

MURIEL'S ADVENTURES



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BLUSHING BOOKS

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PART I
THE FORTUNA AFFAIR



CHAPTER 1



MAY 1897

Muriel Robertson tapped her foot against the floor and tried to calm her overworked heart. Why was she here? Mrs. Temple never called her employees to her house. Never. Muriel closed her eyes and tried to remember something she might have done wrong in the last week, for that was the last time she saw Mrs. Temple. The proprietress of The Written Word had not said a word about being displeased with Muriel's performance. In fact, she'd seemed very happy that day.

But when Muriel had opened the note delivered to her that morning in the shop, she'd stared at it in disbelief.

The other clerk, Connie Fletcher, had gasped when she'd read the missive after she'd grabbed it from Muriel's hand. "You'd best take your things with you, Muriel, because she wouldn't summon you unless she's dismissing you."

"Balderdash," said Mr. Holmes, the store manager. "If Muriel were being dismissed, Mrs. Temple would have me do her dirty

work. She obviously has something she wishes to discuss with you, Muriel.”

Mr. Holmes’s words had made Muriel breathe a little easier, but now that she sat in Mrs. Temple’s parlor, her nerves had returned, and she was sure that Connie had been right. Perhaps she should have gathered her things before she’d left the shop in Regent Street.

She chewed her lower lip as the reality of her situation stared her in the face. This was not where she’d expected to find herself at the age of twenty-four. The daughter of archeologists who had traveled the world, she had expected to follow in her parents’ footsteps. But when they’d been killed three years ago in Egypt, she’d found herself alone—and penniless. Archeologists didn’t make money, her mother had once told her.

“Don’t follow in our footsteps, Muriel.” Her mother’s words echoed in Muriel’s mind as she waited for her employer to summon her to the inner sanctum. “Your father and I love this work, but you’re not overly impressed. We’ve done wrong by you. We should have seen that you were married long before now. We’re going to remedy that after this season is over. We’re going to London and finding you a husband.”

But her parents had died a month later in the cave-in of a tomb, and Muriel had been left alone. She’d done the only thing she could think to do. She sold what little possessions her parents had owned and made her way to London, where she’d found a post at The Written Word, and she’d been there ever since.

The best part was Mrs. Temple included the small flat above the shop in Muriel’s wages. “It’s best to have someone nearby to keep an eye on things,” she’d said. She hadn’t seemed upset about anything, so why was Muriel here now?

“Mrs. Temple will see you now,” said the butler who had admitted her.

Muriel followed him down a narrow hallway. They entered a large library and Muriel tried not to stare at all the books. Her employer sat next to a table, where a maid was pouring tea.

"Ah, Muriel, one lump or two, dear?"

"One, please," Muriel said as she sat down in the chair Mrs. Temple indicated. The maid finished pouring the tea. She set the cup down next to Muriel before she loaded two plates with sandwiches and cakes. After she'd delivered them and left, Muriel wondered if she should enjoy the repast, or wait for her employer to start a conversation.

When Mrs. Temple started to drink, Muriel did too. After a few moments, Mrs. Temple said, "Tell me, Muriel, are you happy at the shop?"

"Yes, ma'am," Muriel said. She wondered why she'd asked that question.

"It would seem to be you would be bored, for a woman with your background," Mrs. Temple said. "I know from when we talked that your parents took you many different places around the world."

"Yes, they did," Muriel said with a smile. "We went to many different places. It was a wonderful way to grow up."

"Do you speak many different languages?" Mrs. Temple asked.

Muriel had just taken a bite of her sandwich. She chewed and swallowed slowly as she pondered where this line of inquiry was heading.

"I'm not fluent in any foreign language," she said. "I speak a little Arabic from my time spent in Egypt, a little more Italian, and a little more French."

"But you're not fluent in French?" Mrs. Temple asked.

"No, but I am able to follow conversations, for the most part," Muriel said. "Do we have a French customer coming to town? I can probably converse with him, if that is what's needed."

"No." Mrs. Temple set her cup on the table. "I would like you to go to France for me, to assist in a purchase."

Muriel's doubts vanished. If Mrs. Temple wanted her to go on a specific assignment, she was happy with her work.

"I would be thrilled," Muriel said. "I haven't been in Paris since my teen years."

"The job is not in Paris, although I would be willing to pay for a few days there, as a bonus if you acquire what I am seeking."

The thought of being in Paris for a holiday made Muriel sigh in pleasure. She had to make sure she did this right, but she had to admit, she had reservations.

"Mr. Holmes will not be happy," she said, and then realized too late that she'd spoken the words out loud.

"I understand he usually goes on buying trips, but it is not a book I'm after this time, and I don't want this purchase associated with the shop."

