

The following weekend was May Eve. The evening was going to begin with a pirate bop. Harriet fastened herself into the corset top she'd bought for the occasion and looked forward to the fun that would be occurring. She accompanied the top with a short, floaty black skirt and the fishnet tights that were an almost inevitable part of all the women's bop costumes and half of the men's. She threaded a ribbon printed with skull and crossbones through the laces of the corset and finished it all off with a pirate hat and sword she'd bought from the fancy dress shop. Having forced her hair into wild pre-Raphaelite curls and put on a ton of black eyeliner, she glanced in the mirror and was pleased with the result. She only wished she still had her necklace, both to complete the look and keep her protected.

She met Tom briefly when the sun first went down. He was spending the evening with the Cavaliers, who were holding a members' only dinner in college. Since he'd defied George and the senior vampire hierarchy to be with her he'd been keeping his distance from the other Cavaliers, but in recent weeks appeared to have been drifting back into the fold.

"The May Eve Dinner is one of the most important events of the year," he explained, "and there's always fantastic food and drink."

"And people to drink from," Harriet added.

"Well yes, that. But I won't if you don't want me to."

Harriet shook her head and mumbled something about it being okay. The thought of Tom drinking the blood of other people disturbed her from both a squeamish and a jealous perspective, but she didn't want him looking weak in front of the others. Besides, although she allowed him to feed from her regularly, she alone couldn't provide him with enough blood without seriously endangering herself.

"I'd be grateful if you can at least try and pick the ugliest girl there," she added, only half joking.

"Well, that's usually exactly what I get, but no doubt this year George will take it upon himself to find me the most beautiful and delicious donor he can, in the hope of luring me away from you," he replied, laughing.

As Harriet sulked, he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her hard.

"You don't have to have any worries on that score," he said. "I'd like to demonstrate that to you, but we should be off to our respective parties. You know what they say about the First of May though. Meet me after midnight."

"What do they say?" Harriet asked.

"Oh, if you don't know, you'll have to wait and see."

Reluctantly Harriet dragged herself out of Tom's room, grabbed a bottle of wine she'd bought earlier and took it over to Ben's room, where he was holding a pre bop party.

All the usual crowd was there, as well as Ben's rowing team, some friends of Josh's from the choir and several random people from the staircase. Maybe the theme had appealed or maybe the fact that it was a special occasion had spurred people on. Either way, almost everybody had made a real effort to dress as a pirate. The fancy dress shop had done a roaring trade in hats, swords and Jolly Roger flags and the charity shops and Primark had sold hundreds of stripy shirts. In one corner of the room, a group was trying to make their own swords with cardboard and silver foil. The tequila shots they were downing were not helping the process along, but they seemed to be having fun.

Harriet had several shots herself. After a while, a few of them settled down with their glasses to play *Never Have I Ever*. Each player took it in turns to announce something that they had never done, from cheating in an exam to having a threesome. Everyone in the circle who had done the thing had to down their shot.

The game wasn't too embarrassing for her. Everyone knew Tom, so there was no speculation about who she was or wasn't sleeping with, and as far as normal behaviour went, she'd done enough interesting/amusing/sexy things to sound fun, but not so many as to sound weird or overly slutty.

As long as no one says, "I have never gone out with a vampire," or "I have never broken a sacred blood bond," then I ought to be on fairly steady ground.

"I have never kissed a girl," she said, when it was her turn, struggling to think of anything more imaginative. All the guys drank, including Greg who was very gay.

"I was fifteen," he said indignantly when several people looked at him questioningly.

Several of the girls also drank, much to the boys' delight, including Caroline.

"Why don't you give us a demonstration," one of the drunker ones shouted. "Poor old Harriet has never tried; maybe you should show us how it's done."

"Wait, wait, let me get my camera," his friend shouted.

"Shut up you perverts," Caroline said, laughing. "Anyway, it's my turn. I have never been arrested."

The game went on for another few turns until the general consensus was that it was time to head over to the bop. Harriet was feeling drunk from the shots and giggly from the revelations of the game by the time they arrived.

