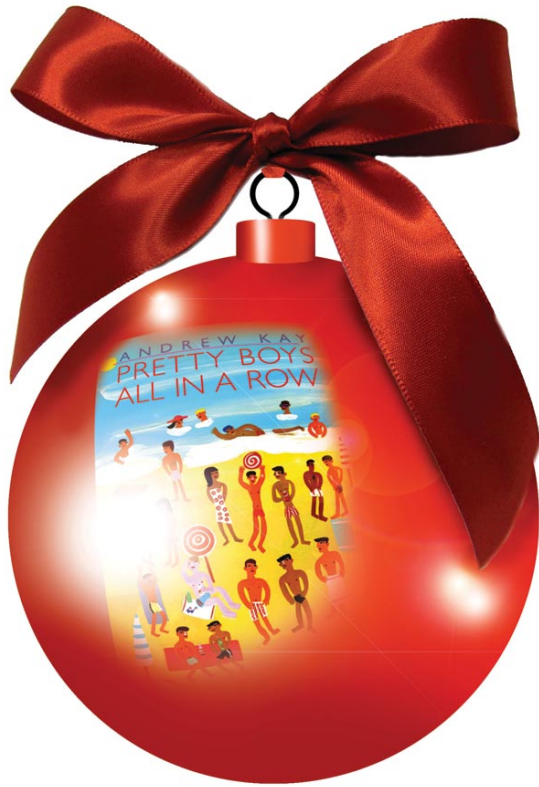


ANDREW KAY

**MI CASA  
ES TU CASA**



PHILLIP & TERRY AT  
CHRISTMAS

For Matt  
& all my friends  
Christmas 2010

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ANDREW KAY

MI  
CASA  
ES TU  
CASA



*A very Merry Christmas and  
a Happy New Year to you all.*

*Having never sent Christmas Cards before I have  
decided that this year I needed to say thank you  
to a great many people – so here goes.*

*Thank you to my many friends who in 2010  
supported me and supported my first book.*

*Thank you to my family and in particular my  
parents who coped with the rather racy subject  
matter on those pages.*

*Thank you to everyone who bought a copy of  
Pretty Boys All In A Row.*

*Finally thank you to Carol Biss,  
Laura Lockington and all the team at  
Book Guild Publishing for all their work and  
their patience.*



# I

The phone rang.

It was around four o'clock on a dull autumn Saturday afternoon and Phillip was taking a bath. The Saturday afternoon bath had become ritualistic, very deep, very hot and accompanied by a very large G&T. Philip reached for a towel, dried his hand and lifted the receiver.

'Hello.'

There was theatrically heavy breathing before the reedy voice asked the question.

'What are you wearing?'

'A gin and tonic, nothing else.'

The breathing got heavier before collapsing into fits of giggles.

'Hello Terry.'

'Oh damn, You knew it was me.'

'Who else?'

It was months since Phillip had returned from his life changing holiday on the island of Ibiza. Terry had kept in touch by telephone at least once a week, updating him on the latest sagas, David's sexual forays, Rodney's disastrous soft furnishings. After Phillip's return they had managed to patch up their strange relationship. Heidi the

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cross-dressing German dominatrix had gone back to his job in a Dresden shoe shop and for the time being peace reigned.

‘So, just the drink?’

‘Yes, I’m in the bath’.

‘How terribly Roman.’

‘It is rather, except the Romans didn’t read the Guardian in their tubs.’

‘Oh The Guardian, I do wish you’d buy a proper paper’.

‘Like The Telegraph, I suppose’.

‘It has a much better crossword’.

‘Yes, it does, but it also comes with a huge slice of homophobia.’

‘Was that a crossword clue? Twenty-one across, five and four, huge slice of homophobia: Fairy cake!’

‘Ha Ha Terry, you know exactly what I mean. Anyway, how are you?’

‘I’m as well as can be expected for a man of my years.’

‘And how many years is that?’

Phillip didn’t expect an answer and wasn’t about to get one. Terry was rather old-fashioned about revealing his age but Phillip had pinned it down as somewhere between sixty and eighty.’

‘You know it’s terribly bad manners to ask a lady her age’.

‘You’re no lady.’

‘How rude!’

Both men laughed as they enjoyed the comfort of their friendship that had grown during that frenetic week in the summer.

‘Now listen Phillip, what are your plans for Christmas?’

‘I plan to go into hiding. I suppose I’ll go to visit mum for a few days and other than that I plan to eat Quality Street and watch Morecambe and Wise.’

‘How vile. No, I’m sorry, that simply won’t do.’

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‘Well it’s all I can afford right now.’

‘Just listen to me. I have to come over to London to sign a few papers, dull stuff, and I will be in town staying in an old friend’s house in Chelsea for the holiday.’

‘Great, we can meet up and have a drink.’

‘Well, I was going to suggest something a little more exotic than that.’

‘More exotic, in what sense?’

‘Well, why don’t you move in with me there for a week. He has a rather marvelous cellar, and doesn’t drink and I’ve already done a Margot.’

‘Done a Margot?’

‘Yes, you know, a Margot Leadbetter, ordered Christmas from Fortnums.’

‘Yum, tinned ham.’

‘Don’t be so facetious. A Fortnum’s hamper is a very fine thing if you know how to use it.’

‘Sorry Terry.’

‘So will you come? Please?’

‘Where is it?’

‘Cheyne Walk.’

‘Posh.’

‘Very posh, very la-di-da.’

‘Well I suppose I could do mum at New Year and...’

‘Excellent! Well, that’s settled.’

‘I’ll need to run it by her.’

‘Of course, but you will come, you will! I’ll start booking some fun things to do. Do you like the ballet, opera? We could have Christmas dinner at The Connaught.’

Phillip had always wanted to have dinner at the Connaught but never thought that he would be able to afford it.

‘Okay, okay but don’t go mad, and no silly presents. You know I have

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a very small stipend.’

Terry laughed.

‘I hope you’re noting that I am ignoring that opportunity to make a derogatory remark.’

‘Thank you.’

‘My pleasure. So, all is settled, well pending mamma’s approval. You will join me in Chelsea on the twenty-third say and stay until the thirtieth.’

‘That’s a whole week!’

‘It’s a very fine wine cellar.’

‘True.’

‘I’m feeling festive already.’

‘I’m feeling wrinkly.’

‘What? Are you saying I make you feel old?’

‘No Terry, my bathwater is getting cold and I am starting to wrinkle.’

‘Oh my dear, you can’t afford to have that happen, not with your tiny stipend.’

‘You’re a wicked old man. I knew that would come back and...’

‘...bite you on the bum? Indeed. Now get dry and have fun, I’ll be in touch.’

Over the next few weeks Terry kept Phillip up to date with plans. There were tickets for *The Nutcracker* after Christmas and, in contrast, tickets to see Michael Crawford in *Barnum* at the Palladium on Christmas Eve. Dinner on Christmas day was, as promised, booked at *The Connaught*.

One evening after work Phillip took a walk along Cheyne Walk and tried to guess which house it would be. Terry was being very cagey about the actual address. In the twilight the houses looked dark and ominous. Most of them were shuttered and looked as if there was no one home. One or two had lights on in the upper, less imposing

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rooms, but the majority were in darkness.

One of the largest houses had high, ornate railings and gates in front of a garden paved with huge York stone slabs. The doors were black and shiny and above them a lantern twinkled faintly in the gloom. Phillip pressed his face up close to the cold railings and stared hard at the doors. He pondered who might live there and, taking into account the enormity of the property and the fact that it looked rather old school, he decided that it must be the town home of some member of the landed gentry.

He was deep in thought when the doors suddenly clicked open and out stepped a thin man, dressed in denim and wearing a silk scarf. His hair was long, almost feminine and not fashionable. As he turned, the dim light from the lantern cast his face into heavy shadow, but not before Phillip spotted those unmistakable full lips. Before there was any chance to do anything the electric gates clicked open and a black car with tinted windows swooped in front of the house. The man climbed into the back and sped away.

‘Lord knows, it’s only rock ‘n’ roll.’ sang Phillip, but he liked it.



# II

Terry arrived at Gatwick on a dismal afternoon.

Phillip braved British Rail and went to meet him but Terry had a car arranged to pick him up and drive them back. As the black Daimler motored up the A23, Terry suggested that they stop off at Phillip's home to collect his things.

'I'm not coming to stay for a few days yet.'  
'Well I just thought it would make things easier.'  
'You just want to take a peek at my tiny home.'  
'Well yes, that too.'

Phillip was having none of it so the car steamed on through Streatham and finally crossed Battersea Bridge with the twinkling Albert Bridge in the distance. The car turned on to Chelsea Embankment, passed Oakley Street and then turned left into Cheyne Walk. There it drew to a halt, almost directly in front of the house where Phillip had spied on the man.

