

# Ghostly gay trilogy

## *PART ONE*

### *1*

Ashley Wynter walked stiffly from his bedroom into the lounge, the familiar early morning warmth of his bed a sharp contrast to the cold air and chill of the white antiseptic walls. Tugging futilely at his sole garment, an M&S vest, he tried to pull it down further at the back instantly exposing another six inches of pale flesh. Exasperated with the stubborn roll of visible fat, Ashley yanked once more not sure whether he was trying to prevent shivers or to preserve sheer solo modesty. The last entry into Kenneth Williams' diaries, which lay open where he had discarded it late last night on the coffee table came into mind "Oh, what's the bloody point!"

Giving up on the vest struggle, Ashley crossed the living room and opened the pale green curtains to reveal a grey, washed out London summer's day. He wasn't sure whether it was reading the biography of the doomed actor that had made him feel like joining the "giving up" club, or the fact that he had another day to go before he got his mammoth weekly unemployment cheque of £45 from the uncaring Tory Government. 1993 and still clinging onto the last vestiges of elected power. "Now there's a party without a soul!" he thought to himself, not for the first time.

Leaning at the window and staring out onto the square below, Ashley noticed that there was a couple of solitary figures traipsing through the quiet drizzle.

"Rather you than me," he thought as he watched them huddle beneath umbrellas, the back of their clothes already slick with rain. Dropping the curtain he turned and flopped onto the sofa.

Now visibly bored, Ashley scanned the room searching for inspiration from his collection of photos in their silver frames, the framed prints on the walls and the rows of books on the shelves above the CD unit. All clean and neat as ever but not giving back much to liven up his dulled senses and feeling of unrest. The gloom outside seemed to permeate every fibre of the room today, even the light from the single side lamp failed to cast more than a glimmer of yellow onto the white walls and flat beige carpet. "Give me some colour in my life, please!" thought Ashley desperately.

Suddenly, the TV/video remote control caught his eye and he remembered that he had taped last night's Come Dancing before retiring. Smiling, he leant forward to pick it up "That programme is easily the best comedy show on TV!" he thought, "Come Dancing? It should be called Prancing Poofs!" The movements, fixed smiles, sprayed hair, make-up and oh such white even capped teeth, make them all look like they have sponsors in the hair, face and dentistry industries, not to mention the corsets and jump suits! And that's just the men!"

Grinning to himself, Ashley began to feel better. Maybe today was improving after all!

Suddenly the opening credits of the show were rudely interrupted by the harsh noise of metal on metal coming from the hall followed by a rush of paper rather than the usual trickle. The post. Involuntarily he glanced at the gold carriage clock sitting on

the mantelpiece above the hideous but serviceable 1970s gas fire. A leaving present from the civil service after twenty-one years of hard work as a social worker. Ashley was reminded again that despite the gift and the kind words he was now redundant at forty something, and 9:33 am meant it was early with another whole day to fill.

Grudgingly putting the video on pause, Ashley heaved his once beanpole-like figure up and forward off of the sofa, stricken again by the middle-aged one it had now become. Still well below weight and gaunt legged as ever, he now had a pregnant-formed stomach that seemed to rest like a half melon on the landscape. Resentful at yet another reminder of the loss of youth and beauty he sloped out to the narrow hall and grabbed at the post on the floor, leaping through it impatiently.

“Perhaps the pools have come up?” he thought, braving a smile and a luminous thought, “Which would be a miracle as I don’t do them! Or possibly it’s a letter about a long lost aunt in Bolivia who has died leaving me a fortune?” Doubtful, he knew, but a man could dream!

Junk mails, bills and brochures, “Rubbish, rubbish and rubbish” he thought, stopping abruptly as the last one with a postmark from Manchester caught his attention. Different from his usual mail, this one was handwritten, delicate and flowery. He knew of only one person in Manchester who could be writing him a letter, but he didn’t recognize this writing. “What is this?” he thought, “Come Dancing” forgotten about instantly.

Leaving the mail on the floor apart from the Manchester letter, Ashley suddenly felt an icy cold chill run through him and rushed to get his dressing gown anxious to shield himself from whatever was contained beneath the flowery exterior. Back in the lounge and still unable to stop shaking despite the warmth of his towelling robe, he turned over the letter and stared, desperately looking for clues. The now heavy rain beat a tattoo on the glass windows in time with his increased heart rate and Ashley could feel the pulse in his temple race. Filled with an inexplicable fear, his heart began to thud hard inside his chest. Nervously licking his lips he turned the envelope over several times before, mustering all his courage, he slowly inched a finger inside the flap and ripped it along to the end.

**13 July 1993**

***Dear Mr Wynter,***

***Please excuse me for writing to you, and even more so if I have the wrong person. I recently found an unfamiliar name and address inside a diary that was in my late husband’s inside pocket. It had got caught in the torn lining of the jacket he had on him, when he was found dead.***

***I mention ‘wrong person’ because the diary is two years old and, of course, it may be out of date or something that is of no interest to you now.***

***My husband, or should I say late-husband, was Barrie Taylor.***

***There were numerous telephone numbers in the diary, including one next to your name and address, but I felt that this was a rather more personal way to contact you rather than by ‘phone.***

***If you are the person in question then this is to let you know that the funeral will be held on the 20 July at the church of St Michael & All Angels, Old Trafford, Manchester at 2:00 pm.***

***I can meet you at the station if you decide to attend and I will tell you what happened then. Just give me a ring. My name, address and telephone number are overleaf.***

***If you are not the person as mentioned in his diary then I apologise, and can only assume that perhaps “Ashley Wynter” lived at your address before. If you do know***

*of him, or have a forwarding address, would you please readdress it and pop into a post box as soon as possible.*

*Thank you  
Yours sincerely  
Anne Taylor (Mrs)*

Horrified, Ashley took in the signature of Anne Taylor and let the thin sheet of paper escape his fumbling fingers and flutter to the floor. Grabbing a bottle of rum from the sideboard he walked back in a daze to the bedroom, uncorking it before he reached the bed.

“I didn’t even know his surname,” he repeated to himself. “I thought he told me everything and I didn’t even know his surname.” Wild eyed and emotionally stricken, Ashley gulped three huge mouthfuls of the fiery liquid, flinching as it hit his empty belly before the tears finally came.