The bar was the fullest that she had seen it since freshers' week. There was even a large third year contingent, despite the way they usually shunned organised college events in

favour of either work or their own parties. The people in Ben's room hadn't been the exception either. Everyone had made an effort with their outfits, and enjoyed plenty of drinks before coming out. Everyone also seemed more willing than usual to dance. Tom was away at the Cavaliers' party. In his absence, Harriet danced both in a big group and with her friends.

Josh was looking great in a ripped black silk shirt held together by a leather cord. It fit him tightly, showing off his body and his naturally tanned skin. She danced with him for the first time since the toga bop, relieved that all the awkwardness of that night had evaporated. "Will you be my college wife?" he asked, presenting her with a child's sparkly ring. "I want to have little fresher children with you next year."

Harriet laughed and squeezed the plastic ring onto her finger. "I'd never dream of college-marrying anyone else."

Afterwards, they joined Ben, Caroline and Olamide and jumped around happily in a group.

"Where's Callum?" Harriet asked Olamide, smiling at her black jeans and striped shirt. She looked good but was probably the only woman that wasn't wearing a mini-skirt.

"Oh he's working, would you believe? On May Eve. Don't get me wrong, I think work is important, but he's so over the top sometimes."

Harriet was surprised. She'd never heard Olamide say a bad word about her boyfriend before.

Before she knew it, it was 2am, and that part of the evening drew to a close. Along with several other people, Harriet decided to go back to Ben's room. By sheer chance, most of the people living on his staircase were as outgoing as him, and the entire building had been given over to the party, with one room having music blasting, another storing the drinks and a third acting as a makeshift chill out room. The porters seemed to have accepted that it was a night when everyone was likely to be awake and didn't try to break up the party.

Before long, there was a knock at the door. Ben walked over puzzled – people had generally just been wandering in and out and the door was wide open. Harriet glanced up to see Tom stood there in his white tie Cavaliers outfit. She was impressed again by the way he never seemed at all tired or dishevelled, despite the fact that he'd presumably been partying hard all evening.

"Oh hey Tom," Ben said, his confusion evident in his voice. "What are you doing just standing there? Come in and get a drink. I've got Harriet here too."

As soon as Ben had extended the invitation, Tom walked through the door and into the room. Harriet wondered how much the potential recruits knew about the existing members' 'condition.' Judging by the fact that Ben seemed unaware of Tom's need to be invited in, she could only assume not a lot.

Tom helped himself to a vodka and coke and chatted to a few people, most of whom (despite still being dressed as pirates) gently mocked his formal attire. After a while, he cornered Harriet. She noticed his rosy cheeks and wondered who he'd fed from.

"Good night then?" she asked. "Where are the other Cavaliers?"

"Oh they've still got the room. So drinking in there, or wandering the grounds looking for likely donors."

Harriet felt rather uncomfortable at the idea, but tried not to show it. It wasn't as though they were really doing any harm – most girls would even be delighted to bump into the handsome, charming members in a dark alley, let alone on such a special night and they neither felt nor remembered the bloodletting, only the fun before and afterwards.

"Anyway, it's time for some fun of our own. Did you find out what it is they say about the first of May?"

"I've still no idea," she replied.

"Way-hey, first of May, outdoor fucking starts today," he whispered, taking her hand and leading her out into the quad and then onto the Steele Walk as she giggled. Hands gripped tightly, they walked until they reached a sufficiently secluded spot, where he spread his jacket on the ground.

"Don't mess up my outfit," she said, giggling. "You don't know how long it took me to get into this corset."

"Then we'll leave it on. It suits you."

He pulled off her tights and her little pants, and leaving everything else where it was, began to play with her.

"Climb on top," he commanded, once she was wet and squirming. "That should keep your clothes as perfect as possible."

Harriet did as he suggested. He too had only removed the most essential items of clothing and was still wearing a white silk shirt and a bow tie and waistcoat in the Cavalier colours.

