After the Storm

by misaffection

Summary

Having gotten thoroughly soaked by a hurricane, Camille ends up ill. Richard comes to the rescue, but then decides on a very different tact to helping her feel better.
Camille’s late for work. She’s never late. Richard doesn’t bother ringing, just goes round to her house and hammers on the door until she wrenches it open. Her hair is a mess and there are dark circles under her eyes, not that they lessen the glare she levels at him.

“Um, you’re late,” he says weakly.

“I’m not coming in.” Her voice is rusty. “You made me ill, Richard.”

He arches an eyebrow at that. “How do you work that out?”

“You dragged me out in a hurricane.”

“Ah.” He had, as well. “Sorry.”

“If you’re done questioning me, I’m going back to bed.” She turns away, but now he knows this is his fault, Richard can’t leave things as they are. He follows her in. Camille snorts, which turns into a cough and God, but that does sound terrible. “I hate you,” she moans once she’s enough breath to.

He pauses, wondering if she truly means that. She leans against the wall and every breath is a rattling wheeze that makes him feel even worse. She doesn’t seem to be able to move. He puts a hand on her arm, then nearly yanks back at the heat of her skin.

“You’re burning up,” he announces.

“You’re so observant.”

“I think… I think you should be in bed.”

Camille sniffs. “I know I should be, but right now I’ve enough on staying upright.”

Richard looks at her, then glances towards her bedroom. It’s not that far. He gets into gear before he can think about it too much. She’s not terribly heavy, though she wriggles when startled. Then she sort of sags in his arms and her laugh is soft. He’s already regretting the decision, because she’s only wearing shorts and her bare legs seem to conduct heat through both jacket and shirt sleeves. She settles her right hand on his collar, the side brushing his neck, and the smell of her assaults him.

His steps slow the closer he gets to the bed. He doesn’t want to let her go, not when she’s nestled against him like this. But the longer he stands with her in his arms, the more stupid he looks, so he lays her carefully down, avoiding her gaze.

There’s a crumpled sheet. He straightens it over her legs. “How’s that?”

“Thank you.”

“Well, it’s apparently my fault, so I thought it only fair that I… ah, help a little.”

“Would you help a little more?”

He dares to glance at her. She offers him a hopeful smile that he can’t resist. “What do you need?”

“Something for this headache and breakfast would be nice.”
Apparently he’s not working today, either. “All right.”

Richard goes to her kitchen and puts his briefcase on the table. His jacket gets hung from the back of a chair. He fills the kettle, switches it on and finds two clean cups. The tea is his preferred brand, which makes him curious. Why is she keeping tea when he knows that she prefers coffee? He has a suspicion and bites back a smile.

He finds eggs in the fridge so decides on an omelette. He can’t go too wrong with that, surely? There’re tomatoes and mushrooms as well. He grins and sets to work. A few minutes later, he has a golden brown omelette garnished with vegetables and it doesn’t look half bad. He grabs some cutlery from a drawer and takes everything to Camille.

She’s half asleep but wakens when he prods her. She sniffs and her eyes go wide. Richard helps her sit and puts the try on her lap with a grin of triumph.

“Oh,” she breathes. “Wow. This looks… I didn’t know you could cook.”

He shrugs. “I can manage a few basics.”

“This isn’t basic.” She cuts off a small piece and pops it into her mouth. Her eyes close on a groan. “Oh my God, Richard! This is delicious.”

Pleasure warms him. He watches her demolish his offering, her soft sounds of enjoyment spiking through him, and wonders if he should have made himself a cold drink. He settles for a little distance and his tea.

“I forget the painkillers,” he says as he realises that mistake. “Be right back.”

He’s gone less than a minute, but she’s eaten by the time he gets back. She’s settled against her pillows, wearing a very contented expression. She smiles at him, and his stomach lurches. Maybe he’s getting what she’s got.

“Better?” he asks.

“I should get sick more often if that’s the result.” She stretches and then accepts the blister strip with a murmured, “Thanks.”

