

Amber was lucky. A pair of tickets was impossible to buy for either of the Saturday performances, but there was a single available for the evening show. The running time was short. The show played without an interval, and if she ran, she would get a late train back to Brighton after curtain down. It was not a hockey Sunday, and she had no desire to crash on Ian's couch. Especially as he had asked her to go to a reception with him. The leering Mandarin had asked about her.

"Sorry, Ian. I'm afraid I really can't this weekend. I have mountains of marking to do, and a speech to write. I'll be up next weekend. I have hockey as well as the speech but don't worry, I don't need you to be there. Your lumpy couch would be appreciated though."

"Oh, alright. The boss will be disappointed."

"Isn't he in the education ministry?"

"Yes."

"Then, he will appreciate how hard we have to work. Tell him, we junior teachers would like to live above the existence level."

"If you came with me, you could tell him yourself."

"Next time."

Amber was not an accomplished liar and felt slightly uncomfortable as she exited the train at Victoria Station and took a tube into the West End. There was no chance of running into Ian or anybody else she knew, but she made herself as inconspicuous as possible, which meant her best black jeans with sneakers and a light sweater. She left her thick hair loose around her shoulders. It was again warm, and she decided to take a light woollen wrap instead of a coat.

As she collected her pre-paid ticket, there was a long queue for returns. She clutched it gratefully and went in search of a programme. She leant up against a wall in the foyer and watched the audience arrive. There were a great many gay men. It didn't surprise her. The show, which originated in a theatre in Munich, already had a cult following. She knew this because, after the dictation exercise, she picked up a copy of the magazine from a supermarket on her way home. She learnt that the show's composer, Jodie Sanchez, not only wrote all film star Laurie Porter's hits but was also married with a daughter. Married to film director Juliette Simon. Which meant that all the beautiful and talented women associated with this show were lesbians. Not that it mattered. She was here only out of curiosity to see how a musical had been written based on the most unlikely subject matter she could imagine.

It was now impossibly crowded in the foyer, and she turned to go into the stalls to find her seat.

"Ow." Amber felt a sharp pain in her back and staggered forwards.

"Tristram, what have you done? Apologise immediately."

Amber was trying to catch her breath, but she recognised the voice. She turned.

"I am so sorry. My son was rather clumsily wielding his umbrella, for which he had no need. It's not going to rain for a week at least."

"If then. Climate crisis you know. If you continue having your way, it will be two weeks before we see a drop. And then two months, and then two years."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I think you heard what I said. I'm sorry I was rude. But it will probably be

the only chance I ever have to say it.”

“I’m not here to talk politics. I want to enjoy an evening off.”

“I appreciate that. But we are at one minute to twelve on the climate crisis.

And if your party don’t wake up and do something about it...”

“Tristram, apologise to the young activist here so that we can find our seats.”

The boy mumbled an apology and held his large umbrella close to his chest.

Catherine Fitzwilliam pushed Amber gently to one side and walked in front of her to a seat in the ninth-row middle.

She looked at her ticket. She was on the end of the eighth row. She cringed.

She wasn’t sure the conversation was a good idea, and now Catherine

Fitzwilliam could see her if she looked to the side. Amber peered surreptitiously,

but the politician looked grimly ahead of her. Perhaps she hadn’t seen her. Amber

was sorry she seemed to have ruined the woman’s evening. She had been

perfectly polite before Amber attacked her.

The lights dimmed, and Amber relaxed as the mad world of the delightful musical swamped her senses. The cast was all good, but Hannah Snyman was exceptional. She cheered along with the rest of the audience as the actress pretended to crawl offstage on her hands and knees after the tour de force that was the ‘Titanium’ number. She performed half the number again and it was several minutes before the applause died down.

For the last number, she wore a skin-tight leather biking outfit. It was incredibly sexy. Amber swallowed. Her mouth was dry. She squirmed in her seat. Something made her glance over to her right. Catherine Fitzwilliam was looking at her. She raised an eyebrow, before looking back at the stage. The audience got to their feet at the end. Amber looked right. Catherine Fitzwilliam was standing clapping enthusiastically. Her son sat, his hands over his ears, looking overwhelmed. Amber left so that the people in her row could get out. She had a train to catch.
