



FB FREYA'S BOWER PRESENTS

A Personal Statement

ANSLEY VAUGHAN

A Personal Statement

by

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CHAPTER ONE

"To say that the Right Honourable Gentleman has just been guilty of a terminological inexactitude would be like saying the sun is a long way away." The man was flushed, furious. "It is both so obvious as hardly to require pointing out, and also scarcely enough to convey the magnitude of his inaccuracy." He banged his hand onto the leather surface in front of him for emphasis. "The statistics on which he is basing his assumptions are wrong. I've already proved them to be wrong. Why does he persist in using them?"

In the dappled light of the House of Commons, two men were squaring up to each other across the despatch box. The man who had spoken flung himself down on the green leather bench, giving way to the other, who stood, tall and elegant, smiling at his opponent.

"Mr Deputy Speaker, it seems to me that we've been through all this before. If the Honourable Gentleman were not so excitable, he might remember that a thorough analysis of these statistics was presented to the House only a week ago."

On this bright spring evening in London, many of the members of parliament who remained at Westminster had drifted out onto the terrace, and groups of noisy drinkers thronged the tables. There were more people there than usual because an important vote was due at ten that night; in the meantime, they had nothing to do but chat and drink. When the whisper went round the bars and terraces, "Dumont and Wickham are having a go," the chamber began to fill up. There is nothing MPs like more than a good punch-up.

Jack Wickham was on his feet again. He was angry now, not feigning it, and his face had paled, with just a spot of colour on each cheek. "Mr Deputy Speaker, I assume that the Right Honourable Gentleman is using yet more of the coded language at which he is so proficient. 'Excitable.' Yes, well, I am excitable when faced with dishonesty and chicanery on this scale."

A hubbub immediately erupted, MPs on all sides recognising this as unparliamentary language of the worst sort. Sure enough, the Deputy Speaker intervened, with a sharp cry of "Order, Order!" He looked at Wickham severely over the top of his spectacles, and intoned, "I must ask the Honourable Member for Beresford to withdraw those words."

Wickham looked mutinous. Across the aisle, his quarry was lying back, long legs crossed, an expression of amusement on his face.

"The Honourable Member must withdraw, or I will be forced to take action against him."

The pause continued, then the person sitting next to him on the opposition benches tugged at Wickham's sleeve and whispered something. He nodded, then straightened up. "Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologise to you and the House, and I withdraw the words unreservedly. But it does seem to me that the Bill, which the minister is seeking to force through, is a microcosm of everything that is wrong with his party and with him. He is presiding over legislation which gradually removes freedoms and makes minorities vulnerable. In the Brave New World which the minister is building, it would be as well not to be different, in any way, not to be a single mother, not to be differently-abled, and certainly not to be gay!"

Pascal Dumont got up again, unfolding his long limbs without haste. "Mr Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member for Beresford has certainly got things out of proportion if he's suggesting that a Bill for tightening regulations on public

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behaviour is a major threat to civil liberties."

"The fact remains," Wickham said, leaping to his feet, "that the penalties included in the Bill are extreme, not to say draconian."

Dumont rose again, scarcely getting himself upright before drawling. "I think the shadow minister doth protest too much."

Wickham had got himself under control by now, and he looked round at the members of his own party behind him. "Mr Deputy Speaker, I read in one of the Sunday supplements that the reason the minister has got that very... fancy French name is because his ancestors were Norman. Came over with William the Conqueror. So all I can say is, his family has a long history of oppressing the poor bloody peasants."

Dumont responded equably. "Mr Deputy Speaker, I am working under the minor handicap of being a British politician with a French name. The Honourable Member for Beresford is labouring under the crushing disadvantage of being... himself."

He smiled around the chamber at the laughter this generated on both sides, and then left. But he was not smiling when he got to his office, his parliamentary private secretary in attendance. He flung his papers on the desk and made for the drinks cabinet.

"What the hell is wrong with that man, that he wrenches everything round to a suggestion that I'm homophobic?"

His PPS, Angela Hilton was a forceful woman in early middle age. She was so ambitious that even Dumont was sometimes a bit intimidated by her.

"Well, he's over-sensitive," she said, accepting a gin and tonic. "And frankly Minister, there are plenty of people who would be quite happy if you were... um... less than committed to this endless whinging about gay rights. Whatever Wickham says, there are plenty of people who think this government has gone too far in pandering to minorities of all sorts."

"Well, I'm not going to change my position. But bloody Wickham is getting on my nerves, always needling me like that."

"Why don't you have a word with him? Ask him to tone it down?"

Dumont thought about it. "I could, I suppose. But I'm wary of handing the little bastard anything he could use as ammunition against me." He banged his glass down on the desk, signifying an end to the conversation. "Now, what's next?"

Angela's brief was to help him with his parliamentary work, but she pulled out the diary which his secretary had left and squinted at it. "You have dinner with your Constituency Chairman."

"Ah yes, of course, Len's here for a few days."

"I presume that means you're not going north?"

"Not this time, thank heavens. That journey really takes it out of me at the end of a long week."

"Ah, you poor devils with far-flung constituencies!" Angela smiled the smug smile of someone who represented a south London seat. "And tomorrow, in the morning, you said you'd make time to talk to the new intern."

"Intern?" He scowled. "Oh yes, Senator Howells' protégé. Well, I'll be in my office all day."

* * *

In a much smaller office at the other end of Whitehall, Jack Wickham stormed up and down while his companion sat at a desk, trying to write on a laptop computer.

"Damn the man. He's clearly a homophobe, he never lets a chance go by without

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getting a dig at me."

The other, a portly blond man in his forties, shook his head. "For heaven's sake, Jack, will you please let me get on with these letters. I'm supposed to be going out tonight."

Jack shook his head, not taking any notice. "Fuck it, Carter, does he think it's easy being openly gay in an environment like this? The last thing I need is some smart-arsed public school boy like Dumont pointing his finger and calling me excitable."

"Well, frankly, old chap," Tom Carter said mildly, "you are a bit over-excited at the moment. Calm down. Have a drink. Dumont's a wanker."

"Yes, but a wanker who's going to be the next prime minister but three. Damn it, Tom, we can't have people like that running the country."

Carter gave up, closed down his computer and shut the lid. "You know, Jack, it's not like you to get so worked up. Sure you don't fancy him?"

"Fuck off, Carter!," Jack said sharply, then calming down. "Oh, go and screw yourself, you idiot." He flung himself into a chair. "Now then, what about that drink?"

* * *

Pascal Dumont had arranged to meet Len Mather at one of the newest smart restaurants in Westminster. He knew it was a waste of money for a man who would probably prefer tripe and black pudding to foie gras and truffles, but he liked the old boy and wanted to give him a good time. And also, his fiancée, Marcia, was coming along, and she definitely required the best.

Len was pleased, having a soft spot for all ladies, but particularly one so glamorous and blonde as Marcia.

"It'll be good when you two are finally married," he said over the dessert. "Folk in Otterthwaite are still suspicious about a man who doesn't have a wife."

"But Pascal has been married before," Marcia said, giving a little tinkling laugh.

"Yes, and they're even more suspicious of men who are divorced," Len said darkly.

When Len had excused himself to go to the gents, Marcia said dismissively. "Horrid, vulgar little man. But he's right, we need to set a date for the wedding."

"I suppose so. But I am dreadfully busy at the moment with this Bill and a whole lot of other things coming up."

"Of course. We can talk about it tonight."

Pascal went to her exquisite mews house in Chelsea. Marcia ran a small and very exclusive art gallery. Here, everything was neat, everything in such good taste that he almost felt out of place himself.

She undressed, in her precise way, sitting at the dressing table to remove her jewellery and take off her make-up. Pascal sat on the bed to unlace his shoes, wondering at what point the passion had totally departed from their relationship. Or perhaps it had never been there at all, he couldn't ever remember that wild feeling of helpless lust, the knowledge that this was a body he had to have, and to hell with the consequences. They made love decorously, as always, and afterwards he lay awake, watching her sleeping form. She was quite beautiful, her heavy golden hair cut in a neat bob, falling back from her pale face as she moved in her sleep. She had a peaches and cream complexion, and a delicate heart-shaped face. Her body, now swathed in pale pink silk, was slender and toned. She was perfect. She had the body of an angel and an iron will, and he knew she'd make him a wonderful wife. He sat up in bed, looking at his watch and wondering why he was surrounded by women who

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were even more ambitious than he was. Yes, she'd be a great wife, for a minister, for a prime minister. She'd take him to the top of the pole.

Pascal sighed and got out of bed. Marcia shifted a little, but didn't wake as he dressed quietly and let himself out, his heart heavy with a sense of unfulfilled longing.

* * *

He was busy with the Bill and its ramifications, and until his diary secretary knocked at his door and told him he had a visitor, he'd completely forgotten the arrival of the American intern. He scowled, not wanting to leave his papers. But Senator Howells had been a good friend, showing him around Washington and hosting several dinners for him on a recent visit, and looking after his protégé was the least he could do. He stood up as the young man entered the room.

What came into view was probably the most perfect specimen of manhood he had ever seen. The newcomer was tall, near to his own height, which was well over six foot. Hair a little long, a sun-streaked blondish-brown, framing the head to give a leonine look. The face was oval, the skin golden, the features regular. The eyes were a deep, glorious blue, and fringed with dark lashes which didn't seem to go with the rest of the colouring, but nevertheless, suited him perfectly. Broad shoulders tapered to a thin waist and narrow hips, with long legs encased in tight black trousers.

Pascal felt his heart move, and even worse, a twitching sensation in his penis, something he thought he'd got under control forever.

He held his hand out, realising that in this crisis, his legendary good memory had failed him, he couldn't remember the boy's name.

"Welcome to Westminster!" he said.

"Well thank you, Minister Dumont," the vision said in impeccable Ivy League tones. "I'm Todd Panopoulos. Thank you for having me."

Christ, Pascal thought as they shook hands. *He doesn't just look like a Greek god, he is one.* He led Todd over to the fireplace, filled at this time of year with an arrangement of dried flowers, and they sat in leather armchairs, facing each other.

"So, Todd," Pascal said, having difficulty speaking. "Tell me about your background, your subject." He was sure it was all in the e-mail from Howells, but it had all fled his brain.

"Well sir." The voice was deep and mellifluous. "I majored in Political Economy and Government at the JFK School at Harvard. And for the past year I've been studying Political Philosophy at Oxford University. Senator Howells thought it would be good to watch government in action."

"Well, you've come to the right place! But I can't help feeling you may find yourself a little overqualified for the kind of work you'll be doing at first. I mean, it's just basic research, searching for things in the parliamentary library, going through reports, checking things in cuttings and in Hansard and so on."

Todd shook his head. "No, that's exactly what I want to do. Learn the nuts and bolts of it. And I'm so thrilled to be working for a real minister!"

Pascal laughed. "Well, I think you'll find I'm only a very junior minister. Right at the bottom of the heap."

"Oh no, sir. Senator Howells says you're up and coming."

Dumont thought 'up and coming' would be all too accurate if he spent much more time in close proximity to this beautiful creature. He stood. "Well, come to the outside office and I'll introduce you to the rest of the staff. We'll see if we can muster up a crowd to go out to lunch so you can get to know them."

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The intern held up a hand. "One moment sir. I'm planning to make a web diary of this assignment, a Blog. Just an account of what happens with stills and some video clips. Do you mind if I get a picture of the two of us?"

"What? Oh no, not at all. Shall I call Bella in..."

"No sir, not necessary." Todd reached into his pocket and brought out the smallest, state-of-the-art digital camera. He flicked a couple of switches with expert skill, placed the camera on a desk at an angle, and went to stand with the minister, both of them smiling artificially.

"It didn't flash," Pascal said, after a while.

"It doesn't need to," Todd said, collecting the camera and putting it away. "It's all done electronically. Totally state-of-the-art."

As Dumont ushered the intern out of the room, a thought struck him. "Oh by the way, Todd, how old are you?"

"I'm twenty-four, sir."

CHAPTER TWO

In the end, a group of eight went out to the restaurant, this one a little less exclusive than the place he'd taken Len Mather to. As well as himself and Todd, there was Angela Hilton, Carrie Mason, his diary secretary, Bella Grant, his general secretary, two young men who were assistants in the ministerial office, and Callum Byrne, the senior civil servant in the department. They were trying to explain to Todd the division between Dumont's personal and parliamentary staff, and the civil servants who assisted him in his ministerial work.

"The civil servants aren't allowed to help with constituency work," Byrne explained, and added with a grin. "But there's no restriction on what you can do. You'll be working twice as hard as the rest of us!"

"Todd's going to keep a Blog," Dumont told them, more by way of warning than anything else.

Todd started to explain the mechanics of it, showing off the camera. "I can just set it and leave it. Look, I'll put it here and we'll get pictures of this lunch. It's great." He switched on the little camera again and placed it on a ledge on a nearby pillar, where its green LED winked silently as it recorded the meal.

On the way out of the restaurant, Pascal, with sinking heart, saw his ex-wife coming in with the unfortunate lawyer she now had in tow. She was an elegant, dark-haired woman, with strong aquiline features. Another one of those ambitious females to add to his list.

Lacy nodded at those of his staff she knew, and air kissed on either side of his face. The lawyer shook hands and moved off to the table indicated by a hovering waiter. Lacy looked at Todd, who was following the others to the door.

"And who on earth is *that*?" she asked, eyebrows raised.

"That's my new intern. American. He's called Todd."

"Oh wow!" she said, then, leaning forward, her lips close to his ear. "But darling, do you really think it's wise?" She whirled off after the lawyer, leaving Pascal with a disgruntled feeling which stayed with him for the rest of the day.

But his feeling of irritation diminished once Todd started work. The boy was conscientious, thorough and enthusiastic. He worked long hours, and was genuinely excited when Pascal arranged for him to attend debates, or Committees. He began giving him more and more complex tasks, and relying on him for some of the constituency work which he was always afraid might get swamped under his ministerial workload.

And every time he looked at Todd, his heart thumped in his chest and an illicit warmth spread through his loins. He told himself it was just because he was a perfect specimen, and as pleasing to look at as a fine horse, a lovely woman or a great painting. But really, he knew there was more to it than that.

It was about a week later that he had another run-in with Jack Wickham. It began at Prime Minister's Questions, when Wickham asked the usual innocuous question about whether the prime minister intended to visit his constituency, and received the rattled-off response that the prime minister didn't, at the moment, have any plans to do so. Wickham followed up. "Will the prime minister confirm that certain of his ministers are pursuing policies which are directly unfriendly to gay men? Will he explain to the House if this is now government policy, or simply the product of the homophobia of a few of his ministers?"

The prime minister gave a small twitch, recognisable to those who watched for

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such things as one of extreme irritation at yet another side issue which might cause him trouble and cost the party votes. But he responded blandly enough.

"The Honourable Gentleman should know that all members of this government, without exception, are committed to enhancing and improving the rights of gay men and women."

Wickham rose for his supplementary question. "If that is the case, could the prime minister explain why the provisions in the new Bill contain sanctions against gay men?"

The prime minister sighed. "I think if the Honourable Gentleman studies the Bill in detail, he will see that what is proposed is absolutely fair and equal treatment for all under the legislation."

The Speaker called the next questioner, and Wickham sat down, letting his glance flicker across the impassive face of Pascal Dumont. He'd just caused him some trouble, and Dumont knew it.

Sure enough, Dumont was visited in his office by the prime minister's political adviser, Duncan Hebden.

"Now then, Dumont, the PM wants me to tell you that he's delighted with the way you're handling the Public Behaviour Bill. Excellent job. No problems there?"

"Nothing I can't handle."

"Good. That's good. Because the PM was just a little concerned with the line of questioning coming from the opposition..."

"Ah, Wickham!" Dumont spat out the name.

"Yes, Wickham. He seems to have the idea you have some animus against gay men." Hebden studied him, his ruddy face creased into a frown. "I have to ask this. Do you?"

"No, of course not," Pascal said lightly. "Wickham has a persecution mania."

Hebden nodded. "Well, I do agree he seems to have taken this up as a crusade. But I have to say his personal dislike of you is fuelling his attitude."

"Not much I can do about that..."

"And the PM is very concerned that the treatment of gay men, which is after all a minute aspect of the Bill, is taking up so much time and getting so much publicity."

There was a silence. Both men knew how hard the prime minister had worked to secure the pink vote for himself at the next election.

"So he wants you to put a stop to it."

"How?"

"Oh, I don't know. Talk to Wickham, offer some concessions. Be nice to him. Persuade him to obsess about something else. The PM emphatically doesn't want to see another piece in the papers about the government launching a gay-bashing exercise."

Really rattled now, Dumont got his secretary to ring Wickham's and ask to see him. The man himself arrived in the office in the early evening. Everything about him was calculated to irritate Dumont, even the way he dressed. Wickham was wearing a loose Calvin Klein suit in a light fawn colour, with a pale green silk shirt which went well with his brown hair. He'd removed his tie as soon as he left the Commons chamber, and his casual appearance was in sharp contrast to Dumont's own formal attire of dark suit and crisp white shirt.

The two men faced each other. Dumont didn't offer a seat. Behind him stood Todd, looking like some angelic bouncer.

"Thank you for coming so quickly," Dumont said a little awkwardly. "I thought we should take the opportunity to clear the air."

"You did?" Wickham's tone was cynical. "I wonder what brought that on?"

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Needled, Dumont launched into speech with rather less finesse than the occasion merited. "Look, you seem to be under the misapprehension that I'm anti-gay. I've no idea why that should be; I've never done or said anything to suggest such a thing."

"Oh? What about the provision in your Bill which applies to what gay men may or may not do in public?"

"Oh come on man; it's hardly homophobic to suggest it would be better if we weren't to have men coupling openly in the street."

"If only it were that simple. But it isn't." Wickham scowled. "There are subtle elements in the proposals which would begin the process of pushing gay men firmly back into the closet."

"For God's..."

"You want us back in the nineteen sixties, don't you?"

Dumont shook his head. "Of course not. But there's no reason why gay men should be exempted from the normal rules of society just because they had a rough time forty years ago."

"And there's the question of your own personal homophobia. Now I don't give a damn what you think of gay men or of me, but when you let it filter through into legislation, then that does concern me."

Dumont was beginning to lose his temper. "You know, I think this owes more to your dislike of me than to any objections to government policies. I have never knowingly insulted you at all, but you delight in ridiculing my name, my appearance, my education, everything. Why? Why the hell do you do it? I mean, what's wrong with me?"

"You're a homophobic bigot, that's what wrong."

Todd, who had been standing quietly in the shadows, suddenly came forward as if impelled by an invisible hand. "Sir, I have to ask you not to be so disrespectful to the minister..."

Pascal held up a hand, looking over his shoulder at the boy. "Please, Todd, let me handle this."

"No, Minister, I have to speak. Mr Wickham, I haven't worked here very long, but it's been a great privilege and pleasure to serve Minister Dumont. And I can tell you, that there has never been a breath, not a suspicion of homophobia. And believe me, as a gay man, I am extremely sensitive to anything of that sort. He's a good man, a great man, and completely honourable."

Stopped in his tracks, Wickham stared at the vision in front of him. Pascal Dumont, tall and elegant, his dark hair framing a face pale with anger, and behind him, this beautiful young man, flushed and earnest. They looked like the cover illustration for some gay erotic novel. And a ridiculous thought flashed into his mind. No sooner was it there than he had dismissed it, but a general sense of mischief made him say, "You know, Dumont, if there's one thing I despise even more than a homophobe, it's one who attacks gay men in order to cover up something in his own nature he'd rather not acknowledge."

"Todd, out!" Dumont whirled around.

Todd looked startled. "Yes, I'm sorry sir. I'll go, I just..." The assistant made a run for the door, a rosy blush staining his golden skin.

When the door had shut behind him, Dumont said, "Wickham, I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that last grossly offensive remark. I'm going to try to forget everything you've said in this room. But I ask you to accept my word that I am not inimical to gay men in any way at all. Will you do that?"

Wickham grinned, pleased to have rattled his adversary to such an extent. "I'm prepared to admit that at least one of my assumptions must be wrong."

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"And Wickham, if you ever, ever approach, or annoy or upset my intern again, I will personally make sure that your political career comes to a complete and utter stop. Understand?"

Dumont held the door open, and Wickham, as he left, muttered, "Yes, indeed. I think I'm beginning to understand rather well."

* * *

Over the weeks, Todd became invaluable to Pascal. No job was too small or menial. He seemed to thrive on the work, still excited by being in the thick of political life. He was alternately naïve and pompous as only a young man with a first-class degree can be. Nothing was said about his outburst to Wickham, or his admission of being gay. It was certainly not apparent to the others in the office, and the younger women continued to flirt with him with desperate enthusiasm.

About a month after Todd's arrival, Dumont asked him if he'd like to visit his constituency. Predictably, the boy jumped at the offer. "That would be great, Mr Dumont, I guess it's the closest I'll get to seeing how grass-roots politics works in this country."

"Well, for that, you'd really have to observe local government. But this is almost as good, I'll grant you."

For constituency visits, Dumont didn't use his ministerial car, preferring to use his own sleek Rover. Todd offered to drive, and when told it was a long way, laughed in the patronising way Americans do when talking about distances. "You Brits don't know anything about long journeys. Wait till you've driven from New York to San Francisco in an old beat-up truck."

"You've done that?"

"I sure have."

CHAPTER THREE

They set off quite late on the Thursday, since Dumont had to attend a departmental meeting in the afternoon. By the time they entered the county of Yorkshire itself, it was well past nine, and Pascal suggested they stop for dinner. He directed Todd off the main A1 road to a small country pub he thought he'd like. It was an ancient, rambling place, with a thatched roof and a timber frame, low ceilings and uneven floor, huge fireplaces and stone hearths.

"Oh this is so cute," Todd breathed.

The inn was packed with a wedding party, and there was a jolly atmosphere as they ate solid, British food; steak-and-kidney pudding followed by treacle tart and washed down by the local ale.

Afterwards, they'd only driven a short way when they felt the car lurch and skid a little.

"I think we've got a flat," Todd said, and they both got out to look. The offside rear tyre was completely pancaked. "You got a spare?"

"In the boot."

"The boot?" Todd said, puzzled.

"Oh, sorry. The trunk."

They got the spare out of the rear of the vehicle. It was soft.

"Damn, I should have had this checked. Looks like a slow puncture."

"Well, it's no good," Todd said, slotting it back in its place. "I'd better walk back to that pub."

"You can't do that, it's five miles. I'll call the AA."

"The AA?"

"Automobile Association. They'll come out and fix it."

"For a flat?" Todd said scornfully. "No way!"

Pascal squared his shoulders, looking at the road ahead. "I think there's a garage about a mile up the road. We could walk up there."

"Great." Todd retrieved the spare. "You sit in the car and I'll be back in no time."

"Oh, no. I'm not leaving you to wander about in the Yorkshire countryside late at night. Senator Howells would never forgive me if you disappeared."

They set out together. It was already dark, and they were on a narrow road, with overhanging trees on both sides. It had been a bright spring day, but now that the sun had gone, it was cold, and a persistent drizzle set in, making the walk dispiriting and uncomfortable. Pascal offered to take his share of carrying the tyre, and the intern looked shocked. "I couldn't let you do that, Minister." Pascal began to feel as if he were some sort of delicate flower.

When they approached the place where the garage was, he saw with some misgiving that there was only one bright security light illuminating the forecourt. The place was, unmistakeably, closed.

"Hell and damnation. Now, will you let me phone the AA?" Dumont got out his mobile and found the number. After a while he closed the instrument in irritation. "No signal. Reception is very patchy up here."

"We'd better go back to the car."

"Yes, well let's walk in that direction and hope we can hitch a lift."

The rain had set in now, driving down at them remorselessly. They had gone about half a mile when they heard a car coming along behind them. Todd stopped it by the easy method of standing in the middle of the road, one hand raised. A young

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girl was driving, a man, obviously her boyfriend, next to her. She wound down the window.

"Good evening, Madam," Todd began in his polite way. "I'm sorry to stop you this way. But I am the assistant to Mr Pascal Dumont. Mr Dumont, as I am sure you know, is a government minister. We've had some trouble with our car. We'd take it most kindly if you could drive us back to where we left it, along this road, so we can get some things, and then on to the pub, the..." He looked over his shoulder at Dumont, standing in the darkness.

"The Royal Oak," Dumont prompted.

"Ah, yes. The Royal Oak. Would that be possible?"

"Sure," the girl said, casually. "Jump in."

The car was small and the back seat cramped and the two men had to wedge themselves in with the tyre, but they were very glad to be out of the driving rain. Todd said formally, "This is Minister Dumont."

The boy and girl said "Hi!" and she flashed him a smile in the mirror, but it was clear they had no idea who he was and wouldn't have cared much if they had.

They reached the abandoned car within minutes, and Todd was able to deposit the tyre back in the boot. He collected his own rucksack, Pascal's small overnight case, the laptop and one of the government Red Boxes, containing official papers, then squeezed himself back into the car.

Although it was, by now, past eleven o'clock, the Royal Oak was still heaving with activity, although the members of the wedding party were looking decidedly the worse for wear. The landlord came to talk to them across the bar.

"Rooms? I don't think so. We've got this wedding, you see. Hang on, I'll ask my wife."

He came back with a plump, motherly woman, who looked at their bedraggled state. "Well, as it happens, I've got one cancellation. But it's a double, there's nothing else. At least you can get warm and have a bath."

Todd looked at Pascal questioningly. He nodded. "Thank you, we'll take it." He followed the woman up the winding wooden steps, trying to ignore the things his body was telling him about the prospect of spending the night in a bed with the beautiful Todd Panopoulos.