For the next two weeks Ashley submerged himself into his voluntary activities. Taking on more work in an effort to dull the pain he bypassed the Samaritans, feeling unable to support the suicidal callers, and concentrated more on his work at the Citizens Advice Bureau, constantly doing more than his usual ten hours a week. He returned the depressive Kenneth Williams diaries to the library and attended the compulsory once-a-fortnight outing to the Department of Employment with its one frustrating question: “Have you worked during the past fortnight?” uttered by a frowsy-looking girl half his age, to which he responded with his customary answer: “No. That’s why I am here to sign on,” barely remaining civil and muttering “twit” under his breath. The girl glanced up at him and sighed loudly before pushing the signing-on form under the greasy glass and pointing with chipped blue nails to where he needed to sign. Irritated beyond belief by the sigh and the bored attitude, Ashley signed his name viciously.

“Why don’t you forget talking to people and just get a tape and press the play button for every applicant?” he snapped, forgetting to look grateful. “This is a nightmare! Sign on once a fortnight, stand in the queue for ages and then have to be polite to an idiot! And you wonder why I turned down the job club!” Shocked by his outburst, he turned away and made for the door.

Ashley remembered vividly being interviewed by a client advisor about a so-called “Restart Programme”. After being given the booklet “Just the Job”, he was asked to attend the course. Quickly reading what the course entailed he pointed out that the programme was really for young people who wanted a new outlet, not for someone middle-aged like himself! Imagine going for a new job after several months of laborious training and finding no work! It didn’t seem to occur to the DHSS that an employer might not want someone who was inexperienced and in the latter part of his working life to do a job better suited to an office junior. Stupid! Still it kept the unemployment figures down to show to the press. Suddenly Ashley’s internal rant came to a grinding halt. In his anger he had forgotten that he had to fill in another form if he wanted to claim for housing benefit and, trying to control his rage, he stalked back to the counter and made the request, ignoring the smug smirk on the faces of the staff.

Deciding to walk home to give himself a chance to calm down, Ashley was plunged once more into despair. Despite the extra voluntary work, he still found himself dwelling on Barrie and the mystery surrounding his death and was going out of his way to find ways to keep his mind active and alert. For once he paid more attention

to his surroundings in the Barbican and walked further and further into the City, along unfamiliar streets. He was not into the arts, theatre, monuments or the usual tourist traps so sought distraction and comfort in churches of all denominations, some hidden and off the beaten track. He walked for hours, thinking and wondering what had gone wrong. It was just over two months since he had last seen Barrie but there had never been anything wrong between them. Calling on his monthly visit and chatting about the usual problems of work, family or with his girlfriend, (or was that his wife?) he had seemed fine. "Funny really, Barrie told me everything bar getting married," he constantly thought, "and why the two months gap in calling?" He had always been so reliable.

The local market at Whitecross Street was noisy, brash and full of the usual faces but he didn't want to chat or be friendly. He fancied isolation and longed to get away and think about his decision not to attend the funeral - now he would not know the cause of death. Perhaps he should write and ask outright but then the reply would ask why he had not come as suggested in the letter. He could imagine it now, a very matter of fact letter, and straight to the point, without any sadness or grief. Perhaps Barrie was right and this Anne is a bitch? Still, he felt he would never know, as dead men can't tell tales.

But the chance to know the cause of death and the truth about Barrie's secret life was to come much sooner than he could ever have imagined.

Ashley finished yet another grim salad lunch and sat back uninspired by his healthy choices. Deciding that it was time to do some shopping, or should that be window-shopping considering the impoverished state of his finances, he stuck the plate in the sink and, glancing at the clock, found it was mid-afternoon already.

The last Saturday in July, and he knew that once again the shopping crowds would be at their peak down the market and in the shops. “Why on earth do I always leave it to the afternoon on a Saturday when I have all day, and the rest of the week, to do it?” he thought, knowing that the answer was something to do with his lack of motivation at the moment to do even the most mundane household chores. Looking up into the kitchen mirror as he half-heartedly washed the plate and fork in cold water he thought about the sparse meal he had just eaten. Not enough to feed a rabbit really! Which is all that salads were good for in his opinion. Not that it was making much difference to the overall package he mused, staring harder at his reflection trying to see himself as a stranger might. The fair/grey hair was thinning slightly at the sides making a widow’s peak, but the skin reflected back at him was still smooth he supposed, and just a few lines showed, mainly worry ones left from the traumas of the previous weeks. Thank God he had always used a moisturiser long before it became effeminate! Nearly six feet tall when he stood up straight and apart from the slight gut he could still consider himself an attractive man and certainly not one short of acquaintances. Men still seemed to want to talk to him, he contemplated, whether it was the street traders sending him up or the numerous men that hung around outside his block of flats, not for him personally, but for the gay cottage on the corner of Errol Street, which was below ground and next to the largest supermarket in London. A “Snack While you Wait” store was how he described it although he had never ventured down into the “Devil’s Dyke” himself, which is what he nicknamed the convenience, as its unsavoury aroma floated to the surface mingled with the scent of lust and nerves. A den of iniquity if ever there was one!

Looking out into the still warm day through the small kitchen window Ashley could see clearly over the balcony and down below to the ground where the weekend crowds were milling about enjoying the sun. He opened a window slightly and was about to water the cactus when the chimes from the doorbell broke through the afternoon quiet. He usually called out first to ask who it was but as it was early in the day he forgot the usual safety precautions and flung the door wide open and was surprised to see a young woman standing there.

“Excuse me for bothering you but I am looking for Ashley Wynter and wondered if you know where I can find him?” she asked, giving him the once over.

“That’s me, why who wants to know?” said Ashley cautiously.

“Oh,” she replied in an even more surprised sigh that spoke volumes. “I am Anne Taylor. I wrote to you recently. Didn’t you get my letter?”

“Yes I did, but I have been away and only just found it with the rest of my mail,” he answered quickly, hoping the lie that sprang to mind was convincing.

“Would it be possible to have a word with you? It’s very important,” the woman responded frowning intently as if to underline her words.

“Well, I was just about to go out – you just caught me actually. But I can spare you a few minutes if it’s that important. Come in”.

Standing aside, Ashley opened the door wider and led the woman down the narrow

hall and into the lounge, pointing to a green chintz chair.

