

CONDITIONALLY MAINTAINED WOMEN

KEPT WOMEN – GOLDEN CAGE

What I mean by ‘kept woman’ is a woman who is dependent on her partner in one or more ways, usually financially and socially. Socially – the man is there to protect her; while his name and reputation both shields her from many of life’s difficulties and gives her a certain status. Furthermore, the benefit of her association with him can gain her access to influential spheres of society and invitations to ‘posh’ parties, for example. Financially – aside from acquiring generous gifts such as clothing and jewellery, possibly even a rent-free apartment, she can make use of his resources such as private doctors, help from his legal advisers, the use of his car or chauffeur, access to his network of business contacts, even air miles for her journeys. All such benefits, and maybe more, can accrue to her purely as a by-product of being in a relationship with such a man. The list of rewards and advantages can go on and on.

I refer to a woman who seemingly has everything, but in reality she suffers from dependency on her partner and pays a very high price for it. I refer to all women regardless of whether they are married, mistresses or girlfriends, as well as mothers of children of men on whom they depend financially, if only to support the raising of the children the man has fathered. I also include women who have been ‘rescued’ from bad circumstances by a rich man, and also women who are providing professional sexual services and are dependent on a single client. All such women are trapped in what I regard as a modern manifestation of slavery – the slavery of a golden cage.

The slavery of a golden cage is a life lived in circumstances in which women suffer exploitation and potential humiliation. They are very often conscious of these depredations, but feel disempowered from fighting against them. They might feel bad, guilty, angry or ashamed, and yet struggle to make sense of why they harbour these negative feelings. After all, he is a ‘perfect’ man, so generous, and what would they do and be without that man? The results of living in such circumstances can be anxiety, restlessness, sleeplessness, unnecessary spending, addictions, a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. Quite dreadful. All of these symptoms can lead to a greater dependency on what such a man can provide, as paradoxically that can prove a temporary fix in the form of more money for shopping, beauty treatments, access to art events, holidays, posh dinners; in short, anything that makes those dreadful feelings disappear, at least for a little while. Then the feelings and problems resume, as does the need for what the man provides, thus creating a deadly vicious circle.

Understanding of what is happening can be extremely difficult. The women feel that somehow their situation is bad, but they don’t quite get why it is bad. Nor can they see a way out of it, being unsure whether there is any other way of living that is possible for them, for a range of individual personal reasons.

There are three possible options for dealing with the future. The first is for the woman to carry on as she has in the past. The second is to try to reach out for all the seemingly good solutions that are available to her. The third is to work through the situation – to understand properly what is happening, and why, to identify the dynamics and complexity of her situation, and to explore safe and reasonable alternative lifestyle choices without making drastic, threatening or merely unrealistic changes.