



Dance Dirty With Me (Dance Lovers Collection #3)

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Category: Historical

Description: Dirty Dancing but make it gay... Fall in love with Baby and Johnny all over again

Johnny

Dancing is all I know, it's a tough life living on the edge of never knowing when the next pay packet will come. Getting seasonal work at Poplins at least adds some stability.

Middle class, preppy guests don't fit in with the staff but the pretty kid that everyone calls Baby can't seem to stay away.

When Penny gets into trouble he steps in to help, he even manages to get through my defences.

Problem is, keeping my sexuality a secret is important to keep my job, so is he worth risking it all?

Baby

Spending the last few weeks of my summer before university in a busy seaside resort isn't my idea of fun, but my family insists. While trying to avoid being dragged into endless activities, I stumble into a staff party where I find Johnny, the gorgeous leader of the entertainment staff. He's everything I'm not—cocky and confident, and lives a life I can only dream about.

I've always been taught to help out when I can, so when the opportunity to do some good arises, I can't say no, and when it happens again, my confession will rock the foundations of my family and everything they thought about me.

Am I willing to risk it all to do the right thing?

Total Pages (Source): 33

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:13 am

“Are we nearly there yet?” My sister Lisa’s voice pulls me from my dozing. I’d fallen asleep against the window of the car, so I stretch my neck to iron out the kinks and wipe the heel of my hand across my mouth in case I drooled.

“Not long now,” dad calls behind him and steers the Ford Cortina down another narrow lane.

Feeling cramped in the back seat, I unfold my arms and knock a box, probably full of makeup, off the seat.

“Baby!” she shouts at me, and starts to gather it together. ‘Mum, he’s being mean.’

“I’m not. It was an accident,” I reply heatedly.

It was an accident but I’m not going to apologise.

I have no idea why she needs to travel with so much stuff anyway.

And she’s the one who’s usually mean to me, which is her prerogative being three years older than me.

I’m the baby of the family, which is how I got my nickname, but I don’t mind.

It’s always made me feel a bit special as it’s hard being the younger brother to someone like my sister.

“Can you see the sea yet?” My mum pipes up and our bickering is now forgotten. I

share a look with Lisa, remembering the holidays we used to have when we were kids and looking for the sea was an excitement.

“Mum, we’re not five anymore,” scoffs Lisa.

“No, you’re not.” Mum’s voice holds a touch of sadness. “You’re all grown up, and it’s our last time together before Baby goes to university.”

She’s right, we haven’t had a family holiday for at least ten years.

Dad’s been busy becoming one of the best consulting doctors in Sheffield, so apart from a few days spent hiking in the Peak District, this is the longest time he’s taken off recently, and I think it’s mostly because of Mum’s constant nagging.

Three weeks at the Poplins resort on the East Coast isn’t my idea of fun, but Dad received an invite from one of his patients, the owner of the resort, so.

.. I only hope I can make it into Skegness, which I’ve heard has a good mod community.

I’m not really one of them, but their music’s cool, and anything has got to be better than three weeks stuck in a holiday camp with my parents and older sister who only worries about her appearance.

“We wouldn’t see the sea unless we drove into it,” I point out peevishly. There’s nothing to see at all, just miles of flat roads, fields, and hedges. “It feels like we’re driving into the middle of nowhere.”

“It looks idyllic,” Dad says wistfully, and I feel a small twinge of guilt.

He’s probably looking forward to some down time as he’s been working hard lately.

I lean forward and squeeze his shoulder, and he pats my hand and gives me a small smile in the rear-view mirror.

He's always been my mentor and rock. He does deserve this break.

The large white rectangular buildings of the holiday camp loom into view, framing a small ornamental lake with fountains. Beyond them I can see hundreds of cabins, a large swimming pool, sports courts, and a funfair.

Dad pulls up outside the central building, which is labelled reception. Above that is written the slogan—sunshine whatever the weather.

I climb out of the car and gaze around. The place is milling with people, holiday makers, and I assume staff as they all seem to be wearing similar blazers—different colours, but they all have a P emblazoned on the pocket.

“Jake!” We all swivel to see a large man in a suit walking towards us. He shakes my father's hand, then places an arm around his shoulders, and with the other he gestures to the camp.

“I'd have to give this all up if it wasn't for you.”

“You're looking well, Max,” my father replies and they fall into talking. I move to get our cases out of the boot of the car and see a man, maybe a couple of years older than me and wearing a dark green blazer, already there.

“Billy, put them in cabin A12,” Max calls out to him.

“Right-ho, sir,” Billy answers, and picking up a couple of cases he asks us to follow him. I pick up the other cases and fall into step with him.

There's a loud crackle and then a voice comes out of nowhere .

Campers, are you ready for fun? There's croquet on the south lawn, water polo in the pool, and don't forget our dance class in the Empress ballroom starting in thirty minutes.

It makes me jump and Billy chuckles.

"You'll soon get used to it."

My mum has reclaimed Dad from Max's clutches and they're walking behind us.

"We should go to the dance class, Jake. I can't remember the last time we danced together. Lisa and Baby can learn too."

"I'm here to relax," Dad grumbles.

"There'll still be plenty of time for that."

Billy stops outside a small wooden cabin, though looking round it's larger than some of the others we've passed.

It has three steps up to a covered deck set with a few comfortable looking chairs.

There's a door with a window on either side.

Billy unlocks the door and carries some cases in.

I can see there's a small hall with a door to each side, and beyond that a larger space with a table, chairs, and a sofa.

“Here you go, sir, ma’am,” he says re-emerging and handing over the key to my dad. “You’ll be eating in dining hall one, breakfast is at eight, lunch at one, and dinner is at six-thirty, but don’t worry, you’ll be reminded.”

He gives me a grin as he points out the tannoy post not ten yards from our cabin. I try not to shudder at the thought of it going off again, and as if it senses my discomfort it crackles.

Don’t forget the first heats of our annual beauty contest start tomorrow .

What’s worse than the loud voice eight feet high in the air, is the squeal my sister gives close enough to almost pierce my ear drum.

“Mummy, did you hear that, a beauty contest, I have to enter. Help me, please. I need to decide what to wear and I want to make sure I look perfect. Oh, I didn’t bring the coral shoes, they would have worked better with the yellow sundress.”

“But you brought ten pairs.” My mum tries to placate her but allows herself to be dragged into the cabin anyway.

“And there I was thinking this holiday would be restful.” Dad rolls his eyes and I smile at him, though I don’t know why he thought Lisa would act differently.

He picks up the remaining cases and starts up the steps. I sigh and follow him. It’s not looking like much fun so far.

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“Step left two, three, four, and right two, three, four.” The elegant blonde-haired woman calls, and I shuffle left and right with very little idea of what I’m doing.

I look daggers at my sister, but she’s too busy flouncing about and doesn’t see it.

I’d planned to stay in the cabin and read, maybe sit out on the decking.

People watching but not interacting. But no, my sister makes some comment about how I’m always reading, as if there’s something wrong with that, and I get hauled along to a dance lesson.

I’ve got nothing against dancing as an activity—apart from the fact I’m not very good at it—but it’s very much an activity for couples.

Men and women more specifically, and that does not appeal to me.

I’d much rather dance with a man, but that’s not allowed.

Not in public anyway. I know there are certain places you can go where men dance with other men, but I’ve never been.

It’s certainly not going to be here at a family holiday camp.

And who would want to dance with me anyway?

I’m aware I barely look my eighteen years.

“Sorry!” I mutter to the poor old lady to my left who’s foot I’ve just stepped on... again.

“Find a partner!” The lady calls and makes a beeline for my dad, which I suppose is a blessing as my mum whirls me around and I’m not left looking lost on the sidelines or having to step on the toes of whoever is unlucky enough to be left with me.

My mum doesn’t seem to mind that I have no clue what I’m doing, she’s just enjoying herself, and when my dad does come over to us he looks happy too.

I leave them dancing together and escape back to the cabin, where I lie down on my bed and manage to fit in a few pages of *The City and the Pillar* by Gore Vidal before they reappear.

“Are you hiding in here already?” Lisa asks as she opens the door to the tiny room I’m forced to share with her while we’re here.

“Don’t I get to relax on this holiday too?” I sigh and turn the page, hoping she gets the message.

“You should try new things, mix more with people, Baby.” She plonks herself down on the other narrow bed. “Get out in the sun, you might even lose that pale look you have. You might even have fun.”

I snap my book shut, knowing I’m not going to get any more peace to be able to read while she’s here.

“Fine, I will go out,” I announce, hoisting myself off the bed. “I want to get a newspaper anyway.

“Urgh, is that all you care about? ”

“We might be on holiday, but the world still exists around us, and I like to know what’s going on. Having an interest in world events is important.” I know she doesn’t understand and thinks it doesn’t affect her, which is proven by her next words.

“They’re having a knobbly knees competition down by the boating lake,” she says to my retreating back. “You’ll win for sure.”

I shut the door on her laughter.

“Mum, Dad, I’m going out for a bit,” I say to my parents who are relaxing on the decking.

I jump down the steps and definitely do not head towards the lake.

I can’t think of anything worse than showing off my knees to be ridiculed.

Instead I walk towards the reception building.

I want to know if there’s anywhere I can get a daily newspaper from.

The receptionist gives me a map of the camp and highlights a couple of small shops on site that have a newsagent’s section.

I follow her directions and buy a copy of The Guardian .

I take my time walking back to the cabin, and decide to explore the other buildings on the way.

I might as well find out which is our dining hall among the vast spaces.

The back door to one of the halls is open and I stop at the sound of Max’s voice

wafting out.

I creep a little closer, staying in the shadows.

Max is standing bullishly in the centre of a group of employees.

“It’s changeover day, so we’ll have a number of people who won’t know how we operate at first. But we have three thousand holidaymakers on site, so you be polite and you watch your manners.

They’ll be expecting a good time, so you show them a great time— all of them, including the ugly ones.

You serve them, you agree with them, dance with them, make them feel like they’re getting the best Poplins treatment. Am I clear?”

There’s a general murmur of assent as he finishes and a few people get up to move. Then I hear a noise from across the dining hall and I press myself further into the shadows whilst craning my neck to see.

About a dozen employees walk towards the group, only a few of them dressed in blue Poplins blazers.

I suppress a gasp as I see they’re spearheaded by the most gorgeous man I’ve ever seen.

He’s not in a blazer, and he walks defiantly, as if he doesn’t care one bit.

His tight black trousers hug his legs and accentuate a sway in his hips I can barely tear my eyes from.

His black T-shirt is skin tight and shows off defined muscles and bulging biceps.

His dark hair is slicked back from his chiseled features and curls slightly at his neck, and I watch transfixed as he leads the group up to where Max is glaring at him. He looks every inch the bad boy, exceedingly dangerous, and I want to learn everything I can about him.

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“You’re late.” Max’s tone is sharp. It grates on me, but then it always does.

He looks over all of us with a barely suppressed sneer.

“Can not one of you tell the time?” he says as if we’re all halfwits.

It doesn’t matter that I was going through a dance routine with the rest of the team, and that Laney slipped and we had to strap her ankle so she’ll be able to work tonight.

I don’t bother telling him that; I’ve tried before but he doesn’t listen.

He just wants yes men and sycophants, which his college kids are more than happy to provide.

Max steps forward, moving his bulk into my space, and I try not to let the disgust show on my face as he leans in close.

“Just keep your noses clean and do the job I pay you for. And next time, make sure you turn up in uniform.” A speck of spittle lands on my cheek. He turns and lumbers away, his dismissal evident. I wipe my face with a grimace.

“What’s the matter, peasant boy? Not used to being told what to do by your betters? ”

I don’t need to look up to know who the speaker is. Robbie Gould, a smartarse loudmouth who thinks he’s above the rest of us just because he goes to some posh university.

“You’d better watch out, Max won’t put up with such tardy behaviour.”

I walk over to him and he rises from his seat. He’s tall but not quite as tall as me.

“Is that a threat, college boy?” I growl.

“It doesn’t need to be, does it?” He smirks at me, but I notice the half step he takes back. “I reckon you can fuck it all up by yourself.”

“You just put the food on the tables and leave the fancy stuff to me,” I reply, tired of him and the rest of Max’s favourites.

I push past him and leave, pleased to see the rest of the entertainment team follow me and give Robbie and his friends the same glare.

He’s been on my case all summer, like he gets some sort of kick out of goading me.

I don’t normally rise to his taunts, but today I don’t feel like taking his shit any longer.

I walk back to the staff quarters and my cabin in a foul mood.

The trouble is, I really need this job. This is my fourth season dancing at Poplins, and it’s good to know I have employment for at least six months of the year.

There’s talk of extending the season to almost all year round, which would be welcome.

There aren’t many opportunities for a dancer right now and I have no idea how to do anything else.

I wasn't one for exams and left school as soon as I could at fifteen.

I eye the blue blazer hanging up on the back of the door.

It defines me as part of the entertainment staff, which is better than the yellow of the waiters and the green of the porters I suppose.

But I don't wear it while we rehearse, which we'd been doing just before the meeting.

If I'd returned to change, I'd have been even later.

We get one blazer and one pair of trousers only, and if we need more or damage them, it's taken out of our wages. So I only have the one set, and I look after them, which means not wearing them to rehearse in.

I put on a record and rest for a while. We aren't needed until after dinner, and it takes a couple of hours to feed the thousands of campers. Those who finish early will be entertained by the orchestra in the ballroom, then I'll lead the evening dance with Penny.

I'm about to start getting ready when there's a knock on the door, and I open it to see Penny standing on the covered porch with tears streaming down her face.

I stand aside and let her in, leading her over to the one chair I have. Penny and I have been dancing together for years; it was she who got me the job at Poplins just a few years after I left school. She's usually so strong, so it's a surprise to see her upset.

"What is it?" I ask, concerned, and she quietly tells me her news.

"I'll do what I can to help, you know that," I tell her as I give her a hug. We've always looked out for each other. She nods against my chest and pulls away, her tears

now dried.

“I need to go and make sure I don’t look like a puffy-eyed panda,” she says with a brave smile that holds a lot of sadness.

I pace my small cabin for a long time after she’s left. I don’t have any answers for her, but I meant what I said about helping her. She’s the closest I have to a sister and she’s always looked out for me, so of course I’ll stick by her .

“Shit!” I notice how late it is and have to wash and dress in my uniform in record time.

Despite my exchange earlier with Robbie, if I’m late to the actual performances, Max will have a fit.

I rush across the ground and make it to the ballroom just in time.

I’m pleased to see Penny is already there and looking a lot brighter.

As I take her hand to lead her onto the dance floor, I give it a squeeze. We’ll figure it out somehow.

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We're just taking our places in the dining hall when Max comes over with two people in tow. I notice that one of them is the kid I saw square up to the gorgeous man earlier.

He's dressed in a yellow blazer and Max puts his arm around him in a familiar way.

"This is Robbie, and he'll be your waiter while you're here. I hand pick our waiters from the best universities. Robbie here is at Oxford, and he's been with us each summer."

"Baby's going to Cambridge in the autumn," my dad says proudly, and Robbie gives me a supercilious smile. I don't think it's the ancient rivalry between the two universities that causes it; I imagine he just looks at everyone like that.

"Robbie, these are my special guests, so you treat them well, you understand?"

"Yes sir," Robbie replies and gives my sister a long look. Of course she preens a little under his gaze .

"This is my granddaughter, Nicola," Max says, and I look up into the face of a young woman, maybe my age or a year or two older.

She has mousey brown hair and thick horn-rimmed glasses, and she's dressed in a maroon Poplins blazer and a white pleated skirt.

She beams round at us, her gaze landing on me for a second before she's ushered away by Max.

He works his way through the tables, greeting people on his way.

My dad, always impressed by those who want to be educated, asks Robbie what he's studying.

"Economics and management, sir. Just about to start my final year," he replies, and I see my father nod. He asks him more questions about his studies in between him bringing us our food and clearing the table.

"He's an impressive young man," my father says to me as we leave the table. "He has his career all mapped out."

"I do too, Dad." It's not strictly true. I don't have a clear path ahead, but I want to study law so I can help people. The ones who need it the most.

"I know you want to make a difference, and you will, Baby," he says with the soft smile he reserves for me. He's always tried to make the world a better place if he can, and I want to follow in his footsteps doing the same.

He opens the door to the ballroom and holds it for us to enter.

Lisa gives a squeal of delight. It might look like a large square building on the outside, in keeping with the rest of the buildings in this section of the camp, but inside it's opulent and ornate.

There's a large raised stage at one end, where an orchestra is seated playing soft music.

In front of the stage and taking up most of the space is a dance floor where there are a few couples dancing .

Arranged around the edge of the room are tables and chairs. My mum selects a table and we sit down. Lisa looks around her with wide eyes.

“Look at all these pretty dresses. I knew I should have brought the blue with the pink roses.” I tune her out as she talks excitedly to Mum, a skill I’ve learnt over the years.

Instead I people watch. There are a wide mix of families and couples, as well as a few very elegant ladies on their own.

Dotted around are a few people in the characteristic blue blazers of the entertainment staff.

Some of them are engaging with holidaymakers, encouraging them to get up and dance.

A shadow falls across our table, and I look up to see Nicola standing there and looking straight at me.

“Shall we dance?”

I can’t think of anything I’d like to do less, but my mum practically pushes me out of the chair.

“Yes, go on, Baby.” My dad looks like it’s some kind of honour as Nicola tugs me towards the dance floor.

I try to remember at least a few of the steps from the dance lesson this afternoon so I don’t actually stand on Nicola’s toes, but it’s not elegant.

But if she notices my shuffling, which is not in time to any rhythm the orchestra is playing, she doesn’t mention it.

The music ends and the floor starts clearing. I'm just about to use it as an excuse to return to my table when a group enters and stands in a line. I recognise them from earlier, when they arrived during Max's briefing.

My eyes land on the man in the centre..

. the gorgeous one. He looks like he's the leader, and next to him is the blonde woman who took our dance class earlier.

They dance as a group for the next ten minutes—a formation dance, all perfectly in time with each other—and they finish to well-deserved, thunderous applause.

The dancers start inviting the guests to dance, and soon the floor is filled with dancing couples again.

Nicola pulls me into the middle, my chance of escape firmly gone.