Muriel's brow furrowed. If it wasn't a book, why was she asking one of her employees to purchase it?

"What exactly are you looking to buy, ma'am?" Muriel asked.

Mrs. Temple took a drink from her cup, and then licked her lips. Muriel wondered if she was using this time to search for the right words to say what she wanted.

Finally she said, "How familiar are you with Roman history?"

"I know a fair amount," Muriel said.

"Do you know about Artamis Fortuna?"

Muriel's face heated, but she kept her mouth closed. She'd never expected to hear that name, at least not spoken while taking tea at her employer's house.

"I would say from your pretty blush that you do know."

Oh yes, she knew. Her parents studied all aspects of a society, including its sexual practices. Artamis Fortuna was an artist, who did paintings, and sculptures, of people performing various sexual acts. His works were said to be long gone. Muriel had seen depictions of them in a book she'd found in her parents' library when she was younger. The pages had been a shock, but viewing the images had aroused her, and from them she'd learned to pleasure herself while she'd viewed them.

"A marquis died recently," Mrs. Temple said.

Her words made Muriel shake her head; she pushed aside the memories of pleasure she'd brought herself while she'd read the book.

"His widow is disgusted by his collection of erotic items, and is selling them. I want the Fortuna objects he owns, or did own. I will give you a hundred thousand pounds to go to the auction she is holding next week at their home. It should be enough to purchase what I want. If not, I will see that you get more."

Muriel almost choked. "A hundred thousand pounds?"

"They are worth at least that much," Mrs. Temple said. "They are originals. Where the marquis purchased them, no one knows. But I want them, with lust."

This was a side of Mrs. Temple that Muriel had never thought to see.

"I selected you for this mission because I trust you, Muriel. And, I think your past makes you more worldly than my other employees. If it is not to your taste, let me know and I will find someone else. In addition to your days in Paris, I will offer you a five thousand pound bonus."

That news was as shocking as the hundred thousand pounds.

"If you need time to think about it, I understand," Mrs. Temple said. "Please let me know by the end of the week."

Muriel took a sip of her tea, and then cleared her throat. "I'll do it," she said. "I have studied the sexuality of many cultures, and I'm not embarrassed by it. I know of Fortuna. I have to admit this is not what I expected when I came here today."

Mrs. Temple's genuine laughter made Muriel smile. "I hardly think so. I have a book that depicts the offerings I want you to buy. I want you to take it home with you and study it carefully. The people who will be attending this auction will be cutthroat. You have to be resolute in bidding, and getting what I want."

"I can do that," Muriel said.

"Good." Mrs. Temple rang a bell. When the butler entered, she said, "Bring me the book."

He left after he gave a short bow, and was back moments later with a paper wrapped parcel.

“Study it, and we’ll talk again before you leave on Saturday,” Mrs. Temple said. “The marchioness is hosting an auction, beginning on Monday. Those attending will have two days to examine the artifacts for sale. The sale will be on the third day. After that you will return to London with my new purchases and receive your reward.”

The reward, a trip to Paris and more money than Muriel had ever thought to see.

“I won’t let you down, Mrs. Temple.”

“See that you don’t,” her employer said. “I won’t be happy if you are unsuccessful.”

Muriel knew from the tone of her voice that her employer was already envisioning success.

“I’ve watched auctions for antiquities before,” Muriel said. “Have you heard how this one will be organized?”

“As I said, the guests are expected to arrive on Monday, and the auction will be on Thursday. You will have four days to get to know the others who are bidding and figure out how to get my treasures.”

Muriel frowned. She’d never been to a house party before, especially not one in France.

“There might be a slight problem,” she said.

“I’ve anticipated that,” Mrs. Temple said. “I will take care of things. When you leave here you will go directly to Mrs. Green’s establishment.”

Muriel’s mouth dropped open. There was no way she could afford clothing from Mrs. Green. She designed clothes for all the stylish ladies, and members of the peerage.

“But...” She wanted to cry at the thought of her extra five thousand pounds being put toward clothes for the event.

“I will pay for it, of course,” Mrs. Temple said. “And the clothing will be yours to keep.”

Muriel perked up again.

"Is there anything else I need to know?" she asked.

"No, but if I think of something I will send you a message," Mrs. Temple said. "I would appreciate it if you didn't mention this to anyone at the shop. If they ask, tell them I am sending you to my country house to catalogue my library."

"As you wish," Muriel said. It would be hard to contain her excitement around her co-workers. She was sure that Mr. Holmes would question her about this meeting, and about her side job at Mrs. Temple's country home.