She frantically kissed him and stroked his soft dark hair as she rocked back and forth on him. They came almost together, and she collapsed exhausted onto his chest. He held her tightly, stroking her back as her breathing began to slow.

Afterwards, they lay there for a while. Harriet began to feel cold, but was utterly contented and had no wish to move. Tom, flushed with her blood and eternally warm, looked as though he could stay there forever, or at least until the sun came up. Eventually, he stirred himself.

“I need to get back for the champagne duelling,” he said languorously. “You should come. Unlike most of our activities, it’s fun to watch and safe for public consumption.”

Harriet thought it sounded slightly ridiculous, but couldn’t deny she was intrigued.

They walked back slowly through the woods. With summer on the way, the trees full and the river low, it already seemed less spooky than it had done when George had attacked her out there. It already felt like years ago. She thought of that night as the real beginning of her time at Oxford.

There were a surprisingly large number of people milling around on the lawns for the early hours of the morning. Some were still in pirate outfits, whilst others had managed to make time to get changed. The Cavaliers had grouped on the lawn in front of the Manor, a striking Georgian accommodation block. Several people were staring at them. Between their beauty, their elegant outfits and that other indefinable quality, they certainly stood out.

No speeches were made or formalities observed. For once, this seemed to be the Cavaliers just out to have fun. The format of the event was simple. Bottles of champagne were stored under the arches of the building. Two members would take a bottle each, shake it up and then run to their opponent, the objective being to release the cork at just the right moment to soak the other as thoroughly as possible without being soaked themselves. In between rounds, the contestants either swigged the remains of the bottles or poured them over each other.

Tom was entering into the spirit of the thing. He covered his first opponent in champagne but received a soaking from his second one.

Some of the onlookers were laughing and clapping. Others were just perving on the attractively soaked men, their white shirts clinging to their firm bodies. Plenty more, however, were mumbling about how it was pointless, excessive, and gave exactly the wrong impression of Oxford.

Harriet was enjoying the spectacle. She’d never seen the usually pristine vampires look so bedraggled.

The event ended, perhaps inevitably, with a showdown between George and Rupert. They fired at the same time, the two streams of champagne merging into one in mid air,

soaking them both. It occurred to Harriet that with their perfect reflexes, they should both have been able to jump away in time, but perhaps that was against the rules.

Everyone was laughing as they all sat down on the grass, other than George and Rupert who were glaring at each other.

Harriet ran over to Tom. Embracing him in front of them all probably wasn't sensible, but he looked so cute with his wet hair that she just couldn't resist.

"How about a real duel?" George said suddenly.

"Don't be ridiculous George. It's getting on for sunrise, and there's no need to spoil the fun," Rupert drawled.

"Not with you, idiot," George snapped. "With Tom. We still haven't resolved this whole betrayal thing."

Everyone fell silent and looked at her, stood with one arm around Tom. She felt a sudden sense of panic.

"Is that a formal challenge?" Tom asked in a strained tone.

"Oh absolutely," George said, grinning now. "Are you going to come and watch Harriet? Who will you cheer for? I suppose I could always make sure it's me since you lost your little trinket."

"What does this involve?" she whispered to Tom.

"Well, we'd fight with swords most likely. Try and stab each other through the heart. The point is that we can take what ought to be mortal injuries and be fine in a few days time, as long as fire or wood aren't involved."

"Don't do it," she begged. "That sounds horrific."

"If it's a formal challenge, I don't have much choice. I've already pushed our laws and customs to the limit by being with you."

He turned to stare at George. "I accept then," he said calmly. "But I want Harriet left out of this. No mind control."

"Well, I think she should watch, and if she's doing that, I don't want her getting involved. I'm told stab wounds are unhealthy for humans."

"If this is going ahead, perhaps I can exert just enough control to stop her from moving," Rupert mused. "Would you accept that?"

"I think you all seem to forget that I'm not a vampire. I don't have to play by your stupid rules," she said.

“Of course not. You can walk away now if you’d prefer, and sit there wondering what is happening,” Rupert said. “But I think you’d prefer to see for yourself, and that means doing as we say.”