A new tune starts up and I see the lead couple dancing.

They move together as one, though, and it's spectacular.

They whirl around the dance floor as if they own it, couples moving out of their way.

I can't stop watching them and almost trip over my own feet, receiving an exasperated sigh from Nicola.

“Who are they?” I blurt, curiosity getting the better of me.

“Them?” Nicola nods towards the dancing couple, her tone brimming with contempt.

“That's Johnny and Penny, they're the head of the entertainment staff. But they should be dancing with the guests, selling dance lessons, not showing off like that.

It's not good for business."

"I think they look wonderful," I say and receive a look like I'm naive and have a lot to learn.

As I watch them move effortlessly round the dance floor, I can't help the fleeting wish that I could dance like that.

After a very impressive whirl they stop suddenly, step apart, and each choose a holidaymaker to dance with, the beautiful man selecting one of the very elegant ladies I noticed was alone earlier.

"That's told them," Nicola says smugly, and I follow her gaze to see her grandfather glaring across the room at them.

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Good morning, campers. Are you ready for another fun-filled day?

I groan and pull the pillow over my head, drowning out the list of ways I can fill my day with fun that the voice over the tannoy is determined to tell me.

But I only get a few minutes rest before Lisa starts talking to me.

Urgh, I never have to share my space with her normally, so this feels like torture.

She begins to tell me about the heats for the beauty contest she's determined to enter.

If it's designed as a tactic to get me out of bed, it's effective, as I can't stand it any more and rise.

I pull on some trousers and a short-sleeved polo shirt and go into the main part of the cabin.

My parents aren't awake yet, so I go to the dining hall by myself for some breakfast. I'm just about finished when I see Nicola enter the hall and look around, then she spies me and starts to walk over.

I'm certainly not in the mood to talk to her right now, so I hurriedly finish and make my way to the exit.

I almost run straight into Mum, Dad, and Lisa.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?" Dad asks.

“I heard there was a donkey derby on the beach.” I say the first thing that comes to mind, and the only activity that had filtered into my brain from the tannoy earlier.

I don't wait for their reply, but I can feel Lisa's glare on my back as I scurry away and duck between two buildings so I'm out of sight.

I head towards the beach, but instead of staying near the activities organised by Poplins, I turn and pass the group of sad-looking donkeys—though I'm pretty sure donkeys always look like that—and walk along the coast. Further away from the resort are sand dunes, and I wander amongst them for a while before sinking down in a secluded dune and pulling my book out of my back pocket. I read in peace for a couple of hours.

It's the thirst from sitting in the sun that drives me back to the camp, but instead of going back to our cabin, I buy a bottle of dandelion and burdock from one of the shops, as well as today's paper.

I meander through the site, past the croquet lawns, the swimming pools, and the boating lake, successfully not getting roped into taking part in any of the activities.

I see a dog show taking place on one of the lawns, and a diving exhibition.

When I get back to the cabin, I'm pleased to see my family aren't there, and I manage to read the paper in peace before they return.

“Baby, look!” Lisa bounds up the steps to the covered porch and thrusts a piece of paper in my face. It's too close for me to read, but I don't need to anyway.

“I got second place in the first round of the contest, which means I qualify for the next one in a week's time.”

She clutches her certificate to her chest and does a twirl, nearly bumping into Mum and Dad who are just arriving.

“I need to work out what I’m going to wear for the swimwear round,” she says as if it’s the most important and urgent thing in her life, and it probably is.

She drags Mum inside to suffer her fate, though I firmly blame her for how Lisa is.

My dad sinks into one of the chairs with a long-suffering sigh, and I can’t help but let out a snort.

He raises an eyebrow at me and holds out his hand to request the paper.

“I think I need to immerse myself in something with more levity for a while.”

I hand it over and pull out my book, and we read in companionable silence until it’s time to go to dinner.

As we walk to the dining hall, Lisa links her arm through mine.

“How was the donkey derby?” she asks loud enough for our parents to hear. She knows me far too well.

“Spectacular. The small brown one won.” It’s probably the truth; they all looked small and brown to me when I passed them on the beach.

The after-dinner entertainment begins with a magic show.

It’s mildly interesting, but the rest of the guests seem to enjoy it .

Then there are a couple of comedy acts, which are pretty amusing and I laugh out

loud a few times.

There's the promise of an open mic night sometime during the week, as well as talk of Dave Allen coming to do a show at the weekend.

Then the floor is cleared of seats for dancing, and I try to sit back in the shadows but Nicola appears within a few minutes.

The only way I'm going to get out of her singling me out is to tell her, my parents, or both the truth—that I prefer men.

But that's not going to happen. Not ever, if I can help it.

It's forbidden. The law changed last year for those over twenty-one, but even then, it's just not acceptable in society.

My hope is that when I get to Cambridge I might find a group of like-minded men, and then I won't feel so alone.

But owning up to my family isn't in any of my plans, so I suffer dancing with Nicola, but I'm very careful to never lead her on.

Maybe I can be so dull she'll leave me alone; it's the only strategy I've got.

After a couple of dances Max comes over with a large smile on his face.

I think he's about to say something to me, but luckily he leads his granddaughter off to meet some of the other more important guests.

I need some air to try and relieve the queasy feeling I'm left with from the look Max had given us, so I walk between the buildings and follow a path I've not seen before.

It's less well tended than the other paths and is lined with trees, which I find intriguing.

Just ahead of me I see Billy grappling with three oversized cans, each one about to slip from his arms. I hurry over and catch one just before it falls to the ground.

"Thanks," he utters, managing to hold onto the other two.

"What are they?" I ask, looking at the label which reads Party Seven .

"It's beer," Billy replies, looking round concerned. "Where's your little girlfriend?"

Urgh. I shove the large beer can back into his arms and turn away, and I hear him struggling as I walk away.

"Do you promise not to tell?" he calls and I turn back round.

"Of course," I say, just reaching him in time to prevent the can hitting the ground.

"Max doesn't allow us to drink, and he'd have a fit if he found out." He leads me along the path and I see a sign saying Staff Only.

Music starts wafting through the trees. The beat is strong and I recognise some of the latest pop and surf rock tunes.

We come to a large low building hidden among the trees, and when Billy pushes the doors open I'm hit by a wave of sound.

I follow him inside and put the can down on a table inside the door.

The lights are low and the music loud; it makes the atmosphere sultry.

It's then that I notice the dancers, mostly couples, some of whom I recognise from the dance troupe, but the dancing is nothing like I've seen before.

Everyone is pressed against each other, writhing and moving.

It's provocative and very beautiful, and I notice that not every couple is a man and woman.

In fact, very few of them are. Women are dancing together as are men, and the way they move together is almost carnal.

I can't stop staring. I'd love to learn to dance like this.

"Can you imagine Max allowing this in the ballroom?" Billy shouts over the music, and I shake my head.

He'd probably rather die first. There's a few whoops and shouts and I see a couple moving through the other dancers.

It's Penny and Johnny, and I watch as he sways his hips raunchily in time to the music.

I've never seen anyone like him before .

"That's my cousin, Johnny." Billy tilts his head towards him.

"He's a great dancer... they both are." I add the last part quickly in case he thinks I'm staring only at Johnny, which I am.

"They look great, don't they?"

“Yeah, they make a great couple.”

“Oh, they’re not together. Penny’s like a sister to us.”

I don’t know why that information makes a difference to me, but it does. I don’t get a chance to think why, though, as Johnny dances right up to us and looks between me and Billy.

“What’s he doing here?” His deep voice sends shivers down my spine, and all ability to sound cool in his presence deserts me as I speak.

“I carried a Party Seven.”

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“What were you thinking?” I yell at Billy, trying to make myself heard over the music. “If he tells Max, we’ll all be in trouble.”

“I won’t,” the kid answers.

“He says he won’t,” Billy echoes, and I roll my eyes. Billy’s far too trusting of people; he has a lot to learn.

“One word to his girlfriend and we’ll be kicked out. You should never have let him come up here.”

The kid’s face twists into something like disgust. “She’s not my girlfriend.” He looks away. “I don’t even like girls.” The last is said quietly as he’s uttering it to himself, kind of an affirmation.

“Don’t do it again.” I shake my head at Billy and walk back to the dancers. I just have to hope he won’t squeal on us, but it’s too late now. I continue dancing with Penny for the remainder of the song, and when a new tune starts up the group holler their approval at the choice of music.

I glance over and the kid is still there, by the door.

He’s wide-eyed as he watches the dancing, as if he’s never seen anything like it before.

He’s pretty, very pretty, and I stare for too long as he chews his bottom lip.

The action makes him look young, and I suppose he can't be more than eighteen—too young.

That doesn't stop me walking over to him, though.

His head swings round as I approach, and I beckon him towards me.

When he gets close, I step into his space and gently sway my hips.

He mirrors me and I move closer, placing one hand lightly on his hip.

When he doesn't move away, I take his hand and place it on my shoulder, and we move together in time to the music, gyrating and twisting.

While I dance with all the members of the dance group, usually in formation, it's been a while since I've danced with another man this way.

.. This close, this sensually. His slim body fits well against mine, which makes it easy to hold him closer than I should.

As he bends backwards away from me, I catch a glimpse of the column of his creamy smooth throat and the fleeting thought of what it would be like to kiss it comes to me.

I keep who I am well hidden, because letting people know you're bisexual doesn't get you work.

Only Penny and Billy know the truth. For everyone else, I don't give them a reason to think anything other than what I make sure they see.

Not even here in the privacy of the staff quarters do I let my guard down, despite encouraging it in the rest of the team.

To be honest, it's easy, because I haven't seen a bloke I've fancied enough for a long time.

The last notes of the song trail away and I release the kid, disentangling myself from his arms. I walk away.

It's too much of a risk, and not one I'm about to take now.

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I'm awoken by another early morning bout of cheerfulness from the tannoy. Whatever kind of holiday they want you to have here, it doesn't involve lie-ins.

"Max has invited me to play golf this morning," my father announces over breakfast.

"Great, I can spend some time with Lisa and Baby." Mum smiles at us both across the table. I try not to groan, but I don't want to be roped into human chess or whatever it was I heard them announce as this morning's activities.

Unfortunately, I was too slow in finding an excuse when Mum volunteered me to become a pawn in the game on the east lawn, so while she settles into a deckchair to read a magazine, I line up in front of an eccentric-looking lady playing the queen.

It could be worse, I suppose. Lisa's at a table to my left trying on wigs.

I get distracted when I see it's being run by Penny, and my thoughts turn to last night, to my glimpse of the staff behind the scenes.

They seemed so carefree, and I can't imagine what it must be like to have that much freedom.

I miss my cue when I see Johnny approach Penny, and I'm shoved forward by the queen.

I stand on my square but keep my eyes on them as they talk.

I'm trying not to think too much about dancing with him last night.

I have no idea why he did it, and I know it's not likely to ever happen again.

I'll never be invited to the staff quarters for a start; Johnny made it perfectly clear what he thought about that.

It seems I'm an expendable pawn, and in the next move I'm out, so I wander over to the table and stand behind Lisa who's wearing a blonde wig.

"That suits you," I say. "Very Barbara Windsor."

"It's Marilyn Monroe," she shrieks at me. I know that, but her reaction was worth it. Out of the corner of my eye I see Johnny give Penny a hug and a grim smile before leaving. I walk over to Penny.

"I envy you all, the dance staff. It must be great to have that much freedom to do what you want." I know I'm gushing but I can't help it. Her face draws into a frown and clouds over.

"You have no idea what life's like in the real world, do you?" It was clearly a rhetorical question, as she storms off and I'm left feeling like I've said something wrong.

I get shuffled from one activity to another for the rest of the day, and then reluctantly dragged to dinner when I'd rather stay in the cabin in peace and quiet.

My plan to creep back there straight after dinner is quickly squashed when Nicola appears at our table as soon as we've finished dessert—it feels like she might have been hovering in wait.

She certainly has a vulture-like quality to her.

“Baby, I need your help,” she announces without even asking.

I see the look on my family’s face and know I’m not going to get any support.

I rise and catch the look on my mum’s face.

It’s full of indulgence, as if we’re the cutest couple she’s ever seen.

I’m not sure how I’m going to get through the next two-and-a-half weeks of this.

The “help” she wants turns out to be moving some of the scene sets and furniture behind the stage in the ballroom.

I’m pretty sure she could’ve got the staff to do it for her, but her comments about how strong I am—which I’m not—and how close she keeps standing to me give me the impression she has another motive. One I’m not happy about.

“Thanks, Baby. Shall we dance now?” she asks once I’ve moved everything to her satisfaction.

This seems like my best chance to get away.

“Actually, I need some air.” Which is the truth, as lugging furniture about is hot work.

“Alright, let’s walk down to the boating lake instead.”

I stifle yet another groan but can’t see a way out of it.

“Robbie, no! I said I wanted to look at the stars.” My sister’s voice reaches me a second before I see her storming along an adjacent path heading back towards our

cabin.

“I should go after her,” I say, but Nicola links her arm tightly through mine.

“I’m sure she’ll be fine.”

I can’t get away unless I physically push her away, and I can’t imagine that would go down well. I don’t want to ruin my dad’s friendship with Max.

We walk as far as the wooden decking where the boats are moored, and I sincerely hope she doesn’t suggest a moonlight boat ride.

I doubt I could row one in daylight, never mind the dark.

I sit on a bench looking out over the water and she settles next to me.

I try boring Nicola with facts, some of the subjects I’ll be studying at uni next month.

“I don’t have to worry about all that.” She smiles in what I assume is supposed to be a charming way but comes across as extremely condescending instead. “I have three holiday resorts and there are more planned.”

I look away, not sure how I’m supposed to respond to that statement.

“Are you hungry?” she asks out of the blue.

“Sure.” I shrug. I’m not really, but anything’s better than sitting here longer. We walk slowly back towards the dining halls while Nicola tells me more of her—or rather, her grandfather’s—plans for the resorts, which I only half listen to.

She opens a back door and ushers me in, as if it’s some sort of privilege, and we walk

through the large kitchen.

I hear a noise and wonder if there's a possibility of rats.

I keep my eyes on the floor, wondering if Nicola's one of those people who are likely to run a mile if they see a rodent.

I doubt it. She'd probably square up to it and tell it that it didn't fit in with her plans.

I catch a glimpse of brightly coloured material and lean down to peer between the preparation tables.

I see Penny curled up and sobbing quietly.

I have no idea what the matter is, but I can't let Nicola see her.

She doesn't strike me as the empathic type .

"I really think I should go check on Lisa," I say loudly, hoping it masks the sound of Penny. I steer Nicola through the kitchen and back out the door.

I start walking determinedly towards my cabin, but as soon as I'm out of sight of Nicola I double back.

I need to find Johnny as soon as possible.

I enter the ballroom, and it's busy, with couples dancing and hundreds of guests sitting at the tables and standing around watching.

I weave my way through the throng, trying to see if I can spot him.

If I can't find him here, I'll have to brave the staff quarters.

Eventually I catch sight of him on the dance floor, dancing with the smart-looking older lady I'd seen him dance with on the first day.

She's clinging on to him tightly and looking like she's enjoying every moment.

I hover at the edge of the dance floor, not sure about cutting in and disturbing him.

Then I see Billy off to one side watching, and I go to explain to him instead.

He has no concerns going up to Johnny, and within seconds he's striding off the dance floor.

As they pass, Billy beckons me to follow him.

"What's he doing here?" Johnny says sharply as we cross the distance between the ballroom and the dining hall.

"He can keep a lookout in case Max's granddaughter comes sniffing around."

Johnny doesn't stop, so I assume he doesn't disapprove, but he looks far from happy. When we reach the door, he enters, and Billy stops me.

"The problem is, Penny found out she's pregnant."

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I gather Penny in my arms and lift her up, letting her sob on my shoulder.

She'd seemed so strong earlier, but I guess the reality is sinking in.

I carry her back to her cabin and lay her on her bed, then finding a blanket I cover her and tuck her in.

I smooth her hair back from her face, pleased she seems to have stopped crying for now.

Billy holds out a glass of water, and I twist round to take it off him and pass it to Penny. I see the kid hovering near the door.

"Billy, are you going to invite half the resort as an audience to our problems?"

Billy looks over at him and then back at me.

"I already told Baby what's going on."

"Billy, when are you gonna learn to keep your mouth shut? Now everyone's gonna know." I ignore the name he called the kid. Who calls a grown-up guy Baby ?

"Whatcha going to do about it?" the kid asks, and starts to walk across the room with a frown on his face. I'm fed up of that look from people who think they're better than me.

"That's it?" I stand in front of him, facing him down. "You think this is my

problem?”

“Billy, how could you?” Penny calls out. “I don’t need the whole park knowing I got knocked up by Robbie.”

“Robbie?” Baby swivels to look at Penny, the shock evident on his face. I suppose he’s one of those who think Robbie’s some sort of golden boy. He’s just like everyone else. I turn away.

Billy steps up to him. “We can get a doctor, a backstreet abortionist, but it costs a ton.”

“A hundred quid!” The kid goes almost white. It is a lot of money, but that’s what you have to pay. “Can’t you just go to a doctor? It’s legal now, isn’t it?” he asks, as if it’s that easy.

Penny gives an exasperated groan.

“I can’t go to a doctor. I’d probably have to go to London or something and they’d never grant permission. I don’t think many of them have caught up with the law yet, and I don’t have time to fight for it, Baby.”

Baby turns to Penny. “I’m sure Robbie would pay, then.”

“He already knows, Baby,” Penny sighs. “I need to keep working. I can’t take any time off. I don’t have anyone else and it’s clear Robbie won’t help me. I can’t have this baby.”

The kid stands, chewing his lip in thought, but that won’t do any good. I push past him and sit back down on the bed next to Penny. I smooth the hair away from her face .

“We’ll find a way, don’t worry,” I say, and she gives me a wan smile. I tried to say it sincerely, but in truth I don’t have any answers. Even between myself, Billy, and Penny we can’t raise that kind of money.

Next time I turn around the kid has gone. Good, I just hope he keeps his mouth shut. The fewer people who know our business the better.

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“She said it was mine, but how can I be sure? You know what these girls are like,” Robbie says, his smirk telling me everything.