“I think you’d get bored of omelettes fairly quickly.” Richard perches on the edge of her bed and puts the back of his hand to her forehead. “You’re still very hot.”

Her smile is mischievous. “Why, thank you.”

“Camille! That’s… that’s not what I meant. Not that you aren’t, but…” He stops as she dissolves into helpless giggles. “I’m going to be generous and put that down to being feverish.” He’s cross with her, and not sure why. “Settle down and get some sleep.”

“Richard,” she sighs.

“I’ve work to do.”


Hot fingers snag his hand. Guilt spikes. How can he walk away when she’s so ill and it’s his fault? He relents. She tugs him back and settles once more. With his hand captured, he’s little choice but to
sit down on the bed once more. His thumb rubs her knuckles, an unconscious gesture of comfort.

She gives a little smile, then sighs and closes her eyes. Sleep is the best thing for her, so he keeps quiet and watches as her breathing slows. She relaxes, her face softening in repose. She is beautiful and his heart tugs hard.

Richard feels things when he’s with Camille that he’s not felt in a very long time. Things he doesn’t particularly want to feel, but she’s a way about her that brings the emotions he’s buried to the surface. She makes him more human, and she apparently likes that.

He likes her. It’s more than that, but it’s too new, too frightening for him to look at for long. So he pushes it aside and pretends it doesn’t exist. Only it’s getting bigger and harder to ignore. She pulls him to her, an irresistible force of nature. He wonders how much longer he can fight it. Whether he wants to any more.

Lifting her hand, he presses a soft kiss to the palm and then lays her hand over her stomach. “Sleep well,” he instructs, quietly so as not to waken her, then stands carefully. She’s still sleeping as he slips from her bedroom.

He retrieves his jacket and briefcase, then leaves the house for work. The only problem is instead of the cases, his mind is figuring out what to make for her later. Chicken soup is supposedly good for sick people. And she might appreciate some flowers.

By the time he reaches the police station, he’s both a list and a plan of action.
Carnations and Chicken Soup

What Richard Poole knows about the significance of flowers can be written on the back of a postage stamp. It’s still enough that he avoids lilies like they were triffids. He gave her lilies after Aimee died and reminding her of that doesn’t strike him as much of a romantic gesture.

He isn’t, he knows, terribly good at romance. Wooing wasn’t a class he took at school – fumbled snogs behind the bike sheds seemed unhygienic at best – and he’d never shared his peers’ desperate urge to prove their manhood. It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate a pretty woman, but rather he simply didn’t know why one would be interested in him. So often, he just didn’t bother.

Camille was different. She’d always been different. He smiles slightly at the recollection of her sat on his bed, sniffing dramatically after he’d caught her in his cabin. She’d seemed to know that he couldn’t handle a sobbing woman and played to that weakness with little shame.

She still plays on his good nature, which was why he’s running errands for her. Well that, and because he really does like her. Her illness gives him an excuse to prove that he’s not utterly useless outside of the police station. That he can be human, if that is indeed what she likes.

He thinks she does. Hopes she does. While he’s not brilliant at body language, he’s noticed how she smiles more often at him than, say, Dwayne or Fidel. She’ll lean into him, watch him with those earthy brown eyes, absorbing every motion and word. He’s fairly sure these are positive signs.

But lilies are definitely out. Roses are too obvious. He browses the specimens on offer, only able to identify type and Latin names. That would have been enough, once. He doubts Camille will be impressed by this knowledge though. He reaches the carnations and stops. Predictable? Perhaps, but it’s the safe option.

He picks out the best bouquet, the one with no dead leaves and a good ratio of open-to-opening blooms, then takes it to the till. He waves off the offer of a card – there’s no point since he’s delivering them by hand – but then curiosity overcomes him.

“What do they symbolise?” Richard thinks it’s all hokum, but he also knows most women don’t. “Carnations.”

The woman at the till gives him a smile. “Fascination, though most people prefer to think of it as attraction. But that tends to be just surface, whereas fascination is more… all inclusive.”

