“Your man Bunter is an absolute treasure, isn’t he, Peter old bean.”

Lord Peter Wimsey waved his recently-removed boutonnière in the vague and general direction of his confidential man and assistant. “He’s my right hand, couldn’t do a thing without him, don’t you know. He’s my only bastion against falling into the dread Abyss of utter Chaos. Without my Bunter, life would be simply too, too dreadful to contemplate.”

Mr. Bunter, the perfect gentleman’s gentleman of the imperturbable sort, merely said: “More coffee, my lord?”

“M’m, an’ once that’s over the old palate, I do rather think we shall have a new bottle of brandy. Perfect way to end our little adventure in sleuthin’, what? A fine 1800 Napoleon, absolute heaven an’ quite the right reward. Have you finished potterin’ about in the dinin’ room yet?”

“Not quite, my lord.”

“Well, when you have, do join us for a spot of brandy an’ then a cigar before bed, why don’t you. After all, without you, Bunter mine, we would all be sittin’ up to our necks in the muck an’ mire of that damned ornamental pond instead of sittin’ here at our ease an’ in luxury, secure an’ dashed content with ourselves. You shall,” he added expansively, “have that new-fangled camera lens after which you have been pinin’ so silently. Or anythin’ else that has stolen your fancy away, Bunter dear.”

There was real affection in Lord Peter Wimsey’s grey eyes as he observed his servant, and then real concern as he observed the slight puffiness under that worthy’s eyes. As he was so fond of saying himself, beware theories, for if a man has a theory, then one can be quite certain the man will see nothing that he does not fully expect to be there. Signs of mere mortal fatigue were not something he had ever thought to see on the redoubtable Bunter’s face, and therefore, his theorem that Bunter was unique and above human weakness kept him blind. Now, however, the scales were taken from his sight, and he saw that which he might well have noticed before. “Have I been deuced beastly to you recently, Bunter?”

“No, my lord,” this said as Bunter made his rounds of the room, refilling the other two brandy glasses, that of the Honourable Freddy Arbuthnot and that of Mr. Parker, Lord Peter’s policeman friend.

I have based this story on the books alone, and with no reference to the television adaptations, but you, obviously, must feel free to bring any interpretation of your own to this. I’ve taken information given in several of the books, most notably details given of Lord Peter’s relationship with Bunter, the terms of affection used (although I took the liberty of stealing Lord Peter’s affectionate ‘acushla’ from Parker and giving it to Bunter), also the triggering-point of Lord Peter’s nightmares. I have chosen to expand upon subtle, doubtlessly entirely innocent details in the books (such as Lord Peter’s pleasure over ‘charmin’ things’ written to him in a letter from Mervyn Bunter, Lord Peter reaching out to Bunter an’ then racing off to his bath upon being ignored by someone ‘too well-trained to notice’ such things; the fact that Bunter’s heart leapt in his breast when his master chose him instead of his new bride; the occasion upon which Bunter was so fearful of Lord Peter’s life that he quite forgot himself and neglected to add ‘my lord’ at the end of every sentence uttered). Of such small innocences are large degeneracies built.
“Are you quite sure? Bit of a drooping flower tonight, wouldn’t you say, Freddy?”
This appeal being made to the young man upon whom Lord Peter could usually depend for prompt and heartfelt agreement, regardless of topic.

“Bunter? Your man Bunter will be as fresh as a daisy when we three are all dead asleep in our beds, old bean. Nothing to worry about there, is there, Bunter?”

“No, sir, nothing at all.”
“I suppose you rather enjoyed all the excitement of our recent sleuthin’, what?” Lord Peter said, in his usually hearty, rather foppish manner that served him very well in his attempts to hide his light under a bushel, in order that he could thusly observe all the more closely without arousing the suspicions of the observed. “An uncommonly bright Watson!”

“Yes: and thank you, my lord. Does your lordship require anything else?” the flawless man-servant enquired, pausing in well-groomed perfection before his master’s chair.

“No, no, we can all take care of ourselves until I toss these reprehensibles out on their ears, Bunter. Unless your fancy runs to you joinin’ us for a brandy or three, you toddle off to bed, why don’t you.”

“Thank you, my lord,” which comment, Lord Peter was quick to notice, was the nearest thing to an admission of exhaustion as he was ever likely to hear pass the lips of the formidable Bunter.

“What time does your lordship wish to breakfast?”

“Oh, half-an-hour after I pry my bleary eyes open, I should think, so don’t you bother about gettin’ up or any of that rot. I shall call you when I need you an’ I shan’t be offended nor my maidenly modesty impugned if you show up in your night-clothes, don’t you know.”

“As you wish, my lord. If that’s all, then I shall retire, my lord. Good-night, sir,” a nod to the Honourable Freddy; “and good-night, Mr. Parker.” He turned back to Lord Peter and came to an almost military attention, his manner suggesting the parade ground rather than the quiet elegance of the living-room. “And a good-night to you, my lord.”