'Mick Jagger lives here.'  
'You're not staying in Mick Jagger's house?'  
'God no! I'm next door, far more modest.'  
Terry's idea of modesty did not match Phillip's. The house next door was equally smart if only slightly smaller.  
'So who lives here?'  
'Well, we do.'  
'Yes for Christmas, but who lives here normally?'

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‘Well, I have to confess to having told a little ‘White Christmas’ lie.’

‘Fess up old man.’

‘I do, this is my house.’

‘Your house, your excellent cellar. You wicked old man.’

‘It was a teensy lie.’

‘Yes, but why? Did you think I would say no if I’d known.’

‘Sorry, no, of course not, I just got used to not telling the truth. Now come on and help me get in. Barry will bring the bags.’

‘Barry? Please don’t tell me that Barry is your chauffeur.’

‘Don’t be silly, he’s not my chauffeur, no. He’s my, well he’s my general aide. That’s it, my aide-de-camp.’

The grey suited driver turned to Terry.

‘Less of the camp, eh?’

‘Sorry Barry.’

From the outside the house was totally in keeping with the rest of the terrace, dark and classic. Inside was an entirely different matter. Beyond the facade it was a completely modern structure, cool white rooms with flat glass doors. The handles were ivory tusks capped in silver and studded with semi-precious stones. The floors were white marble and the art on the walls was a mix of old masters and pop.

‘Wow!’

‘You like? Good, I modelled it on Peggy’s place.’

‘Peggy?’

‘Peggy Guggenheim. She has a little palazzo on the canal in Venice, all very modern, like a slice of Manhattan dropped into Renaissance Italy.’

‘What are you like?’

‘Oh Peggy’s is far grander. Her art is museum stuff, mine is far more modest.’

‘Remember who I am, Terry. I can see an exploding Pope from here. Bacon, yes?’

‘Dear Francis. I got that for paying his tab at the Colony Rooms.’

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‘Would you like the tour?’

‘Not now. Now I’d like a drink.’

‘I’ll get Barry to fetch something nice from the cellar.’

‘No, come on, let’s go out.’

‘Are you sure? We don’t have a reservation.’

‘You don’t need one where we’re going,’ said Phillip, taking the lead.

On the King’s Road the traffic was heavy with Christmas shoppers. Terry dispensed Barry to buy some essentials in Safeway and Phillip marched Terry across the road to the Chelsea Kitchen. Inside, the orange tinged pine booths were full to bursting with locals who loved this home to mediocre food at bargain basement prices.

After a short wait they were directed to share a booth with two post-punk degenerates with heavily kohled eyes and facial piercings.

Terry leaned across the table and whispered.

‘I hope they haven’t ordered soup.’

‘God no! It will spurt out like a watering can rose.’

Fortunately they were spared as the waiter threw down two plates of curried eggs and smiled insincerely. It was all par for the course.

Philip ordered two plates of moussaka and two mixed salads.

‘What no starter?’

‘You want a starter? Okay.’

Phillip called back the waitress.

‘Sorry, can we have egg mayonnaise twice to start as well, please, and a carafe of house red.’

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She scowled and did lots of crossing out on her pad before stomping off to deliver the order. Almost immediately the starter arrived, the halved eggs covered in pallid sauce and sprinkled with cayenne pepper. To garnish, one leaf of tired lettuce was the chef's minimalist statement. The wine was robust but robust was being spelled R O U C H. The moussaka, however, was rich and meaty with good layers of potato and aubergine and a thick layer of custardy béchamel on top. The addition of chips was odd but not unwelcome.

'I never have three courses here,' said Phillip.

'Oh go mad, have a pudding. I want the apple crumble with hazelnut ice-cream.'

'Oh sod it then, I'll have jelly and cream.'

The two men roared with laughter, causing people to stare. It made them laugh even more. Phillip paid the tiny bill.

'Your turn when we go to the Connaught.'

The waitress overheard and sneered. Terry wiped the smile off her face by tipping almost double what their entire meal had cost.

'Right! So a drink and then home, I think. Queen's Head?'

The Queen's Head in Tryon Street was a fairly ordinary back street pub that was popular with local gay men. On Saturday lunch time it was the first port of call before everyone headed off to The Markham. There clones amassed and cruised and those that did not pull went on to cruise in the frozen food section of Safeway across the way. Phillip had once picked up a guy there and taken him all the way home. In the bedroom the man declared that he was into lingerie which he pronounced lingery. Phillip apologised and said it was not a fetish he could help with.

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‘Have you got anything you could tie me up with, then?’

Phillip said that he hadn’t.

‘But what about those ties?’

‘They’re silk!’ Phillip cried in horror.

After that he had driven him back to the nearest underground station.

There were three bars in the Queen’s head, one to the front, one to the back and one long one that ran down the side. The front bar was for locals and not really gay, well not very gay. The other two were gay, the back one quieter and chatty, the long one tended to attract men on their own, seeking company as one might say.

‘The back bar, I think.’

Phillip was steering Terry through the long bar, but not very successfully. Almost everyone in the room seemed to know Terry, from the twinks to the tottering pensioners stretching a half of bitter out across the evening.

Finally, they were able to turn right into the back bar and, finding a couple of seats in the corner, they were able to settle down.

‘I suppose it’s too cold to stand out on the verandah.’

Terry was doing his very best Noël Coward impression and the boys at the next table roared with laughter. Then through the laughter came a screeching falsetto.

‘As I live and breathe, if that’s not Tezza the lezza I’ll eat my Panama.’  
‘Brace yourself Phillip, this is going to be a bumpy night. Hello

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Roger, how are you?’

‘How am I, how am I? How are you? How are you, you old rogue, and who’s your interesting friend?’

‘This is Phillip. Phillip, this is Roger Vaux.’

‘We’ve met before.’ said Phillip through gritted teeth.

It was true. One Sunday Phillip had gone along to the Queen’s Head to meet a Greek painter friend. Ari had convinced Phillip to tag along for lunch in a rather chichi restaurant in Walton Street. There, in the company of a lot of very loud old Chelsea queens and under a ridiculous amount of ruched and festooned fabric, they had eaten a very average Sunday roast. Ari directed Phillip not to pay and Roger Vaux had picked up the entire tab. After lunch they had all gone back to Roger’s flat in Pont Street where the Cointreau had been the slippery slope that led to too many men with too many wrinkles taking off too many clothes and finding it all too much to take. Phillip had excused himself by asking for the bathroom and made a run for it through the front door.

Now Roger was struggling to work out if he knew Phillip or not, and Phillip was trying to rid his mind of the image of this rather short and rather too wide man making naked advances on him with thimble sized glasses of orange liqueur.

‘So Terry, long time no see. What brings you back to Chelsea?’

‘Business, Roger. There’s nothing here for me any more.’

Roger smiled a sickly smile and allowed his eyes to flicker towards Phillip but Terry didn’t react, deciding instead to allow Roger to think whatever he wanted about their relationship.

‘Anyway Roger, it’s been... it’s been, well... such a long time. Must get on though.’

Terry could not bring himself to use the word nice. Roger moved

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away, struggling to conceal the fact that he was being snubbed.

‘What a bastard!’

‘You have no idea how much of a bastard that grave robbing, ambulance chasing old queer is. For as long as I’ve had the misfortune of knowing him he has been fleecing vulnerable men.’

‘But he’s pretty well heeled.’

‘Don’t be fooled. When he first appeared on the scene he was an out of work scoundrel who would sucker anyone who he thought would stand him dinner or a bed for the night. Gradually he realized that this place was full of men with enough cash to lavish on a young man who would pay them a little, shall we say “attention”.’

‘But he looks like a toad.’

‘He does now but back then he was quite a looker, in a rough and ready sort of way, like a street-fighter.’

Phillip laughed in disbelief.

‘Now he lives on the spoils of all his false affections.’

‘I take it you don’t like him, Terry.’

‘I do not. He’s a leech. Now enough of him. Let’s get out of this place, too many ghosts.’

Back on the King’s Road, Barry hovered in the Daimler.

‘He’s as attentive as Maria, Terry.’

‘Yes, but not as butch. Now get in and Barry will drop you home.’



# III

The next day Terry had his meetings  
with solicitors and bankers.

It took up most of the day and evening too. Phillip worked but there was a general air of holiday and not much actual work got done. In the evening he went home to pack a bag and wrap his gifts. Buying gifts for Terry had not been easy. His taste for the very best hardly matched Phillip's pocket. In the end he'd found a few beautiful art books which he hoped would hit the right note.

The following day would be Wednesday the twenty-third, T Day. Phillip pulled his suitcase out of the wardrobe. It was still tagged from the eventful holiday in Ibiza earlier that year. He packed all his bits and the gifts and put it by the front door ready. He took his best suit out of the dry cleaning bag and slipped it into his suit carrier. Then he went to the kitchen, poured a large glass of Rioja before collapsing on the sofa. This would probably be the last time his feet would touch the ground for seven days. He woke after midnight and made his way to his bed. Barry was due to collect him and his bags at eight in the morning and then drop him at work. The office would be open but it was Christmas lunch with mulled wine and cards and tacky Secret Santa gifts before closing at three until the New Year.

