

The background of the cover is a sepia-toned image of a fountain pen lying diagonally across a piece of aged, yellowed paper. The paper has faint, illegible cursive handwriting visible through it. The pen is dark with a silver-colored nib and clip.

# LESSONS IN *Desire*

CHARLIE  
COCHRANE

The bottom of the cover features a sepia-toned illustration of a large, historic building with multiple towers and spires, likely a university hall. In the foreground, a white banner with a decorative, flowing border contains the text.

*A Cambridge Fellows Mystery*

# **LESSONS IN DESIRE**

Book Two:

A Cambridge Fellows Mystery

**CHARLIE COCHRANE**

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LESSONS IN DESIRE

Book One: A Cambridge Fellows Mystery

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This book is inspired by all the holidays I've spent on my favorite island. Jersey is unique, a very special place, although I've taken liberties about some of its geography.

I dedicate this to all the girls on the good ship Naughty who've proved such great friends.

# Chapter One

“A holiday will do us both the world of good.” Jonty Stewart was sitting in his chair in the Senior Common Room of St. Bride’s college, Cambridge, discussing the long vacation and plans he had for it. These, naturally, involved Orlando Coppersmith, who had usually holidayed by visiting other seats of learning, with the occasional dutiful visit to his grandmother in Kent interspersed among the academic outings. Orlando had no concept of just going off to some place of leisure and relaxing, frittering the time away on walks or sightseeing or bathing. His eyes grew wider as Jonty recounted the sort of things that *he’d* got up to in the past; the Riviera, visiting archaeological sites, cruising in the Mediterranean. This seemed to be yet another alien world that the sophisticated Stewart was introducing to his naïve friend. When Jonty suggested that they should go somewhere *together*, Orlando was appalled.

“Consider it, Dr. Coppersmith, the world is our oyster. Now, before you begin to quibble about the costs, I would remind you that my grandmother left her favorite grandson extremely well off, so money is no object. Name where you would like to go and we’ll organize it. Shall it be Monte

Carlo or the rose red city of Petra?" A glorious smile lit Jonty's face as he made the suggestion.

"Must we go anywhere, Dr. Stewart?" Orlando was quite content here in his own college among the places and things that he knew well. No further unrest had come to St. Bride's since the murders of the previous winter, allowing his love affair with Jonty to blossom as beautifully as the magnolia trees which graced the Fellows' Garden. In his eyes, life was perfect here and now, so why should he go off searching for anything else?

Stewart looked mortally offended. "Of course we must. I have no intention of spending my long vac festering here. If you won't go with me, I'll go alone." He sniffed slightly. "Though I have gone alone on holiday too often in the past. I was hoping so very much that you would see fit to coming with me, so we could share the excitement. Think of the novelty, the exotic food, the flora and fauna that East Anglia can only dream of. Strange languages. Mysterious sights."

It was the novelty that Coppersmith couldn't stop thinking of, or so he told his friend. He'd encountered quite a lot of new things these last few months, particularly when he and Stewart were first acquainted. Now he was hoping for a period of relative calm before the new academic year ensued. The minute he looked into Jonty's eyes, he knew that he was beaten—the man was desperate for this break, the chance of a trip with his lover at his side. Who was Orlando to deny him it?

A compromise on the holiday was eventually reached. They would take a fortnight's leave, traveling no further than the Channel Islands; Stewart would find them some nice establishment on Jersey and book tickets for the ferry from Southampton. It would be adventurous, although not too much so, the food would be English (with perhaps a little native cuisine included) and there would be no language barrier. Orlando was particularly pleased about that, as modern languages were not his forte. Moreover, as he freely admitted, the thought of being around exotic

foreign ladies terrified him.

For the next week Jonty beavered away with the Red Guide, simultaneously picking his mother's brains about hotels, the Honorable Mrs. Stewart being a great source of information about many things, until finally settling for the Beaulieu at St. Aubin's. "It boasts *three acres of terraced gardens with lawns, Private Tennis Courts, Fishing, and Bathing from the Hotel*," he gleefully explained to his friend, waving the brochure about. "There are private bathrooms, so you won't risk ladies walking in on you should you forget to shoot the bolt. The additional cost for that will only be sixpence per night, so you won't be risking bankrupting me. Convenient for the train, too."

"It sounds delightful, Jonty," Coppersmith said, with *liar* written plain on his face. "You should book it."

"Already done, Orlando. They alleged that they were fully booked, August being high season, until they found themselves up against Mama. She spoke to the manager, the owners, probably to King Edward himself; she's wangled us the best two-bedroom suite in the house. I never really appreciated how wonderful it is to have quite such a formidable mother until now..."

"Do you still want *Jerusalem* at your funeral, Dr. Coppersmith?" Jonty began to gently rub his friend's back as the poor man clung to the ship's rail, green to the gills and desperately trying to fathom out whether he would feel better if he were sick again or not.

"I no longer care, Dr. Stewart. I think that I would prefer to die with the minimum of fuss, plus the maximum of expediency. I have enjoyed these last nine months, though I'm greatly afraid that I won't survive the journey." Orlando finished his speech with dignity, then sped off to the toilet to vomit again.

Jonty smiled sympathetically. He'd admitted he felt a bit guilty about bringing his friend on this trip, but how was

he to have any idea that Coppersmith would suffer quite so much from sea-sickness? Orlando hadn't even known it himself, having been on nothing more adventurous than the paddle steamer out of Ramsgate. There were at least two hours of the voyage left before they could feel decent, solid ground under their feet again. Then there was the awful prospect of having to do the journey all over again, back to Southampton, in a fortnight's time.

The nightmare of the crossing eventually ended, all the passengers reaching terra firma with much thanks. Coppersmith felt tempted to kneel down and kiss the very solid earth beneath his feet at the quay. Plenty of carriages were waiting for custom, so they were soon riding around the wide bay to St. Aubin's, able at last to admire the innocuous looking waters which had managed to wreak such havoc on a delicate digestive tract.

Orlando felt recovered enough to smile when he saw their hotel. It was everything that the rather overblown brochure had promised and more besides. Their bags were whisked away with just the right amount of efficient deference, the reception clerk was welcoming without being unctuous. Even the suite, once Coppersmith was entirely convinced that it was quite normal for friends of the same sex to take sets of rooms together, was pronounced to be above reproach.

They hadn't long begun to unpack before Stewart suggested that it was time to find a small sherry or some such before dinner. He assured his friend it would be entirely the right medicine to enable Coppersmith to recover his appetite so that he could tackle at least some of the delights that they'd spied on the hotel menu. Orlando was rather affronted, wanting everything to have found its proper place before they ventured out, but Jonty insisted, so colors were struck. Coppersmith changed into his dinner jacket, newly purchased on Stewart's orders, as the old one looked more suited to the stalls at the music hall. Properly attired, they went down to the bar.



The dining room was full, mainly married couples of various ages, from the bashful newlyweds who sat in the corner blushing at every remark that was made to them, to the elderly couple—all wrinkles and bright smiles—who sat at a table directly opposite the two Cambridge fellows. They had taken a great shine to the two young men as they'd chatted with them over pre-dinner drinks, insisting that they reminded them of their sons at a similar age. They seemed greatly impressed with Stewart's smile, his obvious good breeding and Coppersmith's gravity, beautiful manners. They made up a four for bridge in the sun lounge after dinner, proving excellent company, the lady in particular having an impish sense of humor. She chatted away to Jonty, the pair of them giggling like two schoolboys, despite her being old enough, just, to be his grandmother.

There were some families at dinner; two had brought their grown up daughters with them. Both girls were exceedingly plain and seemed rather smitten with the two young men, if blushes or girlish sighs were anything to go by. The only other unmarried couple present was a man perhaps three or four years older than Stewart, accompanied by what could only have been his father, given the strong family resemblance. The younger was a handsome chap whose dark curly hair framed deep blue eyes. Not that the two fellows of St. Bride's had eyes for anyone else, but one couldn't help noticing these things. They also couldn't help noticing the palpable tension that existed between the two men, shown in the strained politeness they showed to each other, the inability to keep eye contact between them. They had formed their own bridge four with another married couple, although they were obviously not having half the enjoyment that Coppersmith and his friend were.

Jonty was fascinated. He kept a surreptitious eye on them all evening, then bent Orlando's ear, back in their suite, over what might be going on.

"That young man's not happy to be here, Orlando. I think his father has made him come, while he'd rather be at

home with his sweetheart, not entertaining a surly old curmudgeon.” He turned to face the surly young curmudgeon who was struggling to arrange, into some sort of acceptable order, the mass of items that Stewart had strewn everywhere in an attempt to unpack.

“Nothing to do with us, Jonty.” Coppersmith picked up the tie he’d worn for the journey, finding somewhere to put it carefully away.

“Aren’t you even a little bit curious? This is such an opportunity of meeting new people, the sort of folk we might never meet at college. Like that delightful old couple; she certainly had the measure even of you at cards, Dr. Coppersmith.” Stewart yawned, stretching like a great ginger cat. “This is going to be such a delightful holiday. The hotel is perfect, the food is excellent, I have great hopes for the company and you look less green than you did this morning. Such a lovely color in your cheeks now.” He drew his hand down his lover’s face, across his lips. It was the first time they’d touched with any degree of intimacy since they’d left St. Bride’s. The caress made Orlando shudder afresh, as if they were touching for the first time. “We may have two bedrooms, Dr. Coppersmith, but do we really need to use them both? It’d be easy enough to slip across before the early morning tea arrives, if we set your alarm clock.”

Orlando looked up, determined to refuse. He was still feeling exceedingly skittish about staying in a suite of rooms with his lover. Sharing a bed was beyond any imagining although, ironically, the item in question was a glorious double bed such as he’d dreamed, on many an occasion, of sleeping with Stewart in. “I’m not sure that I feel sufficiently recovered from the journey to want to do anything *except* sleep, Jonty.” He studied his hands, awkwardly.

“That would be fine, Orlando. I’m as happy to simply slumber next to you as anything else. There are plenty of other days for romance; we could just be fond friends tonight, or pretend to be that old couple we played cards

with. Still very much in love yet beyond the thralls of passion." Jonty gently touched his friend's hand.

Coppersmith felt as if a spider was crawling down the back of his neck, and his discomfiture must have been plain. "What if we slept apart, just for tonight?" They had reached the crux of why Orlando had been so keen not to come on holiday. He was frightened of taking their relationship outside the college walls, displaying it to the world. Within the ivy clad, male dominated locality of St. Bride's, it had been easy to maintain a friendship which was more than close without raising a suspicious eyebrow. He'd spent very little time with Jonty out of Cambridge, apart from a visit or two to London, where they'd stayed in the relatively safe environs of the Stewart family home. To be with the man in a strange place was to put himself at risk of making a demonstration of his affection by an unguarded look or touch. Any footman could walk through the streets of town in his bowler-hatted Sunday best, hand in hand with a parlor maid. A pair of dons could never be allowed such freedom. Not in Cambridge and certainly not on Jersey.

Stewart slammed down the toothbrush he'd been unpacking. "Oh, you can go to sleep in the bath if you want to! I haven't the heart to put up with this nonsense. I'm going to sleep in my own bed, in my own soft pyjamas, with my own book. If you change your mind and decide to join me, make sure you knock, because I might just have found other company." He spun on his heels, entering his bedroom with a slam of the door that caused the windows to shake.

Orlando contemplated opening the door again to give his friend a piece of his mind, but didn't want to end up in a full blown row in a public building. He also contemplated going in and giving Stewart the most comprehensive kissing he'd ever received. That was decided against, as it was probably exactly what the little swine wanted, so must be avoided at all costs. Even at the cost of a miserable night alone. Eventually, after tidying everything to his own immaculate standards, he trudged his weary way into his

bedroom and readied himself for sleep.

At two o'clock in the morning, the heavens opened, torrential rain driving against the window panes while thunder pealed as loud as cannon fire. Orlando leapt out of bed without a second thought, making his way through their little sitting room into Jonty's bedroom. He didn't knock, knowing by now that any threats from Stewart about *finding company* were all bluster, to find his friend standing by the window, shivering.

"Come on, Jonty; you'll get cold, you know." Coppersmith put his arms around the man's shoulders, which felt icy through his silken pyjama jacket. Stewart both hated thunderstorms and was fascinated by them. Orlando had often found him looking out of the window of his room at St. Bride's while the lightning rent the sky, making the college's very foundations seem to shake. Jonty could go into almost a dreamlike state, distracted and seemingly unaware of his surroundings, having to be coaxed back gently into the real world. Coppersmith did wonder whether some of the awful things which had happened to the man at school had taken place during storms, although he'd never been brave enough to ask.

Orlando gently took his lover to bed, tenderly soothing him back to sleep, holding tight as each new clap of thunder brought a shuddering through Jonty's frame. Eventually the storm passed eastwards and they could both fall asleep, Stewart as content as a child in his mother's arms. Coppersmith felt masterful, protective and very much in love. If anyone walked in, he had a legitimate medical excuse to be present. Or so he assured himself.

Thanks to Orlando's innate body clock, the chambermaid delivering the early morning tea found the two men in their own, separate beds, above reproach. Jonty soon brought his cup into Coppersmith's room and snuggled under the sheet, the night having been too muggy to

occasion blankets. "Will you wear that tie today, Orlando, the one I bought you at Easter? The ladies would be very impressed."

Only a snort came in reply. "Most of the ladies I meet seem impressed at anything."

"Do you meet very many ladies, Orlando? Seems you're living a double life, then, because I never see you talking to them."

Coppersmith smote Stewart around the back of the head with his pillow. "Imbecile. Well, I'm going to take advantage of the *private bathroom at sixpence a night extra* to prepare myself for the day. You can shave at the basin while I'm in the tub."

Tea shot out of Jonty's nose, making him splutter in an undignified manner. The thought of Orlando issuing an invitation to be viewed in the bath—such a thing hadn't happened since the afternoon the man had got drunk at St. Thomas' college, not even when they'd shared a bathroom while staying at Stewart's family home. It seemed marvelously out of character. "I'll certainly take up the offer or we'll never see breakfast. I can smell the bacon already, although that might just be an olfactory illusion. Breakfast, then church, I saw you wince, but we *are* going, then off to the beach." Jonty squeezed his lover's thigh. "I saw you wince when I mentioned *beach* as well, so you'll just have to apply your stiff upper lip."

Jonty sat down on a rock to get on with removing his shoes and socks.

"What are you doing?"

"Going paddling, Orlando." The holiday air had affected them both, so using Christian names now seemed acceptable, even outside their suite. Stewart suddenly looked up at the awkward figure which towered over him. "Oh, Orlando. You'd never been in The Bishop's Cope, you'd never been punting, please, *please* don't tell me that

you have never paddled.”

“I have actually paddled on a number of occasions, when I was taken to see my grandmother at Margate.” Orlando attempted to look a man at once dignified and completely au fait with the delights of the seaside.

Jonty assumed a particularly sly look. “When exactly was the last time you indulged in this wild activity?”

Coppersmith mumbled, “When I was seven.”

Jonty giggled. “Then you had better ruddy well get your socks off and your trouser bottoms rolled up, because you are coming with me.”

Orlando felt distinctly miffed. He contemplated refusing to do any such thing, but decided to obey orders, stuffing his socks into the toes of his shoes, then tying the laces together in imitation of Stewart. The reason for this strange procedure became obvious when Jonty slung his shoes around his neck, leaving his hands free to continue to pick up stones for skimming or shells for stuffing in his pockets.

As he watched Jonty turning over rocks to search for tiny crustaceans which he then let run over his palms, it struck Orlando more than ever that at heart his friend was just an overgrown boy. An enormous crab was rooted out, a good three inches across the carapace, which Stewart expertly picked up to wave at Coppersmith. “What a whopper, Orlando! Look!” He passed the creature over, grinning as his friend inevitably grabbed it the wrong way, earning a sharp nip on his fingers.

Coppersmith flung the offending animal away, shaking his sore hand and cursing like a sailor.

“Orlando, such language!” Jonty hooted with laughter. “Look, take him *across* the back, so all your fingers are out of his reach.” He demonstrated the technique, then made his friend do the same.

Gingerly Orlando took up the vicious creature, breaking into a smile of delight when the method worked. “He’s a beauty, Jonty. Not big enough for tea, though.” Laughing, he placed the crab down among the rocks, returning to

follow his friend. The tide was ebbing, revealing rock pools full of shrimps which Stewart caught in his hand, then let spring out of his grasp with a giggle. Coppersmith soon learned that game too, proving much more adept at catching the little invertebrates and the darting fishes than his friend. It was like being a child again, except that there hadn't been that much room for play in his childhood, so there was time to be caught up. Yet again, he could experience a freedom with Stewart that he'd never known before they met. He watched his friend pick up a huge ormer shell, holding it to the light so that they could both admire the mother of pearl glittering in the sunlight.

"Beautiful. Eh, Orlando?"

"Indeed." Although Coppersmith didn't mean the shell so much as the man holding it.

Tired, eventually, of annoying the occupants of the rock pools, they began to walk along the waterline, the warm sea just lapping over their feet. The occasional wave came in with slightly more force, making them jump out of the way, splashing and laughing.

It took a whole mile of wandering for Stewart to begin to make mischief, beginning to splash just a little too deliberately in a particular direction. Coppersmith didn't notice at first, blaming the splatters on his trousers purely on the swell. When he did realize exactly what was going on, he handled the situation admirably, deciding that revenge is a dish best eaten cold. While he would have loved to dunk Stewart completely, there and then, more pleasure was to be had by quietly removing himself from flying water range before making his plans.

Seaweed wasn't the most pleasant thing to handle straight from the sea. It was disagreeable on the feet when it slipped around them in the water and it was truly disgusting when forcibly stuffed down the back of one's trousers. Jonty Stewart was made to suffer the worst of this punishment as Orlando executed his vengeance.

"You swine!"

“You’re no longer dealing with some naïve young man who’s spent all his days in a haze of academia. I’m learning, Dr. Stewart, so you’d better watch your step.” Orlando looked wonderfully smug, strikingly handsome in his triumph.

Jonty fished down his pants to extract the offending piece of algae. He flung it at his friend, missed by a mile, then laughed. “I’ve only ever wanted you to be my equal, Orlando. I’m looking forward enormously to the day when you tease me both mercilessly and with aplomb.” He reached out his hand to take Orlando’s, must have remembered that they were in public, shrugged in apology and walked on.

They strolled the length of the beach, till Stewart’s pockets were so full of shells that he’d begun to rattle. Drying off their feet on their handkerchiefs proved largely ineffective, as did hopping madly about so that the clean, dry foot couldn’t be infected with sand before it made its way into its sock. Sand always found its way into every available crevice and was bound to begin to creep into their shoes, regardless, before they were halfway off the beach. The long walk back to Corbiere station would be uncomfortable, although it wouldn’t spoil the delights of the previous hours.

Jonty felt the glow which always came with having enlightened his Dr. Coppersmith, introducing some new pleasure—innocent or not—into the man’s life. Orlando had shown a spark of delight in having effectively taken a rare revenge on his friend, Stewart wondered whether he was plotting other ways of getting one over on him. *This holiday is showing every sign of being more than enjoyable.*

They saw the young man from the hotel on the station platform, looking much happier without his usual companion. He acknowledged them with a tilt of the head, which was all the encouragement that Stewart needed to



effect an introduction. "I believe that you're staying at The Beaulieu, as we are? My name is Stewart. This is my friend Coppersmith." Jonty waved his hand to indicate Orlando, who had yet to venture any closer.

"Ainslie is my name, sir. Matthew Ainslie. I'm delighted to meet you." The man held out his hand, producing a most engaging smile in the process.

"Have you been on Jersey long, Mr. Ainslie?"

"Matthew, I insist that you call me Matthew." He smiled again. "I...*we* arrived three days ago. My father and I always come to one of the Channel Islands once a year; he feels that the air agrees with him."

"Well, I hope that it will agree with us. It's our first time here and I've been very pleasantly surprised so far. I dare say that we'll be picking your brains about the best places to visit."

"Your friend over there is enjoying himself, too?" Ainslie indicated Orlando, who looked nothing like a man enjoying himself. A man trying to win the most surly face competition, perhaps.

"I believe he is, although he doesn't often show it. He enjoyed playing bridge last night with the Tattersalls. Such a delightful couple."

Ainslie smiled. "They beat us soundly on Friday night. I wouldn't like to meet Mrs. Tattersall in a rubber if high stakes were in order, although she could charm the birds out of the trees." His face suddenly changed. "Please excuse me. I can see my father—he'll want me to attend him." A smile and the man was gone, leaving Stewart's interest more piqued than ever.

After another excellent dinner, the fours for bridge were different from Saturday evening. The Ainslies played against Mrs. Tattersall, who was paired with Coppersmith, Jonty and Mr. Tattersall having opted to observe the fun. Orlando and partner trounced the opposition, even when they were obviously not trying, which made it ten times worse. The elder Ainslie's temper was beginning to fray as

rubber after rubber went down, until he snapped at his son, on whom no blame could be fairly laid. Matthew was a far more competent player than his father.

For Jonty the fascination lay not with the play (that was a foregone conclusion) but in what the eyes around the table were doing. Coppersmith watched Ainslie's hands in fascination as he skidded the cards over the table. This man was a talented shuffler and dealer, the sort who would be interesting to see playing alongside a competent partner. While Coppersmith watched Matthew's hands, the man watched his. Orlando had long, delicate fingers, fingers with which Jonty was intimately acquainted, which he found beautiful. Ainslie followed the graceful movements Coppersmith's digits made as they picked up and sorted his hand, caressing the backs of the cards.

Jonty observed the way that Ainslie was watching. He would not forget it.

## Chapter Two

“Jonty, wake up! It’s time you were back to your own bed.” Coppersmith gently nudged his friend, nudges that became rougher as the sleeper refused to respond.

“Go back to my bed yourself, Orlando. The chambermaid won’t remember who slept where the night before this one.”

“She will, I know she will. Please, Jonty, for my sake. I can hear people stirring already.”

Stewart had to admit defeat, now that Orlando was developing a stubborn streak. Anyway, he was jolly grateful to have wangled a night in Coppersmith’s bed to start with. His strategy had been beautifully simple; he’d come up to the suite well before the game of cards had ended, so that when his companion had himself retired for the night, it was to find his bed warm, welcoming and full of a silk-pyjama clad Stewart. He knew Orlando wouldn’t have had the heart to boot him out. Jonty had come on holiday with several aims in mind, one of which was to get Coppersmith into a nice double bed, rather than the cramped conditions of a standard St. Bride’s single.

Jonty felt that this had been a small triumph. When they

had spent a week with the Stewarts during the Easter break, it had taken Coppersmith four days to give his lover even the tiniest of goodnight kisses by the bedroom door. That was after checking one hundred times that the coast was clear. The fifth night had, however, only required two dozen glances around before a rather more exciting kiss was delivered. The sixth night a whole series of kisses had led them inside Jonty's room, although the bed had never been reached.

Jonty inwardly chuckled at the recollection of that week, especially at Orlando and Helena Stewart meeting for the first time. Papa had been easy, shaking Coppersmith's hand heartily, then immediately launching into a discussion about bridge and the best methods of bidding. Orlando had been put at as near his ease as he was going to be on strange territory, although when Mother had steamed into the room, full of apologies for her having been held up at a meeting, then disapprobation for her son for having had the cheek to turn up early, the shy young man had frozen entirely.

Stewart had often compared his mama to HMS *Dreadnought*. Coppersmith had been shocked to hear such filial disloyalty, but *Dreadnought* didn't cover the half of it. She was a large woman, it was true, although she must have been a beauty in her prime, and her personality was immense. Formidable did not in any way do her justice. Orlando had just about managed a bow with a handshake then had watched in amusement as Jonty was, in no particular order, hugged fiercely, upbraided for being so thin, pinched on the cheek, made to sit down, and forced to eat cake.

"What are you grinning about, pest? No, don't tell me now, come back when your tea's here."

Jonty reappeared ten minutes later, having been found by the chambermaid looking as if he'd been in his bed all night. "I was thinking about when you first met Mama. You could hardly say more than *yes* or *no* to her."

"I was observing her for tips I could use to rein you in.

Any person who could reduce you to silence *and* make you do what you're told must be pretty special." He drew Jonty's hand to his lips for a brief contact. "Do you know, when she smiled my heart melted. She turned into your image, at last I knew where you got your inner strength from."

"Well, Mama was exceedingly impressed with you, too." Stewart broke into an uncanny impression of his mother. "*Such beautiful manners dear, so obviously well brought up. I did wonder if he was connected to the Glamorgan Coppersmiths but it appears not. I am so pleased that you brought him to stay; I like him very much, even though he needs a good feed—preferably several. I shall enjoy his company any time that you would wish to bring him home.*" As they laughed, Stewart's hopes were raised that his friend was going to begin to relax. He knew how much Orlando worried about being seen in public, that in his mind, love was for behind the closed doors of one of two sets of rooms at St. Bride's. It had been agony getting him to accept that the Stewart's London home might be an acceptable place for it, too. Another aim of this holiday was to get Coppersmith to unwind so, with this in mind, Jonty began his next piece of carefully planned strategy. "Now, is it the old Blues' blazers today, then?"

The contrast of dark and light sportsmen's blazers made a big hit with all the ladies in the restaurant. There were several murmurs of unrest from said ladies' husbands as they tried to wrest their spouses' attention back to themselves. The two spinsters looked as if they might just swoon. The two young fellows of St. Bride's ignored all the female glances, ate heartily, drank two pots of coffee, then returned to their room to add the finishing touches to their appearance before setting off for the day.

Matthew Ainslie stood on the terrace, enjoying a cigarette. The appearance at The Beaulieu of two agreeable

young men, both of whom could play cards well, had brightened his holiday. It wasn't the most exciting way to spend a vacation, pandering to a demanding relative, so any distraction would prove enjoyable. Particularly a distraction as attractive as Coppersmith. He'd been thinking on the man since the last evening; the depths of his dark eyes, the curl of his lashes. There'd been every indication, in their conversation, that he might even share some of Matthew's particular interests, which made the brown eyes even more alluring.

As Stewart and Coppersmith emerged from the hotel, Ainslie approached them, smiling. "Lovely day, gentlemen. What are your plans?" Ainslie looked from the dark man to the fair one, then back again, waiting for Orlando to answer.

Eventually Coppersmith, after a pause just the right side of discourtesy, piped up. "Dr. Stewart has suggested a walk around the bay to St. Helier, then a visit to the market."

This would be no great distance; there was plenty of time for other, more athletic pursuits. "Perhaps you would be free for a game of tennis this afternoon?" Ainslie directed his offer firmly at Coppersmith. Stewart was pleasant enough, but Matthew wasn't sure he was his type. Not by any definition of the word.

"I would be delighted, if that's acceptable to you, Dr. Stewart?" Orlando turned to Jonty, as if unwilling to agree anything without his friend's assent.

"I have a new book to read, Dr. Coppersmith, and I'd welcome some time to do so." Jonty cast a sideways glance at Matthew, who hoped he wouldn't notice any relief or anticipation displayed on his face. Stewart seemed a very shrewd customer, the sort who might look into your eyes and see your soul. Ainslie kept his gaze fixed on Orlando.

"Shall we say three o'clock then?" Matthew paused for the nod of assent. "Very good, I'll book the courts and hire some rackets." He cast his cigarette butt into the flower bed, going back inside to find his father, who'd no doubt tell him off for being away so long.

“Matthew. A word.” Mr. Ainslie spoke sternly, as he always seemed to do these days. His son followed him through the hallway, then into the gardens, until they found a quiet spot overlooking the long, curving bay. “What are your plans for the day?”

“Nothing special. I have a game of tennis arranged for this afternoon,” Ainslie tried to sound casual, hiding any tinge of excitement he felt.

“Tennis?” His father sniffed.

There was a wealth of meaning in the sound, as if Mr. Ainslie knew very clearly what his son had in mind. Perhaps he did; he’d made that much plain these last few weeks. “Yes, with Dr. Coppersmith.”

“You, sir, would be better employed playing tennis with one of the young ladies. You know my feelings on the matter, and there’s a limit to my patience. Most men of your age are married, settling down to have a family. Don’t you want our business to be handed down, as I’ve handed it to you?”

Matthew didn’t reply, resisting any temptation to point out that his father had little option regarding handing over duties within the company. They’d had this argument, the great marriage debate, innumerable times, and the result was always the same. His nature to be sacrificed on the altar of the Ainslie name, whatever that was worth.

“I’ll take your silence as assent, then.” Ainslie senior gestured towards the path, a gravel track which lead up to the tennis courts, then beyond to a small copse. “Play your game, if you must, but that’s the end to it. No more of your nonsense.” He strode away, leaving Matthew wondering how his life could have become so bloody complicated.

Coppersmith and Stewart strolled leisurely down to the gate, coming out on the road to the quay. “He seems a pleasant chap, that Ainslie.” Orlando broke the comfortable silence which had settled between them.

Jonty giggled. "I would say that you've got yourself an admirer there, Dr. Coppersmith."

Orlando stopped dead in his tracks. "I beg your pardon?"

"An admirer, Orlando. A devotee. A follower." Stewart spoke in his best *talking to my four year old nephew* tone.

"Oh, I understand the word, I just don't see what you're getting at." It was true. He'd never considered that Ainslie might be any more than a rather lonely chap seeking the company of people his own age. "Why should you think he admires me?" They leaned against the harbor rail.