“I see,” he lies, and takes the bouquet back. “So as a first bunch?”

“Perfect, sir.”

“Good.” He pays for them quickly and then scoots out the shop. “Thanks!”

There’s almost a spring in his step as he makes his way to Camille’s house. He wonders what she’ll think of the flowers, which is a dangerous tack for his brain to take, because he’s dreamt up several scenarios by the time he’s reached her door and none of them are good. Maybe he’s fooling himself.

He dithers, but the fact she’s sick is what pulls him in. It’s his fault and he still feels guilty and that overwhelms his uncertainty over the flowers. He doesn’t knock, just pushes the door open as she’s done to him oh so many times.

Camille is up, curled under a blanket on the sofa and watching something decidedly French on the
television. She looks up as he enters, and her expression brightens when she sees the flowers.

“Are those for me?” she says, her voice little more than a croak.

“I… um… yes, they are.” He thrusts them out, feeling awkward. “I hope you feel better.”

Her smile widens. “I do now.”

“I brought lunch as well,” he tells her, holding the brown bag aloft. “It’s chicken soup.”

“Is that my mother’s?”

He hitches a shoulder. “It might be.”

“And how much did that cost you?” she chuckles, rising from the sofa. Thankfully, she’s gotten dressed since first thing and wears a loose sundress beneath the blanket.

“Half an hour of begging and apologising for just about everything I’ve ever said to her.”

Camille laughs, then she puts a hand on his arm and leans in. Her lips brush his cheek. “Thank you,” she says, and he knows she’s grateful for more than the soup. But apologising to her mother is small enough a sacrifice for him to make.

She wanders into the kitchen and finds a vase for the flowers while he decants the soup into a pan. It’s a moment of domesticity that leaves him longing for something more, something deeper. It’s that point he realises how lost he is.

“Camille?” he ventures. “I was wondering if… if… when you’re better, of course, but if you would like to come to dinner. With me. Just… us.”

She angles him a curious glance. “On a date?”

Richard swallows and nods, unable to even stutter a confirmation. She catches her bottom lip between her teeth and then her head ducks. He’s not sure, but he thinks she might be blushing.

“On; y if you want to,” he qualifies quickly. His voice is rough and why is it so hard to breathe in here? Maybe he’s allergic to carnations. “I mean, if you’d rather not–”

“Richard.” Humour laces his name and she shakes her head. “Shut up a moment, would you?”

He opens his mouth to answer, then realises how pedantic that would seem. He opts for nodding instead. Camille giggles and comes over to him. Stands there, eyes scanning his face with a look that’s gentle enough to squeeze his heart. She puts her hands on his shoulders, slides them around his neck. His own come to rest on her waist. She smiles, then rests her forehead against his chest with a sigh.

“You’re so impossible,” she notes. “The most impossible man I’ve ever met. But there is nothing more I would love to do then go to dinner with you.”

The band around his ribs loosens. “You want to?”

“Yes, Richard, I do.”

“Oh.” A bubble lifts and he finds himself laughing for no reason whatsoever. “That’s great!”

Camille giggles at his amusement, then bats his shoulder lightly. “Though why it took you so long to
ask, I’ll never know.”

“I’m not good at this sort of thing.” He frowns at her then, not sure she knows what she’s letting herself in for. “I am the person who disappeared during his own birthday party, after all. Being sociable is hard enough, being romantic… well, I can’t promise anything more than I’ll try.”

“Oh, Richard.” She touches his cheek with a sigh. “Why would I want you to be anything other than who you are?”

He blinks. “Do you like that, then?”

She shakes her head. “No. I love it.”

His breath catches at the look in her eyes. The fact she’s still ill nudges at him, but he shoves the self-doubt aside. No, it’s not because she’s running a fever; she knows full well what she’s saying and she means every word. He can trust in that, even if the reason leaves him bewildered.

“I love you,” he says without thinking. Her eyes widen. It’s stupid to admit that now, but he can’t take it back. Wouldn’t even if he could. “Just thought I’d mention that.”

