



***BLITZ***

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quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

The beer tasted bloody good. Plenty of people were saying that ale now didn't taste like it had pre-war, that everything had gone downhill, but Adam Jackson couldn't agree. As far as he was concerned, there was too much looking back with rose tinted spectacles going on. He couldn't deny the fact that stuff was in short supply, that the things people had taken so much for granted were now luxuries (if they were obtainable at all), but these were all small sacrifices compared to those that some people were making.

He looked at the two men at the bar, their short flying jackets and insignia on their collars making their roles in this great pageant unmistakable. A frisson of jealousy slid down Adam's spine. It was the role he'd have chosen above all others, but no-one was going to sign up a man who was liable to have a fit flying a thousand feet over Kent. *Temporal lobe epilepsy* they called it and it was a bloody nuisance. He knew that the job he *was* doing, acting as liaison between the intelligence agencies and the War Cabinet, was valuable. Some people would say his role was *more* important than

*Jonny-in-the-air*, but it hardly had the glamour or the prestige, did it?

A familiar face poked its nose around the door, seemed to hesitate, then entered the pub. Dr. Scarborough was one of the decoders who dealt with Churchill's incoming and outgoing signals, and everyone thought very highly of him. Office gossip said he was a bit of a loner, living on his own in a flat up Highgate way, and that he'd such a fierce intellect he'd even been down to Bletchley on occasions to give them advice. You couldn't have found a stronger contrast to Jackson, who was socially aware, able but not over intellectual, and still living at home with a loving, if over-exuberant, family.

Scarborough made a gesture of recognition and seemed pleased when Adam beckoned him over. They'd had a pint together a couple of times before and always enjoyed each other's company, with perhaps a spark of something else in the background. Conversation had always centred on family, work, this bloody war, how long London could withstand the German bombs. Today was no different, and they chatted contentedly over their beer, until the violent backfiring of a car in the street made Scarborough start.

"Are you all right, old man?" Adam was genuinely concerned. He knew exactly what it was to be on edge, now that the air raids were becoming a nightly occurrence. Everyone's nerves were being tested.

"I'm sorry. It's just that the house along the road from mine copped it two nights ago and then the

one over the way was hit last night. It feels like they're making a bee-line for me."

"You can come and stay with us. I'm not sure it's any safer in Kensington than in Highgate, but at least you wouldn't be on your own. There's solace in numbers if not safety." Jackson made the offer out of the blue, having no idea why he was being so bold. It was true that his family had room to spare, as his brothers had enlisted and many of the staff had done the same. Now even the aristocracy was having to fend for itself. But he'd never invited anyone to share the delights of his home, not since he was a lad and had asked his schoolmates back to visit. Now he'd become a man and discovered a man's pleasures, he'd enjoyed them away from the nest. "Stay—just until the worst of this is over. It can't go on forever."

"Can't it? I sometimes think that there'll never be an end." Scarborough drained his pint. "Are you quite serious about that offer? Wouldn't I be in the way?"

"Mother would be pleased to have someone to fuss over. There's only me at home now and she feels at a bit of a loose end, despite being up to her eyes in WRVS work. She'll be off there tonight. We can make do, you don't need to fetch your stuff until tomorrow." Jackson could feel himself nattering on nervously; the idea thrilled him for a particular reason, one he didn't want to acknowledge at present, in case he was presuming too much. Like a child with a wild scheme, he was expanding it and making practicalities, as if in defining a concrete plan he would make it happen more quickly.

“I would appreciate coming to stay.” Scarborough smiled. “It gets very lonely down in the Anderson shelter. Somehow the closeness of strangers is worse than being entirely on one’s own.”

Adam studied this quiet young man for a moment. He’d never known him make such a personal confession. Scarborough was always reserved, some even said standoffish, although Jackson had never found him so. “Shall we toddle off home, then—perhaps grab some chips on the way?”

“Only if you don’t ladle the vinegar all over them. I can’t stand the smell.” A sudden grin lit up Scarborough’s face, generating a quiver of delight in Adam’s stomach, a delight which no amount of fish suppers could equal.

They never reached the fish and chip shop, the siren sounding before they’d turned the corner. The pair were forced to join the mass of humanity heading for a nearby underground station. Neither man had taken refuge in one before, always having been at their local shelters, and the sheer mass of unfamiliar, frightened humanity distressed Scarborough immensely.

They ended up sitting together, watching and waiting, sharing the odd word or a wan smile, both trying to be brave and gallant; not just in front of the families which huddled around them but in front of each other. This was no time for any display of fearfulness. Gradually they drew nearer, until they were thigh to thigh, arm to arm, and the unease of being underground as the bombers strafed the streets was replaced with the excitement of close



physical contact with *someone you fancied and daren't tell*. At least not in words which could be spoken here and now.

"Dr. Scarborough..." Adam tried to control the emotion in his voice.

"My name is Hugh, please use it."

"Hugh. Didn't you ever wish you were on active service?"