“Good-night, Bunter, good-night. An’ I say, do leave all the dreadful household drudgery tonight—I shan’t want to find you scrubbin’ out the scullery when you should be in bed, don’t you know!”

Another slight nod, and then the door was shut and Bunter was gone, borne away on silent feet.

Without the restraining civility of Lord Peter’s man-servant, the brandy and the language began to flow somewhat more freely, the beginning chit-chat of the recovered rubies and apprehended ladies man giving way to discussion of those matters gentlemen prefer to air either only in the stanchioned privacy of their Clubs or in the lesser loftiness of the living-rooms of bachelor friends.

The conversation, eventually, and as it always did, turned back upon itself to the subject of Bunter.

Eyes half-closed, Parker surveyed the destruction of the living-room, glasses and bottles and cigar-filled ash-trays littering every available, once-gleaming surface. There was even a rather grimy coffee-cup upon the black baby grand piano, a single head of chrysanthemum floating in the creamy remains. “Poor Bunter.” Parker said.

“For putting up with me, what? Could not, simply could not, agree with you more, dear chap.”

“You’re not too dreadful bad, Peter my chum. Your man Bunter does rather well for himself, if you ask me.” This slurred and slanderous utterance coming from the depths of a primrose-yellow chair, the occupant of which had his feet propped rudely upon the shimmering black of the coffee-table.

“An’ what are you implyin’ with that, Freddy? Bunter is the most honest, most loyal, most uncommonly wonderful chap a man could ever wish for. Every penny, every half-penny, I swear, is accounted for an’ he presents those damned books to me every blest week.”

“I didn’t intend any slur on his character, old bean. I was simply tryin’ to say that you’re not so appalin’ an employer, that’s all I wanted to say, don’t you know. There’s no cause for you to go leapin’ down a man’s throat, when all he’s done is defend your
character. I just wanted to say that your man Bunter probably goes to bed every night countin’ his blessings that he has a master such as you instead of that blighter Fitzgerald.” He took another, rather carefully negotiated, sip of brandy. “Would never dream of sayin’ a word against Bunter.”

“I should jolly well hope not. Wonderful man. Be lost without him, I would be absolutely at sixes an’ sevens every hour of every day, if I didn’t have my Bunter to keep me straight. Don’t you know,” and Parker groaned with all the fervour of the very nearly drunk at the very definitely drunk, for he knew that this was the hour and this the level of squiffiness that loosened the tongue into reminiscences: “that after the War, when I was so ghastly, absolutely just ghastly rotten with my nerves, he found this flat? He took care of all of the arrangements; he oversaw the decoratin’ an’ chose all the soft-furnishings too. He was an absolute brick to me. Did you know he saved my life durin’ the war, an’ said it was to say ‘thank you’ for savin’ his, when all I had done was follow him through the mud, don’t you…”

Lord Peter’s eyes had taken on the murky complexity of a spider’s web again, his vision turned inwards to where the din of battle had yet to cease. Silence ruled the cheerfully primrose room, until, with the dimmed slowness caused by an over-indulgence of spiritous refreshments, Messrs. Parker and Arbuthnot rose to leave their host. Their farewells went unanswered, for Lord Peter sat hunched in his chair, gone adrift in some world he, and he alone, knew bitterly, horribly well.

“D’you think we should rouse Bunter?” Freddy asked in a stage whisper, all the esses turned to shh! by the brandy.

“No; he’ll go to Bunter himself if he needs him. I must confess, I feel a fool. We should have expected this: it’s always the same. He worries himself with a problem and then when he has time to simply sit and think, his nerves start failing him. The drink only makes him worse. We really should have known better, shouldn’t we?”

Together, they stood shoulder to shoulder, each one of them glad, with that pettiness of human spirit to which we all of us are prey, that he himself was not the one to suffer the depravations and humiliations of shell-shock and nervous indisposition of those few who had come back from the Sommes. After a time, each still with his burden of guilt, they turned, letting themselves out, the Yale-lock latching behind them with a melancholy click that did not impinge itself upon the lonely state of misery into which Lord Peter was slowly sinking. Perhaps, if we had been able to listen in to the sounds seeping into his mind, ebbing and flowing at first with the tides of memory, we too would have heard the distant lower of battle coming ever closer, ever more deadly. Perhaps, had we heard with his ears, we too would have heard the horror of men dying, doing what we had sent them over the top to do. Perhaps, had we seen with his eyes, we too would see the nightmare of No-Man’s Land from which, for too many, there was no awakening, sucked down into the mud before last breath was breathed; or perhaps we would have been as the Wimsey himself was: trapped in the memory of what it had been to be alive there, when all around you, and oftentimes under your orders, men were dying…

A noise, a sibilant silent moving, foot-step gliding over carpeting of a lesser quality than that which graced Lord Peter’s domain, but that small noise in the night was no longer enough to disturb Bunter’s slumber. The pressure of one hand on his shoulder and another over his mouth served, instead, to startle him from his cotton-wooled dreams.