“No, I don’t actually,” I bite back. “And I treat women with more respect.”

“Look, some people matter and others don’t.”

He pulls a book out of his pocket, and holds it out to me. I see it’s a tatty and worn copy of *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand. “You should read it, you might learn a few things. Only, make sure I get it back as I have notes in the margins.

It doesn’t surprise me he’d revere a book that promotes individualism over collectivism at all costs, even into acts of terrorism.

“Not my style,” I reply .

He just shrugs and pockets the book before going back to setting the tables for breakfast. His stance is dismissive.

“You just keep away from my sister and my family, or I’ll tell Max and you’ll be fired,” I say, and he just huffs a laugh and shakes his head.

I skip breakfast, not able to look at Robbie again right now.

His confidence in his own position riles me up.

The injustice of how he can get away with it and Penny is left to pick up the pieces

occupies my thoughts for most of the morning.

I buy the newspaper and walk down to the beach, sitting amongst the dunes to read in peace.

Feeling hungry, I make it back for lunch, but seeing as our server is Robbie again, I eat in silence.

“Is everything alright, Baby?” Mum asks, and I see her concern. “Where were you all morning? You disappeared before breakfast.”

“I’m fine. I just wanted to go for a walk and read the paper. Do you know the USSR is moving in on Czechoslovakia and there are people starving in Biafra right now? It doesn't seem right when there’s all this food...” I gesture to the table.

“Robbie, when we’re done here can you pack up all our leftovers and send them to Nigeria. Baby wants to end world hunger.”

I see Robbie’s smirk and hate him even more. I frown at my dad. I know the causes of poverty are complex and not easily solved, but the way he smiles at Robbie feels at my expense.

“Where are you going?” Mum asks as I get up to leave the table.

“To read,” I sigh .

“We came here to join in and have fun, not do the same things we can do at home. I’m going to miss my Baby when you go away in a few weeks. I want to spend every moment I can with you.”

I stop and turn back, my shoulders slumping with the thought that whatever she has in

mind, I'm not going to like it.

"I was thinking we could play lawn bowls. Remember how you used to enjoy playing?"

I was right, I don't like it, but by invoking a memory of childhood I can't find a good enough excuse to refuse. Mum rises and comes round the table. She links her arm through mine as we leave the dining hall.

"We're going to have a lot of fun," she promises.

We do play bowls and I beat her, just like I've done since I was twelve.

After that we wander down to the small zoo area they have set up near the beach.

We look at the lions, monkeys, and the seals before walking around the boating lake, eating ice creams and talking about childhood memories as Mum gets sentimental about me leaving for university.

"You'll have Lisa," I point out, as I can't see my sister leaving home any time soon.

"But you're my baby," Mum replies, and I don't mind that I've spent the day with her.

We take our time walking back to the cabin to change for dinner, and I grudgingly admit that it hasn't been too bad to spend some time together.

Most of the afternoon, though, I've been pondering whether there's anything I can do to help Penny.

I might not be able to make a difference to people on the other side of the world, but I

may be able to do something more useful closer to home.

As we walk towards the dining hall, I let Lisa and Mum walk on ahead, and I fall into step with my dad.

“May I have some money please Dad?” It’s not a totally unusual request. If I’ve needed any money before I’ve asked.

I don’t have a lot of money myself, and I didn’t get a summer job as my mum wanted me at home as much as possible.

I’m hoping I can find something in Cambridge to work around my studies.

“How much do you need?”

“A hundred.” I try to say it casually but I know how much it is. Dad stops and turns to me, his face both puzzled and concerned.

“That’s a lot of money, Baby.”

I just nod in agreement.

“What do you need it for?”

“I can’t tell you,” I reply, worrying at my bottom lip. I’ve never kept any secrets from him... well, apart from the biggest one of all, that is. He draws his head back slightly as if he’s trying to work it out.

“Are you in some kind of trouble?”

“No Dad.” He relaxes slightly at my answer.

“Is it for something illegal?”

“No Dad.” I shake my head for emphasis and hold my breath. He regards me for what seems like an eternity, no doubt going through all the scenarios he can think of. He must decide he can trust me because he finally blows out a resigned sigh and agrees .

“I’ll get it for you later,” he says, and puts his arm around my shoulders as we catch up with Mum and Lisa.

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“Are you sure you feel up to this?” I ask Penny as we wait in the wings of the stage in the ballroom.

“I’m fine, Johnny. I just let it get to me yesterday.”

I’m relieved she’s feeling better, but we still don’t have a solution despite my promises last night, and it’s a worry that’s starting to get to me.

I try to put it out of my mind for the next few minutes as Penny and I do our show.

It goes well, and we spend the next hour teaching some of the guests how to dance.

“I could do with some more dance lessons,” a rich voice utters into my ear, and I turn to see its owner giving me a sultry smile.

“Hello, Mrs Pressman.”

She steps into my space to claim the dance with me .

“How many times have I told you it’s Vivianne?” She gives a little pout as we step round the dance floor.

Every season for as long as I’ve been working here, but I’ve never allowed myself to call her something so familiar.

“So, about those dance lessons,” she asks coquettishly. She’s already had three blocks of lessons this summer.

“You’re already a very proficient dancer, Mrs Pressman.”

“I know.” She smiles again and leans in close. “But practice makes perfect, wouldn’t you say?”

I spin her away from me and back again.

“You know I’ll make it worth your while.” She places a hand on my chest and looks up at me. “For private lessons.”

I know exactly what she means and I’ve given in before, in previous seasons.

I know I’m not the only one who’s a favourite of hers either.

Sometimes a little favour or a little extra cash can help when times are hard.

We don’t get much basic pay, so if we earn some on top it’s a bonus.

But I’m not in the mood for her advances right now.

“You can sign up for any of the dance classes,” I say, and her expression freezes.

She’s not used to being refused. The dance ends and I bow politely, and leave her on the dance floor.

I seek out Penny and a few of the other staff and we leave.

We head back to our own staff room where we’re free to dance and express ourselves properly.

As I twirl Penny round I see the kid standing by the door. Can’t he understand what

staff and private mean? And the more he comes here, the more likely he is to be followed by that odious granddaughter of Max's.

He's looking round, a little nervously, chewing on his bottom lip again, which is sort of cute.

The low light in the staff room creates shadows which accentuate his pretty cheekbones.

Along with his soft brown hair and kind eyes all wrapped up in a preppy short-sleeved shirt, it makes him stand out from the rest of us.

He should go back to the rest of the guests, those who can afford to pay to be here, not having to work like the rest of us.

I whirl Penny away. If we ignore him, maybe he'll go away.

It doesn't work, and less than a minute later I feel a tap on my shoulder. I turn to face him, giving him my best glare.

He's holding out an envelope to us.

"Here you go, here's the money."

I still have hold of Penny and I feel her stiffen in my arms.

"Robbie?"

The kid gives a wry smile. "No, he was exactly as you said he would be."

"Then where from?" Penny asks.

The kid waves the envelope. “Does it matter?” And in his eyes I see it all, the safety net of the affluent.

“If only we all had a daddy we could ask?” It comes out bitterly and it’s meant to. Penny’s face closes down.

“Sorry, Baby, I can’t accept it.”

Penny draws me away, turning back to the dance floor.

“Why not?” I ask her. “You should accept the money, just take it.” I might not like handouts but I’m not above taking them if they’re needed.

“What are you doing here?” It’s Billy’s voice. I look back and he’s talking to the kid .

“I brought the money,” he explains, and Penny and I stop to watch them. Billy looks between us and then back to the kid.

“The problem is, I can only get an appointment for a week on Thursday. That’s the day Johnny and Penny do their show at the Festival Pavilion in Skegness. If they don’t show then they lose the booking for the season, and it’s good money.”

The kid turns to us. “Can someone else do it?”

“No, Mr fix-it,” I grind out. “No one else can do it. It’s Sheila’s day off, Dana and Laney are working, and even then they wouldn’t have time to learn the routine. There is no one else. Some of us have to work around here. It can’t be done. End of.”

“What about him?” Billy suggests, tilting his head towards the kid.

“I can’t, I’m a bloke,” he protests.

“That’s a bad idea, Billy,” I add, and it is. What is he thinking?

“And I can’t even dance,” the kid continues, his eyes flashing nervously between us.

“See. Told you.” I shrug and turn to walk away. I’m done with this ridiculous conversation. Penny catches my arm and I look at her.

“Hold on,” she whispers.

“Look, hear me out,” Billy says and I wait, still glaring at him because I don’t like where this is going. “He’s petite, he could pass as a girl. Put him in a dress and one of Penny’s wigs and he’d pass alright. You’d fool them down at the pavilion.”

I watch as the kid’s eyebrows shoot up somewhere near his hairline .

“You can teach him, Johnny,” Penny adds. “You’re a strong enough dancer. You can lead anyone.”

I look at her, seeing the fear and uncertainty in her eyes. This is her one chance to get her life back on track. I still think it’s a terrible idea, but I’ll do it for her.

“Alright, I’ll do it.” I hold my hands up in supplication, and Penny grins and hugs me. I look over at the kid.

“Um, okay,” he says, frowning like he doesn’t know what he’s agreed to. I try not to gain some perverse satisfaction at the opportunity to see just what lengths little Mr Fix-It will go to just to be helpful. I fail.

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“I’m going for a tennis lesson, Baby. Do you want to join me?

” my mum asks at the cabin after breakfast the next day.

My dad’s already left to play golf, and Lisa announced she’s going to work on her tan for the swimwear heat of the beauty competition taking place in a few days.

My plans of sneaking off quietly look slim.

“I’m going to take part in. . . the treasure hunt,” I blurt, remembering one of the activities blared at me from various loud speakers on our walk to the dining hall.

Lisa narrows her eyes at me but doesn’t say anything, no doubt thinking that she’ll be invited next and it’ll ruin her plans for the day.

“That sounds wonderful.” My mum beams at me. “I’m pleased to see you’re having fun.”

“Yes Mum, loads,” I say quickly and jump down the cabin steps before she can say anything else.

I dart between the wooden chalets and follow the directions Billy gave me to the dance studio.

It’s a large low building on the edge of the guest space, not far from the path to the staff quarters.

It's light and airy, partly due to one wall being mostly windows, but also because of the opposite wall, which is composed of mirrors.

There are a couple of easy chairs and a low table to one side of the room.

I hesitate on the threshold, feeling the enormity of what I've agreed to now that I'm here.

I could turn around now and leave. It isn't my problem, so I don't know why I'm doing this.

And Johnny was right, this is a bad idea.

But I've promised to help, and I can't deny the thought of spending some time with Johnny is very appealing.

I take a deep breath and enter, feeling immediately self-conscious about seeing myself reflected back in the huge mirrors.

Johnny has his back to me, bent over a record player, a disc in his hand. He's wearing nothing but black jeans and a black vest that shows off his impressive biceps. I can't see anyone else in the room, and I don't know if that's a good thing or not.

My steps make a noise on the wooden dance floor and Johnny looks over.

"Oh!" he exclaims, looking surprised. I stop, poised to leave. Was he expecting someone else?

"Don't you remember?" I ask tentatively, suddenly wondering if I've somehow imagined it all. He at least breaks into a smile.

“I’ve just lost a bet with Billy. I was certain you wouldn’t show,” he says walking over to me.

Well, that would account for his surprise, but I’m not sure I like being the subject of a bet, or that he had so little faith in me .

I stare at the floor for a minute, deciding if I should really make my excuses and leave. But I can’t, not now I’m here, so instead I look up at him.

“How much am I worth?”

“A fiver.” His face doesn’t show a hint of humour, which makes it feel much worse.

That’s a lot of money. I feel my eyebrows shoot up, closely followed by the sinking feeling that he really didn’t think I’d show up if he was willing to risk so much. I also feel bad that he lost so much money.

“I can go if you like, and you can tell Billy I didn’t show up.”

He doesn’t say anything, which I take to be that he agrees with me, or is at least considering it. I spin round and take a couple of steps, but he grabs my arm. I look down at his large hand holding onto my bicep. My skin instantly feels hot where he’s touching me. I glance up at him.

“We’re doing this for Penny, right?”

“Yes.” I nod. He drops my arm, though I can still feel the tingle of pressure as he returns to the record player and puts on some music.

“Take off your socks and shoes,” he commands.

I notice he's barefoot. "Is that because you're scared I'll stand on your toes and hurt you?"

"Is it a possibility?" The corners of his mouth twitch.

"I did tell you I can't dance," I call over my shoulder, as I walk to the side of the room and sit on one of the chairs to remove my shoes.

When I stand he's in the middle of the room, waiting for me.

I can't believe I'm going to actually do this.

.. learn to dance with the most beautiful man I've ever seen.

I swallow round my dry throat and take a deep breath.

It doesn't mean anything of course, I remind myself.

As he said, we're just doing this for Penny.

Even so, nerves make me feel unsteady as I move across the room. Even walking feels unnatural knowing he's watching me. I stand in front of him, trying to keep my breathing even, and he puts a hand on each of my shoulders and gives me a little shake.

"Relax," he says softly.

"That obvious, huh?"

He answers with a soft smile, one that permeates my body and unwinds some of the tight coils in my chest.

“Now, feel the beat,” he says, nodding his head slightly in time to the music and counting to four quietly. I count with him, over and over.

“Now, we step on the two,” he says, resuming counting. “Are you ready?”

I nod. I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.

“One.”

I step on his foot.

“Ow!”

“Shit. Sorry!” I back off a little way but he grabs my hand.

“You need to really feel the beat. In here.” He lifts my hand to his chest and places it over his heart.

His chest is solid and warm and I can feel the strong thump of his heart. I’m glad we’re not dancing to the beat of mine, as it’s tapping some wildly erratic beat right now that I wouldn’t be able to keep up to .

I take a deep breath, trying to calm myself, and focus on the rhythm I can feel, not that I’m touching another man’s chest. His chest. Slowly he starts moving and this time I follow him.

He places his other hand on my waist and I reach mine up to his shoulder.

We move round the dance studio and it feels effortless, and I begin to enjoy myself.

When the song ends he releases me, and goes to the record player to restart the music.

I catch sight of myself in the mirror wall and see my huge grin reflected back at me.

That was the last of the feeling of it being effortless, as for the next few hours he puts me to work. He breaks down the step sequences, dances them with me, and then has me dancing them by myself so he can watch.

Occasionally he barks at me. “Keep your back straight. Head up, don’t look at your feet.”

Once I’ve got the idea of the steps and putting them together, he moves on to the turns.

It makes me feel dizzy and I crash into him.

His jaw stiffens in annoyance after the third time, but what does he expect?

I’ve never danced like this before. I do not count my shuffling around the ballroom with Nicola as dancing after experiencing this.

Eventually, when I’m tired, hot, and my legs feel like jelly, he calls a halt, probably fearing I’ll step on him or fall on him again. We agree to practice again the same time tomorrow.

“Hey, kid,” he calls when I reach the door.

“I’m not a kid,” I say through gritted teeth and he huffs a laugh.

“Is calling you a baby any better?”

“Not a baby. Baby.” I point out, and he raises an eyebrow at me, like he doesn’t see the difference.

I've grown so used to it over the years, I've not really thought about how it might look to someone else, and I've never really minded.

But although he didn't say it mockingly, I do mind that he sees me as young or like a child.

His expression softens. "You did good today. I'll see you tomorrow."

I nod and leave, hurrying back to make it in time for a wash before dinner. Pride blooms in my chest that at least I didn't land totally on my arse.

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“How did it go?” Penny asks as I meet her before our evening show.

“I’m a little surprised he showed up at all.” I smile and she bats me on the shoulder.

“You’re just sore you lost your bet with Billy. Yes, I did hear about that.” She rolls her eyes at me. I could say Billy suggested it, which he did, but I didn’t have to take him up on it. Except that’s the way we’ve always been since we were kids. Billy’s just about the only family I have left.

“You should’ve had more faith in Baby. He seems like once he’s made up his mind and says he’s going to do something he sees it through,” Penny continues.

“Well, he’ll need to, especially when we tell him he’s going to have to do it all in heels.”

Penny grimaces slightly, uncertainty flickering across her face at my words, which were only half meant in jest. I take her hand.

“He did really well today, so as long as he puts the work in I’m sure we’ll be fine. We don’t have another choice, do we?”

Penny’s face turns serious.

“Thank you, Johnny. I don’t know what I’d do without you,”

“I’m always here, you know that,” I say and hug her close.

When I'm waiting in the dance studio the next day, I hear a sound on the steps outside. Anticipating the kid, as we have a lot to go through, I pull open the door and come face to face with Vivianne Pressman, already dolled up and in full makeup this early in the morning.

She's startled as well, but immediately puts on what she probably thinks is her most winning smile.

"Well, isn't this a surprise?"

"Not really. I'm here most days. I'm just waiting for the next lesson to show up," I say, hoping she'll leave immediately. I can't have her here when I'm dancing with Baby.

"A private lesson?" She frowns slightly.

"Yes."

"Who has you all booked up so you can't fit me in?"

I shrug and stick my hands in my pockets. I can't say anything in answer to that. I keep my face neutral. She stares at me for what feels like an hour but is probably only a few seconds, and then draws a deep breath, her eyes turning stony and her lips a hard line.

"Well, just make sure you're available in the ballroom tonight. Moe likes me to be occupied. You wouldn't want me to have him complain to Max that his best dancer is avoiding me, would you?"

"No, Mrs Pressman." I say her name deliberately, and she gives me a thin smile that doesn't reach her eyes. Her husband, Moe, is a good friend of Max's and could make

trouble if he wanted to. It's a tight line to walk with people like her.

"That's more like it," she says, and I breathe a sigh of relief as she turns and walks away, but then she calls out loudly.

"See you tonight, Johnny. I can't wait."

She disappears round a bend in the path, the bushes obscuring her from me, and a few seconds later Baby comes rushing round the corner. Dressed in shorts, gym shoes, and a tight T-shirt, he's fresh and pretty and a world away from Vivianne Pressman.

"Who was that?" he asks, glancing behind him as if she might reappear at any moment.

"Just a guest," I answer sharply and turn back inside. "C'mon, we have work to do."

I ignore that he stands for a few seconds looking back down the path. It doesn't matter to me that he might have overheard what Vivianne said. It can't matter. I try not to let her bother me, but my annoyance bleeds into our session.

