

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Devon Cream

Aishling Morgan

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This book is a work of fiction.  
In real life, make sure you practise safe sex.

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'Becky is a slut but needs to be told what to do. Octavia is wanton and likes nothing more than a good spanking. Polly is stubborn, but in the end her reaction is the same: stiff nipples and wet between her legs.'

'Sir!' Polly objected, finally giving up the attempt to remain silent in the face of his flagrant rudeness.

'Over the wall, Polly,' Jervis said casually and turned to watch his wife Genevieve, who had placed a finger beneath Octavia's chin and tilted it upwards.

'I understand you enjoy the application of a cane to your fat rear?' she asked.

'Yes, Mrs Maray,' Octavia admitted.

'Yes, madame, will serve,' Genevieve replied. 'Now, would you like to be beaten by me?'

'If it pleases you, ma'am.'

'It does please me. There's little I like more than to see a pair of fat, white peasant buttocks decorated with a fine set of scarlet lines. Join your impudent friend.'

*By the same author:*

THE RAKE  
MAIDEN  
TIGER, TIGER

Dedicated to the master of the Devon yarn, A.J. Cole – ‘Jan Stewer’, who would probably not have approved.



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# **DEVON CREAM**

Aishling Morgan



‘Now that Octavia Challacombe, there’s one who’d likely benefit from a good spanking.’

The speaker was Mrs Arrish, one of three middle-aged matrons who sat drinking tea in a comfortable parlour in the village of Ermecombe. Each held her cup with a refined delicacy somewhat out of keeping with a solid body, yet entirely in accord with an expression of smug authority. Mrs Arrish was the tallest of the three and also the most imposing, big-boned and somewhat red in the face. Mrs Apcott was smaller and dumpy, with a round, beaming countenance. Mrs Athwell combined the height of the first with the flesh of the second, producing a bulky whole that filled her substantial armchair.

All three regarded overseeing the social welfare of their neighbours as an absolutely necessary task, albeit an onerous one. That morning Mr Arrish had visited Erme Head Farm, a remote moorland property on which the young Octavia Challacombe lived with the elderly Lias Slater. This had reminded the three matrons of their self-imposed responsibilities and after a discussion of the general moral welfare of the village the conversation had returned to Octavia.

‘Regular spankings I’d say, Mrs Arrish,’ Mrs Apcott replied.

‘On the bare behind,’ Mrs Athwell added.

‘Certainly on the bare behind, Mrs Athwell,’ Mrs Arrish responded. ‘How else would one go about spanking a maid? It won’t do to leave their dresses down, else they hardly feel it. As to opening their drawers, why, how else is a body

supposed to see what she's slapping? Besides, having their behinds bare keeps them in mind of their place.'

'Very true, Mrs Arrish, very true,' Mrs Apcott answered. 'In fact, I find that being bare altogether doesn't do them any harm.'

'No, it doesn't,' Mrs Arrish agreed, 'but it's not hardly decent, not in company anyhow. Still, there's a time and a place for it, that's for certain.'

They paused, each contemplating the thought of a naked, wriggling, spanked Octavia with a quiet relish. None would have admitted that the pleasure was anything other than an entirely respectable response to the thought of a necessary job well done, yet each was aware of a familiar warmth between her plump thighs. Finally Mrs Arrish broke the silence.

'A housekeeper, that's what's needed,' she stated firmly. 'A sensible maiden who won't stand no nonsense.'

'Never a truer word was spoken, Mrs Arrish,' Mrs Athwell replied. 'It's not proper, a young maid like that living all alone with an old man.'

'True indeed,' Mrs Apcott added. 'Besides, she's a strange one, that Octavia. Giddy as an appledrane that's been at the beer.'

'It's her mother's doing,' Mrs Arrish responded. 'Now, I'm not one to speak ill of those that have passed on, but she hadn't a bit of sense in her head.'

'Plenty of airs, though,' Mrs Athwell said. 'Anybody would have thought she was a fine lady, what with her painting and her poetry and who knows what other old crams besides.'