“Oh fine,” Harriet said. “Is this happening on the Manor’s lawn too? I’m sure everyone would love to see a stabbing. Now that really will give exactly the wrong impression of Oxford.”

“We’ll go to Oak Meadow,” Rupert said authoritatively. “They shouldn’t be disturbed there.”

Oak Meadow was by the river at a point that could only be reached via the Steele Walk. It was about fifteen minutes away from the college and with trees on three sides and water on the other, completely excluded.

“Doesn’t that involve crossing the river?” George asked dubiously.

“Absolutely,” Rupert replied, smirking. “But if you’re going to insist on this sort of childish behaviour I think you should put ridiculous superstitions aside.”

As a group, they headed for the large iron gates leading out onto Steele Walk.

“Someone needs to fetch swords,” George said. If he had any nerves about the upcoming fight, he certainly wasn’t showing them.

“I’ll go,” said Archie, who had spent most of the evening sitting around sulking.

Everyone looked at him in surprise.

“My goodness,” said George. “You’re actually willing to get involved in a Cavalier event? Does that mean you’ve got over your lost love?”

“No, and I probably never will,” he replied. “But I’ve always tried to do everything well. Maybe it will even work with this whole vampire business. Maybe if I prove myself you’ll give me the sort of boost you gave Edward.”

“Well, that’s the spirit,” said Rupert. “Still, I hope you’ll forgive me for not trusting you 100% after the way you’ve been acting all year. We’ll all be very grateful if you’ll go and collect the swords, but I want Crispin to go with you, just to be sure everything goes smoothly.”

“That won’t be a problem,” Archie replied.

With that, Archie and Crispin strode away towards Tom’s room, whilst the rest of them stepped out onto the Steele Walk. They mainly walked in silence, focussed on the serious task ahead. Harriet could barely believe that only an hour before she’d been wandering the same path with Tom, laughing and holding hands.

After a few minutes, their group reached the bridge that lead to the meadow. The younger vampires stepped over it nonchalantly, but the older ones had to be coaxed or even dragged across.

“Are the older ones just more superstitious or actually more affected by running water?” Harriet asked Tom, hoping the others couldn’t hear. He’d hesitated for a second or two then walked across the bridge without any real trouble. George, on the other hand, was acting like a startled horse. Harriet remembered his refusal to go on the bridge the night he’d attacked her.

“A bit of both really,” he replied. “It’s the same for most of our problems. The older and more powerful vampires are definitely more susceptible to sunlight. But they are also more nervous around crucifixes and things, just because they were brought up in a more religious time.”

“George is stronger than you, isn’t he? I mean, that’s just a fact.”

“That’s fair. This is your mother’s point after all. He’s a lot older, and he’s really worked on his powers. Plus, on a practical level, having been born into a seventeenth century aristocratic family, he’s probably just generally better at sword fighting than I am.”

“Do you know how to do it at all?” Harriet asked. Her heart was pounding. She didn’t think she could stand to see him hurt.

“Oh yes, I’m reasonably good as it happens. I actually fenced for Eton and then for the college, back in the twenties. But that’s rather different to training daily to fight in a war.”

Harriet didn’t ask any more questions. She wasn’t sure she wanted to hear the answers.

The group sat down in the meadow, waiting for Crispin and Archie to return with swords. Apparently, all the Cavaliers were given one at the time they were turned as it was a symbol of the organisation.

“Would it help if I gave you more of my blood?” Harriet whispered to Tom.

“Well, I suppose it would, but I’ve already drank from you once tonight. I’m not sure it’d be a good idea to do it again.”

“Don’t be stupid. If it’ll help you at all, then of course I want to do it. Take as much as you need. I’ll recover fast enough, and there’s not that much on next week.”

Tom was clearly unsure, but she took his head and guided it to her neck. She would have preferred to do this somewhere private, but there wasn’t time for niceties. He bit down. At first, he drank slowly, cautious about taking too much, but within moments, his instincts kicked in and he began to drink deeply.