The first time, we practice a turn with him spinning away and coming back. I catch him roughly.

"Hey!" he cries. "That hurt."

"It's because you have no frame," I bite back and push him away from me slightly .

I lift my arms into position. "This is my frame, my dance space." I pull his arms into a mirror of mine. "That's your dance space. Now lock your arms so they're not like spaghetti. Then next time I won't have to stop you from braining me."

He glares at me and we try again. Things improve slightly, but it's still not flowing well, so after another hour, I call a halt.

"We'll try again tomorrow," I say and dismiss him.

He looks down and I think he's about to say something like sorry, but thankfully he doesn't, because it's not his fault.

I shouldn't have avoided Vivianne. She can make things harder for me, though she also pays generously.

But I now see through the facade of it all and I no longer want a part of it.

I want something simpler, which for unknown reasons has made my life a whole lot more complicated.

I dance with Vivianne as she requested, and afterwards, back in the staff quarters, try to forget it all as I dance with Penny. I also try hard not to wish I could do this sort of dancing with a slim, pretty guy I have no right to think that way about.

I'm in a better mood when Baby shows up the next day.

I'm a little amazed he's come back after yesterday, but maybe Penny is right about him.

I've never known anyone to follow through with a decision they've made with so much determination before.

He doesn't have to be here. That he still is, is nothing short of admirable.

He stands in the door, looking at me a little tentatively, and I realise he's waiting to

see if I'm going to snap at him, and I hate that I've caused him that level of concern.

"Trying to gauge if I'm going to snap at you again? "

"Something like that." He gives a little shrug, pulling his bottom lip between his teeth, which draws my eyes to it instantly.

"I'm sorry, I was out of sorts yesterday and let it get to me."

"It's alright. I know how worried about Penny you are."

It wasn't about that, but hell if he doesn't give me an out, an excuse for my poor behaviour, and he's being so damn understanding. He has so much goodness it makes me ache inside. I don't want to explain, or claim his reasoning falsely, so I just answer.

"It won't happen again."

My reward is a brilliant smile, which makes it feel as if the sun has come out on a cloudy day. I don't deserve it, but I'm sure as hell going to enjoy it.

Over the next couple of days, we put in several hours of work, and he's really starting to get the fluidity of the steps and the dance.

The dance routine is there, but it's not quite coming together.

The turns still need some work and we haven't tackled the lifts as much as I'd like.

The show is in a few days and I'm starting to worry we're not going to be ready in time.

To make matters worse, the weather is close.

It's hot and humid and we're both feeling its effects.

After one particularly bad turn he trips, nearly pulling me over with him.

"Will you focus?" I growl

"I am," he yells at me. "We've got a few days left before the show, but I'm not certain of this turn and you haven't shown me the lifts yet. So yeah, I'm doing all of this to get you out of a fix when what I really want to do is show us all up. "

He stands there, his chest heaving and fury in his normally calm eyes. I take a deep breath and look him up and down, seeing the sweat glistening on his skin from the exertion and the humidity, and I come to a decision.

"Then let's go."

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“Where are we going?” I ask as I trail after him along the path. He doesn’t answer and just marches on, leading me to a car park.

He stops at the driver’s door of an old light blue Triumph Herald and faces me.

“Get in.”

He unlocks the door and climbs in, leaning over to unlock the passenger door. I get in. He still doesn’t speak as he reverses the car out of the parking space, and then pulls out onto the road.

After driving along the coast road for about ten minutes he turns off onto what looks like little more than a track.

Sand lines either side and the grass becomes less lush and more dune-like.

The track ends in a small circular area where there’s another car parked.

He kills the engine and then releases a deep breath.

He looks over at me, his scowl from earlier no longer in place.

“Come on.” He half smiles and opens the car door. I scramble out of my side and follow him as he clambers up a bank of dunes.

“Where are we... oh.” The words die on my lips as I take in the view.

I can see acres of flat golden beach leading out to a calm sea.

It stretches in either direction as far as my eyes can follow.

Also, it's deserted, apart from a couple of people I can just about see as specks in the distance.

No holidaymakers, no one shouting and hollering, no children running and shrieking.

.. and best of all, no loudspeakers marking what time of day it is and what we should be doing next, as if we'll become bored if left to our own devices.

I stand and look out to sea for a minute, and all I can hear is the distant roar of the sea, waves washing in over the sand, and a breeze rustling through the dry marron grass of the dunes.

It's stunning and peaceful and a grin stretches across my face.

I turn to Johnny and see he's watching me.

He smiles back at me as if my reaction has somehow pleased him.

"How do you know about this place?" I gaze around again. The beach is empty, so there can't be many people who know about it or it would be full.

"I was told about it during my first season here. The bloke who looks after the donkeys said it was the coast's best kept secret.

He wasn't wrong, and I've kept the secret ever since.

Most people don't notice the track as they drive past, and there aren't any

amusements, cafes, or ice-cream stalls, so it has limited appeal. ”

“It’s stunning, but why are we here? ”

He grins and starts pulling off his shoes.

“To learn the lifts, in the sea.” He throws down his shoe, and starts running down the dunes and onto the sand. I follow suit and chase after him, whooping with exhilaration when my bare feet hit the sand.

The water, on the other hand, is shockingly cold, and I slow down, trying to acclimatise.

“Submerge yourself. It’ll help you get used to it quicker,” Johnny instructs and I try it out. I’m not sure I get used to it any more rapidly, it’s more that there are no dry parts of me to use as a contrast.

We stand in the sea, the water gently lapping at chest height, and Johnny goes through the lifts, the speed, the placement of where I need to be, and the timing for him to lift me up.

I can’t get the speed in the water, but he tells me that practicing in the sea will help it feel faster on land.

The first few times, I crash into him, knocking him over so he’s submerged.

He comes up laughing, though, and even flicks water at me, which of course I return.

Then the next time, magically, he lifts me up over his head.

I’m so busy propelling myself forward to get the lift that we overbalance and I dive

into the water behind him.

When I push up to the surface I notice his arm is round my waist. For a few seconds we stare at each other, and an odd, almost tender expression flits across his face, but I don't have time to think about it as he releases me and shuffles backwards, holding out his arms for me to try again.

We keep practicing, and we do improve, until we manage the lifts about four out of five times. Eventually Johnny calls a stop, which I'm grateful for as my legs feel like jelly.

When I walk out of the sea, the air cools the water droplets on my skin and I give a slight shiver despite the heat of the sun.

"Did you bring any towels?" I ask as we reach the dunes.

"We left in a hurry," Johnny gives in the way of an answer, which I interpret as a no. "But we'll dry off quickly. Even more so if we strip off."

I stop still at the bottom of the dunes and stare at him as he climbs up to the ridge and looks over the top.

Did he just say strip off? Here? Now? He turns around and checks the beach, left and right.

The other car has gone, so it looks like we're all by ourselves. Oh great, that doesn't help at all.

He's already pulling off his soaking T-shirt, and I swallow at the sight of his broad and very naked chest. Then he strips off his shorts. He stretches them out on the marron grass to capture the sun and the breeze, before dropping down onto the dunes

in his underpants and looking up at me.

“You’ll never get dry like that,” he says.

Oh, not totally stripping off then. Like not down to my birthday suit.

Down to underpants I might be able to manage.

I quickly pull off my shorts and T-shirt, and spread them out before sitting down next to him.

He stretches his legs out and leans back on his elbows, closing his eyes, offering his face up to the sun.

I can’t help myself from gazing at his long legs, leading up to muscled thighs and a distinctive bulge in his pants.

He’s gorgeous, and I want to reach out and touch his skin, to trace the contours of his abs.

Oh fuck! I can’t get a chub on now, shit.

I can’t let him know about me. I’m pretty sure he’s straight; I’ve seen him dance with enough women.

Even if he isn’t, he’s said numerous times that he’s just dancing with me for Penny’s sake.

Yeah, he seems to have no problem lying next to me in his underwear without getting a boner.

I flip over onto my front, resting on my elbows to hide the evidence and my embarrassment.

“Where?” My voice comes out sounding like a strangled cat and I clear my throat.
“Um, where did you learn to dance?”

He turns his head to the side and cracks open one eye. I give him a little grin, hoping the thoughts in my head aren't showing across my face.

He closes his eyes again and settles down in the grass.

“Back home there was nothing much to do. Those of us who weren't good at school were just waiting it out until we could leave and do something else.

The choices were slim... pit work or go into a trade.

We had a youth club where we used to hang out.

I think they created it to keep us off the streets and out of trouble, and it mostly worked.

They'd try and get us to engage in activities.

One year they decided to try theatre, and they put on Me and My Girl .

You know, 'doing the Lambeth Walk.'" He says the last few words with an awful cockney accent and I giggle.

“They brought in a couple of professionals to help us. I guess they wanted to give something back. I couldn't act but I was interested in dancing.

I asked a lot of questions, and learnt all I could from the choreographer who was a former ballroom dancer.

She kindly taught me much more than we needed for the production.

I learnt all the different dances, the basic and advanced steps, and then how to make routines out of them.

After I left school I managed to get a job with a dance troupe, which lasted a few years, but finding work was hard.

Then four years ago I managed to get the job at Poplins for the summer season, and I've been head of the dance team for the last two years.

In the winter I find whatever work I can, but some years are better than others. ”

He stays silent for a few minutes as if deep in thought. “I suppose I've been lucky, really. At least I haven't had to work at the pit.”

He turns his head and looks up at me, saying abruptly, “Are you dried out enough?”

I guess he doesn't want to tell me any more, I nod, and we dress in silence before driving the short distance back to the busy resort.

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I'm starting to dream about the dance routine and I'm pretty sure I could do it in my sleep.

Dancing it in front of an audience is a different matter, though, and I try not to let those thoughts crowd into my head as I make my way to the studio.

We only have a couple of days left until the show, and although we practiced the lifts in the sea yesterday, we still have to try them for real.

I half run along the path. I'm late, as it's been getting harder to get away from my family. Another lie about joining a treasure hunt did the trick this time, which narrowly got me out of joining them for tennis.

Of course, dreaming about dancing has kept Johnny firmly in my mind, and the thought of being near him again is another reason that spurs me on.

I'm excited to see him, to be in his arms even for a little while, so by the time I stumble through the door to the dance studio, I'm breathless and already sweating.

Two startled faces look up at me. Penny's presence instantly brings me crashing back to earth that this isn't about me dancing with Johnny and being near him.

This is about me doing a favour for Penny. I take a deep breath to steady myself.

"Sorry." I grimace. "I thought I might have had to spend the morning making up a double for tennis."

Penny laughs and comes over to me. She takes my hands and pulls me into the middle of the room. “Johnny says you’re doing well with the routine but we thought it was time to teach you a few flourishes to dance more like a woman.”

Oh! My cheeks burn. I’d been so caught up in enjoying the dancing I’d forgotten that aspect of it—that I was supposed to be passing as Penny. Now I feel like a fool.

“Don’t worry.” Penny smiles encouragingly at my embarrassment. “You’ll be fine.”

She releases my hands and walks over to the chairs, then comes back with a bundle of soft looking material. When she holds it up I see it’s a skirt.

“Here, put this on,” she says.

I gulp. She wants me to wear it?

“I can’t wear that,” I blurt out and she presses her lips together.

“You’re supposed to be me. What did you think you were going to wear?”

She has a point and I take it off her, then I turn my back on them both as I slip it on over my shorts.

I smooth it down with my hands. It’s made up of layers of a chiffon material, something very much like my sister would wear.

I look up and catch sight of myself in the mirror.

It looks odd to me; I don’t look like myself.

It’s like I’ve become someone different.

I twist a little from side to side, watching the skirt billow and swish.

It's not unpleasant, but it does feel odd.

"Very fetching." I catch sight of Johnny's smirk in the mirror and a chill runs through my veins. Clearly he thinks I look ridiculous in it, and I'm embarrassed he thinks that way.

"Johnny," Penny growls, and I hear him utter a sorry, but it's too late. Any joy I had of seeing him again today, or the tiny dream I harbour—the one in which he might like me too—is extinguished.

"Let's just get this done," I grind out. I'm not giving up on Penny, but now she's the only reason keeping me from walking out the door.

We start dancing, and at first it feels stiff and forced, but Penny's behind me, one hand on my hip and the other on my back.

She adds encouragement and a few corrections, and eventually I begin to relax.

She calls a break and I go to grab a glass of water.

I see Penny talking with Johnny and then he walks over to me.

"I'm sorry for what I said. I wasn't making fun of you."

"Did Penny make you come over and say that?" I ask bitterly, and the look on his face tells me the truth. "Forget it," I say, turning away from him, but he catches my arm and swivels me back to face him.

"I mean it. I'm sorry." He looks down at the skirt and back at my face. A deep,

unfathomable look crosses his face and my heart beats a little faster.

“Have you never seen a bloke in a dress before?” I squeak, trying to sound casual.

“None that look like you.” His voice is low and husky, but before I can try to work out what he means he drops my arm and walks back to the centre of the room.

“Let’s go through it again,” he says, still with a hint of huskiness in his voice.

We dance through the routine a couple more times and I only manage the lift on one of them, but Johnny tells me not to worry, that it’ll be different on the night.

“I think you’re ready for these,” announces Penny, and I see her holding out a pair of shoes—ladies shoes, silver strappy things with heels. Heels! I can feel the blood drain from my face as I feel lightheaded. Why didn’t I realise there’d be shoes as well?

“Um, I think I might break my ankle trying to dance in those,” I say with a grimace.

“Just try them.” Penny smiles encouragingly, and I sit on one of the chairs and take off my gym shoes.

The sandals don’t feel too bad until I try to stand up.

I’m no longer in contact with the floor; I’m suspended over it on a tiny platform.

Or at least, that’s what it feels like. I wobble for a couple of steps and Penny grabs my hand.

“It’s easy for you,” I mutter. “You’ve had years of practice. I don’t think I can do this.” I turn to Johnny, who’s been watching me wobble about. “This is not happening. I’m going to fall on you. I declare that I’m an accident waiting to

happen.”

He comes forward and takes both my hands. “Walk in them for a while.” After his comment about the skirt his voice is soft and kindly, and when he walks backwards, I follow. It still feels unnatural, but after a couple of circuits of the room I feel more sure-footed.

“Do you want to try to dance, just the basic steps?” he asks .

We don’t do too badly—well, I don’t. Johnny is foot perfect as always, but I feel I could improve so I ask that we try it again, and again.

By the end of the afternoon I feel much more secure.

I didn’t manage all the turns, and only learnt a basic lift, but we still have a day to practice.

It’s a relief to step back into my gym shoes afterwards, and I ignore the ache in my feet as I walk back to my cabin.

“Lisa, I need you to do something for me,” I say two days later.

She looks up from the magazine she’s reading. Since winning the swimwear heat of the beauty competition yesterday she’s been insufferable.

“I don’t have to do anything for you. You’ve spent the last week hiding, you’re up to something. What is it?”

“I can’t tell you.”

She gives me her best big sister look, but it doesn’t work on me anymore like it did

when I was ten.

“I’ll tell you after, but not tonight. I just need you to tell Mum and Dad that I’m not feeling well and I’m not hungry. I’ve gone to bed but they don’t need to check on me.”

“What are you really up to?” She tries again.

“Lisa, please?” Now it sounds like a whine. Lisa settles back in her chair with a small sly smile, like getting me to wheedle like I did as a child when she wouldn’t tell me secrets was some sort of victory .

“They won’t be interested anyway.” She gives a flick of her hair. “It’s Robbie’s night off so he’s spending the evening with us.”

“I thought that was over.” He’d lost interest after she hadn’t welcomed his advances, but I’m also dismayed she’s forgiven him.

“It seems becoming Miss Swimwear has its advantages.” She turns her attention back to the magazine.

I really need to talk to her about Robbie, but not tonight.

I quickly make my way through the guest cabins and into the staff quarters to Penny’s place.

The last practice yesterday went very well.

I managed to dance the whole routine several times in heels and didn’t fall once.

I’m not elegant, but hopefully it will do.

“How does that feel?” Penny asks, standing back and looking at me as she helps me dress for the show.

“Honestly, I feel like a dressed turkey waiting for the oven. How on earth do you wear all this stuff?”

“You get used to it,” Penny laughs. “And it feels nice to get dressed up for a change.

“I’ll take your word for it.” It feels strange to me. I look down at the coral dress I’m wearing. Its full flouncy skirt ends just below my knees and feels unfamiliar against my legs.

“I don’t seem to have much here.” I press my hands against my chest.

“Well, neither do I.” Penny chuckles but she gathers in the material to cover that up. You’ll need these as well.” She holds up a pair of tights and I try not to groan. There’s something I ought to bring up first before I put them on.

“Do you know what does feel odd?” I say nervously, and Penny tilts her head waiting for me to continue.

“In this dress, it feels somehow wrong to wear my underpants.” I’m not sure she’ll understand, but although my briefs are pretty tight they feel incongruous, wrong somehow. She looks thoughtful for a minute and then crosses the room and opens a drawer. She comes back with a pair of lace knickers.

“Try these.” She holds them out. “Don’t worry, they’re new. Never been worn.”

I take them off her and hold them up. They look a bit like my briefs, but obviously without space for my junk and in a soft-pink lace.

I've come this far, I might as well try them.

Penny turns away and goes to her dressing table, keeping her back to me.

I whip off my briefs and pull on the lace knickers.

Strangely they feel better than I'd expected and my junk feels more contained.

I pick up the tights and join Penny.

"Thanks, that feels better now. Can you tell me how on earth I'm supposed to get these on?" I say, holding up the tights, and Penny grins.

As Penny applies the finishing touches to my makeup, I stare at the person in the mirror who looks nothing like me. I'm wearing a blonde wig for a start, and makeup and a dress. Penny must see my expression in the mirror because she smiles reassuringly.

"You look great."

I don't feel it, and as I stand, my feet in the silver sandals, I feel uncertain about it all .

"What if I forget everything?" I whisper.

"Let Johnny lead you. Just follow him and everything will be fine."

"Okay, okay." I say it more to reassure myself than to agree with her. I start to recite the steps under my breath to try and calm the nervous bubbling in my stomach.