“Hush, Sergeant!”

This was hissed at him from very close quarters, Lord Peter’s brandy-warmed breath caressing his cheek, waking him immediately and alerting him precisely to the nature of the situation. It was not entirely unexpected, but he had hoped that the progress would have continued and that they would have had a longer interim between these nervous attacks.

“Be very, very quiet. There’s an advance troop, not far from here—hsst! Listen, you can hear them. Can you? Hear them, Sergeant, can you hear them? Are they too close to my men? The reconnaissance unit I sent out at
Of a sudden, Bunter had his arms full of his panicked master, the thunder of racing heart reminding Bunter, breathlessly and dreadfully, of the tortured nights in the trenches. “It’s all right, Major,” he crooned, stroking the tow-coloured hair back from the high forehead, and after a few moments of this, his own voice proved to be a very pleasant baritone, easing into a blend of childhood’s lullabies and the more cheerful of the popular songs of their days together at the Front. With a tenderness that would have shocked many, but not, perhaps, Lord Peter’s mother, who knew far more than she ever breathed to a living soul, and who understood far more than the narrow mind of her vicar could ever comprehend with his unyielding fire and brimstone: with that same tenderness, Bunter lay his master down, intending to cover and calm him. Wimsey, however, with the mindlessness of fear that made him so loathe this aspect of his nervous destruction, clung to him fiercely.

“Don’t leave me, oh, please, don’t leave me! You can’t, you mustn’t, don’t go,” the endless pleading began, a familiar litany that never failed to bring tears to the publicly impeccable Bunter. Wimsey was curling himself inward, refusing, however, to lessen his grip on Bunter, thus pulling his man-servant off balance and on to the bed with him. “You mustn’t leave me,” whispered through the night, an anguish cry from a soul in the depths of despair, where faith no longer offers any hope and only the kindness of those one knows and trusts can give any comfort at all.

Stiff as a poker, Bunter tried, truly tried, to free himself, but Wimsey’s agony would not let him go. “Please, sir,” he begged in his turn: “Let me go. You must let me go. Oh, please…”

But it was not to be. Major Wimsey needed him, was desperate for some taste of mercy. The only one who had ever been able to help him, the only one who had ever stood beside him and suffered with him, had been Sgt. Bunter, and he could not allow Bunter to abandon him. In his nervous condition, his mind could not conceive of being left alone in this hostile, lethal darkness, and so he continued to cling, his breathing harsh in Bunter’s ear, the sound of a man near his breaking—

dusk, they have come back, haven’t they? All of them? Whole, none of them maimed? There aren’t any more letters for me to write back to anyone’s family, are there? Shh! don’t say a word, they’ll hear you!”

“It’s all right if they hear me, Major. It’s our own men, come back from their mission.”

“Then I must go and receive their report, find out what the Bosch is doing, what he’s planning. I must—but can you hear the screaming, Sergeant? Bunter, oh, Bunter, it’s young Davidson. Can’t you hear him, choking in that foul water? He’s trapped, Sergeant! I saw him falling, he fell into one of the shell-holes, and the water splashed all up around him, and I can hear him now, choking, I must go, I know I can pull him out—”

Bunter took a steadying grip of his master’s arm, holding him still against the lure of healing something that could never be healed: he, too, had seen young Davidson go down. He, as well as the Major, had seen with the appalling brutality of war that Davidson had no possible fear of still being alive when he sank into that shell-hole of disease and decomposition. “Major,” he said, holding on firmly whilst he rose from his bed, disdaining the proprieties in favour of the necessities, his dressing-gown remaining across the bottom of his bed. Clad, and most un-Bunterlike, in blue-striped pyjamas creased and crinkled from the heat of his bed, he began, with the infinite care and bottomless tact for which he was so rightly treasured, to lead Lord Peter—now gone back to being Major Peter Wimsey—to his bed and, he hoped with an aching heart, to rest.

It took a few minutes and much manœuvering, but finally, they gained the bedside, Wimsey’s eyes still wide-pupilled and wild, his skin pallid and clammy, his entire body shaking as if an ague had him in its grip. Bunter sat him on the edge of the bed and his well-practised and ever-skilled hands divested Wimsey of shoes and clothing, turning aside, for a mere moment, saying: “Let’s get you into your pyjamas, shall we, Major?”, the last word being drowned out by a hoarse scream of: “No! Don’t leave me alone!” and the thud as Wimsey’s knees hit the floor.
point, struggling with bitter fortitude, not to cry.

It was with something woefully close to gratitude that Bunter finally yielded and allowed himself to be drawn closer, until he held his master fully in his arms, the bed-clothes pulled high enough to cover his master’s nakedness, but not so high that the light of the moon could not find a swathe of perfectly pale skin to caress with its coolness. Bunter was a man of tremendous moral fibre, but which one of us would be proof against our heart’s desire being placed so trustingly in our arms and needing to receive that which we needed to give? In this, if in so little else, Bunter proved to be nothing more, and nothing less, a man.