Harriet was nervous about the duel and despite her brave words, about allowing Tom to take too much blood, but she tried to stay calm. She stroked Tom's soft hair as he drank and let herself drift into the euphoric trancelike state that a drinking vampire could induce.

"Here we are," Archie shouted, reappearing with two swords. Tom broke off suddenly, keeping one arm around Harriet so that she didn't fall to the ground. Archie threw one to George and the other to Tom. Both of them used their perfect reflexes to catch them easily.

"Where is Crispin?" Rupert asked suspiciously.

"He wouldn't cross the bridge. Seems dreadfully old fashioned to me," Archie replied.

"Oh well, we'd better get started. We're running out of non daylight hours."

Tom and George stood, and walked to the centre of the meadow. As soon as he let go of her, Harriet slumped down. She was sure that she'd never had as much blood taken before. It was all she could do to stay conscious, but if it helped Tom to win then she didn't care.

Rupert counted down, and when he finished, the two vampires strode over to each other and began to fight. Harriet watched their battle in a daze. Both Tom and George moved incredibly fast, faster than any human could. They swung their heavy swords as though they weighed nothing, and dodged attacks that seemed impossible to avoid.

Harriet found it difficult to tell who had the upper hand, but she was relieved to see that Tom wasn't struggling anywhere near as much as she'd feared he might. The fight went on and on. Harriet wondered how they were finding the energy to keep going.

"You're better than I thought," George shouted, laughing. "You ought to all but drain people more often. I always find it helps."

Tom didn't reply, just concentrated on fending off George's attacks.

He's starting to weaken, Harriet realised. Tom was still managing to neatly protect himself, but all of his energy was going into defence rather than attack.

"When does this end?" she shouted to Rupert, who was watching intently.

"It's a fight to the apparent death. Basically, at some point one of them will take a wound that would kill a human. They'll pass out but be fine after a while."

As he was answering, George gasped. Tom had managed to catch his arm, cutting the skin. As she watched, the wound closed and healed. George fought back with renewed intensity. Both combatants were losing their cool, and before long, George had inflicted a similar cut on Tom. From then on, the fighting was frantic. They abandoned the careful defences in favour of risking all on stabbing at each other. Every few seconds one would make contact with the other's body, cutting them terribly. Logically, Harriet knew that they

would heal fast and that no real harm could occur, but she still felt sick watching it. The others had no such qualms, cheering either the one they supported, or any impressive move.

Suddenly, Tom had his sword to George's neck, and everyone fell silent. Whilst she would rather it was George than Tom, Harriet could still hardly bear to see his throat slit. She closed her eyes involuntarily. It took all her strength to open them again, and when she did, she was horrified to see Tom on the floor. Somehow, George had dodged the sword and knocked Tom off balance.

Get up, she willed silently. She wanted to shout encouragement, but couldn't find the strength. Before she knew what was happening, George had thrown Tom's sword across the meadow. He leaned over him and thrust his sword down hard. She screamed as it pierced her boyfriend's heart. Blood went everywhere. *My blood mainly*, she thought, before passing out.

Harriet came round in Tom's room, lying on his bed. A few of the Cavaliers were there. She tried to stand, but felt too weak. Instead, she glanced wearily around her, looking for Tom. He was lying in his coffin, absolutely dead to the world. Someone had removed his shirt and waistcoat. She could see that a scar had already formed where George's sword had penetrated. It looked as though he'd sustained the injury years rather than minutes before.

"He'll be okay, I promise," Rupert said. "The wound has already healed as you can see. He'll take a few days to recover from the blood loss and the trauma, but there won't be any long term effects."

"How did we get back here?" she asked weakly.

"The few of us who could flew," he replied calmly. "I carried an unconscious Tom, George took you. I didn't think you'd entirely approve, but you have the blood bond, so he did have the right."

"Okay, but I want you to leave now," she said, as firmly as she could through her weakness. "I think your little society has caused enough trouble for one night, and I need some time alone with Tom."

Rupert nodded and quickly led the other members out, until the only one remaining was George.

"Please leave George," she said. "Can't you see that I don't want you here?"