"He couldn't take his eyes off you last night, not over dinner, not over bridge. Seemed to be fascinated with your hands, by which I don't mean your cards. I wonder what transpired over that table after I went to my unsullied bed."

"Seem to remember it was *my* bed," Coppersmith murmured. He carried on aloud. "After bridge we took a brandy together then chatted. His father owns a publishing house in the city and Mr. Ainslie is one of the directors. We had a very interesting conversation about the works of Oscar Wilde, although I had to profess ignorance of them."

Jonty giggled again. "I should think so, too, Dr. Coppersmith!" He stopped laughing, an unusually serious look on his face. "Did he say anything specific about Oscar Wilde or his works?"

Orlando considered. "I don't think I really understood a lot of what he said. I was very tired, you know, just trying to be polite, nodding or shaking my head in what I hoped were the right places."

Stewart sighed. "Well I hope it turns out all right, Orlando, but do be careful, please."

Coppersmith still had no idea what he was being warned about, and didn't want to show his ignorance, so they resumed their walk. A stroll around the quay led them down to the beach, where the tide had ebbed enough to leave a clear line of hard sand, widening every moment, suitable for walking along to the island's little capital. They



hardly spoke except to point out the two fine forts which guarded each side of the bay, Orlando muttering fevered calculations about trajectories in an attempt to work out whether they could cover the entire sweep with their guns. The sun beat down into their faces, making hard work of things, to the extent that they had to take off their jackets and ties then loosen their collars. This made Orlando feel like he was some corner boy, although Jonty reassured him that it would be acceptable on the beach.

“Might even get you into the sea one of these days.” Jonty waved airily at the ocean. They’d each bought magnificent new bathing costumes, blue and white striped yet just short enough to show off their manly calves. Orlando was dreading having to appear in them in public. Perhaps he would be lucky—rain for the whole fortnight—although the barometer in the hotel kept promising fair weather. At least he’d been spared bathing for this day and Stewart conceded that they should make themselves respectable again when they reached St Helier.

They wandered the little streets of the town, noting many places which they might like to come back to explore. They wandered past the Corn Exchange, finding a small café where they could take a well earned, cool glass of lemonade and watch the world go by. Nursemaids with babies in perambulators, little boys carrying kites which they were taking to the park and ladies in their finest summer outfits passing by (then re-passing in case they’d not been sufficiently noticed the first time). The two men commented on some of the people who went by but as often as not they were silent, simply content, supremely confident in their friendship.

In time they wandered on, poking their noses into any shops which took their fancy, especially the one where Orlando could top up his dwindling toffee supply. Eventually they reached the indoor market, where the sights and smells created a unique, evocative mixture. From one of the stalls the overwhelming scent of freesias took their

breath away. Coppersmith had never smelt the like before; he insisted on buying a huge bunch to take back to their suite, then kept placing his nose inside the paper to take great inhalations of the flowers' sweet perfume. He was terribly tempted by the jewel-like strawberries, too, although Jonty insisted that they would spoil his lunch and dragged him off into a dusty little second-hand book shop where they rummaged happily among the dusty tomes, until Stewart declared that he was so starving that they should take something to eat.

"For lunch, Dr. Coppersmith, we'll have a gastronomic treat such as is rarely exceeded anywhere. Wait here by the fountain and don't annoy the fish." Stewart scuttled away until his dark blond head was soon lost among the crowds. When he did reappear he beckoned Orlando to follow him off into a corner of the marketplace where he was leaning on a stall, passing money over the counter to receive two paper bundles in return. Jonty handed one to his friend then grinned.

Coppersmith peered inside the wrappings. Notwithstanding the glorious smell which emerged from them, he was extremely wary of the contents. "This is what you've made such a fuss about?"

"Fish and chips at their very best, Orlando. Observe the golden batter, take in the wonderful aroma. Add a little salt or vinegar too, should you desire, then just indulge."

Orlando was quite ready to indulge although he couldn't work out the procedure. The Bishop's Cope had been shock enough to his system, but there at least they had plates and cutlery, not food served in newspapers (disreputable ones at that). Here there wasn't a fork in sight.

"Use your fingers Dr. Coppersmith; God gave us those before he gave us forks, you know." Stewart picked up the biggest chip he could find and stuck it whole into his mouth, huffing at how hot it was. "Oh, these are absolutely beautiful. I've eaten caviar, French truffles, the finest Belgian chocolate, yet this culinary treat is beyond them

all.” He stopped abruptly, seeing that Orlando hadn’t even attempted his food. “What *is* the problem?”

“My hands will get all greasy and covered in salt.”

“Then lick your fingers afterwards, Dr. Coppersmith. Or I could lick them for you if you wish.” He cocked his head to one side. “Only don’t put vinegar on them if that’s your intention, I just like salt.”

Orlando liberally doused his portion with both salt *and* vinegar, gave Jonty a look of triumph then set to demolishing the lot. He even licked his fingers afterwards, feeling only slightly guilty about the shame it would have brought his mother to have seen him do it. Never mind that his mother would never have let him indulge in Liquorice Allsorts, either, and if she knew what he’d been up to at Bride’s with Dr. Stewart, she would be turning in her grave.

They strolled leisurely, extremely leisurely, there having been plenty of food in those newspapers, back to the railway station, where they rested peacefully in the shade until the train arrived to take them back to St. Aubin’s. As they journeyed around the bay again, Orlando leaned over to Jonty and simply said, “Glad you persuaded me to come on holiday. Best thing I’ve done for ages. Thank you.” Sixteen little words which knocked any sensible reply out of his friend.

Jonty Stewart was lying on the settee in the sitting room of their suite, reading glasses perched on his nose. He had a bottle of lemonade, a packet of peppermint creams and a Conan Doyle. No distractions, though, Orlando having gone off to play tennis with Matthew Ainslie. A glorious hour or two were in prospect. Or they were until the door burst open, a racket went flying through the air, just missing his feet, and a very cross man in white flannels announced, “Ainslie tried to kiss me!”

“Well, of course he did!” Jonty didn’t even spill one drop of his lemonade. “I told you it was in the air yet you

didn't take the slightest notice. Serves you right." He tried very hard not to look up from his book, despite the long streak of fury which was buzzing around near him.

"We didn't even get to the tennis courts." Orlando paced from the door to the window then back again. "He took me up into the grove of trees at the back of the garden, *to see the honey buzzards*, he said. Honey buzzards my elbow!" Coppersmith stopped in front of Stewart, wrenched the book from his hand and flung it in the direction of the racket. "Then you have the audacity to say *serves you right*."

Jonty looked up this time, to find that Coppersmith was not just angry. His face was suffused with fear, a fear Stewart hadn't seen there since the dreadful time of the St. Bride's murders. "Sit down." He reached out for Coppersmith's hand, drawing him to sit beside him. "Tell me exactly what happened." He stroked the hand tenderly, trying to give every reassurance through his touches. Orlando must have been frightened stiff to have been accosted so, but the man had to learn that the world wasn't full of academics, whose thoughts were always in their theorems and never in their trousers.

"We went into the thicket a little way, before we stopped. I thought he was going to show me a nest or something, only he took my arm and turned me round to face him. Before I knew what was going on, he stuck his face into mine then tried to kiss me. On the lips..." Orlando looked scandalized.

The offended expression made Stewart giggle, quite inappropriately. "Did your mother never tell you not to go into the woods with strange men?"

"I'm glad you find it so very amusing. I understand that I'm a constant source of merriment to you, but I'd hoped that you'd have been sympathetic." Coppersmith rose, storming into his bedroom with such a slam of the door that Jonty feared for the hinges.

Stewart sighed, mentally kicking himself. *When will*

*you ever learn to hold your tongue? He's frightened and confused. You know he's petrified enough of touching you in public, of giving himself away. How must he have felt with a stranger?* He rose then gently knocked the door.

"Go away, Dr. Stewart."

Jonty opened the door a few inches. A pillow came flying through the air, glancing off his head. It was obviously a throwing day chez Coppersmith.

Stewart took his handkerchief from his pocket to wave it dramatically. "Truce, Orlando?"

"Bugger off, Jonty."

Stewart ignored the remark, coming over and sitting down on the bed next to his friend. "Big idiot's come to say he's sorry, Orlando. Doesn't expect to be forgiven but wants to listen, properly this time." He smiled tenderly, then stretched out along the bed, parallel with Coppersmith although not touching, making a nice geometrical shape with the wooden headboard which Orlando would have probably appreciated at another time. Now, no doubt, he was trying to overcome the desire to thump his friend.

"Why do you want to hear? So you can laugh at my innocence again?" Coppersmith huffed, crossing his arms on his chest.

"I want to hear because I want to understand. What did you do when Ainslie pushed his face in yours, which is probably a very good description of what happened. I can imagine it exactly." Stewart ventured the smallest of smiles.

"I slapped his face." Coppersmith screwed his eyes, his cheeks bright red. "I told him that I had no intention of kissing him, then or at any point in the future. Then he apologized and said he'd misunderstood, though what there was to understand is beyond me, so I came back here." He opened his eyes to look pleadingly at Jonty, the anger in his eyes gone even if the fear was still in situ. "I want to go home. Back to St. Bride's."

"Oh, we can't, Orlando." Stewart was crestfallen. "We need this holiday. I need this holiday. I know that you're not

going to want to face this man again, but you're just going to have to find the courage. He probably won't bother you a second time, not after you made your feelings so plain. Slapped his face?" He ventured a hand over to his friend's arm, gently tapped it. "Good for you."

Coppersmith turned to face him. "Did I do right, Jonty? I had no idea, truly. I thought that you were over reacting with that *he looked at your hands all night* remark. I don't want to kiss anyone except you. You know that, don't you?"

"Well, of course I do, Orlando. Known that for a long time. Look, Matthew Ainslie won't be the last to try it on, you must realize that. You've a handsome face and a winning smile, when you care to use it. That air of aloofness would drive many an admirer wild." Jonty caressed the face he loved so much, savoring—as he did every time—the contrast of rough with smooth textures. "You've never realized, sitting in the little world of Bride's, that you're an exceedingly attractive man. People you talk to are going to take notice."

"But you talk to any and everyone, Jonty, flirt with them too. What do you do if they respond?" Orlando drew his lover's hand to his chest, let it rest over his heart. It was a habitual gesture, one they both cherished.

"Run like stink in the other direction, generally. Plead that my heart belongs to my college and no other. I had to lie once—said I belonged to an evangelical sect which insisted on a vow of chastity, although that was with a particularly persistent lady. Never had to resort to a slap, however I'll bear it in mind for extreme occasions."

Orlando leaned up on his elbow. "Did your mother tell *you* not to go into the woods with strange men? Or women?"

"As hard as you may find it to believe, my mother and father gave me no advice about carnal matters. These things are simply not talked about in 'nice' families. The farmer's daughter is better prepared than the gentleman's; she sees the bull taken to the cows or the pigs farrowing. My poor

sister had a terrible time on her wedding night. She had no idea whatsoever about the male anatomy or what parts of it were used for. Came straight home to Mama in torrents of tears swearing that her husband was a misshapen, disgusting brute. She had to be told very plainly the truth of things. I did slightly better. Father warned me, when I was sixteen, *not to get any girls into trouble*. I thought he meant keeping them out late or making them steal things!"

"My mother never told me anything, either, more's the pity. She didn't give me any advice about life except that I should find myself a nice, respectable wife and have two nice, respectable children. She never saw fit to inform me how they were to be begot. Father said that if I 'found myself stimulated', his words, not mine, I should take a cold bath then read *Pilgrim's Progress*." Coppersmith sighed, lying back again, looking very young and vulnerable in his white flannels with open necked shirt. Jonty could understand why Ainslie had been so enflamed. He'd felt the same way when he'd first seen Orlando in his cricket whites. There'd been a game for St. Bride's against St. Thomas'; Coppersmith had thrown himself about manfully in the field, his lithe body looking so athletic that Jonty had been forced to fan himself. After the game he'd rushed the man straight back to his set—within two minutes of their passing through the door, Orlando's whites had joined Stewart's suit on the floor and his long, delicate fingers were roaming over Jonty's body, wreaking havoc. The memory was doing nothing for Jonty's composure, which was fighting a losing battle with excitement.

"Did you ever look for a wife, Orlando?" Stewart tried to keep his mind above waist level. And away from anything male.

"Honest truth, Jonty, I was too scared. Never got on with girls, you know that. My mother invited plenty to tea, although I always found an excuse to be elsewhere or take my leave early. I just thought I was shy, that I'd grow out of it. Never realized why." He drew up Stewart's hand to press

it to his lips. "I realize now."

"Do you want *me* to talk to Ainslie? I'll make it plain that if anyone should be going home it's him and that unpleasant father of his, who, I'm fairly certain, was trying to cheat at cards last night, but that's by-the-by. Do you want me to do this for you?"

"Let me think about it Jonty; I don't want to make matters worse. Discretion might be the better part of valor this time."

Stewart lazily reached over, began to trace circles on Orlando's shirt. "We have a good hour or so before we have to be getting changed for dinner. Would you be thinking of seducing me now, or are you thrusting me back into the arms of Sherlock Holmes?"

Coppersmith looked shocked. "I won't be thinking of seducing you at all until we're back in college. At least, if I think of it, I won't be doing anything about it. It's too risky, Jonty, you know that."

Stewart shrugged. He did know it, or at least Orlando's opinion on the subject. Coppersmith had made it very plain that he didn't want to put them in any jeopardy while they were away from Bride's and that included no indulging in sex. Or what passed for sex between them. Despite the fact that they'd been lovers for months, they'd still not achieved bodily union. Stewart was becoming, if not desperate, then very anxious to have a proper consummation. He'd been hoping that the sea air, the wonderfully romantic location, would loosen Orlando's strait jacket of conservatism. But coming away from his safe haven had made the man even more nervous and reserved. If things carried on the way they were, then even mutual pleasure by hands which stroked or caressed would be impossible this holiday.

"Do I get anything, then? For being a good boy?" Jonty swallowed hard; while he hated to beg, he needed to be shown some sort of physical affection.

"I'll give you what Ainslie wanted," Coppersmith laid a tender kiss on Jonty's lips, "although you'll get no more at



present.” He picked up his own book. “Inspector Bucket and I are off to the bath where I shall soak until I feel clean enough from my encounter in the woods to face the rest of the guests.”

“That’s the spirit, Orlando,” Stewart smiled affectionately, if ruefully, watching as his friend went off to attack the taps. “Though I think Matthew Ainslie wanted a lot more from you than that kiss.”

Irrespective of what Ainslie may have wanted, neither he nor his father was participating in pre-dinner drinks, nor in the meal itself. Their absence didn’t go unnoticed, Stewart remarking quietly, “Perhaps he’s too ashamed to come down tonight and face you.”

Orlando huffed, “They’re probably just taking their meal elsewhere, you’ll see.”

Nevertheless, something was amiss. An unusually strained atmosphere seemed to pervade the hotel staff, the tension making everyone strangely on edge. Eventually Mrs. Tattersall decided that she must venture the questions that they were all dying to ask. She called the manager over. “Are Mr. Ainslie and his son not dining with us tonight? Is everything quite well with them?”

The manager lowered his voice, aware that every ear in the restaurant was straining to hear his comments. “I am very much afraid that Mr. Ainslie senior was taken ill this afternoon.”

“Is there anything that we can do to help?” Even if Mrs. Tattersall hadn’t shown any affection for the older man, her maternal instinct must have been to lend a hand to his son.

“I regret to say that Mr. Ainslie was pronounced dead by the doctor and has been,” the manager lowered his voice further, “taken to the hospital.”

“Dear me. Young Mr. Ainslie—is anyone with him?”

“The doctor gave him a sedative, I believe. I hope that we’ll see him at breakfast tomorrow.”

Stewart, shamelessly eavesdropping, laid down his fork, unable to continue eating. "We should go to see him, Orlando." He saw the pained look on his friend's face then rephrased himself. "*I* should go to see him. He shouldn't be left alone at such a time, so far from home."

"You'll go to his aid even after what happened today?" Coppersmith's face couldn't have looked more astonished.

Jonty nodded. "It's only right for someone to do so, Orlando and it would be better me than you."

Matthew Ainslie sat in the window seat, an unopened packet of medicine, the doctor's prescription, on the table beside him. What a bloody day it had proved to be, from start to bitter end. He'd been such an idiot, up in the woods behind the tennis courts, practically throwing himself on someone he hardly knew. Yes, Coppersmith had looked stunningly attractive in his linen shirt and trousers, a scarf tied artlessly around his neck—Matthew squirmed at the recollection. Should he have plunged in, trusting only to instinct and the answers to questions so casually posed the night before?

Obviously not, if the wallop to his face was anything to go by. His cheek still stung, as did his pride, burning with mortification at his own stupidity. Where had his much vaunted caution been, his insistence on discretion? He supposed he had his reasons, although they sounded pretty thin as his conscience used them to charge him with folly. Ainslie almost missed the gentle knock on his door, the internal cross-examination proving so severe.

"Come in. Ah, Dr. Stewart, can I help you?"

"I was wondering whether there was anything I—we—could do for you, Mr. Ainslie? We were so sorry to hear about your father."

Matthew, like many a decent English gentleman, had been brought up not to show emotion even at the most difficult of times. He kept to his training now. "Thank you,

Dr. Stewart, but not at present. I've sent notification to our firm, and we've no other close family who need to be informed. I'm just awaiting word from the doctor."

Jonty raised an eyebrow. "The doctor?"

Matthew took a deep breath, fought hard to maintain the stiff upper lip which seemed so determined to relax itself. "Yes, Dr. Stewart. Although he can't be sure until an autopsy has been performed, he believes this may have been murder."

Stewart started, more than Ainslie had expected. "I'm so sorry to hear that. In which case our offer of help is redoubled." He rose to leave.

Ainslie, knowing they'd another important matter to deal with, raised a hand to stop him. "Would you be so kind as to pass on my apologies to your colleague? We had a...misunderstanding earlier today." Matthew looked Jonty straight in the eye without flinching, a show of spirit he hoped would impress the younger man.

"Dr. Coppersmith told me exactly what happened, Mr. Ainslie." Stewart's eye shone bright as a tiger's. A tiger protecting its cubs.

Matthew considered his words carefully. "Then you may well know that we had a conversation last night after cards. Certain works of Oscar Wilde were discussed. I fear that I misinterpreted some things that Dr. Coppersmith said and acted upon them rather precipitately this afternoon." He thought again, uncomfortably, of Orlando saying "yes" or "no" in what he'd assumed were the significant places when *Dorian Gray* or *Earnest* were mentioned.

Jonty bowed, a true gentleman. "I'll pass on your explanation to Dr. Coppersmith. I hope that he'll accept it. Good night." He nodded, turned, and departed, leaving Matthew to wonder if all his mistakes he'd made the last few days could be dealt with so easily.

## Chapter Three

The possibility of being in the proximity of a murderer again galvanized Orlando in a quite astonishing manner. Jonty had eventually returned to the bar rather shaken, given his news, then insisted he'd take an early night. He'd anticipated that his friend would make every excuse not to share a bed, especially after their conversation in the afternoon. There'd be no attempt to dissuade him; it was more than Stewart had the heart to attempt.

But Coppersmith was desperate, taking Jonty into his arms the moment they were through the door then hugging him as if he couldn't bear to let him go. The memory of the killings at St. Bride's, never far below the surface, had come back to haunt them both.

"Come on, we'll get ready for bed then I'll sit with you awhile." Stewart kissed his lover's brow, tasting both sweat and fear there.

"Stay with me till morning, please. I'll set the alarm." Orlando cradled his lover's head against his shoulder. "Murder seems to follow us like a hound, Jonty."

"We don't know that it is murder, Orlando. Mr. Ainslie is awaiting the doctor's report—with any luck that will say

that it was natural causes.” He snuggled into the folds of Orlando’s jacket. “Let’s play at being Mr. and Mrs. Tattersall, putting on our pyjamas just to lie in bed planning what we’ll do tomorrow”

“Croquet.” They lay in bed like an old married couple, all thoughts of coupling in any form dissipated. “There’s an excellent lawn here. Should I can ask them to reserve the set for us?” Coppersmith enjoyed this particular game, it being the only sport at which he could beat Stewart with anything like regularity.

“I rather fancied taking a walk to the west of here and finding if there are any little bays where we could bathe on another day.” Jonty stopped, observing a familiar look on his friend’s face. “Orlando, why do you always seem so horrified when I suggest bathing? Can you actually swim?”

“I am a very accomplished swimmer, actually, Jonty, although I’m not keen on the idea of exposing my body to either the elements or public view.”

“Not even for me? Not even if I said it would give me the most immense satisfaction to see you in that striped costume, cutting a dash along the strand, dripping wet and gorgeous? Such a mental image to fill one’s dreams with.”

Coppersmith applied his knuckles to his lover’s head, producing a sharp cry of pain, receiving a punch in the chest in return.

“Amnesty, Orlando! No bathing tomorrow, I promise, just a little healthy exploration of the coast in the morning then you can thrash me at croquet in the afternoon.” Stewart planted a tender kiss on his lover’s head, snuggling down next to him to sleep. Murder had driven all the lustful thoughts from his head.

Ainslie was wearing a black tie at breakfast. He’d found it in an envelope pushed under his door with a note from Mrs. Tattersall saying that her husband always traveled with one *just in case* and at any rate at their age it *saw a lot of*

use. He'd been extremely touched by their kindness, seeking them out as soon as he'd put it on.

"I only wish that we could have been of service to you in better circumstances, young man." Mrs. Tattersall's wrinkled face broke into a wistful smile. "If there's anything else that we can do I hope that you won't hesitate to tell us."

Ainslie promised, grateful if slightly disconcerted at the attention he was receiving. Some kind folk like Stewart, the Tattersalls and the hotel manager had offered help directly to him; that was fine so long as the proposal wasn't thrust down one's throat. Worse were the sympathetic looks, often accompanied by whispered asides to partners that smacked of supposition or gossip mongering. Matthew Ainslie had always sought to keep his affairs to himself and the possibility of his father's death becoming a public scandal unsettled him.

He watched Stewart and Coppersmith taking a more leisurely meal, sharing little more than a nod or smile with him. He cursed himself again for his impetuous action. Coppersmith was damned attractive, but he probably had no interest in anything other than calculus. Ainslie ate his breakfast as quickly as was decent, then quietly slipped back to his room to deal with a whole series of business letters that would need drafting.

The morning passed more pleasantly than Orlando had anticipated, scrambling over rocks to find paths up or down cliffs proving both physically and mentally exhilarating. The views out to sea were stunning. Often he sat with Jonty simply to admire the endless vista of blue, a panorama dotted here and there with fishing boats. Stewart loved the seaside, even more perhaps than he loved London—his obvious delight in the sea air filled Orlando with equal pleasure. They even found a delightful little bay to splash about in whenever *someone* felt brave enough.

On one occasion when their eyes met, Coppersmith saw such absolute adoration in his companion's countenance that his heart fair leaped out of his mouth. Intoxicated, he drew Stewart's hand to his face, gently brushing it with his lips, not uttering a word. Good wine needs no bush and utter happiness no conversation.

"That's rather bold, isn't it, Orlando? I know no one can see us, but still..."

"Perhaps it is bold, for me. Last night I was reminded of those murders back at Bride's, at what fragile things life and happiness are. This is such a delightful place, it would be wrong not to make the most of it. Together. I'm so used to the security of the college, it's hard for me to adjust to the world at large. Please be patient with me." He choked back the tears which threatened to spoil the occasion.

"Of course I will. Idiot. Let's sit here a while just holding hands, then we'll go back for lunch."

By one o'clock they were on the hotel terrace, taking a salad of seafood and local vegetables which were arranged artfully on their plates in order to tempt the appetite to just the right degree. When a lost looking Ainslie appeared, Jonty beckoned him over, earning himself a kick in his shins from Orlando.

"Will you take a bite with us, Mr. Ainslie?" Stewart motioned to the spare seat at their table.

"I will, thank you. Although I insist that you call me Matthew; we're on holiday here, not in a London salon." He attempted a smile but the effort seemed, naturally, half hearted.

"Then you must call me Jonty. It's an awful name, I know. Shame one can't have the luxury of naming one's parents in revenge"

Matthew nodded in reply, then turned to Coppersmith, appearing only slightly perturbed at the memory of the previous afternoon. Orlando wondered how he had the gall to address him at all. "I hope that you'll call me Matthew, too."

Coppersmith gritted his teeth, announcing, "My name is Orlando, should you wish to use it." He returned to consuming his shellfish, which suddenly didn't taste so pleasant.

Jonty must have seen that it would be entirely up to him to carry the conversation so he turned on the charm while they ate, treading a deft line between mentioning Ainslie senior too much or too little. They chatted as pleasantly as they could manage given the dual presence of grief and a silent Orlando, until Jonty asked whether Matthew had ever visited the racecourse on one of his previous visits to the island, as there was a meeting imminent.

"We were looking forward to going on Friday. My father was a great one for the horses." Ainslie suddenly looked older, grayer. "And the tables and the cards."

"Would you still like to? Dr. Coppersmith is an expert on matters of the gallops so perhaps we could all go together. If you would feel that was the done thing, of course." As Jonty smiled sympathetically, Orlando felt enormously proud of him, the assured way he was dealing with Ainslie's bereavement. There was no excuse for his own surliness. Whatever the man had done the day before, he now had a right to be treated with decency.

"I think I'll decline." Ainslie shook his head. "Doesn't really seem appropriate. Thank you, anyway."

"Would you like to go to the races again, Orlando? Quite the thing you were last time."

Coppersmith decided he had to make some effort with the conversation. "Perhaps, Jonty. I do like going racing." Orlando's face transformed itself as he smiled at the memory of being guests of the Stewarts for the Derby, a blustery afternoon spent up on Epsom Downs with Jonty's numerous relatives. Mama had taken him under her wing, refusing to let any of the harridan-like females of the party molest him in any way. He'd been very grateful. When Mr. Stewart had chided her, she'd chastened him with *Dr. Coppersmith doesn't want to run with the fast set as some of*



*your acquaintances do, Richard. You can find the royal party if you wish to indulge in foolery.*

Jonty must have been thinking of the same occasion. "Do you ever go to the Derby, Mr. Ainslie?"

"My father preferred Ascot. He didn't like the bustle of the Downs. Too common, he thought it."

"I'm afraid my family always wants to picnic up there with the crowds. Mama insists we don't keep aloof; she believes mixing with the gypsies and the hoi polloi is half the fun. Then there's the small matter of keeping us all plied with food from morning till night. Poor Dr. Coppersmith couldn't have eaten another thing."

"I may have been full, but I wasn't daft, was I?" Orlando had almost forgotten the presence of Ainslie, so rapt was he in the memory of one of the great days of his life.

"There's a story here." Matthew smiled wanly. "Would you care to share it with me? I could do with some light relief."

"Mr. Ainslie, he had us all fooled. There was me thinking *Orlando's never been to the races before, so I must make sure he has his wallet safely stowed away and guide him to the bookmakers.*"

Orlando could feel himself blushing, not at the trick he'd pulled on his friend, although he hoped Ainslie would assume it was that. Really it was the memory of the oysters he'd had for lunch that day and how they'd affected him, especially when Jonty had asked *What do you fancy, then?*

"I asked him on which horse his hard-earned pennies would be going. I was even daft enough to tease him that he'd been using his mathematical skills to the best advantage in spotting the likely winner. Studying form and all that. Do you know what? He had. He'd kept it all secret." Jonty smiled, looking so dashing and handsome that Coppersmith had the horrible feeling the lobster he'd just consumed was having the same effect as those wretched oysters had done.

“You see, Mr. Ainslie,” Orlando felt that if he kept his eyes away from Stewart’s lovely face he might be able to get things under control, “one of the St. Bride’s porters is a man with a keen appreciation of horseflesh. Mr. Summerbee instructed me in the delights of reading form, studying the weights, picking out the best jockeys and trainers. He even gave me some insider knowledge straight from the gallops at Newmarket, where his brother-in-law is a stable lad.”

“Don’t forget the fact that those devious porters were supplying you with the *Racing Post*.”

“They are men of great discernment. They wanted me to score off the bookies at the same time as scoring off you. I felt very well prepared, Mr. Ainslie.”

“Matthew, please.”

“Matthew.” Orlando felt the name sticking in his throat, though at least concentrating on that discomfort kept his mind above his waistline. “So I was pretending to choose the horse in the first race just on its name and the jockey’s colors. Dr. Stewart took me to his favorite bookmaker so I laid ten shillings ‘on the nose’ as Summerbee had told me to.”

Jonty laughed, attracting the attention of some of the other diners who no doubt felt such levity was inappropriate in the presence of the bereaved. “Chas Satchell and Sons are a firm who’ve gratefully received my philanthropy in the past. I lose so much they love to keep my custom. I couldn’t believe my ears when Orlando used the expression ‘on the nose’. I was so stunned that I couldn’t remember which horse the footman had recommended to me for the first race. I ended up plumping for a rank outsider.”

“Did the horse win? Orlando’s horse?”

“Of course it did. The family said it was a great case of ‘beginner’s luck’, even when he looked so unbelievably smug. The bookie didn’t mind, of course, having made ample amounts of profit from the rest of us.”

“Did the winning streak continue?”

“Oh yes, he steamed up to poor Mr. Satchell muttering

things about a horse called Blue Boy and the going being to his liking. I should have twigged then, if not when he went on to pick the winner for the third. We had to go placing our bets all over the shop. I mean to say, my family would have to face Mr. Satchell again at Newmarket. The embarrassment would be too great if he ended up being fleeced." Jonty laughed again, his voice ringing out over the terrace and raising a fond shake of the head from Mrs. Tattersall. "Naturally the whole family wanted his opinion on the Derby."