Anne didn't sit immediately but stood looking around the room, first at the clean white walls and then at the collection of prints displayed here and there. Her eyes took in the portrait of a young Roman soldier and flicked across to one of a white horse surrounded by naked youths and a man before settling her critical gaze back to Ashley. Raising her eyebrows in an unspoken question she finally sat down, clutching her handbag tightly to her as if it might become contaminated if she put it down. The matching chintz curtains swayed slightly in the breeze leading to the small balcony full of plants and a deck chair and Ashley could see her lip curl in a smug smirk as she noticed the small stone copy of Michael Angelo's David nestling amongst the greenery. Ashley contented himself as he watched the strange woman's eyes dart everywhere with the amusing thought of what she would think of his bathroom if she could see that! A veritable pleasure dome, Ashley's bathroom was in sharp contrast to the stark lines of the rest of the flat, somewhere that he had really let his imagination run wild. Perhaps he should do what Kenneth Williams said he did in his diaries and refuse to let people use it!

Still without uttering a word, the young woman adjusted her skirt and grudgingly placed her handbag on the circular coffee table in front of her, turning to face Ashley as he settled on the sofa. It was Ashley's turn to do the surveying and he carefully looked her over, not bothering to hide what he was doing. The long dark hair and pretty features were set off by carefully applied make-up and she sat with a slight raise of her head that seemed to denote haughtiness. White pearl earrings shone from her small ears and she wore a matching necklace that hung just inside the collar of a white silk blouse tucked into a tight black linen skirt that emphasized her slim figure. As she moved her legs the skirt parted slightly to reveal long, tanned slim legs ending in black strappy high-heeled sandals. Somehow Ashley did not think that this was Barrie's type at all.

"Actually I have come for the sales." She started, visibly relaxing. "I always wanted to visit Harrods and with a day free now I thought I would have a look and afterwards find out what happened to my letter. It was not returned to me by the post office so I thought I would call for information - you live very close to the Barbican station," she finished.

"True, but a bit out of the way for Knightsbridge I would have thought and the Harrods sale doesn't start until next Saturday."

"Oh, are you sure?" she replied, opening her eyes wider with mock surprise.

"Most definitely. When I was working I always went to it," he answered.

"I am sure there are other sales on in the West End," she said with a small wave of her hand as if it was unimportant to be caught out in such an obvious lie. "Anyway I want to go and see an Andrew Lloyd Webber show tonight and now I have more time on my hands I thought it would make it a nice day out."

"Like I said Harrods is in Knightsbridge and not the West End, so I am still not sure why the visit to me? After what happened I would have hardly thought that *a nice day* out would be appropriate at this time. Let's see, it is the 31<sup>st</sup> July today isn't it? That makes it just eleven days since Barrie died isn't it?" Ashley asked, the sarcasm and contempt obvious in his voice.

"No, eleven days ago he was laid to rest," came the bitter reply and Ashley realized that without a doubt she had not come to London for the sales or for a show but for something else entirely. The grieving widow was not in evidence, only the black

clothes made any pretence at acknowledging the severity of the situation. This was a woman to be wary of; it showed in her offhand manners and the arrogant attitude that had brought her to his home today.

“I have my memories of Barrie, as no doubt you do?” she replied, raising her head higher and slowly licking the front of her teeth with her tongue, the green lizard-like eyes staring at him, the mouth like a venomous snake ready to strike.

“It is different for a friend, I think,” Ashley replied slowly, raising his own head to meet hers for the counter-attack. “They don’t count as much as family do they?”

“Of all the names and telephone numbers in his diary your name, address and phone number seem to stand out above the rest, like something special.”

“Special?” Ashley remarked, narrowing his eyes and drawing out the word in a contemptuous way that seemed not that far removed from an over the top character in an Oscar Wilde play.

“Yes. Special. But what I cannot understand is why you should be a friend of his at all! No offence, but he tended to hang out with people his own age, mid twenties, and just didn’t like older people at all”.

“Older people? What do you mean ‘older people’?” came the snappy quick reply as she touched on a raw nerve.

Enjoying his obvious discomfort and realizing that this was a touchy subject she hammered her point home.

“Barrie always said that his parents didn’t understand him. His boss was behind the times as far as work was concerned and the older generation had no patience with anyone under forty!”

“This is certainly news to me! He gave no impression of feeling that way and I would like to add that I am not old,” Ashley spluttered, feeling the heat of rage staining his cheeks.

“Calm down,” Anne smirked. “I was referring to Barrie’s views rather than my own. But you must admit you are much older than him!”

“I am at that age when life begins,” he replied, raising his head even higher than before and trying not to shout.

“You look older,” came the reply.

“What about you?” he snapped back, deliberately ignoring the cheap jibe.

“Twenty-five.”

“You look younger,” he replied, cursing under his breath “Touché.”

“Barrie would have been twenty-seven next month. So you see I am just wondering why you seem prominent in his friendship and in the diary,” she said, quickly adding, “I just can’t see it myself!” before Ashley could respond.

“Well, I’m afraid that’s it – your time’s up! As I mentioned when I let you in I do have an appointment to go to, and from the clock I can see I am already late. I do hope you haven’t had a wasted journey.”

“On the contrary I have found out a lot. Not all to my approval but what is the saying? Oh, yes - ‘let sleeping dogs lie,’” she concluded, standing up, adjusting her skirt and grabbing her handbag.

“As sayings go I prefer ‘to kill a mockingbird’ myself” Ashley said, also standing up, making it clear that the visit was over and frowning in an effort to still the racing pulse in his temple.

As they walked out to the hall, with the veneer of politeness at its thinnest, the sound of the telephone ringing back in the lounge stopped them in their tracks.

Turning to face his new enemy, Ashley started, “Hold on a second I’ll switch on the answer-phone and they can leave a message. I don’t have any more time for unwanted

chit-chats today, although I should point out that you could have phoned rather than visited,” and, leaving her standing there, he rushed back to the lounge.

Swiftly returning, now desperate to get her out of his home, Ashley noticed Anne staring at something on the hall wall and smiling that mirthless smile again.

“You said you are out of work didn’t you? Then why not do some massage? This is your name on the certificate isn’t it?” she hissed. “Although, if you are forty like you say you are, that makes you twelve when you passed your exam! Quite the precocious student eh?” she finished.

“For your information, the date is a printer’s error and I don’t do massage now because I am afraid times have changed and not necessarily for the good. It’s not only dangerous nowadays but the profession has been flooded with younger people who simply charge astronomical fees for things that have nothing to do with the massage.”

“That’s funny! I vividly remember Barrie saying that when he lived and worked in London he often felt tired and ached all over and how he could do with a good massage. He also said that someone in a pub had remarked on a very good mature masseur who lived in Islington. That wouldn’t be you by any chance would it?”