"Baby?" Penny's voice cuts through my muttering and I look at her, seeing the bleak

look in her eyes. “I’m scared.”

It’s the first time I’ve heard her crack since the night I found her sobbing in the kitchen.

“I’m sure it’ll be alright,” I say and she steps forward, hugging me tightly.

“Thank you for doing this for me. I’m truly grateful,” she says as she releases me. I smile at her, too nervous to speak but pleased I can at least try to help.

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The stage curtains are closed and we're waiting in near darkness. All I can hear is the muffled voice of the compere on the other side of the curtain taking a few minutes to entertain the audience before introducing us and the unsteady breathing of Baby standing next to me.

The Festival Pavilion is one of the largest venues in the area. As well as hosting shows and concerts, it regularly has sporting events, some of them televised. It's a good gig for Penny and me. It pays good money and I'm pleased we haven't had to lose it.

Hearing that the compere is almost finished, I move into position behind Baby.

I wrap one arm around his waist and place the other on his hip.

In the gloom I can see the column of his neck and his exposed shoulder showing his creamy white skin.

I had to catch my breath when I saw him tonight.

I've never really fancied men in drag, but there's something fresh and innocent about the way he looks—pretty and without artifice.

It stirred a deep sense of there being some good in the world somewhere.

I can feel him shaking slightly.

"It's going to be alright," I murmur, and he shivers from my breath across his skin.

I want to tell him how grateful I am for him going through with this, but I'm not good with words of sentimentality, except with Penny and Billy, but this isn't like that.

This is something more, a feeling I shouldn't let take hold.

I have no more time to think about it, as I hear the compere announcing us as Johnny Castle and partner just as the first bars of the music start up.

I feel him freeze as the curtains draw back.

I understand it—the people and the lights, it's overwhelming the first time—but he needs to get over it.

I dig my fingers into his hip and hear his sharp intake of breath.

It's enough to break through his immobility and we can move.

The first few steps go well, as we've practiced them hundreds of times, but after the first twirl he looks blank.

So I pull him to me and remind him of where we are in the routine, and I see him visibly start to relax and get into the rhythm of the music.

Then we draw back for the lift, and as soon as he starts moving I can see he's not committed and we're not going to make it so I do my best to turn it into another turn.

The rest of the routine passes without incident and suddenly we're finished.

We take our bows, or rather Baby does a credible curtsy, and the audience erupts into applause.

I let out a deep breath... We made it, we fooled them.

I give Baby's hand a squeeze but he's just standing there looking completely stunned, and I almost have to drag him off the stage.

I see the manager coming towards us so I push Baby behind me, because the manager's met Penny so he'd be able to see the difference straight away.

After the briefest of conversations he leaves, and not wanting to hang around any longer I walk us back to my car.

Baby clambers into the back seat to get changed.

"You did really good," I say glancing in my rear-view mirror as he pulls off the blonde wig and attempts to scrub the makeup off his face.

"That was incredible." His face lights up in a huge smile, making him look even prettier than normal. "I didn't manage the lift, though." He pulls off the dress and I catch a flash of his chest before he pulls his T-shirt on, and I feel a small pang of disappointment that he covers himself up.

"No, but you still did really well."

He wriggles into his jeans and climbs over to sit in the front seat. He grins at me.

"That was so scary, but wow, it was also the best feeling in the world."

"Isn't it?" His smile is infectious and I grin right back at him.

I get it, it's what keeps me performing, the high and the exhilaration.

Though this time, something else is mixed in—regret maybe that I won't get to dance with him again.

I don't even need to see him after this.

We've done what we needed to do. I squash down the disappointment as we pull into the car park.

Guests shouldn't mix with the staff, and perhaps that's for the best.

Billy is pacing nervously as I pull into my usual space.

“Thank god you're back,” he says, rushing up as soon as my door's open. I don't like the look on his face.

‘What is it? Is it Penny?’

“He was a real hack, Johnny. He looked like he barely knew what he was doing. His instruments looked dirty, and he didn't even wash his hands.”

This sounds bad. I sprint over to Penny's cabin, scared of what I might find.

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“It was awful. I could hear her screams from outside.” Billy keeps talking as we hurry after Johnny.

When we get to Penny’s cabin there are several of the other dance staff gathered around.

The door’s open and I follow Billy inside.

Johnny is sitting on Penny’s bed brushing her hair back and soothing her.

Her skin is grey and covered in a sheen of sweat, her face creased in agony as she clutches her abdomen.

I turn and run, there’s only one person I know who can help her.

I quietly open the door to my mum and dad’s room and whisper to my dad.

“What is it, Baby? Are you feeling worse?”

“No Dad, I’m fine, someone needs your help.”

He doesn’t question me any further as he quickly pulls on some clothes and I pass him his bag. We walk silently through the quiet resort but when we get to the sign for the staff quarters he stops.

“Baby, what is this?”

“Not now, Dad,” I say and keep walking so he has to follow me. When we reach Penny’s cabin most of the other staff have left, but Johnny and Billy are still inside. My dad takes one look at Penny and takes charge.

“Who’s responsible for this?” he demands.

“That would be me.” Johnny steps forward and my dad gives him a disdainful look before ordering us all outside.

We wait. Billy sits on the steps while Johnny leans on the railings surrounding the small cabin porch.

I stand next to him. I don’t know what to say right now so I keep quiet.

After what feels like a long time but is probably only ten or fifteen minutes my dad opens the door and we file in.

Johnny goes straight over to Penny who looks so much better.

He straightens up and turns to my dad, holding out his hand.

“Thank you, sir.”

My dad just looks at his hand and turns away, dismissing him. He grabs hold of my arm on his way past, and ushers me down the steps and down the path back to our cabin.

“Is that what my money paid for?”

When I don’t answer my dad stops and turns to face me.

“I don’t know what’s been going on here, but clearly something has and it’s got to stop. You’re not to have anything to do with these people .” His tone is equal parts disapproving and disappointed.

I want to bite back that he hasn’t known me for a long time, but now is not the time to say that, if ever. He tilts his head as if trying to work out what he’s looking at. “And I have no idea what that is on your face, but clean yourself up before your mother sees you.”

Shit! I must have left some makeup on my face. I never got a chance to take it off properly after finding out about Penny. He strides off and I hurry after him. Only after I’m sure he’s fallen asleep again do I silently leave the cabin.

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I pace the floor of my cabin, not able to go to sleep yet. The exhilaration of the night and the worry over Penny has me wound up tight.

There's a knock on the door. Thinking it's Billy and worried it might be about Penny, I open it quickly.

It's Baby hovering on the steps.

"Can I come in?" he asks.

I silently stand back and let him enter. He sits down on the edge of a chair and looks around. There's not much to see, it's a pretty basic room and not very tidy.

I need something to do so I walk to the record player and select some music to put on.

"I want to apologise for the way my dad treated you," Baby says .

"He was amazing, the way he saved Penny. I was worried about her, but what he did was incredible. I could never do anything like that. It's?—"

"No! I meant how he was with you, Johnny." Baby's words cut through my speech.

I shrug. I'm used to being seen as not worth talking to, it's no big deal.

"It took some courage to do what you did."

"Yeah, it takes real courage to go ask my dad," he says bitterly and I don't like to see

it.

“I mean it. You always try to make things better. If you see something you try to fix it. You’re not scared of anything.” I start walking towards where he’s sitting.

“Me? I’m scared of everything!” he exclaims. Then he takes a deep breath and starts again, quieter. “But... but what I’m most scared of is leaving here and not getting to tell you how you make me feel.”

I stop in the middle of the room. I daren’t move any closer to him, because if I do, I know I won’t be able to turn back from this.

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My words die away and he doesn't move, he just stands in the middle of his cabin, barely looking at me. At least he hasn't thrown me out, so that's something.

The record stops, another disc falls into place, and a new song starts up.

It's a soulful number. He's still standing there, and it's now or never, so I rise, and swallowing the nervousness and fear that threaten to send me fleeing out the door, I slowly walk over to him.

I reach out and touch his chest, and he turns his head away but he doesn't stop me.

I need to relieve this ache in my chest, the one I have when he's close to me, the one that makes me feel like it might burst through my ribcage.

"Dance with me?" I whisper.

He hesitates for a second then slowly reaches for my hip and pulls me close.

He begins to sway his hips in time to the slow soulful music, and I move with him, letting myself go with the flow.

Feeling bold, I slip my fingers under his T-shirt and hear a sharp intake of breath as I touch his skin.

I look at him, and this time he's gazing down at me, his eyes heavy with lust like he wants this too.

When he tugs my T-shirt up, I lift my arms for him to pull it off, then his large warm hands are on my skin, on my back and hips, and we gyrate in unison to the music.

He leads me into a slow spin away from him, and then when I return his thigh slips between my legs.

The friction as we shimmy makes me hard and I press myself closer to him.

Lowering his head, he gently kisses my shoulder, and the soft warm touch of his lips makes my skin flutter like a thousand butterflies taking flight.

He pulls off his T-shirt and I run my fingers over his broad chest, mapping out the contours like I've only dreamt about. I raise my head. I want to kiss him. I want to know what it feels like to kiss, to be kissed. His lips meet mine. It's soft and slow but with an undercurrent of need and desire.

My stomach swoops and I love it.

I feel his tongue and I open up, wanting to taste him as he explores my mouth.

He tastes of the sea and summer and forbidden dreams. Breathlessly I pull back and look up at his dark brown eyes.

I've never felt anything like this before.

A small smile plays along his lips, and his eyes are alight as if he's looking at something incredible but unexpected.

He can't think that of me, can he? I'm sure Johnny could have anyone in the world if he wanted them.

I entwine my fingers in his hair and pull his head back down.

If this is the only chance I get to kiss him, I want to make the most of it.

It's even better the second time—deeper, more urgent.

He runs his hand over my arse before lifting my leg, making the contact with his thigh even stronger.

I can't help the small moan that escapes at the increase of pressure, and his response is to grip me tighter.

We still kiss and gyrate to the music, barely noticing when the song changes again. Then he pulls back slowly.

“Please don't stop,” I whisper, and concern flickers across his face.

“Are you sure?” His voice is rich and low, and full of dark desire.

“Yes.” It comes out breathless and needy. I've never been more sure of anything in my life.

He cups my arse and effortlessly picks me up, then he carries me over to the bed and lays me down gently. Climbing onto the bed, he covers my body with his, resting his elbows on either side of my head as we kiss again slowly. This time when he breaks off he has a little smile.

“What's your real name, Baby?”

“Francis.”

His smile widens as he repeats it.

“Francis, I like it.”

I muse on how much I like the way it sounds when he says it as he smothers me with another kiss.

I run my hands over his shoulders and down his back as he kisses my neck, and my shoulder, working his way down my chest. His tongue on the hard bud of my nipple elicits a moan, which surprises me. I had no idea that would feel so good.

“You like that?” he asks, licking and sucking on the other side, and I groan again in answer. He keeps on covering every inch of my torso in kisses, working lower until he reaches the waistband of my jeans. No longer feeling his lips on my skin, I glance at him, and he’s looking up my body at me.

“Have you ever been with a man before?”

“I’ve never been with anyone,” I reply, then a twinge of anxiety asserts itself. “Is that a problem?”

“Not for me. We’ll go slowly, but if you want me to stop just say so, alright?”

“Okay.” I can’t say anymore because my brain kicks in that this is happening.

I thought if I was lucky, I might meet someone at uni.

But this is so much better. There’s no way I’ll be saying no.

I want to experience it all. Johnny gets off the bed and rummages in a drawer for a minute before returning with a pot and what looks like a condom packet.

He chucks them onto the bed and then unbuttons his jeans and slips them off.

I'm treated to a view of his muscular thighs, which I'd admired on the beach a few days ago.

Then he strips off his boxer briefs and I catch sight of his cock.

I can't help but stare at it. I've not seen many dicks before, and never contemplated any except my own, which is fine, I guess—nothing special.

His is as beautiful as the rest of him. Erect and jutting out proudly, I can see every vein along its impressive length and a sheen of precum glistening on the angry-looking head.

I have an overwhelming urge to lick it, to know what it tastes like, feel the weight of it on my tongue.

“Do you like what you see?” he asks, and I realise I've been caught staring. I reluctantly drag my eyes from his dick and look at his face where he's wearing a cocky smirk.

“Very much so,” I reply, wondering if he'd let me suck him off. He chuckles and kneels back on the bed, settling between my legs. I guess swallowing down his cock isn't on the cards right now .

“Remember we can stop at any point.”

My own cock is already hard and aching, so I don't think that will be likely. But he doesn't continue, so he must need an answer.

“Of course,” I say and he nods. I breathe a little sigh when his hands return to my

skin, as if my body already remembers what his touch feels like and has been starved of it. He undoes my jeans and pulls them down. I wriggle out of them.

“Jesus Christ, Francis.” I look up and Johnny is staring down at me . . . in my pink lace knickers.

I quickly cover as much of myself as I can with my hands, squirming in embarrassment.

“Shit, sorry. I didn’t have time to change them after the dance.”

Johnny takes hold of my wrists and pulls my hands away from my groin. I still squirm a little, ashamed he can still see me.

“Do you mean to tell me that when we were dancing earlier, you were wearing these?” The richness to his voice is back, and it sounds like black velvet.

“Yes.” It comes out as a strangled whisper.

“I’m glad I didn’t know. I might not have been able to dance properly with a boner.”

“Y-You like them?”

He lets go of my wrists and traces his fingers over the lace patterning.

“You in lace knickers is the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen. ”

His touch is feather light as he runs his hands over them. I already like how they feel against my skin, but with his hands on them as well, it’s divine. It feels special, and I stretch a little and push into his touch.

“Turn over,” he says, and I twist until I’m lying on my front.

He takes hold of my hips and guides me into kneeling on all fours.

He runs his hands over my arse, smoothing over the lace.

His hot breath heats my skin beneath the material as he slowly starts kissing me, working his way across my arse cheeks, alternating between grazing them with his lips and tonguing at them.

The hot dampness of the knickers feels deliciously wicked, and I wiggle a little, craving more.

I’m so caught up with need, whilst a part of my brain is delightfully scandalised by the very idea of being on my knees waving my behind in another man’s face and loving it, that when he strokes my cock the surprise makes me jerk backwards and push myself further into his face.

His tongue runs along my crack and I’ve never felt anything like it.

I push back again, desperate for him to do it again. The sensation disappears.

“These are going to have to come off,” he growls, and tugs the knickers down to my knees.

Then his tongue is back, licking down my crease and tracing round my hole.

It’s exquisite, and my brain turns to liquid as I can’t focus on anything but the sensation of the warm and wet pressure at my entrance.

My cock, now freed from the confines of the knickers, aches to be touched. I support

myself on one arm and reach for it, sighing as the pressure from my hand gives a slight amount of relief.

“Not yet, sweetheart,” Johnny says, sitting back and batting my hand away. “Lean forward.” His hand on my back pushes me down, and I lower myself onto my forearms. I’m vaguely aware of the music changing again, and I recognise Soloman Burke’s “Cry to Me. ”

I hear the sound of the pot opening, and then a few seconds later feel a light cold touch near my hole. I flinch involuntarily.

“Just relax,” Johnny whispers, and I try. This isn’t like it was with his tongue—it’s harder, his finger—and after circling my entrance a few times he slowly pushes in. Discomfort blooms round my hole.

“Oh,” I squeak and he stops.

“Too much?”

“No, no. It was just a surprise.” I take a deep breath and release it slowly.

The discomfort is still there but it’s peripheral to the wonderful sensation of being filled.

I want more of that. “More, please,” I say, and I hear a chuckle as he slides his finger further inside me.

It feels so good and I relax into it as he glides in and out.

All the while his other hand is soothing up and down my back.

“Can you take more?”

“Yeah,” I hum softly. Right now I’d try and take a rocket if he asked it of me.

I want it all. I don’t want this gloriously full feeling to end.

He adds another finger and works them in and out of me, then it changes again so I think he adds a third.

It’s so divine that I start to move myself, pushing back on his hand, wanting to feel him deeper.

“Please, please, more.” It sounds like a whine but I don’t think I’m above begging at this point.

“Shhh, sweetheart. Almost ready,” he croons, his dark velvet voice traveling straight to my balls, and I hope I don’t come before I get a chance to feel him inside me.

After a couple more minutes he slides his fingers out completely, and I almost mourn their loss as I feel my hole wanting to grip thin air.

It only takes a minute for him to tear open the packet, and then I feel him position behind me.

He nudges at my hole and I impatiently push backwards as he breaches me.

I gasp in a breath and he stops. I breathe out slowly.

“Francis?” His use of my proper name sounds like more than a casual query. It wraps around my heart, enveloping it in reverence.

“I’m okay,” I reply and he pushes forward slowly. I keep breathing, focussing on staying relaxed. Once he’s bottomed out he pauses for a minute, and then slowly starts rolling his hips. It’s both wonderful and stings slightly, and one is very much worth the other.

He moans deeply and picks up the pace, and I drop my head onto the bed, unable to do anything except enjoy him slamming into me.

I can hear the soulful music still, as a backdrop to his breathy grunts and the sound of skin slapping against skin.

I start to see stars, and his fingers digging into my hips are the only things keeping me grounded.

Tingling starts in my lower spine, building, and I know I’m close.

I reach for my cock again and this time he whispers encouragement.

“That’s it, sweetheart. Come for me. You feel so good. I want to feel you come.”

His words do the trick and I spill all over my hand, the biggest orgasm I’ve ever had.

It doesn’t seem to stop, and I keep on coming, and all the while he’s ramming into me.

Then he jerks, his hips snapping forward, and I feel him come too.

When he shudders to a stop he leans forward, almost plastering himself to my back, and kisses between my shoulders.

I wince slightly as he withdraws from me, and I hear a whispered sorry, but I chuckle

slightly as he has nothing to be sorry for.

All I can do is collapse bonelessly onto the bed.

He lies down next to me and his gorgeous face slowly comes into focus.

I grin in what must be an inane way, deliriously high from my orgasm.

“Are you alright?” he asks.

“Just don’t ask me to dance,” I reply. “I wouldn’t even be able to walk right now.” I drift off to the sound of him laughing softly.