That afternoon, after turkey roll, mushy sprouts and cheap sausages wrapped in economy bacon, Phillip took the number 22 bus back to Chelsea, got off just past Manresa Road and Chelsea School of Art

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and gazed in the window of Boris's deli before walking down Oakley Street towards Albert Bridge and turning on to the Embankment and from there into Cheyne Walk. Next door to Terry's, the Jagger house was lit up from top to bottom. Phillip tugged on the bell pull and moments later the iron gate clicked open. By the time he had reached the door Barry was there, champagne flute at the ready.

'Hello Barry.'

'Hello Mr Phillip. Terry is just finishing a few business calls but he asked me to give you a drink and show you to your room.'

They took a lift to the top floor. Inside the walls were covered in mock snakeskin. The guest suite was spacious and had a balcony that overlooked the paved garden at the rear. There was a huge horse chestnut tree but no other plants and on the end wall a huge stone armorial crest filled a third of the space.

Phillip looked around but could not see his bag anywhere. Opening the wardrobes he found all his clothes neatly filed away and his gifts placed tidily on a shelf. 'Barry is Maria in acrylic trousers and a drip dry shirt,' thought Phillip, and he made a mental note to buy him a small gift the next day.

He kicked off his shoes and lay back on the huge bed with its giant headrest covered in raw silk embroidered with butterflies. His head had hardly touched the pillow before he had fallen into a light sleep.

When he awoke he found Terry sat on the end of the bed with two huge flutes of something sparkling but this time pink.

'Our favourite.'

'Cava?'

Terry chuckled.

'I think not. Now get changed. We're out for dinner.'

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“Smart?”

‘-Ish, twenty minutes, okay?’

‘Okay.’

Fifteen minutes later Phillip skipped down two flights of white marble stairs edged with polished brass and joined Terry when he came to the drawing room which overlooked a double height dining room with a massive wall of glass overlooking the garden.

The room was decorated with a mixture of French chairs and sofas and an Eames daybed. On a large desk there was a huge vase of white roses and on the wall a small oil that looked like it might be a Sickert.

‘That looks like it might be a Sickert.’

‘Yes, that’s what the National Gallery said. How’s your drink?’

‘Empty of course. Where are we having dinner?’

‘Langan’s Brasserie. It used to be Le Coq D’Or, very Mayfair, but it’s now very cosmopolitan with a Hockney on the menu and Michael Caine lurking in the corners.’

‘He eats there?’

‘He co-owns it with Peter Langan. The food is good though and we have a nice table.’

Barry drove them to Piccadilly and said that he would return at eleven to pick them up.

The restaurant was busy and the Maitre D’ showed them to a good table from where they could see everything that was going on. When seated, the waiters flicked out their napkins and placed them on their laps. Another sharply dressed young waiter then delivered a bottle of Dom Pérignon.

‘I thought I had tempered your tendency to excess, Terry.’

‘Now don’t be a spoil sport Phillip dear, it’s Christmas, relax, enjoy.’

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Anyway we're having a very cheap dinner, poireaux vinaigrette and boudin noire with mash and caramelized apple slices.'  
Phillip dropped the menu and, raising his glass, toasted Terry.

'To your impeccable judgment – as ever.'

Terry had been right too, the dishes might have been the cheapest on the menu but they were simple and delicious. The champagne once gone was replaced by a bottle of Chateau Musar, a rich wine from the Lebanon that more than lived up to the dark blood sausage. Phillip and Terry chattered away animatedly. Terry brought Phillip up to date with the island's gossip and Phillip talked to him about life in publishing.

'Work, work, work, Phillip. Come on, there must have been some fun since you got back from Ibiza.'

'Well not much, to be honest, and after all that excitement I felt like I needed a rest. You have to admit, it was all a bit full on.'

'Well yes, I agree. So no one new. Have you been in touch with Malcolm?'

'Malcolm is coming down for a weekend in the New Year. I'm not convinced it's a good idea but we'll see. He's such a nice guy but...'  
'...but he's a gas fitter. You're a terrible snob Phillip. I'm shocked.'

But Terry was laughing so hard that Phillip knew he was not shocked at all. Terry's laughter was so loud that people all around the large dining room were starting to stare. And from among them Phillip first heard and then saw Roger Vaux.

'Oh fuck, not Vaux please.'

'Where?' Terry had immediately calmed down.

'Eleven o'clock and heading this way fast.'

'Okay Phillip, leave this to me.'

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Terry stood up fast and moved to intersect Roger, taking him firmly by the elbow and swinging him around in the direction of the gents. He returned five minutes later smiling.

‘There we are then, all done and dusted.’

‘That was quick. How did you manage that?’

‘Well I simply pointed out that the gold and emerald tie pin he had been wearing when we bumped into him in the pub was remarkably like the one that Johnny Smith had reported stolen a few years back. Remarkably! I said that we wanted a little privacy and perhaps he might like me to offer him some privacy about the tie pin too.’

‘You clever old thing.’

‘Less of the old, thank you very much.’

‘The tie pin? Is it valuable?’

‘Yes, very, Tiffany. I’ve just called Johnny and informed him of its whereabouts. I think we might be in for a little light cabaret.’

Twenty minutes later, almost perfectly timed to arrive with dessert, a smart man accompanied by two policemen arrived. Without any fuss they arrested Roger Vaux and led him away.

‘Merry Christmas, Roger.’

Terry smiled knowing that he had made things even for Johnny.

Barry collected them as promised at around eleven. The Maitre D’ shook Terry’s hand on the way out and thanked him for getting rid of their most unloved customer.

‘Will he go away for this?’ he asked.

‘He will if they search his flat and check his bank accounts and all the others he has access to.’



# IV

Barry woke Phillip the next morning  
with a breakfast tray at eight.

‘Mr T says take it easy this morning, the sauna is heated and the plunge pool filled. He has some business to attend to still but wants me to take you to meet him at lunchtime.’

‘Fair enough. Where are we having lunch?’

‘Rules, oldest restaurant in London and a bit of a suit and tie job, I believe.’

‘Point taken Barry, I will get out the whistle.’

‘I may have been born within the peal of Bow bells sir, but I don’t do the slang.’

‘Sorry Barry.’

‘Not at all, sir.’

Barry left and Phillip threw the cloth off the tray. Underneath was a huge bacon sandwich and a cup of tea the colour of Judith Chalmers’ foundation.

‘Perfect.’

The sauna was in the basement and the plunge pool was a five foot cube of cool water. Phillip read the laminated instruction sheet and spent an hour getting alternately very hot and very cold. At eleven he went to his room and found that Barry had brushed and laid out his suit, re-ironed a striped shirt and polished his black shoes. Hanging at the collar of the shirt was a new tie, diagonal stripes of deep violet, shiny then matt. It was not Phillip’s but on close

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inspection Phillip found a tag.

‘An early present. It should look nice with the suit.’

Phillip dressed and inspected himself in the full length mirror. The effect was good except for one thing. Phillip ran down to the kitchen to find Barry.

‘I need your help Barry.’

‘Yes sir? In what way?’

‘Hair, Barry, my hair looks terrible.’

‘Yes sir.’

‘Where can I get it cut before I meet Terry.’

‘I can call Trumpers sir, to see if they can fit you in. Would you like that?’

‘Yes please Barry.’

Trumpers was in Jermyn Street and they had had a cancellation. Barry drove there at great speed and waited outside while a portly barber in a white jacket knocked Phillip’s curly mop into some sort of shape.

‘Curls can be such a trial, can they not sir?’ the barber said in a not very inspiring way. ‘Let’s just see what we can do, shall we?’

Thirty minutes later Phillip was back in the Daimler with a haircut that resembled Richard Green’s brilliantined mop in the TV series Robin Hood.

‘Very nice sir, if you don’t mind me saying so. Very Dirk Bogarde.’

‘Oh God! Do I look like an Ealing Comedy extra?’

‘No, it looks good.’

Phillip was less sure but it certainly looked better with the suit and

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tie than his unruly mop had.’

Terry was at Rules when Phillip arrived. The oldest restaurant in London looked exactly like that, all swags and tassels, plush velvet and gilt. Terry stood to meet him and kissed him on each cheek.

‘The hair?’

‘Trumpers.’

‘Barry’s choice I guess.’

‘Yes, why?’

‘Oh, the old school all like Trumpers. I prefer Vidal Sassoon or Keith At Smile.’

‘Oh no, do I look awful?’

‘Well funnily enough, no, it rather suits you.’

A waiter came over with two glasses of champagne.