"I wanted to join the navy but my university tutor put me into this line. He said that any fool could sail a frigate, but men with brains—his words, not mine—were a rare commodity. I know that the work we do is vital, but..." Scarborough's voice petered out, his uncertainty making itself clear. Was the closeness of their bodies distracting his train of thought as it much as it was Adam's?

"I know." Jackson sighed. He also couldn't be sure of a great deal at present, except that he wanted to take Hugh to his bed. He'd felt the same since he'd first set eyes on the man but he needed to make sure he had a realistic chance. "You'd rather be doing something with a uniform to wear and a bit of glamour—and have two land girls hanging off your arm."

"Something like that. Except for the land girls," Hugh added, in a voice barely above a whisper and full, to Adam's ears, of hidden meaning.

Jackson surreptitiously sneaked his hand between their bodies, found Hugh's, squeezed the fingers. "Prefer someone with a bit more class, then? Mama and Papa with a title?" Adam measured each word with care. He wanted to speak freely, let anybody hear, while leaving the one person who

mattered in no doubt about what he was implying. Being so close to Hugh, even among the press of people, was exciting. Perhaps more exciting because of the public place, the disgrace which might follow if they were caught.

“Absolutely. That’s what I’ve always wanted.” Scarborough moved closer, keeping their hands tightly clasped and doubtless hoping that no-one would notice. So close, the very limit of what was usually acceptable, although the abnormal press of bodies had made all customary boundaries break down. Close enough for comfort, if not for safety, if anyone was eagle-eyed enough. A huge explosion outside provoked an outbreak of screaming, then bitter sobbing. Hugh could feel Adam tense and quiver; he rubbed the man’s hand tenderly. “It’s alright. Didn’t get us.”

“But it hit some poor sod, Hugh.” Jackson lowered his voice, conscious of the presence of several children nearby him. His eyes were blue and cold with fear and anger. “Some family, perhaps. It’s so desperately unfair that London should be copping it—that innocent people get killed.” And it seemed desperately unfair to want so much to kiss someone and be denied by circumstance. If Hugh had been one of the office typists, there would have been no problem, even here.

“Of course it’s unfair, but that’s war. And I always understood it was to save innocent people from suffering that we took up the attack anyway. We’ll talk about this more in the morning, it’ll all seem

better then.” Hugh smiled. “Everything will be better then.”

Before long the siren sounded the all clear and the relief in the subterranean hideaway was tangible. Jackson rose, reluctantly drew apart from his friend. “Let’s get home.”

They were still hungry, so Adam suggested they raid the larder and take the swag up to his study. The house was empty, apart from an aged housekeeper, her ladyship and the rest of the skeleton staff off helping with a soup run. His lordship, who bore a remarkable resemblance to Churchill, had been asked to dine in a public place, as visibly as possible, and smoke huge cigars. It was a novel way to aid the war effort.

“Got everything you need?” Jackson balanced a glass of wine in one hand and a plate of food in the other. In the midst of the desert of uncertainties, he’d found an oasis of peace and pleasure, not least in getting Scarborough alone in a place where a kiss or two became not just possible but almost compulsory.

“Almost. This is fine,” Hugh indicated his own plate, “the rest can wait.”

Eating and drinking, huddling on the rug in front of the fire, simple pleasures that not even the blackout could spoil. Adam’s short, broad feet ranged next to Hugh’s long, sinewy ones, toasting bare flesh to more efficiently drive out the cold. They’d not noticed before how chilly the shelter had made them. “So what is *the rest* that you need,

then? A glass of port?" Jackson was trembling with pent up excitement, in case the answer wasn't the one he secretly hoped for and did turn out to be just *a glass of port*.

"No. Something much sweeter." Hugh's fingers tentatively stroked Adam's hand, their eyes meeting with cautious enquiry. A slight nod, a small sign of assent freely given, then Scarborough drew Adam closer, letting his lips graze the man's cheeks, drawing them down his face, finding his mouth to kiss it tenderly. It made a wonderful end to what had been such a dismal evening. "Wanted to do that ever since I first met you. Shame it took a bloody Heinkel or two to make it happen."

Adam could hardly think of a sensible reply. He'd desired Hugh since their first meeting, indulging in fantasies of linen sheets and long, cold glasses of pre-war champagne. Tall, dark, handsome cryptographers. Never daring to hope those wishes could be reciprocated. "It might have happened at some point, blitz or not, Hugh—assuming we'd got around to meeting." Adam held Scarborough's body tight to him, savouring the tautness of his muscles, the trembling of his hands. "Mama always says that there's good comes out of the worst things." They kissed again, temporarily forgetting the bombs and luxuriating in the slick taste of tongues and lips which were sweet with wine.

"What I hate," Scarborough whispered against Adam's cheek, "is the continual thought that tonight your number might come up. That your house will get it or you won't make it to the shelter or..." He

pressed closer to his friend, finding all the comfort they needed from each other's embraces.

Jackson caressed Hugh's back, as if soothing a child. "I know. It makes us all a bit mad." He drew his hands up to Scarborough's neck, stroking the nape, making the skin tremble.