His hands were trembling, but still, he did it: he reached down and stroked, his palm flat and warm, across the tensely bunched muscles of Major Wimsey’s shoulders. His own breath shuddered loudly, and at that, and the softly loving touch on his skin, Wimsey raised his head far enough so that he could see Bunter and looked clearly and closely at him. Only those of exceptional expertise in the field of human nervousness, and in the new philosophical science of what happened to a few, tormented men after the unspeakable horrors of war, would recognise that this was not Lord Peter Wimsey, fully compos mentis in the dark hollow of days between ’20 and ’21, but a man thrown back to being the very person he had been in ’18, the final months of the Great War, frayed and fragile and very, very far from home indeed. There might be a muddle of experiences this time: perhaps the very first time, all mixed in with those furtive, almost shame-filled times, when Wimsey had come to the khaki cot that was in the far corner of his tent, perhaps even a mixing in of some of Lord Peter’s own youth.

“D’you remember, Mervyn?” Major Wimsey asked, and the use of his Christian name made Bunter groan and his body betray him. “I can’t forget it. That shell-pock, an’ all the night-sky lit up as if it were a bally party. But we knew it was more shells comin’ in—an’ tryin’ to catch us, what! You kept me sane that night, don’t you know, even if we should never have done what we did. I suppose fear does funny things to men, especially in the trenches when all you can smell is death and pain…”

Bunter knew what was coming next. Both during the War and since their reunion after the War there had been many repetitions of this particular act within this particular scene, with only the smallest of variations in the words the Playwright had written for them. None of it mattered, these small changes in their ritual, but only were you to stand beyond this room and disregard the criminal nature of the act that was now inevitable. No matter how deeply he scoured his heart, Bunter could not find it in himself to consider what he did to be criminal. Rather, it gave both comfort and healing, and since it had begun happening again, his master was recovering all the more quickly. So he asked himself: ‘where’s the harm? It makes me happy, gives me a bit of comfort and pleasure for myself, and it helps his lordship no end. It would be worse, really, to try to turn him away when he’s like this. And who’s to say what would happen to his poor mind and the terrible state of his nerves if I bade him no.’ His conscience duly apportioned its due, his fingers strayed the length of his lordship’s—‘Peter’s’, he reminded himself, ‘he’s Peter again’—face, coming to rest on wide, rather thin lips.

“It wasn’t the War, not for me,” he said, as he always did, secure in the certainty that all this would be gone from Peter’s awareness when he awakened in the morning, “I fell in love with you the instant I saw you. You were at the adjutant’s tent, creating all sorts of botherations because you had no batman to take care of all the things you couldn’t possibly be troubled with if you were to make a decent go of being an officer—’don’t you know!’ he added with gentle mockery, still stroking flesh that was slowly losing its chill under the affection of his touch. “And I said to myself, that’s the one for me. They had me marked down for someone else, but I slipped a whole pound to the man who made up the lists and had him send me to you.”

“I didn’t know that,” Peter said, as he always did, genuine surprise written all over his face. “That was rather rum of you, don’t you know. I’m not entirely sure—"
“Shh,” Bunter whispered, his fingers playing over parted lips, “it’s all over and done with now, isn’t it?”

“Is it? But I can still hear them, Mervyn. Can’t you? The dripping of the water—if there’s too much of it, or if it should rain, we could drown here before one of the shells get us. And—” the panic was coming back, taking Major Wimsey away: “Bunter! The shells are being fired from beyond us now! It’s happened, we have fallen behind enemy lines! They’ll torture me for the plans if they capture me, you know that! You must kill me, now, before they can get me!”

“No, sir: beg pardon, for taking such a liberty, but you’ll feel much better when I do,” Bunter said very loudly, slapping Wimsey’s face to break the rising hysteria, in present time as he had in the past, during that dreadful night. “I’m not going to kill you, no matter what. We’re not behind their lines, we’re in No-Man’s Land and we are stuck, but only for the moment. I can get us back to our own lines, I promise you I can. The gentleman who employed me before all this had several country houses and one of them had boglands near it. Believe me, sir, I can get us through this mud and back to where we belong. You just have to give me a little time, until this fog lifts enough for me to know which way is which, and I’ll get us home. I promise.”

“Promise? Truthfully?”

“Yes, sir, truthfully. On my father’s grave, I promise you.”

He lay remembering in silence, as Lord Peter lay beside him, also remembering, perhaps the same things, perhaps different things, but of one thing we can be completely certain: neither man was yet truly free of the War, and neither one of them had yet found the Great Peace for which they had both fought so bravely.