The room was small, with a dormer window looking out on the gardens at the front of the pub. The ceiling was low and sloping, and both men had to duck to get through the oak doorway. There was one double bed with tall bedposts at each corner, and a small bathroom with all the facilities compacted so there was scarcely room actually to move. The landlady bustled off to make them some tea, and Pascal, almost as a reflex action, found an electrical outlet and set the laptop up on the old-fashioned dressing table. He tried to connect to the Internet through the phone socket without success, finally throwing up his hands.

"Damn it, I can't make this thing work. The exchanges up here must be pre-war." He swivelled around on the stool. "Are you hungry?"

Todd grinned. "Not even I could be hungry after that steak and kidney pudding"

"I've asked the landlady to bring a bottle of scotch as well as the tea. We both need warming up. Do you want to use the bathroom first?"

"After you, Minister," was the courteous response.

"Well, thank you." Pascal got up, looked at the bed and at the large presence of his assistant on the other side of it. He felt a surge of desire, translating itself to a flood of blood to his cock and an instant re-ignition of his erection. This made him say, "You can have the bed, I'll sleep on the floor."

Todd sounded shocked. "Oh no, Mr Dumont. Of course you must have the bed...if

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you don't want to share."

"It's not that, Todd, it's just..."

"Of course, I understand that you don't want to share with me. After what I said when Mr Wickham was in your room."

"Oh Todd!" Pascal was mortified at having hurt him. "Don't be ridiculous. I thought you might like your privacy, that's all. I don't have a problem about sharing."

He went into the bathroom and fitted his long limbs with difficulty into the tiny bath. It felt good, after the long journey, to soak away his aches and get warm again. When he'd finished, he dried himself and put on the lightweight robe he'd brought with him. Outside, Todd was drinking tea, the delicate rose-patterned china looking absurd in his huge hands.

"All yours."

"Thank you sir. I could sure use a shower."

Dumont flicked through the Red Box, full of correspondence about the Bill, and decided he was too tired to deal with it. He returned to his computer, reflecting that he could at least sort out some constituency business. There was a particularly complicated exchange involving an elderly lady, planning permission and a whole lot of dogs, and he set himself to studying it intently, knowing he would be seeing her the next day.

He was aware of Todd coming out of the bathroom. In the dressing-table mirror he could see that the intern was wearing only a towel wrapped around his waist, a startling white against his golden body. The vision moved across to the bed and disappeared from view. After a while, Dumont swivelled round again. "Want some of that scotch?"

The first thing he noticed was that the white towel was on the ground. And Todd was stretched out on the bed. He was propped up on one elbow, his body turned towards Pascal. And he was completely naked.

Pascal drew in a breath. The boy looked like some medieval masterpiece. His body was muscled, sculpted, but not excessively so. His hair, damp from the shower, spiked around his head like a halo. His legs were long and well defined, the one furthest away bent at the knee, the other stretched out, toes pointed.

One hand lazily stroked a golden penis, the largest and most shapely Pascal had ever seen. As he watched, it grew and darkened. Todd was watching him intently, blue eyes never leaving his face.

Pascal allowed his gaze to take in the exquisite sight, almost forgetting to breathe. Then he pulled himself together, remembering who he was, what was at stake.

"Oi!" he said, striving for lightness of tone. "You're not in your Harvard dorm now! Cover yourself up!"

Todd didn't move, didn't flinch. "Only if you want me to, Minister."

"I should say so. We can't have this turning into some x-rated scenario. Think of the constituents! Think of the prime minister..." Pascal was laughing, trying to keep it friendly, desperately attempting to deny his state of arousal.

"This..." Todd pulled at his penis, making it swell even more... "is calling out for some attention."

"Yes, well that's a private..."

Todd lay back and bent his knees, spreading his legs wide. "And so is this." One big forefinger circled his anal ring, then was slowly inserted. Todd's hips lifted from the bed. Dumont could scarcely breathe. "It's very, very private. Wouldn't you like to look more closely?"

"Enough, Panopoulos. This is not funny any more. Cover up."

"If you want me covered up, you'll have to do it yourself."

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The tone had changed. Todd was looking at him with a new confidence, secure in the knowledge of his irresistible beauty.

Pascal got up, moved the short way to the bed and retrieved the towel from the floor. Todd had removed his finger and now, with a flowing motion, he began to stroke his cock more firmly, causing it to shudder into full attention. Pascal held the towel in his hands, ready to throw it across the rampant genitals as if silencing a parrot in a cage. But something stopped him.

Todd said, "This would be so much better if you were doing it."

Pascal's mouth was dry, and a thrill of terror went down his spine, competing with the shards of excitement radiating from his cock.

"Just touch it," Todd urged. "That's all you'd have to do. Just a touch, then I can sleep."

Suddenly, the request seemed quite reasonable. Pascal dropped the towel and slowly reached out a finger. He could see it was shaking. The golden cock reared up, hard and proud, from a cloud of blond hair. Pascal allowed the very tip of his index finger to trace the bulging vein on its underside. As if in response a tiny drop of liquid emerged from the slit and balanced, quivering, on the swollen head.

Todd said. "If you could just..."

Pascal needed no more urging. As if hypnotised, he moved to sit on the side of the bed and leaned forward. His tongue made contact with the droplet, licked it off. He tasted ambrosia.

And he was lost.

It had been a long time since he'd sucked a cock, but it isn't a skill you lose. This was particularly easy to do. The freshly washed taste of golden flesh inflamed his senses, and the musky smell of incipient, bursting sex made his own erection even harder. As he worked his way down the glowing column, lips and tongue soft and moulding, his hands found their way to the strong thighs, spreading them further, thumbs feeling the softness of the flesh there. Todd groaned, thrusting upwards. Pascal let one hand slip between the spread thighs to caress the swollen balls, wishing he could see them. His hand went lower, seeking Nirvana. Fingers fumbled in the warm crack, then found their goal. He worked around the throbbing anus, and then with one desperate thrust, plunged his middle finger inside up to the knuckle. And Todd gave a howl and came, hard and fast, firing spurt after spurt into Pascal's throat.

Todd flopped back onto the pillows, but Pascal wasn't finished yet. He pushed the still hard cock upwards. "Hold it," he instructed.

Now he ran his tongue across the ball-sac, inhaling the wonderful smell of Todd and of his recent ejaculation. Todd had drawn up his legs, opening himself wide. Pascal pulled back a little, and contemplated the russet beauty of his anus. The dark pucker throbbed and pulsed. He convulsed, reaching briefly into the open flap of his dressing gown to pull on his own cock, now impossibly hard. Then he put his mouth on the hole, first kissing it gently. After a while, with his tongue just protruding, he let it flicker lightly across the surface of the flesh. Todd went on moaning, a deep throaty sound which increased as Pascal widened the circles and the intensity of his licks.

Finally, he drove his tongue into the hole, through the sphincter, pushing hard. Todd's head rolled on the pillow, his hips lifting in entreaty.

"Fuck me!"

Pascal raised his head, looking up, past the vision of the golden cock and the vista of Todd's flat stomach, to his beautiful face. He made a last attempt to save himself. "This is madness... we should stop."

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"No!" The voice was fierce. "Christ, man, fuck me, fuck me. I've wanted you since the day we met. Please, now..."

Pascal was way past the point where he could make any sensible decisions. His whole focus was on this beautiful, golden youth and on the small opening which would bring him such satisfaction. He pulled back a little.

"Lube?"

"In my rucksack."

While Todd reached over and rummaged in his bag, Pascal got up and removed his robe. When he moved back to the bed, Todd eyed his stiff cock appreciatively.

"That's beautiful, man."

"Thank you... Todd, this is so wro--"

"I know." He handed him the lube. "But forget about the ethics. I want you to stick that thing right inside me as hard as you can."

The crude words coming from that angelic mouth nearly pushed Pascal over the top. He coated himself in lubricant, then made a show of pushing the sticky substance into the tantalising opening, now pulsing with excitement. Todd's thighs were spread, his knees high, and Pascal moved up so he lay between them, his dark chest on Todd's golden one.

"I have to know that you really want this. I'm in an invidious position..."

Todd gave a rasping laugh. "You're in a very interesting position. Please, Minister. Right Honourable. Please, Mr Dumont, sir. Fuck me now before I explode.

They were now face to face, and Pascal gazed down into Todd's blue eyes. "Christ, you are beautiful."

"I... you are my idea of the perfect man."

Pascal gave a desperate little sob, then his lips crushed down on Todd's and his tongue drove into his mouth. Their two cocks rubbed together, both so hard that the feel of flesh on flesh was almost painful. Todd wound his legs around Pascal's lithe body, pushing up against him. They kissed as if a spell had been broken, as if they were now released to be themselves. And after a while, Pascal reached downwards and positioned his cock. He moved the tip around in the dip of Todd's anus, then began to power inwards. Todd gave little cries, but he ignored them, pushing on, relishing the tightness as he passed the first sphincter. There was a pause, then another thrust, and he was in, in so his balls were slapping against Todd's spread bottom, and Todd himself was sobbing and crying out.

"Oh God, man, that's it. More, more, deeper, deeper."

Pascal began to move, his whole being concentrated on the tight, velvet tunnel of Todd's anal passage. He knew that in his current state of excitement, he wasn't going to last for long, but he tried to prolong it with firm, steady strokes. He was holding Todd's wrists, looking intently into blue eyes clouded by passion. And when he could hold on no longer, he thrust, deep and hard, grunting with effort and in release as his semen fired deep into those beautiful bowels. Then he leant forward once more and they kissed with passion, as Todd lowered his legs and entwined them with his own.

Later, they lay together, Pascal on his back, Todd's head on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry about the car," Todd said. "I'll fix it in the morning."

Pascal shifted his head to look down at him. "You did something to the car?"

Todd grinned. "Let the air out of the tyre. And the spare."

"You... you mean this was all a set-up?"

"Yeah. I knew I'd never get anywhere under normal circumstances. And I just had to have you."

"You little devil!" Pascal said, shocked and amused in equal measure.

"And I'm sorry... I know you didn't want this." He made a gesture that took in the

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bed, the two of them, the golden penis. "I thought you were totally straight, but even so, I knew there was something there. I mean, you've been married. Yep, straight as a die. But now we've... Well, after experiencing that performance, I'm guessing this wasn't the first time."

Pascal laughed, feeling relaxed and happy. "Oh, my darling boy, if only you knew. Why do you think my first wife divorced me?"

"I thought it was something to do with drifting apart, because you were working so hard."

"Yes, that sounds good, doesn't it? And I suppose it was part of it. But the real reason was that she found me in bed with her brother."

"Her brother?"

"Yes, also an ostensibly straight man, with a wife and family. That's why she kept it quiet. The only reason. Oh, and because she couldn't face the humiliation of having been cheated on with a man."

"So why...? I mean, it's not a crime to be gay in this country. Gay and a politician. Jack Wickham does rather well out of it."

Pascal smiled sourly. "Yes, well Jack Wickham has rather cornered the market in that sort of high-profile hypocrisy. But it wasn't as if I'd started off as an openly gay MP. And because I'd been married, there would have been all sorts of prurient speculation. Anyhow, Lacy wouldn't hear of it."

"Why did you marry her?"

"Why? Well, I liked women. I like women. I suppose I'm bisexual. And since Roger... since the incident with Lacy's brother, I've been entirely straight. Until I met you."

"Mmmm. Karma!" Todd rolled over, letting his pink tongue just touch Pascal's nipple. "You are so sexy."

Pascal laughed. "I am?"

"Yes. Do you like this?" He was sucking at the hardening bud. Pascal felt a sudden flash of sensation which seemed to move from his nipple and down his spine.

"Yes," he breathed. "It's wonderful."

"And this," Todd said, reaching a little lower, "is nearly ready again. Yes?"

"Oh, God..."

Todd writhed downwards and took the growing penis in his hand, crooning at it as if it were a puppy. "You are beautiful. You are so big and thick and delicious. I'm going to eat you up."

He lowered his head and took the cock in his mouth. Pascal was in no doubt that this man was an expert. The blow job was exquisite, deep and firm. Todd deep-throated him without difficulty, making him cry out as he came again and with force.

"God knows what the landlady will think," he said weakly.

"She'll think you're dreaming about the prime minister," Todd said wickedly.

Tangled up together they fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

At first light, Pascal awoke, not sure where he was. He was aware of a body next to him, sunk in sleep, and he was quite sure it wasn't Marcia. A feeling of dread went through him, but when Todd turned over, still unconscious, it was washed away by one of pure happiness.

He stretched out a hand to smooth the sleeping face, not wanting to wake him, but needing some instant relief for an early morning erection which throbbed insistently. The blue eyes opened, widened, and Todd stumbled into consciousness. "Thank you God. I thought it was all a dream."

"It is a dream." Pascal's hands moved over the strong shoulders and down the arms, slipping onto the perfect torso.

They kissed, a gentle, morning kiss, but with growing passion.

Todd's hands were responding, running over his body, feeling the hardness of his erection. "Is that for me?"

"If you want it."

"I want it. Oh boy, do I want it."

Pascal's erection pulsed in response. "Roll over then. On your front."

He spent some time just smoothing the soft skin of the beautiful, sculpted bottom. Then his middle finger crooked and sought out the tight little anus, and plunged into it. He reached for the lube and pumped some inside, and on his cock. Then he rolled on top, licking at Todd's ears and neck. There was no time for refinement as he spread the golden buttocks and positioned the head of his cock. And drove it in to the hilt. He fucked deep and hard, admiring the curves of Todd's strong back, and relishing his groans of pleasure. He went for smooth, hard strokes, sensing that was what Todd needed, and he sustained it for a long time, until he was panting, sweat pouring from him. When he felt the channel contract, the gripping muscles tighten, he knew Todd had come, and his own climax followed almost immediately. Afterwards they lay in that position, his cock softening gradually and slipping from the hole. Todd's head was turned sideways on the pillow, and they kissed, wet, exhausted kisses, until it was time to get up.

After a huge breakfast of bacon and egg, the landlord volunteered to drive them to the car, and lent them a tyre pump which operated from the battery.

As Todd worked, Pascal leaned against the bonnet, shaking his head. "I can't believe you carried that tyre for miles when you'd sabotaged it yourself."

"Good exercise," Todd said, grinning.

"What would you have done if the garage had been open?"

"Oh, I'd have thought of something else. I'm very resourceful."

"You are indeed."

* * *

These days, Dumont usually found his constituency visits a bit of a chore. In his early, idealistic youth, he'd felt that sorting out the small, everyday problems of his constituents was a noble activity; what democracy was really all about. But as he got older and more cynical, he fell out of love with them. So many of them had unrealistic expectations of him, many were pig-headed and argumentative, quite a few of them were frankly close to certifiable. But always, in the dross was some gold, someone who really merited help, someone who was the victim of a genuine

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injustice. In any case, he was shrewd enough to know that however highly rated were his skills at Westminster, ultimately his career would live or die by what they thought of him in this far corner of Yorkshire. So he got down to his Saturday morning constituency surgery with as much enthusiasm as he could muster.

This time, though, he had Todd with him. Todd seemed to know instinctively how to handle people, what to say to them. He was a perfect assistant, and the morning sped by.

They lunched with Len Mather and others of the party faithful, in the great barn of a place which was the constituency headquarters. Every now and again, Pascal's attention would drift away from some tedious anecdote being told by one of his neighbours, and he would look down the table at Todd, listening with rapt attention to the conversation going on around him, interjecting sensible comments and generally being a big success. He thought he would make a perfect partner, an ideal constituency wife. He shook his head ruefully at the absurdity of it, turning back to his neighbour, a local farmer who was now bending his ear about the iniquity of subsidies.

In the afternoon, Dumont visited a school, where he gave a talk on the theme of 'why Democracy is important for the young.' He went on to an old people's home, and finally toured a factory. They dined with his agent, and only when that was over were they able to return to the small terraced house he used while in the constituency.

"Jeez, I can see why you find it so tiring, coming up here."

"Yes, it's exhausting. It's not difficult stuff, but there's so much detail. And of course, the small things are big things to the people involved."

"You do it so well."

"And you were great, too, Todd. I wish you could always be with me."

"So do I."

They hadn't spoken about the previous night at all, but the memory of it hung heavily between them.

"Do you want a drink, or shall we go to bed?"

"Bed," Todd breathed.

"I'll show you your room."

They carried their bags up the narrow stairs, and Dumont opened one of the doors. "You're in there. Unless..."

"What do you think?" Todd asked. "What do you think?" He dropped his rucksack and lunged forward, pinning Dumont against the closed door of the other room. His hands went inside his jacket, pulling the shirt upwards, and then moving to fumble with the belt. His lips were on Dumont's; the kiss hard and demanding, forcing his head back against the wood.

Somehow they got into the room and onto the bed, still kissing frantically, Dumont with his trousers round his ankles. He lay on his back, laughing, as Todd loomed over him. "Now, Mr Dumont. Now then."

"For God's sake, close the curtains. We'll scandalise the neighbours."

Todd wrenched the curtains across and turned back to the bed. "I have to taste you. All day I've been listening to complaints about the problems of Yorkshire sheep farmers, and all I could think of was your cock, and how I wanted it in my mouth."

"And I thought you were doing so well."

"I was. I've heard more about scrapie than I ever want to hear for the rest of my life. What is scrapie?"

"You don't want to know. Oh!"

Todd had pulled off Pascal's shoes and socks, now he slid the trousers and

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underpants from his legs. The smart blue tie was wrenched aside, and he undid the buttons of the shirt, sliding his hands across the smooth chest. The dark hairs contrasted with his own golden ones; they made a triangular pattern which was at its broadest just below the nipples and narrowed to an inviting arrow pointing to the groin, where it broadened out again, providing a black nest for the thick cock which now reared sharply upwards.

Todd knelt on the floor at the end of the bed, between the spread legs, and took the rigid penis in his hand. It was large, uncut, dark now and swollen. He put his head down and licked as if he were eating an ice-cream.

"Oh, you taste good." His mouth engulfed the stiff rod. Pascal was immediately reminded that this man, despite his youth, was very experienced; this was fellatio at its best. He felt the tensions of the day dissolve and change and move down towards his loins, and when he came, explosively, he felt cleansed and relaxed.

Todd climbed up onto the bed, kneeling across his body, the rough cloth covering his hard penis, rubbing Pascal's naked, sensitive flesh.

"I won't fuck you, you know," he said. "I don't do that. But if you want... something, I have toys."

"Oh, please, no toys. Not this time." Pascal was breathless, helpless, as Todd gripped his wrists and leaned forward to kiss him. When they broke the kiss, he said, "But something, fingers... Please..." The final word degenerated into something which sounded a little like a whine.

"Okay. Don't move." Todd pulled away and Pascal could hear him moving around the room. He lay with his knees apart, legs spread, feeling completely abandoned. When Todd came back, the cool fingers which stroked Pascal's anus were slick with lube. They went on, teasing him to the edge of his endurance, before plunging inwards. Todd was every bit as skilled in this art as he had been in the earlier fellatio. His fingers curved, probed, driving Pascal to the very edge and then over it. His hips began to work, his swollen cock throbbing out his seed for a second time. The American put his head down, resting his cheek against the furry stomach.

"I love you," Todd said.

They spent the night embracing, stroking, whispering. Nothing was said of any importance, but Pascal felt a content he hadn't experienced for many years. In the morning, when he woke, Todd was lying with his back to him, his soft, naked bottom fitting spoon-like into the curve of Pascal's body. His face looked gentle and childlike on the pillow, and his soft breath stirred the golden-brown locks of his hair. Pascal was already hard, and when he snaked his hand around the sleeping boy he found that he, too, was semi erect. A few gentle strokes awoke him, and he wriggled his bottom backwards onto Pascal's already throbbing cock. His fingers felt the willing, warm entrance, and soon he was deep inside, fucking with increasing vigour as Todd pushed back against him, moaning with pleasure. Pascal cried out as he came, his hand cupped around Todd, ready to catch the precious seed, and when he had it, he raised his hand to his mouth. Then he froze.

"Christ!" he said. From downstairs, clearly audible in the small house, came the sound of rattling crockery.

Todd half sat up. "What is it?"

"Mrs Benson. The housekeeper. She always comes in when I'm here. She'll be up with a cup of tea at any minute. Move!"

Todd leaped from the bed, grabbing his clothes which were scattered on the floor. He stopped at the door long enough to wiggle his naked bottom, before disappearing across the landing.

By the time Mrs Benson knocked at his door, Pascal had straightened the

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bedclothes and pulled the sheet up under his chin. She was, as always, exhaustingly bright and chatty.

"Oh, you're awake, Mr Dumont. Good, I've brought you a nice cup of tea. Now, you said you were bringing your assistant up. He's in the other room? I'll just take him in a cuppa..."

She put the cup down on the bedside cabinet and disappeared across the landing, still talking. Todd had just got into the bed, rumpling it up as if he'd been there all night. Mrs Benson was still chattering away as she went downstairs to make breakfast, and Pascal lay back, concluding that she hadn't heard their cries of passion.

* * *

They set off on the journey south later that day, Dumont driving. Every part of him was still glowing from the sex and from the unaccustomed feeling of fulfilment, of loving and being loved. Todd was slumped in the passenger seat, smiling gently to himself. He wore a red check shirt and tight, faded jeans. After a couple of hours, Pascal could bear it no more, and he reached out a hand and cupped the swollen penis, clearly visible through the thin denim. Todd moaned, grabbing the questing hand and grinding it more thoroughly into the growing bulge between his legs.

"Christ, you are so ready to be fucked," Pascal said and the car wobbled a little as his fingers explored. Todd lifted his hips, moving his head from side to side. Pascal wrenched the steering wheel and pulled off the motorway, driving a few miles until he came to a sign which signified there was a picnic area. He pulled off the road and into the car park, pulling up near a closed kiosk and a notice with a map of the area.

He got out, looking around. There was nobody there, the place was empty. Todd clambered out the car on the other side, walking stiffly because of his erection. Pascal led the way into the wood.

"Follow me."

Deep into the forest, they came across a little clearing. "Isn't this lovely?" Pascal said. "Look at that blossom. Oh, and I think that's a lark, can you hear it?" Somehow, continuing this normal conversation when both of them knew what they intended to do made it hotter, more exciting.

"This will do, I think," he said. "Come here."

Todd moved across the glade slowly, eyes downcast, almost as if he were embarrassed. When he was standing in front of him, Pascal put his hand under the boy's chin, forcing his head up.

"Kiss me."

The kiss was gentle at first, lips touching sensuously. Then it became harder and harsher, lips crushing, tongues plunging deep. Pascal pulled back suddenly.

"Strip!" he said.

"Here?"

"But of course."

Todd made a little show of reluctance before stripping off the jeans and the shirt. Underneath he was wearing tight white briefs which showed off his golden tan.

"Off!" Pascal said, his heart taking up a slow, insistent beat. The boy removed them and flung them to one side, straightening up to show his erection, strong and purple.

"Over there. Get against that tree."

Todd moved past him, and he grabbed his arm, turning him round so he was facing a massive oak tree. He gave a genuine yelp of anguish as his sensitive cock

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pressed up against the rough bark.

"Spread your legs!" Pascal used his suede-shod feet to kick Todd's legs apart. His hand scrabbled between the golden buttocks, the middle finger angled upwards and probing. "Lube?" He was panting now.

"In the pocket of my jeans."

Pascal moved across to pick them up. Todd pushed himself clear of the tree, using his hands to keep his swollen cock from harm.

"Don't move, damn you! Did I say you could move?"

Todd jammed his hands against the tree, above his head, as if he were surrendering to a gunman.

"Keep those legs spread."

He moved forward, running trembling hands across the muscled back. At one point, Todd looked over his shoulder and Pascal barked, like a Sergeant Major. "No, eyes front!"

He slithered his hands down the curve of Todd's body, sinking slowly to his knees as he did so. He pressed his lips to the clearly defined bones on Todd's spine, half licking, half kissing his way from shoulder-blades to tail-bone, stopping only when he reached the place where the tantalising cleft of his buttocks began.

He pulled back, breathed heavily, then used his thumbs to part the perfect peach-halves. In the dappled sun light, the tight ring of his anus looked different, lighter and pinker.

Burying his nose in the cleft, he inhaled deeply, and extended his tongue, feeling the twitch of Todd's anus and tasting its tangy richness. He licked, his hands still holding the soft, pink flesh. Todd began to moan, his fingers forming claws against the tree-bark. Pascal stood up abruptly, scrabbling at the fastening on his trousers and unzipping the fly. Unusually for him, he was dressed in casual clothes; fawn-coloured chinos and a red tee-shirt. Todd half turned his head again, but Pascal rapped out. "Damn it to Hell, Todd, if you move again, I'm going to fuck you to within an inch of your life!"

"In that case..." Todd said, insolently. He turned and gave Pascal a long look, his eyes sweeping from the red tee-shirt, now rucked up to reveal his flat stomach, down to the underpants and chinos crumpled ridiculously around his ankles. His gaze returned, lingering, to the huge, swollen cock protruding from the other man's dark pubic hair. "In that case...!" He did a little bump and grind.

"You asked for it!" Pascal said, in mock fury.

"I certainly did." Todd turned back to face the tree, with a shudder of anticipation.

Pascal began applying the lube to himself and then to the pulsing hole, enjoying pushing it deeply inside with fingers that shook. He positioned himself, bending his knees slightly to get the angle right. Then, with the tip of his penis resting on the outer ring, he stopped.

"Christ!" Todd said.

Pascal leaned forward so his cheek was next to Todd's and said softly, "Are you going to behave, or do I have to fuck you hard?"

"I don't think I can behave. So I guess you're going to have to fuck me very hard indeed."

Pascal pushed inwards, very slowly. Deceptively slowly. Todd made small sounds which came from the back of his throat. When he was right inside, so deep that his balls were squashed hard up against Todd's arse, he put his mouth on the young man's ear. "All right. Are you ready for this?"