"Can't you see that you've lost so much blood you can hardly function? And it still didn't do any good. Putting the best oil in an old Ford won't make it drive like a Ferrari."

“I don’t want to hear this. I’m not in the mood for one of our little conversations. You’ve as good as killed him.”

“Oh he’ll be fine,” George said, sitting down on the bed beside her. “I’m not sure I can say the same for you though. He’s going to be in no state to replace all that blood for the next few weeks. Let me give you some of mine to help you rebuild your strength.”

“George, no. I don’t need your blood. I don’t need anything from you except for you to leave me alone.”

“Oh come on,” he said, leaning in slightly. “You’ve had it before. We already have our little blood bond. A few drops more won’t make any difference. Consider it my apology for getting your boyfriend into that state, although I’d be lying if I said I regretted it.”

Harriet wanted to resist, but she did feel incredibly frail and ill. She remembered how great she’d felt the last time she’d taken his blood. How could she help Tom if she had no strength herself?

“All right, I’ll do this for the good of my health,” she said at last. “But don’t you dare try to make anything of it. A starving man would accept food from his worst enemy I suppose.”

“Let’s get started then,” George said, grinning. Harriet wished he would at least pretend not to be delighted about the whole situation.

“Not here. I’m not having Tom wake up to see us doing that.”

“Where then? Your room?”

Harriet wondered whether she dared invite him in. If she did the last bit of protection remaining to her would vanish, but she couldn’t do it in public, and there wasn’t time to get anywhere else that was even vaguely private.

“All right. Take me up there and I’ll let you in.” Harriet couldn’t shake off the feeling that she was about to make the stupidest decision of her life, but it was hard to think clearly through the blood loss, hard to keep things in perspective when she’d seen her boyfriend stabbed.

Gently he picked her up and began to climb the stairs. “I’ll carry you normally this time,” he said soothingly. “Flying is pointless indoors.”

Harriet didn’t think anything else could shock her, but decided not to argue. She paused once they reached her door and looked at his flashing emerald eyes. “I suppose you’d better come in,” she said nervously.

George laid her softly on her bed and closed the door. “I like it,” he said. “Nice posters. Lovely rug.”

Harriet glanced around. The scout had visited that morning, so the room was relatively tidy for once. “Well that’s a relief. You being a bloodthirsty monster is one thing, but I don’t think I’d have coped if you didn’t appreciate my decor.”

He smiled at that but quickly became all business. “It’s almost dawn. Drink now, before I have to seek shelter.” With that, he lay down next to her on the bed, drew his wrist to his mouth and ripped open the vein.

Harriet shuddered, but didn’t require any further encouragement to put her mouth to his hand. The blood tasted as good as she’d remembered, and within seconds, she began to feel her strength returning. She tried her best to focus and stay matter of fact about the feeding, to regard it as purely about nourishment and healing and not let herself treat it as an emotional bonding experience. On the whole, she succeeded, but it was difficult to keep George at arms’ length and not snuggle into him.

After a while, he lifted her head up. “Better?” he asked.

“Much,” she said, climbing to her feet with ease. “Thank you for that, but now you really had better go. I won’t have you make anything of that. Besides, I need to check on Tom.”

“Just give me one kiss as a little thank you,” he said, lounging back on the bed.

Harriet didn’t feel like fighting one of her endless battle with him. She leaned over, kissed him hard but dispassionately on the lips. He tried to put an arm around her and soften the kiss, but she held firm. She kept this up for a few moments and then broke away.

“There you are. I hope you enjoyed it. Now please leave. I suppose I’ll see you at the Summer Party.”

“As you wish Harriet. See you soon.” Obviously tired of any pretence of normality, he disappeared in front of her.

Harriet quickly splashed water on her face and brushed her teeth to take away the taste of both the blood and George’s lips. Glancing in the mirror, she saw she was still wearing her pirate outfit. Never had something looked more inappropriate. She felt as though she’d been wearing it for a lifetime. She tore off the skirt and laboriously untied the corset, and then slipped on a pink polka dot dress in honour of it nominally being the first day of summer, even if the weather seemed unlikely to have noticed.