It seemed, when it had first happened, (and it had happened more times than some people might say it should have both during the War itself and in the months since Bunter had been in Lord Peter’s employ,) it seemed the most natural and the most charitable thing in the world, when he felt that hard thrusting of mortal fear against his thigh, to reach out and take Major Wimsey—Peter—in his knowledgeable hands and ease him out of fear with pleasure.

Of course, it had been little more than that the very first time, trapped together in a shallow hollow barely large enough to shelter one man, and positively inadequate for the comfortable, or polite, shelter of two. They had already been pressed so closely together that Bunter had not had to move more than an inch or two to undo the buttons of Wimsey’s fly, and it had taken little more than a few strokes of his hand to have Wimsey shuddering in release against him. There had been no surprise in him at that, only a deep happiness that he had been allowed such intimacy with the man he so loved and whose class placed him so completely beyond even his most foolish phantasms. The surprise for him had come when Wimsey, his face buried against Bunter’s shoulder in an attitude he had since learned was an habitual one, had repeated Bunter’s own actions, but on Bunter’s person. Bunter, ever sensitive to the correct and proper manners, had protested, quite naturally, wishing to protect Wimsey from this vice into which he had been guilty of introducing his lordship, only to hear some muttering, barely distinguishable under the relentless pounding of both his heart and the enemy shells, words that sounded the way ‘Eton’ and ‘Balliol’ would if muffled against one’s shoulder. It may even have been that his fear for his life added to the pleasure, but it had been the most wonderful experience of his life when Wimsey had reached his hand inside the coarse khaki of Bunter’s own uniform and taken his member into a hand that was probably as knowledgeable as his own had been.

But that had been in the mud and the malodorousness of a shell-hole. They were in a soft and comfortable bed, now, and it was not the decay of other men’s flesh that clung to Lord Peter’s skin, but the lingering, tangy sweetness of verbena. There was never any trace of memory after one of these nights; each time it happened Lord Peter repeated it as if it were completely new, but his body demonstrably remembered what the mind forgot. There was far more to it now than the
boyish innocence of mutual manipulation of each other’s private parts: there was, after all this long time together, a passionate experience between them, one that had branched out and flourished to include every aspect of the Greek love in which Bunter was rather shamefully well-versed. Bunter had also found, in the odd way of the nervous mind, that although Wimsey was thrown back to the War, when he came out of the battle scene, he would still want what he had come to crave as comfort in the field, and he had begun to commingle it with things learned and heard in the modern day of his life. Hence, (although the first time a passage from some ancient Greek writings had featured prominently in their night-time involvements, this inclusion of their real life had given Bunter a leaping, but sadly false hope, a hope that this might be more than a nervous tick of Wimsey’s), hence it was that Peter would use some passage or some illustration from some ancient and rude book to arouse them both; equally, he might well employ the words that one was prone to hear when one dealt so frequently with the criminal classes. It made little difference to Bunter: he treasured every moment, all the more fiercely, perhaps, from knowing that Lord Peter would remember it not at all, that in the morning, they would be nothing more than master and servant once again, although the master was far more affectionate than most and the servant had to refuse some of the more excessive liberties offered him.

The hall clock was ticking very slowly tonight, every slight click and wheeze an eternity of duration, whilst Bunter waited for the moment to arrive, when Lord Peter would come through this last painful barrier into something that was neither light nor dark, but a sort of Limbo, where they lingered for a while. He truly could not believe that what they shared was evil enough to actually cast them into Hell itself, no matter what the vicars and Bishops said, but he knew that it was enough to keep him from Heaven. It was something he had thought of, often and with deep consideration, and he had marked this love to be worth the penalty he would have to pay. Indeed, as time went on and he gained more happiness from this than from any of the dealings a man of his station and class was expected to have with the gentler sex, he had come to the decision that he would rather spend an eternity in Limbo than a lifetime in matrimony. He was rather fond of ladies, but as one would be of friends. His passion, that of the heart and of the flesh, was saved for his lordship now. His lordship, as if hearing this imitable thought, began to move within the tender strength of Bunter’s arms and it took only a very few interminable ticks of the clock for his pyjamas to be removed and consigned to the floor.

Bunter shivered in purest delight as lips caressed the point of his shoulder and as Peter’s tongue dappled and dipped into the hollows of his throat. He arched his neck, so that his head tipped back and out of the way, to free more of his flesh for caressing. His own hands were not still, smoothing and kneading Peter’s skin, daring lower and lower. His master lifted himself up upon his elbows, and then smiled down, with infinite sweetness and profound innocence—a complete freedom from guilt, which made Bunter, in his turn, feel more innocent still—before bowing his head to bring his lips to Bunter’s and to kiss him, quite profoundly.

Straight, exquisitely soft hair brushed Bunter’s face, and he reached up, filling his hands to overflowing with it. In the course of a day, he might brush this hair as often five times, but on those occasions, he must needs keep his face impassive and his hands impersonal, no matter how desperately he might long to caress the silken strands. He was under no such compunctions now, and he intoxicated himself with the feel of it, indulging his own desires.

