea, one sugar, no milk - and a couple of chocolate cookies. You'll find them in the fridge."

"I'd like that too." I said smiling. "Sounds great."

She smiled, but looked a little surprised. "That's good then. We can have the same thing ." And looked at me expectantly.

I paused in what I was doing, just realizing that she meant for me to make her lunch. Time to explain the facts of life to her, I thought.

"Well, I'm busy right now" I said.

"Doing what?" she asked.

"Can't you see? Unpacking."

"But you can do that later."

"I'd rather do it now.."

"And I'd rather you do what I tell you."

"My clothes will be all crushed later if I don't get them out of the suitcase." I said, surprised at the conciliatory tone appearing in my voice. Discovered myself making excuses now.

She spoke patiently to me, as if she was talking to a child. " So you

can iron them later, can't you?"

"But I'm not that hungry right now." I said evasively.

She came over to where I was standing, now nervously folding my clothes. Put her hands gently over mine to stop me, and looked me patiently straight in the eyes until I looked away.

"But you just said that you'd like the same as me, didn't you?" I found that my mouth was suddenly too dry to speak, so nodded.

She continued in the same, soft, reasonable tone. "So then, let's not argue about it, eh? Why don't you just go, make my lunch? Make your own if you want to, or not, if you don't want to - but come on now. Don't be naughty." Her hands took hold of mine gently but firmly. Pulled them away from the suitcase.

Her insistence was remarkable. As if in a dream, I found myself in the kitchen, making lunch for both of us, then joining her at the table. She was quite pleasant, talking about something or other while we ate.

"Gotta get on with my unpacking" I said as I finished, wiping my lips with my napkin.

"In a little while." She said casually. "Get the dishes done first, then come by my room, would you?"

I laughed. She looked puzzled. Then an aggravated expression crossed her face for a second. She looked as if she was going to say something.

"I did the meal - you do the dishes. Isn't that fair?" I said, beating her to it.

She shook her head in total disbelief. Thought for a moment. "You make the meals. You do the dishes. You do what I say." She smiled. "That's what sounds fair to me. Do the dishes, then come to my room." And she got up from her chair and walked away.

This woman was getting to be too much I thought, rinsing the dishes and putting them in the dishwasher. Rehearsing what I was going to say to her, I was surprised by her appearing in the kitchen door. "Aren't you finished yet? Would you hurry up!"

The verbal remarks that I'd been rehearsing disappeared and I heard

myself saying petulantly. "Sorry. But I do try to do a good job."

She pursed her lips then left again, saying over her shoulder "Very commendable but, if you don't hurry up, you will have something to be sorry about!"

When I got to her room, she was sitting in front of her dressing table mirror, looking at her reflection. "I'm pretty, don't you think?" She asked in a chatty way. "I guess so." I agreed hesitantly.

She shook her head impatiently, obviously unhappy with my response. "Pull that chair over, put it there, behind me." I did so. "Now, sit down" she said.

I did that as well, wondering what was going on.

She handed me a long handled hairbrush. "Now brush my hair for a while" she said. "I find it very relaxing."

"Eh?" I said stupidly.

She turned. "I said for you to brush my hair. You can manage something that difficult, surely. And would you get on with it?"

After about five minutes, she was relaxing. "See. See what you can do when you try. You're doing really well. You've got soft hands, just like a girl. With a couple of weeks training, I'll have you putting my hair up. It's funny you know? I really didn't want you in the house, but I'm starting to see that Gloria was right after all."

"But.." I protested.

"Yes?" She said, looking calmly at me from her mirrored reflection.

Totally intimidated by this woman, I licked my lips nervously. "I don't feel right, doing this.."

"Feels perfectly 'right' to me," she said idly. Then her expression changed, an amused look showing in her eyes. "Feel like a ladies maid. Is that it?"

"No, of course not! Well, yes, kinda..." I stammered. "And you feel improperly dressed? Is that it? Don't have a pretty black dress or apron on. Feel that you should look the part?"

"Oh no, Paula. Not that. Not that at all! I just felt inexperienced? That is probably what it was." I said hastily.