Todd braced his legs. "I'm ready."

Pascal began. There was no finesse here, no variation of pace or angle. He just

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began pumping away, viciously hard, slamming into Todd and crushing him against the wood of the oak. His hands went upwards, capturing Todd's, holding them aloft as if this were some desperate, captured prisoner, and he the conquering hero. On and on, harder and harder, the slapping sounds of balls hitting flesh, the subtler tones of skin and lube, filling the little glade. On and on, until Todd was crying out, harsh animal noises, and still Pascal drove onwards and inwards; on, until he was sweating, panting, his whole body taut with lust and passion. On and on until Todd sobbed, elated, shocked and well and truly fucked.

Behind them, there was a crackle of sound, as if an animal had appeared, very near them. The thought that they might be being watched appalled and thrilled Pascal, and his hips drove forward, his cock swelling and throbbing, reaching an even greater depth. His whole body heaved as it delivered shot after shot of semen into the hot depths of his lover. He put his arms around Todd, reaching for the rigid cock, and as he did so, it erupted, spraying milky fluid onto the cracked bark of the tree. They watched in silence as the liquid formed into rivulets and began its slow and syrupy progress down the trunk.

From behind them came the shocking sound of a handclap, and a voice said, "Bravo! A great performance."

Todd turned round swiftly, so that Pascal's cock was wrenched out of him. He pulled the politician's head towards him, tucking it into the curve of his neck.

On the other side of the glade stood the man who had spoken. He was red-faced, balding and massive, a big belly jutting out over low-slung jeans. His fly was open, and a chubby hand was urgently massaging a stubby red cock.

"If you boys want to go again," he said, "I don't mind doing one of you up the bum."

Todd muttered to Pascal, as if he were talking to a dog, "Stay!" He moved away while the man ogled his naked body with a lewd expression. He collected his jeans and pulled them on quickly. "Sorry, dude," he said, "but we've got to be somewhere else."

He took a pair of Ray-Bans out of the pocket, and handed them to Pascal, who put them on gratefully, dressing quickly with his back still to the newcomer.

"Shame," the man said. "Still, I reckon I can get off to that. A very hot little show."

Keeping himself between Pascal and the interloper, Todd led the way out of the glade and back to the car. They scrambled in, laughing like naughty children. A big articulated lorry was parked near the car, obviously their visitor had stopped his rig looking for action.

Pascal handed the glasses back, and started the car. "Fuck, that was a bit too close for comfort!"

"You said it! Was that a dogger? You took me to a dogging site?"

"How should I know? I've never been there before."

"He really wanted to join in, that guy."

"Mmmm. He wasn't really my cup of tea."

"Nor mine. But I like the sound of someone else taking you up the backside while you do me. Someone a bit more attractive. Don't you?"

CHAPTER FIVE

Pascal drew out into the road, still laughing, but despite his recent sexual exertions, another thrill went through him at the outrageous suggestion.

As they got nearer to London, though, the enormity of what had happened, and the incredible risk he'd taken was borne in on him. As the glow of the sex wore off, so embarrassment and horror at what he'd done increased. When they were on the outskirts of the city, he said to Todd, who had been dozing next to him. "I don't have to tell you to be very discreet about all this, do I?"

"Of course not!" Todd sounded offended. "What do you think I'm going to do, bounce straight into the Ministry and say, 'I had a great weekend and by the way, the minister fucked me in ten different positions and sucked me hollow.'"

"No, of course I don't. But we've just got to be very, very careful. My job, my position depends on it. Christ, if that man back there had recognised me..."

Todd relaxed a little. "Well, I guess he could only have done that if he was very familiar with the appearance of your butt." He laughed. "Actually, even if it had been the Prince of Wales with his pants round his ankles, I don't think that guy would have registered it. His mind was on other things."

Pascal dropped Todd off at his rather seedy looking bed-sit in Paddington, then drove on to his smart but soulless town-house in Pimlico. He showered, and went to bed, but was quite unable to sleep, lying in the dark room and thinking about all the things he'd done to Todd, until a familiar warmth infused his pelvis, and, feeling like a guilty teenager, he had to use his hands to bring himself to a shuddering climax.

Over the next few weeks, they were careful, very careful. Dumont was preoccupied with the next stage of the Bill, sifting through a whole host of amendments, and Todd was doing research on a variety of issues. They met in the office, scarcely looked at each other, hardly spoke. The frustration, the tension, built up, day after day, until Pascal found he was being uncharacteristically sharp with his staff.

Thinking it might relieve his frustration, he spent an evening with Marcia and some of her arty friends. They went to the Opera House, where he sat patiently through Gounod's Faust. During Marguerite's 'Jewel Song' visions of Todd leaped into his mind. Visions he'd managed to keep at bay, pictures of him lying on the bed in their Yorkshire hotel, his legs drawn up, his middle finger delicately probing the pink opening of his anus. By the end, as the events of Walpurgisnacht were played out on the stage, all he could see was Todd, hands against a tree-trunk, as he slammed into him in a forest somewhere in the Midlands.

He went home with Marcia and made love to her, feeling guilt and lust in equal amount. He thought it must be one of those things, the more sex you had, the more you wanted. He fucked her hard, thinking of Todd, until she squealed and asked him to ease up. When she had finished her ladylike climax, he turned her over on the bed and put a tentative finger on her anus. He'd never tried anything like that with her before.

"Do you like this?", he said, working the tip of his finger into her.

She rolled away, and he was aware of an almost tangible cooling in the bed.

"No, of course not. Don't be so disgusting, Pascal."

A flash of panic went through him. How was he going to live with this for the rest of his life? Marcia was smart and funny and clever, but he didn't love her, and now he thought he didn't actually fancy her either. And the person he did fancy? Well that,

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he decided, had been a flash in the pan, it was a one-off. He knew he'd been wrong to take advantage of a young employee, and it wouldn't happen again. But as he lay in the neat, white bed, he felt his cock revive at the thought of Todd and his warm, secret orifice.

* * *

The next day was a long one, and although he didn't have to be in the chamber of the House, he was still in his office, working on various papers, at eight in the evening. The room was dark, his desk illuminated by one of those old-fashioned reading lights with a green shade. The door opened and he looked up. Todd. He just stood there in the doorway, the brighter light of the outer office surrounding him like a halo.

"You're still here then, Minister?"

"I am. Just about to finish, I'm seeing double now. What about you?"

"Oh, I wanted to finish that stuff about the farm subsidies. All done now." Todd came into the room and shut the door.

"Would you like a drink?"

"Please. A beer, if you have one."

Todd had gone back to being the impossibly polite Ivy Leaguer. Pascal got them both a beer from the cooler and leaned back against the desk. Todd was in the chair in front of him. There was an embarrassed silence.

"So," Pascal said, "you're doing all right? Coping?"

"I think so," Todd said carefully. "This is a great place to work and everyone had been most kind." He crossed his legs, and in the strange light from the lamp, Pascal could see the blue eyes sparkle and flash. "There's only one thing I need."

"What's that?" Pascal asked, feeling his cock start to twitch.

The distance between them wasn't that great, and Todd leaned forward a little and put his hand on the growing bulge between Pascal's legs.

"This," he said simply.

Pascal gave a great sigh. "Oh fuck!" he said.

"Precisely."

"Look, Todd, what happened in Yorkshire was wrong. Wonderful, but wrong. I'm your employer, you're in a foreign country, and you're in my care. I'm at least twenty years older than you. You must see that we really can't take it further."

Todd hung his head. "Yes, Minister. I see that, Sir. I'm sorry."

Pascal nodded, pleased the lad was taking it so well.

Todd leaned forward. "But tonight, since we've both been working so hard, perhaps just a little treat..." His hand went forward again and deftly unzipped Pascal's fly.

Pascal opened his mouth to protest, but the sound was cut off as Todd lifted his penis out of its nest, gave it a brisk rub, and conveyed it to his mouth.

It had already been hardening, and the touch of those soft lips was enough to make it rigid. Todd was sliding up and down, his hands undoing the waistband of the pin-striped trousers, sliding them down.

"No!" Pascal said, but his hips, lifting upwards to allow the thick material to pass them, gave the lie to his words.

Todd stopped what he was doing for a moment. "Move forward," he said.

Pascal scooted forward so he was on the very edge of the desk, and Todd forced his legs apart and swooped down, drawing into his mouth the swollen balls now hanging downwards.

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Now, the minister was leaning back on the desk, an incongruous sight, above the waist in a smart jacket, tastefully striped tie and white shirt, and below the waist naked, his rampant, throbbing cock plunging into the throat of his young assistant. He was so close, so close to climax, when Todd pulled back.

"Come on my face," he said. "I want to see you come."

Pascal's whole pelvic area felt as if it was on fire and he could feel the contractions deep inside him which meant a climax was imminent.

"And afterwards," Todd said, "I'd like you to spank me."

That was it. He exploded, thick white liquid landing on Todd's high cheekbones and spattering across his nose, then dripping slowly downwards. Todd put out his tongue and licked, and then Pascal grabbed his head, pulling him into a ferocious kiss. He tasted himself, mingled with the unmistakeable, masculine flavour of Todd, pure Todd.

He was still sitting on the edge of the desk, his legs spread, and Todd standing between them as they kissed on and on, with great passion. Pascal's limp cock was rubbing against the hardness in Todd's trousers, and after a while he broke away, breathless, his hand going down to the bulge.

"Let me do something for you now."

"Yes, please." Todd was breathing heavily. "What I said. I want you to spank me."

Pascal held him by the shoulders, pushing him back a little so he could look at him properly. "I don't know, I've never done anything like that."

"It doesn't matter. I know you'd like it. I saw how you were in that wood, all that sergeant-major stuff. You've got some Dom in you, really."

"Christ, Todd, I'm so far from being a Dom that I hardly know what it means."

"Well, never mind. Will you do it?"

"Will it give you pleasure?"

"You bet!"

"Then of course I will."

Pascal got up, stroking the handsome face with real tenderness. He knew, in his heart of hearts, that this was complete insanity. But he was so in love, or in lust with this man, that he had passed the point where his actions were subject to any sort of rational control.

He moved away and with a complete change of demeanour, snapped. "Jacket, shirt, tie, off!" When Todd had removed the garments, flinging them in an untidy heap at his feet, Pascal growled. "Get those trousers off. Now!"

Todd moved fast to obey, dancing from foot to foot in his eagerness. The black serge material joined the other clothes on the floor. He hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his tight white underpants, but Pascal stopped him.

"Wait! Did I tell you to remove the Jockeys? Stay where you are."

So Todd stood, lean and magnificent, his beautiful body illuminated by the pool of light thrown downwards and outwards by the reading lamp. The rest of the room was in near darkness, and there was a real sense of theatre. From outside the rim of light, Pascal contemplated him. The hair was bright, the blonde streaks highlighted by the indirect glow from the lamp. Todd was half laughing in his excitement at the game. His broad shoulders and wide chest, covered with fine, golden hair, tapered to a narrow waist; his legs were long and straight, and the tight, white underpants did nothing to conceal a monstrous erection which seemed to move and grow even as Pascal watched it. He looked magnificent.

He looked like an angel.

Pascal stepped forward from the shadows and very slowly, very gently, began to pull down the white pants. He could hear his own breath, heavy and fractured, as he

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eased the elastic outwards and negotiated the bulge, giving a little grunt of satisfaction as the huge cock emerged joyfully and twanged up against Todd's flat stomach. He pulled the pants on down the long legs, his face passing within inches of the penis, his nostrils filling with its scent.

He picked up a pencil from the desk and used it to move the cock from side to side, prodding it in mock disdain.

"What's this? What's this then, Panopoulos? How dare you have a hard-on in the office of a Minister of the Crown? You disgusting little pervert." He pulled the swollen organ away from Todd's body, holding it away from him with the pencil before letting it twang back against his stomach.

Todd looked downwards, his long lashes magnified by the strange angle of the light. "I'm sorry, Minister," he said.

This was so like the way he usually spoke, in real life, that Pascal felt a thrill shoot through his body, and his cock lurched again. He knew he must look ridiculous, in collar and tie, but bare below the waist, but he didn't care. He took off his jacket and flung it onto the pile on the floor. He knew this was wrong, but he felt alive again, after so many years of stuffiness. He moved to the chair behind his desk, and sat down. "Come along, you grubby little youth. Come and take what's coming to you."

Todd moved towards him, as if reluctantly. His cock, leaking clear fluid at its tip, told otherwise.

"Come on now, lie across my knee."

Todd scrambled into place, the position of a thousand dirty fantasies. He lay across Pascal's knees, adjusting himself until his hard cock could fit into the space between his tormentor's spread legs. There, it rubbed hard against Pascal's own organ, fast recovering from the earlier adventure.

"Now, I'm going to punish you. Spank you. Beat the naughtiness out of you. Do you understand?"

"I do." Todd's voice was muffled but there was no mistaking his eagerness as he writhed around in Pascal's lap. Pascal smoothed his hand across the golden bottom, noting the contrast between the dark hairs on his own arm and the light ones on the boy.

"Ready then." Pascal began to smack the rounded halves of Todd's bottom, gently at first, but then, getting into the swing of it, with more force. He could feel, between his own legs, the lurching of his victim's cock as it grew even larger.

At first, Pascal felt nothing apart from the general intoxicating excitement he always experienced when he was anywhere near Todd. He was concentrating on giving him pleasure, reading his reactions from the minute signals he got back with every slap, the moans, the wriggles, the perceptible swelling in his cock. But then he began to take pleasure in the way the pale pink of Todd's curvy buttocks shaded to red. He found he could create a pattern, a mixture of colours and impressions, according to where he hit, and how hard. He was enchanted by the sight of Todd's reddening bottom, by the way it quivered and shook, by the pain which grew in the palm of his hand as he continued to slap, by the noises of agony and rapture which the boy was making. And in the end, when Todd yelled at the moment of release, and he felt a jet of seed coat his thigh, he was close to coming as well.

Todd seemed to sense this, because he said, "No! Don't waste it. Come inside me. Please..."

Pascal helped him to get up, and got him to sit on the desk, so he was perched on the edge. "My God!" he said, looking into the blue eyes. "You're crying!"

Todd was laughing, somewhat tremulously. "Well, it hurt!"

Pascal moved his thumbs tenderly across the other's cheeks, and kissed him

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deeply. Todd's legs came up, wrapping around Pascal's hips.

"Lube...?"

"I put it on the desk."

They fitted together perfectly in that position, Todd with his arms around Pascal's neck, kissing passionately, and Pascal's cock buried deep in the warm depth. He fucked ferociously while Todd cried out, and finally, spurred on by a vision of his poor, beaten bottom, Pascal felt himself swell and explode and he fired his semen deep into his bowels. They stood, locked together, both breathing hard, kissing. Then there was a sharp knock at the door.

"Christ!" Pascal pulled back, and Todd leaped from the desk and disappeared under it.

"Sit down," the voice hissed from below. "Just sit there and get on with your work."

So Pascal sat, realising that the desk's wooden front would hide his naked friend, and also conceal the fact he wore nothing below the waist. He smoothed his hair, straightened his tie and called out, "Come in!"

It was Bryan Morrison, a fellow junior minister in the department, and well known for being a crashing bore.

"Ah, Dumont! I'm glad you're still here. I want to talk to you about the provision in the Bill for dealing with vagrants, with the rough sleepers I mean. Now I had a discussion with the senior civil servant..."

Morrison droned on, some abstruse technical point, which Pascal was quite unable to take in. He found it even more difficult to concentrate when he felt a warm mouth engulfing his penis. Instantly, it began to stiffen, and he felt his eyes glaze over as Todd began working his magic from beneath the desk.

Morrison had launched into a long description of how he thought a clause in the Bill might be better worded, but Pascal could only nod, helplessly aware that he was close to yet another climax, and mustering all his self control in an attempt not to show it.

"I think it might be better if in Clause Twelve, Paragraph Two... I say Dumont, are you all right? You look a little odd."

"I'm fine. I just felt a little dizzy for a moment."

"Oh. Right. Well, as I was saying..."

Beneath the desk, Todd's willing mouth was working overtime. Pascal wondered what he must be tasting, remembering where his cock had been. And with that, there was no holding back an orgasm so powerful that for a moment, he actually did black out. It was only a matter of seconds, but when he recovered, Morrison was looking at him with concern.

"I say, old chap, you really do look very queer. Let me get you some water." He got up, ready to move around the desk to the side-table where water and glasses sat. From there, he would not be able to avoid seeing Pascal's nakedness.

"No!" Pascal said, rather too forcefully, and then more gently, "No, thank you very much Bryan. But I rather think I'm going to have to end this very interesting conversation. I think I've done enough for tonight. I'd better pack it in before I pass out altogether."

"Of course, of course. Are you sure I can't get you some water? Very well then, but take care of yourself, dear boy. Can't have you cracking up from overwork." He got up, and made his way with agonising slowness to the door.

"Goodnight then, Dumont. Get yourself home straight away."

When they were sure he had gone, Dumont put his head in his arms on the desk. He was half laughing, half crying, his shoulders shaking. Todd scrambled out,

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grabbed Pascal's trousers and flung them at him, saying in a passable British accent, "I say, old boy, you do look a bit queer!"

"Todd, how could you? He could have come round the desk at any time and I'd have been ruined."

Both men were scrambling into their clothes. Todd shrugged. "I guess that's part of it. What it's about. The danger, the risk of getting caught. Don't you feel it?"

"I most certainly do not," Pascal said, but that night he acknowledged to himself that the sheer recklessness of the way he was behaving was giving him a fresh edge of excitement and causing sexual reactions he'd never dreamed of. Lying in bed, he thought about Todd. As always, conjuring up a picture of the golden youth made the blood rush to his loins. He thought it was almost as if Todd were two different men, one the sober, respectful student, the other the wild sexual being, who could fellate a man under the table while another was only inches away.

He thought it was a very powerful combination, and potentially very dangerous indeed.

CHAPTER SIX

He was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain a façade of indifference towards Todd at work. There was something about that hair, that downy flesh, that urged him to touch it all the time, and several times he caught himself, in the open office, on the verge of smoothing the big, beautiful hands, or running a finger down his cheek.

Just before lunch, Todd came in to see him with some research for a constituency case, and shut the door behind him before moving over to the desk. Pascal looked up in alarm.

“Don’t shut the door, they really will think there’s something going on.”

“It’s all right, I told Bella I wanted to ask you something about the internship.” He moved over and put the papers on the desk. Pascal reached out, his arm round the other man’s waist, pulling him forward so his face was buried for a moment in his crotch.

“I want you,” he said shortly.

“Mmmm.” Todd moved his hips slightly and Pascal could feel an instant hardness. “I want you too. That’s why I’ve come with an invitation.”

“An invitation?” Pascal said nervously.

“Don’t say it like that,” Todd said, pulling away and feigning offence. “I thought you could come to my apartment and I’d cook you supper.” He grinned. “I know you’re free tonight, I looked at the diary. Will you come?”

As so often recently, Pascal was conscious of taking a big step, possibly a very dangerous one.

“Yes,” he said. “I’ll come.”

“You bet you will,” Todd said, grinning evilly. Pascal almost thought he saw him adjust the mask, from devil to angel, before opening the door and saying clearly. “Thank you so much, minister. That clears things up for me.”

The minister worked late, and although he was aware of Todd in the outer office, he resisted the temptation to go out there, not wanting to risk a repeat of the previous night’s insanity. At about seven, he looked at his watch, stretched, noted a twinge of excitement between his legs, and went out.

“Ready?”

“More than ready,” Todd said, getting up with alacrity.

They walked out into the street. It was still light, and the place was bustling. He’d told his driver he didn’t need him, so now he said, “How do we get there?”

“There’s a bus,” Todd said, and then as an afterthought. “If you don’t mind. I mean, we could get a taxi.”

Pascal thought the anonymity of a bus would be better, and he doubted if any passenger would recognise him. They walked up through Parliament Square, still busy with tourists. Near College Green, Pascal saw Jack Wickham coming the other way. It was too late to duck.

Wickham acknowledged the minister with a curt nod, then his eyes widened as he saw Todd, and a slight smile crossed his face. Pascal cursed under his breath, as they crossed the road and got onto the bus.

It was a long time since the minister had been on public transport of any kind, and he felt a childish excitement as Todd led him upstairs and to the front of the old Routemaster. They sat together, looking out over West London, and as the bus moved off, Pascal said, “Damn, I wish we hadn’t met Wickham.”

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“He really gets to you, doesn’t he?” Todd said. “I wonder why that is.”

“It’s because he always gives me that quizzical look, as if he knows what I’ve been up to. And usually, it doesn’t matter. But now it does.”

Todd gave a short laugh. “He’s just jealous. Probably fancies you himself.”

“Oh my God, what a terrible thought.”

The journey was long and circuitous and necessitated changing buses in the Edgware Road. They got off in a mixed residential area, buzzing with life and ethnic diversity. On the corner was a small supermarket. “Just need to go in here and get supplies,” Todd said.

Here was another novelty, going shopping. Pascal had been nervous of being recognised at first, but in the crowd of West Indians, south Asians, Greeks and Kurds, no-one was taking the slightest bit of notice of the blond American and his dark-haired companion. Pascal walked round the little shop in wonder, as Todd bought meat, onions, pasta, vegetables and a couple of bottles of wine.

At the check-out, Pascal fished in his pocket for his wallet, but Todd shook his head. “No, this is my treat.”

Pascal watched him pay, enchanted by the sheer ordinariness of two friends getting the makings of a meal, of travelling on a bus. These were experiences which his success had removed him from a long time ago.

“I don’t think I’ve bought groceries like that since I was a child with my mother,” he said as they left the shop.

“What about when you were a student?” Todd said, steering him across the road.

“No, I didn’t really have to cater for myself; I lived in college. And then it was the Inns of Court, and then Parliament, and I got married...”

“You must have been shopping with your wife, surely?”

Pascal gave a short laugh. “Oh, Lacy didn’t do things like shopping for food. There was always someone else to do that. A housekeeper, a ‘little woman’.”

“You don’t like her very much, do you?”

“I can assure you, the feeling is mutual.”

They had reached the front of the building where Todd lived. It was a large terraced house, probably late Victorian or Edwardian, built of red London brick, and very run-down looking. Todd led the way through the communal front door, and up a flight of steps. The landing smelled musty, dry-rot, perhaps, with an overlay of curry. From above, came the sound of somebody practising on a violin. Two small children, a boy and a girl, who looked, Pascal thought, Somali, were running up and down the stairs, screaming excitedly.

“We’ve got all sorts here,” Todd said, opening a door at the end of the landing. “Musicians, asylum seekers...” He opened the door and gestured to Pascal to go in. “The woman in the room next to me is a hooker. Turns tricks all night. It gets noisy.”

“My God, this really is how the other half lives!”

The bed-sit was a reasonably large room, which had once been the master bedroom, with a bow window overlooking the street. A small area had been partitioned off for a toilet and shower, and in the room itself was a kitchenette. There was a desk, a couple of easy chairs, and up against the wall, a single bed.

Todd put down his bags. “Why don’t you open the wine while I start the supper?”

They ate spaghetti Bolognese and drank the red wine which Pascal thought was astonishingly good, considering where it had been bought.

Afterwards, Todd said, “Would you like coffee?”

“No, I don’t think so, thank you, or I won’t sleep.”

Suddenly, those blue eyes were looking at him very directly. “The very last thing I want you to do is sleep.”

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After the ordinariness of the meal, suddenly, sex was in the room. Pascal felt his heart flip, and his genitals twitch.

"I can't stay..."

"Oh, I'm sure you can hang around long enough to do one little thing for me."

"And what would that be?" Pascal raised his eyebrows, but he was conscious of sounding really flirtatious.

"I want you to lay me on this bed and fuck me until I scream."

Pascal was undoing his belt. "I think I can manage that."

When they were both naked, Todd handed over a tube of lubricant, and lay silently on his back, legs in the air, exposing himself as he had done that first night in Yorkshire. Pascal first kissed the pink opening which gave him so much pleasure, letting his tongue linger on the puckered flesh. Then he applied the lube, before leaning across and with his mouth close to Todd's ear, whispering, "God help me, Todd, I think I'm falling in love with you."

Afterwards, they lay with their arms round each other in the narrow bed. Todd said curiously, "Tell me about your ex-wife. She's the woman we met in the restaurant on my first day, right?"

"Yes, Lacy. She's in publishing. Ferociously bright and very ambitious."

"How did you meet her?"

"I was at Cambridge with her brother."

"THE brother?"

"Christ, I'd forgotten I told you that. Yes, Roger. We were friends at University. When I became a lawyer, he was in the same chambers. He introduced us."

"And you and Roger were...?"

"No, not then. After a few early experiments, I was determined to be as straight and conventional as possible, and as far as I knew, that's what he was too. And he was recently married. I realise now that Lacy stalked me as if I were some pathetic kind of prey and she was a lioness. She decided I was going places, and that she could mould me."

"Poor Pascal," Todd said, sliding a hand down the warm stomach and wrapping his fist round Pascal's recovering cock. He gave it a tug. "Nearly ready for me. So what happened?"

"Oh, I soon allowed myself to be caught. We were married with great ceremony in St Margaret's, which is the parish church of the House of Commons....I expect you know that."

Todd gave his penis another sharp tug. "Of course I know. I bet I know more about Westminster than you."

"Oh of course, I forgot about you bloody American tourists and your thirst for knowledge... Ow! Anyhow, her father was a rather grand Member of Parliament. The oldest member, he was the Father of the House. Shortly after we married, he was given a peerage for 'services to the party' and the seat became vacant. She made me apply. I was appointed as candidate – the Constituency Committee was thrilled at the prospect of sending the old boy's son-in-law to Parliament. It was one of the safest seats in the country, and at the next election I sailed in."