‘Just a glass, we don’t want to lose the afternoon do we?’

They ate a fine meal of oysters, steak and kidney pudding and treacle tart. Terry ordered a bottle of St Estephe to wash it all down and they sat in the sepulchral gloom until two thirty when the waiter announced that their driver had arrived.

‘What now?’

‘Bond Street, young man.’

Barry drove from Maiden Lane to Bond Street where he hovered outside Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche while Terry ushered Phillip inside.

‘Terry, you don’t need any more clothes, your wardrobe is bulging.’

‘Not for me dear, now slip off that jacket.’

The penny dropped, Phillip was being dressed and as Terry

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inspected the label in his suit he wrinkled his nose in disapproval.

The sales man brought a selection of jackets for Phillip to try on. A soft navy blue single breasted, a black jacket with double vents, a grey cashmere with a pale cream pinstripe and a double breasted Prince of Wales check in grey and red.

‘Now I see the suits, the haircut works.’

‘What you mean Terry is that the suits and the haircut are similarly grown up.’

‘Well there is that, but take a look in the mirror. That check sits very well on you.’

Phillip turned to the mirror and looked at the effect.

‘Mmmmmm, well yes, it does have a certain something.’

‘Try on the trousers.’

Phillip slipped into a changing room and took off his cheap suit’s pants. The check suit’s wool was soft and the top half of each leg was lined. The trousers fitted perfectly except that the legs were a few inches too long.

‘The trousers are too long.’

‘We always adjust the trousers for the client sir.’ The assistant was being rather too attentive in checking the fall of the legs.

‘Can you do them while we wait?’ asked Terry.

He was already pulling shirts down from the shelves and pulling out a credit card to pay for them. Meanwhile a junior assistant dashed out to a local tailor, Terry continued to pluck shirts and ties from the shelves, much to the delight of the assistant whose eyes were lighting up at the thought of his commission.

An hour later they were both sat in the back of the Daimler

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surrounded by bags and parcels.

‘I feel like Doris Day.’

‘Doris Day?’

‘Yes, you know, in a smart suit and pill box hat in the back of a yellow cab surrounded by parcels and bags of shopping. Very Manhattan. Very Fifth Avenue.’

‘I did think of NYC but there were things I had to do here in London. NYC next Christmas perhaps?’

‘You are a very wicked old man.’

‘Less of the old, the wicked I can live with.’

‘Sorry Terry, you are the youngest grown up I know.’

‘That’s better. Now home and a snooze and then we can think about dinner.’

‘I’m still full from that lunch.’

‘Yes but by nine you will be ravenous and so will I.’

Barry dropped them in Cheyne Walk and went to the mews to park the car for the night. When he got back both Phillip and Terry had gone to their rooms for a nap. At seven the phone rang and woke them both. They met on the stairs down to the kitchen where Barry was putting down the phone.

‘Police.’

‘What did they want?’

‘Asked if they could pop round to ask you a few questions about a Roger something or other.’

‘Ah the wheels of justice have started to turn. Did you tell them to come round?’

‘I didn’t get a chance. They said they would be here in ten minutes.’

Ten minutes later they buzzed at the gate. Barry let them in and brought them up to the drawing room. The plain clothes officer was accompanied by a cute young constable in uniform who upon seeing

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Phillip blushed. It took Phillip a moment longer to recognize him in his uniform as the last time they had met he wasn't wearing it, or anything else for that matter.

Terry managed to answer most of the detective's questions about Vaux' nefarious activities. It turned out that the tie pin had been the tip of an iceberg of theft spanning many years and that Vaux was not in a position to verify how he came by his vast collection of jewellery, paintings and antiques, much of which the police had already identified as stolen. Nor could he account for the vast wealth he had amassed in a variety of bank accounts.

'I think the revenue will be as interested in Mr Vaux as we are. And his wife was rather surprised too.' The detective smiled as he said it. 'Wife?'

'Yes, a wife and three teenage kids in Norbury. They thought he worked abroad, poor sods. Now they know exactly where Mr Vaux was for most of the last 15 years.'

'Well I'll be buggered,' said Terry.

'Well exactly sir, thank you for your help.'

By the time they left it was nine-fifteen. Terry and Phillip roared with laughter, unable to stop for several minutes.

'Hungry?'

'Peckish.'

'Pancakes?'

'Asterix?'

'My thoughts exactly.'

They walked to World's End and had a supper of buckwheat pancakes and Brittany cider. Then they walked back and declared that it had been a very long day and that bed was the only option.

'Thank you Terry.'

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‘It’s nothing dear.’

‘It is and I’m very grateful.’

‘See you in the morning then.’

With that Phillip pecked the older man on the cheek and went up the staircase to bed.

Next day was Christmas Eve. Barry woke Philip with what he called his ‘Festive Celebration breakfast tray’. The only discernible difference was a fried egg in the bacon sandwich, but it was much welcomed. Terry was already dressed and reading the papers when Phillip came down to the drawing room.

‘It’s one of the things I miss.’

‘But you can get the papers.’

‘Yes, but a day late. It’s never the same a day late. Now have you any plans?’

‘None, I did everything I needed to do last week, but don’t let me stop you.’

‘No, I’m all done. We have the theatre tonight but nothing until then. How do you fancy a trip to Liberty and Selfridges and John Lewis?’

‘Not Harrods?’

‘God no, far too vulgar!’

‘Well that sounds nice, but window shopping. You spent far too much on me yesterday.’

In truth, Phillip had no idea how much as when he was not looking Terry had bought him two more suits, one a dress suit with satin lapels and stripes and a dozen shirts and ties.

‘I may feel the need to buy you socks.’

‘Socks? Next you will be saying underpants and I’ll be thinking that you have murdered my aunty Betty and stolen her brain.’

Terry laughed.

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'I like the sound of your aunty Betty.'

'Good, I think she would like you too.'

'I've booked us an early dinner at Simpson's. It's very dull in some ways but a piece of history and the beef is excellent. After the show we are going to a little drinks party with a few of my old theatre chums. I suppose we might squeeze in brunch somewhere along the way.'

'I'll not fit in the new suit.'

'Why do you think I made you eat steamed steak and kidney pudding before buying a suit. It's the only way, buy a suit when you're full and it will fit you after a huge dinner.'

Terry told Barry to take the day off.

'We can manage with cabs. Go and see your old mum.'

'My old mum's been dead for ten year now, but there's a new sauna I'd like to visit, in the city.'

'Really, what's it called?'

'The Business End.'

'Ha! How very droll, I like that. Well have fun and don't do anything I wouldn't... no go ahead do everything – and report back later.'

'Will do, bye, have a good day both of you.'

They drifted up to the King's Road and popped into Peter Jones.

'I miss this too, even though there's nothing in here I want or need.'

'What, not even socks?'

'Oh well, yes. They do have nice cotton socks but we can get those in Liberty too, and probably in better colours.'

'I noticed that you maintained the "new look".'

'God yes! No more sportswear for me. Maria makes sure of that. After you burnt it all we had to buy a new barbecue. It was ruined.'

'Is she well, Maria?'

'Yes, she sends her love.'

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‘I have a little present for you to take back for her.’

‘How sweet, she’ll love that.’

Terry had steered Phillip into menswear and was pulling fine cotton socks from a stand in bunches.

‘How many pairs of socks can you need?’

‘One can never have too many pairs of socks.’

‘What are you like?’

‘My dear boy, you know exactly what I’m like.’

They both laughed and Phillip joined in choosing socks in bright colours.

‘Whenever are you going to wear bright pink socks?’

‘Tomorrow, at the Connaught.’

Back out on Sloane Square, Terry hailed a cab and commanded the driver to take them to Jermyn Street.

‘Not more clothes Terry? Have I created a monster?’

‘Not clothes dear, cheese and then a light lunch.’

The driver on hearing this pulled up in front of Paxton and Whitfield.

‘Seventeen ninety-seven.’ the driver called into the back.

‘What, from Sloane Square? That’s outrageous!’ Terry was bristling.

‘No guv’ner, seventeen ninety-seven, the year that Paxton’s opened’

They all laughed and Terry pressed a crisp new ten pound note into the driver’s hand.

‘Merry Christmas!’

‘And a Happy New Year to you and your son.’

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Out on the pavement Terry slammed the cab door.  
'Fucking cheek!'

Phillip was giggling like an idiot.

'Stop that or I'll call Santa and cancel Christmas.'

Inside the shop Terry settled his account. He had ordered, and had gift wrapped and posted, truckles of Cheddar and Stilton cheeses to all of his friends.

'One stop Christmas shopping. I send them a list of names and addresses and they do the rest.'

'Every year?'

'No, alternate years I send sides of smoked salmon and bottles of Chablis. Now we have a choice: old ladies in minks in the Fountain or louche bankers in pinstripes at Jules' Bar? Put differently: game pie in Fortnum's or cocktails and a Dover sole in the bar?'