"I'd come to the conclusion that Spearmint was the one to back," Coppersmith began to tell the story, caught a keen look in Ainslie's eye then stopped, suddenly feeling very uncomfortable. He'd only meant to be polite, to take Jonty's lead in showing companionship to someone who must have been feeling lonely. Now he was blethering on in a manner totally unlike his usual reserved one. Ainslie might take his friendliness for interest, begin once more the nonsense he'd tried the day before. Orlando clammed up tight and, after an awkward pause, Jonty had to resume the story.

"He kept urging caution on everyone about his tip for the big race, saying he was no expert. Everyone laughed at that, of course, suspecting that he was indeed a great connoisseur of horseflesh who was trying to hide his light under a nosebag, if not a bushel. Great quantities of Stewart cash went on that horse, spread over a number of bookies." Jonty looked over at Orlando, who very carefully kept his eyes fixed on his plate.

"I shall make sure I take very seriously any advice on horses which you give me, Dr. Coppersmith."

Orlando felt heartened that Ainslie had stopped calling him by his Christian name. He looked up, said something about his having given up the lure of the bookmakers, otherwise he'd be happy to oblige. It was a relief to see their fellow guest smile then rise from the table.

"Thank you for the story, gentlemen. It was the sort of tonic I needed today."

"I would say it was our pleasure, but that seems unsuitable," Stewart shook the man's hand. "If we can help at all, please let us know."

Orlando continued his triumphs that afternoon on The Beaulieu's croquet lawn. Time after time he sent Jonty's blue ball flying into the shrubbery as he made his way remorselessly through the hoops. Stewart didn't mind; it was pleasure enough to see his friend with a determined glint in his eye and a keen look of achievement. While he put every effort into the match, the winning of it was not important. Some would call that Corinthian spirit. He called it love.

Jonty was concentrating hard to produce a delicate shot which would edge his blue ball into proximity to the red one when he felt a hand on his shoulder, followed by a familiar voice in his ear.

"Dr. Stewart, Dr. Coppersmith, what an unexpected pleasure this is."

Both men swung around to see the figure of Inspector Wilson standing behind them, the man clad in a sporting jacket of as much eminence as their own two. As far as Jonty was concerned, he must have crept up with enormous stealth to achieve just this effect of surprise. He recovered his composure smartly. "The pleasure is all ours, Inspector. Are you taking your holiday here?"

"I am indeed. My sister married a local man; they live not far from here. Mrs. Wilson and I are staying with them. Indeed, Mr. le Tissier is here today, in his official capacity, acting for the head of the Parish." Wilson's beaming smile began to disappear.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson, please don't tell us that you're here on business?" Stewart's face dropped, while Orlando began to study his croquet mallet.

"Not officially, merely as an adviser to my brother-in-law. Have you met a Mr. Ainslie here?" The men nodded in

reply. "His father died yesterday." More nods of recognition. "I'm afraid he was deliberately killed, a small stiletto-like object inserted into the base of the brain and..." The policeman must have decided discretion was by far the better point of valor so skipped the anatomical details. "It seems we begin again gentlemen, on the trail of a murderer. I expect that you will be taking a keen interest in matters?" Wilson's eyes glinted.

Coppersmith looked up. "You wish for the pair of us to keep our eyes and ears open?" He had an inquisitive glint in his eye that spoke volumes.

"I *was* going to advise that you keep well clear of the case, however I thought better of it. Too combative by half you two, I remembered that as soon as I saw you whacking that ball into the shrubbery. Now, before I start in there," the Inspector tipped his head towards the hotel, "one or two questions..."

## Chapter Four

Matthew Ainslie was half way down the stairs when he heard Mr. le Tissier introduce himself, and Inspector Wilson, to Greenwood. Arrangements were being made to interview all present at The Beaulieu, so the natural thing would have been to return to his room to await their call. Ainslie didn't want that pleasure just yet, so he slipped into the lounge, finding a nook where he could attempt to gather his thoughts. The rotten luck that seemed to be dogging him was obviously still on his trail; rather than going off sleuthing, the two policemen entered the room and stood by the window. Matthew prayed that he would remain unobserved.

"Your old pals, eh?" Le Tissier watched the two croquet players. "A more suspicious man might take a wary view of their appearance at another murder scene."

"I am a more suspicious man, George. There are small bells jingling in my brain. I was chary of them during our investigations at St. Bride's." Wilson narrowed his eyes, as if trying to see through the glass, over the terrace and into the Cambridge fellows' brains.

"But you invited them in to help you."

“We did. It was partly curiosity, partly instinct, partly because I wished to keep a close eye on them. However, they had a faultless alibi for the second crime—thirty members of St. Thomas’ SCR can’t all have been lying. Now here they are again, lurking about another murder scene. I’d advise you look at their explanation very carefully.”

“I will. You know, I don’t hold much store with alibis. I once came across a murderer who produced forty people who said that he was in the dining room of an eminent hotel at the time of the crime. It was the testimony of the forty-first man, who’d seen him enter the house in question, which brought about a confession.”

“Their being here might be nothing more than coincidence. There’s many twists of fate which would look farfetched if set down in fiction.” Wilson’s shrewd gaze implied he didn’t hold much store by coincidence.

“We’d better get down to it, then, the slog of establishing everyone’s whereabouts on Monday afternoon. At least it’ll give us a clearer view of what’s going on in the hotel community.”

As if on cue, Greenwood arrived to usher the policemen into a private room, giving Matthew the chance to escape from his hiding place. So the men from Cambridge did a bit of amateur sleuthing, did they? That was something which needed careful consideration, especially when Stewart had been so free with his offers of help. Ainslie was going to have to find out a bit more on that front—he had a good idea who to ask—before he let himself get any closer to this intriguing pair.

He was still lost in thought when Wilson called him to answer some questions. Matthew’s explanation of all that had gone on the day before proved, judging by the policemen’s faces, unsatisfactory.

Le Tissier questioned with great determination. “You booked one of the tennis courts yet you say that you didn’t end up playing. Why?”

"As I've already told you, Dr. Coppersmith and I had a difference of opinion before the match could start. I returned to our suite to find my father dead. I assume that Dr. Coppersmith returned to his room."

"According to the man himself," Wilson consulted his notepad, "you didn't play because you made a suggestion he found objectionable."

"What suggestion?" The prickles of anxiety on Ainslie's neck grew more intense.

"He wouldn't say. His exact words were *I'm sure it has no relevance in this case, although it was something ungentlemanly. He'd said he wanted to show me the honey buzzards. Honey buzzards, my aunt Fanny.* We reminded him that we would decide what was relevant."

"Could this difference of opinion have concerned cheating at cards?" Le Tissier had a cold, keen eye. Matthew felt as if he were a creature under a microscope.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Someone has told us that on Sunday night they were fairly certain, although without proof, that your father was attempting to do something at the bridge table, perhaps trying to see other players' hands."

This was too close to home. "I can't say what my father was attempting that night. My mind was on my cards. I will admit that he had been known in the past as a sharp player." Ainslie wondered who could have made the allegations. His thoughts came immediately to Coppersmith; Jonty would be far too gentlemanly. The prickles of tension were turning to nausea.

"We've also been told there was an atmosphere between your father and you. Can you tell us what it was about?"

Matthew rose, onto unsteady feet. "I can, but not now. You will excuse me, I feel quite unwell..."

Dinner was a quiet affair for everyone, conversation



subdued, beds sought early. The only really happy note for Coppersmith was the downturn of the barometer and therefore the distinct possibility that bathing couldn't happen on Wednesday. The two eminent fellows of St. Bride's lay in bed listening to a gentle summer shower caress the window panes. There was no question now of sleeping apart again this fortnight, irrespective of what else happened in the bed. Their affection had gone far beyond sole reliance on physical delights—the intimacy of body and soul had become indivisible. Coppersmith reclined on his front, elbows on the bed, chin in hands, reading a book on calculus which Jonty had hidden fifteen times but which had still mysteriously made its way into their luggage.

Stewart was supposed to be communing with 'The Moonstone', an old favorite which he regarded as an immense comfort. Instead he was admiring Coppersmith's shoulders. "When I was a young boy I used to be taken to the Museum of Natural History. It was my favorite treat, even more so than the zoo—of course I was too young for the theatre then. I adored the glyptodont carapace. I had visions of being a renowned paleontologist, going off to find equally amazing fossils to delight children with. I would caress his back, it wasn't as smooth as yours, Orlando, then tell him all sorts of secrets. Now please don't laugh because I've never told anyone this before."

Orlando had begun to giggle at the mention of the words 'glyptodont carapace', not exactly the sort of expression he expected to hear from the mouth of his lover. "Who do you tell your secrets to now, Dr. Stewart? You don't seem that keen on the iguanodon down with the other geological specimens at the museum, so *he* can't be privy to your innermost thoughts."

"Don't have any secrets any more. I've got you and I tell you everything." He began to caress Coppersmith's back, as if the man were as prime a specimen as any nine year old budding zoologist could desire. "Don't want to try to seduce you tonight, Orlando; want to rub your back while

you read your book and daydream a bit. No beds like this back at the college, so I want to make the most of every moment.”

Coppersmith smiled affectionately, then assumed his more usual concerned look. “Shame about this murder business, though. Hasn’t got you too worried?”

“Strangely enough, given the events of last February, the answer is *no*, Orlando. Exhilarated I would say, rather than frightened. The thrill of the chase and all that.” Stewart’s eyes lit up. “As close as we came to death last time, the thought of applying our brains to another mystery stimulates me.”

“Would you be happy if we got involved?” Orlando was still concerned. The death they’d had such a brush with might have been by razor stroke in Jonty’s room, horrific yet meaningless.

“Are you saying that you wouldn’t want to get mixed up in this, because I don’t believe it for one moment. You’d want to poke your rather attractive nose in, too!”

Coppersmith blushed, having been fathomed out again. “You know me too well.” He looked up, held Jonty’s gaze. “I don’t want a repeat of what happened last time, though. You’re not to put yourself into danger.”

“I promise. I won’t let anyone in the room, bar you or the chamber maid—so I hope she isn’t the culprit. I’ll avoid all people with sharp objects, even Mrs. Tattersall with her knitting needles or the manager with that ghastly tie-pin.” He laughed, returning to doodling with his finger on Coppersmith’s back, while the man in question returned to his beloved numbers.

The day did dawn gray, with something akin to a nip in the air. Orlando tried very hard not to appear smug and even offered to visit any place Jonty chose to name in recompense. Even churches. At this, Stewart’s eyes regained a bit of their gleam, sadly lost when he’d seen the

gloomy skies. He plumped for a day of visiting The Town Church in St. Helier, then taking the railway up to Grouville for a walk over the common then up to the harbor. Coppersmith didn't mind, so long as donning the striped bathing suit was still avoided. He would also have enjoyed a little amateur sleuthing if the chance came up, but didn't want to press the subject.

As with the first set of murders they'd been involved in, the two men didn't have to go seeking for evidence; it wanted to come to them unasked, like a paper clip to a magnet. By the time they'd reached St. Helier, they knew more about Ainslie senior than they could ever have hoped for.

They'd met one of their fellow guests—Mr. Sheringham, father of the spinster who rather resembled a horse—at St. Aubin's station, he having been abandoned by his wife and daughter who were meeting a friend who was very hearty, with no time for males. He expressed his pleasure at having the two younger men to chat to as he traveled. He also rejoiced in having been *the only man to be able to tell the police that he already knew, well, knew of, Charles Ainslie* and had *been able to tell them a thing or two, or three.*

These things Mr. Sheringham shared with his two new friends. "Not that I want to speak ill of the dead," he averred, which indicated that was exactly what he intended to do, "but Ainslie had been blackballed by a London club because he wasn't trusted at cards." More revelations followed, Ainslie in his youth having been banned from one of the Riviera gambling dens because of alleged irregularities at the tables. He'd been implicated in the separation of Lord and Lady Hardley, because of his familiarity with her ladyship. "Furthermore, twenty years ago they say that he accused a certain gentleman, good North Country stock, of cheating at the card table. The matter would have come to court had the chap in question not been killed in a tragic accident cleaning his gun. He'd

made a few enemies I would guess, our Mr. Ainslie.” Sheringham ended his character assassination as the train pulled into the station, allowing him to take his leave on the platform.

Stewart snorted, “I’d love to know how much of that tirade Wilson and his brother-in-law actually believed. Because I know for a fact that Lord Hardley ran away to set up home with the parlor maid; had that tidbit from my mother so there can be no arguing with it. If Sheringham’s wrong on that count he could be wrong on them all. Except the bit about making enemies, that would be very likely.”

“An act of vengeance then?” Orlando shivered slightly in remembrance of the vengeful young man who’d wreaked such havoc in Bride’s earlier in the year.

“Quite likely, Orlando. Terrible thing, the need to exact your own kind of justice. That’s why I would never tell either you or my father the names of those boys who hurt me at school. Between the pair of you, you’d destroy them.” He managed a small smile. “Still, the game’s afoot, eh, Dr. Coppersmith? Wonder if we can find anyone else at the hotel who knew Charles Ainslie, yet hasn’t admitted the fact to the police?”

“That would probably be a better hare to course than chasing alibis.”

“True. I bet most people couldn’t produce corroborative evidence of their location on Monday. That young married couple probably couldn’t speak about what *they’d* been doing.”

“Language, Jonty, we’re in public. You still think it wasn’t his son?” Orlando frowned at the thought of Matthew Ainslie. He still wouldn’t trust him with a loaf of bread let alone another man’s life.

“I doubt he did it, Orlando, I saw how he looked that Monday night. Bleak would be the word, or shattered. The man would have to be a wonderful actor to reproduce the expressions and colors I’ve seen on his face the last two days. There was tension between the pair of them, yes, but I

don't think Matthew killed his father. It'll be like it was with poor Trumper. The last person we suspect will be the killer."

It was Coppersmith's turn to grimace. "It'll probably turn out to be the manager, who objected to the way the man complained about the salmon on Sunday." It was a reasonable reply, so he hoped Jonty hadn't heard the sudden tension in his voice, the distress that must be showing on his face when the relationship between Ainslie's father and son had been mentioned. He'd neatly changed the subject, hoping that the possibility of being asked *what was your father like?* had been avoided again.

It hadn't. "What was your father like, Orlando?"

Coppersmith bridled. "Why must we spoil this day with memories of the past? I thought you wanted to see the church." He strode on ahead, leaving Stewart to come along in his wake like a sturdy frigate to a ship of the line. They reached the church without further talk and Jonty tried to bring Orlando out of his shell by getting him to translate the Latin inscriptions. By the time they had looked at every brass or tablet in the place, Coppersmith felt almost civil again. They took a moment to sit in the pews, enjoying the watery light which filtered through the stained glass.

Bloodhound Stewart was obviously still on the trail, not easily shaken off. "I know that it'll hurt to talk of this, but it'll hurt us even more if we don't. I have very few secrets from you, Orlando, you know the depths of my despair and the summits of my joys. I don't know a thing about your childhood so I'm beginning to imagine all sorts of terrible things that must be much worse than the reality. Share it with me, please, as much as you can bear to tell me now." His eyes looked just as pleading as they had back in the Fellows' Garden when he'd wanted to take the first steps towards healing.

Coppersmith's heart was melted; in the thaw, the story poured out. It was a tale of a repressive childhood which seemed to consist entirely of *Thou shalt not*. A boy who

hadn't been allowed to make his own friends and who'd rejected his parents' choice of acquaintances for him. A boy immersed in studies or sport, both seen by Orlando as being a potential means to escape, to release the tension. A mother who couldn't or wouldn't—or wasn't allowed to—tell her only son that she loved him, either in words or with a kiss. A father who ruled his family with the rod.

Orlando's felt the hot, angry tears welling in his eyes and was thankful when Stewart proffered a handkerchief just in case. He shook his head, took a huge breath, tried to smile. "It's such a relief to tell you all this Jonty, not to be always having to try to change the subject or stall. I feel such a burden has been taken off my back."

"I think we can risk this," Stewart squeezed his friend's hand. "Only God and his angels to see us. I'm fairly sure they won't mind." They sat for a while not talking, then set off for the Snow Hill station in order to take the train north into unknown territory. Coppersmith had been constantly amazed this holiday that such a small island could contain such a variety of landscapes—this trip was no disappointment.

They walked over the windy common, then followed the edge of the beach up to the harbor, stomachs rumbling all the while. Stewart seemed to have some definite end in mind, steering them towards an old tavern by the quay, where they were entertained to lunch by one of the old porters from St. Bride's who had taken over the inn from his father. While Coppersmith enjoyed the beer greatly, the mackerel pate even more, the stories of Jonty's undergraduate days were best of all.

From the moment the landlord greeted him with "I can't recall the name, but aren't you the lad who brought the goat into the porters' lodge?" Orlando knew the trip had been worthwhile. It was even better to discover this misdemeanor had cost Stewart a gating plus two crates of ale. By the time they reached the tale about the three umbrellas and the bicycle, Coppersmith was beaming, contemplating slipping

their host a guinea in return for a written account of all the things that Jonty had been in trouble for in his youth. He was thwarted by Stewart insisting they take an immediate, rather tipsy, leave. The two men wandered home happily, picking wild flowers en route with which to decorate their suite.

Dinner was slightly livelier that evening. Ainslie was dining at the Tattersalls' table, having spent the day answering correspondence and phone calls from the mainland, when he wasn't answering questions from the police. They'd called him again, forcing him into admitting that he'd attempted to embrace Coppersmith, an embrace he insisted was just friendly, but had been misunderstood. He said he'd been feeling unwell, been under nervous strain from work and had acted out of character. The admission had inevitably led to a long discussion about whether this strain had caused an equal tension with his father. Did Charles Ainslie know about his son's altercation with the other male guest? Had Matthew not been feeling unwell because he'd just dug a stiletto into his father's brain stem?

Now he looked tired. Being fussed over by Mrs. T didn't seem to be making him any happier—likely he'd had enough of feminine bustling as he'd been the subject of much sympathy by 'The Misses' Sheringham and Forbes in the bar before dinner. Stewart felt enormous compassion for Ainslie, despite his having attempted to seduce Coppersmith. He wondered what could have driven him to be so reckless as to kiss another man in broad daylight, albeit in the cover of the trees. Desperation of some sort, a seeking of release? A desire to shock his father in some way? Who could possibly tell? At least Jonty could hazard a pretty good guess at what had egged him on. He could just imagine Orlando during the conversation about Oscar Wilde in the bar—being clueless, missing the subtle signs of someone manifesting their attraction to him, nodding in

exactly the wrong places and making the insinuation that he would be interested in an encounter. Coppersmith still had an awful lot to learn about life.

Jonty looked at his lover with great tenderness. Orlando had done well today, relating the terribly lonely, harshly repressed times of his childhood. Stewart still wanted to ask the burning questions *Why did your father cut his throat? Why do it in front of you?* He knew the incident had sent his lover into a self constructed shell for the next thirteen years and had shortened his mother's life considerably. He wanted to know more, but Coppersmith had come so far this day, his spirit still intact, that Jonty wouldn't risk upsetting this particular apple cart by asking now. He'd learn the answers some day.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Orlando was licking the last piece of crème caramel from his spoon, in preparation for attacking a scalding hot coffee.

"Just thinking about chains of events, Orlando, the little subtle chances or decisions that might go one way or another and that end up changing the entire world. Like if I'd taken up the offer to go to University College, Dublin rather than St. Bride's."

Orlando stared down at his empty plate, Jonty instantly recognizing the signs of his distress. He knew it always upset Coppersmith to think about the fact that they might never have met. Luckily the coffee arrived and with it a note in the instantly recognizable handwriting of Inspector Wilson. Among the chit chat was the smallest casual hint that the fellows might keep their eyes and ears open, especially in the direction of Ainslie junior. If they also came across anything regarding the hotel manager (who was known to have worked in the club where Ainslie senior had been black balled) or Mr. Forbes, who was involved with a rival publishing business, then that would be very handy, too. Orlando passed the note to Jonty, raising an inquisitive eyebrow.

Stewart whistled. "Seems he does want the stable gossip



again, Orlando, just as he hinted yesterday. At least we can legitimately snoop around now; I know that you're desperate to." The little smirk in reply told him he was absolutely right.

Coffee was drunk, then port, and so at last came bed. As the two men reached the foot of the staircase, Jonty glanced at the barometer. "Set fair for tomorrow, Orlando. Those bathing outfits will be getting an airing, I'll warrant."

Coppersmith sighed, staring defeat in the face. "I dare say they will, but the logistics of the exercise worry me."

"You needn't be concerned, it'll all be under control."

Coppersmith wouldn't be so easily put off and the conversation continued in bed. "How precisely are we to get ourselves into these costumes, Jonty? There aren't any bathing machines in that little cove."

"I think that we should be rather daring, have them on under our normal clothes. Then we can go into that little clump of trees at the back and disrobe. No-one is likely to be there to see us—if they were we'd have to be eminently discreet. We're used to being that, aren't we?"

Orlando grimaced. "The mere thought of unbuttoning my flies in public, irrespective of whether I'm behind a bush and wearing a full bathing costume underneath, is horrifying. How does your plan work for getting us back into our everyday clothes afterwards?"

"Ah, there's the rub, Orlando. Might have to utilize those bushes again or some big towels. We take turns on watch and hope the wind doesn't gust if a lady walks past." Stewart was pleased to see Coppersmith's jaw drop as far as his chest. He was getting fewer opportunities these days to shock his friend; now he relished every one. "It really is quite simple to keep covered if you're quick about it. Anyway, who would want to look at your great long strip of a body? You're just like a streak of water out of the tap. More meat on a butcher's pencil."

Orlando grabbed Jonty and pulled him down onto the soft mattress. "Just because certain people around here are

built like a carthorse, they shouldn't make insinuations about other people's physiques. There may be very little meat on me, Dr. Stewart, but what there is, is prime fillet. Would you be interested in a practical demonstration?"

Stewart sighed languorously. At last, at long last, Coppersmith had relaxed enough to want to make love again, away from his safe haven. They hadn't done so since a few days before they'd left St. Bride's—it seemed a very much longer time of abstinence. "I thought you would never ask, Orlando. Yes, please."

"Well it's tough for you because you're not getting one." Coppersmith rose from the bed, taking his half-naked and offended body back to its own room.

Jonty didn't know whether to laugh or cry. This was what he'd always wanted of his lover, someone who could give as good as he got, who would stand up to him with a bit of sparring. It was a shame that he'd chosen to fight back over such an intimate matter. Stewart waited five minutes—that was usually enough time for an ordinary storm to blow over—then made his way to his friend's room. This was the second time within a few days that he'd been forced to knock apologetically on this particular door. His welcome was no warmer than it had been previously.

"Body not available, Dr. Stewart," the answer came from inside the room. "It's taken umbrage at the insult and wants to be left alone."

"Not after your body, Orlando." Jonty lied. "Wanted to offer to read to you from that nice book about differential calculus. Won't do any silly voices this time or overemphasize words that might have a double meaning." He poked his head tentatively round the doorframe. This might just work, as Coppersmith loved the sound of Jonty's voice and to listen to him intoning mathematical vocabulary was as pleasant for Orlando as to hear him reciting a sonnet. But Coppersmith seemed suspicious now.

"I know what you're up to. You want to get onto my bed then read to me until I'm lulled into a congenial mood.

You know that I'll fall for you hook, line and sinker all over again. Even here. Even away from St. Bride's. You're dangerous."

Stewart couldn't help grinning guiltily. "You know me too well, Orlando. I promise that this time I'll only read and I'll go back to my own room at any point that you ask me to." He picked up the little mathematical volume, flicking idly through it to a well thumbed page. "I promise that tomorrow I'll guard your body as if it were the crown jewels themselves. Not a single eye will see any unseemly part of it, although I have to say that I think you have no unseemly parts at all. Every one of them is beautiful and if there is the slightest chance that you change your mind about a practical demonstration of my admiration, I'll be more than happy to oblige." He couldn't prevent himself from launching into a huge smirk.

"Jonty, I've warned you once already that I will not be gulled into having sex with you tonight."

Stewart's eyebrows leapt up into his hairline. He'd never heard Coppersmith refer to lovemaking in such blunt terms before. "Orlando! What sort of a book can that 'Bleak House' be to cause you to use such language?"

"There's no-one in Dickens who could drive me to such terms, just a lavender pyjama clad imp who insists on coming into my room to seduce me at every possible opportunity." Despite his earlier words, he motioned Jonty to join him on the bed then gently took his hand. "You produce such emotions in me as I never thought possible. There are occasions when all I can think of is how quickly I can get into a convenient bed with you. I worry that everyone will look at me and know that's what I'm thinking."

Stewart shook his head, gently stroking the hand that held his. "They never will, Orlando. You hide your emotions so well, even from me."

"There are times when I feel the need to expose my soul entirely to you, Jonty. I have such thoughts come into my

head, such words on my lips. When we're at our most intimate, I want so badly to say things which are disgraceful." Coppersmith's eyes were fixed on his hands, probably, Jonty thought, in case they should go off doing something naughty if he didn't keep them constantly under view.

"You can say anything to me, Orlando—use any words, voice any thought. I'll neither judge you nor condemn." Stewart drew his hand down Orlando's cheek, his neck, his chest. The silk of his pyjamas felt cool, as soft as the skin beneath. "That's what love is about; absolute trust."

A brief look of fear flicked across Coppersmith's face. "Trust has its dangers, Jonty. Ainslie must have trusted the man who killed him. If he knew he was meeting an implacable enemy he wouldn't have let him go around the back of him with a blade in his hand, would he? That's what was so effective with the St. Bride's murderer. No-one would have guessed such an innocent little lad could have done such awful things and so he was allowed into everyone's rooms." He stopped short when he remembered what Stewart's trust of the young man had led to.

"You're right of course. We should have spotted him, Orlando. I know we've gone through it before but all the evidence was under our noses. Somehow we ignored it."

Orlando mirrored the movement of his lover's hand, caressing Jonty's face, neck, chest with his long, nimble, capable fingers. "We won't make that mistake this time."

"Indeed we won't. Come, I promised to read that book to you and I count that as binding. My reward will be anything you choose to give me."

"You can have your reward now," Coppersmith leaned forward, kissing Jonty affectionately, then with increasing passion. This wasn't a *goodnight, see you in the morning*, kiss; this was a *the night is young and so are we* type of kiss. He began to fiddle with Jonty's jacket buttons. "I'm sorry I've not wanted to...to make love to you. Have I been a big idiot again?"

“No. Not really.” Stewart lightly caressed Orlando’s hand. “It’s like the old thing about hiding a letter in a letter rack. Where’s the best place to hide a pair of men who want to be together all the time? In a Cambridge college. Away from Bride’s it’s different. Here caution isn’t foolishness.” He moved his hand to stroke his lover’s knee. “You must admit, though, we’ve established by now that no-one’s likely to come barging through our locked door, so it wouldn’t be foolhardy to risk lovemaking.” He turned Orlando’s face towards him. “I really would value it.”

“Then we’ll make it so.” Coppersmith began to undo the buttons he’d been fiddling with.

Jonty could feel the prickles of excitement on his neck, like a sprinkle of raindrops. It had been a long, dry spell, a time of constantly searching the sky of Orlando’s demeanor for a cloud of desire. A cloud which might be persuaded to burst into a sweet rain of passion. Jonty felt parched, arid, desperate to be drenched in the downpour. “The light, Orlando. Let’s put it out.”

In the warm, hushed darkness Coppersmith’s hands once more found his lover’s body. He lowered his head, planting kisses on Jonty’s chest, working up, over the shoulders, onto his back. Stewart reveled in the cascade of kisses, turning his head to better take pleasure in the sweet, moist touch of his lover’s lips. He caressed the soft skin of Coppersmith’s back, tracing the same lazy circles as he often did, the motions which they both relished so much and which made them so thrilled. “Let me kiss you.” Jonty whispered into the charged, electrical air that flowed between them, air like the strange atmosphere that preceded thunder. Only this ambience promised a storm without lightning.

“No; this is your reward. You can kiss me later, bring me pleasure later, now it’s all for you. My love,” Orlando murmured into his lover’s neck, gracing it again with kisses, “my only love.”

Jonty lay back, letting himself be soaked in delight,

allowing his lover's fingers and mouth to run free, trying to dispel any guilt at the selfish hedonism he felt. Orlando had offered freely, he wanted it to be so. Stewart knew that despite all Coppersmith had said these last few days, his unconscious body longed for them to make love again. As they'd slept side by side, Stewart had been aware of his lover's excitement, of his being, as Coppersmith put it—poor shy Coppersmith who had to rely on coy euphemisms—*ready to do his duty*. They were both *ready to do their duty* now, imminently so on Jonty's part, especially if Orlando kept touching there, now.

"Please stop a moment." Stewart moved his lover's hand away. "No, it's alright, I just wanted the chance to relax a while. Get my breath back." He brushed his hand along his lover's pyjamas. "Take these off, eh?" He lay back again, breathing deeply. It was wrong, after such a drought, to let the first tempest blow out in such a short space of time. They should calm down again, make the storm last until they both yearned for the thunder to crash, bringing peace and satiation. Jonty felt Orlando's smooth frame sidle up to him again, sleek with sweat. "Together, please? I don't mind playing games, but tonight is special, our first time away from college. It should be concurrent, not sequential, any good mathematician should know that." He heard Coppersmith chuckle in the darkness.