'And fancy calling her maid Octavia,' Mrs Apcott put in. 'That's no name for a country girl. What's wrong with Jane, or Anne, or Mary?'

'Not good enough for her, I dare say,' Mrs Arrish replied. 'She was never content with her place, was Emily Challacombe, and the maid's the same.'

‘And that Lias Slater’s no better,’ Mrs Athwell put in.

‘Very true, Mrs Athwell,’ Mrs Arrish replied. ‘My Jan says he can never figure out what the sly old fox is thinking.’

‘He changes his mood like the weather,’ Mrs Apcott supplied. ‘Tricky he is and not one to be trusted with a young girl. It doesn’t do to think what he might get up to, and her so young and not at all worldly.’

‘She’s a flighty little piece, by all accounts,’ Mrs Arrish stated. ‘She won’t hardly talk to one. It’s as if she’s too good for folk.’

‘It’s the farm sends them that way,’ Mrs Apcott suggested. ‘Way out on the moor with hardly a soul visiting for weeks on end. When she was a child and my Tom used to go up for the milk, she’d run up into the orchard to hide. Not now; she’ll stand and stare like you didn’t have leave to be there.’

‘As we said, a bit more time across her mother’s knee, that’s what she needed,’ Mrs Apcott responded.

‘Wouldn’t do her more than middling harm now,’ Mrs Athwell put in.

‘Very true, Mrs Athwell, very true,’ Mrs Arrish agreed. ‘But the point is not so much as how she needs looking after, but as to who’s going to do it?’

‘How about your Eliza?’ Mrs Athwell replied.

‘No, thank you very much, Mrs Athwell,’ Mrs Arrish answered. ‘I need her to help with my other seven.’

‘Sophie Causey, then.’

‘Don’t be soft, she’s no more fitted to keeping house than Octavia. There’d be more sense in putting one sheep to guard another.’

‘How about Mrs Endicott’s Polly?’ Mrs Apcott suggested. ‘She’s a strapping maid and wouldn’t stand no nonsense from old Lias. She’s got sense, besides.’

‘Don’t she work to the dairy to Kerslake?’ Mrs Athwell asked.

‘Not any more, she don’t,’ Mrs Apcott replied. ‘Seems old Daniel Linnel pinched her where he shouldn’t have and she

gave him a scat on the head with a butter scoop. When he'd got his senses back, he sent her home straight away.'

'She sounds the very person for the job, then,' Mrs Arrish concluded.

High on the moor, Octavia Challacombe was blissfully unaware of the discussion of her life. Nothing more serious occupied her mind than the possibility of being able to find a patch of mushrooms for her supper. She stood on an outcrop of grey granite, drinking in the air and the beauty that stretched away on all sides. The wind blew out her loose black hair and lifted her skirts, making a display of her legs to which she was entirely indifferent, save to enjoy the cool feel of the air on her bare skin. Indeed, had Mrs Arrish chosen that moment to lift Octavia's skirts for spanking, the matron would have been as shocked as her victim, for Octavia wore neither petticoats nor drawers.

The day was hot, the moor a wide expanse of sun-baked grass beneath a blue sky flecked with windblown cloud. She had been walking all afternoon, thinking her own thoughts and choosing her own path, heedless of any need save to be back by nightfall. Lias Slater - who was technically the farm-hand, although she called him 'uncle' - would do no worse than pass a grumbling remark on her lack of industry, which she would ignore. Meanwhile, she was free to do as she pleased, although it was a faint sense of obligation that had spurred her decision to search for mushrooms.

Jumping down from the rock, she began to make her way roughly towards the farm. It was a casual route, born largely of the desire to find a mushroom patch and yet more out of sheer caprice. Walking in a wide curve, she made for a gully which concealed a stand of rowan and pine. As she went, she became aware of pressure in her belly, which grew until, by the time she reached the lip of the gully, it had started to become uncomfortable.