“Really,” answered Ashley turning up his nose in disbelief, “this is the City of London and I haven’t done it for years, so I am afraid I don’t know what you are talking about. Have a safe journey home,” he finished, quickly opening the front door and practically pushing her out.

“Thank you for seeing me,” he barely heard her mocking retort as he slammed the door shut with relief.

“Bitch!” he yelled loudly against the closed door, hoping she heard as she walked to the lift. “Hold on! How did she get into the block as the closed circuit TV security did not buzz?” The thought struck him suddenly. Too relieved by the fact that she had actually gone, he contented himself by thinking, “I really must see the caretaker and tell him to be more careful who he lets in.”

Stomping her way out of the building, Anne left the lift and walked to the main entrance, still pondering on what she had learnt from the visit. Noticing an old woman struggling with a shopping trolley on her way in and struck by something in the other woman’s careworn face she uncharacteristically stopped to offer assistance.

“Can I help you at all?”

“Thank you my dear, it’s nice to see young people looking after us old uns,” the woman said, the gratitude obvious in her voice.

“Not at all,” Anne replied, holding the heavy door right back so that the shopping trolley could get through easily. “That’s the least I can do to help you with all that shopping. Now, I wonder if you can help me?”

“I will if I can luv,” the old woman remarked, getting her breath back as she propped the trolley against the inner wall.

“I am a stranger to London and I forgot to ask my friend on the first floor for directions. I was under the impression that this was Islington?”

“It used to be luv,” the old lady pulled a grimy hanky out of her pocket and began to wipe the sweat from her head.

“Used to be?”

“Yes. Last month it changed from Islington to the City of London, at least this block of flats did. You see it’s part of four blocks and the other three were already in the City of London boundary, so they changed this one from Islington to the City of London as well. Can’t think why, but everything seems to be changing these days.”

“Thank you dear old lady, you have just made my day!”

For the first time that afternoon, Anne's face broke into a genuine smile. That information certainly answered one question.

For the next few days Ashley operated in a state of shock. As July burst into the heat of August the city seemed to go mad, sunbathing in the parks at lunchtime and sweltering in the office blocks during the day, Ashley noticed nothing except for his pain. He was trying desperately to work out why the so-called Mrs Taylor had come to see him. She'd been rude and arrogant in the extreme with her unpleasant comments and insinuations - he hoped he would never see her again. Not only was it in bad taste so soon after Barrie's funeral but she had never actually told him how he died, if, of course he really had. Where, when and why? The questions revolved in his tired head on a never-ending loop through the hot sticky nights.

Admittedly he had grown rather impatient with her line of questioning but perhaps if she had stayed longer his social work training would have kicked in and he would have got to the bottom of it. What did she really want? What did she hope to find out by coming here? She seemed to be testing him out but for what? What did it matter anyway? Perhaps she had found more in the diary than she was letting on? But to trek up to London from Manchester so soon after her beloved Barrie's death - it didn't make sense. If she really did love him, but why else would she have bothered?

Barrie had mentioned the frequent rows he and Anne had. He had told Ashley all about the time he had flown off in a rage and instead of going to a pub to drown his sorrows like he usually did, he had gone to a gay club that had fascinated him for months and met a drag queen.

Searching for clues, Ashley kept asking himself what could have happened in the lost two months that Barrie didn't visit London. He had always turned up in the second or third week of each month, regularly for two years. In between there had been many late-night chats on the telephone or loving messages left on the answer-machine. Had he been unhappy and Ashley not realized it? Perhaps there were questions he should have asked Anne that would have explained everything. Perhaps he should send a letter now and ask for the truth? That could rake up old wounds and she hadn't seemed like she wanted to help, he told himself, dismissing the idea. In desperation he concluded that he might never understand the reason for Anne's visit or know what had really happened.

Later in the month he went to one of the hidden churches in the city that he had found and now loved, St Michael-within-the-Walls. Dressed head to toe in black, pale and unattractive, he lit a candle on what would have been Barrie's twenty-eighth birthday, crying softly as he prayed. Ashley found help and solace within those old war torn walls and the nearest thing to inner peace he had experienced during this troubled time. Even the stained glass windows seemed to breathe life into him as the sun's golden rays filtered through the dark, stark, realism of everyday life. The quiet solitude of a lost era seemed to penetrate the depths of the religious surroundings. Prayers and poetry seemed to go hand-in-hand whilst he stayed within the compounds of the inner sanctum or wandered feeling thoughtful and reflective outside past the untended graves lying abandoned in the sterile corporate gardens. Poetry by Byron and Wordsworth, always his favourites, took on new meaning and seemed to speak straight to his heart, offering him comfort as he sat in the churchyard, a slim volume of poems on his lap contemplating the future. Despite the roar of the city just over the

horizon in and around the vicinity of the church he felt his bruised soul begin to heal and felt more able to face that age-old saying: Life must go on. Perhaps Barrie had gone to a better place now.

Reluctantly leaving the church but still carrying the lingering traces of peace deep within himself Ashley realized that somehow through the death of Barrie he had finally found the courage to face the trials and tribulations of everyday life alone. Hesitating as to which way to go home, he wandered along in a daze, jolted back to reality by a voice that brought his mind to its real senses.

“Can you please tell me the way to the Barbican Arts Centre?” the voice patiently repeated the question.

Ashley blinked and noticed the woman speaking to him. Looking down he realized that she must be a tourist as she had a map in one hand and a camera in the other.

“To be honest I am not sure where we are!” he stuttered embarrassed at being caught out daydreaming, and looking around hesitantly trying to find a landmark to place them by.

“If it helps at all I came along a quaint street near here called Ropemakers,” the lady in a high hat, dark glasses and a very thick American accent stated. “I seemed to have got lost after Silk Street!” she exclaimed, almost dropping the map in her eagerness to show him.

“Go down to the end of this street and you will see a crossroads and signs - you can’t miss it!” he directed and quickly turned away. He felt rude for not taking more trouble or bothering to smile but he was just not in a thinking mood, however, something in the way he had just said “crossroads” made him stop and look up to the sky. “Perhaps I am at the crossroads of my life?” he thought for a brief moment. “Perhaps this is it – all I need to do is make choices! But which is the right road? I don’t have a map to make sure I don’t go wrong and get lost. Still, perhaps this is the beginning of a new era, he considered, all he had to do was take a chance.