"As you wish. Always as you wish." Orlando began to pay his attentions again, letting Jonty respond in kind this time.

It was better, so much better, to give and take pleasure in concert. Orlando's skin tasted sweet, as did his hair. His silky skin delighted Jonty's fingers as much as Orlando's fingers thrilled his lover's flesh. The trickles of delight became streams, and the streams became torrents of exhilaration.

"Sh, sh," Stewart whispered into his lover's ear. Coppersmith had begun to moan, just a little too loudly—the walls here weren't as thick as the stone of St. Bride's.

"This isn't the place." He brought his fingers up to Orlando's lips, holding them there.

"I'm sorry," Coppersmith murmured against Stewart's hand, "Should we stop?"

"No!" Jonty wasn't sure he could stop, not now. "No, just keep the noise down. If you can," he added, smiling affectionately.

Orlando became quieter. Stewart could feel his lover's mouth pressed against his shoulder as the tempest reached its crescendo. He wondered whether the man was trying to repress the urge to cry out. One day he'd take him to his family home in Sussex, with its thick walls and long corridors, but for now they'd have to be canny. Jonty whispered more words of affection, broken whispers because it had got close to the point where he'd hardly be able to speak.

"Make it happen, Jonty." Orlando breathed the words into his lover's hair. The plaintive note in Coppersmith's voice made Stewart's heart turn a somersault. Making love to Orlando over the last few months had proved a revelation, the man having depths of emotion that could hardly be guessed at by looking at his stern exterior. If he was serious and shy in the outside world, in bed he was strong yet sensitive, as bold as Thor with thunderbolts of passion, as tender as a fawn. Now he was like a child again, a little boy who'd found an amazing gift—love—and the equally amazing acts of love which could enfold it.

"Of course, Orlando. I do love you, you know." Jonty's hands began to make the final little motions that would make the storm reach its climax, then be done. He almost didn't need Coppersmith to do the same for him; to bring his lover pleasure was going to be enough, this time. As the peak came, with a summer shower suddenly hitting the windows and serenading them with soft pattering, they didn't need to swear their love to each other, protest the fullness of it, as they both already knew that fact well enough.

## Chapter Five

“Just go behind the bush and take your trousers off. Now.” Stewart’s patience had worn dangerously thin because someone was prevaricating. The *someone* still refused to move. “If you don’t do it within the next ten seconds, I will come and do it for you. I mean it. I’ll strip you down to your bathing costume in full view of *everyone*, then I’ll take all my clothes off—*all* of them, Orlando. Then I’ll probably shout, just to bring attention to ourselves.”

It was a hollow threat. The everyone was actually three sea gulls and a sad looking cormorant. The only people who could have paid any attention were on two fishing trawlers and they’d have needed powerful telescopes to see anything in the secluded little cove. But empty as it was, the warning had been enough to get Coppersmith scurrying behind the shrubs while his friend kept watch, eventually emerging in a glorious blue and white horizontally striped costume. One which he felt did justice to his lithe frame.

“About time too. That water looks so enticing, some of us could have been in it ten minutes ago.” Stewart continued to mutter as he went behind the bush, flinging his suit and shirt off. He filled his costume very effectively, so



much so that Orlando had to look away for a few moments to compose himself. He had seen this extraordinary sight before, of course, when they'd donned the handsome garments after breakfast, but he'd been too full of worry to take any notice. Now Jonty was looking devastatingly attractive and he couldn't do a thing about it. Except remember how wonderful the last night had been, perhaps anticipate the next.

There had been a nasty moment, as they left the hotel, when they'd run into the 'Misses' as Jonty now referred to the two young unmarried ladies who were staying at The Beaulieu. The girls had been particularly inquisitive as to how the men were to spend their day. Orlando had silently prayed that the normally scrupulously honest Stewart wouldn't reveal their secret, making it impossible not to invite the females along. He'd underestimated his friend's ingenuity; Jonty had told the ladies that they were intending to study *Scyphozoan* life forms, with perhaps a diversionary examination of the native *reptilians*, which had been quite enough to put the girls off. It was to Coppersmith's great good fortune that the bag they carried, though stuffed with towels and clean underwear, resembled a zoological specimen sack.

"We will look for jellyfish," Jonty had said once they were heading along the coast, "and lizards too, but not until we've swum in the sea." His eyes had sparkled at the prospect.

Those same eyes had dulled considerably after Orlando's display of skittishness concerning fly buttons. They were now regaining luminosity. "Race you to the sea, Orlando!" Pushing his friend out of the way to get a head start, Stewart bounded off towards the waves. He'd counted without Coppersmith's exceptional turn of speed—the man had overtaken him, dodgy Achilles' tendon notwithstanding, by the time they reached the wet sand. They raced headlong into the water until the waves hit their chests, making Orlando splutter. "Just a bit cold, eh, Jonty?"

“You’ll soon get used to it. This is glorious!” Stewart bounced energetically as the waves broke on his body, encouraging Coppersmith to do the same. Once they were almost immersed in the sea, the shock of the cold lessened, providing a pleasant contrast to the heat of the day. The water was beautifully clean and seaweed free in this little cove, allowing a clear sight to the shell strewn sea floor. They soon decided to risk swimming, just a short distance at first, then in great widths across the bay, resting on the rocks in between laps.

“Bracing, Dr. Coppersmith?”

“Marvelous, Dr. Stewart.”

All morning was spent in the water until the rumblings of Jonty’s internal stomach alarm indicated that lunch was required. The picnic the hotel had provided was rummaged out of the zoologist’s sack, to be laid out on the flat stones at the back of the beach. The men had insisted on simple fare—sandwiches, fruit, and bottles of beer—but in this setting, with the glorious weather, they felt like Adam and Eve feasting on the fruits of a yet unsullied paradise. *Perhaps this was what it felt like in Eden before the fall*, Orlando reflected, which was an odd thought considering that it was Stewart who was the religious one.

After lunch they lay on their stomachs on the warm, flat rocks, watching the green lizards scuttling along the paths like little, liquid emeralds. The sun beat down on their backs, the air smelled sweet and they both had the most precious thing in their lives next to them. It felt exactly like the February day when they’d sat in the Fellows’ Garden weeping away the majority of the hurt they’d suffered during the ‘St. Bride’s Murders’, as the News of the World had referred to them. For despite the Master’s best efforts, the gutter press had found the story, relating all its salacious details to the public, although the motivation for the crimes had thankfully remained a secret.

The process of recovery had gone on a lot longer, of course. Stewart’s family had noticed the change in him

when he'd joined them for Easter, Coppersmith in tow. The smile and the easy banter couldn't entirely mask the reserve they hadn't seen during his previous visit. Not to mention the extremely serious young man at his side, who felt like he was being taken to the Spanish Inquisition rather than staying with an aristocratic family as their guest. Orlando knew he'd been mentioned in many a letter or the occasional telephone call, but he'd wondered how they would react to the contrast he made with their own fun loving son. Orlando needn't have worried; now he remembered the time with great fondness.

Much of what had happened during their visit he only found out second hand. How Stewart had quietly taken his parents aside, calmly explaining to them all the winter's events. The murders, the threat to his own life. His mother had cried at the thought of her most beloved boy having a razor held to his throat, although she'd apparently seemed pleased to see the look of tenderness which swept over Jonty's face every time he spoke of his dearest friend. Mr. Stewart, shocked at the events that had rocked St. Bride's, his own college, had patted his son on the shoulder over again, murmuring *brave boy, very proud of you*.

Orlando suddenly jolted back into consciousness. He'd been thinking about the trip to the Stewart's home, had fallen asleep and dreamed the whole experience again, vividly seeing and hearing Jonty's parents, tasting the food, smelling the fresh flowers which had always been in his bedroom. Happy days. These were happy days too, despite a murder and an unwanted suitor. He looked fondly down at the blond head that lay beside his. Stewart snored gently, seeming for all the world as if he were twelve years old and without a care. Mercifully the small copse of trees gave them enough shade to avoid the risk of burning, allowing them to gently bask like the lizards they'd been observing. Orlando thanked the God in whom he didn't believe for being so gracious as to give him such joy.

He watched while Jonty gradually came to, shaking the

sleep out of his head and rubbing his eyes like a small boy. This was how Stewart always awoke, the little rituals he indulged in giving Coppersmith great joy in observing them. He waited for the expected stretch of the arms—it came—the turning on his side—that came too—then the familiar words. “Hello, Orlando. Lovely to see you.” Jonty stretched again. “Been dreaming?”

“I was thinking about Easter, at your parents’ house.”

“Happy times, Orlando.” Jonty began to giggle. “I remember the first two days, your incessant thinking made the house seemed filled with brooding. You were so worried.”

“I was scared they’d hate me. Or guess about us.” Coppersmith shivered at the thought, even though the day was at its warmest point.

“They loved you. Mama was totally besotted, still is. Papa likes you enormously.” He grinned furtively. “And of course they’ve guessed.”

“What?” Orlando felt a bolt of fear shoot up his spine. For all the sunshine, he was suddenly very cold.

“Well, they couldn’t have had us as guests twice over and not guessed, could they? They’re not daft.” Jonty began to study his hands. “Actually, I told them. I meant to tell you before, but you always seemed so skittish about it that...”

Coppersmith felt as if his head would explode. He respected the Stewarts greatly, was beginning to feel an affection for them he’d never had for his own parents. He’d never guessed they *knew*. “When did you tell them? On Derby day?”

“No, back at Easter. By the time you were their guest at Epsom, they knew exactly how things stood. It didn’t make a difference to the hospitality you received, did it?”

Orlando had to admit it didn’t; he’d been treated just like a son, those marvelous few days. It made no sense to him. “I could never have told my parents anything like this had they still been living, Jonty. The repercussions wouldn’t

have borne thinking about. They'd have thrown me out of the house, my mother wailing at the disgrace I'd brought upon the family. My father.....I suspect that my father would have marched me to the police and had me up in court. Probably would have regretted that I wasn't in Nelson's navy so I could have been hung from the yard arm." Coppersmith shivered again, closing his arms around himself. Stewart responding by cuddling him close. The bushes which gave them shade gave them plenty of privacy.

"I've been blessed with a very understanding family for which I regularly thank God. I can only guess how different it must have been for you."

"You haven't the slightest idea." Coppersmith drew Stewart's head towards him, ruffling his hair. "Did you ever tell your parents about Richard?"

"Of course I did, Orlando. How else would they have taken the news about you without so much as batting an eyelid?" Stewart smiled kindly. "It was when I was in my second year as an undergraduate. When I'd made the decision to tell my parents what had happened at school."

Coppersmith's was astonished again. "You hadn't told them before?"

"No. I'd hoped that keeping silent about it at the time would make it feel like it had never happened. If no-one else knew, I could pretend it was all a bad dream. Or a series of them, punctuated by thunder and tears. But I grew up; Richard had helped me to regain my confidence, as had being such a success on the rugby field. Telling all to him had made a huge difference to my feelings about myself, cleansing the guilt, getting rid of the dirt, so I felt that telling my parents would take that healing process further on."

For all that Orlando rarely spoke of his own childhood—he still couldn't open up some of the deepest parts of his life—he'd taken infinite pains to support his lover in sharing his own troubles. "Did it, Jonty? Did opening up help?" The question hadn't just been asked for

form's sake. Coppersmith needed some reassurance that if he ever exposed his own history, completely, it would be a healing and not a harmful act.

"Orlando, I should have done it years before, truly. It was a terrible shock to them, of course, Mother crying buckets as usual. For a woman who is built like, even acts like, the *Dreadnought*, she can be remarkably soppy. I do love her." He smiled beatifically then continued. "As I expected, Father wanted to know the names of the culprits so he could go and horsewhip them."

Coppersmith entirely sympathized with that viewpoint. He'd felt the same when first told.

"I wouldn't tell him; I didn't want to become part of a national scandal. He finally settled for making sure that no boys in the family were ever sent to that particular school again. Any road up, as the footman has the endearing habit of saying, I felt so relieved and happy that I found myself telling them about Richard."

Orlando remembered with great fondness the afternoon Stewart had told *him* about his first love and the lovemaking which had ensued. "Whatever did they say, Jonty?"

"You must remember I hadn't planned to say anything at all; they'd never even met the lad. It just all got blurted out accidentally, and what a shock it was to the three of us. Mother cried once more—she must have to use sails for handkerchiefs—but Father," Stewart smiled again, with real pride, "Father was a revelation. I'd thought, as soon as I realized what I was doing, that I'd made a dreadful mistake. He is such a moral man, Orlando. He's always drummed the Ten Commandments into us, going on and on about the sanctity of the marriage vows." He grinned. "You should hear what he says about the morals of His Majesty. In private of course, he's not daft. To my great astonishment, he launched into a series of disclosures himself. It seems he'd advised Oscar Wilde to flee the country when the scandal about Bosie first broke."

Orlando shuddered. "Not Wilde again. I really don't

think I want to hear anything more about that man.”

Stewart grinned at his lover’s discomfort. “Well, hear you shall. It appears Papa even offered to pay the man’s fare to the continent, although whether that was out of sympathy for him or a desire to get one over on the Marquis of Queensberry or his ‘hideous whelps’—Father’s words, not mine—I never established. Anyway, after much digression on the subject of hypocrites and people who should know better, he’s a terrible one for going off the point, my father...”

“Not something *you* ever do, is it? Ow.” Coppersmith was given a swat for his pains.

“His main concern seemed to be that I shouldn’t lay myself open for blackmail. He recommended discretion, a single partner to whom I would be loyal and no going around looking for ‘boys’. *The downfall of many an honest man, Jonty my son.*” Stewart broke into an uncanny impression of his father. “No breaking the Ten Commandments, either. I’ve been pretty good on most of those points so he’s had no complaints. I reassured him that Richard was my first love, probably my last, which is why I think they both got a bit of a shock when you appeared. They’d thought that their youngest and handsomest son had taken a vow of chastity, thereby breaking the hearts of the entire eligible female populace of London. I daresay some of the male hearts with them.” Stewart finished with a huge grin, earning himself a whack on his backside from his second and only love.

“What did they say when you told them about me? About us?”

“Mama squeezed my cheek, said that she thought you were a lovely lad and Papa slapped my back. He said he felt confident that my heart was placed in the safest hands. They didn’t bat the proverbial eyelid, either of them.”

“I don’t know whether I’ll ever have the nerve to face them again. They know, and when they look at me, I’ll die.”

“You are such a melodramatic idiot. You should have

taken to the stage, then you could have swooned all over 'East Lynne'. They *haven't* treated you any differently, have they? You talked to Mama quite happily all the way home from the racing. I remember Mother interrogating you about whether I was eating enough because she thought I looked thin."

"I suppose so." Orlando decided he would need to think this one through before they resumed the discussion. They lay in silence for a while, enjoying the last of the sun before it went behind the tall trees up on the cliff. To Coppersmith's great satisfaction, they'd dried off sufficiently to be able to put their day clothes back on over their costumes, assuming instant respectability. They strolled back to The Beaulieu, bag full of empty bottles and wet towels, yet not a single jellyfish or specimen of a lizard to frighten the ladies with.

Coppersmith and Stewart spotted Mr. Wilson as they crossed the gardens. It was no surprise when he beckoned them over. "Pleasant swim, gentlemen?"

They didn't ask how he knew. The Inspector seemed to be able to pick up all sorts of things just by observing then putting two and two together. Usually he made four, although in the case of the St. Bride's murders he'd failed to even make three. They simply nodded in reply.

"We've been looking at Mr. Ainslie's business affairs. Unfortunately they're as pure as the driven snow, although I think that's more likely due to the influence of his son. Bit of a fly boy, our Charles Ainslie."

"So we understand. Mr. Sheringham told us at length."

Wilson raised an eyebrow "So you took my hint, gentlemen? Though which of you is Mr. Holmes and which is Dr. Watson I've yet to fathom out. I hope that you'll be sharing the fruits of your labors with us?"

Stewart grinned. "Of course we will, Inspector. Please excuse us just now, I can see the next victims for our



powers of interrogation,” he nodded towards the ‘Misses’, “they can’t fail to fall for Dr. Coppersmith’s considerable charms. I bet that we can persuade them to tell us more about their fathers’ businesses, and any connection there may be to the dead man, than they’d ever reveal to you.” He grabbed Orlando’s arm to drag him off in the direction of the terrace where the young ladies were taking tea.

“Jonty,” hissed Coppersmith, “we’re not going to talk to them, are we?”

“Even Sherlock Holmes was not above a little flirtation to suit his ends, Orlando. We won’t flirt, well, not very much. You can just look serious and ask penetrating questions. You’ll like that.” They bounded along the terrace, Stewart positively beaming at the girls. “Good afternoon, ladies. May we?” He indicated one of the vacant seats at the table, then elegantly placed his bottom on it, motioning Orlando to do the same.

“Did you have any luck with your *scysophoa* or whatever it was?” Miss Sheringham, the bolder of the two, enquired

“Alas no, they avoided our grasps unceasingly. Even the *reptilia* who sported themselves in the sunshine wouldn’t let themselves be taken. Would they, Dr. Coppersmith?”

“Indeed not. Shall I pour you another cup, Miss Sheringham?”

Jonty was hugely surprised at Coppersmith’s forwardness. *Oh, well done, you, rising to the task at last.* If only Orlando could maintain his naturally reserved look, employing those big brown eyes, these girls would be eating out of his hands. In no time he’d wheedle out of them all the information they knew about the Ainslie family. Stewart suppressed a chuckle, thinking about how the girls might have reacted if they’d seen his lover just a few hours earlier, dripping wet in his swimming costume. *They’d have probably fainted. I nearly did.*

The general chit-chat progressed from the doings of the

day to the murder of the Monday afternoon. Much feminine sympathy for the handsome Mr. Ainslie was forthcoming. "Such a lovely young man," gushed Miss Forbes, fluttering her eyelashes at the two gorgeous creatures gracing her table. "Such a tragedy for him. He's taken it so very bravely. He's terribly shy, though."

Coppersmith rolled his eyes at Jonty. *Very shy, my aspidistra*, the look implied.

"I believe that your father knows him through his business?" Stewart turned his charm on Miss Forbes, earning him a slightly huffy look from Miss Sheringham.

"Oh, yes. There's quite a rivalry over some aspects of the business, although they each have their specialities." She poured Stewart another cup of tea, earning herself another glare from her pal. Jonty wondered whether they saw themselves as rivals for his attentions. Or Coppersmith's. Or any eligible young men who might come their way. "Father had quite a lot to say when he discovered that we were both staying here, not much of it complimentary, although not to young Mr. Ainslie, only to his father. I really daren't repeat some of the things he said."

Miss Sheringham snorted. Stewart suspected that she wanted to reclaim control of the conversation and turn attention back to herself. Girls really could be very trying at times. "Well, *my* father could tell you rumors about young Mr. Ainslie, not just his father." Both pairs of male eyes fixed on her.

Stewart tried to appear at his most arch; this was becoming a very amusing game. "Now, you're not going to indulge us in the same tittle-tattle, are you?"

Much feminine giggling. "Well, it was after I was asked by Mr. Ainslie to walk down to the harbor with him. We admired the boats." She cast a small glance at her friend, who looked like she was silently fuming at the fact that she'd never been invited to walk anywhere, by any of the eligible males in the vicinity. "Papa was furious when he

found out. Said that he'd just heard a thing or two about young Mr. Ainslie in a letter he'd received that morning. He said that I wasn't to associate with him anymore."

"Hasn't stopped you flirting with him when Papa's not around, though, has it?" The waspish tone in Miss Forbes voice was noticeable and her friend had the grace to blush.

"Do you know what this letter said?" Orlando tried to produce a winning smile, very nearly succeeding.

"Oh, no. It was just something scandalous. He said it hadn't been substantiated at all, although if it was, there would be hell to pay. Oh, don't look so shocked, Mavis, I'm quoting his very words, not mine." There appeared to be little to be gained by continuing the discussion, especially as the girls seemed to be at daggers drawn, so the young men made their goodbyes, pleading that they had to tidy up before dinner.

At the meal, Ainslie wasn't present. *Dining in his room*, the manager told Mrs. Tattersall, who had of course enquired.

"Hope he's eating as good a piece of pork as we are, Orlando." Stewart was stuffing his face with crackling and apple sauce.

"I don't know where you put it all, Jonty. You should be the size of a house by now, the amount you seem to get through."

"Burn it all off, Orlando. My mother says it's nervous energy. Although they do say she was a tiny little thing in her youth, and I hope I haven't got a shock coming."

As Coppersmith began to laugh, most of the conversation in the restaurant ceased. No-one had seen this serious young man laugh in the six days he'd been there. The occasional smile, yes, but never so much as a giggle otherwise. Two couples had even taken up a little side bet as to whether he'd ever seen the funny side of anything. Now he was laughing, his stern face became extremely handsome. If he didn't notice their looks, Stewart did, and felt very proud to be able to produce such an astounding

effect in his friend.

Dinner finished, coffee drunk, a light hearted game of rummy, then off to their suite. Jonty began thumbing through The Beaulieu's guide to its facilities. "There's a dance every Friday night, Orlando; we must go to the one tomorrow." He waited for his friend to produce a look that would suggest he'd just ventured *there's a hanging every Friday night, Orlando, we must go to the one tomorrow*. He wasn't disappointed. "You can dance, I take it?"

"I had lessons when I was younger. I was actually quite good, although I'm rusty. Still, the basic principles are mathematical so I should soon pick them up again." Coppersmith looked very dignified and Stewart wanted to pinch him. Or seduce him.

"I bet you don't actually *want* to dance, do you?" Jonty received a shake of the head in reply. "Well you'll just have to bite the bullet. It's your duty, given that there are only three eligible men in the hotel and I don't think that Matthew Ainslie is up to dancing yet."

"Who, dare I ask, will you take the floor with?"

"I'll dance with Mrs. Tattersall at least three times and each of the young spinsters twice. Once would be insulting among so small a company of unmarried people yet three times might occasion talk. I haven't decided whether I'll ask the blushing bride to dance, not wishing to arouse jealousy in the equally blushing groom's bosom." Stewart grinned. "I think *he's* the murderer. He found that Charles Ainslie was intending to take his lady wife up into the woods to see the honey buzzards so had at him with a meat skewer."

Coppersmith frowned. "How can you make jokes about murder, Jonty? After last time?"

"It's precisely because of what happened last time that I feel the need to joke, Orlando. Gallows humor you could call it; very well, it might be. I'd rather laugh than cry any day so I'll enjoy myself thoroughly at that dance. I want

every woman in that ballroom to see you looking gorgeous and wish that you were taking her up to your room—I'm ignoring that blush because I think you've learned how to fake them. I want to stand there smug in the knowledge that *I'm the one you'll be sleeping with tomorrow night.*"

As Stewart smiled, Coppersmith noticed for the first time the finest of lines on the skin coming down from his friend's eyes. They added a gravity to his appearance which made him even more desirable. Orlando took him in his arms. "I want to stand in the ballroom and have every woman fall in love with you. I can picture going up to each of them and saying *Dr. Stewart isn't available, ma'am, Dr. Stewart wouldn't kiss you for all the tea in china, miss, Dr. Stewart will be sharing my bed tonight, madam.* I want to imagine the shock on their faces." Orlando pulled Jonty's face close and kissed him passionately, more inflamed by the outpourings of these stupid imaginings than he cared to admit. This fantasy about confessing his love to total strangers was ridiculously arousing. He'd just started to undo Stewart's shirt buttons when a knock on the door made them both jump. Their hands moved like lightning to adjust their dress to something like propriety before they dared turn the lock.

It was the hotel manager, pale and anxious. "I'm sorry to disturb you, gentlemen. I wonder whether you could be of assistance? I know, Dr. Stewart, that you've been friendly with Mr. Ainslie so I was rather hoping that you would come with us and talk to him."

"We'd be glad to oblige." Jonty adjusted his tie. "What's this about?"

"I rather think," Greenwood raised his hand to forestall Orlando "that this calls for only one of you. It's a very delicate matter." The manager looked around, lowered his voice another notch. "I don't think he presents any danger to anyone except himself. It appears that he's threatening to take his own life."

## Chapter Six

As they walked along the plush carpeted corridors of The Beaulieu, Mr. Greenwood explained the situation as he understood it. Mr. Ainslie had taken his dinner in his room. One of the waiters, coming to take away the empty dishes, had found the man with a half empty bottle of whisky at his side and a revolver next to it. When Greenwood had gone up to investigate for himself, the bottle had been slightly less full, and the revolver was being swung around in the air. The manager didn't lack bravery; he'd calmly suggested that Ainslie put the gun down and be sensible.

"You are in no danger from me, my good man," Matthew had insisted, "there's only one intended recipient for this bullet. Me. When I've drunk enough to give me the courage." All this had been spoken with the strange dignity of the truly inebriated, or so Greenwood reported to Jonty.

"I had to fetch you, Dr. Stewart. The only alternative would have been Mrs. Tattersall, except I was afraid that the shock of the gun might kill her."

Jonty wondered whether the man was speculating if a heart attack would be even worse for trade than suicide. He hadn't felt particularly afraid, even before Greenwood's

reassuring words, although he was racked with guilt about Orlando having been left behind in their suite to fret. Coppersmith had insisted that he be allowed to come along, but Greenwood had been equally insistent that only one person was needed.

Stewart once more found himself knocking on the door of Ainslie's room. "Matthew—Mr. Ainslie—it's Dr. Stewart. Can you spare me a moment?"

There was a sound like a chair being knocked over. The door opened. "Dr. Stewart. I'm afraid that I'm unable to attend you tonight. A bit preoccupied." The drink couldn't obscure the dignity in Ainslie's voice.

"That's quite alright Matthew, I just wanted to check that you were quite well. Been a hard few days, hasn't it?" Jonty slowly started to inveigle himself into the room.

"It has that." Ainslie let go of the door, allowing the other man to enter. Greenwood stayed discreetly aloof. Stewart eyed the bottle—it was almost empty now—then surreptitiously looked for the revolver. With a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach, he saw it in Matthew's hand.

Ainslie might have been inebriated, but he seemed quick to notice the look on Jonty's face. "Don't let this thing worry you. Only intended for my own use." He politely indicated a chair. Stewart began to wonder why ridiculously well mannered madmen made a bee line for him. Only Matthew didn't seem mad, not like the St. Bride's murderer had been, just sad and confused.

"I would offer you a drink but there's not much left. I'm afraid your visit will have to be a short one, unless you want to see me kill myself?"

"I've seen a man kill himself before, Matthew." Jonty's words were a chilling echo of Orlando's back in the times of the college murders. "Not a pleasant thing by any means, such heartbreak for the family. I remember the young lad's mother being so determined not to cry when they came to visit the college."

"I have no close family now, Dr. Stewart."

"Call me Jonty, please."

"Jonty, then. There were only the two of us. I've no female relatives to come and weep either with me or over me."

Stewart tried another tack. "What about your business? They must rely upon you, especially now when there'll be so many responsibilities. You can't let them down."

"Why not? I've been let down many times over the last few years and left to get on with things. Perhaps they should have their turn." Ainslie reached for the bottle but Stewart had neatly edged it out of reach.

"What is this all about, Matthew? Why the gun?" There was no point in prevaricating; the man had to be talked out of or into using the weapon, or else they would be sitting here till kingdom come.

Ainslie looked carefully at Stewart, considering. "My father has—had—long wanted me to marry, produce an heir for his business. I've avoided it for what I think will be obvious reasons to you." He looked up, acknowledged Jonty's slight nod of assent. "I think that you'll have guessed by now that my tastes are not those of every man. I've managed to serve them well, with discretion, throughout my life. I've also managed to keep them a secret from my father, or had, until two months ago. How he found out, I don't know—I suspect that he might have had me followed. Anyway, his discovery was followed by an ultimatum. I was to find a girl, woo her and wed her, all within the next six months. I was given the dispensation of a longer period to produce the required grandchild." Ainslie produced an unexpected smile.

Jonty felt that some sort of reply was in order, though he was pushed to know what would be helpful. That gun looked horribly threatening. "I'm always grateful that I'm one of a brood with no requirements of lineage upon me." It was the second time in as many days that Stewart had listened to a story of parental pressure, of being expected to



conform when that act was against all one's needs and hopes. He would thank God again this night for his own parents.

"I'd decided to ask one of the unattached young ladies here to oblige me. I guess that I'm no great catch, yet they seemed to be amenable to letting me woo them. It would have been an unhappy match for me; any match would. I'd have made some endeavor to be a good husband and I'd have tried to produce an heir. Now it isn't necessary." Ainslie sighed, fiddling with the gun.

"Then I don't see why you feel the need to take your life. I could understand if the pressure to do what you didn't want to had driven you to suicide. But the expectation to conform to someone else's expectations is no longer there."

"The knowledge of my own nature remains, Jonty, and the fact that I tried to force myself upon your friend. That was a grave error of judgment, which I've got away with lightly so far. A repeat of such an incident might bring scandal or worse. I don't want to end up with two years hard labor."

Jonty was trying to weigh up whether he could grab hold of the gun, eventually deciding it wasn't worth the risk. "I must admit I was surprised that a sensible man such as you should have acted quite so precipitately. You hardly know Dr. Coppersmith."

