

## Mask by Xanthe



<http://www.xanthe.org/mask/>

### Story Notes:

This is an unbeta'd vignette inspired by the first 3 eps of S5. Many thanks to Anne for sending me the tape (although I don't think she expected me to write \*this\* as a result!) This isn't the kind of thing I usually write but once the idea was in my head I wanted to run with it. Please forgive any errors and Criticisms etc.

### Chapter 1 by Xanthe

Abbey slid out of the bed quietly, to avoid disturbing Jed, and got dressed quickly, in sweatpants and a tee shirt. She glanced over Jed's sleeping head at the clock on the nightstand: 5 am. In half an hour the place would start to stir, but until then the Residence would be in silence. She liked this time of the day best, when it was quiet, before the place turned into a house full of strangers, people who came and went and whose names she sometimes did not even know. Abbey slipped quietly out of the bedroom, closing the door behind her, and emerged into the hallway. Ron was standing outside and he straightened up as she appeared, muttering something into his sleeve, presumably alerting whoever needed to know that the First Lady was up and about and headed off for her usual morning ritual; he then proceeded to trail her unobtrusively down the hallway.

Abbey ignored him, glancing down at her bare feet as she walked. She wasn't wearing any shoes – she was only going along the corridor to one of the spare bedrooms to do her Pilates exercises and she didn't need shoes for that. She opened a door just down the hallway and slipped inside, closing the door behind her. She left the drapes closed and

turned on the small lamp by the bed. She didn't like the harshness of the overhead light. She preferred the more muted tones of the lamp, bathing her in shadows.

Abbey sat on the floor, and began her exercises. She breathed slowly, deeply, trying to gather her thoughts. The woman she'd learned Pilates from, years ago, had instructed her to clear her mind of clutter and give her overactive brain a chance to rest. Abbey gave a low, throaty laugh, as she remembered those words now.

"Fat chance," she muttered to herself, sliding forward to stretch out her spine. It gave a satisfying little click and she sighed, leaning further into the stretch. She took her time, slowly going through her repetitions for fifteen minutes, and then she got up, went to the door, opened it, and glanced at Ron who was standing outside.

"Ron, would you come in here for a moment please," she asked him politely. A variety of emotions passed across his face, but she didn't wait around long enough to analyse them. Instead she turned and walked back into the bedroom. Ron followed her a split second later, and she waited until he was inside, then shut the door behind him, locked it, turned, grabbed him by the jacket and pushed him back against the closed door. His hands went around her and she was reminded once again of how very tall he was, and how very tiny she was. Not that it mattered, for he swept her up against him, and she leaned eagerly into his passionate kiss. His hands were warm and large, cupping her ass, and his mouth felt unfamiliar, pressed against her own, the moustache strange and yet oddly thrilling for being so different to Jed's clean shaven face.

"Mrs. Bartlet..." he began the moment she let him up for air, but she stopped him by placing her fingers over his mouth.

"Ssh," she told him urgently, needing to silence him. She didn't want to talk. She could get that from Jed; she had always been able to get more than enough conversation from Jed over the years. Now she wanted silence.

"Please..." Ron whispered through her fingers, and there was an agonised look in his eyes. She ignored it, ignored everything except for her own need, and hastily drew back and pulled off her tee shirt. She wasn't wearing a bra, and her breasts tumbled out of their confinement, as if eager to be free. She wasn't wearing any make up either, and she hadn't yet taken a shower this morning, but Abbey had never been unconfident of her sexual charms. There had never been a man she couldn't have, if she wanted him, and Ron was no different. It had been she who had seduced him, a few weeks ago, out in the barn at Manchester where she had gone with Zoey after her daughter's kidnapping. She could still remember the surprised look in his eyes and the scent of straw as they'd made love that first time. He'd protested then as he protested now, but she still wasn't listening.

"Come here," she told him throatily, grabbing his hand and placing it on her breast. He came, unable to resist her, now or ever, for as long as she wanted him. He let out a deep, heartfelt sigh as he moulded his hands around her breasts. He began kneading softly, his fingertips gently caressing each nipple, and she pressed herself against his groin, gasping with pleasure. Her breasts had always been highly sensitive, and she loved the way they felt,

cupped in his big hands, hands that were so gentle, caressing and warm, stroking her arousal higher and higher. She slid out of her sweatpants, grabbed one of his hands away from her breasts, and insinuated it instead between her legs. She was wet and ready for him, and his eyes darkened with the arousal that knowledge caused. He picked her up easily, in a way that Jed never could, so that she was straddling his big thighs, his mouth claiming her breasts, neck and mouth with passionate fervour. She wrapped her legs around him, and dimly heard the sound of him unzipping, and then he was thrusting up inside her, pushing her so that her back was against the wall, his hands around her waist, his mouth still on her breasts. She gripped him tightly around the back – he was so big, so broad and strong, an unmoveable oak of a man; calm, solid, and dependable. She kissed his mouth again, loving the feeling of being held by him, enveloped by him. He was so big that it felt as if he was everywhere; his arms were around her, his muscular legs were planted sturdily on the ground beneath her, effortlessly bearing her weight, and his hard cock was buried deep inside her.

She loved how he made her feel. That had been what had first attracted her to him, as he had discussed the details for Zoey's protection with her a few weeks ago. He had taken her and her anxieties seriously. He had spoken so zealously about the safety of her child, the child she had so nearly lost, and those deep, dark eyes of his had radiated empathy with her emotions. Although she knew that it was just his job, he honestly seemed to care. Once they were at Manchester, she had found herself drawn to him more and more. He had a quiet quality that was so different to Jed's edginess. Jed was mercurial, charismatic and volatile. Life with Jed had always been exciting and full of drama – the one thing it had never been was quiet, and she had never wanted it to be. She had been drawn to Jed because life with him was never dull, and Abbey didn't like being bored. She thrived on constant excitement, on passionate quarrels and just as passionate rapprochements...but not now. Ron offered her something else, something that Jed had never been able to give her - something she had never even wanted before now: Ron made her feel safe.