'Mmmm, tough choice. Can we do cocktails and Dover sole first and then nip across the road for the minks and an ice-cream after?'

'Genius, walk this way.' and with that Terry started to limp down the street as if he had a club foot.

The cocktails were good, dry as a witches tit, and the sole excellent. Afterwards, they scooted into the Fountain and ordered, much to the horror of the very po-face waiter, two mont blancs and two glasses of champagne.

'So what's the plan?'

'Ah well, I'm afraid that I have one more appointment to keep. Can you keep yourself entertained for a few hours? Why don't you join Barry at The Business End? I can get you free admission.'

'Free?'

'Yes, I own it. It seemed like a good business proposition, all those

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horny and frustrated bankers letting off steam before going home to their wives and kiddies.’

‘You’re terrible, and thanks, but no, I don’t think I want to bump into Barry in a sauna.’

‘No, perhaps not. It could be difficult over the toast in the morning.’

‘I’ll be fine. Should I make my way back to Chelsea?’

‘Excellent! I should be back by five.’

Terry had slipped into a much quieter mood and was visibly twitchy.

‘Is everything alright Terry?’

‘Yes, yes, of course,’ and he laughed, but Phillip sensed that he was covering something up.

Terry played on his mind all afternoon. No matter how Phillip tried to entertain himself he kept coming up with gloomy thoughts about why Terry had seemed suddenly so low. The foreboding had been made worse when he overheard Terry whisper Harley Street to the cab driver.

Slipping back into Fortnum and Mason, Phillip bought a tiny box of glacé wild strawberries in a wooden box for a huge sum of money. He knew that Terry would love them. Then he decided that his mother would too and bought a second.

‘An excellent decision sir,’ said the red tail-coated assistant as he wrapped the gifts and tied ribbons around each parcel. He placed them in a shiny blue bag and handed them to Phillip with a very knowing smile. Phillip, not one for winking, forced out a flashy wink and smiled back.

‘Merry Christmas!’

‘And a Merry Christmas to you, sir.’

Outside the wind was blowing hard down Piccadilly. Phillip looked left and right. He considered popping into Richoux for Godiva

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chocolates and then remembered the new suit and thought better of it. He crossed over and walked into the courtyard of The Royal Academy. Art would be his distraction. He had a few hours to kill and two hefty drinks to walk off. The high ceilinged galleries were painted a gloomy maroon. The art on the walls might have been brilliant but Phillip's mind was elsewhere. He imagined that Terry was by this point with a medical professional and he feared the worst. After all, Terry was a man of a certain age. All manner of things could be starting to go wrong. He started to mentally count up how many times Terry had needed to pee that morning. Was it three or four? Could it be prostate trouble. Phillip had no idea what prostate trouble was but had heard that it wasn't good.

By three he was in a stew. In the gift shop he had bought a desk diary with pictures of naked Greek male statuary for Barry and the bag of shopping now weighed heavy but the idea that Terry was unwell was weighing far heavier.

He decided to walk back to Chelsea but outside the weather had turned bitterly cold and the wind was now cutting down Piccadilly like a guillotine. Fortunately the holiday season had started and most of the offices and shops had now closed, people had already headed for the stations and there were plenty of cabs to be had. Phillip crossed to the South side of the street and flagged one down. The driver was the silent type and Phillip was relieved. He didn't want to have to chat to a stranger and very soon he was back in Chelsea where he paid the fare, and tipped too much, because he thought that Terry would tip too much.

He turned a key in the gate and let himself in. The house was lit up but quiet. Barry appeared and put his finger up to his lip.

'He's having a bit of a nap. Do you want a cuppa?'

'God, yes please! Is he, you know, is he alright?'

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‘Just tired, I think. He wants me to wake him at five and drop you at Simpsons at six. Your clothes are all laid out for you and I’ll pop up and run you a bath.’

Phillip was unsure about having someone running after him like this.

‘I can run a bath, Barry. You relax. Did you have a good time at The Business End?’

‘Yes, it wasn’t bad, very relaxing if you follow my drift.’

‘I think so, good.’

Phillip drained his cup and took the lift up to his room where he planned to throw himself face down on the bed, exhausted, but when he opened the door to his room he couldn’t. There, laid out on the bed, was the immaculate dress suit with a narrow shiny satin shawl collar. On a wooden hanger was a perfect white dress shirt with a pin pleated bib and flat collar. At the neck was a black silk brocade bow with an ornate design of chrysanthemums. On the floor was a pair of black patent leather dress loafers with tassels and pair of silk socks with a small note pinned to them.

*‘One can never have too many pairs of socks.  
I though the suit would go well with these.’*

The tears poured down Phillip’s face in an unstoppable stream. He cried until he could cry no more, then he undressed and stood in a cool shower until he felt the puffiness around his eyes decrease and the tension in his back and neck ease. He stepped out, shaved for the second time that day, even though he did not need to, and splashed some Frankincense and Myrrh about.

The suit was the same perfect fit as the grey Prince of Wales check. Phillip picked up the bow tie and realized that he had no idea how to tie it. There was a knock at the door.

‘Fifteen minutes.’

It was Barry.

‘Barry, thank God! Come in, I need help.’

‘Of course, is it the tie?’

‘Yes Barry, the tie.’

Barry stood close behind him and put his arms round his neck to tie the tie. ‘This is the only way I can do it.’

Phillip could feel the breath on his neck and hear him whisper.

‘Left over right and under, form a loop...’

Moments later he swung Phillip round and pulled the tie into a neat bow. There you go, and very nice too if I might say so.’

‘Thanks Barry. You’re sure I don’t look like a twit?’

‘You would have done if you hadn’t followed my advice and gone to Trumpers.’

They laughed and turning to the mirror Philip took one last look before going down to the drawing room. Terry was already there, suited and booted.

‘My word, don’t you look the part?’

‘You’re a very naughty man Terry, but thank you, I love it.’

‘A gentleman needs a good DJ, it will last you years, if you look after it. Now, here’s a quick glass of fizz before Barry takes us to Simpson’s. I hope you don’t mind but we’re joining friends of mine. You’ll like them.’

Barry appeared and tapped his watch.

‘Ah, okay, bring your glass and the bottle.’

The Daimler was purring at the kerb-side. Barry held open the door and helped them in. He was wearing his usual grey suit but for the occasion had donned a grey chauffeur’s cap which he had decorated with red tinsel.

‘Thank you Rudolf.’

Terry was cheerful but Philip was worried and remained very quiet.

‘What’s the matter, cat got your tongue?’

‘Oh, nothing, sorry, I was just thinking.’

‘For goodness sake Phillip, it’s Christmas with Terry, you don’t need to think again until January the second.’

Philip turned to Terry and smiled. He did his best to make it look genuine but Terry was no fool and Phillip knew it. He knew that Terry would sense that something was on his mind and, given what was on his mind, he knew that Terry would have worked that out too.

‘I’m good, really, and I’m starving. Did you say roast beef?’

‘Yes, and excellent Yorkshire puddings.’

‘Brilliant! I could eat a scabby horse between two straw mattresses.’

‘This is Simpson’s, ask and they might do it for you.’

Simpson’s was a sparkling slice of Christmas past. Terry had booked a booth in the main room and his guests, he was informed by the Maitre D’, had already arrived. As he led them down the room he could see an ice bucket out of which was sticking the neck of a bottle of champagne. Phillip was now not only anxious about Terry’s health but also about who the guests he was about to meet might be.

Terry appeared to be putting on a bit of a spurt as he strode down

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the room, as if he had to get there first to make the introductions. Once at the booth he turned to Phillip and smiled. 'Another surprise I'm afraid.'

Phillip arrived at the booth to see Maria and Malcolm sitting side by side and grinning from ear to ear. Maria, overcome with excitement leapt to her feet and smothered Phillip with kisses before burying his head in her ample bosom, She was wearing a brightly coloured dress and when finally Phillip surfaced he tried to tell her how lovely she looked but she was equally trying to tell him how smart he looked. Eventually they both pointed at Terry and realised that he was responsible for both outfits. They laughed and embraced again.

Whilst all this was going on Malcolm stood and watched with a wide and slightly amazed grin on his face. Simpson's was a long way from his normal life in Barnsley and this was the first time he had worn a suit, let alone the smart dress suit that Terry had organised to be made for him back home. He had done his best to knock his mop of wild red hair into shape but it still stood up in huge unruly clumps. Phillip tried to take it all in but all he could do was smile.

Malcolm finally managed to get to him and threw his arms round him and whispered in his ear.

'Hiya.'

Phillip squeezed him tight and kissed his neck.

'Hey you.'

Dinner was exactly as Terry had described it, delicious beef and great Yorkshire puddings. He tipped the carver handsomely and almost managed not to wince when Malcolm asked for his beef to be well done. Maria ate each mouthful as if she was being poisoned, but finally relented and declared it delicious. Terry had ordered a great bottle of claret which had been decanted earlier to allow it to breathe.