Camille stares at him a moment, then gives a soft laugh. “I thought it would take wild horses to drag that confession from you.”

He grins. “You were wrong.”

“Hey, I’m sick! I’m allowed to be.”

“All right. So soup, then?”

Richard slips away to stir the pan. He can’t stop smiling, even when she huffs and elbows him in the ribs. He’s managed to say something he’d never imagined feeling, never mind saying, and to top it off she’s going to dinner with him.

All in all, the day is going pretty damn well. Now he just needs to not screw it up.
Shrimps and Cough Syrup

Richard’s finished for the day and halfway home when his mobile rings. He grins at Camille’s name and answers it with a cheery, “Hello, you.”

“Richard?” Her voice is tired, weak. “I’m sorry. I really did want to go out tonight, but…” She breaks off to cough and he flinches at the sound. “I don’t feel well.”

His disappointment is sharp, but then she coughs again and that emotion is over-ridden by concern. “Have you called the doctor?”

“It’s just a cough.”

“Camille, call the doctor. I’m on my way home now, give me chance to get changed and I’ll be right over.”

“You don’t need to come;” she sighs.

He smiles slightly, amazed that she can miss the obvious. “Perhaps not, but I want to. And since you can’t come out, I’ll bring dinner in.”

“You just want to check up on me.”

“Absolutely.”

“I could be contagious, you know.”

He nods, even though he knows she can’t see it. “Yup. Still coming over.”

“What if you end up sick?”

“Then you can look after me.” He bounces up the step and onto the veranda. “As long as you promise to keep your mother far, far away.”

Camille laughs at that, then coughs wrenchingly. “Oh, don’t make me laugh,” she begs once she’s recovered.

Richard promptly feels awful. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” She sighs and he can hear the rustle of sheets. “But if you’re sure that running the risk of catching whatever I have is worth the risk, then I’d be happy to see you. I really didn’t want to rescind on tonight.”

“There’ll be other nights.” He refuses to get upset over it – she’s not backing out because she wants to, but because she’s genuinely ill. It’s more his fault for timing the offer badly. “I’ll take a rain check.”

She groans at his pun. “I’m hanging up now,” she informs him. “See you soon.”

The line goes dead. Richard chuckles and puts the mobile on his desk, then dumps his briefcase at the side. A small green head pops out, startling him, then he shakes his head at the lizard.

“So, what on Earth do you wear on a not-quite-date to visit your sick not-quite-girlfriend?” he asks it. It blinks and then skitters off. Richard shrugs and turns to the wardrobe.
He isn’t sure what he should call Camille, if their relationship counts as one just yet. His confession of how he feels startled him as much as her, but now it’s out there, he wants… Well, he’s not sure. What comes next? Not knowing bothers him, even though he supposes one can’t schedule romance.

Being out of his depth is something Richard hates, why he disliked coming to Saint-Marie in the first place. He likes order and control, not chaos and being directed by someone else. He is, he knows, something of a loner, but now he has a team. Friends. And… Camille, whatever she is now.

Richard changes out of his suit and into looser trousers and a t-shirt; a concession made to the island, to its culture and the eternal, scorching heat. That, and because he knows it’ll surprise Camille.

On the way to hers, he stops off at one of the many seafood restaurants and buys dinner. She had a weakness for shrimps, and he’s coming to understand why. Even if they have too many legs and eyes that watch him eat them. He also buys a couple of lower alcohol beers – getting her drunk while she’s ill is probably not a wise idea – and then heads over.

He’s gratified to run into the doctor on his arrival. The portly woman smiles in greeting. Richard asks a few questions how her health and is assured that it’s a minor infection that’ll pass with bed rest, cough medicine and plenty of fluids. He is, the doctor makes a point of mentioning, not to upset her.

“As if I would,” he mutters and shoves his way inside.

He puts dinner out and then the plates and bottles on to a tray. Going into her bedroom, he finds her propped up on her pillows, reading a book. She looks up, and her eyes widen as she takes him in, then she smiles.

“Hey.”