"And is this madness?" Hugh clung tighter, his fingers winding themselves in the tail of Adam's shirt. "Please don't say that this is just some fling you're indulging in because today could be your last day alive. Or if it is, tell me quickly so that I can go home."

Adam sighed. War made you desperate, fear made you act in outrageous ways, but he would never compromise affection for the sake of an hour or two of fun. "Believe me Hugh, I'd kiss you even if it were eternal summer and the skies outside were filled with nothing more threatening than bees and goshawks." He began tentatively to undo the buttons of his friend's shirt, was relieved that he wasn't rebuffed. "Come on—there's my bedroom next door. If you're serious."

"When am I ever not serious? I'd like nothing more than to use a nice, romantic bed with my nice, romantic friend." Hugh slipped his fingers under Adam's shirt, stroking the soft skin and making the man squirm in delight.

"Just make sure that come morning you're in the equally nice guest bed in the room next door." Jackson breathed against Hugh's neck. "I don't want to shock the housekeeper when she brings the tea. I know there's a war on, but some things are sacred."

“Oh yes, you must never upset the servants. Blitz or not.”

“At least the war can’t take away this pleasure.” Adam’s fingers caressed Hugh’s chest, feeling his tension ease away and pleasurable anticipation begin to build. “And I won’t ration it tonight.”

“If your body was on the ration, there’d be such a demand you’d have to go on the black market.” Scarborough began to undo Jackson’s shirt, appearing to be in such a tearing rush that at least one button was going to be lost. “No-one would complain that *this* wasn’t up to the standard it was pre-war, would they?”

“Just as well I’ll give it to you without the need of coupons, then. It’s all yours, Hugh—free and gratis.” Adam drew his friend towards his big, old-fashioned bed, moaning with delight at every kiss they shared. Ties, jackets, discarded on the floor, shirts soon to follow them. It was cold in Jackson’s bedroom, what spare fuel there was to hand not being squandered when blankets and eiderdowns could provide the warmth. “We’ll catch our death, you know.” The hairs on Scarborough’s arms were on end, the supple flesh beneath alive with goose bumps, prickling Adam’s fingers as they roved. “Romance is all very well, but the thought of pneumonia is a passion killer. Come on.” He pulled back the covers, exposing cool, crisp linen sheets, creamy white as his mother’s finest stationery. They could write their passion here, tonight. Not the words *I love Hugh Scarborough* because it wasn’t love; not yet anyway. Perhaps *by morning I’ll know*

*Hugh Scarborough intimately. What makes him lose control, how he looks when he's in ecstasy.*

"We'd be much cosier in there," Hugh fingered the covers, caressed the silken eiderdown. "I've long imagined how warm your bed might be."

"Is that warmth," Adam gently caressed the nape of his friend's neck, "degrees of temperature or degrees of passion?"

"Oh," Hugh lay back, drew Jackson with him, "I don't waste my thoughts on Fahrenheit."

Skin on skin, breath mingling with breath, lips on lips. Adam couldn't have hoped for more, not even in his wildest fantasies, when Scarborough had joined him for that innocent drink. He felt more tipsy now, intoxicated by his lover's kisses, than the beer or wine had made him. "What do you waste your thoughts on then?" He traced the lines of Hugh's chest, his shoulders.

"Oh, that would be telling. Sailing that frigate. Finding somewhere to live where the bombs can't find me. This blond haired bloke who works as liaison for the War cabinet—think about him all the time." Scarborough spoke dreamily, the words dripping with affection. There was no doubt which blond haired man invaded his imagination when he should have been decoding things.

"And would it be *telling* to let him know what these thoughts involve? Seeing as he features in them?"

"He'll have to wait and see. Practical demonstration if he's very lucky." Scarborough began the kissing again, deep, warm kisses, sweet

and heady as a glass of port would have been, if they'd chosen that instead of the bedroom.

Adam sighed, pleasant sensations springing up all over his body in response to the touches of lips and hands. Scarborough wasn't just a star when he had a handful of communications to decipher. He was more than efficient in this bed, interpreting what his lover wanted, the hidden messages contained in sighs and murmurs. "He already knows he's lucky, Hugh. Very." To have found someone to care for and who seemed to care for you, in the midst of bombs and blackouts and fear such as you'd never known, was like finding a diamond among the flattened ruins of a Hackney terrace. Jackson stroked his friend's stomach, inching his way physically and emotionally to the inevitable, breathtaking conclusion of the evening.

For once the War seemed a million miles away and the fiery glow in the sky over the East End had become meaningless. The only explosion which mattered was the one which would happen between the two of them.

**The End**



## **About the Author:**

Charlie Cochrane's ideal day would be a morning walking along a beach, an afternoon spent watching rugby, and a church service in the evening, with her husband and daughters tagging along, naturally. She loves reading, theatre, good food, and watching sport.

She started writing relatively late in life but draws on all the experiences she's hoarded up to try to give a depth and richness to her stories.

**Also by this Author:**

**Trilogy No. 111: Speak Its Name**

**Lessons in Love (Book One: A Cambridge Fellows  
Mystery)**