It was only after she was on her way to Mrs. Green's house that she realized she hadn't asked where the country house was located. She hoped none of her co-workers asked where she was going, exactly.



MURIEL PUT the parcel on her bed. She stared down at it, her fingers trembling at the thought of unwrapping the book. Something told her Mrs. Temple had the same book Muriel's parents had owned, the one that aroused her so much when she viewed its pages.

She was almost afraid to take the wrappings off the tome. If she did, she would look at it, and if she looked at it, she would be aroused. That wouldn't be a good thing. She didn't forget the time her mother caught her pleasuring herself. She was nineteen at the time, but her mother had been shocked.

Instead of punishment, though, her mother had said they "Needed to find a man for her."

Unfortunately, her parents were more interested in their work than finding a man for their daughter, and Muriel had tried to find a husband on her own.

"Obviously, I was unsuccessful," she said as she sat down on the bed and stroked the bundle next to her. She couldn't believe her good fortune. Five thousand pounds. What would she do with that

amount of money? She didn't know because she'd never thought to see that much.

What did she want to do with the rest of her life? Her goal was not to be a clerk in a bookshop forever. But there was no other option that came to mind. She didn't relish digging in the dirt as her parents had done. She supposed she could teach; surely that would bring her better pay. But she wasn't sure she would be good at it, because the thought of being in a classroom all day didn't please her. She supposed she could be a tutor, but that brought about the same inactivity, and being cooped up all day.

The thought of leaving her job after this was over and doing a little traveling was nice, but the five thousand pounds would not last that long. She shook her head. Now was not the time to think about the future.

Her first objective was to get the art objects that Mrs. Temple wanted. To do that, she needed to know what she was looking for; to know that she would have to open the parcel and look at the book.

She prayed the images contained on the pages did not make her nipples hard.

Or her quim wet.

Muriel took a deep breath and undid the twine. The paper fell apart when it was free. Muriel couldn't help but smile. It was indeed the same book her parents had owned.

She stood and started to pace. This book was one of the ones she'd sold when her parents died. She had thought about keeping it, but she had needed the money, and one of the archeologists her parents worked with had offered to buy her parents entire collection.

Sometimes she wished she'd kept some of their things, like their copy of the book sitting on her bed right now. The only difference between this book and the one her parents owned was this one was marked with slips of paper, five of them to be exact.

Muriel sat down and turned to the first spot. The relief showed

a woman on her knees with a man's penis in her mouth. A second man stood behind her, his erection in his hand. A second painting on the page showed the woman ministering to his prick while the first man stroked himself.

The second marked spot showed a man on his back, the woman on top of him. The second man knelt behind her. Their penises were elongated to show the action. One man was in her quim, the other in her bum. There was a look of pure pleasure on the woman's face.

The third marked spot showed the woman tied between two stakes. One man stood in front of her, the other in back. Both of them held floggers, and Fortuna had painted vicious red welts on the woman's body from where the men were striking her with the floggers.

The fourth marked spot showed the woman over one of the men's knees. He was spanking her, her bottom a bright red from the strikes. The other man stood in front of her, holding her head up by the hair, obviously forcing his prick into her mouth.

The fifth marked spot showed the woman tied over a post. Her bottom was bright red. One of the men held a flogger in his hand. The other was working a marble dildo into her bum. There were three other paintings on this page, one with a male's arm drawn back, ready to strike the woman's bum. The other two showed them with their pricks in her pussy; the dildo was still in her bottom in each painting.

Muriel slammed the book shut. Why did photos of a woman being spanked, and then filled with two pricks and a dildo, make her quim so wet? Her nipples ached to be touched, and her clitoris throbbed with the need for attention.

She'd never had one prick inside her, much less two. And the idea of taking a marble phallus inside her was—Muriel shivered. It was a fascinating thought, that's what it was.

It was a shame she would never find someone who would think the same thing. She wished her parents had concentrated on

finding her a husband, like her mother had said they were going to do. Where would she be able to find someone who would enjoy these types of activities?

She needed to push those thoughts from her mind. Her main objective was getting the reliefs that Mrs. Temple wanted, getting them back to England, and earning her reward—money, and a trip to Paris where she could explore monuments, restaurants, bookshops. It was all like a dream come true, and Muriel couldn't wait for it to happen.

Maybe she could find a Frenchman to take her maidenhead, and to help her explore the finer points of sex, which included spanking, and maybe playing with a dildo, or two.

"Focus, Muriel!" she said to the empty room. "If you don't memorize the reliefs you might buy the wrong one, and that would be the end of everything, including your employment."

She picked up the book and studied the marked pages. Then she flipped through the rest. It was obvious Fortuna had done many paintings. There were similarities in some of them, changes in couples, maybe, but not in the positions. She would have to be on her toes to make sure she had the right ones.