“You really love my hair, what?” Peter asked him, breaking off from kissing him barely long enough to ask the question and certainly not long enough for Bunter to answer. “Well,” and then there were more kisses, before he said: “I love everything about you. I love your black hair, so thick and lush. Your eyes, with eyelashes black as soot and eyes, oh, the way you look at me, Mervyn, acushla, makes my heart glad. And your mouth, I like that best of all when it is swollen and pinked
by my kisses.”

Bunter, mouth covered by Peter’s, could answer only with his body, surging up priapically with every seductive compliment.

“You have such a beautiful body, acushla mine. One day, I shall take you to Italy an’ show you all the sculptures, and then you shall see how beautiful you are. Michaelangelo could have moulded you, your muscles so hard and your skin so flawlessly white. But,” Peter gave a low, vulgar chuckle that thrilled Bunter to the depths of his soul, “you are of much,” a hand squeezed his phallus: “much,” there was another caress, so perfect that he was growing in size with heart-thumping speed: “better proportions in those areas of purely masculine beauty, don’t you know.”

There was nothing they had not shared together, and there was nothing that Bunter did not dare. “Take me in your mouth,” he asked, urging his lordship to kiss a path down his body.

“I shall take you in my mouth.” Peter said through a mouthful of alabaster pap, the flesh warm and responsive against his tongue, “and pay homage to you.”

Impatient with the impediments of the cloth, Wimsey threw the bedclothes aside, sheets and blankets and counterpane landing in a tangled heap by the side of his bed. He cared nothing for those, only for the perfect masculinity revealed in new nakedness.

Bunter was, as Peter had said, as beautiful as a statue created by one of the Old Masters, but far from as cold or as lifeless. Every inch of him was tingling, and he was writhing and wriggling with the pleasure given him. His body was pale in the moonlight, apart from the dashes of black hair that highlighted details of his body, most particularly a line of soft blackness that Peter was following to where it blossomed into a small bush of hair, and a most need-filled erection pulsing there.

“Oh, what a beauty you are, Mervyn acushla, what a rare and perfect beauty you are.”

With those words, Mervyn Bunter arched in an exquisite agony of delight, for Peter’s mouth had descended upon him, and Bunter could barely endure the joy of watching his flesh disappear into that loving and amorous mouth. His flesh was gleaming, here, with the perspiration of passion, and there, with the moisture of his lordship’s oral caressing. It was, very nearly, his undoing, and so he tugged, breathless and wordless, until Peter freed him and came to lie beside him.

“No not fast, Peter,” Bunter said, his eyes gazing at Peter’s face whilst his hands tweaked and twisted Peter’s nipples, much to that man’s delight. “Shall I tell you what I want tonight?” he asked, pausing once to taste the prominence of small pink nipple.

“Oh, yes, tell me. Tell me the way I like to hear it, oh, please, do indulge me. I shall,” he said, and his eyes were very knowingly seductive, “do anything at all, absolutely anything at all that you might want me to.”

“Well, then, I shall indulge you, as you shall indulge me. I want to roger you, Peter, I want to bugger you and sodomise you, and fuck you. I want to know you,” he said, his hand going between Peter’s legs, and he smiled as Peter rolled away from him, but only so that he might return, flat upon his belly, his nether regions exposed and utterly defenceless. “I want to cleave to you, and plough you and plant my seed right in you.”

Peter stretched his arms behind himself and parted his cheeks, exposing that most secret of buds, pink and vulnerable to Bunter’s exploring fingers.

“You want me to, don’t you? Shall I fuck you, then? Shall I?”

“Oh, yes, fuck me, plant me with your seed,” Peter moaned, rubbing his front and his own hardened need against the sheet. “Come on, Mervyn, do me.”

“In just a moment, Peter, you stay there just like that, while I get something to ease my way in your back passage. Wouldn’t want to cause either of us any hurt, would we now?” He did not even need to leave the bed, a small jar of soothing unguent being kept in the drawer beside the bed. It had much-vaunted medicinal purposes, but Bunter sincerely doubted if the manufacturer had divined some of the uses to which his gelatinous solution was put. He covered his fingers with it, and slowly eased one digit into Peter’s bottom, smiling at the sheer animal pleasure this brought both of them. As the small mouth stretched hungrily for more, he slid a
second digit in, and then a third, until Peter was mewling with his pleasure and Bunter himself was dangerously close to being unable to control himself. Gently, he withdrew his finger and laid himself atop his lordship, his engorged penis finding the waiting maw easily enough. He pushed, not softly, the thickness of his shaft slowly disappearing inside the milk-white flesh, soft cries of delight coming from Peter and himself both. Peter shoved upwards, quite abruptly, and Bunter was buried up to the haft in him, and both their cries now were rough and animalistic, peppered and spiced with the crude eroticisms in which lovers find such pleasure.