"Inexperienced, huh? Well we can't have that, can we? Why don't you just do it for another five minutes or ten? Get you experienced in a hurry, won't it. Or would you feel better if I asked you do it for another thirty minutes?"

"Whatever you say, Paula." I said helplessly.

"You DO learn quickly, don't you dear," she said happily. "But why don't you get that Cosmo magazine for me? I sometimes like to read a little while I'm being attended to."

Speechless at being bossed around, I went and got her magazine. She leafed through it, then found what she was looking for. Opened it up, and laid it across her lap. The page she was looking at was titled "A Fabulous Outfit from the Ground Up!" and had photographs of shoes, stockings, lingerie, and dresses. She pointed her finger at one. "Think I'd look good in that one Charles?" I nodded enthusiastically.

"Absolutely Paula! I think you'd look great in it!"

"Thank you," she said. "But I don't think it would look good on you though, huh? Don't think yellow is quite right for you - though if we tinted your hair a little?"

"I don't really know, Paula. I don't think so." I said, blushing.

"But this floral dress with the long chiffon sleeves? Bet you'd look pretty in that!"

I cringed, but didn't answer.

"Charles! Answer me please! Don't you agree that this floral dress would look nice on you?"

I thought of a way out. "I'm not really built for a dress, Paula. It is pretty, but I'm afraid I wouldn't do it justice."

"Well, that's at least a sensible reply! But a nice body shaper like that? A nice lacy bra with padding? That would help don't you think?" She was pointing at various articles of lingerie.

"Yes. I guess so." I mumbled, blushing to the roots of my hair.

"That's better." She said, casually turning pages. "Now what do you think of that lipstick tint? Nice huh?"

For the next ten minutes or so, totally mortified, I brushed her hair and conversed on a variety of feminine topics - cosmetics, lingerie, nail and hair care. With her watching me mockingly from the mirror, I blushed and stammered my way through a conversation that most women would have delighted in. Finally, she dismissed me.

"You're doing very well Charles. Now, if you would? Vacuum out the living room and hallway, would you? Then make some tea - enough for four, and set up a tray of cookies? Patti and Lacy will be arriving about two thirty, and that way the house will be reasonably clean and you can relax while they are here."

"But didn't you say 'four' Paula?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, you and your two friends only make three."

She flipped her hand at me. "Silly! Forgetting yourself!"

And it dawned on me that I was to have afternoon tea with three girls.

She made me wear a small, frilly, apron to do my vacuuming.

"Not very functional, I'm afraid," she said, tying a large bow at the back, "But it's very pretty on, don't you think?"

I finally acknowledged her authority. "Please Paula? Don't make me wear this?"

"Charles?" she said warningly. "You've been very good until now. Don't start being naughty! You're not answering me again! Don't you think that it's pretty on?"

"Yes Paula." I agreed.

She smiled gently and patted my backside. "That's better. Do a good job now. I don't want to have to chastise you in front of my friends."

I was finished with the vacuuming and in the process of setting the tray for tea and cookies when the doorbell rang. Paula called for me to join her as she opened the door to her two friends. Two pretty girls stood

there, both in miniskirts, silk 't's and bright colored blazers. "Hi Paula!" they called in unison, then "Who's this?"

"Girls? Meet Charles, my new companion. Charles? This ugly blonde here is Patti, and the brunette is Lacy."

"Hi, pleased to meet you Patti," I said stepping forward with my hand outstretched.

"Hello Charles," she replied, ignoring my hand, and walking up to me and kissing me on the cheek. "What a pretty apron! Where did you buy it?"

I'd been greeted as if I was a girl! Then, before I could get myself re-established, Lucy came and greeted me the same way! Not only that, I found myself reciprocating and kissing her on the cheek.

"Patti?" Paula was saying. "That's MY apron he's wearing!"

"Sure!" Patti replied, disbelief written all over her face. "Sure it is! You never wore anything that pretty in your life!"

"Believe what you like" Paula replied, laughing, then turned to me. "Charles? Be a dear and put their handbags and jackets in the spare room, would you?"