Spurred into action, Ashley decided to make some changes to his life. Almost a year out of work, the dole money drawing to a close, he started answering adverts for jobs again, something he had previously given up on after failing to get even a reply once too often. Frustrated, he had called each company and asked directly why he was not going to be considered, immediately made despondent by the response that he was too old. But he still felt he had made the right decision by not moving to Leeds with other civil servants as the Government had wanted. He might feel uncertain about life now, but he knew deep within himself that this was a direction he would not have wanted to take.

Feeling energized and motivated, Ashley decided to take control of his life again. Reading keep fit books from the library and watching ultra slim bodies exercising on TV made him determine to get rid of the paunch. He had no money to waste on gym fees so a do-it-yourself fitness regime was the next best thing. Already careful with food, he began to cut out his favourite cream cakes and strudels, instead seeking out his slow cooking pot from the kitchen’s top shelf and vigorously dusting off the cobwebs. Buying fresh vegetables from the market and scouring the supermarkets’ reduced section just before closing time, he made stews with cheap meats. Salads, he had always loved so that was no hardship, and additionally he supplemented this with plenty of fresh fruit, muesli from the health food shop and fish. It was a start and made him feel he was doing something positive. Snapping up some bargain cookery

books in a local bookshops closing down sale, he determined to stick to this new way of life and experiment with healthy recipes.

Back home, Ashley took to walking up to the first floor rather than waiting for a lift. Breathless and puffed out after the short flight of stairs at first, he felt his stamina increasing daily with the exercise and healthy living. Swimming was good exercise too but although the estate had an indoor swimming pool he found it difficult to try and find a time in the day when it wasn't too crowded. Early morning became the best possibility and as he was an early riser anyway he soon became a regular visitor and familiar face to the staff.

A week later, emboldened by this change of heart, Ashley rang up an old friend who had once owned her own hairdressing salon. Although retired, she still did friends' and neighbours' hair to supplement her income. Swiftly responding to her instant invitation to spend the afternoon together, Ashley burst through the door of her 19<sup>th</sup> floor flat near Old Street tube nearly two hours later.

"I'm sorry Belle that I haven't been for a long time but since I have been out of work I have had to cut finances to the bone!" he announced in a flurry of good intentions.

"I know the feeling dear. When I lost all my money on the stock exchange after retiring you could have knocked me down with a feather!" the plump, peroxide, heavily made-up, wrong side of sixty blonde said as she pointed to the kitchen. "Wanna a cup of Rosie Lea first or later?" the North Londoner remarked in a false East End accent.

"When the colour is doing its magic and we're having a good old chin wag on old times," replied Ashley smiling.

"It's not just old times I am interested in, I want to know about all the new ones as well!" she laughed in a raucous way that bounced off the walls and into Ashley's ear.

"Still common as muck," he thought. "But with a heart of gold! The rich cow that I thought owned the stock exchange!" he murmured under his breath.

"Well gal, how's life been treating you. Still with Hymie?"

"Yes at times. But he's getting so old I have to lift him on and off these days" she replied, bellowing the same coarse laugh. "What about you? Still got your boyfriend? What's his name, Barrie?"

"No, as a matter of fact he's just died," Ashley answered, sighing heavily as he took off his blazer and put it behind the chair he had just sat down on.

"Oh no love! I am sorry, how did it happen?" she said, all laughter behind her now and her face a picture of concern.

"I don't know. I had a strange letter and an invite to go to the funeral, which was too painful to even contemplate. But the other week who should turn up on my doorstep but his wife, or at least she said she was. I got rid of her quick which was silly I suppose because I didn't get to know anything." A thought of Anne Taylor's smiling, spiteful face swam unasked into his mind.

"I didn't know he was married!" Belle remarked watching him closely as she took a white overall off the hook on the cupboard door and put it on.

"Neither did I and I thought he told me everything! Anyway she came knocking on my door and said that my name and address, along with the phone number, was in his diary, which was on him at the time of his death. Out of curiosity I think she came to find out who I was," Ashley said, undoing his collar button and loosening his tie.

"There must have been more to it than that. Something must have happened and she was looking for an explanation as to why you were in his diary. Perhaps he wasn't the

sort that kept names and addresses. She probably thought you were the other woman!" Belle exclaimed. "After all, Ashley could just as well be a girl's name as a man's!"

Neither of them laughed but just stared at each other struck by the obvious truth.

"What's the saying? 'Many a true word spoken in jest', or something like that?" he said.

Belle nodded.

"Before we go on, what colour do you want," she asked, showing him a chart with three shades of bottled blonde on it.

"I'm not sure now what to choose, what with Barrie dead and everything that has happened. I seem to have gone even greyer over the last few weeks." Ashley unconsciously ran a hand through his hair as if to illustrate his point.

"Then the best colour for your fair hair, mixed with the grey, would be ash blonde. I'll wash it first with this new herbal shampoo someone brought me back from France. All right?"

Ashley nodded and went over to the sink where Belle had poured some hot and cold water in a bowl and bent over while she carefully poured over the contents over his head and started shampooing his hair.

Much later, after she had finished with the shampooing and the colouring, she pinned up the hair in curlers and left it to dry naturally. With a copy of *Playgirl* to flick through, Ashley went into the lounge to sit down amongst the clutter of chrome, silver, chandeliers and cut glass. Flopping down into a well-upholstered pink velour chair, careful not to knock any of his curlers out of place, he waited until Belle came back with two cups of tea.

"Not much in there dear to write home about," Belle said, glancing at the magazine Ashley was clutching. "What some of those guys have got between their legs I've got a wrinkle in my knee for!"

"Oh Belle you are incorrigible!" Ashley giggled. "Now where were we?" he continued, taking a cup of tea and placing it on a nearby mini table covered with a white lace cloth, careful not to knock over the vase filled with artificial roses.

"I said you might be the other woman," she replied also taking a sip from her cup and settling down in a matching chair opposite.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Barrie came to see you once a month when he worked in London didn't he? Then when he moved to Manchester, just before Christmas, he still came to see you every month."

"Up until May this year," Ashley interrupted.

"So, that was for about two years. Right?"

Ashley nodded.

"If you didn't mean anything to him then why did he keep seeing you? Let's face it, he is, or was, a good-looking chap of about twenty-seven, and you my dear, are definitely the wrong side of forty! With all the gorgeous young men about today and presumably in Manchester as well, he could have had his pick, bisexual or no bisexual. You must have had something going for you. No, I think this so-called "wife" wanted to know all about you and why Barrie spent time with you," Belle replied.

"Perhaps he thought I would make a good housewife?" Ashley said, smiling and giggling.