“Hello. You look… um…”

“Dreadful?” she supplies. “Don’t say I don’t, because I know I do.”

“You’re still beautiful.”

She colours and drops her gaze to her hands. “You really think so?”

“That’s why I said it. Here—” He puts the tray on her laps, holding it until she’s steadying it. He snags one of the bottles and clicks it against the other. “To you getting better and our next date getting out of the house.”

Camille chuckles, but she takes her bottle and drinks to that. Richard settles on the chair with his dinner and tucks in. They eat in companionable silence for a while, then she breaks it.

“So what have I missed?”

He spears a shrimp with his fork. “Nothing much. Been quiet today, which was how I’ve been able to sneak out to see you.”

She grins. “You make it sound much worse than it is.”

“I’m a DI, you’re the DS under my leadership. It is fairly bad, Camille.”

“Then put me up for promotion.”

An obvious solution. “I already did. Though I’m not sure the Commissioner fully bought that it was simply about your police work.”
She toys with her food. “Is it?”

He bristles. “Of course it is! You’re a bloody good officer, Camille. I couldn’t have solved half the cases I have without your insight and support.”

“We make a good team.”

They do. He lets the inferred insult go, knowing that she probably needed to ask. He would, if he were in her position. “Do you think we can make it work?” he asks. As early as it is, he desperately wants confirmation that they can.

Camille smiles. “I do, yes. It might not always be easy, but I think we can Richard.”

“And it would be worth it?”

“I think so.” She munches on a forkful of rice. “This is delicious, by the way. Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome.”

She chews, then swallows with a wince. Takes a hasty sip of beer. “I don’t reckon much to this illness, though,” she says, sounding put out. “I really wanted to go out.”

“There’ll be chance for that, Camille.” He leans forward and pats her hand. “I promise you that I won’t back out of it.”

“You’d better not.”

“Though on the other hand, having you to myself isn’t all that bad. Or it wouldn’t be if you were feeling better.”

She arches an eyebrow. “Dare I ask?”

He smirks. “Best not.”

She blushes and he feels quite accomplished. Of course, he’ll have to follow up on that vague promise sooner or later, but as he watches her, the usual concerns fail to materialise. He can’t imagine her giggling over his lack of prowess, or whispering about certain dimensions to Dwayne and Fidel. Trust isn’t something he manages often, but he does trust her and he knows she won’t betray him.

Once she’s finished, he clears the plates away in the kitchen. There’s a small white paper bag on the side, which contains a brown glass bottle with Camille’s name on the label. He reads the instructions and realises she’s due a dose. He takes it to her.

“Ugh, that stuff tastes disgusting,” she tells him. “I’m fine without it.”

He gives her a hard look. “The doctor didn’t think so and neither do I. Come on, Bordey; suck it up and take your medicine.”

She starts to argue, so he simply unstops the bottle and pours a measure onto a spoon. “Are you going to take this, or do I have to force feed it to you?”

“You and whose army?”

Richard puts the bottle on her bedside table, then sits on the edge of the bed and pulls back the sheet. She’s wearing a camisole and shorts, enough that he doesn’t immediately blush, but also little to do
much against his fingers. Not when he knows where she’s ticklish.

Camille squeaks and wriggles. She isn’t going down without a fight and there’s a tangle of sheets and limbs as they tussle. But Camille isn’t well, and it’s left her weak. Richard has little doubt she’d have beaten his ass otherwise, but as it is, he wins. She lies beneath him, panting and sweaty and utterly beautiful.

He can’t help it: he has to kiss her. Her lips are hot and dry, and God knows what risks he’s running, and he simply doesn’t care. She gives a soft hum and links her arms around his neck. Trapped between her long, mostly bare legs, he gets some idea of what it would be like, but he won’t go there. Not yet, not now when she’s feeling so dreadful. Though pulling away is probably the hardest thing he’s ever done.

“I think I win,” he murmurs, breathless and fighting the desire coursing through his body. “Any more arguments?”

Her smile is naughty. “Depends. As arguments go, that was rather enjoyable.”