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Breakfast is a largely silent affair. My dad keeps glancing my way, alternating between frowning at me and giving me a look of disappointment. I don't regret that I wanted to help Penny, and I wish he could see it that way.

I shift on my seat. I'm uncomfortable, achy.

It's kind of a good ache, a reminder of last night, but I wish there was someone I could ask if it's normal, or what's to be expected.

I suppose I'll have to figure it out for myself.

I shift again and Lisa shoots me a look, one that has questions attached.

Oh god, what if she can tell? Do I look different now?

I hope not. I keep my head down, hoping to avoid anyone's notice.

"Good morning. Jake, can I sign you up to play in the golf tournament on Friday?" I look up to see Max and Nicola.

My dad puts down his knife and fork and gives me another of his looks. "No, we're leaving tomorrow morning. "

The heads of my mum and sister snap round like they're on strings.

"What's this?" my mum asks.

“We’re going to beat the weekend traffic.”

“Jake, but we’re paid up for the full week,” my mum points out.

“I’ve made up my mind.”

“Daddy, no!” exclaims Lisa. “It’s the final of the beauty competition this weekend. You know how much I want to be Miss Poplins.”

My dad looks at her and his expression softens.

“I guess we can stay till then,” he says.

“Daddy, thank you,” Lisa says excitedly, jumping up and going around the table to hug him.

Nicola turns to me and asks, “Baby, can you help me with some scenery for the big show at the weekend? It’s our end of season finale.”

“Yes he can.” My dad answers for me, and then leaves the table without giving me another look, with Lisa dancing after him and giving him all the details of what she’ll be wearing for the beauty competition.

Any thoughts I had of escaping Nicola are gone and I almost groan at her beaming smile.

“This is going to be great,” she says, linking her arm through mine and leading me towards a small building behind the ballroom. “Every year I get to run our end of season show and I’ve got some excellent ideas for this year. ”

For the next few hours I help Nicola sort through the scenery from previous seasons

while she makes a decision on whether or not to use it or to modify any pieces.

Then she sets me to work painting some wooden trees to look like palms, as the theme for the beauty competition is tropical.

Eventually I manage to leave her, but not before she's made me promise to help again tomorrow.

When I get back to our cabin, there's no one around.

I stand in front of the small mirror in the room I share with Lisa and strip my T-shirt off.

I turn from side to side, looking at myself, trying to decide if I look any different.

I don't. I look like the same pretty weedy person I was yesterday.

I just feel different. I raise my hands and touch my nipples, marveling at how turned on I was when Johnny was licking them, how they hardened.

Just running my fingers over them and thinking about him makes them firm, and that's not the only effect as my dick starts to harden as well.

Lisa bursts through the door. "What are you doing?" she asks scornfully. I spin away from her so she can't see me, and hurriedly pull my T-shirt back on.

"Boys are weird," she states, and takes my place in front of the mirror and starts brushing her hair.

"Anyway, what happened? What's got dad in such a funk that he'd want to go home?"

“I have no idea.” I collapse onto my bed with the intention of resting and hopefully catching up on some sleep before dinner.

“I don’t believe you. Something’s going on and it’s to do with you.”

I’m not surprised she’s noticed how dad is with me. He’s never been like that before, but then I’ve never lied to him like this. I still think I did the right thing, but there’s no way I’m telling Lisa.

“I can’t tell you.” I turn away from her and face the wall, hoping she’ll leave it alone.

“I knew it,” she crows. “When did you become so secretive?”

I don’t answer. I’ve been keeping a secret from my family ever since I knew I was different and that I preferred men. This seems like nothing compared to that.

She gives an infuriated sigh, knowing I’m not going to say any more, and deploys her usual tactic, which is to talk about herself. I let her talk, only half listening until I fall asleep.

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“I think you’ve been avoiding me.” Vivianne’s brittle voice disturbs my reverie as I stare out of the dance studio windows.

I spin round and see her in the doorway.

“Not at all,” I reply. “I’ve just been very busy.”

She looks round the obviously empty studio. “You don’t look busy now.”

She’s right. I’ve no need to practice the dance with Baby anymore, and I’m not scheduled to be on duty until later.

“Can I have a dance lesson?” she asks.

“Now?”

“Seems like as good a time as any.” She saunters into the room, and for the next hour I dance with her. She’s already proficient, but I know her husband Mo doesn’t dance. I’m pretty sure she’s never in want of partners at the resorts she stays at and on the cruises she’s always bragging about.

“I could come by your cabin later,” she says as she takes her leave.

“No, I’m busy,” I reply bluntly.

“I’ll make it worth your while.” She drops her voice, trying to sound sexy and seductive. I know exactly what she means, and there would’ve been a time I’d be

tempted by her offer, but no longer.

“No, thank you.” I try to remain polite so she can’t complain about rudeness. She gives me a long stare, before she flicks her head as if she’s not bothered and leaves.

I walk back to my cabin and look around, trying to see it with fresh eyes, like Baby must have seen it last night.

It’s untidy for sure, and I make a decision to put things away so when he comes back it doesn’t look so bad.

I laugh at myself. When he comes back . But he did agree to return tonight, and if there’s one thing I know about him it’s that he keeps his word.

Somehow it makes a difference to me that he sees it tidy.

I start putting clothes away, including those I’d flung across the chairs.

As I’m picking others up from the floor, I see a flash of pink half under the bed and pick up the lace knickers baby was wearing.

I sit down on the bed, running them through my fingers, my mind flitting to last night and how sexy he looked wearing them.

I lift them to my face and inhale the scent of him still on them.

I finish tidying everything else away, but the knickers I tuck under my pillow.

I knock on Penny’s door and she shouts for me to come in.

I open it and the first person I see is Baby sitting on the edge of Penny’s bed.

I didn't know he'd be here, so I hover just inside the door.

He sees me and says something to Penny, then he stands.

As he walks past me he gives me a small, almost shy smile, and I can't help my lips twitching in response.

He closes the door behind him and I turn back to Penny.

"How are you doing?"

"Johnny?" Her voice is stern but also full of concern.

"What?" I walk over to the bed, pretending I have no idea what she's on about.

"What have you done?"

I don't answer her. She knows me too well and can guess the rest.

"Damn it, Johnny! How many times have we said to never get involved with the guests?"

"I know what I'm doing."

"How old is he?"

"Eighteen."

"You could get into real trouble. He's not old enough.

" I don't respond. I know the law as well as anyone, and until recently it was illegal

for men of any age to be together.

That they've now made the legal age twenty-one seems arbitrary.

It being against the law hasn't stopped me in the past, though.

It doesn't stop anyone, they just know how to be careful, as do I.

She lets out a big sigh and shakes her head, letting it be for now.

"The doc was here a little while ago."

"What did he say?"

"That I'm going to make a full recovery. I should also still be able to have children someday, when I'm ready. "

"That's great news." I smile, genuinely pleased for her.

We talk a little longer, and she tells me how she should be able to get back to work the next day.

I stay with her until I need to get ready for my shift, going back to my room and putting on my blue blazer, looking once again like a Poplin's employee.

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My nerves are on edge as I wait for the cabin to go quiet, and it feels like forever until Lisa goes to sleep.

Only then do I slip out and run as quickly as I can towards the staff quarters.

What if Johnny is regretting what happened last night?

What if he doesn't want to see me again?

I knock softly on his cabin door, and it quickly opens so I slip inside.

Still keyed up, with my insides twisting like a washing machine, I pace his room.

"What's the matter?" he asks, after he shuts the door and turns around.

"I wasn't sure if you wanted me to come here." I twist my hands.

"Why would you think that?" He walks over to me. I shrug and look down at the floor, but he puts his hand under my chin and guides my head up to look at him. He bends down and places a soft kiss on my lips. My stomach settles and I take a deep breath .

"I thought you might have regretted last night."

"Never," he says and pulls me closer, wrapping an arm round my back. I reach out and grasp his hips and tip my head up for a longer, deeper kiss.

“How are you?”

“A little sore,” I say, giving a small wiggle so he knows what I’m referring to.

“I’m sorry.” He cups my face and looks into my eyes. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“It’s fine. It’s not bad, just more like I’m aware of it.”

“It’ll be better next time,” he whispers, running his thumb over my bottom lip.

“There’ll be a next time?” I give him a hopeful smile.

“There will, but not tonight.” He kisses me again. It’s definitely something I could get used to, kissing Johnny.

“That’s good, because I have something else in mind,” I say when he pulls back.

“Do you?” He tilts his head and cocks an eyebrow at me. I chew my lip for a couple of seconds and then blurt it out.

“I wanna suck you off.”

He gives me a cocky little smirk. “You do, do you?”

“Yeah, I mean I want to give it a go. I’ve never done it before, so I’m not sure if I’ll be any good, but I want to try.”

He silences me with, “Okay,” as his lips meet mine for another lingering kiss.

“Let me put some music on.” He releases me and walks to his record player, loading several discs on the spindle .

I hover in the middle of the room, nervous but excited, then he turns round and beckons me over.

He catches me round the waist and snakes his hips, and I can't help but move with him.

As we move I unbutton his shirt, kissing each part of his chest as it's slowly revealed.

I lick across his nipple, feeling the hard nub with my tongue.

I flick it and hear a sharp intake of breath.

I smile to myself at his response, and kiss across his chest to do the same to the other side.

I work my way down his abs and kneel down in front of him, then I slowly undo his trousers and pull them down along with his boxer briefs.

Wow, I've never had my face this close to another bloke's cock before.

Hell, I've never had my face this close to my own cock since I can't bend myself in half.

I thought it was impressive yesterday, but this close it's amazing.

I look up at Johnny and he's gazing down at me, his hair falling over his face, his dark eyes swirling.

He gives me an encouraging nod and I turn my attention back to his dick.

I lick it from bottom to tip, feeling the veins with my tongue before running it over

the slit tasting his stickiness.

It's not unpleasant, not at all. In fact, I like it.

I wrap my lips round the head and take in as much as I can, then I wrap my hand around the base and go to work on sucking and slurping as hard as I can.

I don't think I have much technique, but I'm going to give it everything I've got.

Getting used to the feel of it hitting the back of my mouth, I relax and find I can go deeper.

I start to work my tongue underneath the head as I bob up and down, drooling a little but not caring in the slightest. I can hear Johnny's breathing speed up until he's nearly panting.

A couple of times he thrusts his hips forward and I nearly choke, but each time he stops as if he's regained some sort of self-control.

I don't want him to. I want him to lose it, so I take him deeper, harder, and apply more pressure until he's moaning with every bob of my head.

His hands twist into my hair, at first stroking, but then he holds my head, and I can't move as he thrusts into my mouth once, twice.

I almost can't breathe, and then hot cum fills my mouth.

His breathing is ragged as he withdraws his cock from my mouth.

I swallow his cum and work my jaw a little as it's a little stiff.

Still holding onto my head, he guides me up off my knees until I'm standing in front of him.

Then he kisses me, deeply and tenderly. When he finally releases me his eyes are shining, and I can't help the grin that spreads across my face.

"Was I good?" I ask, as we lie on his bed and I rest my head against his chest with his arm around me.

"I came, didn't I?" he replies, which is not really an answer so I push him a little.

"I know I have a lot to learn. I bet you've had fantastic blow jobs."

"What is this?" He frowns at me, but now I've started I can't stop.

"Have you been with lots of people, men and women?"

He disengages his arm and gets up off the bed, which tells me enough. He's a few years older than me, stunningly handsome, and he's lived, he's been places.

"I understand," I say, and he spins round with an almost furious look on his face.

"They offer me things—money, jewellery, watches. Always the women. They're wealthy, and I've got to eat."

"I get it, you use them. It's fine."

His expression darkens into something bleaker.

"No, Baby, I don't. They use me. They want a good time, to be made to feel special, beautiful, or younger." He sits down on the side of the bed, his head bowed.

“They think I can give them what they’re missing, just for a while, and when they’re done with me, I’m back in the gutter.”

I crawl over to him and put my arms around him, pressing my lips to his shoulder. I’ve never thought of it like that. I assumed he had a charmed life.

“Four months ago I was in Monaco. I’ve even danced with Estelle Winters,” he says, his voice taking on a bitter tone. “And now I’m here, trying to get holidaymakers to join our singing competition or enter the knobbly knees contest.”

I run my hand up and down his back, and he leans into me resting his head on my shoulder.

We stay like that, in silence, with my arms wrapped around him, for a long few minutes until he turns to me.

His lips seek mine. His kiss is urgent and needy, and I respond eagerly, letting him possess my mouth.

He pushes me down onto the bed and straddles my hips, sitting back and looking down at me.

“It’s my turn now,” he says darkly, before shuffling backwards and unbuttoning my trousers quickly and pulling them down over my hips.

He tugs at my briefs until he releases my dick.

He doesn’t take his time, or treat me delicately.

Instead, he nearly swallows me whole with a greedy pleasure.

My hips buck at the sensation of his lips round my cock and the perfect pressure of his mouth along the length of it.

“Oh fuck!” I nearly come straight off, and he slows down a little, maintaining a rhythm while I lie back and wonder if I’ve entered heaven.

It’s too perfect, it’s too much, and I can’t hold on for long.

My hips move on their own, and all too soon my orgasm rips through me, hard and savage.

Not like any I’ve had before. It feels cathartic, as if a part of me has let go.

He slides his mouth off my softening cock and gathers me to him, holding me tight, and I wonder who needed that the most, him or me.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

“Step one, two, three.” Baby counts out loud as we twirl round the dance studio.

He’s taken to hanging out in the studio.

If I’m teaching, he sits in one of the chairs and reads, though I know he steals glances at me, as I do of him.

He’s a distraction, but a good one, and there’s no way I can send him away.

In between lessons we dance, but I can’t seem to get enough of him and would rather hold him and kiss him.

I grab him round the waist and pull him closer.

“Do you think you can step into my dance space?” He grins at me, wriggling out of my grasp and lifting his arms to dance again.

“You need to lock your frame, Johnny boy.” He smirks.

“Johnny boy?” I raise an eyebrow at him.

“Uh-huh.” He gives me a beautiful smile as he dances past me.

A smile that lights up his pretty face, the one I see when I close my eyes at night and think of when I wake each morning.

I’ve never felt like this about anyone before, and I know it can’t last but I can enjoy it

just for a little while.

I can also play his game. I crook my finger at him, gesturing for him to come on over.

“Well, little Mr Fix-It. Come over here and fix me.”

He dances over and right on past me, wiggling his cute backside as he goes.

“Hey!” I exclaim, and he circles back around and into my arms. I hold his hips and push my thigh between his legs, enjoying the sight of him trying to keep it together as we writhe together.

We both hear a tread on the steps outside and jump apart, Baby continuing to dance. There isn’t another lesson for at least half an hour, so when I turn I see Nicola standing in the doorway.

“So, this is where you’ve been,” she says to Baby, her voice holding a hint of accusation.

“I’m taking dance lessons, so I don’t step on your toes,” Baby manages to say smoothly, still moving round the floor.

“That’s sweet of you,” she says in a way that makes my stomach curdle. “But I could have taught you. She dances a couple of steps.” I tend to show my emotions on my face, so I daren’t risk looking at Baby. I turn away and go over to the record player.

Nicola follows me over.

“So, Johnny, I’ve been wanting to talk to you about the dance for the last show on Sunday night.”

This sounds promising, so I decide to go for it .

“I have some great ideas. I’ve been working with the entertainment staff on a crossover from some of the steps they’re doing in the clubs.”

I demonstrate a couple of moves, quite raunchy but nothing close to how we dance in the staff room. That would never be seen on the dance floor.

“Woah, that’s a bit too much.” Nicola puts out her hands and I come to a stop. “Listen to this. Every year we dance the mambo, but I was thinking this year we could dance the jive?”

“The jive?” I’m not sure what era she thinks we live in.

“The jive, that will get them going.”

Yes, about thirty years ago it might have. But I can see on her face that her mind is made up, and that it would be too much for her to accept anything new or exciting.

“Yeah, sure,” I say, trying to hide the disappointment in my voice. She walks back across the room.

“I’ll see you later, Baby, and you can show me what you’ve learnt,” she says. The thought of him dancing with her floats into my head, and the record I’m holding nearly breaks in my hand.

I feel Baby’s hand on my back.

“You should stand up for yourself, get to do what you want to do, no matter the consequences. You’re the expert and you have a real talent for choreography. You need to tell her that.” He always makes it sound so easy, but it doesn’t work like that.

“It’s not that simple. I need to be able to come back next year.” I put my arm around his shoulder and he leans into me, offering a little comfort. I just wish I could share his optimism too.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

Mealtimes are still awkward. My father's still barely speaking to me so I spend less time with my family.

I also try to avoid Nicola, though she's discovered that the best time to corner me is just as we're finishing breakfast or dinner, when I can't refuse her in front of my family without giving myself away.

Whenever I can, though, I seek out Penny, Billy, and of course Johnny.

When he's at work, I stay in his cabin, reading while I wait for him.

If he has a split shift and has free time in the afternoon we usually spend it in bed.

I'm getting good at sneaking out after my family have all gone to sleep.

We usually dance in the staff room for a while before we go back to his cabin, and sometimes, if we wake up early, we'll go for a walk on the beach.

If we walk far enough, there's usually no one around and we can walk hand in hand.

I savour those moments, the sun already risen but not too hot, a day full of promise.

It feels at that moment that life could be the same, that we have a future.

I know it can't happen, but just for those moments I like to pretend and not dwell on the fact that in a few days I'll go back home and pack my things for university, and Johnny will move on to whatever he's got lined up next.

After an early morning walk, we're heading back and about to part for breakfast when I see my dad walking up ahead with Robbie and Lisa. He has his arm thrown round Robbie's shoulders. They start along a path that doubles back towards us, so I pull Johnny back behind a cabin and out of sight.

"What was that you said about standing up for what you believe in?" he whispers, and I ignore him, watching until they're out of sight.

"I don't see you telling your dad and your family about who you really are." He continues talking, walking away for a couple of steps and turning back.

"It's difficult. My dad's complicated. I don't know how they'll take it," I say quietly.

"What about taking chances, whatever the consequences?" he says right into my face, but I turn my head away. "You're just like the rest of them," he says before storming off.

I stare after his retreating back. He's right, I am avoiding telling my family, but it doesn't make me feel better. I just feel like I've let him down.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

My day goes badly. I shout at the staff, which I never usually do.

