

'Two Days in the Life of Grace'

'Yeesh, dis Madam of mine? She willy wolly in her head! Do dis, do dat, look up, look down, who she tink I am? *A-h-h a roobort*, no, not right, *robot*, somet-ing like that. Hauw!'

'Grace, where are you?'

Where she tinks? In the kit-chen, always in the kit-chen! 'Me here, Madam.'

'Ah, there you are Grace. I was looking for you. Now, as I was saying before, you really need to look upwards and downwards when you clean. Please believe me, I am not criticizing you. You are an excellent worker and all the surfaces are shining beautifully but...'

Blaady, blaa, gobilty gook.

'You are not looking at me; you're definitely not hearing me; what goes on in that brain of yours Grace? Look at me!'

'Yes Madam, me look at you,' replied the large black lady whilst trying to keep a bland face.

'Okay,' continued Mrs Hinckley, putting a hand on Grace's shoulder. 'Look up; do you see that cobweb dangling from the ceiling. It's large enough to trap me,' she stated with a grin, pleased at her attempted joke.

'Ha,ha, me see, me see b-i-i-g spider!'

'Ah, a joke Grace, good one,' answered her mistress, peering intently at the spider-web, trying to find the non-existent creepy-crawly. 'Well, can you please clean it up and get rid of all the other webs in the house at the same time. I am too tired now to point out other tasks you are neglecting to do, so we will look at them tomorrow. Toby, Toby, where are you my darling? Mommy needs a big hug and kiss. Have you seen Toby Grace?'

'Yup, he's outside me tinks.'

Dis Madam of mine, she not good in the brain. That pussycat, she loves, she smoochy, smoochy, kissy, kissy, Ugh! Wha-rt's wrong with her?

'Put that darn cat down Louise! You are ridiculous! I swear you love him more than the girls and definitely more than me!' commented Mr Hinckley, arriving home from work.

'Hi Grace, supper smells good as usual. I think we need to up your pay; you are the best cook in the world! You should teach Madam how to cook. Where did you find her Louise and how on earth have you managed to keep her for this length of time?'

‘Very funny, Richard. I see you’re in good humour tonight. Did your day go well?’

‘Excellent my dear. Made more money for you to spend.’

‘You are in good form husband. I will take you up on your offer!’ Mr Hinckley’s mood changed abruptly as he visualised his hard earned cash disappearing.

‘Call me when the dinner is ready Grace. Put that cat down Louise!’

‘Darling no need to get so huffy! Come, sit with me in the lounge and put your feet up; I will rub them for you.’

Yeesh, me rub no mans feet! Madam, she feeble in the head, me sure! Ha, Beauty, she laugh when me tell her about the stoopid cat and Master! Me like Master though, he good man and he care for people. He kind to me; he only reason me still work in dis big house.

After dinner had been served and eaten the girls were sent off to do their homework, Mrs Hinckley sat watching TV and Mr Hinckley disappeared with his mobile phone.

Grace had finished washing the dishes and clearing the kitchen. She then made her way to the master bedroom to place a clean glass of water beside the Master’s bed. She had knocked gently before entering but he had obviously not been aware of her presence. She could quite clearly hear him talking and using terms of endearment to someone on the other end. She shook her head, ‘Not goot, me tinks Master he play with other Missy.’

Hearing her Madam calling she quietly exited from the bedroom.

‘Grace, you know what to do when the Master is asleep.’

Hauw, her wink, wink, like me don’t know; stoop-id Madam; agh, what me do here?

She looked at her blonde-haired Mistress tottering around on her high heels even though it was late in the evening. Just before Master came home, Mrs Hinckley would take off her slippers, replace them with high heels and hurriedly fix her make-up. Grace knew that the Mistress was nervous of her husband but didn’t understand why. He had never hit her, even though he was often impatient with her, and could be rude to her. Suddenly, she came to the realisation that the Madam was not as stoopid as she pretended. Maybe she knew about Mr Hinckley’s, *on the side Mistress?* Once again she thought, *not goot!*

As all was quiet in the house she now had to carry out Madam’s instructions quietly. Every evening she had to find the cat and bring him inside.

‘Toby, Toby, come to Grace,’ she whispered loudly. ‘Serve Madam right if Master wake up. Toby,’ she hissed seeing a black streak making its way in the opposite direction to where she

was standing. 'I ki-ill you, you hairy no goot piece of meat! Come here! Only jok-ey Toby,' she pleaded. You know Gracie love you, *come here*,' she hissed.

After a good half hour of chasing the black Persian cat, Grace got a good grip on his tail. 'Got yah!' she said triumphantly, tempted to give him a good swing by the tail to teach him a lesson. Instead, she picked him up gently and gave him a cuddle.

'Me love you Toby, you naughty cat, me tinks you cute, not like Madam though, she cuckoo in the head. She don't know you only a cat. Me tink she tink you her husband,' she chuckled. Gently tucking the Persian inside, into his fancy bed, she made her way tiredly to her bedroom. It was after 11 pm and she knew she would be asleep in an instant.

'Good morning Grace,' greeted her Mistress.

'Grace knew she was in trouble by the tone of Madam's voice.

'Sorry Madam, me not wake up. Me not hear alarm clock, me too tired, chasing Toby last night. I chase and chase, he not goot boy, he hide from Gracey, me only get to bed after 12,' she exaggerated.

'I know he can be naughty,' grinned Mrs Hinckley. 'You're forgiven Grace.' She turned around and picked the cat up kissing him on the mouth. Grace's face wrinkled in distaste.

'You naughty boy, you mustn't tease Grace,' she said, pulling the cat in for another kiss. His feet where out horizontally towards her, desperate to keep her lips away from his mouth.

'Stop struggling, you naughty boy. You know Mommy just wants a love.'