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‘It’s not like Terry to order house wine, is it?’ whispered Malcolm. ‘Shhhh, I’ll explain later.’

Delicious as dinner was, there was no time for pudding as Barry had returned to take them on to the Palladium and an evening of circus fun with Michael Crawford. The show was good, Maria had never seen the like before. She had never seen a theatre on this scale let alone a musical extravaganza. Their seats were in the centre of row G.

‘Prime position,’ explained Terry as they sat down and waited for the curtain to rise. A few hours later when they stood to applaud, they all agreed.

Outside in Great Marlborough Street, the crowd was full of festive cheer and not a little festive spirit. The pubs were desperate to close but the last of the revellers, those with no homes to go to, were resisting landlords’ cries of “Have you no homes to go home to?”

Barry was waiting patiently outside Liberty, the Daimler purring gently and taxi drivers cursing him for causing a blockage. He simply smiled sweetly and expressed the opinion that they should perhaps return to their maternal parent and engage in coitus. Few, on seeing his size, gave any sort of response.

Once on board, the car pulled away and headed across Regent Street to Bond Street where Barry stopped again.

‘Okay kids, party time.’

Terry was already on the street and heading for a door where a queue of anxious youngsters were waiting to see if they were smart enough to get in. This was The Embassy Club and Terry simply walked to the front where he and his party were ushered in.

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‘Fucking hell, Phillip! Is your life always like this?’

Malcolm was finding it all hard to take in. Phillip considered his answer and on reflection replied.

‘Yeah, always, one long wild and very expensive party.’

Inside the crowd were having the best of times, dancing drinking and generally misbehaving. Phillip thought it was like a scene from an Evelyn Waugh novel and said so to Terry.

‘Before he got God dear, yes, but not after.’

They were led to an area behind a red rope barrier where a table awaited, loaded with cakes and more champagne. Terry popped a cork and filled the glasses.

‘A Merry Christmas to my dear friends!’

They clinked glasses and each of them downed that first drink in one before sitting down. Around them people were having the best of times, some perhaps far too good a time.

Malcolm whispered in Phillip’s ear.

‘Some of these guys are off their tits.’

‘I know.’

‘I don’t like it. Not drugs.’

‘Nor me, I can get high on good champagne and cream cakes.’

‘I’m serious Phillip, it’s not good.’

‘Sorry, I didn’t mean to be flippant.’

‘I know, God, I need to pee! Where is it?’

‘Do I look like I come here often?’

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‘Well tonight you do, you look totally at home, and so do I for that matter.’

Phillip kissed him hard on the lips.

‘Go and pee.’

Five minutes later he returned and could hardly contain his excitement. Sitting down he looked left and right before divulging the cause of his excitement. Dutifully they leant in to listen.

‘This place is wild. I’ve just seen someone from Coronation Street being sucked off by two young black guys in the toilets. No shame, just stood there with his trousers round his ankles. And his undies were dead shabby too.’

The night continued in much the same vein. People came to the table to say hello to Terry but he never allowed them to overtake his party and when it was time to go, the dutiful Barry was outside, ready.

By two thirty they were back in Chelsea where Barry looked after Maria and left Terry in charge of making coffee.

‘I’m not very good at this.’

Malcolm took over and produced a pot of tea instead, warming the pot by swirling hot water before spooning in the loose tea. Instinctively he found where Barry kept everything and very soon there were four mugs of hot tea. Barry joined them in the kitchen but they were all far too tired to chatter and very soon they decided to call it a night.

Phillip contrived to send Malcolm up first and then shooed Barry away. Terry looked up from his empty mug at Phillip.

‘I hope I did the right thing.’

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‘It was a perfect evening.’

‘I meant asking Malcolm.’

‘Oh, I see, well yes, he’s sweet, and funny and...’

‘Oh I know, he might not be the one, Mr Right, whatever. But I spent too many years on my own dismissing perfectly nice men because I thought Mr Right would come along on the next bus. And yes, you’re right, men are like buses, there will always be another one along in a minute. But will he be any better than the last one?’

‘Malcolm is great, I really like him, and I’m really glad he’s here Terry. You done good boss.’

With that he embraced Terry and held him for what might have been a moment too long. He could feel tears welling in his eyes and quickly excused himself until the morning.

‘Breakfast at ten and not a minute sooner.’ Terry called after him, but he was already in the lift to the top floor. In the room Malcolm was lying naked on the bed snoring gently. Phillip undressed, brushed his teeth and climbed quietly in beside him. Pulling up the covers disturbed Malcolm but he merely turned on his side and drew his knees up to his chest. Phillip switched off the lights and snuggled in behind to sleep.

In the darkness his mind darted back to earlier that day. Terry directing the taxi to Harley Street, the lack of detail about where he had been. Phillip worried himself awake and became restless. Slipping, as quietly as possible, out the bed he checked his watch. It was five thirty, still the middle of the night. He slipped on a towelling robe and went to the stairs. The lift would have woken a light sleeper so he walked down intending to go to the kitchen and make a drink. But when he reached the drawing room he saw that there was a light on. Pushing the door open he saw Terry sat at the large ornate bureau leafing through piles of letters.

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Terry jumped.

‘God, you gave me a start! What are you doing out of bed?’

‘Couldn’t sleep.’

‘Why not?’

‘I’m worried Terry, I heard you ask the taxi to take you to Harley Street. I’ve been worried since. Are you ill?’

‘Oh God! I had hoped to avoid all this. You’d better sit down.’

Terry went over to a side table and poured two brandies.

‘Here, drink this and sit and listen.’

‘So you are ill.’

‘I said listen. Okay, the thing is, I had been feeling rather poorly but being me I was putting off doing anything about it. I really didn’t want to spend my time with some horrid doctor sticking his finger up my bum. But Maria was on the case. She’s a remarkable woman you know and she called Carlos and then he called me. And of course he was anxious to get me to go over to the mainland and see a doctor but I decided to come back home and do it all in English. You don’t want to find out if you have something seriously wrong in a foreign language, do you? Anyway Maria stood over me while I booked the appointments and made the arrangements and it all coincided with Christmas and became very complicated. I really wanted to find out without having to talk about it, and I almost did until now.’

‘So the doctor, what did he say?’ Philip’s voice was anxious and he reached over and took Terry’s hand.

‘I had a string of tests a few days ago and today I went to find out the results. All clear, well, all clear for now.’

‘Not cancer.’

‘No, not cancer, just inflamed and a bit of a bladder infection. But all clear for now. I’m sorry I worried you but I didn’t want to spoil Christmas.’

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Phillip fell back in the chair and the tears welled in his eyes.

‘You really are the most ridiculous old man.’

‘Less of the old, I’ve told you about that before! Now come on, give this man in denial a big hug and then bugger off back to that red head in your bed.’

Phillip squeezed Terry tightly and as he did he felt that there was less to him than there had been. The flesh seemed weaker, the bones less robust and the muscles did not fight back. Terry had done his best to put his mind at rest with words, but his body was telling a different story. The words ‘All clear for now’ swam around in his head as he climbed the stairs back to bed and Malcolm. The red head was sprawled across the whole bed like a starfish and Phillip had to fight his way in. Malcolm mumbled and turned over. Phillip assumed the same spoon position as before but he lay awake for a long time before finally falling asleep.



# V

Morning arrived slightly in advance of a few sore heads.

When Phillip finally went down to the kitchen he found Maria and Malcolm drinking strong coffee and nursing their heads. Barry was trying to usher them out so that he could prepare breakfast and Terry was wondering if anyone was up for some buck's fizz. The suggestion was greeted with groans.

'Lightweights.'

'I'll have one.'

Phillip didn't fancy one really but he didn't want to start the day by saying no to anything that might please Terry.

'Excellent, now you lot up and out of Barry's way. He has work to do before he can escape. Up to the drawing room for a drink before brekkie. We can do gifts after.'

Reluctantly they agreed. Barry had squeezed fresh mandarins and Terry popped a bottle of Veuve Cliquot. The combination worked wonders and pretty soon they were all laughing about the efficacy of the mix as a pick-you-up. Breakfast followed. Barry had sliced the top off a huge round brioche and hollowed the centre out. He had then lined the inside with perfect slices of Fortnum's best smoked salmon and after filled it with delicious creamy scrambled eggs before replacing the lid. At the table everyone whooped with delights as he cut and served it, topping

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each portion with a spoon of caviar. Maria was beside herself with delight and demanded to know how he had made the eggs so creamy.

‘Twelve whole eggs plus three egg yolks, good butter and at the last minute a spoon of double cream. It makes them rich but it also stops the egg cooking and going hard. Oh yes, and white pepper, not black, very important.’