Ainslie smiled again, ruefully. "When you ask a man if he understands the true connotation of a book like 'The Portrait of Dorian Gray' and he says that it's one of the things he would very much like to find out, then you've an inkling that he might be sympathetic to your inclinations. I was wrong to act on such small signs. My only excuse is that factors have conspired to drive me to be less than sensible, almost as if I've had to make the utmost of my last chances of freedom."

Stewart nodded. He also made a mental note that he was really going to have to teach Orlando exactly what he mustn't say or do around other people. Probably word for

word, like a child. "You have that freedom back now, Matthew."

"I think not, Jonty. Even if my father's gone, there's just the little matter of this." He reached over to the dressing table and produced a letter, carefully passing it over to Stewart.

Jonty could hazard a guess at its contents before he had even read it—the merest skim through vindicated his assumptions. Blackmail. The one thing that his own father had been so frightened of for his son. A simple threat to "tell all" unless a certain amount of money was placed in the sender's hands by the usual complicated type of route.

"When did you get this?"

"The day after we reached here. I've been worried sick about it, unable to take any action other than reply to the address of convenience that's given, pleading for some more time because I can't access sufficient funds until I'm back home. I received a reply yesterday." He produced another letter, which he read out loud, his tones decidedly more sober now. The threats were still there, termed in even coarser language, the stake had been raised, but the time scale had extended until the start of September, which would be just after Ainslie was due to return home.

"Do the authorities know about this?"

Matthew laughed bitterly. "Should I show them it? Ensure that I was straight on the road to jail? I don't know how Channel Islands' law stands, but Wilson is from the mainland and he'd have no truck with *pederasts* or whatever vile term he'd use for fellows like me. I've known men destroyed by blackmail. Frankly, I'd rather take an easier route to my destruction." He waved the gun again.

"Matthew, would you put that bloody thing down. You're not going to kill yourself. You're going to fight this evil bastard," Jonty waved the letters, "we're going to help you. The Inspector is a man of enormous discretion and common sense; the university wouldn't use him if he weren't. My family isn't without a little influence, they can

wield a bit of clout should we need it. You can't let this person conquer you Matthew, he just isn't worth it." Stewart stretched out his hand. "Give me the gun, now. I don't want to see you hurt for the sake of some twisted individual."

Ainslie considered. "Can't see the point, Jonty. I'll end up just paying this swine until he gets fed up with bleeding me dry, or waiting for the police to arrest me. No life in either."

Stewart sighed. "Then you'd better just shoot yourself, Matthew, because with that attitude there'd be no point living."

Ainslie seemed totally surprised. He looked at Jonty, looked at the gun, then simply handed it over. Whether Stewart had finally persuaded the man that he was being an idiot or whether he'd somehow struck a strange chord among the drunken logic he couldn't tell, but he gratefully received the weapon and gingerly opened the chamber. It was empty.

"Matthew," Jonty was exasperated, "you've put me through all sorts of hell here, then it turns out this bloody thing isn't even loaded!"

Ainslie looked sheepish; he fumbled in his pockets, bringing brought out a pair of bullets. "Must have forgotten".

"You are an idiot, Mr. Ainslie. Now I think you should get into bed and try to sleep. You're going to have a stinker of a head in the morning, which won't help when we see the police." Jonty rose. "My own experience tells me that life is rarely easy. I've faced many a challenge, too, but they each have to be fought, or else evil will win every time." Having delivered his sermon, he took his leave.

"I don't know if decadence has heights or depths, Orlando. Whatever it has, we're at them." Stewart smeared his toast with a thick helping of Jersey butter, then crunched

into it. Breakfast in bed; they hadn't had such a luxury since they'd been in the sick bay after the Bride's murders. The atmosphere then, and Nurse Hatfield's frighteningly starched pinny, with equally starched bosom behind it, had rather spoiled their enjoyment.

Now, sitting together in a double bed, trays on their laps laden with tea, toast and an array of cooked delights, this was indeed another foretaste of heaven. Mr. Greenwood had been extremely grateful for Jonty's endeavors the night before, not least because it kept scandal away from the hotel. A murder they could cope with, but suicide would be a disaster to trade. So a late breakfast in the privacy of their own suite was the least he could do to express that gratitude.

*Such a breakfast* as Jonty kept saying. No bacon or sausages today, although The Beaulieu's butcher must be a man to be valued as his meat had been consistently excellent. This day it was scrambled eggs, light as a cloud, topped with smoked salmon and a tiny spoonful of caviar. Stewart ate as if he hadn't seen food for years.

He'd returned to their suite to find Orlando in his pyjamas, asleep on the sofa, looking worn out. Kissing him gently on the brow, with a murmured *back now and all safe*, he'd flung himself on his own bed without removing more than his tie. So the libations of butter and egg with which he was anointing himself were dripping onto his shirt, not his best silk jim-jams. The hotel laundry would have to deal with it, like all the rest of their stuff.

"I was very worried about you, Jonty." Coppersmith looked very young, charmingly vulnerable.

"But Greenwood assured us he believed that Ainslie was no harm to anyone except himself. He said that before I left our suite, Orlando; I might have had second thoughts, if not."

"He couldn't be sure. A gun is an even more dangerous thing than a razor."

"Not when it has no bullets." Stewart chuckled at the thought of Matthew's blank expression and the sheepish one

which rapidly followed.

"You didn't know it wasn't loaded. Not till the end. You shouldn't have gone."

"So I should have let a poor unhappy man kill himself?"

"You said yourself the gun wasn't loaded." Coppersmith grimaced, fiddling with his toast.

"Don't quibble. Anyway, we didn't know that at the time, which is an argument you just used on me. Are you losing your rational powers under the strain of this, Orlando?" Jonty produced a wicked grin at his friend's evident discomfort. "Anyway, if he'd remembered the bullets, my conscience would have had to live with Ainslie's brains being splattered all over the wall. Had to do the right thing, old chap. Every man has to recognize his responsibility and fulfill it."

"What would it take for you to stop putting yourself into danger? Would I have to beg you?" Orlando looked as if he was going to cry.

"Ass." Stewart took Coppersmith's face tenderly in his hands, delivering an eggy and salmony kiss.

"I mean it, Jonty. I would do anything, give you whatever you asked, if you were just to promise me that you wouldn't be so devil-may-care."

"What would you grant me Orlando, my lord? Up to half thy kingdom?" Stewart's bright smile would have wheedled three quarters of a kingdom from any monarch.

"You have my whole life Jonty; what more could you want?"

"Would you answer me any question that I asked you, without reservation?" Jonty cocked his head to one side.

"If it were in my power to do so, yes."

"Why did your father cut his throat?"

Coppersmith looked as if he had been kicked in the stomach. Jonty saw him wince and grabbed his hand. "I don't ask this idly, Orlando, believe me. It's preyed on my mind this last six months—I can take it no longer. That talk with Ainslie has brought it uppermost in my thoughts.

Please tell me, I implore you.” He saw that his friend remained unmoved so played his last card. “Do I have to get down on my knees and beg, Orlando? Because I will.” He rose from the bed, lowering himself to the floor.

Coppersmith leapt up, dragging him back to his rightful place. “You will never beg me for anything, Jonty. I’d lay myself completely open to you before I let you abase yourself.” He sighed deeply. “I’ll tell you everything.” There was a long pause before he recommenced. “My father wasn’t a well man. He suffered terrible bouts of what I guess the clever folk would call a depressive state or some such term. He would reach such depths, Jonty. I would see him sitting with his ‘black crows’ about him as he would call it afterwards, when he was more himself. There are times when I think I’ve been dogged by those same crows myself, Jonty. But not these last nine months.”

Stewart couldn’t resist a smile, and Orlando almost managed one himself. He carried on. “I suppose that things got so dark for him that he couldn’t see a way to carry on. He was crying *that* day. You know, I had never seen him cry before. We were in the parlor having luncheon; he took the carving knife then said *I hope you know that I have a great fondness for you both—goodbye*. After that...”

Jonty brought out his handkerchief to mop the tears which were flowing along his lover’s cheeks. “Shouldn’t have asked you Orlando. Unfair. Sorry.”

Coppersmith sniffed, blowing into his own hankie. “No, it’s all right. It’s been a relief to tell you at last.” He looked straight into Jonty’s eyes and produced the most relaxed smile that Stewart had ever seen on his face. “No secrets now, not one. Clean slate.”

Stewart caressed his shoulder. “Come on, finish your breakfast. What would my mother say if she saw how lean you are? *Jonathan, you’re neglecting that young friend of yours. He needs at least six square meals a day and a very hearty breakfast*. Only I think she might well say *that young man of yours* because she regards you in the same light as

her other son-in-law. In fact she likes you a sight better.”

Orlando smiled, reflecting the affection he had for Mrs. Stewart, particularly now that she didn’t frighten him sick any more. He picked up his toast and nibbled at it. “So where are we, Jonty? A man’s been murdered. We know pretty well how so there seems little point in speculating as to the weapon employed. Very few people can have an alibi for the time—well, snort, if you wish Mr. *I-don’t-trust-alibis-at-all*, but at least they can eliminate people from suspicion. Unless they drug their friends into supplying them,” he added hastily, recalling their last case.

“Have to start with *why*, Orlando. And who he’d trust to be in the room with him alone.”

Orlando frowned. “We should remember the last time. Start with the most unlikely person.”

Jonty giggled. “That would be you, I think, my dear. Got so cheesed off with the honey buzzards incident you went straight off to take revenge on the old man. You told him you were a phrenologist and wanted to read his bumps; round the back, then Bob’s your uncle!”

Coppersmith very deliberately took the breakfast trays to put them on the floor. He pulled Stewart over, encountering not an ounce of resistance, and whacked his backside. “Idiot, but the idea’s sound. Who is the least likely? That young bride I would say, or Mr. Tattersall.”

“Ainslie himself doesn’t seem very likely to me either, Orlando. I think if he’d stabbed his father, to avoid the unwelcome marriage, he’d have told me last night, then killed himself. He’d not have forgotten the bullets in that case.”

“I trust your judgment in this Jonty, despite my misgivings. So, what now? Look for the blackmailer? I suppose that if Ainslie senior knew about the letters he might have decided to confront the writer. He or she must be here, on Jersey, if they were delivered by hand.”

“I would love to find out more about *our girlfriends’* fathers. Oh, you can cut out the snorting. It was a joke and

you know it was. I wonder what Mr. S had found out that was so shocking?"

"There's the matter of the card sharpery, too. Perhaps someone Charles Ainslie had tricked at the tables had decided to take revenge by digging the dirt on his son." Coppersmith stretched, yawning greatly. "You'll be taking Mr. Ainslie to see our friend Wilson this morning?"

"Not sure Matthew will be in any fit state to see anyone much before this afternoon. I'll leave a message for them both to meet us for a pot of tea; until then the time will be entirely our own. What plans do you have? Will we go to the races?"

Orlando considered. "Are our bathing costumes dry?"

Jonty was astonished. "I believe so. I left them out on the balcony in the evening sun. Why do you ask?"

"Thought we might wander down into that little cove again. Won't need any lunch after this lot; we could swim then try to catch the lizards for a few hours."

"You daft old thing. After days of protesting about it, you actually want to go bathing now?"

"Indeed I do, Jonty. I'll take every opportunity of doing so this holiday, I think. If that's agreeable with you?"

Jonty beamed. "Of course it is. I love the sea, and bathing is simply the nicest way to spend a warm day, such as this one is threatening to be." He rose, taking Coppersmith's hand to lead him through their lounge to the glass doors that gave onto their little balcony. "Sun's going to crack the paving stones today, Orlando. You can see the way it's burning off the mist already, it'll be an absolute scorcher. Oh, hell!"

Coppersmith scarcely had time to say "What's the..." before he was dragged away from the doors and behind a curtain.

"Our female friends have just walked out into the garden. If they look up here they'll get a terrible shock."

Orlando looked scandalized. He'd no doubt forgotten that he was only in his pyjama bottoms and Stewart was in



little more than a shirt. They were still holding hands. “We must take care, Jonty. If there’s a blackmailer here, we don’t want him to be finding himself another set of victims.”

“I’m not frightened of any blackmailer. If anyone was stupid enough to try it, they’d have my parents to deal with. You’re right about the need for discretion, though. We don’t want Mavis and her equally ghastly friend twigging—they’d let all the world know.” He grimaced. “Get your costume on then, the sea awaits.”

As the cove was just as peaceful as the day before, Orlando decided to disrobe right on the edge of the sand with never a twig between him and the rest of the world. This day the rest of the world consisted of two oystercatchers. When Stewart had followed suit, they wandered down to the water’s edge, paddling, splashing and annoying the tiny hermit crabs.

“Not sure I like these fellows, Orlando. Always suspect them of strong arming other people out of any shells that they take a fancy to. My zoological friends try to dissuade me of the notion but I remain unconvinced. Now here’s something I like, though.” He reached into the water, fished around a while until he’d got a handful of periwinkles. “When I was a lad, I would fill my pockets with these things. So either Mother or Nurse, or more usually both, would force me to tip them out. If I refused, they’d turn me over, upside down, and shake me until all the little blighters had gone. It was so very unfair; I don’t think I’ve ever got over it.”

Orlando kicked out, sending a huge spurt of water in the direction of Stewart’s buttocks. “I bet you had an idyllic childhood, Jonty, I can’t imagine anything else with your family. You have no idea how lucky you were, compared to me.”

Stewart stopped trying to coax the winkles to crawl

along his hand... "I do know how lucky I was, and it was wrong of me to make light of it. God alone knows how much I would give to turn back the clock, to make your early years as blissful as mine were. My only consolation is that you can enjoy some of my family's affection here and now, well, not here and now exactly, because if Mother *were* here she would be scolding you for being too thin. She'd make you eat scones with clotted cream. Then she'd forbid you to swim because the water's too cold." The pair of them laughed—that's exactly what Helena would do.

"Perhaps your mother would adopt me, Jonty."

"No, thank you. I already have two brothers, which is two too many. Brother, no. Best friend, lover, colleague, fellow detective; those are enough for me. Come on, let's swim out to the rocks and bask like a pair of seals." He plunged into the water, heading out for the outcrop at the edge of the bay. Coppersmith soon caught him up, began to outpace him, reached the rocks first, then waited to help his friend up onto the smooth platform they formed.

They did bask, like lizards in the sunshine, the water dripping from their costumes giving them a reptilian sheen. It was perfect, until Jonty spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "I know that when someone says *don't look*, the very first thing that people do is to turn around to try and see what they're being warned about, but if you could restrain yourself from looking up onto the cliffs, I'd be very much obliged."

Coppersmith did restrain himself, despite the fact that he was itching to know what was going on. "What is it Jonty? Inspector Wilson, or worse still, Matthew Ainslie?" He was itching to know.

"It's the worst case. We've been discovered by 'The Misses'. They're up on the path and I'm fairly certain that they're deliberately observing us."

"What are we to do?" It seemed so unfair. This was their special place, where they could be happy alone. Three times they'd visited and this was the first time Coppersmith

had seen another soul.

"Ignore them. I'm fairly certain they can't descend to the beach. It's a fair old scramble down that path which I think they'd baulk at. The problem will be if they hang around until we need to return to The Beaulieu. We'll be too wet to just put our jackets and trousers back on."

Orlando felt sick. "Those bushes give plenty of cover from the front, but from above there's very little, apart from the trees we lay under last time. A beady eye could probably penetrate them."

"Do you think that they'd want to see us dishabille, then?" Jonty chuckled.

"I shudder to think, truly. I wouldn't put anything past them."

Stewart crinkled his nose in thought. "I've got an idea, Orlando, a very bold one, but then my father has always said that cowardliness never won a man anything. He should know. He must have been pretty brave to propose to my mother, as she'd boxed the ears of three other men who'd tried it. I don't mean it figuratively, either—she laid one of them out cold."

"And this audacious plan is?"

"I daren't tell you, Orlando, as you probably won't let me do it if you knew." He stood up, making absolutely sure that he didn't look at the ladies, who still remained enjoying the view. "You just keep *them* in sight out of the corner of your eye. If there's no immediate effect you'd better let me know." He started to undo the buttons on the front of his costume.

"Jonty, are you mad? What on earth do you think you're up to? Stop it at once." Orlando made to grab at his friend's hands, but he flapped them away.

"I told you it would make you cross. Just leave me to it and play your part as a scout, I need all my wits about me." When all the buttons were undone, he proceeded to peel the garment off his shoulders. "Any movement yet?"

"There seems to be a distinct fluttering going on up

there. How far do you intend to go?"

"As far as it takes, Orlando, with a quick dive into the briny if it goes too far." He removed his arms from the costume then let it fall to fully expose his muscular chest. "Still there?"

"They seem a bit agitated although they're still hovering. You're not..."

"Might have to." Jonty inserted his thumbs into his waistband. "Here goes, Orlando. We need to frighten them off once and for all with no chance of returning, so if it takes the ultimate sacrifice, so be it." He started to edge the material down.

"Stop! They're on the move." Orlando risked a direct look. "I had no idea they could run so quickly." He began to laugh. "Just in time to preserve your modesty. Put that costume back on now before it gives me ideas."

Stewart obliged, rebuttoning it until he was the model of propriety. "Close call there. Very near thing." He joined in the giggling. "Did I really nearly expose myself?"

"You did. Promise you'll never do it again, except in the privacy of our own rooms."

"Promise." Jonty sighed. "Now back to the shore, Orlando. I've an appointment with the police."

"It was nearly an appointment to discuss indecent exposure."

Inspector Wilson poured a cup of tea, handing it politely to Ainslie; Jonty was left to help himself. Mr. le Tissier had brought a coffee from the bar, while Orlando had disappeared somewhere with his books. They were in the garden of The Beaulieu, with a beech tree providing them with some very welcome shade on such a scorching day.

"Dr. Stewart spoke of something that was worrying you, Mr. Ainslie. I see that it's been arranged for us to talk without risk of being overheard, so I might conclude that

this is something of a personal nature. Am I correct?"

Matthew nodded his head, fumbling reluctantly in his pocket. If his whole character was about to be exposed, he couldn't delay the disclosure. "There are letters I received after we arrived here last week, letters that were delivered by hand under the door of our suite. I've assumed that they were sent by someone at the hotel. The content of them is odious in the extreme." He handed the papers across to let Wilson read them.

The Inspector passed them to le Tissier, who perused each page twice, nodded his head on several occasions then returned them for Wilson's attention. He only needed one viewing before folding them up and placing them in his pocket. "Odious indeed. Is there any truth in the accusation?"

If Matthew was surprised at Wilson's forthrightness, Jonty must have felt the same. "Is that a fair question to ask, Inspector?" Stewart expressed his shock. "We're talking about someone potentially incriminating themselves here."

The two officials both snorted. "I don't know about your position, gentlemen," le Tissier began, "but I regard blackmail, particularly blackmail that may be linked with murder, as being of much more importance than any sexual indiscretion." He faced Ainslie, who felt the force of his gaze like a blow. "I can assure you that I won't be taking any official action should these accusations turn out to be verified. I've received no official complaint; I'll make no case."

Matthew took a deep breath, only partly reassured. He'd believe the 'no case' part when he saw it. "The substance of the allegations are true. I do prefer the company of men, the particular company of men. However, some of the details given are not accurate and these I'd deny unreservedly. I've never resorted to *paying for boys* as is alleged, nor have I *kept an establishment*." He looked to Jonty, who gave him an encouraging nod.

"Do you have any idea who could have sent these?"

"If I did I would have taken my revolver and used it on him, or her, last night, rather than making a botch job of trying to kill myself." Ainslie registered the surprise on the constabulary's faces, then turned to Stewart. "You haven't told them?"

"Of course not. Not the done thing at all."

Wilson whistled. "A revolver, eh? I think that you'd better let us keep that too, just in case you find out who the writer of these vile things is. One murder is enough to be dealing with, you know." He smiled kindly, shaking his head as if he were addressing a child. "Can't be taking the law into our own hands. That's why I do appreciate that you've seen fit to share these letters with us. Is there anything else that you wish to share as well?"

Ainslie shook his head slowly. "I can think of nothing else relevant. As far as I know, my father wasn't aware of these letters; he would have kicked up a hell of a fuss if he had been."

"Was he aware of your *tastes*, as we might term them?"

"He was. Although I hadn't chosen to tell him, he'd somehow found out. I believe he'd taken to having me followed, although it could be he followed me himself. Not a pleasant thought, but that's how it can be. We don't all share our parents' trust." He glanced sideways at Jonty, who seemed fascinated by his teacup.

"What was his reaction?"

"He wanted me to get married, to give him an heir and me a veneer of respectability. I had agreed to do so." Ainslie waited for the next question, feeling relieved when the attention turned to Jonty.

"Just forgot to mention the matter of the gun or the suicide attempt?" Wilson smiled ruefully at Stewart.

"I had every intention of making sure it was mentioned here—by Mr. Ainslie himself, preferably. He's had a lot to face up to these last few days without someone blabbing left right and center about his affairs. That wouldn't help anyone."

“So you regard talking to us as blabbing?” le Tissier had a cold edge to his voice which made Ainslie’s hackles rise. He wasn’t alone.

“Of course I don’t. Inspector Wilson knows that, and I’d hope he sees fit to verify the fact. I’ve never hidden anything relevant from the police, either now or before. Likewise I don’t indulge in idle gossip.”

“Then Mr. Ainslie, will you tell us exactly what happened?”

Matthew related the events of the evening before, as well as he could remember them through the alcoholic haze, Jonty chipping in with the odd point. Only the personal things concerning Coppersmith stayed unspoken.

“So,” Jonty took up the tale, “I believe the tension I told you I noticed between them can be attributed to the pressure his father was driving Matthew with. Forced marriage is an awful weight to put on anyone.”

“An awful enough thing to make someone kill the person making the demand?”

The full force of le Tissier’s question knocked any reply out of Ainslie. Jonty soon came to his rescue, an uncharacteristic ice in his tone. “I don’t believe that for one moment. Matthew would have made a better fist of killing himself if it were true. I think that nonsense with the gun was entirely due to the letters which now reside in your pocket, fear rather than guilt being the motive.” He rose, plainly shaking with anger. “I believe that I’ve said all I can, gentlemen. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance,” he turned to Ainslie, “to any of you.”

As the policemen watched him go, le Tissier unexpectedly laughed. “Have you entirely eliminated Dr. Stewart as a suspect, Gerald? I would imagine he’s a formidable young man, should you get on the wrong side of him.”

Wilson chuckled. “I don’t doubt it, but I think he would have no reason to kill your father, would he, Mr. Ainslie?”

“Not that I know of. I don’t think we’ve refused to publish some nice little book on John Donne that he’s spent hours sweating over.”

“I don’t think the answer lies with your publishing business. It’s been going along quite nicely since you effectively took over the running of it last year. My spies suggest that there’s little to pursue there now. Is it,” le Tissier obviously hadn’t forgotten that Matthew hadn’t answered his question, “a personal thing?”

“I assure you I didn’t kill my father. We may not have seen eye-to-eye but I loved him dearly.” The memory of a dozen conversations, ill-tempered or pleasant, ran through Ainslie’s mind.

“Who else held a grudge, then? This blackmailer? Or someone your father fleeced at the tables? Lord Hardley? What about our academic friends—do they have reason? Let’s turn this case on its head. What if *they* share your inclinations and somehow your father found out. Would he have tried a little blackmail of his own? Dr. Stewart has the intelligence to know just where to stick in a blade.”

“George!” Wilson’s sharp warning reminded his colleague he was in the presence of the victim’s son. There were proprieties to be observed, even if they believed the man guilty.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Ainslie.”

Matthew no longer had any idea of what was truly proper. He wasn’t even sure he cared very much either way. “I can’t see Dr. Stewart’s weapon of choice as being a stiletto sneakily driven into someone’s brain.”

“True.” Wilson continued to use placatory tones. “He’d be more likely to beat a man to pulp with those fists of his. Have you seen the muscles he has on his arms? Quite extraordinary.”

“I knew his mother in her younger days; she’s given him both his striking looks and those muscles too.” A wistful look crossed le Tissier’s face. “She was far above me, you know. I was just a young subaltern and she had a



whole raft of the lesser aristocracy at her feet.” He broke into a laugh. “Didn’t stop me proposing, though.”

“You amaze me. What did she say?”

“I have no idea. She laid me out with one great blow; she must have had a punch like James Corbett. She was terribly sweet about it afterwards, sent me flowers and an apology. She sent a firm ‘no’ as well.” He sighed. “I just might have been that lad’s father.”

While the constabulary thoughts turned to nostalgia, Matthew saw his chance of a hasty escape, excused himself, and left.

## Chapter Seven

Stewart lay curled up at Coppersmith's side. He'd huffed all the way back to the room, come in muttering under his breath, plonked himself down in Orlando's lap then started to kiss him. Over and over again, until all the anger had gone. He'd then snuggled his head against his lover's neck, letting Orlando stroke his hair.

"That was most delightful, Jonty. I'm not sure what I did to deserve it."

"It was nothing you did, apart from being adorable, which isn't anything to your credit. It's your breeding accomplished that."

"So why the kisses?"

"Apart from the fact that I love you? Because I had a rough time with the inquisition down there and I wanted someone to be nice to me." He rubbed his nose against Coppersmith's neck, sighing. "You're usually nice to me, so that's rather convenient." They sat in silence for a while until Stewart became aware of the legs beneath him starting to wriggle. "Orlando, have you got ants in your pants?"

"No, I've got an elephant on my lap. You forget sometimes how much you weigh, Mr. *Muscles-in-my-spit*. If

you want me to be able to trip the light fantastic tonight with the assorted ladies of the hotel, then you mustn't crush my legs like this. Your mother thinks I have very elegant limbs and wouldn't want to see them squashed so."

"When did my mama say you had nice legs? I don't remember any such conversation."

"You weren't there. We were talking over tea, while you were off looking at your father's print of *Ranjitsinhji in his pomp* as you described it. She told me how much she'd enjoyed tennis in her youth, how fine the young men had looked in their 'bags', as she called them. She said she thought that my legs probably would look very nice in white flannels and that all the girls of her youth would have broken their hearts over me."

Jonty sniggered. "She used to say the same to me. Fancy finding out one's own mother is such a hussy." He slipped off Orlando's knees, making himself comfy at the end of the sofa. "Now I'll have to sit here contemplating how to tell Papa that his wife has been chatting up her own son's boyfriend."

Orlando couldn't resist laughing a moment longer. "Imbecile. Idiot. Any other insult beginning with I. You are so ridiculously sweet when you pretend to be put out. Curl up there like a good boy while I finish my chapter then I'll give you a nice kiss before we have to get the old boiled shirts on." He reached into his pocket and produced a paper bag. "I'll even give you my last bulls-eye."

"Why do I have the distinct impression that you're treating me like the family pet?" Stewart spoke petulantly, but he took the last sweetie all the same.

"Because I am, my own little rabbit."

"You are extraordinarily soppy today, Orlando." So saying Jonty simply shut his eyes for twenty minutes dozing, the bulls-eye left to grow stickier every minute in his little paw.

Dr. Stewart spun Mrs. Tattersall around the floor with an easy smile and a graceful air. The lady must have been a talented dancer in her youth—she still retained a lightness of touch in the foxtrot which belied her years. Coppersmith was stuck with Miss Sheringham. It had been impossible to avoid asking someone to have the first dance, especially as Jonty had whizzed over to his elderly friend the minute the band had struck up. Orlando held her awkwardly and their dancing was ungainly; not the fault of either partner, it was the lack of mutual confidence which threw them out of synch. Far worse was the girl's prattling. She droned endlessly about the doings of the day, Coppersmith being very careful this time not to just say *yes* or *no* at any random juncture. He'd learned his lesson well.

The evening promised much. The small orchestra was very good, everyone present had put on their finery with aplomb, even Jonty and Orlando's shirts had turned out crisper than Nurse Hatfield's fiercely starched pinnies. If the ladies at dinner hadn't all been exceedingly well mannered, then one or two of them might just have drooled into their consommé at the sight of these two dashing young men, especially as Coppersmith could never quite keep his hair as well controlled as the other chaps, despite quantities of brushing and pomade. The curls seemed to want to free themselves, giving him a raffish air.

It was to the great delight of those same females that these two single gentlemen had attended the dance. Many a feminine bosom was in a high state of anticipation of an invitation to take the floor. Coppersmith was certainly handsome, his reticence and sternness giving him an allure which many a lady from Girton had found appealing. There had been more than one attempt to lure Dr. C out to smell the wallflowers, in an attempt to get behind that maddening reserve. Stewart was strikingly good looking, always seeming to attract the females whenever the men were in

mixed company. He was gracious and flirtatious with them all, which raised the ladies' hopes in vain.

The two friends decided to sit out a few dances, much to Orlando's satisfaction, as he was able to get a few quiet words with his best friend. "I'm glad that propriety means that Ainslie can't show his face, Jonty."

"Are you? Still angry at him? I think he's been a pretty plucky chap."

"You don't need to tell me that, I've personal experience of it."

"Oh, do give it a rest, Orlando. That particular incident is done and over. If you have any serious intention of helping to catch this murderer then I think we should be getting Matthew on our side. I suspect that he could wheedle more secrets out of 'The Misses' than either you or I could. Miss Sheringham seems particularly smitten."

"Well, he can let them spy on *him* bathing and see how he likes it."

"Are you going to take umbrage with everyone here, Orlando?"

Coppersmith had the grace to color. "No. No, I'm sorry, Jonty, I know I'm being a real curmudgeon. I do like the Tattersalls, indeed, there's several couples who are pleasant. I think I could even like Ainslie if he hadn't tried the whole honey buzzards stunt. But the spinsters of the parish I draw the line at."