"And that was Otterthwaite?"

"No, it was a constituency in the south. It disappeared when the boundaries were redrawn. Happens now and again. Then I got Otterthwaite. It's one of the reasons I like the place, I feel I truly got it under my own steam, as my own man."

"So then..."

"So then we settled down in a bijoux little house in Kensington. And I soon realised I'd made a huge mistake."

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“In getting married?”

“Well, yes, I suppose so. At least, in getting married to the wrong woman. As I said, I like women. Love them. But Lacy was cold and controlling. I wanted love, she wanted to be married to the next prime minister.”

“And then Roger?”

He moved uneasily, uncomfortable with this conversation. Todd rolled over and began to suck his nipples, very slowly and deliberately, drawing the pearl-like nubs upwards from the black fur that surrounded them. Pascal was suddenly aware of a hitherto unsuspected connection between his chest and his cock, a neural path that flashed with sensation.

“No, I began to...um... entertain myself, with other men. It was very discreet, but Lacy knew about it. She wasn't in a very strong position, because she'd begun an affair with one of her authors while we were engaged, and it carried on into the marriage. But nevertheless, she was furious and disgusted. But by then, I think she'd invested too much in me to let it go. Periodically I'd give it up, go back on the straight and narrow. Somehow, there always seemed to be some bright, sexy man to lure me back. But after I was made a Parliamentary Private Secretary – and I knew I had my foot on the ladder of power – I stopped it altogether. Lacy made it clear to me that I had too much to lose. So I stopped. For five years. And after a while even I began to believe I was 'cured' as she put it.”

Todd was writhing down the bed, running his tongue down the line which led to his navel. Pascal groaned, thrusting his cock upwards. It was hard now.

“Go on,” Todd said, lifting his head for a moment.

“I don't think I can, if you're going to... Oh!” Todd had given his hard penis a little swiping lick, and now he moved upwards, kissing and licking Pascal's neck. “Right, if I finish this story, will you do something about the hard-on?”

“I might.” His hand swept across the flat plane of Pascal's stomach, and again, briefly, his forefinger and thumb circled the eager cock. “Hurry!”

“Right. Oh God! Well, after their father died, Roger and Lacy inherited this rambling old country house in Essex, quite near the sea. We were supposed to go down for the week, but at something came up and Lacy had to attend some urgent meetings in London, so I went by myself. Roger's wife and children were staying with her parents in the south of France. We were alone.”

“Go on!” Todd's clever tongue was making soft little stabs at his navel.

“It was a glorious summer's day, and we swam. In the sea; you can't do that very often in that part of Essex. We walked up from the beach, still in our bathing trunks. We had a drink on the terrace, and then Roger said he was going to shower. At the last minute, he turned at the door and said, 'Come with me.' ”

Pascal shut his eyes, both because he was remembering the incident, and because he was savouring the attentions of Todd's warm tongue. “There was a shower off the master bedroom, where Roger was sleeping, and we went up there. He stripped off his trunks and made for the door of the bathroom. I hesitated a bit, and did the same. And then he turned round and I could see he was half erect, a beautiful cock, uncut, magnificent. He looked at me, looked me up and down in the same way I was doing to him. Then he took a step back towards me, and he said in a quiet voice, 'I've always fancied you, you know.' ”

Todd had squirmed down the bed and was pushing at Pascal's legs, getting them further apart. He held the throbbing penis out of the way and began to lick the swollen balls, making them wet.

“I... Jesus, Todd, I can't really... Well, I was astonished. I'd thought he was the ultimate straight. He was still looking at me as if he thought I might be going to hit

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him. I just said, 'And I've fancied you since the day we met.' He came at me like a train, and for a moment I thought HE was going to thump ME. Then he had his arms around me and he was kissing me and we staggered back and fell onto the bed."

Todd let the ball he was sucking slip from his mouth and said eagerly, "So then what happened? To quote the limerick, *who did what, and with what, and to whom?*"

"Oh, we kissed a lot, then sucked each other off, and then he asked if he could fuck me. Said it was something he'd been wanting to do for more than fifteen years."

"And you said yes?"

"I think I just spread my legs and bent my knees. I didn't need to say anything. I wanted it so much."

"But you don't... I thought you were a top."

"Well, yes, I suppose I am now. Well, I am with you. But then I liked it either way. Still do, I suppose."

Todd moved up a little, lying so his head was on Pascal's stomach, and his breath touched the damp skin of his cock. "Do go on," he said. "I like this story."

"He fucked me, there on the double bed he usually shared with his wife, the one I'd slept in with Lacy many times. We had five days before Lacy came down with a gaggle of her friends, and we spent most of it in bed. It was bliss."

Todd shifted so he could look up at him and asked seriously, "Did you love him?"

Pascal thought about it. "No. I liked him a lot. Lusted after him. But it was more of an intense friendship than love." He stroked the golden hair which was spread on his chest. "Not anything like what I feel for you."

Todd leaned forwards and placed a little kiss on the very end of the straining cock. "Not long now. Finish the story."

"All that summer we conducted what I suppose you would call an affair. We'd meet at his house when the children were at school and his wife was out. We even went to a hotel a few times, but it was very risky. Then in about September or November, Lacy had to go to some conference in Manchester. For one reason or another it had been a while since Roger and I had been together, and when he came to the flat, we just fell on each other. Real Hollywood style, clothes ripped off in the hall, underpants in the living room. We got as far as the bedroom and he pushed me down on the bed, put my legs over his shoulder, and started to fuck me really hard. And I was yelling, I remember, because it was probably the best fuck I'd ever had. I came, all over him, over his chest, and he gave a shout and pushed into me deeper and harder than he'd ever done before. I could feel the throbbing of his cock as he climaxed too. We kissed. Then I became aware of someone else in the room. We both turned our heads at the same time, and there was Lacy, eyes flashing venom, standing very still in the doorway."

"Shit!" Todd said, breathing hard.

"Shit is absolutely the right word for it. She blamed me, of course. And Roger was so busy grovelling, begging her not to tell his wife, I just let it go."

"And she divorced you?"

"We divorced, yes. It had been in the cards for a long time, but I think that up till then she'd believed my prospects made it worth the effort to keep things going. I think if she'd caught me with some anonymous pick-up she'd have gone on turning a blind eye. But fucking her own brother on our bed was too much, even for Lacy."

"And a good thing too," Todd said, with an air of finality. "Now, let's see to this little problem you have."

After another expert blow-job, with Pascal feeling drained and content, they lay, kissing and talking, on the narrow bed. The noise all around them was a distraction.

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Upstairs, the musician – although Pascal thought that was a fairly generous description – played on tunelessly. There seemed to be some sort of altercation going on in the street outside. The thumping from the stairs made it sound as if someone was carrying a heavy body up to the attic. And through the thin wall came the unmistakable sounds of two people having noisy sex.

“Oh, baby, baby! Fuck me, do it. Yeah, that’s right, just there. Harder! Harder! Aaaaaah!”

The voice was female, husky, probably as a result of a regime of gin and cigarettes.

“It’s like this all the time,” Todd said, rolling his eyes.

“She’s faking,” Pascal said, like a critic at the end of a bad play.

“Of course she’s faking. She’s a hooker. As soon as she’s got rid of this guy, there’ll be another poor sap in there.”

They made love again, slowly and sensuously, Todd on his stomach. By now it was three in the morning, but Pascal resisted all attempts to persuade him to stay; one tiny piece of sanity remaining told him that being recognised coming out of this place in the morning would be a very bad thing. As he dressed, he felt compelled to say, “Todd, this is a terrible dump. You shouldn’t be here. Can’t you find somewhere a bit more salubrious?”

Todd rolled over in the bed, leaning up on his elbow. “Christ, Pascal, do you know how much you pay me? This is about all I can afford. In any case, it’s incredibly difficult to find accommodation near enough to work.”

“Well, look for somewhere. I’ll help with the rent.”

Todd swung his legs round so he was sitting on the bed. He looked so warm, so tousled, and amazingly his young cock was hardening again. Pascal fought the temptation to kneel down and take it in his mouth.

“I don’t think I’ve sunk quite that low yet, thank you Minister.” He was smiling, but there was an edge to his voice.

Pascal made a decision, one he knew he would regret. But fresh from that bed, his whole body tingling with the afterglow of wonderful sex, he couldn’t stop himself.

“There’s a spare room in my house. You can have that until we can sort something out.”

Todd’s face lit up in a slow, beaming smile. “You want me to move in with you?”

CHAPTER SEVEN

The next day, Pascal, feeling a bit hung over, was wondering how he could square the existence of his new lodger with the staff in his office. He decided that fronting it out was the best policy; better than attempting to keep it a secret, when he'd inevitably be found out, when things would look much more suspicious. He told Bella Grant, in a casual manner. "Oh, by the way. I'm putting Todd up at my place for a week or two. His digs were most unsuitable, and I did promise Senator Howells we'd look after him. I'll let you know as soon as he finds somewhere else."

She nodded and made a quick note in her efficient manner. He'd hardly left the room to go to the Commons chamber before, in the most tactful way, she'd let both the parliamentary private secretary, Angela Hilton and Callum Byrne, the senior civil servant know what was happening. The two of them went into Dumont's office to talk.

"Well, he's really taken to that young man," Angela said, looking down at her nails. "If he's not careful, he'll make the others in the office jealous. Showing favouritism."

"Todd's very good, very keen," Callum said, in his soft Irish accent. "But I can't help feeling that the minister singling him out like this is... unwise. People are so liable to jump to conclusions these days."

"Perhaps someone should have a word?"

"Well, it all depends." Callum looked at her directly, his pale grey eyes searching. "I don't suppose there is any... funny business going on, is there?"

"Of course not," Angela responded with some heat. "He was married. He's engaged. Besides, Todd is such a manly man."

Byrne nodded. "That's what I thought. In that case, I'm sure we can leave it to the... party authorities... to sort things out if they feel it's getting out of hand."

* * *

The authorities to whom he referred were the Whips, who maintain party discipline. Named after the whippers-in who control the hounds at a fox hunt, they are powerful and all seeing. It's said that the Whips knew every indiscretion of the members of their party, and are not above using their knowledge to exert a little blackmail if anyone threatens to fall out of line with the party leader.

Some days later, in his office in the heart of Westminster, the Chief Whip was talking to one of his deputies. They'd gone down a list of various members who had strayed, or looked as if they might. The Chief Whip got to the last name on his list.

"Excellent, Muir, I think we've broken the back of it. But finally, there's the little matter of Dumont."

The deputy was a pale young man, wearing an old fashioned suit with a brocade waistcoat. He tipped back in his chair. "Dumont? He's pretty sound, isn't he? A rising star."

"Oh, solid as a rock, on domestic matters. But there's a slight feeling he might be going soft on foreign policy, and particularly on Afghanistan and Iraq. And as you know, the PM expects absolute loyalty there."

"Fine. So do we have any leverage?"

"We do." The Chief Whip tapped the Black Book, repository of all the most dirty parliamentary secrets. "Quite a lot, as it happens. Most of it's ancient history, our

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Pascal has been a good boy for the past few years. But recently, he seems to have been slipping again.”

The other man let the chair fall forward with a bang. “Boys? Girls? Goats?”

His companion made a face. “Boys. He’s got his researcher living with him. A very young and handsome young American. Male.”

“But isn’t there a fiancée?”

“There is. But she’s out of the country at the moment. There’s also a vengeful ex-wife, and one or two former boyfriends.”

Muir pursed his lips and let out a whistling sound. “Plenty to go on, then.”

“Plenty. There’s enough in here,” tapping the book again, “to get him so close behind the PM that you won’t be able to tell their shadows apart. But there’s a danger that this new indiscretion of his might spin out of control, and the last thing we need at this stage of the parliament is another scandal.”

His companion stretched out his legs, languidly. “You think I should have a word?”

“I think it wouldn’t hurt to fire a little salvo across his bows. Just so he knows we know.”

* * *

The day after their tryst in Paddington, Pascal had moved Todd and his few possessions into the house. Late in the evening, after a lengthy debate in the House and a vote which the government had won, he showed him the room at the back, with its feminine décor and single bed. “Sorry about the frills. It’s been like that since I moved here. Do what you like with it.”

Todd shrugged. “It’s fine. Real luxury, compared to where I was before. Anyhow, I don’t expect I’m going to spend much time in here. Am I?”

Pascal had intended to explain that here, in this house, they must be restrained and chaste. But one look at Todd’s face, one flicker of his beautiful long lashes, and all his good intentions were gone. He crossed the room swiftly and took him roughly in his arms, kissing him hard, his tongue probing. His hand was scrabbling at the other’s fly, finding the zip and pulling it down. He fondled the growing cock, and then, sharply aware of his own need, said, “Get these off. I want you, now.”

Todd scrambled out of his trousers and underpants, and dug about in the pockets of his rucksack for the lube. He bent over the bed in an obscene obeisance, top half still clothed in shirt and tie, his bottom, framed by faint tan lines, in the air. He put his head down and spread his knees as widely as he could. Pascal had only just time to unzip before he was overcome by lust, and plunged his cock into the dilating hole, fucking hard and without finesse. His hand went round Todd’s body, stroking the magnificent erection, and at the moment he felt himself swell and come hard, right inside the golden body, Todd’s own cock twitched and spurted, depositing copious semen on the virgin bed-cover.

They moved back into the master bedroom with its large double bed, and that was where Todd stayed. They had a week of dizzying sex. Even after late-night sittings, when Pascal was exhausted, Todd could get him interested with a wiggle of his hips or a well-placed kiss. They made love for half the night, and again in the morning, before leaving for the office. Pascal was convinced that he was operating better, more efficiently, performing more sharply on the floor of the House than he ever had before. And as he told Todd, he was sure he knew why it was. “I’m in love. Probably for the first time ever, I’m in love.”

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* * *

The next weekend, Dumont was due to have talks in Paris with his French opposite number. He was to travel on the Sunday, meet the minister on Monday, attend a formal dinner that evening and return for a parliamentary debate on Tuesday. As he moved through the office on the way to a meeting with his minister, he said casually to Bella, "Oh, by the way, I think I'll take young Todd with me to Paris. It'll be a good experience for him. Could you book another ticket for him on the Eurostar, please? And a room next to mine at the George V."

Bella looked at Carrie, the diary secretary, and they raised their eyebrows momentarily.

Todd had never been to Paris, and when Dumont told him he could come with him, he was child-like in his joy. They were in the small kitchen in the Pimlico house, washing up. Pascal liked to play at these everyday tasks, which gave him a sense of the normalcy which eluded him. Todd pinned him up against the sink, extending his arms over his shoulders so the soapy hands wouldn't touch his suit. He kissed him, a long lingering kiss, at the same time forcing his legs apart with his knee and pressing forward to grind a monstrous erection against his.

"I'm going to be so inventive for you tonight," he purred.

The trip to Paris was magical for both of them. Dumont would usually have had a civil servant with him, but he told Callum Byrne that he'd dispense with this, since it was an informal meeting. "And I'll have Todd if I need anything." Byrne had merely raised an eyebrow and nodded in true civil service style.

There were two long meetings, but the rest of the time was their own. They went to the Louvre, to the Pompidou Centre and to Les Invalides, the burial place of Napoleon Bonaparte. Todd, on his own, even braved the crowds to ascend to the top of the Eiffel Tower.

On Monday, they attended the formal dinner with Dumont's French counterpart. Perhaps because of his perceived French heritage, more likely because he spoke the language fluently, he was a big success, and the meal was excellent, with a seemingly endless array of food and wine. When it was over, Dumont turned down an offer of an official car. "But no! On such a beautiful evening, in such a wonderful city, one needs to walk."

They went down to the Seine, crossing over by the Pont Royal and walking along the Left Bank, to come back over the river on the Pont de La Concorde, so they could peer over the side at the Bateaux Mouches, brightly lit and full of revellers, moving underneath.

"I'd like to do that," Todd said, wistfully. He'd been snapping away with his little camera almost without ceasing since they'd arrived, but now he stopped.

"Next time." In the darkness, Pascal risked reaching out to hold his hand. They stood for a while, looking down at the sparkling surface of the river, and Pascal felt a completely unaccustomed sensation of content. He was happy, for the first time in a long time. Looking quickly to the left and right, he could see only other lovers, older couples, families out for a late-night stroll. Quickly, he kissed Todd on the lips. "Come on! There's a lot more to do before we're finished."

They walked on up towards the Champs Elysées, Todd still wide-eyed at the throngs of people, the lights, the sounds, the smells of Paris by night. "Where are we going?"

"I thought we'd go to a club."

"Oh yeah! That sounds good!"

They strolled on towards Pigalle, stopping now and then to look in the bright

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shop windows and to examine the menus displayed outside the teeming restaurants. Eventually, up near the Place de Pigalle, Pascal put a hand on Todd's arm. "Here it is."

The place was garish, the entrance flanked by pillars of neon, flashing lights proclaiming, "Hero, Club Gay."

Todd stopped dead. "Christ, Pascal, you can't go in there."

"Why not?"

"It's a gay club, for God's sake! Your reputation... you're always telling me we have to be so careful."

Pascal was so light-headed, so carefree, and after the hospitality of his French counterpart, quite drunk, that he was almost dancing there on the pavement. "But this is Paris, not London. No-one knows me here, and in any case, there isn't that prurience here about people's private lives. You won't find paparazzi hanging about outside this club."

"But Pascal..."

"Unless you'd rather go to the Folies Bergères? Naked ladies, Todd?"

Todd grinned, spluttering. "Well, no, but this seems like madness..."

"Come on, live a little. We'll never get a chance like this again."

They went in through the garish entrance, Todd still looking nervously around him. Inside, the place was reminiscent of the foyer of an old fashioned cinema, all heavy red velvet drapes and gold braid. Pascal paid for their tickets and they went on to join a short queue which led to another door.

When they finally got through, they found themselves in a huge room, filled with tables. Waiters wove in between the diners, trays held aloft on splayed hands. The place was full. In the centre was a small stage, on which a woman stood. Dressed in a shimmering gown, she teetered on four-inch heels, her long blonde hair piled up on top of her head as she sang the Edith Piaf song, 'Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien'.

They were now at the head of the queue, and one of the waiters led them to a table near the stage. In the area around it, people were dancing, and it soon became apparent they were all men. Todd turned round in his seat to look, his hand going out to cover Pascal's on the table. "This is amazing," he said. "Have you been here before?"

"Once, just after I graduated from University. After that, life got too serious."

"It's really cool."

The waiter returned, and Pascal ordered Champagne. The blonde chanteuse had moved on to a raucous song about a woman whose boyfriend kept asking her to go just a little bit further. At the end of each verse, the refrain, sung in a babyish, Marilyn Monroe kind of voice was, "Peut-être un petit peu..." "Perhaps, a little bit."

Pascal consulted the programme he'd bought on the way in. This, apparently, was Madame Clara.

Soon, the lyrics were getting more saucy, and Madame Clara began to peel off one of the long gloves she wore, flinging it out in the crowd as she reached the plosive consonants of the refrain. Then the next glove went. Next, she shimmied out of the dress, revealing a voluptuous figure clad in black fishnet stockings and a red basque. The central part of the basque was removed, leaving just tassels on the ample breasts and a strip of scarlet material over the flat area of her mound. One stocking went, then the other, though she clambered back into her heels. Then the suspender belt, and the tassels disappeared. Now she was just down to the thin strip of satin, and she turned, wiggling her bottom provocatively at the audience as she slowly pulled the tiny panties down her legs.

Pascal and Todd were watching in fascination, not entirely sure what it was they

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were witnessing. The singer turned back, completely naked now. They could see the lush black of her pubic hair. She stopped the song, leaned over to the audience in a confiding way. "Mesdames et Messieurs, as you can see, I am not a natural blonde!" With a flourish, she removed the brassy wig, revealing short spiky dark hair. There was a howl of laughter and applause from the audience. "And that's not the only thing about me that's not quite right..." She put her hands down between her legs, and there was a clearly audible ripping sound, like a sticking plaster being removed. The pubic hair came off in her hand, to be tossed off into the crowd. Her hand was moving, deftly rearranging things. Then she thrust forward her hips to reveal a very masculine, semi erect cock and pendulous balls.

She...he... twirled around on the little stage, manipulating the cock until it was hard and straight. "Now then," she cried. "Does anyone in the audience want to come up here and finish me off?" She scanned the room, listening to the rumble of laughter. "Come on, doesn't one of you have the balls... is that the right word... to come and give me some relief?"

From the other side of the circle to where Todd and Pascal were sitting, a young man was thrust forward. It was obviously some sort of outing, and he was feigning reluctance as his friends pushed him towards the stage.

Madame Clara leaned forward, microphone in hand, saying, "Well, aren't you sweet. It must be my birthday. What's your name, darling?"

The mumbled response was inaudible. She said, "Speak up, mon garçon. You don't have anything in your mouth... yet! Now tell us again, what's your name?"

"Philippe!" The youth was puce with embarrassment and excitement. Pascal thought he was about Todd's age.

"And are you man enough to sort me out?"

"Mais oui," the young man said, with the confidence of the very drunk.

"Eh bien. If you can genuinely make me come, you and your friends will get a bottle of champagne. But if you can't do it within ten minutes, you have to pay a forfeit. Do you agree?"

Philippe shrugged. "Easy," he said.

Madame Clara rolled her eyes at the audience. "We shall see," she said. "Come on then, darling. Down on your knees.

To applause, the young man fell onto his knees and took the tip of the pink penis into his mouth. Madame Clara looked down at him, ruffling his hair. "Start the clock!" she said, and immediately a big back-projection appeared behind the stage, counting down the time.

There followed an extraordinary ten minutes, as Philippe made ever more frantic attempts to excite Madame Clara, while she continued with a surreal series of jokes, apparently quite unmoved by what was going on below her waist. The audience was in hysterics, laughing partly at the act, but more at the absurdity of the situation.

The clock ticked away, Madame Clara's jokes became more raunchy and peculiar, and the youth on his knees at her feet was trying every trick in the book, licking at the balls, tickling the slit with the tip of his tongue, even managing to deep throat, with the loud encouragement of the audience. But still, without apparently suffering at all, Madame Clara failed to climax.

The clock was counting down the last thirty seconds, the audience chanting the numbers. When they got to zero, Philippe fell back, exhausted, while Madame Clara pranced around the little platform, thrusting out her hips, her arms thrown upwards in triumph. When the shouting and the cat-calls had died down, Madame Clara put her stiletto-shod foot out and delicately poked the fallen Philippe in the chest.

"And now, mon brave, you have to face the forfeit. Well, gentlemen, what shall we

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make him do?"

There was a roar from the audience and a variety of obscene suggestions, which even Pascal struggled to translate for Todd.

Eventually, the transsexual held up a hand. "Well, you are a disgusting crowd. Very naughty! I think the consensus is that you want to see our dear little Philippe stripped naked, and then you want to see him comprehensively fucked. Yes?"

The audience yelled its assent. Madame Clara prodded Philippe again. "Get up, dear. Strip!"

Philippe was clearly beside himself with excitement. He got out of his clothes at record speed, urged on by the lewd encouragement of his friends. He was a tall young man, broad-shouldered, with an almost hairless body. His penis was long and narrow, jutting up pinkly from sparse sandy hair. Madame Clara looked him up and down. "Well, I'm glad that little thing isn't going in me!" she said. She clicked her fingers in the direction of the side of the room, and two stage-hands ran on with a box, like a cut down version of a vaulting horse, wooden, with a padded top. They set this up on the platform then one of them handed Madame Clara an enormous tube of lubricant, about a foot in length. She waved this at Philippe, who was dancing from foot to foot, his arms wrapped around his body. "Now, my boy. All of this is going up your bum..."

The crowd roared, and Philippe, playing up to the audience, feigned terror. Madame Clara made him get up and lie on his stomach on the padded box, his head and chest flat on the top, his bottom at the end. His long legs would have been dangling over the edge, just touching the ground, if Madame Clara hadn't made him bend them upwards, as if he were a frog, his feet resting on ledges in the wood. After much comedy play with the giant lube, she placed the nozzle on his anus and shoved, causing him to yell in genuine shock. She left the thing wedged in his bottom, to general hilarity, and went round to the front of the box, where his head was resting on a level with her chest. "Now then, darling, you didn't make me come, so to make up for it, while we get you ready, you can suck my tits."

Philippe obliged, sucking the silicon protuberances with gusto, until Madame Clara declared herself satisfied.

"Now for the main course," she said, walking round to the giant tube and pulling it out of Philippe's overstretched anus. She faced front again, stroking the massive penis which rose so incongruously from her hairless loins, and hefted up each breast, causing more laughter. Then she approached the hapless Philippe. "Shall I do it?" she asked.

"Yes, yes!" yelled the audience.

Madame Clara placed the tip of her cock on the expanded hole. "Yes?" she said, taunting them.

"Yes!"

With one smooth movement, she drove her cock deep into Philippe's bowels. He let out a loud and genuine groan. Then Madame Clara was fucking, really hammering into him, hard, meaning it.

Pascal reached out for Todd's hand. "He's a plant. He must be a plant. This is a set up."

Todd's own hand moved into Pascal's lap, stroking the growing bulge. "I don't know. I don't care. Christ, I want you. We'll have to go soon."