Without the least sign of self-consciousness, she pulled her dress up and sank down into a squat. With the folds of her skirt held high to ensure that it didn't get splashed, her whole lower body was on display: long, shapely legs, a pert yet entirely feminine bottom, and a neat, well-furred sex with the pink centre open as she allowed her muscles to relax. The pee squirted from her vulva and she smiled at the delicious feeling of release, then shut her eyes in bliss as it drained into the grass beneath her. The stream dried to a trickle, then to a drip. With a brief wiggle of her bottom she shook the last few drops away, then rose and went her way.

The copse proved fruitless, with only poisonous or distasteful species to be found. The same was true of the next two places she looked, but she finally found what she wanted on an area of short turf beside a brook. Lifting the front of her dress to form a convenient pannier, Octavia began to pick mushrooms. She was now definitely late, yet she knew that her tardiness would earn no more than a mild rebuke and perhaps a gentle slap on her bottom. Indeed, when Lias saw that his meal was going to include mushrooms, the rebuke would probably be omitted altogether. When they had eaten and rested for a space, she would peel the top of her dress down to her waist and suck his cock for him, an action that was as much part of their evening's routine as clearing the table or dousing the fire.

The knowledge that within the hour she would be bare-breasted and sucking on a large, thick-skinned penis gave her no more concern than did being late for her meal. It meant no more to her than her other chores at the farm and, if she sometimes felt an urgent tingling sensation between her thighs afterwards, then there was a simple remedy. Up would come her dress and her fingers would go to the soft mound of curls below her belly. A few deft touches to the little bud at the top of the wet opening from which she peed would bring a delicious sensation, after which the odd feeling would be gone. Occasionally a carrot

or parsnip would provide a pleasant filling for her hole while she touched herself, but while she knew that uncle Lias's cock was intended for that same hole, he never suggested inserting it and she never pressed the issue.

Despite her innocence, she had seen what happened when neighbours brought their mares to be covered by the carthorse, Georgie, and she knew the consequences. Georgie's enormous penis would grow hard, just as Lias's did. Also, just like Lias, Georgie would become excited and his cock would produce a good quantity of a thick white substance which Lias called seed. This was what caused the mares to produce foals. Lias, she supposed, refrained from covering her in order to avoid the risk of the same thing happening.

The farm was hers, yet she was so used to Lias's company and following his rule that it had become entirely a matter of habit. Indeed, the regular cock-sucking and occasional fondling of her breasts or bottom formed an element of the stability that lent so much to her happiness. Infrequently he would spank her, bare-bottomed, across his knee – unless it was bedtime, when she would be done quite nude. This happened when she was naughty, but his excuses for doing it were so plainly manufactured that it seemed more of a game. It was also usually fairly gentle, and more arousing than painful. Nor did she suffer any of the indignation that being turned bare-bottomed over an old man's knee would have led to among less unworldly girls. After such sessions, she would usually find a quiet corner in which to play with herself. Only when he was drunk did he spank her hard, which hurt but then became more arousing still.

Octavia selected a last mushroom and gave her head a toss to shake a loose curl of hair from her eyes. It was a button, but a large one, with a shape and a glossy skin that brought back the thought of the head of a penis. A large penis, she thought, as she stroked the bulbous shape: bigger than Lias's but not so large as Georgie's. The



mushroom flesh felt firm, again not unlike the end of Lias's cock, and presumably like Georgie's too, although when helping with coverings she had only ever touched the shaft.

She smiled at a sudden, delightful thought and once more stroked her finger over the cap of the mushroom. Thoughts of cocks and smacked bottoms had set her sex tingling and she badly needed to play with herself. Action came immediately after the decision, and she at once decanted the mushrooms on to the ground and pulled her skirts high over her waist. For a moment, she stood enjoying the feel of the cool air on her naked lower body. Then, choosing a suitable patch of long, soft grass by a tree, she made herself comfortable with her back to the trunk and her knees up and open. A tug removed her neckerchief and another burst the knot that held the drawstring of her bodice. Pulling it open, she let her breasts spill out and cupped them in her hands. It felt nice to be bare-breasted, and she took a while to enjoy the sensation, feeling their weight and the way her nipples hardened under her caress. The little buds were soon erect, hard and sensitive so that her stroking renewed the urgency to touch her sex.