"Good in bed is more like it, and I mean really good to keep him visiting for two years!"

They both laughed so loud that the walls echoed.

“You know Ash, I never told you this before but when my shop, ‘Belles and Beaux’, closed I had a party over the shop to say farewell to all my good customers, although you would never know I retired as I still see so much of them! Anyway, three women came up to me that night after you and Barrie arrived. One was Lola, one of my neighbour’s daughters that had just gone on the game. She said Barrie reminded her of that character in ‘Coronation Street’, what’s his name? You know? The young one! Married to Gail! It’s on the tip of my tongue!” Belle said, banging her forehead with the fist of her right hand.

“Martin the nurse,” Ashley said.

“That’s him! Well Lola said your Barrie was so good-looking she was going to ask him if he would like a quickie – free of charge! And she wasn’t the only one interested! Angie, the barmaid from The Slug and Lettuce, said he was wasted on you and that she could teach him a few tricks given half a chance! I said he was spoken for and told them all he was definitely off limits! Plus the fact that he was already living with someone else.”

Ashley nodded again.

“Where did you actually meet Barrie? I can’t remember now if you told me it was in a pub or at the baths?” Belle asked, finishing off her last drop of tea loudly and placing the cup down onto the coffee table separating them.

“Neither - he came for a massage. Fate really, two years ago that Dizzy Queen, Blaine, placed a card in a newsagent’s window, for an April Fools joke and Barrie saw it! Two days later he turned up for a massage – told me he was married that first time!”

“Ah well your social work training soon wormed the truth out of him didn’t it? Married my arse! Turned out he was living in Ealing with Theresa and her gay brother – definitely not happy ever after!”

“Yes but it was a coincidence wasn’t it? I mean Ealing is a hell of a long way from the City of London isn’t it? And why he should see my advert in that shop window, I never did find out!”

“Fate love. Perhaps he was working there at the time? Brickie wasn’t he?”

Ashley nodded once more, remembering Barrie and his beautifully toned, muscular body, fit from all that outdoor labour, and his rough builder’s hands.

Ashley left an hour later pleased with his newly vamped hair, his chat with an old friend who seemed to know everything about everyone from all walks of life and the relief of being able to speak openly about Barrie with someone who had known him. As he left the flats he heard a low wolf whistle and turned ready to flash a smile of gratitude for this boost to his flagging ego, impressed with the change that a bottle had managed to make, until he saw it was from a middle-aged woman sat on a wall with a bottle of beer in her hand. “Oh well!” he thought, and gave her a smile anyway. “It’s a start!”

As he continued to walk, smiling, he thought more of Belle in vivid detail...Belle Bernstein, born in a pub around Charing Cross to parents who owned it, had no career vision after leaving school and with no qualifications therefore remained behind the public bar for a few years.

To say that she had liked the male population was the understatement of the century and her first conquest was when she was 13 and he was 18. He had been an apprentice in the brewery that served the pub and on the day his apprenticeship was over not

only was he dipped in a full barrel and ‘christened’ by the gang but, later, when everyone was gone and he was sobering up, Belle had her wicked way with him and he had her, literally, over a barrel. To her, the line from the famous song, “Roll Out the Barrel” would never be the same again and was often changed to “roll on the barrel” at the pub’s Saturday evening sing-song – to her parents’ puzzlement.

Nearing the age of 20, she bade farewell her work as a barmaid and marched up the road to Soho, where she learned hairdressing in a moderately sized salon that had once been known as a brothel. Needless to say, the clientele that frequented the place and the decidedly cosmopolitan nature of the area’s population brought her into contact with all sorts of people of both genders, various sexual orientations, races and religions.

Tall, with bright blue eyes and peroxide blonde hair permanently in a bun, she could be attractive, sometimes even pretty – and although her figure was voluptuous, it lent her a top-heavy look, which on occasions unfortunately resembled that of an all-in wrestler. She liked sweaters and slacks, skirts and blouses and seemed not to bother with her appearance, despite the fact that so many people told her she was wasting the great assets of her face and figure. She just smiled and took no notice – it was her decision how she looked and behaved. Independence had no bounds on her!

She was tough and had a mouth like the bottom of the Thames and could drink any man under the table, which she frequently did after work was over in the shady cellar bars, pubs and clubs in the ‘Square Mile of Sin’ as Soho is known.

Belle was friendly with the “ladies of the night” – gays who were either on the game or who frequented the many queer spots that were open till all hours – and she was well-known locally as a “Happy Hooker” – although in Belle’s case everything was free.

Some time and couple of abortions later (Canadian and Russian), her parents retired, sold the pub and moved to a villa in Spain, where Belle visited them at Christmas, because she hated spending the festive season alone. Although she had many lovers and real friends, the majority of people she knew were married and, although that was not her scene, she was sometimes left feeling lonely and vulnerable.

Much later, when her parents died, within a month of one another, the sale of the overseas property and some bonds eventually meant that she could leave her rented Soho flat and buy one on the fringe of Hoxton. She also rented one of the shops on the new private estate. “Belles and Beaux” hairdressers became a tidy earner for her until retirement, although customers and friends still visited her flat for the occasional hairdo. Belle never married.

Time progressed, the summer began to come to an end and the signs of autumn arriving were clearly visible, or as Ashley liked to call it “the fall”. The mornings became sharper and in parks and churchyards the leaves began to fall from their once abundant foliage, swirling around in circles spreading a rusty carpet on the ground to the delight of the children playing there. Chrysanthemums and Michaelmas Daisies were in full bloom both in the small gardens and window boxes giving the Barbican a colourful glow. It was just beginning to get cold at night, which, considering the warm humid summer, was a welcome relief to the non-sleepers and vibrant sunsets of orange, pink and bright bruised purple gave the city an aura of burnished gold. The

beautiful streaky bands of light reminded Ashley of the aurora borealis sometimes seen in the North Pole skies.

It was getting darker in the evenings and the wind stirred its wayward course through the estate up to Ashley's flat. He had not noticed the oncoming change in the atmosphere or in fact any changes to himself either. Although sticking rigidly to his diet, regular exercise and a healthier lifestyle, his human frame presented no real change and disappointedly he admitted to himself that perhaps he was asking too much too soon! At night he lay awake his memory still haunted by Barrie, and what might have been, still wishing that he knew what had really happened. He would never be at peace with himself until the truth of those last two missing months and leading up to his death was revealed. Perhaps he should write to Barrie's so-called wife after all? But why hadn't Barrie told him that he and Anne had married on one of his many visits? He was always so open about himself and his other lovers; it was one of the many things that Ashley had loved about him, so why keep it secret? Young, handsome, strong and healthy, full of life, delving more into the gay world after meeting the infamous drag queen that had changed his life after the row with Anne he seemed to have everything to live for. Ashley stopped suddenly, a new thought hitting him: "I wonder whether she would know anything more about the tragic event? If I can't ask Anne the wife perhaps I can find the drag queen and ask her!" He wondered why he hadn't thought of it before! Now all that remained was to find out who the mystery queen was.