Maria nodded with delight as she ate the last scraps. Phillip and Malcolm cleared, insisting that Barry sit down and have a drink. While they did this Terry disappeared to the drawing room and started putting gifts under the tree. Philip and Malcolm had already put theirs there although Phillip had nothing for Malcolm as he was not meant to be there for another week. He slipped away and cornered Terry to explain.

‘All dealt with, there is a small box on my dressing table with cufflinks. Wrap them quickly and bring them down. I’ve bought him a shirt that they will look lovely with.’

‘You’re a star Terry, and I love you very much.’

Phillip gave him a peck on the cheek and dashed up to Terry’s room. On the dresser he found a small pale turquoise Tiffany box and in it perfect silver cufflinks with a red enamel design. He found paper and tape to wrap them and then attached a tag and signed it. It would be easy to slip them into the pile without being noticed.

As he finished Phillip started to realise that on the dresser, amongst the usual bottles of cologne, were a great many boxes of pills. They sent a chill down his spine and he didn’t hear Terry come into the room.

‘Come on you, you’re keeping everyone waiting. Ah, the pills! Yes, precautionary, until we know the whole story.’

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‘So not all clear then?’

‘Phillip, I’m a man of a certain age, despite my denials. Things start to go wrong. So far they have ruled out a whole load of scary stuff but there are still some tests to come, after New Year. Now I have never let things get in my way and I’m damned if they’re going to get in the way of us having the best Christmas we can. So put a smile on that face and get back down for presents - NOW!’

Phillip squeezed out a faint smile.

‘Listen, you’re going to have to do a whole lot better than that. Now SMILE! Better, come on, the others are twitching to see what presents they have.’

In the drawing room Maria had taken charge of reading the labels and handing out the gifts. Barry was in charge of folding the wrapping paper as it was pulled open. Malcolm was first and opened his shirt from Terry, then the cufflinks from Phillip. Barry loved his naked Greek men and the kid gloves and cashmere scarf from Terry. Maria cried when she opened the small gold crucifix that Phillip had bought for her and she smacked Terry hard on the knee when she opened a huge box of silk underwear. Malcolm gave Phillip a recording, Peter Pears singing English folk songs with Benjamin Britten at the piano.

‘How did you know?’

‘I’m not completely stupid. You played that *Midsummer Night’s Dream* over and over on your Walkman. I just had to look.’

‘Genius! I love it.’

Terry opened the books from Phillip, big volumes of pictures, *Ballets Russes*, Herb Ritts and Robert Mapplethorpe. Finally he opened the wild strawberries.

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‘I love them, thank you.’

Phillip opened an endless stream of small parcels from Terry, books, cologne, ties and shirts, cufflinks. They came and came and as they did, Phillip became more and more embarrassed.

‘This is all too much, Terry.’

‘Nonsense! Anyway, only one more.’

Barry finally brought in a huge package. Inside a set of beautiful luggage.

‘I think you might need them next year. Now come on everyone, a drink! I really fancy a snowball, then a walk by the river before we dress for lunch.’

Malcolm helped Phillip pile the gifts up on top of the cases and carry them up to their room.

‘My God, so many prezzies!’

‘I know, it’s embarrassing. I think we should put them into the cases to save space.’

‘Good idea.’

Malcolm unzipped the largest case. Inside was an envelope, smart, and on it in a precise hand the words “Not to be opened until Christmas night.”

‘Look at this.’

‘Oh no, not more! Oh, it’s only a letter, that’s okay.’

‘Don’t you want to open it?’

‘Yes, but I can wait. Put it back now and let’s go for this walk.’

The Chelsea embankment was quiet with hardly any traffic. A few

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people were out walking and there was the strangeness of people who would never normally speak wishing each other a Merry Christmas. Maria walked along with Malcolm chattering away despite the fact that he spoke no Spanish and she could not penetrate his accent. Phillip walked behind with Terry in silence. When they got as far as the Chelsea Bridge they turned North and headed for Sloane Square, which was equally abandoned. For the most part the good people of the borough had decamped to their rural estates or to the continent.

‘I love Chelsea when the posh totty has left. No blue stockings and Lodens, no Hermés headscarves, no kids in brown cord and amber sweaters. It’s bliss.’

‘Are you homesick Terry?’

‘For London? Maybe a little. Much as I love the island and the weather, there’s something nice about being a bit cold and a bit damp and a bit grumpy.’

‘Why not come back, for part of the year at least, winter in Ibiza and Summer in Chelsea.’

‘It could work. I quite like summer in London.’

‘So what’s stopping you? Tax?’

‘Well there is that, but not really. Too many ghosts I thought but actually, this week, apart from the doctors, has been good, really good. I might well take you up on the idea.’

‘Good, I’d like that too. I missed you after I came back. Life has been a bit dull, you know. Not much happens.’

‘Oh it will. Next year things will happen, I promise you that. Now come on, let’s catch Morecombe and Wise up. Malcolm is a sweetie chattering to my mad Spanish housekeeper.’

‘Yes, he’s sweet, I know.’

Back at the house they all went to their rooms to dress. The code Terry announced was smart but not black tie. Malcolm looked panicked, but Terry winked at Phillip in a way that he knew meant

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that matters had been taken in hand. In the room Phillip found the last of the three Yves Saint Laurent suits ready with a pure white Oxford button down shirt and a perfect silk tie in royal blue with white polka dots. Against the grey pinstripe it looked stunning. Malcolm's hanger had an immaculate blue blazer with a pair of grey flannels and a cream shirt with a vermilion polka dot tie.

'Oh, my God! I want your tie.'

'But it's a gift from Terry.'

'He won't mind. Come on, swap.'

'How long have we got?' Malcolm grinned.

'Long enough, I think.'

When they finally went down, Phillip's cheeks were the same colour as the tie.

'Phillip, you're a very naughty boy.'

Phillip blushed more.

'Give Malcolm his tie back this minute.'

'Oh, the tie, yes, I see, sorry.'

He pulled the knot loose and handed Malcolm the vibrant tie. Maria came in wearing a simple tweed suit in shocking pink with lime green and white flecks set off by a pair of Chanel earrings. Terry was in navy wool, double breasted, over a pale blue shirt and plain blue tie.

'Well, I think we pass muster, shall we go, I have pre-ordered everything so we can't be late.'

Barry held open the door to the Daimler and Terry sat in the back with Malcolm and Maria. Phillip rode up front with Barry.

'So what are your plans Barry?'

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‘I’m off to Bow to see my brother and his family. They love it when I go over in this and we’ll take a spin around the city, then a turkey dinner and terrible veg. The sister-in-law needs locking up, she’s the worst cook in the world but it’s Christmas – what can you do?’

Barry’s talk of family loyalty gave Phillip a pang of guilt. What was his mother doing right now? Of course he knew the truth, she was in with the neighbours, sleeping off a terrible lunch and waiting for the Queen’s Speech.

‘It sounds good to me Barry. Family is a good thing.’

‘Yes, if you can tell them the truth but my life is so full of lies.’

‘You mean they don’t know you’re...’

‘God no! They think I’m a bit of a ladies man, How stupid is that?’ and he laughed but the laughter sounded hollow and sad.

The Daimler swung around Hyde Park Corner and headed up Park Lane before swinging into Mayfair and drawing up outside the Connaught. Immediately a flunky dashed out to hold open the doors and help them out.

‘What time do you want me back Mr T?’

‘Seven-ish should do it Barry but no rush, take your time. Here, this is for you, a little bonus.’

Terry threw a fat envelope on to the grey leather passenger seat.

‘Treat yourself, or the kids. Just have some fun. Bye and thank you.’

Inside the reception Malcolm was looking twitchy.

‘Relax Malcolm. Boys with golden hair were born to dine in places like this.’

Malcolm laughed and felt more at ease. The duty manager had come out to greet Terry and took them through to a lounge where a bottle

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of Cristal was waiting to be opened.

‘Compliments of The Connaught sir.’

‘Thank you very much, it will certainly set the tone for what I am sure will be a delightful afternoon.’

After opening the bottle and filling the glasses, the manager reversed out of the room.

‘Why did he walk out backwards?’ Asked Malcolm

‘Because, my dear, he recognises that he is in the presence of royalty, three queens and the Duchess of Ibiza. Cheers!’

Dinner was superb, unpretentious and perfectly cooked. The wines that Terry had ordered were sublime and came to the table with such pomp that they all knew they were drinking from the best end of a very prestigious list.

After dinner they retired to a lounge for coffee and there Terry sat back and smiled before slipping into a light sleep. When Barry arrived to drive them home, Maria woke him gently and without any fuss. Terry pretended that he had been awake all along but the others knew that he was tired and Maria and Phillip exchanged a worried glance.