What she really needed to do was research on Fortuna. Her mother always told her to learn all she could about a situation before she went into it. That meant a trip to the library tomorrow, where she could study the artist in a quiet setting.



SHE WORKED IN THE MORNING, and fielded questions about her trip. She said the house was in the Cotswolds, and she prayed she was right. Mr. Holmes didn't seem to know, and Connie didn't either. The day was slow, so when she asked for time off to get ready for her trip, Mr. Holmes didn't argue.

Connie had ignored her for most of the morning. When Muriel said goodbye, Connie only grunted; professional jealousy was not

a pretty thing. Muriel could only imagine how Connie would respond to Mrs. Temple's request that she go and purchase sexually explicit reliefs in France. The thought made her laugh, which earned a big scowl from her friend. At least Muriel hoped they were still friends. Maybe Connie was so angry that she would not have anything nice to say to Muriel in the future.

Before she left she received a note from Mrs. Temple, telling her to go to Mrs. Green's for a fitting at five in the afternoon, and then to come by the house afterward. That cut into her research time, but when the boss sent for you it was best to obey.

She left the shop at one and made her way to the library on St. James's Square. They knew her well there, and she knew they wouldn't bat an eye when she said she wanted to study a Roman painter. Fortuna did many things and not all of them were erotic.

Muriel was happy to see that Derrick Plant was working the desk that afternoon. She smiled at him and asked if he could point her in the right direction.

"We have several research books you can view," he said.

"What about one or two I could take home?" she asked, and then she batted her eyes.

"Sorry, they're all out," he said.

Muriel stared at him. "All of them? How many books do you own on Fortuna?"

Derrick didn't consult any records, which let her know he'd looked at them fairly recently.

"Can you tell me who has the books?" She flashed him a seductive smile, hoping it would make him forget the rules and tell her who had been searching for books on Fortuna.

"You know better than that," he said. "The only people who know about books that are lent to subscribers are librarians. And you are not a librarian."

"I'm a bookseller," she said. "Does that not count for anything?"

"No," he said, but he did smile. "I'm sorry, Muriel, I would like to help you, but I want to keep my position even more."

"I understand," she said. "Can you point me in the direction of the books that are not lendable. Surely they are on the shelves."

"They are," he said. "Come with me."

He pulled three books from the stacks and led her to a table. There were several small lamps on the table. Muriel settled herself between two of them and started to read.

She'd been sitting there for about twenty minutes when someone tapped her on the shoulder. She looked up, and up, and then frowned at the man standing next to her.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"I would like to look at the book next to you, if I may," he said. His sharp Scottish accent made her knees go weak.

Muriel stared at him. He was not overly handsome, but he was nice to look at. And his request had been made in a polite manner.

"I'm using it," she said. "I won't too much longer, if you'd like to wait." Muriel turned her attention back to the book she'd been reading. She finished the chapter on Fortuna, and then took up the book the other patron was looking to read.

It was an art book. She opened it to the chapter on Fortuna and started to read. It talked of his sculptures and paintings of the Roman gods, but it didn't mention his erotic work. She wondered how he'd become known for such things when no one seemed to write about it.

"Are you researching a certain artist?" the man now across from her asked.

"Excuse me?" she asked as she closed the book.

"Who are you reading about?"

She pushed the book toward him and started to gather her reticule. "That is none of your affair, sir." She stood and started to walk away. But then she turned back to him. "Are you the one who has checked out the books on Fortuna?"

"Perhaps," he said. "May I ask why you're interested in him? He's not exactly a well-known artist."

Muriel scoffed at him. "Then why are they writing about him in the art books?"

"One or two pages," he said. "He doesn't even have a whole chapter assigned to him in books."

"One or two pages in the books you've borrowed?" Muriel asked. "If there is so little information on him in those books, why would you have to take them from the lending library?"

"Why indeed?" Muriel frowned at him. "I didn't catch your name."

"I didn't give it," he said. He stood and bowed to her. "Good day, Miss Robertson."

Before she could respond he walked away. Muriel watched him go through the door, and then she called for Derrick. "Who was that man?" she asked.

He looked around. "You're being very loud, Muriel. That man, as you called him is Ewan McClacken."

"What does Ewan McClacken do?" she asked.

"He is what one terms a jack of all trades," Derrick said. "I'm not sure what his actual job is. He pops in here from time to time to research things. He started last week on artists."

Someone called for his help at the desk and he turned away.

Muriel felt a stone drop in her stomach. Something told her she'd just met one of her opponents in the bidding for the Fortuna reliefs.