The two girls quickly handed me their handbags, then shrugged their blazers off. I took them and started to put them away. Heard Paula speak to me again. "Charles? Have you finished the vacuuming?"

"Yes Paula."

"Very good. Serve the tea and cookies as soon as they're ready please.

"Yes Paula."

A little while later, I carried the tea and cookies into the room where the three girls sat, lounging on easy chairs. After they'd instructed me as to how they wanted their tea, I fixed it and carried it to them. They all thanked me graciously so, finished, I poured a cup of tea for myself then took an easy chair beside them and sat down tentatively, putting my cup down on a table beside me.



"Charles! for goodness sake! Takeoff that bloody apron!" Paula chided me, though pleasantly. Then she turned to the other girls.

"Honestly! He has become so bloody attached to that thing! And you two didn't help, telling him how pretty it was!"

Face flaming in embarrassment, I undid the bow at the back and took the offending garment off. She was making it look as if I wore the apron voluntarily! Not only that, but it also now appeared that I liked to be complimented on how pretty I was. Oh god! What had I got myself into?

But worse was about to follow. I finally tuned in to what Paula was telling the two girls.

"... And Charles and I got in to a little argument over that same article. I agreed that he wouldn't look nice in that yellow dress - but I couldn't convince him that the floral one wouldn't be just about perfect for him!"

"I'm not so sure that I don't agree with him." Lacy said. "I saw that article and, if I remember correctly, it was a sort of aqua? Wouldn't go with his coloring."

"No Lacy!" Patti said. "It was green. Almost pure mint green. No blue in it at all!"

"Charles darling?" Paula said. "Go and get that magazine and bring it here please? No sense in having an argument about something that can be solved so easily"

I brought the magazine back a few minutes later. So that everyone could view it at the same time, I had to sit between Paula and Lacy on a couch, while Patti pulled her chair up. I was now completely surrounded by femininity - and discussing how a particular dress would suit me. It didn't take long to come to the conclusion that I would look nice wearing it, but I'd have to be wearing the right accessories, or the total effect would be ruined.

Then the conversation moved on to lingerie. Patti started raving about how Lacy had sewed some lingerie for her - and what a difference it made to wear undies that fitted perfectly.

"Are you wearing them right now?" Paula asked.

"Of course!" Patti said. "Once you get used to nice custom-made stuff, there's just no way you'd want to go back to store-bought."

"Well? Let's see." Paula said.

Patti reached for the collar of her T' then looked a little shy. "I don't know that I want to strip in front of Charles.."

"Why not, for goodness sake?" Paula laughed. "Charles would just love to see your undies, wouldn't you dear?"

Now, when you consider that it is a perfectly valid comment when you say that a man would like to see an attractive women dressed only in her lingerie, Paula's comment should not have bothered me. It was just the way she said it. Made me out to be a sissy, one of the girls so to speak.

Patti looked at me, and saw my blush, shrugged, then removed her T unfastened her skirt, pulled it down and stepped out of it. She wore beautiful lilac matching undies with extravagant maroon lace trim. She had on a slip, bra, panties, and garter belt. She laughed as she lifted the hem of the slip to show the panties. "Wow!" Paula said. These are drop-dead gorgeous! Let me see."

With that, she got up and started fingering the materials. "Wow!" she repeated. "Charles? Come here and have a look!" Nervously, I got up and approached them. Stopped about a foot away. "Yes." I said. "Lovely!"

"Don't be silly Charles! Come here and feel this material! It's to die for!"

And I had to go and 'feel' the seams in the bra that a young woman was wearing, touch the lace trim on her panties, then talk admiringly about the workmanship while Lacy preened. "Lacy? Could you teach Charles how to sew like this?" Paula asked.

"Don't know. Charles have you ever sewn dresses or stuff like that?" Lacy asked, then added, asking me "Would you be interested in learning?"

"I've never sewn anything ..." I started.

"Oh come on Charles!" Paula said. "Didn't you take sewing in Home Econ. at school?"