'Morning my dear,' said Mr Hinckley giving his wife a kiss on the cheek. 'That poor cat, he gets no peace! Morning Grace, no coffee this morning?'

'Grace had a bad night and had a tiny sleep-in this morning,' commented his wife.

'You okay?' asked a concerned Mr Hinckley.

'Yes, thank you Master. Me okay, just woman troubles.' She knew that would quickly get the attention off of her as no man was interested in women's' troubles. It was just too personal! 'You sit Master, me make coffee and toast.'

'Thanks Grace, but don't worry, I am in a bit of a hurry today.'

Mrs Hinckley frowned. 'Why, my dear,' she questioned in a sweet tone but her face revealed an entirely different emotion.

‘Lots of work. Don’t worry about me, my darling, I will get Lynne to take care of me at the office.’

‘Oh, the new secretary,’ his wife replied, an underlying tone in her voice.

‘Ah, I see we are a little jealous. Don’t worry dear; I would never look at another woman, not even a pretty little thing like Lynne. It isn’t worth the time or energy and definitely not worth the attitude I would get from you. Besides that, I know you would make sure that you took every cent of my hard earned cash if we ever had to get divorced.’

‘That is hardly fair, I work hard too.’

‘Doing what exactly?’ he asked mildly.

‘You know I work hard to keep your little mansion spotless, I have endless charity events, never mind the soup kitchen and all my church duties.’

‘I am teasing you, my dear. What do you do all day Grace?’ he asked grinning wickedly at the maid.

‘Ah, Master tease Grace. Madam show Grace what-y to do in the house. Madam very goot cause she wants Master to be happy,’ she replied, automatically defending her Mistress, even though not understanding why.

With a shrug and smile Mr Hinckley bent over to kiss his wife good-bye and gave a wave to Grace.

‘Thank you Grace,’ said Mrs Hinckley. ‘We woman stick together! Now let me show you what needs to be done in the house today. Grace, you need to focus on looking, not just up, but also down. You clean perfectly, everything at eye-level, but neglect the rest. The skirting boards need to be cleaned with a wet cloth, the doors could do with a rub down and the tops must be dusted. Also don’t forget to dust the ceiling lights.’ She suddenly looked at Grace. ‘Thank you my friend. Thank you for defending me.’

Grace looked at her Mistress in surprise. This was the first time in the nine years of working for The Hinckley’s that her Madam had ever shown a soft side or thanked her without criticizing her at the same time! She couldn’t wait until she told Beauty during her break.

‘I will be out all day Grace. Please can you cook tuna steaks; potatoes’ in their jackets and make a salad for dinner. See you later.’

Grace tore around the house, dragging a wet cloth over the mentioned spots and quickly dusting the required areas.

‘Beauty, is the Madam out?’ she questioned, peering around the back door of her friend’s house.

‘Hi Grace, yes she’s out. Come on in and I will make some tea and toast.’ Beauty and Grace made their way outside to sit on the back porch, in the sun, with their toast and tea.

‘Me tinks Master, him have affair.’

‘Really, what makes you say that?’ questioned Beauty.

‘Him out lot lately, early to work, late home and he got new secretary. Me tinks Madam not happy. Madam says tings lately, me see her crying and she much more nice to me.’ Grace related to her friend the breakfast incident and the kindness shown by her Mistress.

‘Men,’ commented Beauty patting her pregnant belly. ‘If I hadn’t fallen pregnant my Mistress would have helped me finish my schooling. Now, I will probably be a maid for the rest of my life.’

‘Why Beauty? You still study; don’t give-y up just ‘cause of baby. You study, you be teacher, you not give up. Your Madam, she your friend. She love you and she say she look after the baby. You not give up!’

‘You are right of course Gracey. She is wonderful and she does care for me. I know she will take care of the baby. She has already bought so much for it. So, how is your nice friend Marcus?’

‘Me tinks, Marcus, he more than my friend,’ Grace giggled.

‘Has he been buying you things again?’ asked her friend.

‘Yes, dis bangle,’ replied Grace, showing it to Beauty.

‘Fine piece,’ commented Beauty, looking intently at the intricate African art, woven in a letter and depicting a love story. ‘I think he fancies you, my friend.’

‘Me better go, time, he go by so quickly. Need to cook dinner. See you tomorrow.’

The sound of pots and pans greeted Mrs Hinckley as she entered the front door. ‘Grace, please bring the shopping in from the car. I’m going to have a quick bath. ‘Is the Master home yet Grace?’

‘No Madam, he not home.’

‘I will just give him a ring. Strange, the phone is going to answering machine. I will phone the office. Hello, hello can I speak to Mr Hinckley?’

‘He’s already on his way home?’ replied the voice on the other end.

‘Thank you. By the way, do you not take messages for him? Are you not his secretary? It is Lynne I am speaking too, is it not?’

‘Yes,’

‘That’s what I thought; I will be having a word with him about your inefficiency and you can expect not to have a job by tomorrow!’

Grace washed dishes like crazy pretending not to take notice of the conversation but straining to hear every word. Even though she was curious she felt enormous empathy for her Mistress. She had liked her Master, she was not sure she liked him anymore. One thing she was sure about though was that her Mistress always won the battle. The secretary would be jobless in the morning. Richard Hinckley could not afford to divorce his wife!

‘I will eat now Grace. Any left-over food, take for your dinner. Don’t worry leaving anything out for the Master.’

Grace hiccupped on her suppressed laugh. Everything was back to normal. He would be punished tonight but tomorrow would play out, once more, the same as every-day.

‘Grace, when Toby has finished eating, please bring him to the room. I will take him to bed with me tonight.

She will show him who da boss tonight, but tomorrow...me will be chasing dat Toby again,’ Grace thought with a grin.