After receiving many compliments on his hair from friends, neighbours and the ever-present market traders, looking healthier and feeling good at least during the day, he hurried back home one day just in time to miss a thunderstorm. Managing to escape the rain and he congratulated himself on his good fortune as it looked as though a hailstorm was going to follow. Letting himself into the flat, relieved at dodging the weather he was struck by the fact that the flat seemed icy cold compared with the tempest storm outside.

Shivering and hurriedly pouring himself a brandy, after depositing the recently bought food on the kitchen table, he noticed the answer-phone red light was winking away ominously in the corner - a flash of colour in a room filled with shadows and reflections of the violent weather outside. Filled with an inexplicable sense of dread he felt reluctant at first to listen to the caller. "Is it the weather that has brought this on?" he thought, trying to instil some common sense into himself. Shaking his head vigorously, he tried to joke, "I must be sensing some frightening sinister source like a lonely old cottage queen with piles!" Muttering to himself not to be silly, he gingerly leant forward and pushed the play button first, taking a large swig from his glass. For a few seconds the flat was filled with sound of voices, laughter, music and the clinking of glass. Ashley looked confused as slowly a husky voice with feminine overtones muttered:

**"Barrie was murdered. Come to The Open Closet in Manchester".**

Then a different male voice shrieked in the background !

**"Get off that phone Morgana! You're on next!"** and the phone went dead.

Shaken and scared, Ashley put down the receiver, switched off the answer-phone and sat down, jumping as a terrific clap of thunder rumbled across the sky followed by a bolt of lightening that took aim at the balcony of his flat, hitting its incumbent wooden deck chair, which caught fire immediately. Ashley screamed, rushing to the

kitchen, flapping about in his terror desperately looking for something to fill with water but when he finally opened the French windows the chair had burnt to a cinder. Only a pile of wood ashes remained to show that anything had ever been there.

Sitting on the sofa all night drinking tumbler after tumbler of brandy trying to steady his battered nerves he could not contain his terror. Ashley remained glued to the sofa, eyes staring around the room, terrified of what might happen next until the light fingers of dawn touched the sky and he finally left his all night vigil and laid down to sleep.

After that night of doom, gloom, madness and the strange telephone call, Ashley kept replaying the message on the answer-machine, firstly to see if it was a joke, and secondly, to try and find a reason why someone should call him. Each time he played it, his heart skipped a beat as he wondered if he was tempting fate even to listen to the message and pondering whether lightning ever did strike twice, he was certainly relieved when another fork of lightening didn't appear.

The unrecognisable voice, background noise of laughter and loud voices and the sound of glass had first made him think it might be a pub, party, or even a household. On reflection he became convinced that the mystery caller had phoned from a club. He tried to trace the caller's number but it had been omitted and calling Directory Enquiries proved a waste of time as they insisted on being given the full address before they would give out a number. Frustrated at the wasted effort, despite insisting to the operator that it was a matter of life or death, he was fast running out of avenues to explore. With a name like The Open Closet he was sure his search was limited to clubs, disco, fringe theatre, or even a private cinema club. If it were a party at someone's house then why would the mystery caller mention the name of the place? Inspired and feeling confident he rang Gay Switchboard and asked them if they had any details listed. Drawing a blank, they suggested he take a look at a copy of Gay Times and so he nipped out to his local W H Smith but still got nowhere.

By the end of the week Ashley still had nothing to go on to know if the whole phone call business was genuine or not. He knew no one from Manchester, apart from the awful Anne Taylor and he wasn't about to ask her! In desperation he tried asking around whilst out shopping, in the market, and the library saying it was all to do with a plumbing firm! Just as he had determined to write off the whole thing as an unpleasant prank Lady Luck deigned to pay attention to a certain block of flats in the city and a certain gentleman when a cheque for £100 came whizzing through the letterbox in the shape of a premium bond he had forgotten he even had!

Taking this as a sign, Ashley rushed to Trade Winds, a travel agent's nearby that he had dealt with for years when he worked and travelled a lot. Just remembering all those exotic and erotic places that he had gone to in the Far East gave him a small rush of excitement and convinced him that he was doing the right thing. Jo, the same lesbian woman who had worked there before, seemed a bit surprised when he enquired about cheap hotels and off-peak travel to Manchester. He confided in her his change in circumstances and explaining his predicament and she called around and managed to get him a last minute bargain - two nights for the price of one in a 3-star central hotel. Of course there was a condition attached to the deal and he had to travel tomorrow! "Oh what the heck," he thought, "lets give it a try! I might even find out something! Up, up and away! I just need this afternoon to sort my wardrobe out - I

want to arrive in Manchester looking like a business man rather than an ageing queen!”

Spurred into action and with a feeling that at last things were beginning to go his way, Ashley flew to the dry cleaners with a suit and to another shop with a pair of shoes that needed a complete facelift. Nothing to cancel, a word with the next door neighbour who lent him a small real leather suitcase and, armed with the tickets and hotel booking confirmation, he closed the door to the flat, stopping only to flip the answer-phone on and before he could say “Barrie Taylor” he was off and on his way! Without much time to prepare for what he might discover Ashley found himself seated on the late afternoon London to Manchester train. He tried to read his book of poems, thinking of its usual calming effect, but in such a crowded carriage all that seemed pointless with so many distractions. The continuous flow of people traipsing to the toilet and snack bar and gaggles of unruly children hopping from seat to seat added up to a noisy experience for the usually quiet and reserved Ashley. The train seemed filled with overloud conversations that you couldn’t help but hear, ticket inspectors shouting, and the tinny sound of the quaint speaker telling of the delights on sale in the buffet car or announcing the arrival of the next station all added to the stressful experience. Ashley felt himself wince at the loud screaming of other trains as they passed, the clanking of tracks as they crossed junctions and the noisy opening and shutting of carriage doors. Trying to imagine himself back in one of his favourite peaceful churchyards he thought about what he had let himself in for. Would he find The Open Closet? Who or what was Morgana? Would he or she have any answers? He closed his eyes slowly and drifted far, far, far away into a remembrance of things past and happier times.