As soon as she was ready, she rushed down to Tom’s room. He was as she’d left him, unconscious and scarred, though she was sure that even in the half hour that she’d been away the scar had already begun to fade.

“Tom, it’s me,” she said loudly, shaking him as vigorously as she dared. “Wake up.”

At the sound of her voice, he stirred slightly. “Harriet,” he said, his voice barely audible.

“Oh thank God, you’re alive. I know all this stuff about how normal injuries can’t kill you, but I was so worried.”

“I’ll be okay. I need two things. Rest and blood. It’s almost dawn, so for now I’ll settle for the former. Tomorrow night, however, you might have to bring me people to drink from. I daren’t take more from you, and even if I all but drained you it wouldn’t be enough.”

She kissed him then, allowing herself all the passion and feeling that she’d carefully avoided with George. “Shush, save your strength. I’ll do whatever you need me to do, I promise. Do you want me to stay with you?”

“No, you should enjoy the choir and the sunrise. It’s the main point of the evening after all. Close the lid and let me sleep. Then take this key and lock my door from the outside.”

Harriet didn’t like the sound of that. Did he really think someone was going to come and hurt him? She nodded, and after one last kiss, awkwardly put the lid onto the coffin. It would have been too heavy normally, but with the fresh dose of George’s blood, it wasn’t physically too difficult. Emotionally was a different matter. Shutting her boyfriend into a coffin was something she’d hoped never to have to do.

Trying not to think about the evening’s odd events, she ran over to Ben’s staircase to see whether her friends were still there. She bumped into them halfway, walking towards the cloisters to listen to the choir and see the sunrise. She fell in with them and tried to act normally.

“Hey, I was wondering where you were,” Ola said, coming up beside her. “I’ve managed to get two tickets to go up the Founder’s Tower to get a better view. Do you want to come with me?”

Harriet wasn’t sure how she could just carry on as normal, but nodded and followed her. The Founder’s Tower was smaller than the main college tower that the choir would sing from, but still one of the highest points in the city. She’d never been up it before as it wasn’t open on a day-to-day basis.

Most of their group walked out onto the lawn at the centre of cloisters whilst she and Olamide ascended the steep stone staircase. She was glad she’d taken George’s blood – the state she’d been in before she’d barely have been able to leave her room, never mind make the difficult climb. It was worth it when they got to the top. She could see out across the city in all its glory, bathed in the pre-dawn half-light. Always slightly fantastical, it looked like a bizarre medieval toy town. Closer to home she could see the other students milling around on the lawn below, clutching one last drink and steeling themselves for the final part of a long night. She noticed two people in white tie slumped in one corner of the lawn. They appeared

to have passed out drunk and were face down, so it was difficult to tell who they were. Could they be Cavaliers? If so, they were taking a huge risk, staying out with only minutes until dawn. There were other dining societies who might conceivably be wearing white tie, but she hadn't seen any around the college.

“Don't look down there, look up,” Olamide said, turning her around to face the larger tower. “Can you see Josh? They're going to start singing any minute now.”

Trying to ignore the feeling of unease, Harriet followed her instructions. “It might just be the booze and sleep deprivation speaking, but this feels really magical,” she said.

Before she could reply, the choir began to sing in Latin, their voices carrying over the college. As they sang, the sun began to rise, turning the sky a beautiful shade of pink. There was just the music and the dawn, and Harriet felt that the world was how it should be.

Within seconds, the choir were all but drowned out by the sound of screaming. Harriet rushed to the edge of the tower to look down. The two bodies she'd seen were on fire. Too high to hear anything but themselves, the choir kept on singing. As people panicked down below, they sang the college anthem in their angelic voices.

Some students were running away, others were dashing over to the burning boys, trying to pour water on them or smother them in a cloth. Nothing helped. Within moments, they had burnt away to nothing. All that remained were their canes, topped with the silver horse and sword sign. The choir came to the end of their final song, and the bells began to ring for 6 a.m. – the new day and the start of summer.