Octavia closed her eyes and reached out for the large button mushroom. As her fingers closed on it, she imagined it to be the head of a big cock. Her imagination ran as she placed the mushroom between her legs, close to the wet flesh of her vulva. In her mind she was sat spread open in front of a man, a man who was about to push his cock into her hole. It was not Lias, but another man, a bigger, stronger man; a man with a bigger cock; a huge cock that would fill her like the fattest of parsnips. Perhaps it was the big, heavy-set man who had come that morning to buy some hams. Mr Arrish had been his name, and his trousers had shown a most promising bulge . . .

She put the mushroom to her vagina and pushed, feeling it slide in and open her just as Mr Arrish's big, fat cock might have done. She closed her fingers around the thick stalk and

tried to imagine them being the shaft of Mr Arrish's cock as she pushed them up herself. Her vagina felt tight around the bunched fingers, deliciously tight, as if the hole were really straining to accommodate the cock being put into it. The image of Mr Arrish was strong in her mind, his face red and beaming as he fucked her, his big, jovial smile turning to a huge, lustful grin. The size of his fingers had impressed her and she now imagined them gripping her by the thighs to control her body. A finger found her clitoris and she began to flick at herself with little cuffing motions, each of which caught the top and made the little bud wobble back and forth in the most delightful way.

As her pleasure rose, she embroidered her fantasy. First it was to imagine why Mr Arrish might be inside her. Possibly he might simply have caught her in the woods and thrown her skirts up to get at her sex. He would have pulled her breasts out and made her suck his cock before mounting her, then come in her and left her pregnant on the ground. Certainly it was important that she ended up pregnant, more important than why he had chosen to put his cock in her in the first place. That was simple: men liked girls, as Lias had explained, and what they liked was to put their cocks in whatever warm, wet orifices were available.

She began to push her fist more deeply into herself and to rub harder at her clitoris. The fantasy had now changed. Lias had decided that it was time she was covered and had chosen Mr Arrish to do the job. She had been told to strip and been put out in the field, naked and with a wet sex from a warming spanking, a really hard one. Mr Arrish would have come to her, had her suck his cock, then put it between her breasts. Then he'd have fucked her, down in the grass with her legs kicked high and her hole bursting with huge, fat cock as he pumped himself into her, pushing, and pushing, then grunting as he came. Suddenly she would be full of seed, enough to make her belly swell and to drip from

around his cock on to the grass so that she was left in a puddle of it: naked, come-sodden and, best of all, pregnant.

Octavia came at the thought, whimpering out her pleasure in a long, blissful orgasm as her vagina clamped again and again on her fingers. Her breasts were pushed out, her nipples jutting up from them, pink and achingly tender. The mushroom was pulled from her grip, lodging well up her as her hole contracted and sucked it in. She gave a last, choking sob and then it was over and she was relaxing back against the tree with a satisfied sigh.

After a giggling search of her vagina to retrieve the mushroom, a quick trip to the brook allowed her to wash herself with cool water. Clean and refreshed, she returned her breasts to her bodice and replaced her neckerchief. After gathering up the mushrooms, she took a careful hold on the hem of her dress to stop them from spilling out and set off for the farm.

She had masturbated without the slightest feeling of guilt, nor any idea of how rude her contemporaries would have thought her. Instead she had enjoyed the simple physical pleasures of being bare and of touching herself, with only a mild awareness that it was something that she should not do in front of other people. Her mother had provided her an education better than that of many country girls, but had made no mention whatever of sex. Since then, Lias had simply allowed her to follow her natural instincts, answering her questions but never troubling to discuss the complex restrictions and taboos that surrounded the subject. Still less had he troubled to explain the prevailing attitude to nudity and, as she walked briskly back to the house, it was with her skirts held high to contain the mushrooms and incidentally to provide an impressive display of her bare legs.