They stayed a little longer to see a variety of acts. There was a high-kicking line of birds of paradise, glorious chorus-girls who, on closer inspection, were all young men, and who stripped off for one sensational, testosterone infused finale. There was a ventriloquist who had painted his bottom with eyes and eyebrows, so he really did

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Speak out of his arse. There were erotic dancers and contortionists. And eventually, when they knew they could no longer keep their hands off each other, they walked through the Parisian night to their hotel, and made love until five in the morning, when they fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

Travelling home on the train, Pascal thought he had never, in the whole of his adult life, been so happy, so fulfilled. And all the way across the flat French plain to the coast, as they approached the Channel tunnel, he kept glancing at Todd, the golden boy, sitting opposite him, reading his book or dozing, and his heart beat a little faster.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Things began to go wrong almost as soon as they got back. The Bill had by now reached its report stage, and Dumont spent a bad-tempered afternoon in the Commons defending it clause by clause. Wickham was on form, and in his new relaxed state, Dumont let him land some hits on him.

"I note that the minister has curbed his customary homophobia sufficiently to allow a diminution of the penalties for gay men who choose to have sex in an enclosed area, such as a toilet cubicle, in a public place. If this small largesse is due to some benign influence in his life, we can only hope that he continues to derive some pleasure from it."

This barb got through the bubble of content in which Pascal had been floating. He replied with a classic politician's answer about balancing the liberty of the individual against public good, but he was simmering with fury. His state of mind was not helped by the fact that, for the rest of the debate, Jack Wickham lounged back on the opposition front bench, regarding him with cool amusement.

He waited until he got into the outer part of his office before bursting into a tirade, mostly directed at Angela Hilton who had walked with him from the chamber.

"Bloody Wickham and his foul insinuations. Damn him, insolent bastard, making jibes at me then laughing at me all afternoon. If he thinks..." He stopped abruptly when he noticed that Bella was holding one finger to her lips and gesturing towards the office with the other hand.

"Mr Muir is waiting to see you, Minister."

Both Dumont and Mrs Hilton paled a little. Sebastian Muir, was the youngest and most deadly of the government Whips. Pascal had already been unsettled by Wickham's remarks, now a jab of fear went through him. He squared his shoulders and went into the room.

Muir was sitting at the desk, tilting the chair backwards in a characteristic way. His lemon coloured hair was smooth, and his expression was bland.

"Ah, Dumont. So sorry to come unannounced." He didn't sound sorry at all.

"Not at all, Muir," Pascal said politely, sitting, by default, in the visitor's chair on the other side of the desk. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh, I just thought it was time we had a chat. How was Paris?"

"Excellent. My opposite number was in fine form. Very interesting and constructive."

"Good, good. And you enjoyed your leisure time as well?"

Pascal could feel his stomach begin to turn over. "Well, you know what it's like. Paris... It's hard not to enjoy oneself."

"Indeed, especially if one has congenial company."

Muir allowed the silence to stretch out, before he took another tack.

"And how is Mrs Hadley-Wade?"

"Marcia? She's fine. Been away for a while, but she's back in London now."

"Good. And when are you actually getting married? I'm afraid I've forgotten."

"We haven't yet set a date, we've both been so busy. Next year probably. Spring-time."

"That will be splendid. I shall expect my invitation."

"But of course." Pascal was beginning to think he might be off the hook.

Muir lent back further, closing his eyes for a moment as if reminiscing. "Goodness, I remember your first wife so well. Lacy, wasn't it?"

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"That's right."

"Are you still on good terms with her?" He chose to interpret Pascal's slight twitch as a nod. "Oh splendid. Delightful, I always thought. And her charming brother."

Dumont was silent, using all his energy to keep himself under control and maintain a façade of normality.

Muir let the front legs of the chair fall back onto the floor and sat upright, saying casually, "Oh, by the way, Dumont, I hear you have a lodger."

"A lodger? Oh, you mean my intern. He's not a lodger, really, I'm just putting him up for a few days while he finds somewhere suitable to live. The digs he was in were appalling."

"You went to see them, did you?"

Dumont was inwardly cursing this slip, but Muir went on. "Well, I admire your dedication to your staff."

"Thank you."

"But I'm a little concerned..." He let it drag out, looking round the room as if he'd lost the thread of the conversation. "Yes, a little concerned about the young man."

There was another long pause. One part of Dumont's brain noted that Muir would make a first-class interrogator. His technique was brilliant. In the end, he had to break the silence.

"You're concerned about Todd?"

"Yes. I mean he's such a young man. So very much younger than you. It must be extremely boring for him living in that house. Awfully dull."

"Oh, I think he manages. He's a very serious young man."

"Serious..." Muir rolled the word about in his mouth, as if tasting it. "He's serious, is he? Well, I dare say you find it entertaining to be... serious... together. Still, I can't help thinking it would be better for him if he were to find somewhere else to live very soon. We don't want things getting too... serious."

He got up to go. "Well, I must be off. So nice to have had this little chat with you, Pascal. We must do it again, soon."

"Yes indeed," Dumont enthusiastically, shaking his hand and wishing he might never have to see or speak to the man ever again.

At the door, Muir turned. "And by the way, you know there's the big debate on Iraq coming up next week? I know we can count on your absolute support."

"But of course."

"Excellent. Goodbye then, Dumont. Do give my regards to your fiancée."

When Muir had gone, Pascal flung himself into the chair he'd recently vacated and put his head in his hands. Of course, he had known the Whips must be aware of his indiscretions. The Whips knew everything. But he'd pushed it to the back of his mind. To be confronted with it like this was a real shock to the system.

He was just grateful that Todd had been in the library and had missed the whole episode. God knows what Muir's sharp nose would have sniffed out if he'd seen them together.

He grabbed some papers from the desk. Clearly he needed to have a careful think about all of this. But now, he was late for a meeting.

* * *

The unpleasantness of the day was not yet over. In the late afternoon he was back at his desk, when Bella ushered in Marcia, and his heart sank. She was bronzed and chic in a dark blue Chanel suit which went well with her fair skin and blonde hair, and impossibly high spiky heels.

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“Look who’s here to see you, Minister!” Bella said brightly, and he stood up to receive a peck on the cheek from his fiancée.

“Darling, I had to come in to see James Baxter. He’s going to speak at the opening of my next exhibition, you know. How that man can be an MP, I’ll never know, he’s so well educated and refined.”

“Well, thank you very much!”

She gave a little tinkling laugh. “So while I was in the building, I thought I’d come and say hello and try to lure you out. I bet you’ve forgotten that we’ve been invited to the Lambs for drinks, and afterwards I thought you could take me out for dinner. Carrie says your diary is clear.”

Pascal, who had been looking forward to a quiet evening and an early night with Todd, groaned inwardly. And at that minute, Todd himself bounced in through the open door, sheaves of paper under his arm, and an excited expression on his face. “Minister, you’ll never guess what I found in... Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t realise you had someone with you.”

“No problem Todd,” Pascal said, trying to sound upbeat, but experiencing a sharp feeling of anxiety. “I’d like to introduce you. Marcia, this is Todd Panopoulos, an intern from the States who’s been doing some wonderful research for me. Todd, this is my fiancée, Marcia Hadley-Wade.”

“Your fiancée?” Todd said sharply, before recovering. Pascal saw his eyes go dead as he put out his hand, and he slipped back into the safety of his polite Ivy League manner. “So nice to meet you, Miss Hadley-Wade.”

“Well, actually, it’s Mrs, but do call me Marcia. It’s the second time around for both of us.” She directed a bright smile at Todd, then turned away, as if dismissing him. “Come along, darling, the party’s in Mayfair.”

Thinking about it afterwards, Pascal concluded that Muir must somehow have influenced Marcia to come and claim him like that. He had no idea how, and Marcia didn’t seem suspicious in any way, but when they had finished their meal and left the restaurant, she tucked her arm in his and said, “Let’s go home and go to bed.”

“Well, it’s a delightful offer, but I think I have to decline. I have to be up so early tomorrow, there’s such a lot to do with the Bill.”

“Come on, Pascal, I bet you’ve missed me. I know you get quite edgy if you don’t have your... release. We’ll go to your house, and then you won’t have to get up and go home in the middle of the night.”

As a rule, Marcia would never agree to spend time at his place, preferring the cool anonymity of her own. But now, she was insistent. He still hadn’t mentioned Todd, and he prayed he’d be working, or at least respectably dressed. In fact, he was, and was sitting watching television. By the look on his face, he’d been waiting for a showdown.

Marcia swept into the room, eyebrows raised. “Good heavens. It’s the researcher, isn’t it? My goodness, Pascal, you do make your staff work hard. Quite the slave-driver.”

He moved over to the drinks cabinet, needing a stiff scotch. “Oh, didn’t I mention it? Todd’s been camping out in the spare room for a few days. His own digs were absolutely frightful, so he’s a bit of a refugee, really.”

“Oh?” Marcia’s eyes were cold as she accepted a glass of wine. “How very inconvenient.”

A thought struck Pascal, sending shards of panic shooting through him. “You stay down here and chat to Todd, Marcia. I just want to make sure the bedroom is tidy. I left in such a rush this morning and the cleaner’s been off this week.”

Todd got up, his face completely blank. “I’m sure it’s fine, Mr Dumont. But I’m

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going up now, and I'll look in and give you a shout if it seems too rough."

"Thank you Todd." There was a mute appeal in his eyes, but Todd wouldn't meet his gaze. "We'll see you in the morning."

When he'd gone, Marcia said, "What a very peculiar arrangement. And if you don't mind me saying so, Pascal, not very appropriate really."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're a minister, and he's just a researcher. You shouldn't be sharing accommodation as if you were students. I mean, you wouldn't move one of your secretaries in here, would you?"

He breathed a little easier. "Now that," he said, laughing, "would really be inappropriate."

When they finally got upstairs, he was relieved, and touched to see that Todd had not only removed all his belongings, but had also changed the sheets, bundling away the evidence of last night's wild passion. He made love to Marcia mechanically, but she, spurred on some undecipherable instinct, was more responsive than she had ever been, and when she climaxed, her screams of rapture would have been quite audible in the bedroom across the hall.

Todd was gone when they got up in the morning. "Well, at least he's showing a little tact," Marcia sniffed.

During the day he wasn't visible in the office, and Callum Byrne told Dumont that he'd decided to do some research work in the British Library. But when Dumont got home at about seven that evening, Todd was there, sitting bolt upright on the sofa, his face pale with anger and two little spots of colour on his cheeks.

Pascal had scarcely entered the living room, before Todd was on his feet, eyes flashing.

"How could you, how could you do that to me?"

He responded wearily, "Todd, I'm sorry. But she insisted on coming back with me and I..."

"That's not what I mean, and you know it. Why didn't you tell me you were engaged?"

"I assumed you knew. It's not a secret. It was in the Times."

"Well, I didn't know. And you must have realised that. How the hell do you think I felt yesterday when you introduced me? And that bitch looking me up and down and then dismissing me as if I were some hick colonial."

Pascal's face showed a glimmer of a smile. "Don't take it personally. She treats everyone like that."

"Well, I'm not used to being talked to as if I were some knuckle-dragging redneck. The hired help."

"Look, I'm sorry. But I could hardly say to her, 'Oh by the way Marcia, this is my lover whom I shagged six different ways last night'."

"It's not a joke, Pascal." Todd's normally deep voice sounded shrill. "I thought I meant something to you. How could you treat me like this?"

Pascal moved forward, holding out his hands. "Of course you mean something to me. I love you, you know that."

Todd backed away, his eyes flashing with rage. "You love me, but you're going to marry that up-tight bitch."

"But Todd, you've always understood that I have to maintain a façade..."

"A façade, yes. But to marry! For Christ's sake, Pascal, you only just escaped from the last marriage with your reputation intact. This is madness."

"I know it's wrong. But everyone expects it. The public, my constituency committee, the Whips..." He suddenly remembered the conversation with Muir. "In

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fact, the Whips are making some very threatening noises.”

“But what about us?” Todd was almost crying with frustration and fury. “What happens to us? I can’t imagine your new bride is going to put up with me sharing your bed.”

Pascal was shocked. “But Todd, it was never going to last for ever. I mean, you’ll go back to the States...”

“You bastard! You low-down swine! You tell me you love me, and it turns out you’re just making cold-blooded plans for the next person to take my place.”

“No, please Todd, no.” He moved forward, putting his arms round Todd’s rigid body. “It’s you I love. All I meant was that you’re young, you have a great life in front of you, a career. I can’t expect you to stay in the shadows waiting for me for the rest of your life.”

“That’s not the point,” Todd said, wrenching away. “You didn’t think about me at all. You just care about you, your career, your ambitions. You think you’re going to be prime minister and you’re not going to let anything stand in your way. I thought you were a decent man, principled. But you’re just another sleazy politician on the make.”

Todd had turned his back, and Pascal went after him, pulling him towards him. He buried his face in the curve of Todd’s neck, pushing his hips forward, feeling the muscled buttocks and his own answering hardness. His hand slid downwards, cupping Todd’s soft bulge. “Come on Todd, let’s talk about it in bed.”

“No!” Todd pulled away again, his eyes blazing. “This isn’t one of those times when you can get round me with a quick fuck. You’ve betrayed me and you’ve betrayed what you are. You’re gay, Pascal, gay. What you did last night disgusts me.” He slammed off towards the front door. “I’m going out. Don’t expect me back.”

Despite this, Pascal sat up until two in the morning. Then he went up to bed and lay, with the lights out, staring unblinkingly at the ceiling. His main feeling was one of irritation. How was he supposed to know that Todd hadn’t picked up on the general office gossip about his engagement? And what a ridiculous, petulant performance that had been.

Underlying it was anxiety about what Muir had said to him. And somewhere, well concealed in his conscience, a small voice was telling him he was behaving unfairly to Todd, to Marcia – and to himself.

Todd wasn’t at the office at all the next day. Bella gave Dumont a rather odd look when he asked. “He called in sick. I thought you’d know.”

CHAPTER NINE

Todd wasn't at home when Dumont got in at about ten. He checked upstairs, dreading that he might find all his belongings were gone, but everything was still there. Eventually, he went to bed, filled with fear. About an hour later, he heard a key in the lock. He didn't get up, wanting Todd to make the first move, and after a short while, the door opened, and he came into the room. Even with this distance between them, Pascal could smell beer. From the sounds, he guessed Todd was removing his clothes. The light was switched on, and when he opened his eyes, Todd was standing at the end of the bed, naked, magnificent, looking more than ever like some ancient Greek illustration of male perfection. He was half erect, and swaying slightly.

"Where have you been?" Pascal hadn't meant to sound querulous, but that was how it came out.

"With friends. You know you keep asking me to fuck you?" The non sequitur followed with the logic of the not-quite-sober.

"Well, yes, I suppose..."

"Well, that's what I'm going to do. With this."

Pascal saw that he was clutching a large, black dildo, and his sphincter tightened with instinctive excitement. But he sat up and said, "You're pissed."

"I am indeed pissed, in both the American and the British sense of the word. You could say I'm pissed on both sides of the Atlantic. Now then." He lunged forward and stripped off the thin duvet which covered Pascal. He paused. "Are these sheets clean? They're not the ones..."

Pascal nodded, shocked, but horribly excited. One of the first things he had done had been to strip the bed of the sheets he'd slept in with Marcia, knowing they'd be anathema to Todd.

"Good. Bend your knees. Bend them and let your legs drop down either side."

As if mesmerised, Pascal obeyed him, finding himself open and exposed. His cock was already hardening under Todd's careful scrutiny.

Todd knelt on the bed, between Pascal's open legs, and leaned across. "Kiss me," he said, his mouth open, his lips wet. "Kiss and make up."

Pascal could taste beer and something else. *Dope*, he thought. Todd was massaging his ball-sack, where it lay flattened against the root of his cock.

"You want to be fucked?"

"Where the hell were you?" Pascal was trying to reassert himself. "I've been worried sick about you."

"Oh, around," Todd said, vaguely. "I do have other friends, you know."

"I was really upset. I thought you might have had an accident."

"Oh? Well I'm sure Marcia was available to comfort you."

His hands were on Pascal's legs, pushing them even further apart, quite roughly. He was crouching, his head dipping down until his hair was tickling the sensitive flesh at the top of Pascal's thighs.

"Got to stretch you first," he said, then he looked up, so that Pascal, looking down the length of his own body could see the leonine head between his legs, the blue eyes blazing. "You do want this?"

Pascal could feel his anal passage contracting sharply, while blood surged to his cock. "Oh yes, I want it," he said.

Todd put out his tongue and began to lap like a cat. It was warm and a little rough. He worked the tip round and round the anal opening until Pascal howled with

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a mixture of excitement and frustration. The tongue began poking into the hole, deeper and deeper. Pascal cried out.

"Fuck me, please fuck me. Just... Oh dear God, Todd, please..."

Now Todd lathered on the lube, pushing it in deeper and deeper until four fingers were going easily into the stretched orifice. Pascal had forgotten what it was like, what overwhelming pleasure he derived from that feeling of being expanded, filled, plugged to a point where it felt as if something must give, some fragile flesh might split.

"Look at this." Todd was holding up the black dildo, glistening with lube. "Do you want this inside you?"

"I want you. I want you inside me."

"You do?" His smile was twisted. For a moment, he held the tip of his swollen penis over the greasy entrance, prodding a little while Pascal moaned. At last he said, "But I don't do that. You can have this instead." Holding up the dildo again. "Would you like that?"

"Yes..." It came out as a gasp.

"It's big..."

"I...know. Just do it. Todd, please..."

"Okay, okay." He began working the end of the implement into Pascal's stretched opening, pushing it in incrementally, twisting it slightly as he edged it upwards.

The feeling was overwhelming, yet still Pascal wanted more. He strained at the intruder, needing it to go deeper in. Todd laughed and continued to work the giant dildo into him.

Pascal began to cry out, convulsing, his knees moving higher until they were flat against his chest.

"You do like this, don't you?" Todd said.

The voice was hoarse. "Yes. My God, yes. More, more..."

Todd went on working the huge object inwards, concentrating hard, his streaked hair flopping over his forehead. Eventually it was crammed right in, up to the flared base, and Pascal head and neck moved from side to side on the pillow while he made a strange keening sound. Todd wrapped his hands, still slick with lube, around Pascal's thickening penis, and began to stroke it with increasing speed.

Pascal was still making guttural sounds when Todd moved round. "Something for me now," he said. He adopted a crouching position, his bottom poised over Pascal's face. His hands still worked the giant dildo, beginning to move it in and out. He lowered himself downwards, his pulsing anus grazing Pascal's nose.

"Eat," he commanded, and Pascal thrust his tongue upwards, tasting the familiar earthy smell with a surge of passion and emotion.

Finally, Todd leaned forward and took Pascal's swollen penis in his mouth, sucking hard. The effect of these different stimuli was a sensory overload which threatened to knock Pascal out altogether. The room went quiet, the only sounds the slurping, sucking noises from the mouths of the two men, and the pneumatic effect of the dildo being worked in and out.

After a while, Pascal's whimpers became louder. His hips lifted off the bed, gyrating madly, as Todd continued to drive the black pillar downwards. Then he exploded, fireworks sending jagged sparks across his brain, his whole body rigid, sensations flashing along his exoskeleton like the Christmas lights in Oxford Street. Todd sucked and swallowed, grinding his bottom downwards while Pascal's tongue drove inwards to its full extent. Now, he swivelled round again, leaving the black monstrosity in place. He moved up the bed, his legs astride Pascal's body, and fed his penis, still rigid, into the older man's willing mouth. Holding himself up on the bed-

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head, Todd began to drive his cock into Pascal's throat with growing desperation, causing Pascal to gag and choke. But there was no let-up, as Todd's bottom rose and fell, until finally he gave a cry of release and spurted great quantities of liquid straight into the waiting throat.

At last they subsided. Todd moved down the bed and removed the dildo which created a satisfactory slurping noise as it emerged, but for Pascal, leaving an aching void. Todd moved into Pascal's arms.

"Oh Todd, dearest Todd, my beloved, my darling. I never meant to hurt you. I love you," Pascal said.

"And I love you, Minister Dumont," Todd said, sleepily. "My Pascal."

And on the chest of drawers, where he had put it earlier, the little camera winked as it silently recorded the scene.

* * *

The next day, Pascal found it hard to concentrate on the job. He felt sore, exhilarated and nervous. He'd won Todd back, but he knew it was only a matter of time before the disparate parts of his life came crashing together again. His feeling of doom was not helped by a phone call in the early evening. Bella, who was just about to go home, put her head round the door. "Minister, there's a call for you. Jack Wickham."

"Wickham? What on earth does he want? Put him through will you, Bella?"

"Yes sir. Goodnight."

"Night, Bella." He picked up the phone. "Wickham, hello."

The deep, languid voice which so annoyed him sounded tinny and distant. "Ah, Dumont, I'm glad you're still there. I need to speak to you, just a quick word. Can you meet me in the Members' Smoking Room? Ten minutes?"

Pascal was deeply irritated that the man should contact him at all, and by his casual assumption that he would drop everything to meet him. "Look, Wickham. I'm very busy. What's this about?"

"It's..." there was a brief hesitation. "It's personal."

"Well, I doubt very much if I can help."

The man at the other end of the phone laughed. "Oh no, Dumont. I don't need anything. I'm trying to help you."

"But I'm not..." A feeling of unease, never far away, was spiralling up through his consciousness. "Can't you just tell me what it is on the phone?"

"Actually, I'd prefer not to. Come on Dumont, just a quick drink. I promise I won't force you into making a night of it."

Pascal hesitated. "Oh, all right. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

* * *

The bar, reminiscent of an old-fashioned gentlemen's club, was nearly empty. Wickham was sitting with a pint of bitter, but he got up when he saw Pascal. "Ah, Dumont. Can I get you a drink?"

"No, thank you. Can we get this over please?"

Wickham drew himself up to his full height. He was wearing a suit in a deep ochre colour. Pascal thought it was probably very expensive and exclusive, but quite unsuitable for parliament. His shirt was a subtle, pale tangerine, open at the neck. They were the colours of Tuscany, Pascal thought, inconsequentially, and they suited his pale face and the dark brown hair which curled wildly round his head.

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“Look, Dumont, try not to be even more of an asshole than usual. Bitter?”

Dumont gave up the battle and sank into one of the leather seats. “All right, thanks. Just a half.”

Wickham gave him a look of disgust, and when the drink arrived, it was a pint.

Pascal sighed, passing a hand over his eyes. The work on the Bill, the emotional upheavals he’d been going through, and the night of debauchery he’d spent with Todd, were all catching up with him. He took a sip of his pint, realised he was enjoying it, and had another mouthful.

“Now then, what’s all this about?”

Wickham leaned back in his chair. He seemed to hesitate. At last, he said, “Because I’m gay, the less respectable papers are always trying to catch me out. I’ve no idea why, you’d think it would spoil the sport that I’m so well and truly out. But nevertheless, they do lay little traps for me now and again.”

Pascal stared at him, wondering where on earth this was going.

“Of course, they’d never indulge in anything which smacks of enticement.” His voice was laden with irony. “But if someone else comes along with a story about how they slept with this celebrity or indulged in an orgy with another, then that’s another matter.”

There was another sigh. “Is this actually going anywhere?”

“Oh, it’s going somewhere.” Wickham’s voice was grim. “Some years ago, an attempt was made to inveigle me into a set-up. I met a man at a party, and he was hot. Really hot.” He gave Pascal a sideways glance. “I don’t suppose you know what that means, in masculine terms, do you? Or perhaps you do... Anyway, this guy was about thirty, of West Indian origin, black and buff. He was about six foot tall, built like a body-builder, great conversationalist, witty, amusing. The perfect man. Luke, he was called. And he wanted me. He focused on me to the complete exclusion of everyone else there.”

Pascal shifted uncomfortably. “What has this got to do with me?”

“He told me he was into leather. He was actually wearing leather trousers and a harness. You know, straps around his shoulders and chest.” Wickham shuddered at the memory. “He was sensational.”

Recovering his poise a little, Pascal said, “I hope you’re not going to give me a blow-by-blow account of this.”

“No, because nothing happened.” He grinned. “Otherwise, I would. Anything to bring a little colour into your humdrum life. No, nothing happened, because I smelled a rat. He was just too sexy, too perfect. Too interested in me. I walked away. I mentioned this to an editor friend, and he told me the guy was called Luke Guard. He’s a freelance journalist who specialises in honey-traps. He preys on gay men, and sets them up, to get information from them, or to create a story. If I’d slept with him, he’d have led me on, taken me to an orgy, or to rent boys, or got me taking drugs. He’d have persuaded me to tell him all about my dark and dirty past. Then he’d have had a meaty story to sell to the Sunday tabloids.”

“Fascinating,” Pascal said, his hand tightening round his glass. “But I still don’t see what this has to do to me.”

“The night before last I went to a new club. It’s called ‘The Pink Palace’. Gay, naturally. I hate to sound boring, but I don’t usually go to those places any more. I’m tired at the end of the day, and it all seems a bit hollow... But you don’t want to hear that. I went because it was a friend’s birthday, and there was a group of us.”

Pascal looked at his watch. “Sorry, Wickham, but could you hurry this up. I’ve still got a lot to do.”

“Nearly there. The club has a big open dance floor and then some private booths.

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There are curtains, people can sit with them open and watch the world go by, or they can draw them and... well, you can imagine what they do."

Pascal could, indeed, imagine, and to his horror he felt his cock stir. He lowered the glass into his lap and said sternly. "Could you please get to the point?"

"We'd been there a while when I got up to go to the loo. Bladder not what it used to be, I'm afraid. On the way there, I saw someone I knew. It was Luke Guard, looking as enticing and beautiful as I remembered him."

"And?"

"And he had his arms wound around someone else I know. Someone very handsome indeed. Your intern, Todd Panopoulos."

There was a long, long pause while Pascal fought to keep his emotions under control. He knew that whatever happened, he mustn't give anything away to this man. Eventually, he said, "So what? Todd's gay, we both know that. He's entitled to his private leisure time. This Luke person was probably just an acquaintance."