Bunter withdrew, completely, the breached flesh closing only slowly behind him, and then he thrust forward, hard and immutable, plunging into Peter, possessing him thoroughly. Again and again he did this, watching his own hard flesh plunder softer flesh, taking absolute possession of his master, loving him to the very core of his being. Peter’s body was hotly satined around him, a ribbon of tight muscle clenching at the base of his rigid priapism, keeping him inside the body he held so dear.

Peter was raging under him now, a maelstrom of pleasure and demanding need. He had pushed up onto his knees, so that Bunter was now coupled with him like a dog, so that Bunter could plunder him all the more deeply and with all the more determined force. Bunter, for his part, wrapped his arms around Peter’s middle, clinging on tight as a barnacle, only his hips moving, up and down, like the pistons on a steam engine, stopping now, to remain buried in groaning flesh and to move, in tiny, deep circular motions of unendurable delight, until either he or Peter wrenched them back into the thrusting patterns once more.

Again and again, they did this. Bunter especially, although Peter assisted him with every ounce of his being, trying to make this last as long as possible. But as we have noted before, even Bunter is only human, and as he thrust deeply inside the man he loved beyond life itself, the hungry muscle clenching around him, milking him, whilst there was a quiver where his glans was buried in tender flesh. It was then he felt the first hot-liquid spurts of le petit mort caress his hand. It was too much for him, and his body trembled and shuddered as he spent himself, his seed spilling inside Peter, anointing him with pleasure.

It was almost over now, the passions both nervous and animal. With a very gentle speed, Bunter used the large linen handkerchief and the carafe of water he always laid out for his lordship to clean away any evidence that might cause such difficult explanations if questioned. That routine task accomplished, Bunter lay in the dry warmth of Lord Peter’s bed, his body comfortably and comfortably entwined with his lordship’s, waiting through the silence that happened now, as often as not, patient for the next words, for he cherished them dearly and never tired, no matter the circumstances, of hearing them again. He longed for them, even though he knew that they marked the end of each idyllic tryst and signalled the marshalling forces of recovery, which he both loved and hated. Very quietly, it came, the softly spoken words marking both a beginning—of healing, for which he longed, truly longed with a profound unselfishness of love—and an ending—which he dreaded, with a depth of despair rending to know.

“This gentleman who employed you—is he holding your position for you?” The same words, spoken to him after their…liaison in the nightmare of being trapped in No-Man’s Land.

“I’m afraid I really don’t know, sir. No mention was made of it when I volunteered.”

“A footman? Yet you were sent out into...
mud?" This last was always uttered with the true loathing for mud that any man in the Trenches nurtured in his bosom. "Then, when this is all over and done with, and if we both come through all of this in once piece, don't you know, you come and look me up again. You've done an absolutely splendid job of batman to me here, I do believe you would be a spiffing valet." The blond-brown head ducked in to hide in the crook of Bunter's neck, running his fingers through and through Wimsey's hair, eyes threatening to spill tears of happiness and misery both. "Be rather put out if I never got to see you again after what we've been through, don't you know."

"I shall be sure to do so, Major," he said, his voice trembling past the lump in his throat. Oh, how much an agony this was, and how much a pearl beyond any price to hear the words that told him he was wanted, and needed, and loved, in his way. Words that were spoken as they had been that night, not in the thoughtless heat of passion, but in the contemplative honesty of the aftermath.

"You will come to me, won't you? You will come and stay with me, be my man?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I shall," he said, promising himself so much farther beyond mere valet. He was promising his heart, his loyalty, his life. "The very instant I obtain my demobilisation papers, I shall present myself to you, and I will stay with you."

"Promise?" Lord Peter's voice was becoming vague and fragile now, a higher pitch entering into it, warning Bunter that they were running out of time.

"I promise you, Peter. I'll come to you and stay with you forever and for a day."

He had done precisely that, of course, and had, indeed, stayed with Lord Peter, and would continue to stay with Lord Peter, no matter what. There was only one thing that could possibly make him leave his lordship, and that would be a direct dismissal from the man's very lips. Rising from his master's bed, silent as ever, he knew that dismissal would never happen, excepting, of course, the risk of what his master might feel he was bound and due to do, if these nocturnal secrets were ever to come to light. Quietly, he put his pyjamas back on to hide his nakedness, and then dressed Lord Peter in his favourite mauve silks, finally making the bed neat and tidy around him.

Padding on cold, naked feet, he went back to his own room, wrapping himself in his dressing-gown and slippers, so that if Lord Peter had returned enough from the night, then he should see nothing whatever amiss. Then on to the kitchen, whence he returned with the bromide ready for his master, and gave to him, Lord Peter propped up demurely on his pillows, Bunter standing decorously eighteen inches from the bedside.

Almost immediately, the bromide worked its usual magic, Lord Peter's eyes growing heavy with sleep. At the last moment, he stretched his hand out and whispered: "Mervyn, acushla."