Richard reluctantly untangles himself from her. She’s not the energy to hold him down and groans in disappointment. He kisses her cheek. “Not when you’re not well.”

Camille gives him a look, sighs hard, then pushes up the bed. She grabs the bottle and the measuring spoon and doses herself. “There. Happy now?”

“Absolutely.” He smooths wrinkles out of his t-shirt and offer her a mischievous grin. “I knew you just needed the right motivation.”

She throws a pillow at him. “You realise I’m supposed to sleep tonight. Not sure how I’m going to now. All I can think of is…” She trails off and her look is heated. No woman has ever looked at him like that and he’s not quite sure what to make of it. He does know what she means, though.

“I think I should go,” he says. “Before I forget my manners. Going to take some settling down before I sleep, as well.”

Camille’s smile is like a cat with the cream. “Well, I’m thoroughly inspired to get better quickly. But there’s one thing I am curious about.”

“Which is?”

“Whether our next… date is going to be your place or mine.”
Rain Check

Camille is well, the new date is set, and the place chosen. Richard supposes he has a home ground advantage, but the choice wasn’t down to familiarity. Not entirely. It’s more that the bungalow is remote: they shouldn’t, as long as no one kills anyone else, be interrupted. Given the plan for the evening, he really hopes nobody dies tonight.

It’s odd. He has experience, but it’s always been the one-thing-leading-to-another sort. Sex is something that’s been almost accidental. The idea of strategically planning to do it strikes him as alien. Odder still is that the plan doesn’t fill him with horror. He’s not nervous in the slightest, though he is trembling. But it’s anticipation, and the vivid recall of her legs twined around his, that’s making him shake. The evening has been planned for one thing, but rather than embarrassment and panic, all that the thought of them sleeping together fills him with is nothing more than pure desire.

He wants her. He wants this. It’s very strange, and very slightly scary, but in a good way. He feels like he’s on the edge of something new and it’s thrilling, which was never something he’d ever imagined feeling, because old is secure and comfortable, but for once in his life Richard Poole is going to leap without looking.

Camille will catch him, he’s sure of that.

The hands on the clock tell him it’s almost time. He does one last sweep of the room, making sure it’s clean and tidy, and then sets about lighting candles. A small voice in his head whines about the fire risk. He quells it and finishes his round. A rap sounds at the veranda door and there she is. Her dark hair is loose and spills over bare shoulders. She wears a long sundress, simple enough in itself, but the riot of colour suits her, and the front vees dangerously low. Richard swallows dryly.

“Hey,” he manages: as usual her presence steals his usual eloquence.

She smiles and ducks her head, seemingly shy. “Hi.”

For all the intents and purposes, now she’s here it doesn’t feel right to simply slam into high gear. He goes to the drinks cabinet and pulls out two glasses. She’s still hovering in the doorway, and it looks like one of them is nervous after all. Just not whom he’s expected.

“Would you come in?” he invites softly. “And care for a drink?”

“Yeah.” Camille wanders in, taking in the room with a glance. Her smile widens, becomes surer. “Very nice,” she says and joins him, leans against his arm. He forces his hand not to shake and manages to decant beer into the glasses.

“Here you go.”

“Here’s to us.”

He can drink to that. He drains the glass, then puts it down and turns to her. She glances at him. Colour darkens her face. He lifts a hand and touches the curls of her hair, brushing it back over her shoulder. Her eyes close momentarily and he’s aware of the shiver that ghosts through her.

“We can change plans if you’d rather,” he tells her. There’s no way he’s going to do this if she’s not sure. “Camille—”
“No.” She shakes her head. “I’m fine. This is fine. I’m just… I don’t know why, but I’m nervous. How stupid is that?”

“It’s not stupid at all. It’s not… it’s more than just… that.”

“Sex.”

He wishes he’d not drunk so quickly, because his mouth is dry again. “Yes, that. It’s not a fling, is it? We both… want more.”

Camille looks up, her lips quirking. “Is that a not-so-subtle question as to whether I’m just using you?”