"Is there anyone else here you like? Anyone in particular? Anyone with dark golden hair, blue eyes and a smile which his mother says makes the darkest day light up?" Stewart grinned, flashing his pretty little white teeth.

"Sounds absolutely delightful. If I meet such a paragon of beauty I'll befriend him straight away."

Stewart giggled, then made a sign for the waiter to replenish their drinks. "Need a bit of Dutch courage before I take the floor with Miss Forbes. You can enjoy a chat with Mrs. T." Dutch courage downed, the men went off in search of their prospective partners.

“Dr. Coppersmith!” Mr. T sat beaming, probably with pride at the accomplishment his wife showed at dancing. He’d earlier confessed that it gave him enormous pleasure to see her in the arms of a handsome young man. It also gave his bad leg a well deserved rest, so dancing with her was doing them both a favor.

“We were taught to dance as children, my brother and I.” Mrs. T seemed caught up in a reverie. “My mother thought it as important as any other accomplishment, to be able to hold your own on the dance floor. That’s how I met Mr. Tattersall, back at a rather stuffy ball in the Guildhall. My, the things we did in our youth, Arthur and I—Arthur being my brother, my dear, not Mr. T who is called Aloysius, although he’d rather nobody knew of it.”

Coppersmith smiled, as relaxed in this lady’s company as he was tense with ‘The Misses’. “I can imagine you were quite a hit with the gentlemen.” He grinned again, imagining what Jonty would say should he hear his lover almost flirting. Although whether it counted as flirting when the recipient of one’s attentions was seventy-odd was a moot point.

“Oh, I had my moments. On the floor and at the tables, my parents having brought us up to be proficient at cards, too.”

“I could tell that from the first evening when we played bridge. They succeeded creditably; rarely have I seen such perceptive play. Is your brother still keen on cards, or dancing?”

“Oh, no, duck. Arthur died a while back. He’ll be beating St. Peter at a rubber or two now, I dare say.” She smiled wistfully. “You remind me of him, you know. Terribly serious.”

Orlando blushed and studied his hands. Even seventy-something women could cause embarrassment. “Would you like to dance now? I know that you’ve promised Dr. Stewart, but he’s rather occupied at the moment.”

They both looked over to where poor Jonty was trying

very hard to politely extricate himself from the grasp of Miss Forbes. "Oh, he is rather, poor lamb. I think that someone should rescue him," her eyes twinkled. "As it wouldn't be seemly for you to do it, I'll have to oblige." She sailed over the floor like a ship of the line, taking Jonty's arm. "I'm so sorry to have to take this man away, my dear. He's promised the next dance to me, and the elderly must be indulged."

They glided onto the floor, leaving behind an indignant Miss Forbes. Stewart whispered, "You just about saved my life there. She was insisting that we go out onto the terrace."

Mrs. Tattersall giggled like a schoolgirl. "I dare say you didn't want to have any truck with that sort of thing." She looked over to Dr. Coppersmith, then back to her dancing partner. "Not with Miss Forbes, anyway."

"You sly old thing, how on earth did you guess?" Jonty had decided long before that he couldn't hide anything from this shrewd woman. She reminded him of his mother, except in physique, and you couldn't keep much a secret from the Honorable Helena Stewart, either.

"Oh, I've seen a bit of life myself, young man. You youngsters think that you invented romance and frivolity, but it's been around as long as Adam. Not all the lads I used to know were interested in the girls; it used to cause such a scandal at times. I believe that you should live and let live, as long as the innocent don't get hurt." Her face suddenly became serious, "I hate to see the guiltless suffer."

Stewart shivered a bit, thinking of his schooldays, as he often did when people referred to abuse of the innocent. "Especially children, Mrs. T. I hate to see them wounded."

"Oh, I so agree with you, Dr. Stewart. I have two lovely sons and four adorable grandchildren, a great grandchild on the way, too. It would break my heart to see anyone bring them to harm. I dare say your mother thinks the same."

"She does indeed, ma'am. She has four children, three grandchildren and the loudest voice in the Home Counties. If she found out that someone had been hurting them, she

would be a fearsome protector of her kin." He smiled ruefully at the thought of someone sending the sort of letter to him that had been pushed under Ainslie's door. His mother would have found the identity of the sender within days—she had all sorts of contacts, that woman—then he would have been torn apart, limb from limb. Both figuratively and probably literally.

Mrs. Tattersall nodded. "It's a wicked thing that the guilty seem to get away with things so often. It's proof you need of course, solid proof. People who are willing to stand up and speak the absolute truth. Neither of them very common commodities." As the dance came to an end, they made their way back to the little table where Mr. T was sitting trying to look inconspicuous and as little like an Aloysius as possible.

Mrs. T leant over to whisper in her young acquaintance's ear. "If you want to sneak out onto the terrace with your friend, I don't think anyone would notice. I'll get Mr. T to ask Miss Forbes to dance, and Miss Sheringham seems to be entangled with that young newlywed, much to his wife's disapproval, if I'm not mistaken."

Jonty nodded, happily, then sidled up to Orlando, who was lurking in a corner. "Fancy taking a turn outside? I have a mind for a cigar." Stewart took the occasional smoke although he knew Coppersmith didn't care to see him indulge. He alleged it made his lips taste strange. On this occasion Orlando simply nodded, no doubt happy to get out of range of 'The Misses'.

The terrace was pleasantly cool; after a turn or two they decided to amble over the lawn to the little fountain, where they could perch on the edge of the bowl and chat without fear of being overheard. Stewart began to rustle in his pockets.

Coppersmith sighed. "Must you? I know that you rarely indulge, but tonight it would be so pleasant were you not to." There was something in his voice which made all sorts



of implications as to what might happen should Jonty's breath remain unsullied.

Stewart gave a soft answering chuckle. "As you wish, Orlando. Just let me light one for form's sake so that we appear to have a valid reason to be here." Anyone could have heard the striking of a match against the stones and seen the faint glow as the cigar gently came alight.

"Thank you."

"My pleasure, Orlando. Always like to make you happy."

They sat in silence for a while, until Jonty felt the need to talk. "Do you know the Tattersalls have been married for fifty years? Can you imagine us in our seventies? Your hair would be completely white and I'd be the size of my mother."

Coppersmith giggled. "Perhaps I'll have to start rationing your Liquorice Allsorts. You'd be Professor of English by then—it would be beneath your station to indulge in them."

Jonty snorted. "You'd be the Mathematics Professor and therefore not allowed even the smallest bulls-eye, not even on Sundays. It's against University rules, I've read them. English Professors, the same august text states, are expected to live on nothing but truffles and champagne, with fish and chips on special occasions." He began to giggle. "Do you think we'll still be holidaying together, or will I have got so tired of you I've put poison in your Chelsea buns?"

"I think we'll still be together, growing old and disreputable. We'll be permanent fixtures in the college. No-one will dare try to dislodge us." A bright thought appeared to have struck Coppersmith. "You might even be Master by then; that would be wonderful." His tone suddenly changed. "They wouldn't let me live in the lodge with you, though, would they?"

"Probably not, Orlando. Don't think the world will become so enlightened so quickly. Could move you into a

set of nearby rooms though, then have a secret access constructed. You could sneak in and out at any time, should your arthritic old knees be up to sneaking, or indeed *anything* at that age."

"They're not arthritic now, Jonty."

Stewart giggled. "No indeed. I saw you tripping quite nicely with Mrs. T, lovely movers, both of you. Shame I couldn't have been your partner." He reached a hand across to squeeze Coppersmith's arm "Do love you, you know. Don't say it enough."

"You don't need to say it, not in words." Orlando briefly caressed Stewart's fingers. "It'll be the last dance soon. I'll take Mrs. Sheringham if she's up for it, and you ask Mrs. Forbes, that'll wipe the smiles off the faces of their husbands. And their daughters. Then we'll be allowed to make our way up to bed."

"A handsome plan. So to bed, where actions may be given free rein to express what words can scarce dare to hint at."

"That's lovely. Is it Shakespeare?"

"No, it's Stewart, inspired by a theme of Coppersmith. I hear a waltz; duty first." Jonty made an elaborate salute.

"I hope you don't intend to *do your duty* by the young ladies?"

"You know I only ever *do my duty* by you. If you want, I'm ready to do it tonight."

Coppersmith was convinced that his heart would have leapt out of his chest had he not his best boiled shirt on to contain it. "Then mark your card for the last dance with me, Jonty. To be performed in our suite."

The sound of the orchestra still rang in their ears as they opened the door to their rooms. Orlando closed it carefully behind him, then immediately took Stewart in his arms. "I promised you the last dance. We'll have it here and now." They began to slowly waltz across the room, Coppersmith leading them expertly between the little tables and the sofa.

"Why must I be the woman? I'm sure your

mathematical noddle would be better at reversing the steps.”

“You can lead next time. If your home in Sussex is as spacious as you keep saying it is, there should be ample room for dancing.” Orlando drew his lover close, took in the aroma of his hair, newly washed that afternoon and still smelling of lavender. “If I were a woman, I wouldn’t let anyone else dance with you.”

“If you were a woman, I’d get my mama to tell you that I’d been injured in a certain part of my anatomy in a hunting accident, so couldn’t be interested.” Jonty buried his nose in the folds of his lover’s jacket.

“You are such an idiot at times.” Coppersmith kissed the top of Stewart’s head. “I sometimes wonder if I really do love you, or simply tolerate you in an attempt to keep you from causing chaos amongst the rest of the world.”

“I have no idea what you think, Orlando, not being inside that handsome head of yours. But I do know what this means for me and that’s pure adoration. Well, perhaps not so pure, the way that I feel at the moment. That wretched bed in your bedroom is singing to me, giving me the most impure thoughts.” He began to play with Coppersmith’s shirt buttons.

“Then let it sing all it wants, Jonty. Even if I was tone deaf I could follow that song very clearly.” Orlando put his arm around his friend’s waist, began to dance again, the sensuous steps of the waltz leading them into Stewart’s bedroom. As they reached the bed, Coppersmith gently pushed Jonty onto it, kneeling by his side, pinning down his arms to better smother him with kisses.

“Very masterful, Orlando.” Jonty broke the fourth kiss and came up for air. “I think you suit being dominant, taking the lead.”

“I like being masterful.” Coppersmith remembered the first night of the holiday, when he’d felt so protective. How wonderful the sensation of caring for his lover had been. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Jonty, as he had the annoying habit of doing at the most

sensitive moments, began to giggle. "Just as well you weren't born a Viking, isn't it? Or one of the Mongol horde. Fat load of use you'd have been at the old rapine and pillaging. *You don't mind if I steal your sheep, do you?* Of course I don't mind, you great pudding. It's a lovely variation on your usual romantic style."

Coppersmith wondered if he were the only man in the world to find the term "great pudding" strangely endearing. He laid his fingers to his lover's lips then began to unfasten Jonty's shirt buttons, stroking each inch of skin as it was exposed. Once the entire line was undone, he pushed the crisp white linen back to expose Stewart's magnificent chest. It hadn't acquired the golden sheen that the summer sun had placed on Jonty's face and hands, this flesh always being hidden behind shirt or swimming costume. Its pallor made it gleam in the thin stream of moonlight which pierced the crack between the curtains. Orlando caught his breath once more at the beauty of his lover's body, hastening to express his awe with lips and hands. It seemed ridiculous that Jonty's skin tasted so delightful, a mixture of sweat, soap, even—now they were on holiday—the added element of the sea.

"If this is you being masterful, then you can be so whenever you want." Stewart almost purred, lying back to luxuriate in Coppersmith's attentions.

"I'm not being as masterful as I'd like to be, not yet." Orlando started to work on more buttons, these ones below the waistline. More flesh was uncovered, more skin to delight, flesh ready to be taken out and put on parade. "I see you're ready to do your duty for me." He sighed longingly, kissing Jonty's mouth with long, fervent kisses.

"I've been ready for that since you started to dance with me." Stewart fingered his lover's curls. "I don't understand how these things work with the female of the species but I can't help feel that every woman you danced with must have been excited in some way. You just have this effect..."

Orlando didn't dare think of what effect he had on

women; ignorance would be bliss on this point, so long as they didn't try to lure him into the shrubbery. The only person he'd ever desired was Jonty, and all he wanted to do now was to make his Jonty lose control, to make him squirm until he had the blissful look on his face which only came when they made love. Tonight Orlando would see that look by moonlight and it would almost break his heart in its perfection. "Come on, then. Let me work my effect on you." Coppersmith began stroking, fondling, watching his lover's expression all the while, until the moment of climax came and Jonty's face, his eyes screwed tightly shut, shone with exhilaration.

"I do love you, Orlando." Stewart at last found his breath, held his lover tightly. "Please don't dance with any man except me."

"Idiot." Coppersmith kissed his friend with great affection. "There has been no one but you, there will be no one but you. Now, if you would be so very kind, there's a poor soldier here who wants to do his duty and please could you make it so?"

## Chapter Eight

Saturday dawned dry and bright, but it took a long time to penetrate into the skulls of the two young men who occupied one of the beds in one of The Beaulieu's best suites. Coppersmith eventually woke with a start, leaping immediately from his rest like an old sailor when the drum beat the crew to quarters. He automatically made his way to the other room, arriving with only minutes to spare before the maid brought the tea. It was only then that he realized he was in Jonty's bed and had left a blond head peacefully snoring in his own.

Orlando spent a good ten minutes just worrying about whether the maid had noticed, whether she would say anything to her friends. Which then led him to another ten minutes of speculation about how being a servant in a hotel might lead you to having all sorts of sources of information that could be tapped into for blackmailing purposes. Realizing that his tea had grown cold in the untouched cup, he ventured across to the other bedroom, where gentle rumblings told him that Stewart was still asleep, which at least gave him the satisfaction that he too had missed out on a refreshing brew. But he wasn't to be satisfied; Jonty had

obviously woken up, drunk half his tea then gone back to sleep, the little swine. Orlando was so cross that he pulled back the blankets, rolled Stewart onto his stomach and whacked his bottom.

"Ow, stop it. Stop it now." Jonty turned back over, with the pillow in his hands to swat Coppersmith. A swift glance around the room made him realize he wasn't quite where he should be. "Close call was it, Orlando?"

Coppersmith swallowed hard. "Three more minutes sleep and it would have been two years hard labor."

Jonty grinned. "That's such a romantic expression to use to your lover in the morning, especially after a night of bliss. I don't know how I cope with the ardor of your speech."

"You'll never really want to take me seriously, will you?"

"No, not if I live to be a hundred. Especially when you pout like that." Stewart stretched. "Unfortunately it seems to be time to get dressed. I have every intention of carrying on the stunning impression we made last night. I'm going to wear my most outrageous blazer, and since you don't have a jacket of sufficient élan to match it, I'm going to lend you a tie that will knock the ladies' hats off."

Orlando grinned, refusing to show the distinct misgivings he had about wearing one of his friend's ties, some of which were particularly *forceful*. "As you wish. I'll happily concede that I did quite enjoy myself at the dance last night, despite my qualms. If you promise that you won't say *I told you so* or anything like it, I'll state that you were right again and that I should trust you much more than I do."

"I won't say it, Orlando. It'll be enough that you'll concede to wearing any tie I choose."

"I agree."

"Good. Because I've brought the red one."

"Except the red one. Any other, I beg you."

"Splendid, seeing as I haven't packed that one at all. It's

the orange one I had in mind.” As Jonty grinned like a madman, Orlando’s only possible reply was a groan.

There was a letter in a familiar hand waiting for Dr. Stewart on his breakfast plate, a letter freshly arrived on the Friday boat. He smiled in recognition of the writing then stuffed the missive into his pocket, having learned at a very early age that communication from the Honorable Mrs. K was best opened in private. They strolled onto the terrace for a post-prandial sit down, Jonty immediately beginning to rip at the envelope which was, as usual, very tightly sealed. The manager, passing by with his normal unctuous air ready applied for the day, spotted his difficulties and held up a hand.

“I’ve just the thing for you sir, should you care to use it.” He produced a handsome letter opener, holding it out hilt forwards, so that his guest could grasp it safely. Stewart couldn’t help notice how the straight, true blade glinted cruelly in the sunshine, how effectively it opened the cunningly sealed envelope. His mother must have been expecting to have to get this letter unscathed through three rugby scrums and a game of polo for all the security she had applied to it. At last the stiff, expensive paper began to emerge from its sanctuary, spilling the inevitable reams of gossip concerning the least doings of the least of the Stewarts. There was a smaller envelope as well, with the name *Orlando* impressively imposed upon it, which was passed across for the nominee’s perusal.

They read in silence for a while, Jonty producing the odd titter or poking out the tip of his tongue in concentration at the convolutions of life in London and Sussex. “The Manor will be ready for us to visit on the way back to Cambridge, Orlando. Almost all the rooms habitable now—Mama promises not to do anything embarrassing like giving us the honeymoon suite.” A big smirk, a quick glance around to see if anyone was within earshot, a look of



disappointment that the newlyweds were in the offing, then a stifling of the rather salacious comment he was about to utter.

“That’ll be fine Jonty. I’m looking forward to seeing this country estate that your father has mentioned so often.”

“Mother have anything special to say to you, Orlando?”

“Oh, just the usual. Nothing out of the ordinary.” If the awkward words didn’t tell Stewart, then the blush should have signaled that there was something very private within Coppersmith’s letter, just as there had been within his own. Neither was ready to share the confidential messages just yet.

*I hope that Jonathan is happy, Orlando. Although he has been much happier since he met you than I have ever known him to be. It’s not my place to speak of such things, but as you will know by now, I am no great respecter of place or convention, so I will say my piece freely. Look after him, Orlando. I have wanted all his life for my Jonty to have someone who would love him and care for him. He is the most precious to me of all my children, although if you tell him I said that I will brain you next time you grace my doorstep. He’s not had the easiest of times; I dare say you know about that, too. Nasty business. Better now. Better with you. The epistle ended abruptly with your most affectionate friend, Helena.*

Stewart’s own letter had contained amongst the tittle-tattle *I hope that Orlando is behaving himself and not going native. I have always suspected that underneath that solemn exterior there beats an adventurous heart.* Jonty smirked to think of how those words might have been applied so aptly the night before. *He really is the most dear boy and I profoundly wish that you won’t be too cruel to him, as I know how much you enjoy making game of his naivety. The day may well come when he decides he has had enough of it. Then where will you be, my boy? Treasure him and don’t take him for granted.*

Once the letters had been read twice, the day needed to

be planned. Shopping was the necessary evil today, but instead of the train or Shank's pony, bicycles were the preferred mode of transport. The pub near the harbor hired them out so a pair of machines had already been booked, Coppersmith wanting to leave nothing to chance.

"Should we invite Mr. Ainslie to join us? We could easily find three bikes, and I bet he'd be glad of getting away from the hotel. Those young ladies were making eyes at him across the room all over breakfast."

Coppersmith sighed. "Not today, Jonty; tomorrow, perhaps."

Stewart raised an eyebrow at the encouraging thaw in relations. "Yes, we could walk up the valley after church, maybe find an inn for lunch. Or take the train out to the coast again. See the lighthouse. As long as you promise not to push him over the cliffs. One murder is enough."

"If you were any kind of a friend, you'd say he'd slipped and that I was yards away at the time."

"Daft beggar. I'll catch him before dinner to give him an invite. He might agree to tolerate you for a couple of hours. I'd like to ask him to help us, Orlando. He may well still be le Tissier's number one suspect, but I think he'd easily get those girls eating out of his hand, the housemaids too if we want. One of those females will have an idea about who's sending these letters. The servants always know exactly what is going on in any household, and a hotel would be no exception."

Coppersmith started to produce a very small, vestigial glower, then shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish, Jonty. It can't hurt, especially if he is the culprit—we'll have him close to hand to observe." He rose, stretching. "Now are you going to laze here all morning or are we going to find those bikes?"

"I have no intention of sharing a tandem with you, Dr. Coppersmith. I know exactly what will happen; I'll have to

do all the work going uphill, then you'll offer to take the strain coming down the other side."

"Actually my intention was to share the work absolutely, Dr. Stewart. There were no plans for foul play."

"So it'll be just two ordinary pushbikes, then, gentlemen?" The publican was keen to conclude the transaction as he had kegs of beer to attend to that, without question, had a far higher status and importance than these two young turks.

"Yes, sir." Stewart produced the hire fee, thrusting it into the chap's eager hand. "Don't worry about the change. When do you need these back?"

"Tonight will be fine, if you please, though they're not spoken for till Monday."

The bikes were wheeled out, tires inspected—they were all in excellent condition—then the deal concluded. The riders mounted their iron framed steeds, intending to speed off towards the quay, although the word *sped* would be an exaggeration as their progress was wobbly and uncertain as they got used to the bikes. Once they'd reached the road out of St. Aubin's, they'd become confident, almost devil may care.

Both machines had ample baskets on the front. This had been part of the required specifications, as the whole intention of the visit to St. Helier was to purchase presents. Jonty had two nephews and one niece to provide for, as well as trying to find something for his parents. The children were easy, as any sort of toy or sweets would generally do, although the elder boy liked things that were unusual if not slightly disgusting, like stuffed animals or little packets of joke items. These would need to be scoured for, then selected to provide just the right amount of annoyance to his parents.

Helena and Richard Stewart would be a problem too, as they had everything they could possibly want. So Jonty would usually search high and low for the strange or different or simply amusing, only this time he would have

someone to help him. Although how much Orlando could be relied on to offer sensible advice in the matter of shopping was a moot point. They pressed on as far as the Martello tower then rested for a while to look out to sea. Supplies were being taken out to Elizabeth Castle, the soldiers' voices carrying across the water as they barked instructions. It provided an interesting scene, prompting Orlando to speculate about how the logistics of the operation could be made smoother. Stewart rather switched off, counting the different types of seabird until he realized that the subject had changed from the martial to the commercial.

"I'd like to find something in St. Helier for your mother. She has been so unfailingly kind to me that a present would seem appropriate."

Jonty inclined his head. "I'm sure she'd be delighted, Orlando. She thinks the world of you, you know. What did you have in mind?"

Coppersmith looked out at the sparkling sea, face full of uncertainty. "What about some jewelry? I have very little to spend my money on. Apart from you, and you rarely let me pay for anything."

Stewart turned to him, concerned. He'd been left a hatful of money by his grandmother and was far richer than Orlando would ever be. "Does that bother you? Do say if it does. I know I can be a bit overbearing; I get that from Mama. Because I'm always flush with cash, I just want to treat you, that's all." Jonty knew that despite his bold words, their disparity of income rankled a bit with Coppersmith.

"Think I'd like to pull my weight just a bit more, then I would feel less like a kept man." Orlando blushed to the very roots of his dark hair.

Jonty didn't know what to say, for once in his life; he was left to resort to his lover's strategy of changing the subject. "We could go 'halfers' on a piece of jewelry. The old girl loves a necklace or brooch and I'm sure there must

be a decent jeweler somewhere in town.”

“We could buy her a sapphire to match your eyes.”

“She already has lots of those. The old man bought them for her in his youth because he was so smitten with her own fair gaze, although I dare say she’d like some more. Something set in silver to go with her hair, perhaps.”

“Now what can I buy you? A tie pin? Cufflinks?”

“Think it might be a bit embarrassing to have what I’d like to see engraved on them, Orlando. Let’s spend our money on Mama, give her a bit of a treat. I’d like to see her speechless for once when you make your big presentation. She might even kiss you, so keep your hankie handy as she can be a bit sloppy.” He smiled to think what Orlando’s reaction might be if Mrs. Stewart did attempt one of the big smackers that she usually gave her youngest offspring, leaving him covered in powder and smelling sweetly of her perfume.

“I might just kiss her in return, Jonty, then she’ll realize how sad your efforts have been in comparison. A kiss on her cheek from you may well be a familial duty, but one from me will thrill her beyond all reason.”

Stewart gaped, speechless, gobsmacked. “Orlando Coppersmith! First I find out that Mama has been admiring your legs, now you’re offering to kiss her in such a fashion as to turn a respectable matron into a giddy girl. What has come over you?”

“You, idiot. Another glorious night of lying in your arms, listening to your tender words. It would fill any man with supreme self confidence in his romantic abilities. I remember what you said afterwards, and during. If I believed even half of it, my head would swell beyond being able to get it through the door.”

Jonty began to titter. “Well, it always seems true at the time. On sober reflection too. But don’t go trying anything on Mama, though. She’d knock you out with one blow if you became too saucy.”

“Oh, get on your bike and stop this nonsense. We’ll

never get even a piece of toffee if you stay here all day chatting." Coppersmith leapt into the saddle, pedaling away furiously, leaving Stewart temporarily unable to move for laughter.

St. Helier could boast one or two extremely classy establishments. The jeweler's shop they found tucked away in a narrow side street proved to be one of these. They'd begun to despair of finding a gewgaw of the right quality to suit an earl's daughter, despite having been successful in their other endeavors, including rectifying the scandalous situation of Orlando's supplies being dangerously low on bulls-eyes. There'd even been talk of giving up, settling on buying a hat or, *saints preserve us*, some embroidered hankies, until a little place was spotted which proved to be ideal.

The proprietor looked them over appraisingly, recognized the quality of Jonty's clothes and the insignia on Coppersmith's cufflinks then bowed appreciatively. "Good day to you, gentlemen. How can I be of assistance?"

"We're looking for something for my mother; a necklace or a brooch was what we had in mind." Stewart's eyes sparkled as they caught sight of many handsome pieces of work.

"Now, could you enlighten me as to the lady's coloring?" The jeweler held his head on one side, squinting intensively, as though trying to imagine the woman in question through her son.

Coppersmith spoke up. "You have her glass in front of you, sir. My friend has just the same shade of eye and the hair, if less silvered, is a reasonable match."

The jeweler nodded, squinted again, nodded once more, then turned to a tray. "There are a couple of fine items here, although not new. They came from a family of impeccable reputation, however. The lady of the house would have a similar coloring to you, sir, if a little paler." He held the tray

out for inspection, the jewelry being displayed on black velvet to its best advantage.

"These are very nice," Jonty eyed them with appreciation, "but I was hoping for an original, rather like Mama herself."

The proprietor nodded. "I see. Yes. We do have some other things that might fit the bill." He stepped over to a curtain at the back of the shop, "Mr. Renouf, would you please bring out some of the sapphire pieces?" A sandy haired assistant appeared, bearing another tray, this one full of handsome blue stones adorning platinum settings.

Stewart immediately nodded. "Oh, this is just the stuff."

Coppersmith nodded too, gingerly picking up one of the delicate earrings. "This little thing is nice, and there's another to match it."

Jonty giggled, caught Mr. Renouf's disapproving eye, hastily stopped. "Well, there would be, Dr. Coppersmith; a pair, don't you know. Actually I think Mother would like these very much. Good choice." He slapped his friend's back. "We'll take these please." His gaze fell on another tray. "Now, I rather fancy this." He pointed to a little tie pin, gold with a single onyx stone.

The jeweler nodded again—the man had begun to resemble a heron—then motioned for his assistant to wrap the two items. Stewart stopped him. "Just the earrings please. The other one will be worn now." Once outside the shop, Coppersmith produced half the cost of the sapphire gewgaws (he'd ensured that he'd taken plenty of cash with him, as he didn't want to be seen to be less flush with money than his friend). Jonty carelessly put away the notes and, taking the pin from the pocket where he'd carefully placed it, affixed it to Orlando's tie.

"No, Jonty, I can't. I thought you'd bought this for yourself."

"Well, I didn't. This is to remind you of your first real holiday and to say thank you for the last few months. Been enormously happy, all in all. I'm not sure that I've told you,

really.” Jonty reached for his hankie, feeling a sudden need to blow his nose.

Coppersmith was about to argue again but decided not to. He could see how much this meant to his lover—to force the issue would be unkind and hard-hearted. “I should buy something for you, in return.”

“No need, really. Smile for me all day. That will be quite enough.” Jonty laughed. “Smile for me all day without a single sulk and it will be a miracle.”

“You’ll at least do me the courtesy of letting me buy you lunch. I’d also like to find a jar of black butter which I can give to your father, just from me. Would that suit?”

“Aye, it would, so long as I get a ride out to the hills before we go home. I have a hankering for a boyhood pastime.”

“I used to love rolling down hills as a boy; I shan’t ask you if you enjoyed it too, as I can anticipate the answer and it would merely depress me.” They’d made their way up one of the many valleys towards the centre of the island, finding acres of rolling sward which rose and fell like great waves over the back of the land.

Orlando contemplated the matter, carefully avoiding sulking, just as he’d promised. “If it’s such a wonderful thing, why don’t you do it again? You’ve had us paddling, collecting shells, annoying crabs, goodness knows what daft things. Rolling down this slope should be meat and drink to you.”

“I’m game if you are. We just need to find a bit with no rocks near the bottom.” They found an ideal place, all rolling smooth sward with a gently shelving end to the descent. “Now we just lie down, Orlando then give ourselves a bit of a turn over and...”

Stewart began to revolve down the hill at a frightening pace. When he’d been eleven, this had been the most glorious of activities. Now it was an absolute nightmare. A



third of the way down, a descent which seemed to take hours, he decided that he was going to be sick. Half way down he realized that he was very probably going to die and however would Orlando explain it to his mother? *Very sorry, Mrs. Stewart but needless to say he was arsing about as usual.* Three quarters of the way down, his life was passing before his eyes, along with newspaper headlines about *Distinguished fellows of Cambridge college found dead on Jersey.* For he was also aware that Coppersmith's rate of descent outstripped even his and that if he was about to hand in his chips, so was his best friend.