Bunter came to him, of course, perching himself on the edge of the bed and holding the beloved hand while the very last of the man who called himself simply 'Peter', and who loved him, was subsumed by sleep and lost to him, if not forever, then until the next bout of nervous agony. Though it grieved him dreadfully to watch Peter fade away and leave him yet again, Bunter could not wish for his return, for such a return meant untold horrors for Lord Peter, whom Bunter loved as much, though more discreetly, as he did Peter.

Finally, Lord Peter was fully asleep, and so Bunter removed the extra pillows, disporting his master more comfortably to rest all the way through until morning. He left the hall light on, to give some light should the unwanted happen and his master awake in screaming nightmare, and by that light, he returned to the bedside. Bunter's gentle hands cradled his lordship's head, tangling in the tow-coloured hair at the temples, and a kiss, nonetheless chaste, but of fervent, passionate devotion was pressed to Lord Peter's brow.

"Good-bye," Bunter whispered, to his lover and his own unattainable dreams: "Good-bye."

"Oh, dash it all to the Seven Hells, Bunter! Why did you not remind me last night, before I had all that deuced brandy, I hasten to add, that my sister and my mother—both of them
together, and me with a hang-over, Heaven help me!—were breakfastin’ with me? Jolly poor show, Bunter, an’ not up to your usual standards at all, don’t you know.”

“If I may be so bold, my lord,” Bunter said, rearranging the chrysanthemums (which were, by supra-human efforts the only remaining visible sign of the entire preceding night), “I did not remind your lordship, because your lordship had not informed me of the event.”

Lord Peter looked at him with the skittish remorse of an untried horse. “Oh, damn, I really am being beastly to you, what? I say, why don’t you take the day off, have yourself a bit of a break away from me an’ my silly trials an’ tribulations. Take whatever cash is in the housekeepin’ an’ spend it on yourself. Go out an’ buy yourself somethin’ absolutely top-hole that you’ve wanted for absolutely ages, don’t you know.”

“If I might remind your lordship, the Dowager Duchess and the Lady Mary, your sister, will be arriving within the quarter hour.”

“Oh. Right, absolutely. After brekkers then, you just take yourself off. Oh, do this for me, please, acushla?”

The endearment caught him completely by surprise and the chrysanthemums very nearly decorated the floor instead of the baby grand. He was, fortunately, saved by the bell and was able to excuse himself neatly and hasten off to answer the call at the door.

The Dowager Duchess and Lady Mary Wimsey swept in, the younger giggling and laughing as she draped Bunter with her fur.

“Hallo, Polly,” Lord Peter greeted his sister, kissing her with uncommon affection on her cheek. “And mother, dear. Come in, come in, make yourselves comfortable. Bunter’s created his usual perfection for breakfast, in between coping with my beastly temper an’ the uncommonly bad mess we made of this room last night.”

Bunter seated the ladies at the table, deftly serving three breakfasts, the only sound he made the faintest click of silver upon silver as he served the eggs.

One sip of the coffee, and Lady Mary was heaping lavish praise on his impeccable head. “I say, Bunter, you will tell Cookie the secret of your coffee, won’t you? Hers is barely fit for drinking, and only if one drowns it in farm cream and demerara.”

“I shall be honoured, Lady Mary.”

Drinking her coffee, her eyes brightly alert and far more perceptive than either of her children would ever give her credit for, his mother said: “Peter, I hope you’re treating this man of yours well. Bunter is a treasure, an absolute treasure.”

“He’s my right hand, don’t you know?” Lord Peter said, blissfully unaware, lost in his own theory of Mr. Mervyn Bunter and therefore unseeing of what was in front of his, admittedly red-shot and bleary, eyes.

Bunter felt a thrill of pure happiness diffuse his heart, but he was far too well-trained, and also far too discreet, to ever allow it to show.

“I simply could not manage without him. In fact, I would go so far as to say, Mother, that life without him is more than I care to contemplate.”

Only inches away from Bunter, the tow-coloured hair gleamed in the morning light, the exact shade as the chrysanthemums he himself had chosen for the piano. For a moment of divine insanity, his hand trembled, reaching, almost, as if to touch. But then, sanity and reality returned, and he turned the gesture into a correction of an already perfectly correct collar.

“Oh, don’t fuss so, it makes my nerves twitch, don’t you know, Bunter.”

Of course, none of his reaction to that pierced his imperturbable armour, either. “I do beg your pardon, my lord.”

“See, Bunter? I am being an absolute beast to you! I demand that you take the day off an’ do somethin’ perfectly wonderful for yourself. I shall muddle along without you.”

“Very good, my lord,” Bunter said, his tones perfectly modulated.

“An absolute treasure, your man Bunter,” the Duchess said, watching them both together, missing nothing at all.

“Oh, couldn’t agree more, Mother. An uncommonly wonderful fellow.”

And Bunter, ever the perfect gentleman’s gentleman of the imperturbable sort, revealed none of either his love or his pain and simply said: “More coffee, my lord?”