Richard frowns. “No. Maybe. Are we rushing this?”

Her gaze doesn’t falter. “Do you want me?”

“Yes. Badly.” He isn’t ashamed of that admittance.

“And I want you. So we can pretend that doesn’t exist and go out to give a nod to the usual routine, or we can act like adults that know what they want and cut to the chase.”

Trust her to be so blunt about things. “And then what?”

She puts her glass down and steps closer. His hand settles on her shoulder of its own accord. Camille lifts hers and undoes the second button of his shirt. Then the third. Her movements are slow but determined. Halfway down, she stops and looks up at him.

“Then we take it one day at a time. Can you manage that, Richard?”

He could do anything for her. “Yes.”

Her smile lights up her face. “Good.”

Then Camille finishes what she started and undoes the last few buttons of his shirt. Richard knows he isn’t quite as fit as he used to be, that a dislike for the sun leaves him pale, and there’s a temptation to baulk and pull away. But he fights it and trusts in whatever she sees in him. Her eyes are soft as she traces the scattering of hair across his chest. He tries and fails to suppress the shudder when her fingers brush his nipple.

A catty smile curls her mouth. She slips both hands under his shirt and then pushes it off his shoulders. It drops to the floor, and he feels a pang at the creases it’ll get down there, but Camille leans in and all thoughts of shirts are forgotten.

Her lips are hot against his skin and her tongue drags damp circles. He closes his eyes on a groan, incapable of doing anything other than just feeling each and every exquisite sensation she causes as she investigates his body.

Part of it hardens and she notices. Her chuckle is low and terribly naughty. She squeezes him through his trousers and his knees almost give way.

“Camille,” he says, half pleading for her to stop before he embarrasses himself, half begging that she carry on.

She lets go. “It’s okay – I’m not going anywhere.” Fingers touch his check, then ruffle his hair. “I love you, Richard Poole.”
It shell-shocks him. He blinks his eyes open and stares at her. The only word he can think of is, “Why?”

“Because you are clever and infuriating and stubborn and childish. Because you make me laugh. And because when you look at me like that, I can’t help but want you.”

“H-how am I looking at you?”

“Like I’m the only other person on the planet that exists.”

He smiles at that, at her. “Aren’t you?”

“Oh shut up.”

Camille hauls him into a tight embrace. Her lips find his, her tongue slipping between, and he cords one hand into her hair. The other he puts on her backside, because he might as well be obvious about it. She giggles into his mouth.

The heel of his hand brushes the knot of her halter-neck. He teases her hair away, then tugs the knot loose. The top of her dress sags. He encourages that so it ends up gathered at her waist. Her eyes are impossibly dark as he cups one perfect breast, and she gasps as he thumbs her nipple. It hardens at his touch, evoking a response in his own body.

“So,” he murmurs. “About that rain check?”

Her laughter fills the bungalow, swells his heart. He sweeps her up into his arms, her chest bare against his, and carries her to the bed. Lowers her gently and then just leans over, watching her watch him.

She lifts her eyebrows. “What about it?”

“Just wondering if…” He trails a fingertip down the centre of her chest then flattens his hand on her stomach. Moves slowly down. “If you wanted to claim it now.”

“I thought that was obvious, I–” Her words tangle on a gasp as his hand curves between her legs.

“Hm?” He tilts his head, as if he can’t understand what’s caught her tongue.

“I–”

He can feel the shape of her through the slightly damp knickers. Her eyes widen as he strokes lazily, her teeth catching on her bottom lip.

Affecting innocence is hard is this position, but he tries that look on her. “You what?”

Her expression changes. “You’re teasing.”

“I might be. Was there something you wanted me to do, Camille?”

She shakes her head, her lips pressed tight together. He rubs a little harder. A mewl escapes her. Watching her squirm, half naked on his bed is more enjoyable than he’s imagined. He gives her a wicked smile and drops a kiss on her torso.

“Swine,” she breathes. “That is not fair.”