I almost trip over my own feet when I give a dance lesson, and I'm late for a staff meeting, which Max berates me about in front of everyone.

I don't mind Max shouting at me, I can shrug it off.

He likes to show he's the boss by being hard on us sometimes.

But I can't stand Robbie's smirk as I receive my dressing down.

Especially after seeing him this morning, being treated almost like one of the family by Baby's father.

But what's worse is the knowledge that I had a go at Baby.

I shouldn't have done that; I was out of order.

Regret hangs heavy in my chest, because he's the one person outside my two closest friends who seems to see who I am.

I haven't seen him all day, he must be avoiding me, and that feels so much worse.

I miss seeing him curled up in the chair in the studio.

He always senses when I'm gazing at him and he looks up and gives me his pretty smile.

I miss finding him half asleep in my cabin when I return there between shifts too.

Without him in my day it feels hollow and somehow meaningless.

I need to find him and apologise. It's up to him when he feels it best to talk to his family.

Before I try to hunt him down I call to see Penny.

She's still on light duties and is usually resting in her cabin between shifts.

When I open the door, Baby is with her, sitting on a chair chatting.

He rises when he sees me and walks past me, not even looking at me, and the lump in my chest grows until I can hardly breathe. I turn back to Penny.

"Johnny." Her voice holds a warning tone. "I told you to be careful."

"I'm fine," I lie unconvincingly.

"He's a good kid."

"Yeah, I know, too good for me." The sharp edge of my voice betrays me and shows the cracks.

"I didn't say that," she sighs. "He's not like us. He's grown up with a loving family. Don't expect the same from him as you would from one of us."

I almost bark out a laugh, because the kid is one of the toughest people I know.

I'm the coward here, and that's the part that made me snap at him and has had me

twisted up all day.

After a few more minutes I take my leave from Penny.

As I close the cabin door I see Baby waiting on the porch, picking at the wooden railings.

That he hasn't left makes my heart beat a little faster in my chest. I walk over to him and he looks up at me.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have snapped at you. You don't ever need to tell your family if you don't want to."

He wraps his arms round me and I pull him close, breathing into his hair, inhaling his scent. He always smells of fresh linen and the summer sun.

"I want to tell them. I'm just scared," he whispers against my chest.

Robbie appears around the corner of the cabin and looks straight at us. His face twists into a cruel smile.

"Looks like the brother is as easy as the sister. I didn't figure him as a poofteer, though."

It's the last time I'm going to take his shit.

Making comments about me is one thing, but he doesn't get to say anything about Baby—ever.

I launch myself at him, knocking him to the ground.

I land a kick to his ribs and he curls up.

I grab his shirt and draw my arm back, and he lifts his hands to cover his face.

I see his expression; he's actually terrified I'm going to hit him.

For all his talk he's not willing to fight.

I lower my arm and shove him away from me.

“You're full of hot air and nothing else. Stay away from us, you worthless posh boy.”

I walk away from him and back to where Baby is waiting for me at the railing. I hug him to me again as I hear Robbie scramble away.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

Nicola finds me as I'm leaving breakfast. She wants some help moving some of the sets I've helped her paint to backstage in the ballroom, ready for the show on Sunday.

After I've carried all of it over she directs me to arranging pieces while she stands in the middle of the ballroom and gives directions.

She changes her mind a lot, and I feel like I've moved the same tree about a dozen times.

I look up and see Johnny is on the ballroom floor, a clipboard in his hand, talking with a few of the staff.

I steal as many glances as I can, taking in his broad back, gorgeous arse, and muscled thighs.

"Baby, are you listening to me?" Nicola's voice is shrill, ringing across the mostly empty room. I see Johnny look over at her, and then up at me. He winks and I nearly fall over the wooden boat I'm holding. I bite my lip to hide my smile, and turn my attention to an impatient-looking Nicola .

"I want it moved over there," she says, pointing to the far side of the stage. As she directs me to move it back five minutes later, I'm pretty sure she asked me to move it just because she can.

A few other people, some of them guests, come to see Johnny, and he checks them off his list. I wonder if it's for the singing competition.

He seems to have finished what he's doing and comes towards the stage.

I try to focus on Nicola's instructions.

The next time I look up I see the older lady guest, the one I've seen dancing with Johnny and who I saw leaving the studio when I was arriving for practice.

She saunters up to him, and they're close enough for me to hear her even though she leans in close.

"Hello, loverboy. I'm just checking that I'm on the list for the singing competition."

Johnny checks his list. "Yes, Mrs Pressman. I have you down as sixth on the running order." He holds the clipboard against his chest.

"My husband will be busy all night, so it's our last chance." Her voice is sultry and my heart sinks.

"No, Mrs Pressman. I can't," he replies.

She tosses her hair back haughtily and stalks off. As she goes, he glances at me, but I go back to moving scenery, keeping my smile to myself.

"I've made a decision," Lisa announces as we're in the cabin dressing for dinner .

"What's that?" I look over at her and she's almost bursting with wanting to tell me something.

"I've decided that I'm going to visit Robbie tonight. Late. After lights out."

I know exactly what she means as I've been sneaking out myself for the last few

nights. I don't know why she's confiding in me, though. Probably from the lack of having her usual friends to tell. I pause in buttoning up my shirt.

"You can do better than Robbie, Lisa. Believe me." I hate that she still seems to like someone like him.

"What would you know about it? Why would you care about me?" she snaps at me. "All you care about is that Dad doesn't talk to you anymore, you're no longer his favourite. He prefers me now."

I finish dressing in silence. Her words speak a truth that cuts deep into me. I don't know how to heal the rift with my dad and that hurts.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

“Sorry I’m late,” says a breathless Baby on my doorstep. I pull him inside and as soon as the door is shut, I press him up against it and kiss him because I just can’t seem to get enough of him. He pulls back, his chest still heaving.

“I had to wait until Lisa had gone, and then I ran all the way here.”

“I’d still have been here.” I smile at him and he releases a breath, his panting subsiding.

His cheeks are flushed and his lips are parted and glistening from the kiss I just gave him.

I run a hand down his cheek. “I didn’t know what I was waiting for until you showed up in my life,” I say softly, and see him drop his eyes like he’s not worthy.

“Hey,” I admonish gently, and take his chin in my hand, forcing him to look back up at me. “None of that now. You never have to look away from me.”

I want to profess more to him, but I don’t know what those feelings are.

I don’t have a word for them, and I know this can never be a long-term relationship.

He’ll finish his holiday, and at the end of the season I move on—that’s life, that’s how it has to be.

But I’m not going to let those thoughts ruin this night.

After another long kiss I walk over to the bed and he follows me. I rummage around under my pillow and find the lace knickers.

“You forgot these.” I hold them out to him and his eyes widen slightly.

“I can’t take them back to my cabin. What if my mum sees them? I doubt my sister will cover me, she already suspects something’s going on. I don’t know what she’ll make of me having them.”

“Will you wear them for me?” I ask.

“Now?” he asks and I nod. He captures his bottom lip between his teeth, the way he does when he’s thinking. I watch him, because it’s the cutest look.

“Then what?” He has a cheeky glint in his eye so I step close to him, fold his hands round the knickers, and brush my lips against his ear.

“Dance dirty with me.”

By the time I’ve put on a record—“Be My Baby”—and turned around, he’s there, wearing nothing but the pale-pink lace knickers, and he’s every bit as beautiful as I imagined.

Breathtakingly so, with his slim body and perfectly round arse, his skin, soft like swans’ feathers, and his pretty face that captured me the first time I saw him.

I pull my T-shirt over my head and close the few strides between us. I almost hesitate to touch him.

“You’re beautiful. You’re perfect,” I utter huskily.

I place one hand on his hip and with the other I direct his arm around my neck, moving closer so we're pressing close.

I sway and he moves with me. I catch him round the waist, holding him close as we sway in time to the music.

The skin-on-skin touch as we gyrate in unison is electric, and the air almost fizzles between us.

He bends back away from me and I lick up his chest as he rises back up, capturing his lips and kissing him as we dance.

I run my hands down his back and over his tight backside, and the contrast of his smooth skin and the lace feels divine.

He presses closer, and I offer my leg for some friction.

His head thrown back—with slightly parted lips and heavy-lidded eyes—as he grinds against my thigh is more than I can stand.

I pull him towards the bed and sit down on the edge of it so my face is level with his groin.

I pull down the knickers, freeing his cock before sucking it into my mouth. He gasps and his hips thrust forward.

“Fuck it, that’s good.”

I bob my head a couple of times, but then he pulls away and I look up at him, slightly annoyed that he disturbed my pleasure.

“Not yet,” he says, and pushes me backwards on the bed.

“Take these off.” He gestures to my jeans.

“And tell me where the vaseline is.” I point to the dresser and he reaches for the pot and a condom.

I shuffle back so I’m lying properly on the bed, and I wonder what he has in mind.

He sits across my thighs and wraps a hand round my dick, running it up and down until I’m groaning.

I give myself over to his touch until I’m almost going to come, then he stops and I growl at him.

He laughs a little and picks up the condom.

He opens it and attempts to put it on me, but he fumbles a little, so I put my hands over his and show him how to do it.

Then he coats my cock in vaseline and I understand his plan.

“It’s going to hurt you,” I whisper, and I grab his hips, pulling him up so he’s sitting on my chest. “Now come here and let me taste you while I get you ready.”

He kneels over me and leans forward until I can reach his dick.

I want to carry on sucking him off, which he interrupted earlier.

I reach for the pot, and lubing up my fingers carefully, I reach for his hole and insert one.

I prep him slowly at the same time as my lips are flowing up and down his length.

The tiny moans he makes—as if he can't decide which he wants to do more, thrust forward into my mouth or plunge himself back onto my fingers—are my new favourite sounds, and I think I'm going to come myself just from hearing his pleasure.

My mouth wins, and he almost buckles in half as he comes down my throat.

I swallow everything he has to give and withdraw my fingers before he sits back.

“Wow, I um... no, can't speak... I can barely see,” he laughs, and I gently stroke his thighs as he catches his breath.

When he looks down at me again I see a look full of bliss and adoration.

He leans down and presses his lips to mine with a touch like gossamer, and whispers, “I love you, Johnny.” It's so faint I think I must be imagining it.

I'm sure I am because no one has ever said those words to me, and they aren't likely to start now.

He then gives me the widest grin and crawls backwards until he's hovering over my cock.

I grab his hip with one hand and help him line up.

He sinks down slowly, breathing deeply and stopping as he tries to accommodate me.

When he's fully seated he gives a satisfied sigh, taking a moment before he starts moving.

I grip his hips and help as he slides up and down.

He's so tight, and it's perfect as he rides my cock like he's been doing it all his life, so I know I'm not going to last for long.

He glides smoothly on my dick like it was made for him, all the time keeping up an intense gaze I can't look away from.

I know I told Penny I had this under control, but I don't think I have anymore.

I could be seriously falling for this amazing man, but then I've known that for a while.

I shove those impossible thoughts away and let the sensation of his perfect arse gripping my cock take over.

He grips my hands where they rest on his hips, digging his nails in as he arches his back, his breath coming in short bursts.

"I'm gonna come, sweetheart," I groan, as he sinks down one more time.

I meet him by thrusting upwards, orgasming hard as he comes over me again.

I pull him down onto my chest, holding us together until our breathing returns to normal.

I have my arms wrapped round him and all I can hear is the thudding of my heart, beating out its own rhythm—our song.

Once I've cleaned us up, I lie down on my bed, sated, and for once in my life, content... happy even. Baby crawls into my side and I put an arm around him.

“Do you ever think there’ll be a world where we can be normal?” he asks.

“Normal?”

“You know, where we could walk down the street hand in hand, together? ”

“I doubt it,” I scoff. “I barely get treated equally as a person as it is. I can’t see it happening for two blokes anytime soon.

” I think back to the way Max and the management staff treat me and those like me in contrast to the college kids.

It’s been like that all my life. The breaks only happen for those with money and connections.

“Maybe for the privileged few being gay is tolerated or ignored, but that certainly isn’t the case for us working class folk. ”

I feel him sigh against me. He’s such a dreamer and an optimist. He’s going to get hurt, have his dreams and ideals shattered one day, but I don’t want to be the one to do that for him.

“You’re going to university soon. Perhaps you’ll become one of those types of people. You know, you become a lawyer, then maybe a judge. A supreme court judge with lots of power. You could do anything you wanted then. No one would dare say anything about you.”

I feel his breath ripple across my chest as he giggles.

“I don’t think I’d be like that.”

“No, you wouldn’t.” I glance down at him, all the teasing gone out of my voice.
“You’d probably want to change the world for everyone.”

He grins at me. I can believe he’d do that as well.

“What about you, Johnny boy? What are you going to do?”

“Whatever work I can find,” I answer with a sigh.

“Not good enough.” He gives me a poke in the ribs. “Don’t you have any dreams?”

“I used to, but they came to nothing.”

“Tell me about them. ”

I huff a laugh that’s only half filled with humour. “I wanted to work in the West End, choreographing shows and musicals and dancing in them.”

“You’d be brilliant at it, so why don’t you?”

“It’s not that simple. Either I don’t have an education or I don’t know the right people. Even getting into the dance troupe is hard when you’re not one of them .”

“Well, it’s their loss, but you should try again. We can be whatever we want to be.”

“No we can’t, that’s just it. Why can’t you see that?” I snap at him. “What’s the point of having big dreams? All they lead to is disappointment.”

“They don’t have to,” he tries to reason.

“Oh, be realistic, Baby. Life isn’t like that.

” I emphasise his nickname to show how naive his outlook is.

“It can never be like that.” I pull away from him and clamber off the bed, angry with the world and myself for letting it get to me and for taking it out on him.

I glance back at him. Hurt lines his face and he presses his lips into a thin line.

I walk over to the record player and put on some soft music.

“I know that, of course. I’m not naive.” His voice is quiet but resolute. I walk back over to the bed where he’s lying on his back, the sheet draped across his hips. “But if we give up trying, if we give up hope, what is there worth living for?”

His eyes flick to mine, and they seem to shine with a lifetime of knowledge. I know our time together is limited, though, and I don’t want to spend it fighting.

“You, you’re worth living for,” I say, climbing back onto the bed. I cover his body with mine and kiss him until nothing else exists except us in that brief moment of happiness .

I say goodbye to him with the first light of dawn, lingering on the porch steps for a last kiss. I watch until he’s out of sight, and when I turn to go back inside I see Vivianne Pressman on the path leading from Robbie’s cabin. She’s looking straight at me.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

“Baby?” Lisa’s sleepy whisper seems loud in the early morning gloom of the cabin.

“Shhh,” I say, quietly slipping between the sheets of my own bed. There’s still an hour before I need to get up and I want to use it.

“You were right about Robbie.”

I turn over to face her and see she’s lying on her back, staring straight up at the ceiling.

“I went to see him last night, but when I got to his cabin he was with someone else.”

“I’m sorry you had to find out like that.”

“You can crow about being right about him.”

“I would never do that.” I mean it. We might bicker, but I would never gloat about something that made her unhappy .

She turns her head to look at me.

“Where have you been? You weren’t here when I got back. Have you just snuck in?”

She turns over fully to face me. In the half light her dark eyes glisten with excitement. I don’t answer her so she prods some more.

“What’s her name? How come you get to have all the fun?”

I look at her. What would she say if I told her the truth. Would she be shocked, would she tell our parents? Even though the semi-darkness lends itself to half-whispered confessions, I can't do it, I'm not brave enough.

"It's nothing like that," is all I reply, and I turn my back on her, making it clear I don't want to talk.

I eat my breakfast slowly. I feel like I'm living two separate lives and it's exhausting me.

I barely raise my head as Max and Nicola appear at our table.

It's such a regular occurrence that I don't bother to acknowledge them.

I'm probably going to be volunteered to help Nicola again, so I concentrate on finishing my breakfast instead.

I didn't get enough sleep, so the next best thing I can do is fuel myself.

"It's a sad day today," Max declares. "It's never good when you find a bad one amongst your staff."

"What happened?" asks Lisa, eager for gossip, and Max turns back.

"Last night a watch was stolen from one of our guests. Not just any watch, a Cartier. Vivianne Pressman, who comes here every summer, says it was stolen from her cabin last night."

My ears prick up at the name, the same lady who propositioned Johnny yesterday.

"She said she went for a walk late, and when she returned it had disappeared. She

says she saw the head of my entertainment staff, Johnny, hanging around last night. The Pressmans are such good patrons, it's a shame this has happened to them.

Come, Nicola, you can learn what it's like to sack someone. ”

They turn and begin to walk away. My blood goes cold.

They can't just believe that woman, can they?

Without evidence? A thousand thoughts run through my head, but I can't sort them all out at once.

There's only one thing that's clear. I know how much this job means to Johnny and I can't let such an injustice occur, no matter the consequences.

“You can't fire him,” I say loudly enough to get the attention of Max and Nicola. When they return to the table I repeat the words quieter. “You can't fire him.”

“Why not?” Max asks.

“Because he didn't do it. He didn't take the watch.”

“Baby,” my dad cuts in. “This is not the time.”

“No, Dad. This is the time.” I stand and take a deep breath. I'll never be ready for what I need to say, but I'll do it, for Johnny.

“He didn't do it, because he was in his cabin all last night. I know, because I was there with him.”

I see their expressions change at my confession, mostly into shock.

Max looks furious and Nicola's face twists into disgust. I daren't look at my family any longer.

I don't want their judgement so I leave before anyone says anything.

I take a long walk, not sure if I can face them after that.

This is not how I would've chosen to come out—suddenly and in front of a packed dining hall, which a part of my brain hopes was too noisy for people to overhear—but for Johnny, I'd do it all over again.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

When I finally pluck up the courage to return to the cabin I find my dad alone on the porch.

I sit next to him and he doesn't speak. Neither do I.

I've spent the last few hours walking along the beach, trying to find the words, but I've just drawn a blank.

I've run through a dozen scenarios in my head, each one getting worse.

Eventually the torture of not knowing what they thought was too much, and I decided I needed to find that out, even if they cast me out.

The silence stretches for several minutes, and I think that I might just blurt something out, anything at all, when he breaks it.