They reached the bottom in an untidy heap. "I thought," remarked Orlando, gasping for breath, "that this was supposed to be a pleasurable activity?"

"It used to be," Jonty's lungs felt like they were ablaze. "Some miserable sod, probably one of your relatives, has come along and turned it into a particularly nasty form of torture." He sat up, immediately regretted it, lay down again. "Think we should just lie here for a while until we're absolutely sure that we aren't going to pass out or away. If anyone comes along, we can say that we're studying cloud formations under field conditions. Under no circumstances should we be interrupted. You can look studious, with a touch of ferocity; I'll smile sweetly, and they'll hopefully depart."

"I'll never do that rolling thing again, Jonty."

"If I even attempt it, Orlando, you must tie me to a tree until the madness passes. Might be time to put away childish things, you know."

"Oh, don't do that to all of them; just the ones that no longer appeal. I enjoyed catching those shrimps, you know, more than anything on holiday. Apart from the swimming."

"More than anything? Really? More than last night when you....."

"More than anything that can be mentioned in broad daylight," Orlando hastily clarified.

"Ah, that's better. Let's just put away the things which

have become unpleasant and keep the nice ones. Lying here is quite nice, now that I'm more certain I won't die just at the moment. Ten more minutes, then back to the old hotel, I think."

As they walked through the hotel gardens, they were hailed by a cheery voice. Mrs. Tattersall, in a haze of yellow and white wool, was sitting in the shade trying to make progress on an assortment of little items for the anticipated great grandchild. She waved the men over, insisting on their drinking tea, sharing a biscuit, then showing her all their purchases. She admired the earrings and the little items found for the smaller Stewarts, but the tie pin was the greatest success.

"Very sharp, these things, you'd better be careful you don't prick yourself with it. Poor Mr. Greenwood was bleeding buckets from his finger after breakfast because he'd decided to reset his tie pin. He gouged the thing into his thumb, silly boy." She shook her head. "Just like these things," she indicated the variety of needles in her workbag. "I never let my little Katie play with any of these, far too sharp. Not dissimilar to those two over there." She inclined her head to where Wilson and le Tissier had just emerged from the hotel, looking rather frustrated.

"We'd better report in." Jonty rose, tipping his hat to Mrs. T. The officials hadn't been idle, as Wilson carefully explained to his friends. After their discussions with Stewart and Ainslie on Friday, logic suggested that Mr. Sheringham had been supplied with some information from the mainland, which had led him to immediately send the obnoxious blackmailing letters. There'd just been enough time for the reply to have gone back via the writer's suggested method—a note to be left in an upturned bucket down by the quay at dusk—and a second letter sent almost by return.

"But not only do I share your mistrust of alibis, Dr.

Stewart, I also don't like the obvious." Le Tissier seemed less than convinced by Wilson's conjectures.

"Have you spoken to Mr. Sheringham?" Coppersmith shared Wilson's distrust of the man, although he couldn't see him as a blackmailer.

"We have. He insists he has nothing to tell." Wilson scratched his head. "He swore he'd received no letters, that he'd said nothing derogatory about young Mr. Ainslie to anyone."

"What did he say when you told him you have an eye witness to his getting such information?"

"He changed his tune, naturally." Wilson smiled knowingly. "Suddenly he remembered receiving letters about Matthew, but he was adamant he'd not gone on to issue any threats. He refused at first to produce this correspondence—alleged he'd lost it—but Mr. le Tissier and I ground him down."

Orlando could imagine this formidable pair grinding Stonehenge down. Only Helena Stewart would be able to resist them. "Where had they come from, these wretched things?"

"Some source in London," le Tissier's voice was full of disgust. "They didn't just give a general estimate of Ainslie's inclinations, there were some specific, very nasty allegations as well. They matched those in Ainslie's letters almost word for word. Of course, Sheringham couldn't, or wouldn't, account for the fact that such details could be the same, except to keep denying that he was the blackmailer."

"And?" Jonty sounded belligerent, as if he sought permission to thump the truth out of Sheringham.

"We had to call it a day. We left him in no doubt that he was under extreme suspicion, but we're left with the question if not him, then who?"

Orlando nodded. "Who else could have got hold of this information? And why should they choose to use it to blackmail Mr. Ainslie?"

## Chapter Nine

Sunday morning, Coppersmith was amazed because Church was reasonable again. *Himself* always liked a nice prayer book service but Orlando usually found his own attention wandering. Today there was a visiting preacher who gave a wonderfully intellectual sermon about the true dating of the exodus which Coppersmith alone of all the congregation had followed and understood. He made Jonty stand for a quarter of an hour at the lych gate while he quizzed the man on the Egyptian pharaohs. In the end, he was bodily hauled away by a muttering Stewart with lots of *sorry vicar, have another engagement, do excuse my friend's curiosity, mustn't keep you from your lunch*.

"What about *my* lunch?" Jonty snapped, as they raced up to the station to meet Ainslie, he having gone to Chapel earlier. "My stomach is becoming convinced that my throat's been cut and it'll barely last the journey."

Coppersmith mumbled a reply.

"What was that?" Jonty always became peevish when hungry—this day was no exception.

"I said that you're the very worst sort of exaggerator, if that's the appropriate term. There must be enough meat on

you to endure forty days wandering in the wilderness, so a little extra gap between meals will do you no harm.”

It was as well he didn’t press Stewart to repeat *his* muttered reply as it consisted mainly of swear words.

Ainslie was waiting patiently. Stewart had invited him, when they’d shared a drink before dinner on Saturday, to join them for Sunday lunch. The invitation had been unexpected, but so welcome that even his hosts’ poor timekeeping didn’t bother him. He accepted Jonty’s profuse apologies graciously.

“When Dr. Coppersmith gets the bit between his teeth, he’s quite incorrigible, Matthew. It seems that they’ve decided that Rameses wasn’t the pharaoh of the Exodus. Oh no, it turns out he invaded Jerusalem instead, which makes him Shishak. You look just as puzzled as I am.”

Orlando opened his mouth as if to carry on some obscure debate; he wasn’t allowed to utter a syllable. “No, Dr. Coppersmith, you won’t bore either of us with this esoteric stuff. You can discuss beer or sandwiches or whether that noise is the train coming or merely the rumbling of my stomach. No Egyptian stuff, please.”

Matthew grinned. He liked Jonty, despite the antipathy he’d felt towards him at the start when he only had eyes for Coppersmith. Stewart had proved unfailingly kind, something Ainslie had no right to expect when he’d tried to seduce what he now guessed was the chap’s boyfriend. He hadn’t spotted their relationship at first, assuming that they were no more than friends, although he’d soon noticed the subtle signs which only those in the know would recognize. Moreover, he was now quite glad that Coppersmith hadn’t given in to the kiss a week ago. Handsome the man might be, but heavens above he was stuffy. How a livewire like Stewart had taken up with him, the angels alone knew.

Still, Ainslie was pleased to have something to do for the afternoon, notwithstanding the inevitable awkwardness

that remained over both the honey buzzards incident and his suicide attempt. Matthew missed his father—despite the man’s faults, he’d been very dear to him. Guilt tinged the grief, the weight of an unwanted marriage lifted from his shoulders replaced by the burden that the last words between them had been part of a quarrel. Sitting in his room at The Beaulieu did nothing to ease the pain.

The train came, they rode down to Corbiere, walked up to the little Inn up on the cliffs, bought three pints and three crab salads. It took half a glass of beer, not to mention several mouthfuls of seafood, before Jonty had reached a decent mood. Then there was no stopping him. Coppersmith seemed to have exhausted most of his small talk and was avoiding anything even remotely private.

“Now that the inner man has been, if not satisfied, at least mollified a smidge, I—we—have a suggestion to put to you, Matthew. Would you be interested in joining us in a little amateur sleuthing?”

“I don’t quite get your drift, Jonty.” Ainslie looked from one to the other, unsure of exactly what was being asked of him.

“We’ve helped the police in the past.” Coppersmith held his glass up to the light, inspecting it as if he thought he would find a murderer hiding among the hops. “There was a series of murders at our college last winter. Inspector Wilson, who took charge of the investigation, asked Dr. Stewart and myself to help in elucidating some of the germane facts from one or two of our more reticent undergraduates. We were reasonably successful in helping the constabulary to achieve a successful conclusion to their investigation.”

“You’ll excuse Orlando,” Jonty’s wry grin spoke volumes. “He tends to use overly long words.”

“I think I followed what was said.” Matthew raised an eyebrow. “About this case—as I understood it, you nearly ended up as victims number four and five.” It was gratifying to see both his friends’ jaws dropping like stones into a

well.

Jonty recovered his poise first. "Well, you'd make a fine addition to anyone's detective network. How did you know that?"

"Now gentlemen, apply your own investigative abilities. Who knows everything about everyone at the hotel?" Ainslie felt wonderfully smug that 'the commercial' had got one up on 'the academic'.

Two voices spoke in unison. "Mrs. Tattersall."

"Mrs. Tattersall indeed. She has quite a passion for mysteries. She'd read about your college in the *News of the World* and remembered about the story when you came here. She wanted to ask you directly whether you were involved, but the arrival of Wilson made the task easier. She talked to him. He told all."

"All?"

For some reason—Matthew could make an educated guess—Coppersmith looked as if his stomach was turning over three times. "He said that you'd been threatened by the murderer because of your interest in the case." By the expression of relief on Orlando's face, not *all* had been told.

"Wilson has asked us to keep our ears and eyes open again. Would you be inclined to join us?"

Ainslie laughed. "Do you think the police would really welcome their chief suspect taking a close interest in the case?"

"If you're the chief suspect, I don't think we can be far behind; not if the interrogation I received or the look in le Tissier's eye is anything to go by." Stewart smiled ruefully and drained his glass. "By taking action, we can hasten the pace at which our names are cleared."

The proposition appealed, not least because it gave Matthew something constructive to do, some way of making amends with his father. "So what assignment did you have in mind for me, gentlemen?"

"You've been quite friendly with Miss Sheringham"

"Gwendolyn? Indeed. Although you understand what

my motives were. Pragmatic, not romantic."

"She doesn't know that, and we suspect she still has rather a hope or two in your direction. She does know, however, that her father received some information about you. We're aware that when the police were questioning him yesterday, they had in mind the possibility of Sheringham being the blackmailer. Dr. Coppersmith thinks that's unlikely, don't you, Orlando?"

Coppersmith nodded. "It seems far too obvious. If that were true, the man wouldn't have been trumpeting to his family the fact that he'd heard some things to your discredit. Not if he'd any intention of using this information for what is an illegal activity."

"There's some merit in that notion." Matthew shivered at the thought of those letters, of the disgusting allegations.

"So, is there anyone else who might have had access to the same stuff? There's always his family, although I find them even less likely in the role of blackmailers than the father."

Stewart chimed in. "Orlando, we've said this before, often. Who always, apart from the Mrs. Tattersalls of this world, knows exactly what's going in any establishment?"

"The staff." Coppersmith looked as if light had at last dawned in this case.

"Exactly; the staff. I bet that someone like Greenwood could glide in and out of anywhere. He'd always have a valid excuse, as would the chamber maids. Matthew, would you know by any chance who 'does' the Sheringhams' rooms?"

"I would indeed. Gwendolyn told me, when we walked down to the quay, that it was a nice coincidence that the same girl attended to both our rooms. Alice, I believe her name is. She's a pretty little thing, if that's your inclination."

"Would it be your inclination to chat to her, Mr. Ainslie?"

"Such things are rarely done, Dr. Coppersmith,



although they're not unknown." Asking a maid to walk out was nothing compared to the other improprieties he was being accused of. "I dare say I could ask her for a walk on her afternoon off. I believe that's tomorrow, as a different girl turned down the sheets the day..." He stopped, recalling the events of the previous Monday, only a week past but already feeling a lifetime away.

"Tomorrow would be most welcome, if you're up to it, Matthew."

"I'll broach the subject tonight should I see her." Ainslie stretched out his sturdy limbs, pushing his chair back from the table. "Now I could do with a walk and some fresh air. Feel like I've been cooped up in that hotel for a month."

"We could walk down to the beach. Orlando will teach you how to catch shrimps, he being a world renowned expert." Stewart laughed and punched his friend's arm.

When they wandered down to the place where they'd walked so happily the week before, Coppersmith stopped, astounded. "Where's the beach gone?"

"You've reckoned without the changing of the tides, Dr. Coppersmith." Matthew laughed, feeling at ease for the first time in weeks.

"Ah well." Jonty pointed airily up the cliffs. "Let's go and pick Hare's-tails to take home for Mama.

"I've met your mother, I believe—that's if she's Helena Stewart." Ainslie, like many a man before him, recalled the lady with awe.

Jonty snorted. "I'm not sure that there is anyone in London who hasn't heard of my dear mama. Or been shouted at by her. Or boxed around the ears. How did you come across her? I suppose she ran you down in her chariot. Was it the one with the knives on the wheels?"

Matthew felt worried that he'd hit on some tender spot with his new acquaintance, but was reassured when he observed the large smile accompanying all these pronouncements. "No, indeed," he ventured, "it was only

the smaller vehicle that she uses on Sundays.” To his delight Jonty laughed heartily at this response; even Orlando smiled. “My father and she have—had—a mutual friend. Lord Hardley.”

“If you will excuse the pun, he is *hardly* the sort of man that anyone would be proud to claim friendship with. That business with poor Lady Hardley scandalized society. Mother refused to talk to him after that.” Stewart’s eyes narrowed. “Said plenty about him though.”

Ainslie stiffened slightly, tension constricting his voice. “I must insist that, for all his faults, my father had nothing to do with the affair.”

Jonty gently laid his hand on Ainslie’s arm, something Orlando seemed to find annoying. “I know that already, Matthew. His Lordship ran away with the maid, I think that sensible people appreciate that. According to Mother, Lady Hardley wouldn’t be able to even spell the word adultery, let alone commit it. She’s a poor innocent little thing, so the tale tells.”

“It’s not just that, Jonty. I know that my father had achieved a bit of a reputation for himself with the cards, but he never played fast and loose with the women. He was true to my mother for as long as she lived.” The lump in Ainslie’s throat threatened to unman him. “She adored him, keeping him on the straight and narrow as much as she could. Things deteriorated when she died.”

Stewart clapped Ainslie on the shoulder then murmured comforting words, two more things that earned him a dirty look from Orlando.

The three men walked back to the station pretty much in silence, barely speaking while the train took them to St. Aubins. The appearance of ‘The Misses’ on the road to the hotel sparked them into conversation, most of it along the lines of how they could avoid talking to the girls. Matthew knew a little back path which brought them up into the

gardens, a diversion for which the two younger men were very grateful, not wanting to be nabbed this, or indeed any, day.

Back in their room, the fellows of St. Bride's took stock. They now had an ally in the hunt for the murderer, assuming he wasn't the killer himself, something which Orlando wasn't entirely convinced about. The Hardley connection having been eliminated, as Jonty had sworn it would, the identity of the blackmailer seemed the next important thread to unravel. Coppersmith's thoughts still nagged him, however, about Ainslie senior's behavior on Sunday night. Stewart had put the man's agitation down to cheating at cards, but had it really been to do with something else?

"Jonty, a week ago tonight, you thought that Ainslie senior was trying to pull a fast one at the tables. Are you sure? In the light of what we now know, given that the man was murdered only a day later, is there anything else that could have cause his erratic behavior? You said you weren't sure what was going on."

Stewart closed his eyes, trying hard to remember what had occurred the previous Sunday evening. "I remember seeing all sorts of things. Ainslie junior looking at your hands, mainly, and his father getting agitated. You were playing cards, as was Mrs. T, Mr. T was sitting with me observing the play or at the bar. Hang on a moment, though. Mr. Tattersall was talking to Mr. Sheringham; both Greenwood and the barman were quite close by, could have been listening in, I think. Orlando I'm astonished, I never realized I would remember all this. It's truly remarkable what one can recall when one really applies the brain."

"Well, apply it a bit more. Did Ainslie senior show any particular reactions to any events around him?"

Stewart poked his tongue out in concentration. "He got a bit annoyed with 'The Misses', who were giggling as usual, while eyeing you and Matthew up. There was a lot of feminine gossip going on in their part of the room—I dare

say most of it concerned men. Ainslie senior seemed to be concerned with the talk at the bar, too, now you come to mention it. He kept looking over there, I believe, but I could be wrong."

"You rarely are wrong in your observations, Jonty. I should have known that and taken more heed when you warned me about Matthew being interested in me. I was a bit silly then."

"Oh, Orlando, you weren't to know that he was likely to be quite so bold. Although you must take more care in future. As I've said before, you are an exceedingly attractive man and there are bound to be other men who would agree with me. Promise me that you won't even speak of Oscar Wilde to anyone except me. Deny all knowledge of him and his works. Say you have no interest in them."

"I will indeed. I'd better not go near the woods or any honey buzzards, either. Nor Mr. Ainslie." He stopped, considered. "Although you seemed pretty pally with him today."

"Just being friendly, Orlando. We want him on our side, you know. A little sleuthing may add to the holiday fun, but this seems to be getting a bit nasty, what with threatening letters and all."

"You feel sorry for Ainslie, don't you?" Coppersmith spoke quietly.

"Well, of course I do, the man must be a bit lost at present. Doesn't hurt us to be civil." Stewart was beginning to appear wary, with the merest hint of a frisson in the air.

"You were more than civil this afternoon." Orlando huffed slightly.

"How do you mean?" Jonty's hackles began to rise, just like the great cat he so often seemed to resemble.

"With Matthew. You were distinctly friendly." The frisson had become a palpable lump of ice.

"In what way?" Stewart was undergoing a freezing of his own.

"You held his arm."

"I did not. I merely laid my hand on it when I wanted to reassure him. Don't snort. I hate it."

"Then you put your arm around his shoulder."

"I didn't do that either, Orlando. You're deliberately exaggerating for some reason of your own. He was upset talking about his mother. I would have been if it had been Mama in the same situation, and I just..... Oh, to hell with it. I don't see why I have to explain myself to you. We were both there, you saw exactly what happened. I don't know why you're so jealous." A wave of anger was rising in Jonty, and there wasn't likely to be an ebb in this tide any time soon.

"Because you obviously like him and he likes you." Orlando studied his shoes.

"Then you should be jealous of Mrs. Tattersall, or Mr. Tattersall. Half the English fellows and who knows who else, I like them all. Stop being an idiot."

"You don't put your arm around the English fellows. You don't get sent for to talk Mr. Tattersall out of suicide." Coppersmith tired of addressing his shoes and spoke to Stewart's shirt buttons.

"You were the one he tried to kiss, Orlando, not me. He's never shown the slightest inclination to do anything with me."

"I suppose that you regret that."

Stewart had taken enough. He swung out an arm and clonked Coppersmith on the chest, a hefty blow such as he'd employed on a lock forward or two in his time, when the referee was looking elsewhere. Orlando, winded, fell back onto the settee. "I've never hit you before, but I'll damn well do it again if this nonsense doesn't stop. I have no desire for Matthew Ainslie. I've not even looked at another man since I met you, Dr. Coppersmith, even from that first night when you were so stuffy. Why you have the temerity to accuse me of such things is beyond me."

"Frightened I'll lose you." Orlando had begun to regain

his breath. "That would be the end of my world. I'd not forget to load the pistol then."

Jonty looked at him, rolling his eyes. "Overdramatizing again, are we, Orlando? Blackmail is a horrible thing—I'll not be kept at your side by it. You can't play the *leave me and I'll kill myself* card because I'll ignore it. I have no intention of leaving you as things stand, I love you far too much, but my patience isn't infinite. There's only so much self pity I can put up with." He stomped off to the bathroom. "Going to have a soak and use up all the hot water so *you* can't have one. That'll serve you right for being a cantankerous old puss."

Left to mull over what had been said, Orlando quickly concluded that he'd been an idiot. Again. He confessed as much to Jonty round the bathroom door, receiving a wet flannel in the face by way of showing that he was on the road to forgiveness. He resolved to keep his head down and say nothing that might be construed as provocative of argument until he'd fully attained a state of absolution. Even if that took until next week.

Before dinner, they took drinks in the bar as usual, intrigued at the sight of Mrs. Tattersall unraveling a fluffy, white, half-finished item. She smiled at them wistfully. "Daft, isn't it? I can't get this completed now, as I've only one needle. Think I lost the other one that first night you came. I've searched high and low but to no avail. Mr. T reckons I was so taken with you two that I stuffed it down the side of one of the chairs in a mad moment. He's probably right."

They all laughed, their contented condition continuing through to the end of dinner, despite Mr. Tattersall dropping his glasses in his consommé and sending little savory droplets in all directions. They made up a bridge four, Coppersmith rather pleased that Ainslie had decided to play chess with Mr. Newlywed while Mrs. Newlywed looked on admiringly, annoying Matthew with her constant stream of chat, all of it centered on her beloved Anthony. Bridge was

concluded early, Mrs. Tattersall feeling rather tired, so the two young men were allowed to escape to the refuge of their suite.

"Orlando," Jonty purred, full of food and once more very happy with life, "do you really feel like a, what was the delightful expression you used yesterday, a kept man?"

"Not in college, Jonty. But sometimes when we're out, off to the theatre or here on holidays, it always seems to be you footing the bill."

"It's purely a matter of logic, Orlando. You of all people must appreciate that. I have plenty of money and nothing to spend it on except my own pleasure, of which you are the summit of all my joys."

"I'm not a pauper, you realize that." Orlando produced one of his sternest frowns to support his assertion.

"I do realize. You'll note that I'm wearing one of the shirts you bought me at the end of last term to mark the end of the academic year. Romantic as always, Orlando." He couldn't stop a stream of giggles issuing forth.

"I've been thinking."

"Really? Not something you indulge in that often. Ow. Don't whack me."

"Is there no way in which we could share the expenses equally?"

"Not without ending up in an argument about the overall costs or resenting one another for having different amounts of ready cash. Look, Orlando, it's like a scalene triangle," Stewart had thought of what he no doubt felt was a clever allusion. "The angles are all different aren't they? Every triangle doesn't have to be equilateral or even isosceles. I bet the little fifteen degree angle doesn't get cross with the filthy great ninety-five degree one because it is bigger."

Orlando began to laugh. He didn't stop until he was having trouble breathing and Jonty had slapped him very hard on the back, making the giggling stop with an enormous hiccup. "Oh, Dr. Stewart, I've never heard such

nonsense in all my life. Scalene triangles; I bet you can't even spell the word, let alone know what it means. If that's the best logical reasoning you can produce, then there's no point arguing with you. Pay what you like, spend what you like, I'll never complain again."

Stewart looked a bit put out at the denigration of his mathematical skills, pointing out that the *can't even spell* remark was *his* line and *people shouldn't steal things without asking*. To which Coppersmith replied that, technically, the *can't even spell* remark was Mrs. Stewart's line, so Jonty had already committed larceny on it. He was fairly certain that he wouldn't have said *please* or *thank you, Mama* in the process, which was counteracted with Stewart asserting that he was always incredibly polite to his mother—wouldn't dare to be otherwise. The figure of speech had been a gift she'd given him for his own personal use and no other's. He looked so ridiculously stuffy about it all, that Orlando took him into his arms and kissed him. Any initial resistance soon softened into compliance, with Jonty nestling his head into Coppersmith's shirt.

"Do you really mean it? Not another complaint about money?"

"Indeed I do, Jonty. No point in arguing with you, I'll have to let you win."

"Now that's exactly the spirit, Orlando. Could use that sort of noblesse oblige on the croquet green, although I suspect that would be asking for too much." He raised his head, smiled then leaned towards Orlando for another kiss. It was given and received with much delight. Slowly his fingers crept around to the small of his lover's back, tugging at the shirt tail until it came free. He was particularly fond of the skin at the base of Coppersmith's spine and liked to caress it at every opportunity, even if he didn't always compare it to a giant, extinct armadillo's.

"So that's the way of things tonight, is it?" The slow touches on his back always seemed to be a prelude to more audacious things, had been from almost the first time that



they'd shared a bed and found the ultimate pleasure together.

"It could well be, Orlando, should you desire it. Unless Greenwood comes to the door to say that someone else is trying to kill themselves with a gun carrying no bullets or a knife with a blunted blade."

"If they do, I'll insist that we pretend we're not here. Let's put out the light just in case."

They stood in the dark, close and warm, listening to each other's breath. "You do know there'll never be anyone else, don't you, Orlando?"

"Yes," he gave a huge, deep sigh. "We're one flesh now, Jonty. Can't be put asunder by anyone, not Matthew Ainslie or Inspector Wilson or King Edward himself."

"Ah. Technically we're not one flesh yet, although I appreciate the sentiment." Stewart drew his hands up to the back of Orlando's neck, began to fiddle with the hairs there. "We could be, though, if you wanted. If you're ready."

Coppersmith shivered. He knew the offer would be made one day, knew what was being asked of him. At the time of the college murders, he'd read some vile books that had left him in no doubt about how men lay with men. It had scared him silly at the time, and he was still not sure he was ready to do it. Not now, not even with his beloved Jonty, perhaps not ever. "I'm scared." It was all he could say.

"I know you are. But it wouldn't be like it was for me; we'd only do it when you wanted to. Of course, it would be you doing the, you know..." Jonty went bright red, and made a little gesture with his hands.

"Oh!" That made things rather less alarming. "I'd rather assumed it would be you....." Coppersmith made the same little thrusting gesture with his forefinger.

"Well, I hope it will be at some point, though I think we'd better perhaps start the other way round."

"Yes, I think I'd be happier with that, except I'd be worried about hurting you. During..." Orlando made the

same little gesticulation. Now he was frightened about his being inexperienced, the risk of being too rough or bringing back painful memories for Stewart.

“Well, there are things one can do to make the process easier, comfier...” Jonty wagged his own forefinger again and the fit of giggles he’d been trying so hard to keep in check could be contained no longer. Coppersmith began to laugh, too. *What a pair we must look. Grown men, unable to discuss such intimate matters without ending up like a pair of schoolboys.* Jonty continued to waggle his finger, poking it into Orlando’s ribs, then into the waistband of his trousers. “I’m game, if you are.”

Orlando put his arms around his lover, drew him in close. “Seems appropriate, doesn’t it? I’ve tried all sorts of new things this last week or so.” It sounded brave, or he hoped it did. He was still terribly unsure, but his lover seemed to want it and what Jonty wanted, *he* wanted Jonty to have. They began to kiss, Coppersmith aware of Stewart’s probing little fingers starting to undo his shirt buttons. That was reassuring, this was how things usually started. Kisses, buttons; maybe the rest wouldn’t be that different.

“There’s an awful noise in here, Orlando.” Jonty held his fingers to his lover’s lips. “Oh. It’s just your brain whirring again. Whatever you’re mulling over, stop it.” He kissed Coppersmith heartily, passion growing with every movement of his tongue.

It felt as exciting as their very first kisses had, months ago, as if the fact that tonight would have a different ending made it a new beginning. Orlando started, between kisses, to strip the clothes from Stewart, each little layer of dinner jacket, tie, boiled shirt, representing another step into the familiar and the unknown. He quivered with anticipation, steadying his trembling by holding Jonty tightly against him once he was bare-chested. The well-known combination of muscle and flesh both comforted and excited him. “Come on, you take off the rest. I’m not sure I can manage trouser

buttons.”

“You are shaking a bit, aren’t you?” Stewart caught hold of his lover’s hands. “Look, it’ll all be like it normally is, well most of it anyway. Just...just the conclusion will be different. It’ll be lovely, I promise, just as lovely as you could imagine. Better than anything we’ve done.” He drew his hand down Orlando’s chest.

The thrill that shot along Coppersmith’s spine promised more than even his lover’s words had done. He couldn’t trust himself to speak, so gave his assent with a kiss then began to tackle his own clothes, concentrating fiercely on shoelaces and socks, anything that would help him regain composure. There was a bubbling up of excitement which was progressing at such a rate that, if he wasn’t careful, they wouldn’t even get as far as the normal conclusion of things let alone anything different. He breathed deeply, trying to relax, which was hard when he kept catching the sight of Jonty undressing.

They’d decided that Stewart’s bed was perhaps the more discreet, his room being right on the corner of the hotel, so they drew each other there, small steps and little nudges alternating with kisses, caresses, sighs. When they reached the bed, they found that the sheets were newly changed. The linen felt cool and stiff; it smelled subtly of the washing line. Coppersmith found the feel of freshly laundered sheets incredibly sensual, his skin delighted by their cool textures, the virgin state of the bed. If anything could add to the perfection of the night, this was it.

It began as it always began. Kisses, caresses, tender murmurings and whispered jokes, Stewart on the verge of giggles as he often was when they made love. Orlando felt the need to swat him at one point, insisting that Jonty could do with having some sense slapped into him. He made sure it was the gentlest cuff possible. Excitement began to mount, bodies tingling and readying themselves, so familiar each with the other, yet always finding new things to amuse or amaze. Coppersmith was continually surprised at the

novel delights he found in Jonty's bed, how the man could devise so many ways to make him writhe with joy, laugh in ecstasy. As they moved together now, flesh on flesh, mouth on mouth, a small sliver of fear crept up his back again at the thought of the unknown into which he would soon be plunged.

"Say no now." Jonty's voice was unnaturally hoarse. "If you've any second thoughts, it would be best if we just carried on as we normally do."