Wickham looked down at his drink, then glanced at Pascal through his lashes. "An acquaintance? When I passed their booth later, on the way out, they were very close. Very close indeed. Flesh to flesh. And I'm not just talking about lips here."

Pascal got up abruptly, banging his beer glass down on the table. "So? As I said, he's entitled to a private life."

"Yes, of course. But if this man is trying to set him up, I thought you should know."

"Yes, well... thank you." Pascal was moving away, his brain in turmoil.

Wickham got up. "Or if he's using Todd to try to get to someone else. A bigger fish."

Pascal couldn't wait to leave. "I'll make sure he knows. Thank you, Wickham. Thank you for your concern."

As he got himself through the door, Wickham gazed after him thoughtfully. "Be careful, Dumont. For God's sake, be careful."

* * *

When Pascal got home, Todd was lying on the sofa, in a tee-shirt and shorts, drinking beer from a can and watching American football on cable television. He looked for all the world like an overgrown teenager.

Pascal shut the living room door quietly, determined not to lose his temper. But fear and jealousy gnawed at him, skewing his reason.

He walked to the television and turned it off.

"Hey, I was watching that."

"You can have it on again in a moment. I need to talk to you."

Todd sat up, his eyes wary. "This sounds heavy."

"Todd, the other night when we... when we quarrelled, where did you go?"

His brow creased. "I called a guy I know. We went to a club."

"This 'guy'. What's his name?"

"I don't see what business that is of yours. I am allowed to have other friends, you know."

Pascal went on grimly. "Is he called Luke Guard?"

Todd just stared at him insolently.

"Well, is he?"

"What the fuck is all this about?"

"You were seen, at that club, with a man called Luke Guard. A journalist."

"Who..." Realisation dawned. "I bet this is that bastard Wickham. I thought I saw

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him. Shit, that guy really has the hots for you.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Todd. Wickham knows that Guard is a vicious exploiter, a journalistic piranha who’ll try to compromise you to get at me. What did you tell him?”

Todd thought for a moment. “Nothing. I didn’t tell him anything. Except he knows I work for you, but that’s it. Nothing personal.”

Pascal relaxed a little. “Did he ask questions about me?”

“Yeah, he was interested. But people are when they find out I know you. You’re a celebrity, they want to know what you’re like.”

Pascal sat down heavily in an easy chair. “Wickham told me this man tried to set him up. He gets people into impossible situations, he worms his way into their lives, and then he sells them down the river. Exposes their sordid little secrets in the Sunday papers.”

“And I’m a sordid little secret?”

“No, you know I didn’t mean that,” Pascal said wearily. “But you also know we’re skating on very thin ice here. I have to ask you not to see this man again.”

“But...”

“Look, Todd, I’m all too well aware that you have your own life to lead. I wouldn’t dream of trying to interfere normally. But I think you – we – have been targeted by this man. God knows what he’s found out already. It may just be a fishing expedition. But for both of us to be safe, I need to know you’ll keep away from him. Will you?”

Todd hesitated, and then seemed to crumble. “Okay, if that’s what you want. I’ll choke him off next time he calls.”

One other question was forced out of Pascal. “And Todd... Did you let him fuck you?” There was real pain in his voice.

Todd stood up. “Christ, you really don’t think much of me, do you? What’s the scenario? I find you’ve been cheating on me, so I run out of the house and find the first guy I can and beg him to shove his cock inside me? Do you really think that’s how I operate?”

“No, I don’t. But the idea is in my mind now, and I have to know. I have to have an answer. It’s only because I love you that I just must know. Did that man fuck you?”

There were tears in Todd’s eyes. He took a deep breath and said, “No. I did not let him fuck me. I swear it.”

“Oh Todd...”

Suddenly, the American was on his knees at Pascal’s feet, and they were kissing, arms twined around each other. After a long while, they broke the embrace, and Todd began to scrabble at Pascal’s fly, unzipping him with ease and bringing out the hardening cock. He sucked it tenderly, his hands underneath, gently palpating the swollen balls. Then he got up. “Lube!” he said, and disappeared upstairs. When he came back he went and stood between Pascal’s knees, and Pascal put up a hand to smooth the bulge beneath the shiny material of his shorts.

“This feels good,” Pascal said. He slid two fingers up the leg openings, and stroked the growing cock, then moved his hand to the back and located the warm hole, pushing the tip of his forefinger there. “I think I can do something with this.” He withdrew his hand, and pulled the elastic waistband out, manoeuvring the shorts downwards. Leaning forwards, he placed the very tip of his tongue on the purple head of the penis, applying little gentle lapping strokes which made Todd gasp.

“I want to try something,” Todd said. He scrambled up onto the chair, his feet still in their white socks and trainers, and crouched over Pascal’s lap. The, very slowly, he lowered himself onto the spike of his cock, moaning with pleasure as it went in,

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opening him wide. When he stopped, it was in him to the hilt. He moved his legs so they were over the arms of the chair, and he was sitting, completely impaled on Pascal's throbbing cock, his red tee-shirt pulled upwards. They put their arms around each other, and began to kiss again, rocking backwards and forwards together, creating delicious friction and a completely novel sensation which had them sobbing into each others' mouths. After a while, Pascal began to thrust involuntarily, heaving upwards, making Todd bounce on his rigid cock, until he came with unbelievable ferocity, feeling great streams of ejaculate pump out of his body and into Todd's very core. Then Todd leaned back, his arms round Pascal's neck, and Pascal used his hands to stroke Todd into a spurting climax, thick white liquid coating his shirt and his smart silk tie.

CHAPTER TEN

In the weeks after this incident, Pascal felt as if the relationship had undergone a dramatic change. Todd was more assertive and more confident, and he was quieter, humbler, terrified of causing another row. As he continued to work on the Bill and other ministerial concerns, Todd was going out more, citing a number of friends from the States, old Oxford acquaintances and new ones from Westminster.

The big debate on Iraq came up. This was a subject about which Pascal felt strongly, and one of the few issues on which he had spoken against the government in the past. This time, he issued a few bland sound-bites which reflected the views of the prime minister, and slunk into the government lobby. Sebastian Muir smiled and nodded at him in the corridors, and nothing more was said about his domestic arrangements.

He was assiduous in his attentions to Marcia, and promised a full discussion of wedding plans once the Bill was through all its stages. She never asked to come to the house again, and he never suggested it, but he went to her place and made love in the gentle and reverential way she preferred.

He felt ashamed, as if he'd finally surrendered his integrity. But although it felt like one of those plate-spinning acts, he was, at least, keeping all his separate lives on a relatively even keel.

And at night, the pill was sugared by the wonderful, inventive love-making he shared with Todd, although to his disappointment, they never again repeated the sensational experiment with the dildo.

In late May came the Whitsun recess. It was the shortest of the parliamentary breaks, and Dumont was due to go with a delegation to Central America for a week. He told Todd, "I'd love to take you with me, but I think we'd be pushing it."

"Don't worry; I've got plenty to do here. I have to write some of my dissertation and there's lots of research I need to do."

On the night before he was due to leave, he fucked Todd for most of the night, leaving both of them exhausted and sore.

"I shall miss you so much," he said.

"Me too," Todd said, wriggling round from a position on his stomach to deliver a series of passionate kisses.

On the way to the airport in his official car, in a rare moment of analysis, Pascal faced his dilemma head on. He could no longer imagine life without Todd. But the consequences of abandoning his marriage plans would be appalling. He wondered if there was some way he could marry Marcia but go on seeing Todd. And keep the Whips happy at the same time.

He got to Heathrow to find the chairman of the Parliamentary law group standing by the check-in with a gloomy expression on his face.

"Sorry, chaps, the jaunt's off."

Pascal, joining the group a little late, asked. "What is it, what's happened?"

"There's been an earthquake. Doesn't sound too serious, but the airport's unusable and the minister thinks he ought to concentrate on rescue and reconstruction. Sorry. We'll try to reschedule in the Summer Recess."

Pascal had sent his driver home, so he shared a taxi back to Westminster with some of the other delegation members and then walked the short distance to the house. There was a spring in his step as he contemplated the prospect of ten days without appointments – ten days to spend in quality time with Todd.

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The downstairs windows of the house were dark, but there was a light in his bedroom. Pascal grinned. Todd had gone to bed early, and soon, he'd be there with him. He let himself quietly into the house, thinking he'd surprise him. He left his suitcase in the hall and tiptoed up the stairs. At the top, he saw his door was open, and heard unmistakeable sounds of passion coming from it. Todd was clearly missing him. He crept to the door, thinking it would be an amazingly erotic sensation to see Todd masturbating when he thought he was alone.

In the doorway he stopped dead. On the bed, his bed, crouching on all fours, was a man he'd never seen before. Never seen him, but he knew who this was. The man was black, with a magnificent body. He was naked except for a network of leather webbing around his chest; two leather straps disappearing between his legs. Undoubtedly, this was Luke Guard.

On the floor behind him, legs apart and with a look of fierce concentration on his face, was Todd. His eyes were closed and he grunted as he thrust into the other man's anus. He was fucking him.

For almost a minute, Pascal stood there, clinging onto the doorjamb. His first instinct was to flee. He didn't want to deal with this. But then anger overtook him, and he stepped into the room. Todd was reaching a noisy climax, his hips pistoning back and forth. He yelled, "God, Luke, you're so hot, so tight. Fuck, this is incredible. I'm coming, I'm coming..."

He thrust one more time, and let out a scream of rapture before flopping down across the other man's back. Pascal said in a brittle voice, "And after that, you're going. Get your things and get the fuck out of my house."

Todd straightened himself up, his eyes widening, and extricated himself from his companion with as much dignity as he could.

Pascal said, "Hello Mr Guard. How fascinating to meet you in the flesh, as it were. Now get out."

"Pascal..." Todd's voice was little more than a croak.

He turned on his heel. "I shall be in the living room. Please leave your keys on the hall table before you go."

He poured himself a very large scotch, and was sitting in the armchair, staring sightlessly at the blank television screen when he heard the front door slam. A few moments later, the door opened, and Todd stood there.

"Pascal, I'm so sorry."

"So am I. Sorry I trusted you. Sorry I loved you."

"It was a mistake..."

"Oh yes, a real mistake. But I'm afraid I'm not up to an emotional scene tonight. So tired, so..." His face crumpled, his composure gone. "Christ, Todd, I loved you so much. I nearly wrecked my career for you. How could you do this to me?"

Todd's face twisted. "I suppose the same way you were able to screw that woman in this very house. I had to lie in bed and listen to her screaming and faking it."

"But that was different..."

"No, it wasn't different. For me, it was agony. It was a betrayal."

"So you did this to get back at me."

"No." Todd's eyes narrowed, he wanted to hurt Pascal now. "I did it because I wanted to, because Luke is lively, and beautiful, and young..."

But Pascal had moved on to the most painful thing of all. "And you were fucking him. You don't do that. You've always told me you won't do it."

"Ah, but I've never wanted to before," Todd said savagely. "Not with you, anyhow."

"Ah!" Pascal gave a little cry as if he'd been stabbed. "Not with me..."

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“No, because you’re really rather unattractive. You’re staid and boring and conventional and dull. You’re trying to be all sorts of things you’re not. Trying to be a husband, when you’re gay. Trying to be a dashing young lover when you’re a boring old man. Trying to be a decent politician when you’re a time-serving hack.”

Pascal put the whisky down with a bang and moved towards his tormentor. “And you are a whiny, tedious young man who still thinks he’s a teenager. But believe you me, Todd, age creeps up on you sooner than you think. You’re not always going to be the golden youth. The act is already beginning to wear a little thin.”

“Maybe. But at least I’m true to myself. You’re just a joke, a parody of a bent politician. An aging, crooked pervert.”

Pascal slapped his face, hard, a sharp sound which reverberated around the room. Todd’s hand went up to his cheek, his eyes wide with shock. Pascal stepped back, and when he spoke again, his voice was calm.

“I won’t throw you out on the streets tonight. But I do expect you to have gone by the morning. You can keep your job, and I’ll give you a decent reference. But after tonight, I never want to speak to you again.”

He walked past the stunned Todd and up to his room. He stripped off the cover on which the two of them had been cavorting, and threw it out onto the landing. Then, fully dressed, he lay down, and stayed like that all night, his eyes open, turning over recent events and re-evaluating his life. Several times, he heard Todd trying the handle of the door but he’d locked himself in. When finally he went downstairs in the morning, Todd had gone.

* * *

Pascal sleepwalked through the remaining days of the recess, and when the parliamentary session resumed he looked so gaunt and ill that everyone was commenting on it. Todd, he learned, had taken some leave which was owed to him and wasn’t expected back for another week. Pascal worked flat out, getting the Bill ready for its final reading, dealing with his daily ministerial duties and some complicated constituency work and trying to keep himself occupied at all times. But always, he was waiting for the next blow to fall. Up until now he’d felt he lived a charmed life; now it seemed as if he was cursed.

And fall it did, on the Friday after his return to work. He was at home when the phone rang. A voice he didn’t recognise said, “Mr Dumont? Pascal Dumont? This is Roy Franks, the Editor of the Sunday Nova. I believe we met at a dinner last year.”

Pascal had no recollection of it, but he responded anyhow. “Oh yes, Mr Franks. Good to hear you. What can I do for you?”

He was surprised. He often had calls from journalists on the Sunday papers wanting a quote on something or other. But this was the first time he’d heard from the Nova, which was chiefly remarkable for acres of celebrity gossip, pages of naked ladies, and the occasional searing exposé.

“Well, Mr Dumont, we’re proposing to print a story about you on Sunday, and we feel you should have a chance to respond beforehand.”

Fear jabbed through Pascal, making him feel weak, but he managed to sound calm and authoritative. “That’s very fair of you, Mr Franks. What is the story?”

Franks sounded unnaturally cheerful, considering he was about to deal the potential death-blow to Pascal’s career. “Well, I’m afraid there have been suggestions of impropriety with one of your assistants.”

Pascal feigned boredom. “Oh dear, not again. This does get tedious. Who is it this time? Bella, Carrie? Surely not Angela Hilton? Do these people think I’ve got a death

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wish?”

“No, none of those. It’s a man. The intern, Todd Panopoulos.”

There was a pause, then Pascal drawled. “Well, I suppose there’s a first time for everything. What do you want me to say? It’s so absurd as to be laughable. Surely you’re not going to print such arrant nonsense?”

“We have impeccable sources, minister.”

He gave a sarcastic laugh. “Oh, I’m sure you do. For a sum of money with enough noughts after it, any source can sound impeccable. So what form is this... impropriety alleged to have taken?”

“There’s a suggestion you took this young man with you on official visits, that you cavorted with him in a public place, that you and he had... relations in your office in the Commons.”

“Oh, for God’s sake! It’s obvious this is a stunt set up by opponents of the Public Behaviour Bill. You’re going to make yourself a laughing stock if you go ahead with this.”

“Possibly, Minister. So can I quote you as saying you deny the allegations?”

“You can quote me as laughing hysterically. Of course I deny them. They’re false, ludicrous, absurd. You’d do better devoting a few more pages to those giant breasts you chaps are so keen on.”

“Yes, well that’s always an option. Thank you Mr Dumont. Thank you for your time.”

Afterwards, he sat for a long time, staring into space. Oddly, now the blow had fallen, he felt a little better. He squared his shoulders and rang the prime minister’s office, asking to be put through to the political adviser, Duncan Hebden.

“Hebden? Pascal Dumont. I’ve just had a very strange conversation with the editor of the Sunday Nova. He says they’re going to print some garbage about me. Thought I better give you the heads up.”

Hebden sounded amused. “Really? What are you supposed to have done this time?”

Pascal sounded rueful. “Apparently I’m having an affair with my intern. My male intern.”

“Oh dear,” Hebden didn’t sound so amused now. “What did you say to him?”

“What do you think? I told him it was absurd.”

“Good. Have you talked to a lawyer?”

“No, not yet. I thought I’d better let the PM know first.”

“Well, thank you. I think you need to get legal representation fast. There’s too much of this lately, the papers latching on to some wild story and going with it. The PM feels we can only counter this kind of thing by forceful and aggressive retaliatory action. We need to sue for libel on every occasion.”

“Well, if you think so. Personally, I don’t feel like dignifying it by taking much notice.”

“It’s up to you, of course. But our view would be that we can’t let this sort of thing go. Smoke and fire, you know.”

“Well, let’s see how bad it is.”

“Yes, let’s do that. We can speak again after the papers come out.”

“Thanks. Thanks Hebden.”

“Not at all. But Dumont... you know, I do have to ask you this. There’s nothing in it, is there?”

“Jesus, Hebden, you have to ask? No, nothing. Of course not.”

After he’d rung off, Dumont found he was breathing heavily as if he’d been running. He calmed himself down and phoned, in succession, his lawyer, his agent,

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his constituency chairman Len Mather, and finally, Marcia. She was full of sympathy.

“Oh darling, how foul. I knew that ghastly man would be trouble.”

“I wouldn’t mind, but it’s so crawlingly embarrassing.”

“I know. Tell you what, I’ll come over on Saturday and then we can face the bastards together in the morning.”

For the first time ever, he welcomed the suggestion. In fact, Marcia was so supportive that his guilt about what he’d done became almost overwhelming. He had lied comprehensively, lied to everyone. And now he just had to sit it out, not be the one to blink first.

He usually had a delivery of the more serious papers, and a phone call to the newsagent meant that the despised Sunday Nova was included in the bundle deposited on his doorstep. Marcia was making coffee in the kitchen, and she came and leaned over his shoulder as he scoured the paper.

“It’s not on the front page. That’s good,” he said, turning over the pages. It was prominently featured on page six and seven, a double page spread. There was a picture of him and a separate one of Todd taken somewhere in Parliament Square. The headline, not very inventive, was ‘The Minister and the Intern’. It began,

Colleagues of up-and-coming junior minister Pascal Dumont expressed concern last night about allegations that he had a gay affair with a researcher, an American intern, Todd Panopoulos, aged twenty-four (above, left.) Forty-three year-old Dumont, who is divorced, is due to marry art gallery owner, Marcia Hadley-Wade (inset), whose first husband was the noted conductor, Terence Hadley-Wade, next year. A friend of Harvard-educated Mr Panopoulos said. “Dumont started coming onto Todd almost as soon as he arrived in the office. He took him up to Yorkshire, and seduced him in a hotel.” Our investigator has confirmed that Dumont and Panopoulos did spend a night at The Royal Oak in the Yorkshire village of Wratham, where they shared a double room. Later, the friend said, Dumont took Panopoulos to a woodland area frequented by doggers, where he performed a series of lewd acts on him. Dumont is also alleged to have taken the American to Paris where they shared a room at the upmarket George V hotel. The two men are reported to have attended a gay nightclub and witnessed a number of obscene acts. The friend said, “There was no end to the humiliations he subjected Todd to. Once, he made him crouch under a desk in his room in the Commons, so he could pleasure him while visitors sat there, none the wiser. And he liked to pull him over his knee and spank him.”

It’s understood that Mr Dumont moved Panopoulos into his house in Pimlico several months ago, although it’s believed he’s now left. A source close to Mr Dumont said, “He’s been obsessed with this young man ever since he arrived in the office.” When faced with this story, Mr Dumont denied everything. “You can quote me as laughing hysterically,” he said. Mr Panopoulos was not available for comment.

There was a sub-paragraph, boxed, with the headline, ‘Roger, Roger.’

Friends of Mr Dumont’s first wife recalled that their marriage came to an end after she suspected him of having an alleged affair with her brother, the barrister Roger Selwyn. Mr Selwyn, who was married with two children, is now understood to be living in Morocco.”

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At the bottom of the story was a small text box:

Have you seen Dirty Dumont in action? If you have any information about this story, please contact Dumont@news.sunnova.

Marcia said, “Filthy. It’s just filthy!” Her eyes were unnaturally bright, and perhaps unfairly, Pascal thought she was weighing up whether this was enough to make her jump ship.

“It’s foul, but it’s really pretty lightweight. I’ll get my lawyer to fire a shot across their bows, and that should be it.” Privately, he felt elated. There was nothing, nothing he couldn’t counter. It was all tittle-tattle and hearsay. It would die down within a few days. And what made his heart lift was that Todd had clearly not contributed to it. The material must have been gleaned by Luke Guard from Todd’s conversation, but at least he hadn’t betrayed him further.

After lunch, Marcia said she was going home, and he offered to escort her, knowing there would be pictures the next day of them leaving the house together. He took her arm and they sailed out, ignoring shouts from the journalists and the camera flashes, although their dignified departure was slightly spoiled by one of the hacks, who’d obviously had a liquid lunch, shouting out, “Hello, darling! Does he give it to you up the bum?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Going back to Westminster was embarrassing, but for the most part, people rallied round. Hebden had told him the Prime Minister was content to let the matter rest, and by Thursday there was a new scandal involving a fading pop star and Pascal felt he was off the hook. The only fly in the ointment came with the resignation of his parliamentary private secretary, Angela Hilton. She had written him a bland letter about spending more time with her family, but when he went to speak to her, she was unable to meet his eyes, and he knew she couldn't deal with even the suggestion of homosexuality.

That evening, on his way out of the building, he met Jack Wickham, and they nodded coolly at each other. Wickham hesitated, then touched his arm. "You all right?" he asked.

"Fine. Thank you."

"Good. But Dumont, don't make the mistake of thinking it's over. They'll have another bite at it, they always do. If there's anything else out there, you'd better brace yourself."

The now-familiar sense of dread settled on Dumont again, not helped by the discovery on his answering machine at home of a furious message from Lacy. "Pascal, you absolute swine. I've just got back from Italy to find all hell has broken out here. You promised faithfully that you would never, ever mention what happened between you and Roger. That was the deal. You really are a despicable little worm."

He settled into a deep gloom, and he was half expecting the phone call from Roy Franks on Friday evening.

"Ah, good evening, Mr Dumont."

"Mr Franks. I'm not sure I should speak to you without my lawyer present,"

"Not necessary, Mr Dumont. We've already had several interesting chats with your lawyer."

"Well, I have nothing to say to you. I don't feel I should dignify your ridiculous unsubstantiated allegations with the courtesy of a response."

"Whatever you say, Minister. But we have more serious allegations against you, we have more details about your alleged affair with your brother-in-law, we have a further account of your kinky games with this young American..."

"Oh, for God's sake, this is all fantasy,"

"Is that what you call it? This time we have pictures, Mr Dumont."

Pascal had slammed the phone down before he really knew what he was doing. Somehow, his heart told him that the game was up. He sat with his head in his hands, then went upstairs and started to pack.

He spent Saturday night in his house in Yorkshire, in the bed where Todd had first penetrated him with cunning fingers, and where he'd first said, "I love you." Strangely, despite his deep agitation, he had one of the best night's sleep he'd had for weeks, and he woke up, refreshed and grimly determined. He dressed in jeans and a sweater, and walked to the nearest corner shop to buy the Sunday Nova. The place was crowded, and as soon as he walked in, he knew it was bad. Everyone stopped talking, eyeing him with something close to hostility. He paid for his paper and walked back to the house, just glancing at the front page. There was a screaming headline, "Spanker Dumont" A smaller headline read, "Kinky games in the House of Commons." The picture, which took up most of the front page, was of himself, naked, his legs raised, his head thrown back in ecstasy. A strategically placed black spot

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masked his genitals.

He sat in an easy chair in the small sitting room and read the paper from cover to cover. Five pages were devoted to him. They had everything; all his adventures with Todd, descriptions, details, quotes. And pictures. Pictures of events where he didn't even remember a camera being present. It wasn't until he noticed, at the foot of page three, the happy snap of the day he'd taken the office staff to lunch – Todd's first day – that he remembered the state-of-the-art digital camera and Todd saying it didn't need to flash.

He read, in graphic detail, an account of how Todd, hidden under the desk in his office, had 'performed a sex act' on him while he talked to a colleague. He studied the tale of the spanking incident, of their visit to Paris, 'And there, on the bridge, he kissed me...' There was a detailed description of their tryst in the wood. 'Mr Dumont performed actions too disgusting to be mentioned in a family newspaper.'

Everything was there, his whole, pathetic love affair wrenched into the open and spread out for the prurient delectation of the whole world. But all of it distorted, written out of context, making him sound perverted, as if he'd preyed on a young and innocent man, and taken advantage of him in a most vile and disgusting way.

On page four, there was an interview with his ex-wife. "He was always slipping away to meet other men. I'm most emphatically not anti-gay. But he was dishonest, pretending to be something he's not. He's a pathetic, sordid, untrustworthy man."

And as he read, he could almost physically feel his career, his job, his life, ebbing away. And what hurt most, what was seared into his soul, was the fact that Todd had betrayed him. Todd had cynically destroyed him. For just a moment, he gave way to his misery, and put his head in his hands and howled like a wounded animal. But he soon pulled himself together and, red-eyed, got ready to go out.

At his request, Len had gathered the members of the committee at the constituency headquarters. They were waiting for him in the main room. To greet a roomful of hard Yorkshire businessmen and farmers, knowing they had all been reading the most intimate details of his life was one of the hardest things he had ever done, but he thought they deserved a proper show, so he squared his shoulders and walked into the lions' den. There was dead silence as he took his place at the head of the table. He stayed on his feet, tossing the newspaper down onto the wooden surface.

"Well, gentlemen, if you've read the Sunday Nova, you've no doubt seen rather more of me than you ever wanted to. And heard a little too much about my most private foibles.

