

THE POSEUR

BY WILLIAM BUNGEROTH



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He descended the narrow staircase proudly, step by step in his stocking feet. The lord of the manor is how he imagined himself, landed gentry, walking down a grand spiral staircase on a rolling hills estate in Chester County that only the supremely wealthy could afford. He felt fulfilled as he reached the bottom of the stairs and looked into the mirror. His toupee of choice had an Elvis Presley pompadour, neatly trimmed to let his graying hair on the sides mingle with the rug on his abnormally large head. Pleased that of his three hairpieces, he had chosen the right one for today's occasion; he walked into the cramped foyer on the way to his diminutive den.

Today was Saturday, Hunt Day, fox against the hounds, as he looked out the window from his leased property onto another's beautiful vista. This was his land, though he paid no taxes to maintain it, and was on average a month behind in the rent.

His beeper buzzed, shattering his gentleman farmer's daydream. He knew he wasn't on call, knowing the interruption couldn't be about patients. He wondered aloud why his other mistress beeped him on a Saturday; she knew it was Hunt Day. He reached into his vest and found his cheaters. With a sigh of relief, he recognized his daughter's phone number.

He debated whether he should call her back. She was his lone child from his first and only marriage. Considering the state of his assets and his current amorous commitments, he knew divorce would be disastrous to his lifestyle. So he stayed married to the mother of his acknowledged child, even though they lived in different houses and led separate lives. Their commonality was their offspring, the paying of bills, and the occasional sexual encounter to perpetuate his lie of a possible reconciliation. He looked again at his daughter's phone number and decided that if urgent, she would beep him up to four times, the benchmark for calling her back.

Quite honestly, he cared more about the state of his riding boots and whether his live-in mistress remembered to polish them than why his daughter was calling.

As he entered the kitchen, he spied his black boots with mahogany tops alone in the corner, spit-polished, and ready to be worn. He smiled to himself, knowing his hold over weak women was intact, as he sat down, grabbed his boots, and forced one pudgy foot downward through the leather till it reached the lift concealed inside the shoe. He repeated the exercise with equal effort on the other foot gaining height in the process.

Though he never served his country, feeling it was the responsibility of others to defend the land; he admired certain aspects of the military, namely the uniforms and the ceremony. He had found that same type of regimental attire, along with pomp and circumstance, in Fox Hunting. The day he received his hunt button, which allowed him to wear his magnificent red hunt coat, dwarfed any other achievement in his life. Now he was one of them, and they couldn't deny it.

He bought the three brass button hunt jacket on credit, using one of his mistress's cards since he had maxed his resources. Walking back to the full-length mirror in the foyer, he checked the fit. It was still a little tight around the waist, but his man retainer, which he wore instead of underwear, kept his gut in. Satisfied with his reflection, he was glad that he did not buy his riding apparel off the rack but had it custom made. He thought it was worth the price. And how he looked should be compensation enough for his mistress without any need to pay her back.

Slightly ahead of schedule, he poured himself a black coffee and read the paper. Liberal in his views, but uncharitable in actions, he perused the upcoming elections. Though he didn't actively participate in the voting process, he considered himself an expert on today's political issues. He reveled in the knowledge that no one, outside of those representing their constituencies, spent as much time as he did debating local and national issues. Finishing the paper and armed for political dialogue, he couldn't wait to joust with unsuspecting hunt club members on even the remotest topic with political overtones. His game was well known, and most members avoided his web.

Checking his Rolex, a knockoff, he put his equestrian helmet, covered in black cloth, under his arm and closed the kitchen door behind him. His live-in mistress, an excellent rider, left earlier in the morning to prepare their horses for the Formal Hunt, because as the lord of his manor, he had people for such menial tasks

It was a glorious day as he looked up at the cloudless sky. He would soon pretend to be among his element, well-bred people and competent horsemen with a respect for all their animals' needs that lived by a code of honor that could not be changed by a wink and looking the other way.

Gazing one more time at his counterfeit image in the rearview mirror, he felt every bit the success he wasn't as he turned on the engine of his high-powered European SUV, which his brother-in-law had personally guaranteed, and drove down the shared driveway to the Hunt.