It was over as quickly as it began. He stood there panting, and she, still impaled on him, gazed at him hazily in the aftermath of their mutual orgasm.

"Mrs. Bartlet...this is wrong," he whispered, that agonised look returning to his eyes again now that the moment of sexual excitement had passed. She had never told him to call her Abbey, and he had never presumed to do so, even when he was fucking her up against the wall, or on the floor, or in the hay in the barn at Manchester. Strangely, they had never yet made love on a bed.

"Hush, Ron...hush," she whispered, hugging him close. He buried his face in her breasts, and she held him there, held him fast. She could feel his moustache again, tickling her skin, and the muscles in his broad back quivered as she stroked him.

"Please," he murmured, his words muffled. "We have to end this."

"Not yet," she told him. "Not yet. I need you. I still need you." There was nothing else she could have said to him that would have bound him more closely to her. She didn't even know him that well – they'd barely spoken before their affair, if that was what this was, and

that hadn't changed during these weeks of frenzied sexual grappling. Yet somehow she sensed a need in him as much as he did in her. His need was to be needed – maybe that was why he had chosen this particular career, although she had never asked him. She knew she was using him, knew she was being cruel, but she couldn't help herself. She needed his desire, needed his steadfast, constant presence, his loyalty, and the security of those big hands making love to her. She had to have some place to escape to these days, when her emotions felt as if they had been frozen in time and locked up in stone. He was her escape.

She held him there for a long time, comforting him as she might a baby, soothing his back with little strokes of her hand, but she wasn't really there. Her mind was a million miles away, detached, numb, looking on as an observer, not a participant.

She loved her husband. It wasn't a hearts and flowers kind of love. It went deeper than the heart; soul deep. She'd been popular at college, had dated lots of men, and she loved to flirt – but the day Jed had walked into her life, she'd known, without any shadow of a doubt, that he was her future. Sometimes she still resented him for that, for there never being a contest, for him never having to work for her, for the fact that she had never got to make a choice. If she had believed in reincarnation she might have thought that she had known him before, in a previous life. He was like her twin, his passions and drive matching her own, and their lives were too deeply entwined to ever be pulled apart. She knew their marriage would last until the day they died. Yes, even after all these years she still loved her husband. This wasn't about that.

Somehow, Jed's destiny had consumed her own. She had fought it for awhile, but ever since Zoey's abduction she had been too tired to fight any more. She wanted peace and quiet, wanted silence, kindness and all the things that Ron could give her. She didn't want to fight or argue any more. She still blamed Jed for what had happened to her little girl, but she couldn't talk about it any more. She couldn't hold a grudge about it any more either. That wasn't her style and it wasn't something she could do to Jed. She loved him too much for that.

Abbey shifted, and began disentangling herself from Ron, and he stepped back, placed her carefully back on the floor, and tidied himself up. She pulled on her sweatpants and tee shirt, and he waited until she was done, and then went to the door and held it open for her.

"Ron," she said, with a nod as she passed.

"Mrs. Bartlet," he replied softly. She walked down the hallway, feeling serene and detached, and back into the bedroom she shared with Jed. He was just stirring and gazed at her lazily.

"Morning sweetie." She kissed him on the forehead in passing and then hurried to the bathroom, locking the door behind her. She undressed, put her clothes into the laundry basket, and then stepped under the shower. The warm water washed away the little red marks on her breasts where Ron had sucked on them, and she lathered herself in soap to wash away all the other evidence of their love making. Abbey would never let Jed know about Ron; not for Jed's sake, although she knew that he would be upset. Her husband had always been a jealous man, and she had not been above playing on that over the years,

when she'd felt she needed some attention, but not this time. Jed would never find out because she wouldn't let that happen to Ron. He stood to lose his job and his honour for something that wasn't his fault. She didn't love Ron, but he was showing her a kindness that she needed right now, and she would do everything in her power to protect him. No – Jed would never find out. One day these assignments would simply stop. She wouldn't initiate them, and Ron never would. They wouldn't talk about it. They would never talk about it. It would just be over, as silently as it had begun.

Abbey stepped out of the shower, dried herself, and carefully styled her hair. She got dressed in the outfit she had placed in the bathroom the previous night – coffee coloured suit, pale cream blouse, plain underwear. She pulled on her panty hose, stepped into her shoes, and then sat in front of the mirror and began applying her make up. Her First Lady mask she called it; dark brown mascara, smoky black eyeliner, honey-coloured foundation, golden powder, warm-toned lipstick. She finished applying her lipstick, rubbed her lips together, and then gazed at herself in the mirror. With her First Lady mask in place she looked flawless – but she didn't even recognise the woman in the mirror. The strange creature, the one wearing the mask, smiled at her, and she gazed back, numbly.

She had been taken apart, piece by piece over the past few years. Her husband had been shot, she had lost the career she had worked so hard for all her life, and her baby girl had been kidnapped and returned to her bruised, broken and scared. She would stay strong for her husband, for her children, and for her country, but she couldn't stay strong for herself because she didn't know who she was any more. The only time she felt as if she caught a glimpse of herself was during those snatched minutes with Ron. That was when the mask slipped, and she had some respite from the trappings of her title and the complexities of her relationship with her husband. Nobody would ever know how she felt, because she would never tell them. They needed her to take care of them – they didn't need to know the ways she had found to take care of herself.

The First Lady took a deep breath, composing herself, and studied her reflection carefully in the mirror. Only when she was sure that her mask was in place did she get up and step towards the door, ready to face another day.

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