Exactly as she anticipated, Lias met her with a vain attempt at a frown and smacked her bottom as she went through the door. He asked her what she was carrying and then, as she dropped her dress to spill her cargo of

mushrooms on to the kitchen table, his weather-beaten face broke into a broad grin. A stew of mutton and vegetables was already simmering over the fire, and to this the mushrooms were added.

Over supper they talked lightly and in the casual fashion of two people fully used to each other's company. The visit of Mr Arrish formed the main topic of conversation, any caller at the remote farm being sufficiently unusual to merit discussion. Throughout the meal Lias poured cider with a free hand, refilling his own quart mug twice before Octavia had finished her own. When the stew was finished, Octavia took an apple as Lias stretched and belched in satisfaction. For a while, they sat in a silence broken only by the sound of Octavia munching on her apple, then Lias rose from the table.

Lias settled himself back into the angle of the chimney corner. He drew on his pipe and placed it on the mantel, then put his hands to his trouser fly. Without hurry, he pulled the buttons open, delved within and pulled out a thick, leathery penis and a large, heavily wrinkled scrotum. Once more taking up his pipe, and lifting his quart pot with his other hand, he slid his body forwards and spread his knees, leaving his genitals bulging from his fly. Octavia paid little attention to this, but finished her apple before getting up.

'Titties out, my dear, if you wouldn't mind,' he remarked.

She smiled and removed her neckerchief, then began to undo her bodice, working at the laces with far less hurry than when she had needed to free her breasts for her own pleasure. Lias watched as she pulled the two full globes of flesh from the restraining cloth and pushed her top down around her middle. Topless, she placed her hands on her head and stretched, pushing her breasts out to show them off in the way she knew he most enjoyed. He smacked his lips in response, admiring her breasts with a relish similar to that which he had shown towards the mushrooms.

‘Quite beautiful, my dear,’ he said after watching her pose for a while. ‘Now, Willy’s ready, if you’d be so kind.’

With the air of one going about a familiar task, Octavia crossed to where Lias sat and knelt down between his open legs. Her tongue flicked out, moistening her lips in readiness as she came forwards. His cock moved sluggishly, as if in anticipation of her tongue, but it was to his balls that she applied her attention. She kissed each, then took hold of his penis and lifted it, allowing her to get at the full bulk of his scrotum. Opening her mouth, she took in both balls and began to roll them over her tongue as she tugged at the shaft of his cock.

Lias gave a low, satisfied moan, then took a swallow of cider. Octavia continued to suck on his balls as his cock stiffened in her hand. The salty, male taste of his scrotum was strong in her mouth despite the sweet juice of the apple, and his pubic hair was tickling her nose. Nevertheless, she persevered, working the big testicles around in her mouth as his cock swelled. He continued to smoke and sip his cider, moving only to slide a little further forwards and press his crotch more firmly into her face. At this, she moved her hand up and began to roll his foreskin back and forth, alternately exposing and concealing the meaty red glans within.

His erection began to grow more quickly, the head poking free. She began a frantic jerking, moving her forearm up and down to pull at the old man’s cock with all her young strength. With an unsteady hand, he put his mug down on the bench, then took a firm grip on her hair. She began to masturbate him even more furiously and to suck his balls deep into her mouth. His response was to pat her cheek: a gentle, admonitory cuff.

‘Come my dear,’ he urged. ‘After all, you wouldn’t want it in your pretty hair, now, would you?’

Resigning herself to the coming mouthful of sperm, Octavia let his balls slip from her mouth and allowed him to

guide her towards his cock. She pursed her lips, forming a tight moue to which he pressed his glans. He pulled her head down and it went in, pushing her lips open as if penetrating a much tighter, more reluctant hole. Keeping her lips tight, she let him do it, feeling the thick cock shaft slide deep into her mouth and bump up against her tonsils. She gagged slightly and he let her pull back; then she began to suck as her hand found his balls.

