

behind the bar but she pretended to fidget with a corkscrew.

'Yes,' I said. I stared down at my rain-boots, my olive-green wide-wale corduroys, my black cashmere turtleneck sweater. 'I feel overdressed.'

He nodded, half-smiling. He had the most perfect body I'd ever seen. The water did not want to run off his skin: it beaded on him, like drops on the hood of a freshly waxed car.

**"The water did not want to run off
his skin: it beaded on him, like
drops on the hood of a freshly
waxed car."**

'We've been waiting for you. Come on, follow me.'

This is why I came to the city, I thought. So that beautiful, naked men could say: We've been waiting for you. Come on, follow me. Anywhere, sir, I thought to myself, draining the rest of the vodka.

The room we entered must have been the photographer's studio. The radiators were cranking and the air was lush, tropical. A giant white tarp had been laid across the centre of the floor. Blue buckets of steaming water sat on the tarp; yellow sponges floated on the water. Twelve men stood naked on the tarp, holding drinks, chatting and laughing and whispering into one another's ears. Thirteen men stood naked on the tarp where my guide had joined them. It was 1991, before the rage for tattoos and piercings; everyone's skin was their own. I recognized six or seven faces, well-known artists and art writers.

'Alexander!' cried the photographer. 'At last! A party of thirteen is a very nasty omen. We would have had to kill someone! Alexander, everyone. Everyone, Alexander.'