"I don't feel I know you anymore, son."

That he calls me son instead of Baby is monumental, and I look at him. He's just staring out across the resort, sadness etched on his face .

"I can't change who I am. I've tried to deny it for too long."

He doesn't respond.

"I've kept who I am bottled up for years, and it's been eating me up from the inside. I'm sorry you found out this way, it was never my intention to do that."

He remains still, not even turning his head to look at me.

“I’m sorry I lied to you about the money, but I wanted to help.

All I’ve ever wanted is to be like you, to help other people who need it.

But that’s not true, is it? You help those who are like you, those who, due to some social code, you think are worthy.

I know I’ve disappointed you, but you’ve disappointed me too, Dad.

I thought you treated everyone equally, but I was wrong. ”

I finish and he stays statue-like. I’m not sure if he’s even heard me. I have nothing left to say, and I can’t face my mum and sister right now, so I leave and walk away.

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I stalk through the site, trying to find Baby, and I eventually track him down curled up in a chair in the dance studio.

His eyes are closed and he looks so innocent and young.

But I know his young body holds a wise mind and a courageous heart.

Not that it's done him any good. I gently shake him until he wakes up.

"Johnny!" The joy in his face fills me with warmth, even though I know I'm about to shatter us both.

"I've been sacked, Baby."

"What?" He launches out of the chair and towards me.

"I'm out of here."

"I said they had the wrong person, and they sacked you anyway?" His voice rises in disbelief.

"What we did was illegal. We both knew that. So that's why. And if I go quietly now Max won't call the police. No doubt he doesn't want the scandal, or for his park to be tarnished by this."

"I stood up for you. I came out to my family, in front of Max and the whole bloody room, all for nothing?" He starts pacing the studio like a small ball of fury. I catch

him, holding him by the shoulders until he looks at me.

“Hey. It wasn’t for nothing. No one has ever stood up for me like that before, it took real courage.”

His shoulders slump. “My dad won’t even acknowledge my existence.”

I can see in his eyes he’s defeated. I can’t stand to see his light dimmed this way; he deserves better. I need to try to make that happen for him, but first I draw him into a hug and hold him close one last time.

I tentatively knock on the cabin door. Mr Houseman’s face is like stone as he answers it.

“Sir, I’m out of here, but I wanted to say thank you for helping Penny, and to ask you not to be too hard on Baby. He’s a good person. He looks up to you. He is worthy of your love. I hope you can see that.”

He looks me up and down.

“All I see is a law-breaking sodomite, who after getting his girlfriend in trouble, preys on innocent young men. If I see you again, I will call the police, no matter what Max wants.” He crosses his arms and I realise I’m wasting my time.

It rankles me that he gets to judge me. People like him are all the same, only accepting if people conform to their narrow-minded ideals.

It pisses me off and I want to shout at him, but for Baby’s sake I contain myself and just manage to utter.

“Well, I guess that’s all you would see, isn’t it?”

I don't wait for an answer, I just jump down the steps and walk away.

When I get to my car, Baby is leaning against it waiting for me. I stand in front of him.

"I'm sorry," he says.

"Don't be, sweetheart."

I cup his face and wipe away the tracks of his tears with my thumb.

I rest my forehead against his and breathe deeply.

I knew it was too good to last, but I hate that it's ended this way.

I'll never find anyone with as much goodness and bravery as him.

I swallow back my own tears. I'm not going to let them out here.

I don't want him to see me like that. I'll save them for later, when I'm alone, like I'm destined to be.

I think of all the dreams Baby talked about. I'm right that they'd never happen, but I wish I was wrong, as it hurts like hell to be right.

There's nothing more to say. Goodbye seems so final, and if I don't say it then maybe I can borrow a bit of his hope and pretend it isn't real. My heart breaks from the weight of both love and sadness.

I ghost a kiss across his lips, just a touch, like it's already a memory, resisting the urge to never let him go, but that isn't for us.

I climb into my car and drive away, looking at him in my rear-view mirror until he's no longer in sight.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

I curl up in the dunes, not wanting to go back to my family just yet.

I have no clue what their reaction will be and I can't face it.

I didn't know that feeling deeply for someone could hurt this much.

Everything feels so raw. I'm wearing his shirt and I bury my head into it.

After I could no longer see his car and I knew he wasn't coming back, I went by his cabin, not ready to leave the spaces we shared.

I saw this shirt hanging on the back of his chair, probably forgotten when he left.

I catch his scent on it and I let the tears fall, soaking into it.

Eventually, after dinner time and I've cried myself dry, I walk slowly to my cabin, knowing I should check in with them but reluctant all the same.

I walk in through the door and both my parents are sitting at the small table.

My father doesn't say anything, but my mum gasps when she sees me and rises.

She wraps her arms around me and hugs me tight.

"I love you, Baby," she whispers into my neck. I try not to let the tears fall again when I hug her back. I go into the room I share with Lisa.

She's lying on her bed but sits up when I enter. I drop down on my bed with a sigh.

"You're still my little brother, you know?" she says.

I look up at her and try to smile, grateful that she hasn't taken it badly or called me a freak, or worse, just ignored me.

"Why didn't you say anything before?" she asks.

"I was too scared, Lisa. Society doesn't like people like me. What if you didn't like me? Dad already isn't speaking to me."

I shift back on the bed to rest against the wall, and pull my knees up and wrap my arms around them.

"I think you're lucky, you at least found someone."

I huff a laugh that's devoid of any hint of humour.

"Fat lot of good it did me, now that he's gone." I drop my head onto my arms, letting the misery wash over me. I feel the bed dip beside me as Lisa climbs on. She hugs me and I lay my head on her arm. We haven't done that for a long time.

I don't leave the cabin at all the next day.

Lisa brings me some breakfast but I have no appetite.

I try to read but find it hard to settle.

It's our last day. Tomorrow we go home. I have to go back to my old life, packing to go to university.

But nothing will be the same. I feel different; I am different.

Everything has changed since I've been here .

Tonight is the last show of the season, including the singing competition and the final of the beauty contest. I really don't feel like going but I want to support Lisa.

I stare into the small mirror, not liking how ashen my face looks.

"I look terrible." I pull at my cheeks and grimace.

"I can help you with that," Lisa says, directing me to sit and pulling her makeup bag closer.

"I'm not about to start wearing that stuff," I protest, peering into the bag that contains a bewildering array of tubes and colourful powders. It wasn't this complicated when Penny did my makeup for the show.

"Keep still," she says, "It'll hardly look like anything." It certainly feels like a lot with everything she applies, but when she finally allows me to look in the mirror again, I do look better. I have more of my natural colour, and I don't look made up like a clown, as I'd feared I would.

"That's pretty good," I say, and she looks pleased before pushing me out of the way so she can do her own makeup for the competition.

"I wish you'd told me sooner," she says, pausing in applying a layer of blue to her eyelids. "We could've had so much fun." She grins at me, and I know with her I'm going to be okay. I try not to let anxiety overwhelm me that it's a different matter with my dad.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 11:14 am

I sit in the shadows, watching the magic show and the singing contest. I take note that my mum tries to cheer me up, and I'm grateful to her, but I'm not feeling anything but a hollow emptiness.

But I can't wait for this awful night to end. I want to get it over and done with so I can go home and try to forget everything, as it feels like the best way to move on.

Robbie passes our table and my dad stands up and stops him.

"I'm impressed with you, young man. I think you'll go far," he says, holding out his hand for Robbie to shake. Robbie smiles and takes his hand, and my dad hands Robbie an envelope. "Here's a little something to help towards your studies."

Robbie looks down at the envelope and smiles, then accepts it.

"Thank you, Mr Houseman. Also for that trouble with Penny."

My father's face forms into a puzzled frown and Robbie continues.

"She says it was mine but you know how these girls are." He gives a little shrug.

My dad swipes the envelope back from Robbie and sits back down at the table. He gives me a thoughtful look before turning his attention back to the front of the room.

Performers and staff start congregating on the stage and the band starts up. They begin an anthem, a song about the resort. Some of the guests join in on the chorus, so I suppose it's one they sing every year.

A shadow falls across the table. I look up and see it's Johnny. My breath catches in surprise and my heart starts hammering on the inside of my ribcage. Dressed all in black, he looks as gorgeous as ever. He gives my dad a challenging look, and then he turns to me.

“Baby should never be put in a corner.”

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When I stand in front of Baby, it feels right, unlike anything ever has before. I offer him my hand, and my heart soars when he takes it. I pull him to his feet and walk with him to the front of the room. I can hear whispering but I don't care.

When we step up onto the stage the singing dies out.

The whole room falls silent as we reach the front, and I stand before the microphone and look out across the hall full of people.

Guests as well as staff, many of whom I've known since I started at Poplins and who I consider friends.

I'm sure some of them will judge me, may already have done so, but I want them to understand. I owe it to Baby.

"For the last few seasons, my staff and I have always led the final dance. I wasn't supposed to this year, but I'm going to do it anyway.

So I'm going to dance, my kind of dance, with a special person who's taught me a lot about life.

They've taught me that there are people who care about others and are willing to stand up for those who need it, no matter the cost. They've shown me the sort of person I want to be. Mr Francis Houseman."

I carry the microphone to the side of the stage and pass a disc to Billy who's waiting to load the record player.

I look back at Francis and give him a smile, which I hope is reassuring.

He breaks out into a stunning smile, one which lights up his whole face.

He's the most beautiful person in the world.

As the opening bars of the music start, I take my place behind him, in the same way as when we started our show dance.

"You came back," he whispers as I reach for his hand.

"I can't stay away from you," I say, as he spins away from me and then twirls back into my arms. I grip him by the hips and grind him into me a little.

From the back of the room I hear a few whistles and hollers, most likely from the dance staff.

We begin to dance, stepping and turning across the stage.

I can see that chairs are being removed from the dance floor and other people are getting up to dance too.

The entertainment staff, mostly my dance crew, are helping people to their feet and dancing with them.

After a few more steps, I turn and step backwards from Francis, releasing his hands.

I turn and then leap off the stage, into the middle of the dancers, then I dance my way down the room.

My staff fall into step with our formation dance, but with a few more raunchy moves

we've been practicing.

We advance back down the room towards the stage.

Francis is standing proudly, still up on the stage, still smiling. I catch his eye and he nods at me; he understands.

He leaps off the stage, and when he lands, he dances a few steps and turns, mirroring what I did, then the dance staff part, leaving a clear path. Then he's running towards me, and I grab him as he launches himself into the lift—it's perfect .

I stare up at him. Joy is etched on his face and I match his elation. He wraps his arms around my neck as I slowly lower him, and I pull him close. He lightly touches his lips to mine, never taking his eyes off me.

"I love you, Francis," I say, and he kisses me again, this time deeper but with a tenderness that makes my knees weaken. I cling on to him for a few seconds before I can hold my own weight again.

We continue to dance, aware that the whole room has joined in.

He tips his head to the side and I see a couple of old ladies dancing together.

I've seen them here for a few seasons now, always as companions.

It's great to see them dancing as well. I notice a few other same-sex couples dancing, and feel proud that we may have managed to help other people feel confident to be themselves too.

I want some time alone with Francis, so I grasp him by the hand and I lead him towards the door. His dad stands in front of us, blocking our way.

“I know about Robbie and I’m sorry,” he says.

“Yeah?” It comes out belligerently. I don’t need his good opinion, nor do I feel like listening to him right now.

“I know when I’ve done wrong and I say so,” he says, and then turns to Francis.

“You looked really good, son. I’m sorry to you too.” Francis lets go of my hand and puts his arms around his father, who hugs him close.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Francis says, and his dad agrees. He holds a hand out to me and after a brief hesitation I take it. His grip is warm and he gives me an almost friendly smile. It’s a start .

Francis looks relieved, and a deep satisfaction that he can heal the rift with his father blooms in my chest.

I move toward the door but he stops me, and I turn to look at him.

“We’ll have time later, but for now, I just want to dance with you.

” He gives me a sly sexy smile that I’m never going to be able to refuse.

He tugs me back onto the dance floor and we weave our way into the middle of the crowd.

He puts his arms around my neck, and I wrap mine around his waist, fitting his slim body against me as we gyrate and sway to the rhythm.

“I want to dance with you forever,” I breathe against his neck.

“We can,” he whispers and turns his head, capturing my lips and imprinting himself onto my soul.

Three years later

I look out across the packed university auditorium, searching for the faces that are familiar to me.

It takes me a while but eventually I spot them, my mum, dad, sister, and the one that's most dear to me—Johnny.

They're talking amongst themselves and not looking at me, so I spend a few minutes watching them in the lull before we start.

I allow myself a small smile as I see Johnny lean forward, rubbing his hands together.

I know he doesn't feel comfortable here.

In this seat of academia he feels out of place, like he doesn't belong.

He's never gotten used to it over the last three years, and we've spent more of our time together in his flat in London than here in a place he says is full of stuffy and dusty old men.

I laughed hard when he said that because it's true.

I pointed out that Cambridge had a rich history of homosexuals, and named a few such as E.M.

Forster and Alan Turing, to which he replied, stuffy and dusty old gay men.

But I'm grateful to those forebears, because they've helped make a community where—whilst there isn't a vibrant gay scene—I didn't feel out of place, and even managed to find others to hang out with when I was on my own.

And I have been alone for the most part while I've been here, without the distraction of Johnny, which has been good for my studies.

Though he's a distraction I'd welcome anytime.

When my name is called, I adjust my gown and mortar board and proudly walk across the stage to receive my certificate.

Whilst collecting my law degree marks the end of an era, it also signifies a beginning of a whole new life.

I've been to several interviews and have been lucky enough to get a job at Standfords, where I'm going to train as a civil lawyer.

I plan to represent those who are prosecuted under the Sexual Offences Act, and have joined the Sexual Law Reform Society to advocate for change.

As soon as the graduation ceremony finishes, and I've given back the rented gown and look normal again, I go to meet my family.

"Well done, Francis. I'm so proud of you," my dad says, hugging me first, followed by my mum and sister. No one calls me Baby anymore, a name I'm not sorry to leave behind. Johnny hangs back a little, but then he comes forward and swings me round.

"I'll show you how proud I am of you later," he whispers before letting me go, his husky voice holding a promise that makes me shiver in anticipation. I can't wait.

"Do you have to go now?" my dad asks, and I glance at my watch .

“We have a few more minutes before the train,” I reply. Johnny and I are catching the next train back to London as he’s needed at work. My family, who came by car, want to have a look around Cambridge but will be joining us later.

After that summer at Poplins, Johnny, Billy, and Penny managed to afford a flat together in London.

Billy found a job in a hotel, started as a porter and worked his way up to concierge, and now has his sights set on the front of house manager one day.

Penny found a job in a chorus line, and there she met Alfie, the theatre manager.

They were married last year and she moved out of their place.

At the start, Johnny found it hard, working in a bar for almost six months just to pay the rent.

I know he was unhappy but he stuck with it and kept trying and going to auditions.

Eventually he got a break in a dance troupe.

Johnny being who he is, he was soon offering suggestions for what they could improve, and luckily the manager recognised his talent and he was soon leading them.

Six months ago he secured a position as the choreographer for a new production of West Side Story.

I’ve seen how hard he’s worked for this, and opening night is tomorrow, so him finding the time to be here with me today is even more special.

It hasn’t been an easy time for us over the last three years, we’ve been apart for a lot

of the time.

I've split my time between Cambridge and London, spending many weekends and all my holidays with Johnny, and taking casual work over the summer months to help contribute towards the flat.

I've grown closer to Billy and Penny, who have become like a second family to me.

Penny worked evenings and Billy did shifts, so I've been grateful that I've had Johnny to myself some of the time too.

Though they've both been wonderfully supportive of our relationship.

We live in a great area, not too far from Soho, where we often go to a gay club—Le Duce.

There we can dance together, with nobody taking any notice of us.

I often wonder if it's where Johnny learned to dance like he did the first time I saw the staff party back at Poplins.

When we get to Liverpool Street Station, just before rushing off to catch the tube to the West End for the final rehearsal, Johnny briefly takes my hand and gives it a quick squeeze before letting it go.

It's pretty much the extent of how much affection we show in public.

Whilst I'm twenty-one now, and being together is no longer illegal, it's still too risky to make it too obvious.

I go back to our flat, which is my home now.

When my wages start coming in we're hoping to start saving up to buy our own house.

Probably still in Bloomsbury, or close by, as it has a good gay community.

I rest for a little while, rereading *Maurice* , which has been a favourite since its publication a few months ago.

Billy comes in from work and reports that my family, who are staying at the hotel he works at, have arrived safely.

It's much later when Johnny comes in, tired but happy that the rehearsal went well.

He still makes good on his promise from earlier and I sleep deeply and sated.

He leaves fairly early the next morning, but not until I've given him a blow job so good he'll keep thinking of me all day.

Then I go to meet my family, to show them some of the sights of London and the office in Clerkenwell where I'll be working.

We go to dinner before the show, and I look around at my family with some pride.

My mum and sister have been great, but my dad found it hard to accept Johnny at first. He had years of prejudice he barely knew was there to strip off, and it took him some time but he's managed it, and whilst I don't go home often, I know Johnny is also welcome.

We take our seats for the performance in a box that Johnny secured for us, and my chest swells when I look around the packed theatre. The anticipation and the excitement in the air is palpable.

The show is incredible, and of course the choreography is amazing and the dancers are perfectly in sync.

By the roar of applause and the number of encores called for, it's clear that the audience think it's a success too.

I lead my family to the after-show party and seek out Johnny, calling congratulations to a few of the performers I've met through him.

My mum hugs her congratulations, as does my sister, and Johnny holds out his hand to my dad who, as he takes it, pulls Johnny into a hug too, which is the first time I've ever seen him do that.

Gratitude blooms in me and I stop the grin spreading across my face.

Johnny steps close to me, our bodies pushed together by the crush of people in the room.

"It was amazing," I say, and then add, "As I knew it would be." Because I always knew he could do this.

"I couldn't have done it without you," he says, looking deeply into my eyes.

"Nonsense," I admonish lightly. "You could always do anything you wanted. "

He snakes an arm round my waist and gives me the smile he reserves just for me. One full of love and the promise of a wonderful future.

"Sweetheart, you know I owe it all to you."