He took it slowly, moving her head up and down on his penis by the hair as she stroked his scrotum. She could feel the warmth and moisture between her thighs and knew that she was going to have to touch herself afterwards, or even while she did it, if he persisted in taking his time. Then his cock stiffened abruptly and he gave a low grunt, allowing her only the briefest instant to ready herself before her throat was flooded with thick, salty male come. She swallowed and took him deep, allowing the second spurt to erupt in her throat. The grip in her hair tightened as he came, then changed as her head was jerked suddenly back. His cock was pulled from her mouth and she found herself looking up into his bright, pleased eyes. He was smiling, watching in delight as last drops of his sperm oozed from his cock. It went into her open mouth and over her nose and lips, leaving the clear signs that he had come in her mouth. Then he released her hair and she was pulling back, even as his hand went to retrieve his mug of cider.

‘I did say not over my face, Uncle Lias,’ Octavia chided without heat. ‘I don’t really mind swallowing, you know that, but it does feel so dreadfully slimy.’

‘I’m sorry, my dear,’ he answered, ‘but you know I only do it because you’re so pretty.’

Octavia returned a wan smile and accepted his neckerchief as it was offered.

At the window, Polly Endicott watched Octavia wipe Lias’s sperm away with a mixture of outrage, shock and an

alarming excitement. Following the summons from Mrs Arrish, she had been hard put to reach Erme Head before sundown. With her full breasts and hips, hurrying was not something at which she was very good, and the evening was also warm, leaving her somewhat out of breath. She had paused to take a swallow at the farm pump, intending to refresh herself before what she knew might be a difficult task.

Having lost her job at Kerslake dairy, she had been delighted at Mrs Arrish's suggestion of taking the post of housekeeper at Erme Head Farm. The information that she would have to impose this on old Lias Slater and Octavia Challacombe had been less welcome. Yet Mrs Arrish was not to be argued with, especially when backed by Mrs Apcott and Mrs Athwell. To have argued might well have resulted in a painful and shameful few minutes being spanked bare-bottomed across one or another of the women's knees, following which she would have had to give in anyway. So she had gone, and walked the long, rough track with her head full of ways to inform the occupants of Erme Head Farm that she was the new housekeeper.

That she was, as Mrs Arrish had put it – 'expected to spank some sense into that Octavia' – was even more satisfying than being given the job. Polly enjoyed spanking girls as much as she disliked being spanked herself. Like the three matrons, she would have been openly scandalised if it had been suggested that there was anything sexual about such punishments. In secret, she was embarrassingly aware that after giving a spanking she would be hot and wet between her legs. Worse was the knowledge that being spanked herself provoked the same response.

That punishment would do Octavia good, she had no doubt whatever. The girl was spoiled and stand-offish, also rumoured to be immoral – all vices which called for the frequent application of a hand or hairbrush to the offender's bottom. Yet what she saw at the window was so far beyond

what she had expected that it left her wide-eyed and gaping. She had arrived at the exact moment that Lias had been draining his sperm into Octavia's open mouth, an act of the most extravagant obscenity. Worse still was the fact that the girl showed neither reluctance nor remorse, but treated her degradation as if it were quite normal.

Stepping hastily back from the window, Polly struggled to collect her wits. Evidently the three matrons were right; it was time somebody took Octavia and Lias in hand. Lias, she was sure, would not dare such behaviour with her around, while Octavia – well, she knew exactly what to do with girls like Octavia . . .

Burning with righteous indignation, she strode to the farmhouse door and hammered the knocker down. Lias himself answered the door and, as Polly pushed inside, she glimpsed Octavia making a hurried adjustment to her dress.

'Why, if it isn't little Polly Endicott,' Lias said, 'and all in a tizzy. What's the matter, girl?'

'It's . . . it's not decent, that's what's the matter,' Polly stammered, her anger vanishing in a flood of blushes as she tried in vain to express her outrage.

'Not decent? What's not decent?' Lias enquired even as his eyes betrayed his amusement at her condition.

'I . . . Well, you shouldn't,' Polly continued. 'It's not right, not when you're not wed. I'm not even sure it's right when you are wed!'