“Do come this way!” Ashley’s voice called back to the young man following him. “Like I said on the phone, the card in the newsagent’s window was an April Fool’s bet really, but I am a qualified masseur and you said that you were nearby so I decided to see you,” he finished leading him down the hallway of his Barbican flat and into the bedroom.

“I told you that I don’t have a massage table anymore didn’t I? So I’m afraid it will have to be on the bed. Is that OK?”

“Fine!” came the husky voiced reply. “By the way my name is Barrie. I have never done this before so you just tell me what I need to do.”

“Mine is Ashley, I think I said on the telephone? Don’t worry I am very professional, my certificate is there on the wall if you want to check it out?” Ashley spoke confidently trying to put Barrie at ease, aware from his training that relaxed bodies respond best to massage. “There is a chair over there that you can put your clothes on. Do you want talc or oil? I think I still have some in the bathroom.”

“Working outside all day my skin does get a bit sore with the sun so oil would be good,” the younger man replied, slowly taking his dusty t-shirt off over his tousled head and looking down to unbutton his ancient Levi 501s.

“What work do you do?” Ashley asked in a loud voice as he left the room.

“I’m a brickie! Working on one of the big sites on the other side of the river at the moment! Don’t know if you ever get over that way?” he replied, also raising his voice to make sure Ashley heard.

Walking back into the bedroom with the half-filled bottle of oil, Ashley stopped dead in the doorway as he saw the young man standing naked by the edge of the bed. Sighing deeply, he looked at the handsome face, deeply tanned strong shoulders, prominent hairless chest and pointed nipples. His eyes travelled down taking in a flat washboard stomach, small waist with a line of silky hair leading down to sensuous hips and an above average cock and balls. Standing feet slightly apart, the calf muscles in his strong legs evident, the complete picture was enough to make Ashley sigh again secretly. Trying to regain control of the situation Ashley pointed to the towel he had already placed on the bed and motioned for Barrie to lie down on it with a trembling hand. Involuntarily he drew in his breath as the young man lay face down, the view of his shoulders, taut back and small but perfectly formed buttocks made him think of the statue of ‘David’ on the flat balcony. Stunned by a sudden rush of pure lust, Ashley spilt some of the oil, watching it trickle through his fingers onto the white carpet before he had time to rub it into his hands. Stopping for a few seconds to regain his composure, he took several deep breaths and tried to mentally maintain a professional distance. Leaning down over Barrie’s outstretched body, Ashley concentrated on not getting oil on to the thick curly dark hair at the back of his neck, spreading his hands over sinuous neck muscles and down over his torso touching every inch of the firm, smooth flesh down to his feet. Barrie’s body moved slightly, like a snake uncoiling, as Ashley’s expert professional hands caressed the warm skin slowly at first kneading along the shoulders and down onto his back, firmly squeezing the white buttocks in sharp contrast to the overall dark tan. Staring at the outline left by the sun and feeling his eyes drawn to the soft virgin skin usually hidden, Ashley broke his professional code and deliberately “forgot” to put a towel over Barrie’s private parts. Ashley knew he was enjoying himself more than was strictly appropriate, not only was he taking much longer than he had in the past with other clients, but he found himself doing an erotic massage rather than a traditional one,

wanting to give this beautiful man as much pleasure as possible. The glistening back, twin orbs of a perfect ass and the slight groans escaping from Barrie's open mouth as Ashley enticed the crevice of the buttocks with his long slippery fingers, encouraged him to explore, feeling the tight anus muscles relax as first one then two fingers probed deeper. Stroking and teasing, Ashley was concentrating so hard he almost missed a small tattoo of a dove with an envelope in its mouth at the base of Barrie's spine. Tracing the fine detail with his finger as Barrie shuddered beneath him, he thought how lucky the dove was to be in such a perfect position.

Finishing Barrie's back, Ashley's heart was beating fast and he forgot to wipe the entire body length with tissue paper, as he should, before inviting him to turn over. Meeting Barrie's thick lashed green eyes with his own before glancing down Ashley saw that the young man's manhood was already awakening. Looking back up into his face Ashley felt compelled to ask "Are you still OK with this?" and was relieved by the lazy smile that broke across Barrie's lust-glazed face and the slow nod that followed. He grabbed the bottle of oil and quickly put some in the palm of his right hand before spreading it slowly and evenly over his exposed body. Starting with Barrie's throat, neck and shoulders, he was able to watch the handsome face with its closed eyes, high cheekbones and boyish mouth. Working in the hot sun without a shirt on had made the front of Barrie's body even more bronzed than his back and Ashley felt the prominent chest and hard pointed nipples rise back and forth with his movements. The rippling stomach was flat and perfect and Barrie's abdomen seemed like a slightly twisted core from an apple. A dark line of hair led from a neat belly button down to a tangle of pubic hairs that were thick, curly and damp and Ashley could see that his sizeable penis was seeping at the end, like the silvery cord of a trapped kite fluttering in a windless sky. Resisting the urge to lick along the trail, Ashley saw that Barrie's eyes were still closed and turned his attention to massaging the hips before reaching down and parting the legs slightly to do the inside of his thighs, hands circling and probing into the muscles, only just missing the large, almost bursting globes.

Remembering that Barrie had said on the telephone that he was married and lived in Ealing, Ashley decided that this was probably a one-off visit and, breaking with all convention, he vowed to give this "David" God very special attention. In his experience of clients, it was usually inquisitive young men who visited masseurs as they found it safer than experimenting in toilets, old queens who were expecting a very butch masseur or married men whose wives did not understand them. Aware that he did not usually offer "extras" to paying customers but excited beyond endurance he sat down on the bed and took hold of the now very erect cock and slid it deep into his open mouth, gasping as Barrie reached down and grabbed his hair tightly, thrusting himself deeper into the glistening cavern. Lost in an erotic dream Ashley was suddenly awakened by the jolt of the train.

"Are you home yet?" a child's voice broke vaguely through into his subconscious.

"Yes nearly, another ten minutes and we will be there. Come on! Quickly, it's time to get ready. We shall be in Manchester in a couple of minutes," responded a tired-sounding woman.

Ashley was hot and bothered and his face felt flushed. It had been an exciting dream and he rushed to the toilet quickly bracing himself against the grimy, thin door for the ending which was wet, very wet indeed!