In Chelsea they went straight up to the drawing room and chattered. Barry made coffee and offered brandies but no one wanted, or needed, more booze. By ten o’clock they all decided that the day had been a huge success but it was time to declare it over. Terry sat in his chair as each went over to kiss him and thank him for making it such fun. Phillip was last and simply squeezed his hand tightly. He smiled as he looked directly into his eyes.

Up in their room, Malcolm was careful folding his trousers and hanging up his blazer.

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'I've never had clothes like this before.'

'They suit you. You looked great.'

'You too.'

'Thanks, but it's a... a bit unreal, all this. So way beyond my pocket.'

'Beyond your pocket? What about my pocket? This is like winning the pools, mega! I'll never see a week like this again.'

'Why not? Who knows what will happen.'

'I guess, but you know what I mean.'

'Yeah, I know what you mean.'

Phillip was rolling his tie and wondering where to put it when his eye fell on the envelope. He picked it up and stared at it.

'Aren't you going to open it?'

'I'm scared.'

'What of?'

'Of what might be inside. Terry is so full of surprises, all of this, you being here. So what can he have put in an envelope?'

'Well there's only one way to find out.'

'Okay.'

Phillip slipped his finger under the flap and opened the letter. Inside was a piece of folded paper and on it four words.

"Merry Christmas, Love Terry"

As Phillip pulled it open something heavy fell to the floor. Malcolm dropped down to pick it up.

'It's a key.'

'A key?'

'Yes, it looks like a house key.'

Phillip asked Malcolm to wait upstairs and went down to see if Terry was still awake. He found him at the desk in the drawing room.

‘So you opened the envelope?’

‘Yes, it’s a key. I don’t understand Terry.’

‘Here, it goes with this.’

Terry turned to Phillip and smiling handed him a bundled document.

‘I still don’t understand.’

‘It’s your Christmas present.’

‘I’ve been getting presents from you all week.’

‘Tokens. This is the real thing.’

‘I still don’t understand.’

‘It’s the key to the house. The house in Ibiza.’

‘A key to your house?’

‘You know for someone so bright you can be remarkably slow. It’s the key and the deeds to what is now your house.’

‘Are you mad? You can’t give me your house.’

‘I’m not mad and I can, in fact I have. It’s yours, lock stock and barrel.’

‘But Terry...’

‘Please Phillip, no buts. It’s your house and yes, I know you can’t afford it, which is why there is a trust to help you maintain it. My lawyers have put in a clause that allows me to live there for as long as I should choose, then it’s all yours, to do with as you will. You can sell it, or keep it and let it, or live in it or, well whatever.’

‘It’s too much.’

‘I know.’

‘I can’t accept it.’

‘Why not. Think it through. Who else am I going to leave it to. This year you changed me. I’d lost the plot and you put me right. Now I have a bit of a health scare and I need to get my affairs in order. This is stage one. Stage two I will deal with after the holiday. Please accept the house. Please help me get through this.’

Phillip put the key and the bundle of deeds down and walked over to the drinks tray. He rummaged around, found a bottle of Cardinal

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Mendoza and poured two stiff measures into balloons. Turning to Terry he passed him the drink and then clinked his hard against it.

‘Mi casa es tu casa.’

‘Mi casa es tu casa.’

They both smiled and downed their brandies in one.



# VI

Boxing Day came quickly.

The night before Phillip lied to Malcolm and said the key was a joke present. The truth was hard enough for him to take in and he didn't want to deal with Malcolm's reaction as well. They stayed in bed late. Barry knocked at nine and delivered a tray of tea and sausage sandwiches with melted cheese. Malcolm was still asleep.

'The festive breakfast number two.'

'Thanks Barry. Is Terry up yet?'

'No, I'm letting him sleep. He seems very tired.'

'Good idea. I'll leave him in peace for a while.'

'Maria has gone to church. She was a bit teary this morning and said that she needed to pray. I drove her over to Westminster Cathedral and said I'd collect her in an hour.'

'Is she okay?'

'She's worried, we're all worried.'

'Yes, well let's make things as easy as possible for him by not talking about it.'

'It's not easy.'

'It has to be easy. He's filled the week with stuff to do.'

'True, so that's the plan.'

'That's the plan.'

Malcolm stirred.

'What plan?'

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‘I’ll tell you later, eat your sandwich.’

Terry stayed in his room until lunchtime. Barry prepared a table of food from the Fortnum’s hamper and opened some bottles of apple juice but no wine. When they had all sat at the table Terry spoke.

‘No booze today until tonight. Is that alright?’

Everyone agreed that it was a good idea and tucked into the ham and the potted Stilton. There were pickles and sauces and anchovy paste. The apple juice was a blessed relief. Conversation was kept light, Terry retold the story of Roger Vaux and they all decided that it would be fun to seek out the wife and kids in Norbury, but also far too cruel.

Phillip had not spoken a word about Terry’s huge gift to anyone, so when Terry brought up the subject himself he blushed a deep scarlet.

‘So Phillip is now the owner of the Spanish house and I am the tenant. Maria of course will still work for me and I have another gift for her.’

Terry handed Maria an envelope. She opened it and inside was another key. She looked at the key and then at Terry and shrugged her shoulders.

‘It’s the little house across the street. I bought it for you so that you can have your own home but still be close to work.’

Tears filled her eyes, then she started to protest, very loudly and in Spanish.

‘My dear Maria, the deal has been done. The house is yours and my Spanish is not good enough to understand what you are saying now.’

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She flung her arms around him and sobbed on to his shoulder.

‘Stop that, you’re ruining a good cashmere cardigan. Now Barry, I also have news for you. I’m selling Cheyne Walk, it’s too big and empty for far too much of the year. It’s on the market as of January but without the mews. That now belongs to you.’

He threw Barry a set of keys.

‘I’d be grateful if I could keep the car in the garage for the time being, but the flat is now in your name. And before you ask, I have already bought an apartment around the corner, a new one with lifts and a porter. I picked up the keys the other day so we can all go and take a look tomorrow. I don’t want any discussion about this. It’s all done and dealt with. Nothing else changes. Your jobs are the same as ever and Phillip and I have already discussed what will happen at the house in Ibiza.’

That afternoon everyone lazed in stunned silence. Phillip finally found a scrabble set and played with Terry and Malcolm for a while but their hearts weren’t in it. Maria produced a bag with some knitting and Barry was busy in the kitchen preparing something for supper before the ballet. That evening they would be driving over to the Coliseum to see *The Nutcracker* and Maria was very excited. Full scale classical ballet was not big on the small Balearic Island and this would fulfill a lifetime dream.

At five, Terry announced that it was of course a black tie event and that threw everyone into trauma. Maria panicked about her hair, Malcolm panicked about his hair and Barry, who was also joining them at the theatre prayed that his DJ, bought years ago when he had a job as a night club bouncer, would still fit.

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Terry dressed quietly and was fiddling with his cufflinks when Phillip knocked on the door to his room.

‘Come on in.’

‘Do you need a hand with those?’

‘Yes, I’m all fingers and thumbs. Do you like ballet? I do, I love all the silliness, all the pretty costumes and of course the boys in tights.’

‘Stop wittering Terry, and stand still.’

The cufflinks in place, Phillip adjusted Terry’s bow tie and smiled.

‘That’s better. Barry says supper is ready when we are.’

‘Okay, let’s do it.’

‘You know you’ve really shaken everyone today.’

‘I know, I’m sorry, but I couldn’t see any other way of doing it, and I did need to do it. I need to start putting things in order just in case...’

‘Yes, I know, just in case.’

Supper was simple, prawn sandwiches and Christmas cake. The ballet was a twinkling delight but by eleven they were all exhausted and ready for their beds.



# VII

The following morning Barry produced a mountain of bacon sandwiches and pots of tea and coffee.

They sat in the kitchen to eat and, apart from some idle chatter, the mood was quiet. Barry bustled about and tried to lighten the moment by whistling Christmas tunes but it didn't really work.

Once they had all eaten and Barry had cleared away and stacked the dish-washer Terry stood up and made an announcement.

'Alright you miserable lot, it's time for hats and coats and a brisk walk to the new apartment. And while you're at it you can all try to muster a smile.'

It was a short walk away and once inside they took the lift to the top floor. Terry took out a bunch of keys and opened the doors. Inside was brilliant white and spacious but there was not a stick of furniture. Malcolm and his new best friend Maria dashed off to explore with Barry. Terry steered Phillip across the main room and opened the glass doors on to the roof terrace that looked South towards the Royal Hospital.

'What do you think?'

'It's very nice, very smart, but it looks huge.'

'It's got four bedrooms but it's half the size of the house and easier to live in. I think it makes sense.'

'Yes, I think it does.'

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Terry fiddled with the keys as they chatted.

‘So, half the year here?’

‘Well, for the moment I think being here will be the right thing to do, and then we’ll see. Here, you’ll need these.’

Terry reached out and put two keys into Phillip’s hand.

‘Mi casa es tu casa, Phillip.’