'And what might that be, my dear?' Lias insisted.

'You know full well what I mean, Lias Slater,' Polly retorted, her anger returning at the subtle mockery of his voice.

'I dare say I do, at that,' Lias replied, his tone suddenly hardening. 'And if folks go peeping in at other folks' windows, then they shouldn't expect to like what they see.'

'That doesn't excuse what you were doing,' Polly snapped back.

'I'll do as I please,' Lias answered.



‘Who is it?’ Octavia’s voice sounded from the kitchen before Polly could find a response.

‘It’s Polly Endicott, from the village,’ Lias answered. ‘Up here minding other folks’ business.’

‘I am not,’ Polly retorted automatically.

‘Aren’t you?’ Lias said. ‘Well, what were you doing peeping in at the window, then?’

‘I came up to say I’m to be your new housekeeper,’ Polly answered defensively.

‘Housekeeper?’ Lias answered. ‘What’s this? We never advertised for no housekeeper.’

‘Well, it’s time you did, then,’ Polly answered. ‘It’s not decent, it’s not!’

‘Decent it may be and decent it may not,’ Lias answered, ‘but it’s none of your business, Polly Endicott.’

Lias’s face was set in a stubborn frown, which was exactly the response Polly had expected. She had intended to appeal to his sense of propriety, yet it now seemed that he was without one. Only the threat of social disapproval remained.

‘Mrs Arrish says –’ Polly began with a phrase that normally put a worried frown on the most obstinate of people.

‘Oh, Mrs Arrish, is it?’ Lias answered. ‘I might have known she’d have a finger in this pie. Well, you can tell your Mrs Arrish that we’re very happy as we are.’

‘Now see here, Lias Slater,’ Polly continued determinedly. ‘You know very well what it’d mean if news of your behaviour were to get around. Where’d you sell your hams, then? What if Mrs Apcott wouldn’t serve you at the store?’

‘Threats now, is it?’ Lias answered hotly.

‘Not a threat, just a plain fact,’ Polly answered. ‘Now, Mrs Arrish has asked me to look after the welfare of the farm, and that I mean to do.’

‘Oh, I see how it is,’ Lias laughed, his anger vanishing abruptly. ‘Anne Arrish is up to her old tricks again. Don’t tell me, she made you the offer and said she’d ask your mother

if she could smack your behind if you didn't take it up; for insolence and laziness, I dare say. Then, when you come back and say we wouldn't have you, she'll smack it anyway, because you haven't done as you should. You want to watch Anne Arrish, you do, my dear. There's nothing she likes more than to smack a fine young behind: a girl's especially. Like as not, she's cooked up the whole scheme to find an excuse to get you over her knee. Then, when's she's finished, she'll like as not nip upstairs to have a little feel where it'll do her the most good.'

Polly found herself colouring furiously. Not only was the suggestion outrageous but it would have been uncomfortably true if applied to herself. Thus it seemed horribly likely to be the truth. Yet that was hardly something she could admit.

'Lias Slater!' she exclaimed with a desperate vehemence. 'That's not true! How could you make such a suggestion! Why, you filthy old beast!'

Lias laughed and showed his yellowing teeth. Polly struggled for words to effectively deny what he had said, but stopped as Octavia came out from the kitchen. In her hand was a candle, which made Polly realise how dark it was getting. Somewhere out on the moor, a fox called, and she turned a nervous glance to the sky beyond the door.

'What's the matter, Uncle Lias?' Octavia asked.

'Oh, nothing to speak of, my dear,' he answered. 'Young Polly here was wondering if there was a place for her here, as housekeeper. I told her we do very well on our own, thank you.'

'Housekeeper?' Octavia queried.

'A misunderstanding, as I say,' Lias went on.

'Then I had best be on my way,' Polly said resignedly.

'Down along to Ermecombe?' Lias asked. 'It'd be as black as a parson's hat before you got to the bridge. Moon's new, you know; there won't be enough light to piss by.'