"I'm not going to try to excuse myself or to wriggle out of this. It's too late for that now. I did have an affair with Todd Panopoulos, but it wasn't exploitative as the paper suggests. It was consensual and loving and..." For a second, his voice broke, and he couldn't go on. But he soon pulled himself together. "I'm not going to apologise for falling in love, or for being bi-sexual, because I can't help it. Or for trying to cover it up, because however enlightened the times are, it's something on which society still frowns. I'm not even going to say sorry for making a fool of myself. I'm not the first and I won't be the last. But I am desperately sorry to have let down my constituents, my party, and the prime minister. Of course, I now tender my resignation, both as a minister and as your member of parliament. You are the first people to hear of this; I shall go from here to London and write to the prime minister. Then, as some of you will know, I must apply to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for an office of profit under the crown. For the stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds. This is an arcane way of resigning my seat; once appointed, I can no longer be an MP." He looked round at the craggy faces, regarding him with characteristic stony

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faced expressions, and he felt a surge of emotion. "Nothing in my whole career has given me so much pleasure and fulfilment as representing this constituency. And now it's time for me to leave the stage, the thing I will miss most is Otterthwaite and its people, the sheer integrity, variety and hard-working nature my constituents. I'll miss you all, very much. I'm sorry." His voice cracked again as he sat down.

There was a long pause, and then one of the members, a grim-faced hill farmer called Habbershaw, started a slow, deliberate handclap, which caught on around the room. At first Dumont, his face burning, thought they were mocking him, then he realised it was a genuine round of applause. Habbershaw got to his feet, twisting his cap in his hands, and looking like a caricature of a bluff Yorkshireman. "I'd just like to say that I don't hold any truck with this business of being gay or bisexual or whatever it is. But Pascal Dumont's been a fine member of parliament, and I reckon what a man gets up to in his bedroom when the lights are out is between him and his God."

There were murmurs of agreement from around the table. Another man got up to speak, but before he could begin, there was a flash from outside the window, and several of the members rushed over there. "Bloody journalists," one of them said, and before he pulled down the blinds, Pascal could see a crowd gathering outside.

One by one, the men around the table got up and thanked him. The one woman in the group was crying. And by the end, so was Pascal.

The front of the building was now surrounded by reporters, photographers and camera crews. Pascal said helplessly, "I don't know how I'm going to get out."

"Leave it to me," Len Mather said. He went into a huddle with some of the other men, and Habbershaw and another went out. Len said, "Get ready to run for my car when I tell you."

"What are they going to do?"

"Watch," Len said, peering through the slats of the blind. Pascal did the same. From somewhere down the road came a tractor pulling a trailer. There was a whirring sound, and suddenly it started spraying the hoards of journalists with a thick, brown liquid.

"Move!" Len said, and they ran out to his car and roared away.

"What the hell was that?" Pascal asked, looking over his shoulder at the chaos.

"Slurry," Len said, chuckling. "That'll teach them to mess with us."

* * *

Pascal drove down to London fast and without stopping, arriving at Marcia's house in the early evening. She was waiting for him, her face grim.

"Pascal, this is appalling. You told me none of it was true."

"I know."

"But there are pictures. This..." with a gesture of extreme disgust she indicated the front page, the image of him, knees up and bent, a look of bliss on his face. "How do you explain this?"

"I can't. I'm not going to lie any more." He sat down wearily. "I did have an affair with Todd. I was in love with him, and I thought he loved me."

Her face was a mask of disdain. "And this..."

"We made love. He... he did things to me which made me wild. Helpless. I'm sorry."

He could almost see the calculations going through her head. "It needn't stop you. You can deny it. Tough it out."

"No. I can't. And I don't want to. In any case, I'm resigning. It's all over."

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He saw her mouth open, distort, and he heard the screaming, the vituperation. He felt her fists hammering at him, her nails attempting to scratch his face. In some distant part of his mind, he thought she had never been so passionate, so alive as she was tonight. There was nothing he could do, nothing he could say, he just had to take it until the storm blew itself out.

Finally, in an absurdly dramatic gesture, she took off the diamond solitaire he'd given her, and flung it at him.

"Take this. Take it! Though God knows, you're never going to find another woman to give it to. Perhaps your precious Todd can have it embedded in his navel or something. Now, get out. Go please. I never want to see you again."

It reminded him of the night he'd thrown Todd out of his house, and his mouth twisted in pain.

"Of course, I'll go. But please, may I stay here just to write some letters and get them couriered to Downing Street? I guess my house will be under siege."

"You can do what you like," she said coldly. "Just let yourself out when you've finished. I'm going to bed, something I know you won't be interested in."

He smiled painfully. "I guess I'm about as anxious to fuck you as you are to fuck me."

Marcia made an angry little noise and flounced out. Pascal wrote to the prime minister, a formal letter of regret and apology, submitting his resignation. He wrote to the Chancellor, applying for the Chiltern Hundreds. And he wrote to the Speaker, asking to be allowed to make a personal statement to the House on the next day. He summoned a motor-cycle messenger and sent the envelopes off. As he was leaving Marcia's house, he saw the ring, and picked it up, tucking it into his pocket. Then, wearily, he drove the short distance to Pimlico, parking in the street next to his house and walking the rest of the way. There were still a few watchers outside, but he was able to scurry in, with only a few snatched pictures and shouted questions. He ignored the winking light on his answering machine, and went up to bed with a bottle of scotch, which ensured that he slept deeply, but gave him vivid and terrifying nightmares.

* * *

He walked into the Commons chamber like a man going to his execution. He wore a dark suit, white shirt, sober maroon tie. His face was deathly pale, his dark hair brushed back, with just an unruly lock falling across his forehead. A few people spoke to him, and he acknowledged them with a nod, but his eyes were fixed forward.

"Dead man walking," whispered one backbencher to another as he went past them.

The business of the Commons continued over Pascal's head; he might as well have been a million miles away. He had never felt so completely alone. Briefly he looked up at the galleries, packed at one end with journalists, at the other with members of the public, and in between, members of the House of Lords, diplomats and other dignitaries. In the Strangers' Gallery, where the public could sit and watch proceedings, he saw a familiar shock of golden hair.

Todd.

On one side of him was a black man who could only be Luke Guard. On the other, a beefy looking individual, who he guessed was a minder from the Sunday Nova.

Madly, in this moment of crisis, the words of the old music-hall song came back to him. "The boy I love is up in the gallery... The boy I love is looking down on me..." For one horrible, insane moment, he thought he was going to burst into song.

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But at that instant, the Speaker intoned. "A personal statement from the member for Otterthwaite."

Pascal rose to his feet. He looked around the packed chamber, at the galleries, the journalists, Todd. And it came to him that no audience would ever be as hard to address as the stubborn Yorkshiremen of his constituency association.

"Mr Speaker," he began, nervously, then again, more strongly. "Mr Speaker. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to make a personal statement to the House." His remarks had been agreed with the Speaker's office beforehand, but he was unable to resist a small ad lib. "I must say, I don't remember seeing this many people when we were debating the clauses about litter in the Public Behaviour Bill."

A murmur of laughter rippled through the Chamber.

"Mr Speaker, you will know that stories have been published about me in a national newspaper. Stories suggesting I had a homosexual relationship with an intern working in my office. And that these stories have been illustrated in graphic and salacious detail.

"Mr Speaker, I have to say that these stories are, for the most part, true. I did indeed have a relationship – what I would characterise as a love affair – with Todd Panopoulos, who was extensively quoted in one newspaper this weekend. And I'm ashamed to say that I lied about this affair, to the prime minister, to my fiancé and to my friends.

"And the reason I lied is that we, in this country, are still not ready to accept alternative sexualities as the norm. In trying to protect my career, I was denying my true nature, and for that I am truly sorry."

He looked directly at Jack Wickham, sitting opposite him. "Some people have suggested that the Bill which I have been nursing through this House contains elements which would push gay men back into the closet; drive them back to the shame and concealment of the years before the great reforms of the 1960s. All I can say is that that is emphatically not my intention. I hope whoever carries on the Bill after me will check it throughout, every clause, every paragraph, to make sure there is nothing in it which discriminates against homosexuals, or indeed, any legitimate grouping or minority in this country.

"If I have contributed in any way, however unintentionally, to the intolerance and lack of understanding which makes dissimulation necessary, even today, then I'm very sorry indeed."

Pascal's gaze swept the Chamber; he was getting into his stride now.

"I don't have to tell you that I am profoundly embarrassed by the way this story has come out, and particularly by the pictures of me which have been printed. I am desperately sorry for having caused such great distress to my fiancée, my party and my constituency. But I refuse to apologise for having been in love.

"I made a discovery which, despite everything that's happened, has rather cheered me, that love is stronger than politics and overrides expediency and good sense. Man is still governed by primitive, basic emotions. And I'm glad of it. But in my case, those emotions have ultimately led to disappointment and embarrassment. In the words of Othello, I'm one who loved, not wisely, but too well."

He looked up to the Strangers' Gallery, where Todd's golden hair shone like a halo around his head. "No blame should attach to Todd Panopoulos, a young man with a great future ahead of him. I find it hard even to blame the newspaper, which found a genuine story of apparent hypocrisy, and was entitled to pursue it with vigour. There are elements..." He glanced up at the Gallery again, where he could still see the impassive face of Luke Guard, "... elements who have manipulated these events and those involved in them for their own profit, and I despise them from the bottom of

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my heart.

“But most of all, I despise myself. Because I bowed to the conventions of society and denied my true nature for so many years. And in doing so have caused embarrassment to so many people that I love.

“Yesterday, I wrote to the prime minister and asked to be relieved of my ministerial responsibilities. I also applied to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to grant me the Stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds. Once I leave this Chamber, I am leaving parliament for ever.

I would like to apologise to my friends, to my constituents in Otterthwaite, to my party and to this House. For lying. For being a hypocrite. For trying to cover up what happened. But the one thing for which I will not apologise, is for loving another man. I may have gone about this whole business in the wrong way, but it is not a crime, not wrong, not evil for one man to love another. It's natural and wholesome and sometimes even noble.”

Dumont let his gaze range around the House, now totally still and silent.

“Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me to make this statement.”

He bowed his head, his face white but with flaring patches of colour on his cheeks. As was customary, the statement had been received in complete silence and now there was no reaction, except for the rustle of MPs waving their order papers in support. He walked from the Chamber, oblivious to the pats on the back and attempts to shake his hand. He went straight to the Members' Entrance, handed over his security pass, and left the Palace of Westminster for the very last time.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A crowd of journalists was camped outside his front door, and he strode past them, shaking his head to their questions. On the doorstep, he turned.

“Look, I know you have a job to do. So I’m telling you, absolutely straight, I have nothing more to say. I’ve made my statement to the House, and that’s it. There will be nothing more tonight. Thanks.”

He let himself in, knowing that nothing he could say to them would make them go away. The place was dark and faintly musty. He put on the lights in the sitting room and drew the curtains, noting that still more journalists were arriving. The lights on his answering machine were winking, and he went over to it and wrenched out the plug. He went to the kitchen and got a glass, pouring a small measure of scotch. It was going to be a long night. He contemplated turning on the television, but couldn’t bear the prospect of seeing any mention of his own disgrace. In the end, he found a CD. It was Gershwin, ironically, ‘An American in Paris’, and he put it on and slumped on the sofa, his eyes wide.

His brain was working overtime, thinking about the way he’d mishandled things all along. Then as if the memories were forcing themselves into his brain, he began to see Todd, in this very room, Todd lying on the sofa watching television, wearing nothing but a tee-shirt and socks, Todd crouching over him on the armchair, lowering himself onto his throbbing cock, Todd sucking on his penis as if his life depended on it. He felt tears well up in his eyes, and he fought desperately not to let go, not to descend into abject misery.

He’d been there for about an hour when the doorbell rang. Pascal sighed, and moved to the door. He took a deep breath and opened it.

“Look, I’ve already told you, I can’t talk to you. I said all I had to say in the House, and that’s it. No more statements from me. Sorry.”

“Well, thank God for that,” said a familiar voice. “There are only so many of your statements that a man can take. Although I have to say today’s was one of your better efforts.”

Lounging against the little wall at the top of the steps, clutching a bottle, was Jack Wickham.

“What the hell do you want?”

“Well, that’s nice. I thought I’d come and offer you some support.”

“Thanks a lot, now fuck off.”

“Oh, charming.” Behind him, the reporters and photographers were gathering, flashlights were going off, and there was a general buzz of excitement. “You’ve got to let me in. I’ve brought you a coming out present.”

“What the...”

“It’s a twenty-five-year old malt...”

Seeing the pack closing in, Pascal bowed to the inevitable and opened the door a little wider. “Damn you to hell, Wickham, I suppose you’d better come in.”

Wickham stepped past him into the narrow hall. “Now then, glasses. Where do you keep them?” He moved down to the end of the passage and found the kitchen. Pascal was leaning on the closed front door regarding him with horror.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

“Do stop saying ‘fuck’ Dumont, it doesn’t suit you.” He’d found two glasses and now he moved into the sitting room and began pouring the whisky. “I see you’ve already started,” he said, nodding at the glass by the sofa. “But I bet that’s not as

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good as this stuff.”

Pascal came into the room and sank down into a chair. “Please, Wickham, I’m very tired. Just say what you want and then get out.”

“Okay, fine. I came to make sure you weren’t going to be daft enough to go into the routine with the pearl-handled revolver.”

“Believe me, if I had such a thing, I’d have used it long ago.”

“Oh, come on. You’ve done really well. You’ll be a hero in tomorrow’s papers.”

“Terrific, I’ll be a gay icon. Just what I always wanted.” He took a sip of the malt, nodding in appreciation despite his irritation. “Actually, Wickham, all I really want is to have my life back. I’d be perfectly happy if I hadn’t spent most of today pissing it away.”

“Think of this as the beginning of your new life.”

“Well thank you, Aunt Agony... Now please tell me what the hell you’re doing here.”

“Well, as I said, I really did think you might need a little support.” He peered around the room. “But perhaps there are lots of others here, somewhere I can’t see them. Your chums from party headquarters, your ministerial associates?” He gave Pascal a straight look. “Your fiancée?”

Pascal leaned forward and picked up the diamond solitaire from the coffee table. “She’s my ex-fiancée, thank God,” he said, rolling the ring between forefinger and thumb. “And I can’t say that my former colleagues are falling over themselves to comfort me.”

“Quite. Here, drink some more of this. It’s good stuff.” He put the glass of malt back into Pascal’s hand, and watched him take another sip. “What you did today... it was amazingly brave.”

“Ah, when you’ve lost everything, it’s quite easy to go over the top.

Wickham frowned slightly. “Do you really think you’ve lost everything?”

Pascal regarded him as if he were a little mad. “Well, I’ve lost my job. All my prospects. My fiancée. And the respect of every right-thinking person in Britain. And I’ve been betrayed by the person I loved. What do you think?”

“I think jobs in the top echelons of politics are much over-rated. You might have got higher, been in the Cabinet, risen to one of the great offices of state, even been prime minister. But all it would be is hard slog and heartbreak.”

“But I wanted to change things. To improve people’s lives.”

Wickham swirled the whisky around in the glass, holding it up to the light. “Well, frankly, old boy, with your policies, you were never going to do that, were you?”

“Really, I don’t...”

Wickham held up a hand. “As for prospects, you’re bright, you’re young. Well, youngish. You’re the sort of flash bastard who does well in whatever he turns his hand to. You’ll rise to the top again in some other capacity. What was the next thing? Oh, your fiancée. Well, as far as I can gather she was a hard-faced bitch who would have bled you dry and then run off with her hairdresser. I bet once she realised she wasn’t going to get to Number 10 she dropped you so fast it made you dizzy. Yes? I thought so. Respect? Well, there will be some ‘disgusted of Tunbridge Wells’ types who feel that your recent activities aren’t very nice. But a hell of a lot more will remember the way you stood up in that Chamber and faced the world with real dignity. Oh, and finally, you’ve rid yourself of that nasty little weasel, Todd Panopoulos, who was bound to cause you untold misery sooner or later.”

“No!” Pascal’s voice sounded anguished. “No, it wasn’t his fault. He was set up.”

“Oh, for God’s sake, Dumont. Just because you were infatuated with the creep, it doesn’t mean you have to buy the little-boy-lost act. We’re not talking about a child

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here, this is a grown man. And I'm prepared to bet he made all the running. You're just too innocent to have made the first move."

"I'm... I don't think anyone would describe me as innocent."

Wickham got up and poured two more glasses of malt. "Dumont, my dear, you're a babe in arms. Tell me how you and the weasel got together."

"Don't call him that."

"Fine. But tell me."

Hesitatingly at first, then with growing fluency, lubricated by the whisky, Pascal told the story of the trip to Yorkshire. Wickham was leaning back in his chair, looking at him in that infuriatingly superior way of his.

"So he sabotaged the tyres, then he came into the bedroom naked and... what did he do next?"

Pascal looked down at his whisky, realising, too late that none of this was supporting his argument very well. "He began to stroke... he was masturbating."

"And what did you do?"

"I told him to cover himself up. And I watched him. That perfect, golden body. He was magnificent. He put one finger inside himself, and that was it. I was lost to reason."

"Jesus Christ, Dumont, the bastard seduced you. He set out to hunt you down and catch you and devour you."

"No, it wasn't like that." Dumont wasn't drunk, but the tensions of the day, and the fact he hadn't eaten, were catching up with him. "He loved me. I know he did."

"He loved you so much that when I saw him in 'The Pink Palace' he was fucking that skunk, Luke Guard like there was no tomorrow."

"No..."

"What do you mean, no? I saw it."

"But he told me nothing happened."

"And you believed him?"

"He said..." Pascal was struggling to remember. "I asked him if he'd let Guard fuck him, and he said no. He swore he hadn't."

"Well, he would say that. But it's just semantics. Because he was the one doing the fucking."

Dumont remembered. "But... He used to say he wouldn't do it. He just didn't top, ever. That's what he said. Top. I'm still getting the hang of the jargon. And then afterwards, when I caught them, he said it was because I was unattractive; he just didn't want to fuck me."

Wickham slammed down his glass. "He said WHAT?"

"Oh, that I was old and ugly and... you know."

"And sorry, but you said, 'when I caught them.'"

Pascal sighed, and then told him the story of his final, bitter quarrel with Todd. Halfway through, the strains of the day finally caught up with him, and he began to draw in great lungs full of breath, sobbing awkwardly. Wickham moved across to where he was sitting on the sofa.

"Hey, hey, easy there. You've had a hell of a day; perhaps we should stop this conversation for now." He put an arm behind Pascal, stroking his heaving shoulders. And then, because he couldn't help it, he moved in for a gentle kiss.

For just a fleeting second, he tasted the soft warmth of Dumont's mouth, overlaid with the salty flavour of his tears. Then Dumont was on his feet, swaying slightly, furious.

"For fuck's sake, Wickham, you bloody gay men. You jump at any chance, don't you? However unsuitable."

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Wickham held up his hands as if in surrender. "I'm sorry. Sorry. It won't happen again."

"No it won't, because you're leaving now."

"I don't think so." Wickham sat back on the sofa, crossing his legs. "Come and sit down again. I promise not to do anything."

"No. I want you to get out of my house. I don't know what you're doing here anyway. I guess you just want to gloat. See how low the old adversary has fallen."

Wickham reached out a hand. "Nothing like that. I just didn't think you should be alone after having had such a traumatic few days."

"Alone!" Pascal began to stride up and down the room, still clutching his glass. "I think I've always been alone. Always felt like an outsider. I thought I'd found my home in politics, but now that's chucked me out as well. And look how quickly the water closed over my head."

"It won't always be like this, you know."

"Oh yes it will." Pascal threw himself down on the sofa, forgetting the earlier incident. "Because I'm never going to allow myself to get close to another human being again. I don't ever want to go through the agonies of love and betrayal. Or be the cause of such misery."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about the little weasel..."

"It's not just Todd. I feel so terrible about what I did to my wife, and to Marcia."

Wickham looked at him with interest. "Oh yes, I meant to ask. Is it really true that your first wife found you in bed with her brother?"

Pascal gave a short laugh. "I'm afraid it is. I suppose it doesn't matter now, the secret's out." He told the story, as he had told it to Todd, smiling in bafflement when Wickham started to laugh.

"One thing about you, Dumont, you never do things by halves, do you? So Lacy agreed to keep her mouth shut so as not to advertise her own humiliation?"

"Yes, and to protect her brother."

"This is the same brother who's now living in Casablanca with an exotic dancer, male?"

"How do you know that?" Pascal asked, surprised.

"Oh, my sources of gossip are excellent. So it really is absurd for you to continue to feel guilt about that, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. But I did do a terrible thing to Lacy."

"But wasn't she conducting a very public affair all the way through the marriage?"

"Yes, but..."

"I'm not trying to say you haven't behaved badly. But you're not the only one. I'm just pointing out that no-one emerges from this with much credit. Stop trying to bear the whole weight of it on your shoulders alone."

Dumont put his head in his hands. "Oh, I suppose you're right. But it doesn't matter. None of it matters. Because my life is over."

"What will you do now?" Wickham asked, curiously.

"God, I don't know! Nothing, for a while. I could go back to the law, but I doubt anyone will want to be represented by a barrister who's the laughing stock of the whole country."

"I think you'd be surprised, actually."

"Hmmm, well, we'll see. Actually, I don't need to do anything for a while. I'm not hard up. And later, I suppose I could concentrate on ethical work. I've always been interested in human rights legislation. Not absurd things like men in jail being allowed to watch the sports channel; more the issue of prisoners of conscience, that kind of thing."

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"That's my boy!"

"But now I just need to get myself together. Then I'd really like to get out of Britain, go travelling, somewhere where no-one knows me."

"You could go round the world."

"Yes, I could." Pascal was getting a little animated now. "I could go to all the places I've always wanted to visit; and the ones where I've been on official trips and only ever seen the inside of a hotel room and some ministry or other."

"Good. Well, if you want a travelling companion..."

"You?" Pascal focused on Wickham again, a small frown crossing his face. "And what, exactly, is in this for you? Why are you being so kind? You don't even like me."

Wickham sighed, then he got up and refilled their glasses before moving over to the window. He moved the curtains aside and looked out. "Bloody hell, they're still there. Even more of them than before." He turned round again. "I'm going to do something I swore I wouldn't do today. But I can't help it. I'm going to tell you the truth."

"That'll be a real novelty for you then, Wickham!" Pascal said, with a flash of his old form.

"Yes." Wickham seemed uncharacteristically serious. "A real novelty." He stayed standing by the window and took a sip of his scotch. "How much do you actually know about me, Dumont?"

"Not a lot. You're a journalist. Been in parliament for about six years. Gay. Always give the impression of having more fun than one man is really entitled to."

Wickham grinned. "That's nice. But actually, for about the past four years, I've been mainly celibate."

"Mainly celibate? You can't be mainly celibate. It's like being a little bit pregnant."

"Oh all right then, pedant. But you know what I mean."

"I suppose so."

"And that's because... because I'm in love with someone who doesn't feel the same way about me."

"Oh. Oh, that's rough. I'm sorry."

"Mmmm. It is rough. What's that song, 'Unrequited love's a bore...?' Well it is. Because it consumes you. I think I've got a fairly obsessive personality, and however hard I try to get over it, I can't. It's got worse over the years."

"Well, I know what that's like."

"Because of Todd, you mean."

"Because of Todd."

"You still love him?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure now how much it was genuine love and how much was sheer lust. I thought he was perfect, but now I know he wasn't." Pascal shook himself, looking across at Wickham's elegant form. "This is really a very odd conversation to be having on the day I flushed my career away. But still... Go on with your story."

"There's not much more to say. I've never had an opportunity to talk to this man, to tell him how I feel. And until recently I had no reason to think he could ever reciprocate. But now there's a chance, just the faintest glimmer of hope. And although it's monumentally inappropriate, I just have to go for it."

Pascal slapped his hand down on the surface of the couch. "Quite right! Carpe Diem! Seize the day."

"Right. I will." There was an awkward pause. "You're being very obtuse, Dumont."

"I am? I don't quite..."

Wickham sighed. "You remember I kissed you earlier?"

"Yes. That was..."

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"Why do you think I did that?"

"I don't know. I suppose it's just the sort of thing you do."

"No. It's not." Another long pause. Eventually, Wickham burst out. "Oh for Christ's sake, Dumont, how much more obvious can I make it? Isn't it blindingly clear? It's you. You're the one. I'm helplessly in love with you. And I've been falling deeper and deeper every day for the past four years."

There was a long, stunned silence. Then Dumont put down his glass and began to laugh, a little hysterically.

"That's not a very nice way to greet a declaration of undying devotion," Wickham said, offended.

"No, I'm sorry. But it's so absurd. You don't even like me. Sometimes I've thought you hated me."

"No, I hate your politics. Hate your policies. Not you. Never you."

"Oh." Dumont was silent, watching Wickham. All the man's bounce and confidence had disappeared, and he looked curiously youthful, watching warily from the other side of the room. And suddenly, quite unexpectedly, Pascal's heart filled with joy at the realisation that his life wasn't over after all, and he was seized with an awareness of the great capacity of the human spirit for recovery and regeneration.

"So if you did want a companion on your travels, you could count on me."

Pascal's mouth was suddenly dry. "But what about the job? Your constituency?"

"I've already told them that I'm standing down at the next election. I've done my bit."

Wickham shook his head. "And I've thought for a long time that it isn't worth sacrificing any chance of a normal life just for the benefit of telling one's fellow citizens what to do."

"But you're a shadow minister. If your lot get in next time, you'll be in the cabinet."

Wickham shrugged. "So what? Like you, I thought I could do some good, change things. But now I suspect that change comes from elsewhere. The lawmakers just seem to be bogged down in procedure and hype. In any case, I've been appalled by what happened to you. I don't want to work in an environment where the slightest faux pas will bring a hoard of ravening wolves down on me."

"I do know what you mean." He nodded in the direction of the window. "Are they still out there?"