“I never said that I would be.” He smirks at her and then gives her a little, taking a nipple into his
mouth and sucking. She arches beneath him on a strangled cry. “Now, are you sure there wasn’t something you needed?”

Her glare is half furious, half hungry. “I didn’t… expect this of you.”

Richard tilts his head. “No? What, because I’m so very English? Or did you think that I didn’t have the experience?”

She pushes up, his hand still caught between her thighs. Her arm goes around his neck and she kisses him deeply. “Maybe a little of both,” she admits. “But if you want to prove me wrong, go right ahead.”

“Nice try, Camille, but that won’t work.” He shoves her back down with a short laugh and then moves his hand. The curls are tight and wet. She shivers as he delves in deeper. “Tell me what you want.”

“You,” she breathes. He feels the surrender in the sudden relax of her body. She parts her legs to better accommodate his questing fingers. “Richard, please.”

He gives her a little, because he wants to know what she feels like. She shudders on a moan and grips his arm. A litany of French tumbles from her lips. He knows enough to figure it’s something extremely dirty and, while it’s something of an achievement, he’d rather understand exactly what she’s saying.

“English,” he whispers into her ear. “My house, my rules.”

“Twat,” she bites out. Her nails dig into his skin. “I swear, Richard, if you don’t stop teasing me, I will shoot you.”

“You’re no fun.” But he tugs the dress down, strips that and her knickers off. The contrast of her dark skin against his white sheets fills him an emotion he can’t name. It’s desire coupled with possessiveness and a dash of disbelief, he thinks. Then dismisses it as unimportant.

She watches him rise, her expression curious as he removes the last barriers that lie between them. His uncertainty about his body is lost to the need to tangle his limbs with hers, to bury himself deeply inside her.

Her gaze sweeps down and her smile widens. “Very nice.”

“It’ll do.” He’s under no illusions, but doesn’t suffer from false modesty either. He’s not bad, though he could probably do better. “Everything works at least.”

“Well, that’s what’s important,” she laughs and holds out a hand. “Come here.”

He goes, climbing onto the bed and letting her pull him down. Her breasts flatten against his chest and she winds one long leg around his, her heel nudging his rear. Their mouths meet in a long kiss. Camille strokes one hand over his shoulder and then down his back. He runs his fingers up her side. She snorts and wriggles.

“That tickles.”

“Sorry.” He props up on one elbow and gazes down at her. “You’re beautiful.”

She smiles. “You’re not so bad yourself.”
Richard shifts – if she wasn’t sure, she’d have let him know – and slides into her. She gives a long sigh, her eyes closing. He shivers at the sensation wrapping around him and hides his face in the curve of her neck. He breathes her in. Her breath is heavy and her hands drift over his back, down his arms.

“Okay?” she whispers.

He’s never been better. “Hell, yes.”

“Then would you…?” Her hips jerk, reminding him that there’s more to this yet. “Please.”

He nods, lost for words, and then moves. In and out is simple enough, but she feels so damn good, and doesn’t lie there but engages – she shoves with one foot and tumbles him onto his back. Watching her stretch lazily, her hips grinding, is the kind of vision that etches onto his brain. He can only take so much, then he has to pull her down and roll them again.

It slows a little, hands and mouths exploring, then the pace mounts again until Camille is panting hard, her nails sharp as they graze his back. She whimpers his name and that is what undoes him.


“Bloody useless,” he gripes. “Sorry.”

“You are not, and what are you apologising for?”

“I wanted to make it last longer.”

Camille smiles and ruffles his hair. “Well, I’ve nothing else on tonight. We can try again.”

He gives her a look. “And if I mess up?”

She shrugs. “You didn’t this time as far as I’m concerned. But if you’re worried about technique…” Her grin is naughty and she squeezes his backside. “Then practise is supposed to make perfect, Richard.”

His bad mood evaporates and he kisses her. “You’re amazing, you know that, right?”

“Of course I do – I am half French after all.”

Richard laughs and drops to the mattress beside her. She cuddles up, content enough it would seem, so maybe it wasn’t as bad as he fears.

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