Wickham looked again. "They seem to be camping out. Quite what they expect you to do in the middle of the night, I don't know."

"They're probably hoping I'll jump out of a window."

"Yes, they'd love that. So... You're not running around screaming after what I told you."

"No," Dumont sounded hesitant. "But I'm afraid I think this is a wind-up."

"Why on earth should it be?"

"You can't love me. Nobody loves me."

"Oh, Christ, Dumont... Do you really have no idea how stunningly attractive you are?"

Dumont smiled sadly. "Now I know you're taking the piss."

"Look; I've sat opposite you in the Commons and I've been so attracted to you that it was hard not to stand up and just grab you there and then. I mean, you're always talking complete crap, so it wouldn't matter. I look across the aisle and I see you stand at the despatch box in your prissy little pin-striped suit, and I just want to tear your trousers off and push you back against the government benches and take your cock in my mouth and suck you dry."

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Pascal made a strange little sound.

“I’ve imagined myself stripping off your clothes and bending you over the Commons table, next to the Mace. Exposing your bottom for the whole of the chamber to see; watching the television cameras zoom in on the tiny bulls-eye of your anus. Then I’d push my fingers inside you, one, two, three, four, then the thumb. The whole hand, and you’d be pushing back, trying to get me deeper in, while everyone else in the chamber watched.”

Pascal stood up, looking for a moment as if he intended to leave the room. But he stayed where he was, swaying slightly.

“Then I’d fantasise about pushing you back to the Speaker’s Chair and lifting your legs over my shoulder and...”

He stopped dead. “Christ, I’m sorry. I’m sorry Dumont. Here we are on what’s been an absolutely traumatic day for you, and I’m going on about my masturbatory fantasies. Just ignore me, most people do.”

Pascal was making his way a little unsteadily across the room. He stopped right in front of Wickham and studied his face with care. Then he lifted his right hand. Wickham flinched, thinking he was going to hit him. But instead, Pascal stroked his cheek, his fingers moving down the fine bone of the jaw and gently holding the chin.

“That kiss... I hardly felt it. Do you want to try again?”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

He leaned forward, looking deep into Wickham's eyes. Then their lips met, and Pascal's tongue reached out. And they kissed gently, making soft contact with lips and tongue, and Pascal made a little moaning sound as Wickham's arms came forward and held him gently, not pulling him forward, but steadying and enfolding him. And after a little while, Pascal raised both his hands and put them on either side of Wickham's face, and started kissing him harder. Suddenly, as if on cue, they broke the kiss and looked each other in the eye. Wickham was the first to let his hand move downwards, to smooth the front of the charcoal business suit and feel the hardness there.

Then Pascal's hand repeated the investigation, and Wickham started scrabbling wildly at the waistband of Pascal's trousers, wrenching them downwards, pulling off his expensive shoes without unlacing them. And Pascal stood in front of him in shirt, jacket and tie, and nothing else.

Wickham steered him gently backwards until he fell onto the couch. Then he went down on his knees between the spread legs, and lifted the swollen penis with reverential hands.

"God, this is beautiful. I knew it would be beautiful."

Pascal laughed weakly. "You really are being absurd, Wickham."

"Absurd? I've dreamed of this for so long."

"Then do something about it."

Wickham lowered his head and gave the swollen cock-head a tentative lick. Then he moved forward, burying his face in Pascal's genitals, sucking the hard penis deep into his throat. Pascal gave a sob.

Wickham broke off to say, "Please, you have to let me fuck you. I must fuck you."

"These are not words I ever expected to hear you say," Pascal said, laughing at him. But he reached out a hand and stroked the unruly brown hair.

Wickham stopped what he was doing again to look up. "What, you expected something more cutting? You've screwed the nation, now I'm going to screw you?"

"Stop talking, please. Oh!"

Wickham cupped his balls, and took the rigid cock into his mouth, moving up and down with firm, confident strokes. His hands moved to Pascal's thighs, pushing his legs upwards and further apart until Pascal was right on the edge of the couch. Wickham lifted his cock, holding it back against the flat stomach, and started sucking on the balls as if he were eating peaches. Pascal cried out, his hips lifting.

Wickham went lower. He kissed the dark circle of Pascal's anus, pulling back to see it pulse and twitch. His tongue went out, circling the tiny hole. Then he drove it inwards while Pascal bucked and moaned beneath him.

When finally he withdrew, he licked upwards along the underside of the cock, before taking the whole thing back in his mouth, his lips stretched wide to accommodate it. Pascal gave one final, desperate shout, and spurts of ejaculate filled Wickham's mouth. Wickham stayed kneeling, savouring the liquid with a look of ecstasy on his face, while Pascal let his legs relax and return to the ground. And then they kissed again, a long, full kiss, an intimate exchange of tastes and textures. It was Wickham who broke it.

"Do you have any lube?"

"In the hall. In the red box."

Wickham laughed. "Probably the most interesting item that's ever been in there."

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Take the rest of your clothes off, please.” He went out and returned with the lube. “Turn round a bit. Lie on the couch. Put your legs up again.”

On his back, his legs raised, knees bent, Dumont looked very vulnerable. His pale skin was a blotchy red in places from his orgasm, and his softened cock lay wetly on his stomach. Fumbling and shaking, Wickham got the top off the lubricant, but his hands trembled so much that the little plastic cap fell onto the floor, rolling off into a corner.

“Leave it!” Dumont said, in a tone of desperate command. “I want you to...”

Cool fingers probed the exposed cleft between his buttocks, pushing the gel up inside him. Then they were withdrawn, and Wickham got undressed, flinging his clothes across the room until he was naked, his penis purple and hard up against his stomach.

“Let me see,” Dumont whispered. He reached out one hand and stroked it, seeing it lurch. “Magnificent. And now you’re going to put it in me. Hard.”

Wickham manoeuvred himself so he was kneeling astride Pascal’s body. He leaned forward, his lips a little parted, and put his mouth on Pascal’s, the tongue just flickering forward. It was an exquisite feeling. At the same time, their two cocks were rubbing together, Wickham’s drum-tight flesh stirring Dumont into action again with the promise of extreme pleasures to come.

Pascal moaned into the mouth which covered his. “Please... oh please!”

Then Wickham got himself in position, a look of fierce concentration on his face. There was one glorious moment of anticipation as Pascal felt the tip, warm and wet against his sensitive opening. Then the great bulk of it, bearing inwards, slowly but surely opening him up, stretching him. Where the dildo had been cold and inanimate, this was hot and pulsing. His nerve endings trilled as he felt the hard throbbing of the veins. He pulled his legs back even further as Wickham gave a series of thrusts, getting himself in as deep as it was possible to go. Balls pressed tight to soft flesh, Wickham paused, his eyes looking straight into Pascal’s.

“I’ve wanted this for so long. I can’t believe... Oh, Pascal!”

It was the first time he’d ever used his first name. They kissed again, and Pascal noted that Wickham’s cheeks were wet with tears of passion and extreme emotion.

“Hard,” he whispered. And Wickham began to move, slowly at first, then gathering pace, his hips swinging back and forth, driving the massive penis into Pascal’s core. Harder and harder, deeper and deeper, until Pascal was yelling in total, abandoned passion; a passion which bordered on pain, and which was so exquisite, so all-encompassing that he felt as if he was about to pass out. And still, Wickham kept going. His breath rasped in Pascal’s ear, his eyes were closed, his face screwed up in absolute, focused concentration. They were both wet with sweat, bodies glistening and shining, flesh skidding against flesh. Pascal felt another climax, something different, coming from inside him, and his brain erupted into shards of light. His anal muscles contracted and squeezed, and at last Wickham slowed down, his strokes now even harder and more deliberate, until with one last savage inward drive he stopped, and Pascal felt the huge object inside him swell and pulse and empty itself into the very centre of his being.

Wickham lifted his head a little, panting as if he’d just run a marathon.

“You all right?” he said.

“Jack... Jack... oh Jack...” Pascal could say no more and they kissed wetly, lying there for some time until Wickham softened and left him.

Suddenly, Pascal got up, searching for his clothes, pulling on his socks.

“What are you doing?” Wickham asked, alarmed.

“I have to see Todd.” Pascal was dressed now. “I think he’s with Guard and some

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other Sunday Nova goon. You've got good contacts. Can you track him down for me?"

"Yes, but..." Wickham looked stricken. "You want him back?"

"No, I want it to be over. If we're going to have any chance at all, I have to lay my memories of Todd to rest. I need to say goodbye on my terms."

Wickham struggled up, his face still troubled. "If you're sure, but I'm afraid..."

Pascal faced him. "Don't be afraid. I must do this. Will you help me?"

Wickham nodded, although he still looked unhappy. He started dressing, hunting for his jacket until he found it and extracted his mobile phone. He pressed a button and conducted a short, murmured conversation. When he'd rung off, he said, "He's in a hotel in Park Lane. You're right, Guard is with him. They've got more, apparently."

Pascal snorted. "Well, I don't know what. They've turned me inside out and hung me upside-down. I don't think there is anything more."

"If you go roaring in there you'll create something. Leave well alone now Pascal, you're out of it."

"No!" He whirled round and put his hands on Wickham's shoulders. "It's unfinished business and if I don't deal with it, it'll eat me up. Let's knock it on the head now. Then we really can look forward to a new future."

Unconvinced, Wickham pulled the curtains back again. "Whatever you say. But I don't know how we're going to get out."

"Yes, where's the slurry sprayer when you need it?" Seeing Wickham's questioning expression, he laughed. "It's a long story. I'll tell you later."

He went through into the kitchen, Wickham trailing after him. "Just tell me where he is. I won't be long."

"Fuck, Dumont, you don't think I'm letting you out alone? Of course I'm coming with you."

"Oh!" Dumont was unlocking the back door, but he turned to face Wickham. "You're sure?"

"I'm bloody sure I'm never going to let you go anywhere by yourself ever again."

"Now there's a challenge!" Dumont said, but his eyes sparkled.

Wickham sounded irritable. "Yes, the whole thing is a challenge. I've never before had the experience of fucking someone for the first time, only to find their immediate reaction to my skilful love-making was to demand to see their ex at once."

"Christ, Jack..." Dumont moved back into the room, putting his arms around the man and backing him up against the sink. "Believe me, it's not like that. He pushed his hips forward, his hardening cock finding an answering firmness. "Let me get this out of my system and then, I promise you, I'll give you concrete proof of how I really feel."

"Concrete?" Wickham said, his hand working on the growing bulge. "Promises, promises!"

"Come on!" Pascal broke away. "We'll have to go over the fence."

"Over the...? My God, Dumont. When you kick over the traces you do it in fine style, don't you?"

He followed Dumont out into the tiny courtyard garden. At the end was a bench set into a small bower. Dumont started to pull at it, dragging it over to the fence on the left hand side. When it was in place, he climbed up, and eased himself up onto the edge, balancing there for a moment before disappearing into the next garden. There was a pause, then the very top of his head became visible.

Dumont's voice was breathless. "I think I just fell into a rose bush. Come on, Wickham."

Together they crept through the neighbouring garden. At the end there was a

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gate, which Dumont unlatched, and then they were out in a narrow back-alley.

"This way," he said, pointing. "We'll get a taxi."

By the time they arrived at the hotel on Park Lane they'd smartened themselves up as best as they could, Wickham picking bits of twigs and leaves out of Dumont's clothes and hair.

"Now, leave this to me," Wickham said. After some discussion at the front desk, he beckoned Dumont over. "Room 727," he said. "Come on."

In the lift, Wickham put out his hand, stroking the other man's arm. "You're going to be all right, aren't you?"

Dumont seemed calm. "I'll be fine."

They found 727 and Wickham knocked on the door. It was answered by Luke Guard himself. Clearly they weren't expecting trouble.

"Hello Luke," Wickham said brightly, holding out his hand. "How very nice to see you again."

Startled, Guard shook hands, and as he did so Wickham stepped smartly past him and into the room. He didn't let go of the hand until Pascal was inside as well.

"What the fuck..."

It was a large room with two queen-sized beds. One of them had clearly been used, the cover was pulled back and the sheets were ruffled. Lounging on top of it, wearing a white towelling robe, was Todd Panopoulos.

Dumont strolled into the room, his control impressive. "Hello Todd," he said.

Todd literally recoiled, sitting up and scooting up the bed in shock.

"Sorry to walk in on you and your friend unannounced, but we have some unfinished business."

"Pascal, I..." He was up against the headboard now, eyes wide. "How are you, man?"

"I'm about as well as can be expected." He nodded towards the crumpled bed. "I see you and Mr Guard have been busy."

Guard moved over to the phone. "I'm calling security."

Wickham moved swiftly to intervene. "I wouldn't do that. Mr Dumont just wants a quiet word with Panopoulos, then we'll be out of here. No need for any unpleasantness."

Todd had got off the bed now, and was tightening the belt of the robe. He looked very young, and as if he was about to burst into tears.

"No Luke. I want to talk to him." He walked over to Pascal and reached out as if he was going to stroke his face, thinking better of it at the last minute and letting his arm fall to his side. "Pascal, I never thought... I had no idea that all this would happen."

"Todd, you've studied politics at Harvard and Oxford, two of the greatest universities in the world. I can't believe you weren't aware of what the consequences would be of giving the details of our private life to this... this leach."

"No, but after the first week, when nothing happened, I thought it wouldn't hurt... and I was so angry with you."

"About Marcia?"

"Yes. Well, not just that. About everything. About me just being one small segment of your life."

Pascal looked sad. "You got it wrong, Todd. You meant the entire world to me. But I knew you'd move on, leave me. And I had to have something... I hoped to have something... left for myself."

"And I've destroyed that..." Todd looked round wildly at the others. "Look, for Christ's sake, this is difficult enough. We don't need an audience. Can you leave us

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alone, please?”

Wickham and Luke Guard spoke together. “No!”

“Pascal, I was angry and I was mad. But I loved you. I still do... Can’t we...?”

Guard had moved over to the mini-bar and was miming drink-pouring at Wickham. He nodded and took a beer, but he didn’t take his eyes off the tableau in the middle of the room.

Pascal reached out and pulled Todd into his arms. “It’s all right, Todd. It’s all right. You’ve destroyed me, the old me. But perhaps some good will come of it.” He glanced across to Wickham, who was standing, transfixed, his beer can crumpled in his hand.

“It’s important that you don’t let this stop you. You’ve got a good future; you’re bright, you’re able, you work hard. Go back to the States and forget about all this. What is it you chaps say? Have a good life...”

Todd sobbed. “But I don’t want to go back to the US. I want to stay here with you. I love you. Please, Pascal, can’t we forget what’s happened?”

Pascal gazed at the boy, his lip quirking. He ignored the sounds of derision coming from Wickham.

“No, I don’t think so. Because I would never be able to forget that you set out deliberately to hurt me. And no matter how angry people are, it’s something no lover should do to another.” His hand reached up and smoothed the golden hair for one last time. Then they were kissing, a passionate, swirling kiss of love and longing and regret. Finally, although hugely aroused, Pascal pulled away. “I loved you so much, Todd. More than my fiancée, more than my job, more than my duty. But you... you couldn’t stay true to me. You betrayed me in the most basic and heinous way. And somewhere along the line, love died.” He turned around, his eyes moist. “You ready, Wickham?”

“Too right!” Wickham said, putting down his can and moving towards the door. “Goodbye then, Panopoulos.”

“Ah, Mr Wickham,” Todd said, his eyes narrowing. “You didn’t lose much time I see. So at least someone got what he wanted.”

Wickham looked at him in disgust. “Christ, Panopoulos, you don’t deserve to have been let off the hook in such a gracious way. If it was up to me...”

“But it isn’t,” Pascal said, taking his arm. “Goodbye gentlemen. You’ll understand if I don’t come to your farewell party, Todd.”

Then they were out of the suite and in the lift, and on their way back to Pimlico. Neither of them spoke a word.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

When they got near the house, Pascal said, "I really can't be bothered with all that back garden business. Shall we just brazen it out?"

Wickham grinned. "Why not?"

They got the taxi to draw up right outside the house, then climbed out in the midst of the journalists and photographers. It took a while for someone to spot Pascal, and by that time, they were on the steps.

The pack closed in, bellowing questions at both of them. Pascal was just saying, "I'd talk to you if I had anything more to say. But I haven't. Sorry chaps. Sorry."

When they finally got through the front door, Pascal leaned against it, exhausted. "Whew. Enough. Bed, I think. What are your plans, Wickham?"

"Well, you're not getting rid of me. And bed sounds very attractive. But first, just tell me, when did you last have anything to eat?"

"Oh, I don't know." He thought back. "Yesterday, probably."

"Dear God! And you've had all that exercise as well. Go and sit down, I'm going to get you something."

Pascal collapsed into an easy chair, listening with pleasure to the crashing sounds coming from the kitchen, and relishing the fact that someone was looking after him. After a while, Wickham came in with two steaming plates of scrambled egg on toast, and they sat in companionable silence and ate.

When they had finished, he took the plates away and Pascal could hear him washing up. He called out, "I had no idea that you were so domesticated."

Wickham appeared in the doorway, drying his hands on a tea towel. "In many ways, I am," he said. "But in others, I'm quite feral." He threw the cloth down. "You said something about bed. And there was a promise earlier..."

Revived by the food, Pascal got up. "Yes, I believe I do remember something of the sort. If you're absolutely sure..."

"Pascal, I'm as sure as it's possible to be."

They went upstairs to the big front bedroom. Peering out, Wickham could see that the turning on of the light had stirred up the watchers, already agitated by their inexplicable appearance outside.

Suddenly, despite what they had done earlier, they were embarrassed with each other. This business of going to bed together seemed more intimate, more significant than the wild sex on the couch. Pascal said, almost shyly, "The bathroom is through there, if you want..."

"Come with me," Wickham said. "You're worn out. I'll help you get ready."

And so he gently removed Pascal's clothes and his own, and they stood together in the shower, as the water cascaded all around them. Wickham put his arms around Pascal and soaped him gently. Afterwards he dried him, giving a rub with the towel to the growing penis, but not saying anything. They moved through into the bedroom again.

Wickham said, "Today has been the realisation of my best, my wildest dreams. But I realise that for you, it's been traumatic and exhausting. So I won't mind if you just want to go to sleep. I'll hold you."

A glint appeared in Pascal's eye. "Bloody not! Especially now I've had something to eat. I feel invigorated." He reached for the lube. "Just get on the bed and bend over. I want your arse in the air."

Wickham regarded him for a moment, his face breaking into a grin. "Considering

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you come over so prim and proper, you really are a dirty bastard, aren't you, Dumont?"

Dumont gave a wolfish smile. "I think you're about to discover just how perverted I can be. Now bend over."

He spent some time arranging Wickham, so his head and shoulders were pressed down onto the bed, his bottom in the air, and his legs spread wide. From the rear, he could see the muscled buttocks, the semi-rigid penis and the beautiful, even balls hanging down between straining thighs. He reached between the legs and pulled the dangling cock towards him, feeling some resistance as he moved it to an unnatural position. Wickham groaned. Pascal stroked a few times, and ducked down between the legs to take it in his mouth. He gave a few firm sucks, then let the thing go. "My first taste of you."

"Is it good?" The voice was muffled.

"It's glorious."

He knelt at the end of the bed, letting the tip of his tongue tease the hole which convulsed and contracted beneath his touch. Wickham gave a groan of pleasure and arousal. Pascal licked wetly for some time, the musky taste inflaming his own senses and causing his erection to become so hard that it was exquisitely painful. After a while, he stood up, and pushed his middle finger into the orifice, curving it downwards and searching for the magic button. From the sounds Wickham was making, he had found it.

The other man was gasping, and eventually he managed to say, "Please, do it, Pascal, do it. I want to feel you inside me."

Pascal gave a gentle kiss to each buttock, then he stroked himself a couple of times and positioned his cock on the twitching entrance. It went in slowly, the only sound audible the pleasing squish of lube and flesh. He held onto Wickham's hips and began a steady rhythm. It was not the wild fuck Wickham had given him, but it was firm, and tender. It went on for a long time, until Wickham cried out in passion and pleasure. And when he came, emptying himself, astonished he still had so much to give, Wickham collapsed flat onto the bed, and Pascal went with him, still inside him.

After a little while, Pascal said, "If they could only see us now."

Wickham knew what he meant. The party managers, the uptight political colleagues, the Whips, the press, all of them.

Pascal rolled off him, noting with pleasure that his lover's anus was still distended, semen oozing from it. He watched it for a little while, gently stroking the curved buttocks and thinking about the field day the journalists outside would have if they could witness this scene.

"I wonder if they're still there?" he said, and got up and walked over to the long window, peering through a gap in the curtain. "Yes, hoards of them."

Wickham joined him, putting an arm around his waist. "Poor devils. Are you coming back to bed?"

"In a minute."

"And tomorrow we can look into our travel arrangements."

Pascal pulled back, holding him by his arms, looking into his face. "Are you absolutely sure about this? It's a big step. And it's all very sudden. It might not work."

"It works for me. I know I must seem pathetic, but when you've wanted someone for as long as I have, and it finally happens, everything falls into place. This is where I want to be."

"My God, Jack, the last thing you are is pathetic. But I don't feel you should abandon your career for me. You've got such fire, such promise..."

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“That’s not what you said about me in the House... But yes, I’m sure. If you’ll have me.”

“I...” Pascal shook his head in bafflement. “Today has been utterly extraordinary. I thought it was going to be the worst day of my life. But all this... you... It changes everything. I simply can’t believe that you love me.”

“Christ, Pascal, what can I do to convince you?” He looked up suddenly. “I know. I know just the thing. But first I have to be sure that you are absolutely committed to this and to me.”

“I am,” Pascal said, in a voice which brooked no contradiction.

“And if I get myself into just as much bother as you’re in now, you’ll believe me? You’ll accept my commitment?”

Pascal had taken Wickham’s hands, and he looked into his eyes. “I don’t want you to be in any trouble.”

“But if I was part of the scandal?”

“I suppose you are now, anyhow.” Pascal gave a lopsided grin.

“Exactly. Kiss me.” Wickham cupped his hands around the other man’s buttocks, pulling him close. He pushed himself hard against Dumont, grinding his sore penis against the other’s. And as the kiss continued, he moved one hand up to the curtains and found the cord that opened and closed them. And he pulled.

It was a long window, the sill so low that only the fact they were pressed together preserved their modesty. From the hips upwards, they were gloriously exposed, chests naked and glistening, arms entwined, eyes shut, tongues probing deeply. It was a kiss of passion and acceptance, of love and commitment.

Down below, the lenses extended, and the flashbulbs popped as the waiting photographers captured the sensational image which would grace a million breakfast tables.

Excerpt from
The Facility Trip
by
Ansley Vaughan

The Facility Trip

They washed in silence, the water still warm from the heat of the day. Thinking about that beautiful body, so close to him, was playing havoc with Guy's blood supply and soon he was fully erect. He couldn't resist turning round, just once, his hands covering the evidence of his shame, to get another glimpse of Major Changa. His gaze fell again to the magnificent penis, now half-hard and pulsing. He looked swiftly upwards, afraid of being caught staring, and his eyes met those of the major. For one long, intense moment, they looked at each other. Then Changa moved swiftly across the small space between them, grabbing Guy's wrists and forcing him back against the tiles with his hands above his head in an attitude of surrender.

Guy said nothing, but he thought it ironic that he'd escaped being blown up and shot at, only to meet his end at the hands of a homophobic African soldier who'd misunderstood a single glance.

Then Major Changa's lips were on his, his strong body pressed against him. As if on cue, the water in the tank ran out and the spray ceased.

Guy's first emotion was one of astonishment. He'd expected to be beaten, not kissed. Then he gave way to the extraordinary sensation. Kissing, to Guy, was a gentle, comforting thing you did with women, either just before you made love, or sometimes to persuade them to let you do it. This activity bore no resemblance to the feeble embraces he had experienced. The major's lips were demanding, his tongue hard and probing. It was more like a sex act in itself than a prelude to one.

Finally, Changa broke the kiss, looking into his eyes with a mixture of lust and concern. "I hope I read the signs right. Otherwise I guess I'm out of a job."

Guy was still shaking. "I'm not... I'm not gay."

"No? Well I'm not either. I'm not gay, I'm not straight. It's complicated." He put one huge forefinger on the side of Guy's face, tracing a rivulet of water down his cheek. "But you want it, don't you?"

Now it had come to it, now his fantasies were in danger of becoming real, Guy was seized with nerves and beset by all the inhibitions of a conservative past.

"I'm not... not sure."

Surprisingly, Changa laughed, a rich, deep sound. "Oh, I think you are. Look." He leaned back a little and looked down between their bodies. Two cocks, one a rich purple-black, and the other pink tinged with mauve, moved alongside each other, both now completely rigid. He moved his hips so the two organs rubbed together. Impossibly, Guy felt himself getting harder, the tension so great now, the pressure so intense that he thought he might explode.

"Well, make up your mind. Because before the night is over I intend to fuck your arse so hard you won't be able to walk tomorrow."

You can purchase a copy of *The Facility Trip* [here](#).

Ansley Vaughan Biography

Ansley Vaughan is a journalist, who has worked in print, in radio and in television news. She read history at Oxford University and trained as an actress. She writes erotic adventures and her first novel for Freya's Bower *The Facility Trip* is an m/m romance which was published late last year. Three others are due out early in 2007, *An African Moon* an m/f adventure dealing with modern politics and an ancient curse, *Plan Colombia* set in the murky world of espionage, and *A Personal Statement*, an m/m story which deals with the rise and fall of a senior British cabinet minister. Ansley Vaughan has lived in France, Italy and the United States. Her passion is travel, and if she can just get to Antarctica, she will have visited every continent. She lives in London with two extremely naughty dogs.

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