"No. I mean yes." Orlando nuzzled against his lover's ear, suddenly emboldened, in spite of his fear. It was now or never; if he balked at this fence, he'd never have the courage to attempt it again. "I mean we should." When he felt Jonty's blissful sigh, he knew he'd made the correct decision. That opinion didn't change, even when Jonty proceeded with a string of tasks, finding a towel, scrabbling about in a drawer for something, tasks which weren't usual when they made love. Orlando wasn't so naïve that he couldn't guess why Jonty produced a jar of petroleum jelly—it was quite logical.

"It'll be more dignified if we arrange to face each other." Stewart spoke as tenderly as if he were whispering the sonnets. Then all was left to gestures or movements, two bodies finding each other anew, delighting and surprising one another until they became one.

Orlando couldn't believe how wonderful it felt, how it exceeded anything he'd ever known, any pleasure he'd ever experienced. All his fears were proved to be unfounded—they seemed so stupid now, he really should have known better. If Jonty said that something would be lovely, then of course it would be. And this was far beyond lovely. The burst of unbearable ecstasy shattered him, made his body feel like it was being torn apart, then he felt simply wrapped in warmth and joy, a tender glow replacing the fires which had burned only the moment before.

"Thank you," Coppersmith whispered against his lover's neck, when he'd regained the ability to speak

anything that resembled sense. "None of this would have happened without you. I'd never have even kissed anyone, all my life, if you hadn't come along. You've changed the whole world for me."

"You're a big soppy pudding, Orlando and you're more precious to me than anything I've ever known. That includes Richard; I never loved him like I love you. Always thought of him as someone who looked after me. I prefer to be with my equal."

"There's something in the prayer book about becoming one flesh, isn't there? Then there's another line about *with my body I thee worship*." Coppersmith laid his head on Stewart's chest, not wanting to be out of contact with him, even for a moment.

"Yes, Orlando. Why do you ask?" Jonty smoothed his lover's dark curls.

"Because it feels like what we've just done has been about that. Can't explain very well, I'm not religious, you know that, but it's as if I've found something almost sacred. It's not dirty or nasty, like those stupid books I read suggested, or evil like some of the preachers make out, the *sins of the flesh* and so on. Well, I could imagine it might be evil, if one of the people didn't want it." He stopped, conscious that he'd touched on Stewart's past. The man simply hugged him, saying *it's alright, carry on*. "I don't think it would mean a lot if we didn't love each other, like people who just do it for money. It can't be the same, can it?" He looked anxiously at Jonty, who this time shook his head.

"Not the same at all, Orlando. This is very special, the joining of souls, not just bodies." He sighed and held his lover closer. "We can't be put asunder now."

## Chapter Ten

“This really is very kind of you to ask me for a walk, Mr. Ainslie. I don’t want you thinking that I go walking with just any gentlemen from The Beaulieu.”

Matthew inclined his head with a kind smile. Monday afternoon had seemed a long time coming once the idea of a little detective work had been mooted. He’d eagerly anticipated it, not least because it gave him something to do, a bit of a purpose to his sad, empty days. “No, I understand that entirely, Miss……?”

“Brabazon.”

“Ah, that’s not a local name, is it?”

“No, it ain’t. Sorry, isn’t. My father came over here as the chef a good five years ago. Mother died when I was a little girl,” Ainslie produced a sympathetic nod, “so I came with him. I like it, very much. Hard work but nothing to complain about, and the food is lovely.” Miss Brabazon looked like the sort of girl who would appreciate her food.

“Well, Miss Brabazon, I asked you to come for a walk so that I could express my gratitude to you for being so kind over the last week since my father died. You’ve looked after my room very nicely—I appreciate the way you’ve kept his

things so tidy, despite the best efforts of the police to disarrange them.”

“That’s very kind of you, sir. Just my job, really.”

“You have such a lot of rooms to keep clean, it must be a chore. I bet that Miss Sheringham causes you a lot of work.”

The maid gave a toss of her auburn curls, ringlets which couldn’t have been that particular color before the odd chemical had got to work. “Oh, *madam*. Her friend’s as bad. I don’t do *her* room, Martha does, and you should hear what she has to say about Miss Forbes.” The maid stopped, no doubt afraid that she had said far too much. Matthew put on his most encouraging look. “I shouldn’t say so, but young ladies are often the most trouble.”

“I would think *that* lady in particular causes you a problem or two, they’re quite a presumptuous family, in my experience. Indeed, I find them rather unfriendly towards me. I have no idea why.” Ainslie wasn’t sure he could wear a convincingly innocent face; nevertheless he gave it his best shot.

“I did hear say that his company is a rival to yours, perhaps that’s it. Jealousy about how well your business is doing.”

“You’re probably right. It’s not as if they have anything else against me, is it?”

Alice colored slightly, suddenly greatly interested in the sea. “Don’t think so, Mr. Ainslie.” The answer was so obviously a lie that she might as well have said *I’ve heard the story, I know about the letters*. She changed the subject. “Lovely day today, it’s nice to have a break.”

“I hope that you get a well deserved rest as often as you can. I would hazard that some of the young gentlemen at the hotel make plenty of offers of entertainment.”

“Mr. Ainslie! I’m a nice girl! What would my Alec say if he heard you speak so?”

“I meant no impropriety, my dear, only that you must receive many an unwelcome offer. I knew that you were too

sensible to fall for any saucy young buck's chat."

"I should think so too. But I don't want to be working here all my life. Alec would love to set up a little pub on his own. I could cook and he'd run the bar. You'll have seen him behind the bar here, Mr. Ainslie, very good he is with the clientele."

"Are you sure he doesn't mind you taking a little stroll with me?"

"Oh, not at all. *You go along with him*, he said, *he seems a nice man.*"

Ainslie observed her closely out of the corner of his eye, however this time what she said seemed to be the truth. "Realistically, what are your chances of finding a little place to run?"

"Good enough if we had the money, sir, but that's the rub, as my Dad says. Difficult enough to put anything by these days. Alec's working all the hours he can here and he's desperate to pick up any other bits of casual employment so he can put by a bit extra." She sighed.

"Does he do any extra work in the hotel or just tend the bar?"

"Just that, officially. The Beaulieu's well staffed, doesn't need any extra hands at present. Although I think he might help the 'boots' and the laundry on the quiet for a share of the tips with no questions asked."

"I wonder if he may have done something for my father? I would hate to have him go without a gratuity if he deserved one."

"No," it was just a fraction too long a pause, "I don't think he helped your poor papa, sir. I think he's done a bit of valeting for the Sheringhams, their own man having been struck down with food poisoning two weeks back. Food poisoning, I ask you, sir. He shouldn't have been eating winkles from a stall like a barrow boy, should he?"

"Indeed not," Ainslie's thoughts had turned to food not for the stomach but for thought. "Your Alec sounds a very able chap; he's a lucky man to have such a nice girl as you.



I hope that you'll be very happy together."

The maid's face crumpled in dismay just a little. Ainslie understood the situation in that one small look. No doubt she was fond of her young man, but many girls had a pragmatic streak. Mr. Ainslie was a very eligible quantity, a little flirtation with him might have led to some very nice rewards, except he'd brought the shutters down very firmly on that possibility. Alice would have to keep with her Alec and his dreams, at least for the time being. She managed a smile, her training in never showing your true feelings to your betters standing her in good stead. "That's most kind of you, sir. I just hope that Alec can make as much of himself as you've done."

They walked back to the hotel surrounded by an air of disappointment on the lady's part and thoughtfulness on the man's. Ainslie desperately wanted to discuss this conversation with his two new friends, but they'd gone off in the morning to look at some ancient monuments on the far side of the island then were stopping off en route home to see a concert in the park at St. Helier. He'd have to bide his time, content with an afternoon's cribbage with Mr. Tattersall.

The sound of the band tuning up drifted softly over the air, exciting Stewart's senses to an alarming degree. "Just like the orchestra starting up before a show, Orlando. Always sets all my nerves a-tingle and sends shivers up my spine." They walked over the grass to where the crowd was already beginning to settle for the concert. The little bandstand shone delightfully, looking like a toy in a shop window at Christmas, just a little too perfect to be used for anything except admiring. However, a small brass band had crammed themselves into it and were busy making arrangements to play.

They obtained two deckchairs, gaudy striped contraptions which resembled the worst kind of pyjamas.

For once, Jonty was bested, Orlando being immediately able to work out how to erect the awkward thing he'd been given then watching with delight as Stewart went from crisis to crisis in his vain attempt to get his chair to fit together properly.

"Shall I?"

"You'd better, or I'll take a hammer to the thing."

A quick flip, and the seat was in its rightful position. "See? Easy."

Jonty muttered something that might just have ended in 'ugger', but wasn't 'rugger', then sat down. He soon cheered up when the band struck up a Strauss waltz, drumming the beat on his thighs with strong fingers. The end of the piece was met with loud applause from the audience, the quality of the music being much appreciated. The joie de vie of the players infected everyone, not a hard feat as the day was fine and holiday spirit abounded.

The next item was a rather naughty medley of music hall tunes, the words of which were happily sung among the crowd, followed by a selection of light orchestral pieces. During one of these, Orlando nudged Stewart in the side and pointed to an elderly couple in front of them who, having struggled to put up their one deck chair, were now attempting to share it. "I think we should give them one of ours, Jonty"

"Of course, I'll take mine over." He looked a bit sheepish and stared at the grass. "If you'll just fold it, of course."

Coppersmith's bosom swelled with pride and he mentally listed this as being another area in which he had supremacy over the light of his life. Bridge, racing tips, croquet, catching shrimps, putting up deckchairs, making his lover moan—the list was becoming nicely lengthened. He deftly returned the chair to its flat state, waved aside all offers of help, took it over to the couple, then just as deftly erected it again, bowing politely. Stewart was grinning with pleasure, standing up to stretch himself while the band

searched out their music for the next tune.

Orlando indicated his own chair. "Take mine, Jonty, I can sit on the grass."

"You will not; we'll take turn and turn about, one piece of music each. We're not in the Senior Common Room now with rules about keeping to particular seats. I've already been accused, very early on in our friendship, of stealing your special chair. I shan't risk it again."

They'd set the deckchairs up at the very back of the crowd, where they were likely to be unobserved as all the eyes and ears were turned forwards to the bandstand. The height of the backs of the chairs made it very difficult to see over them anyway, except if you took advantage of the slight rise at the side of the arena. Stewart gently lowered his posterior to the grass, a process which gave him a strange view of a world peopled by rear ends encompassed by sagging striped canvas. He gradually maneuvered himself until he was by Orlando's knees, then surreptitiously lifted his arm, resting it on one of them. The music carried on, a variation on the 1812 overture being attempted as a first half finale, and Coppersmith was so wrapped up in the piece he didn't notice what was happening. Jonty grew bolder, moving his head across until it rested on his own arm, the one which lay upon Orlando's knee. It was about the closest he'd come to Coppersmith in broad daylight, in public—the thrill was delicious. He was wondering whether there was any way that he could get his little nose to make contact with Orlando's flesh when his head got thrown violently in the air by the jerk of a bony kneecap.

"What do you think you're playing at, you little pest?" Coppersmith hissed like some agitated serpent.

"Seeing how far I could go without you noticing, of course," Jonty whispered his reply. "Got quite a way really, my main objective being to get my nose in contact with a

part of your exposed flesh.” He laughed. “Quite a good game this, I must try it again.”

“Well you won’t do it here. I’m wise to you now, trouble maker.” Orlando almost giggled, something which happened very rarely in public. They sat back and waited for the music to start again.

The concert re-started with some Vivaldi. Orlando listened with pleasure, not least because the swell and grandeur of the music made him think of the previous night, which had been stunning. This holiday was proving beyond all expectation, now that he was relaxed and in an excellent mood, especially as he could apply his mind to the challenge of another murder. This time neither he nor his college was at threat so it had become almost an intellectual exercise, especially today when it was Ainslie who was out doing the questioning, the part of the procedure which Coppersmith liked the least. He desperately wanted to unravel the mystery before the police did, not through any malice for Wilson or le Tissier but from the sheer thrill of the chase and the delights of an intellectual puzzle solved.

Orlando’s brain kept ticking over, exploring avenues. He could clearly formulate a theory about one of the staff finding the accusatory letters in Sheringham’s drawer, using the information, flawed as it was, to start a little scheme of his or her own. All that was missing was the evidence that such a thing had happened. He inwardly laughed at how he’d have ripped apart any thesis from his students that didn’t follow the strict Coppersmith *evidence first, theory second* rule. They should hoist him on his own petard here, and a pretty explosion it would make. Frustratingly, the theory, neat as it was, still didn’t bring them any closer to finding the murderer.

If Ainslie senior had found out about the letters then confronted the blackmailer, possibly they might have panicked and killed him, but how would any blackmailer

have got around the back of his victim without raising the man's suspicions? Had there been two people working in concert? A collaborator of the letter writer, apparently an innocent party to Ainslie, might be the answer. Someone who could have come in on another pretext—the maid to re-hang a curtain, perhaps—that person could have quite easily dealt the blow.

The concert came to its loud and dramatic end, people struggled to put down deckchairs while Coppersmith smugly watched them, then folk walked off to coaches or train stations humming the most popular melodies. Time was drawing on, so he and Jonty wandered down to the quay to take a cab back to The Beaulieu. They had barely time to change for dinner before they were due to meet Ainslie in a quiet corner of the bar, summoned by an intriguing note they found pushed under the door on their return.

Matthew's eyes were all aglow with his information. *Nothing you could rely on in court*, he averred, *just some juicy little tidbits that bear thinking about if you'll let me share the fruit of my thinking*. He'd chosen a table where they were unlikely to be overheard. "If Alice had got an inkling about those letters, perhaps she'd mentioned them to her Alec," he tipped his head towards the barman, who was busy serving the newlyweds, a couple who were starting to look just a little tired as the fortnight progressed. "He wants to increase his funds, has his sights set higher than keeping someone else's bar, and he gets to visit the guests' rooms. What if he found the papers in Sheringham's rooms then just repeated the allegations verbatim? He could have had his letters under my door soon enough, and the method of reply seems more suited to a local rather than a relatively newly arrived visitor."

Coppersmith studied his glass for a while then spoke. "I never even saw those letters; Jonty won't share their

contents with me. He probably thinks I'm not mature enough. Would you tell me what the accusations were and how they were substantiated?"

Stewart turned to Orlando, incredulous at his boldness. He was distinctly aware that something had changed in Coppersmith over the past few days, even predating their physical union, and he was inclined to put it down to the final revelations about Coppersmith's father. It was as if, with this last secret shared, Orlando had found new confidence. There had always been a masterly streak within him, Stewart had seen that the night of the first murder at Bride's, when the man had taken control of events. Since then it had only shown itself on odd occasions, like at the Derby, or when he'd threatened the Bride's murderer so chillingly.

If this assertiveness was now showing in everyday life, then it had been made even more plain in their bedroom last night. Stewart began to color at the remembrance and hastily spoke. "Would you be happy to tell us, Matthew? I know what was said in those vile things, although I've no idea, apart from your assertions of what was untrue, how much could be proven."

Ainslie stared at his hands, as he had stared at Coppersmith's the night before his father was killed. "The letter stated that it knew that I lay with men and pointed out that this wasn't just illegal but, in the writer's view, immoral. While I disagree with the last point, the rest is true. There were allegations made that I had paid for boys to....." he colored slightly, "to provide me with services, at certain hotels. That is *not* true, I've never had to pay to make anyone take my favors. I find the idea of that abhorrent, anyway, as no doubt you both do. There also was a suggestion that I kept a young man in accommodation at my cost, like men keep their mistresses. This is also not in any way accurate, though I've made presents to one or two of my friends in the past. Tokens of my esteem."

Stewart smiled as he saw Coppersmith trying not to

look down at his tie-pin, which might well qualify in the same category as Ainslie's *tokens*.

"If these allegations are untrue," Orlando said, "there would be nothing with which to substantiate them, so what would you have to fear?"

"Oh, I know full well that nothing could be made to hold up in court on these counts, unless someone were prepared to bribe a witness. Why on earth should someone seek to see themselves out of pocket on that score? There might be some leeway in misinterpreting the gifts I gave my friends, but I think not. The simple truth is that these men were more than friends to me, and one of them I parted with on less than happy terms. If he's seen fit to supply Sheringham's agent with information..."

"I think I see a possible chain of events here." Orlando sat forward, his eyes keen. "Sheringham's not only your rival in business, he also seemed to bear your father no great love. Perhaps he's been waiting for his opportunity of doing your reputation, both personal and commercial, harm. Let's say he somehow stumbles across your friend, the embittered one, they fall to talking about the printing business, your name comes up and certain accusations are made in spite. They say hell hath no fury like a woman scorned—I dare say men can hold their own on that point too. Sheringham says that he needs things in writing, with details of some specific incidents, as soon as possible, however this has all happened too close to his holiday, so the information has to be sent here."

Stewart snorted. "Aren't you breaking your own rules again about basing theories on evidence? You'd flay your students for doing the same."

"Jonty, I don't care. This freedom from the university practice of academic rigor and rectitude is exhilarating."

"Alright, Sheringham gets the letter with the details he requires. What then?" Jonty was almost bouncing with eagerness to see what stunning conclusions his friend had reached.

“Then he takes his chance. By one of life’s strange coincidences, the Ainslie family is staying here, so he strikes while the iron is hot and sends the blackmailing note, unaware that Matthew’s friend has told him a pack of lies.”

“So far it makes some sense, Orlando, despite the fact that it seems to be the complete opposite of what you said yesterday. But I guess that mathematicians are likely to be a bit changeable. *La don e mobile*, what?” Jonty giggled, as did Matthew who appreciated the exceedingly bad operative pun.

Orlando simply made a rude face at his friend. “I’m ignoring those comments. I’m merely re-exploring all the possibilities now that I have more information, some of which I did not have previously.”

Matthew fought hard to hide a grin, his blue eyes burning with intense concentration. “I have less and less inclination to accept that theory about Sheringham. The man isn’t short of money; his motive would surely be to disgrace us, not to fleece us. He would probably be better off financially with a rival out of the way, rather than risking being in court himself for extortion. I accept that the information may well have come as you suggest, but I think that someone else used it. I wouldn’t be surprised if that someone was in the room now.” A little inclination of the head toward the bar. “What do you think, Jonty?”

Stewart started slightly. “Oh, I’m sorry, I was wool-gathering again. I think that Orlando is possibly right about the source of those accusations. If you’ve been discreet, then I think it unlikely that you’ve left an incriminating trail, so they’ll have come from someone close. I think there’s much to be said, Matthew, for your choice of suspect for blackmail. Although murder is quite another thing.”

Orlando rolled his eyes, implying that Stewart was only a poor student of the bard, not equipped with a mathematician’s academic rigidity.

“You can sneer if you want to, Orlando, but I feel that you’re both making this thing too complex. We potentially



have someone collecting information, or making it up more like, another man to whom this gen is given, then another person who comes along, notes or copies the stuff and uses it for blackmail. Does he or she commit the murder? No, it's his, or her, accomplice who does the deed."

"Accomplice?"

"Yes, Matthew. Orlando feels that your father was far too sensible to let a blackmailer walk around behind him, so he's introduced some other person, one your father would have trusted, who got behind his defenses. Stuff and nonsense." Stewart waited for Coppersmith to make a defense of his theory, but none came. "I believe that there was great passion at work in your father's murder, and significant physical strength too. I'm not sure that, say, Alice would either feel moved enough to commit the deed or have the power to do it. It can't be easy to..." He stopped, realizing he had overstepped the bounds of decency. "Alec might well have qualified on both counts, if he were desperate enough."

Ainslie looked puzzled at this new development to an already complex theory.

"Suddenly an expert on Ockham's Razor, are we, Jonty?" Coppersmith was still undoubtedly miffed about the *la donna e mobile* joke.

"Never pretended to be, it's just common sense not to create some over elaborate scenario. And a bit of gut feeling, talking of which, is that waiter ever coming with the menu? Because I feel fair clemmed again."

"You're always fair clemmed, you must have worms," Orlando countered, "or hollow legs." The gathering dissolved into laughter, anticipation of dinner being much more welcome than considering the labyrinth this case was becoming.

## Chapter Eleven

Tuesday brought another scorching hot day in prospect. From the moment they'd rather daringly taken their early morning teas out onto the balcony, Jonty and Orlando had begun to plan their swim. They knew that they would be safe from peeping Toms, or peeping Mavises, as 'The Misses' were going into St. Helier to look for new outfits with which to astound their male admirers. Stewart's view on hearing this was that there couldn't be enough material on the whole of Jersey to make a dress for Miss Forbes, who wasn't a small girl. He also speculated that Miss Sheringham's family would be better off waiting for the races and seeing if there was a supplier of horse blankets present. It was really very rude of him, hardly displaying his usual magnanimity, excusable only because he'd taken extreme umbrage with these young hussies over their spying on him. He had no doubt it was *deliberate* spying, that they'd been on his—and Orlando's—trail. As Ainslie senior had probably followed his son.

This time, when they arrived at *their* bay, the only inhabitants to be observed on the cliffs were some sand martins darting about looking for insects, so the men were

free to strip down to their costumes on the beach then run down to the sea. They stopped just short of the waves, astounded at what they found on the sand there. Starfish—red golden, creamy white, large as plates, small as a penny—dozens of them, strewn along the strand.

“Where have they come from?”

“Wind got up last night, Orlando. I heard it even if you were dead to the world. Combination of that alongside a strong sea drove them in and cast them up on the shore, I guess. It seems so sad.”

Coppersmith gingerly picked one up, observing the slow movement of its limbs, then gently put it back into the surf, only to see it be stranded again. “Is there nothing we can do?”

“Cast them back, I suppose, as far as we can throw them and away from the rocks.” Several of the things were already missing limbs where they’d been thumped against the stones with all the force the waves could muster, as if the sea itself was intent on destroying them. The men began to pick the creatures up, flinging them out to the place where the beach fell away steeply.

“Do you think that we can save them?”

“I don’t know, Orlando. Truly”

“But we should try?”

“Oh, yes, if we can make a difference to just one, then it’s been worth while.” When all the handsome little beasts had been sent flying, the men stopped to watch the crashing surf, wondering how many of the things that they’d rescued were just being smashed up again. Stewart waited for what he thought would be an inevitable remark from Coppersmith about how *he* felt like one of those starfish and how Jonty had rescued him, but the comment didn’t come. He felt relieved, as sometimes Orlando was just too mawkish for comfort, yet from the corner of his eye he could see a sentimental look on Coppersmith’s face, a look which needed to be got rid of quickly.

“Race you to the rock pools, slowcoach. Last one there

buys lunch all the rest of the week.” Stewart hared off like billy-oh, leaving Orlando in his wake, a state of affairs that didn’t last for long. “One day you will be kind enough to let me win for once.” Jonty was bent over, hands on knees, huffing and puffing like a great whale.

“The kindness wouldn’t be to your ultimate good. You’re quite insufferable enough already about all your many accomplishments. You must accept that I’m the faster runner. Always will be.” Orlando grinned.

Stewart began plotting an elaborate revenge. Involving mild to moderate bodily pain. And a lobster.

“I’ll get even with you, Orlando. I’ll tell Mavis that you have such a passion for her, you’d like to meet her by the fountain tonight.”

“You wouldn’t dare, not in a million years.”

“Wouldn’t I just? No, I suppose I wouldn’t, you’re right. Perhaps I can meet you by the fountain instead. I seem to remember that was the start of a very memorable evening. As I recall you ...”

“Sh! You mustn’t speak of such things in public.”

“Public? How does two oystercatchers, a turnstone and some starfish—the bloody things are coming in again, Orlando—constitute public?”

“It just does.”

“I suppose that those starfish are going to write down every word we speak, they’d be good at that given the number of arms they have, then give it to Inspector Wilson, who would be supremely indifferent to it, I suspect. That would teach the little buggers, and they’d have to go home to the bottom of the sea shame-faced. Only they don’t seem to have faces, so it would be red bodied.”

“You talk such twaddle at times. If anyone had told me a year ago that I’d be intoxicated listening to someone going on about what part of a starfish turned red when they were embarrassed, I’d have thought they’d gone totally mad. But it’s not madness, is it? It’s love.” He took Stewart into his arms, out by the rocks, in full view of the sea and the cliff

tops, then kissed him. "Don't ever forget."

The police were just about twenty four hours behind the combined intellects of Ainslie, Coppersmith and Stewart in the matter of the hotel staff. Or so it appeared to Matthew, when he was summoned back to the little room where interviews took place. It seemed they'd questioned Alice, receiving much the same information as Matthew had, although he suspected it wasn't given as freely or with such good will. She'd not been able to hide the fact she'd overheard Gwenny Sheringham being told about the letters by her father, or that she'd then related the story to Alec Banks.

"We wondered whether Banks could have looked for the letters when he was doing his valeting and whether he would have been inclined to use them to draft his own missives." If Inspector Wilson knew he was behindhand on the trail, he didn't show it.

"What did he have to say for himself?" Ainslie was aware that, as a suspect, he should be answering the questions not posing them, but his amateur sleuthing had made him bold.

"Very little; like he'd put up shutters of steel. There was the usual nonsense of insisting he'd been told nothing by Alice who, if looks are anything to go by, is in for a tongue lashing once he gets hold of her. *Letters?* He didn't know the first thing about them, either." Le Tissier sniffed. "He says all he did was valeting for Mr. Sheringham and cleaning the shoes for all the family."

"He said we could check all the blades kept behind the bar if we want, but he swore he'd never taken or used them for any purpose other than they were designed for. Doesn't have his own one, either." Wilson's face showed how little he believed any of it.

"And so?" Denials, lies. Were they any nearer the truth of things?

“We had to allow him to return to his job, on the understanding that, like several other people here, he’s not to leave the island. We need to find some other witness who can contribute information on what Banks has been up to. There’s one thing you can help us with,” Wilson drew some envelopes from his inside pocket. “Perhaps you might be able to help us by putting a name to the author?”

Matthew didn’t blanch when he saw the writing; he’d steeled himself to see something familiar so wasn’t overly surprised. Of course he could name the person who’d shopped him to Sheringham. Nonetheless, his heart was torn apart to observe such spite in the familiar handwriting, script which had spoken before only of tenderness. Elegant whorls that had described endearments and passion now told of lies and anger. The author was Alistair Stafford, a man Ainslie once thought he could have loved. He sighed, folded the papers, returned them. “I’m sorry gentlemen; I can’t tell who has written these.”

Le Tissier shook his graying head. “This problem’s proving as slippery as an eel and just as liable to twist itself into knots when it thinks itself caught. Give me a nice straightforward case where men are stabbed to death by their wives for kissing the parlor maid or ancient aunts get poisoned for the profit of their beneficiaries.”

“Ah, there’s the rub.” Wilson looked as if he too would rather be investigating a pub brawl. “There’s nothing so simple here. Whoever killed your father, Mr. Ainslie, has been very clever, or very lucky, or both.”

The soft double bed in The Beaulieu’s best suite was, for once, not seeing anyone *do their duty*, except in the detection sense. Orlando had made a list for them to go through, item by item.

Possible weapons; the hotel was bristling with them, from Greenwood’s tie pin to the lethal looking thing that Mrs. Newlywed kept her hat on with. According to Wilson,

many of these nasty little items had been examined and all had proved relatively spotless. "Perhaps that's suspicious in itself, Jonty?"

"I doubt it. People like to keep things clean, especially when they have servants to do the cleaning for them." Stewart wrinkled his nose thoughtfully. "What have you got listed under opportunity?"

Coppersmith snorted like a grumpy horse. "That's worse. I feel at times that the whole island could have come in and caused mayhem in that room. The police say all their attempts at logical elimination have proved futile. You'll be pleased about that, with your hatred of alibis." He turned a page. "Then there's motives. Those are crawling out of the dark like woodlice when you turn a garden pot."

"Well, I think you can discount infidelity, not just because of what Matthew said about his father. Lady Hardley should be scratched from your race card."

"Even if Wilson says that Mr. Greenwood knew Lord Hardley from the London club where he once worked? Or that Mr. Newlywed was a distant relation of his lordship?"

"Red herrings, the lot of 'em. I trust my mother implicitly in this. You'd be better off considering sharp practice at the tables; several people have mentioned things Ainslie allegedly did, including accusing other people of cheating. What if one of the guests here had been a victim of the man's skullduggery? That evening before he died—what if he'd been at it again and someone took umbrage?"

"Come to that, you can't discount business rivalry. I'd love to know what's behind Sheringham's attempt to embarrass Ainslie's publishing house. Perhaps it's just fierce rivalry, but there's been more than one hint that things weren't at all rosy in the garden when Charles Ainslie was in charge of the business." Orlando tapped his notes in frustration. "It's all hints or gossip, nothing concrete to get our teeth into."

"That blackmail's concrete enough. I can't decide whether it's just some opportunist trying to make some easy

money, or if there are deeper motives at work.” Jonty’s fingers traced the word ‘murder’ which stood out among Coppersmith’s notes. “There’s passion here, Orlando. Real passion, enough to take a man’s life in cold blood. Someone hated Ainslie enough to take his life. If you want a nice conundrum to go to sleep with, think long and hard about who we’ve come across who’s given us a hint of something like zeal for revenge.”

On Wednesday the two fellows of St. Bride’s—who had arrived on Jersey pale and wan, it having been a disappointing summer in East Anglia—came down to breakfast looking brown and healthy, wearing huge smiles. They exuded goodwill to all men, even managing a bit for ‘The Misses’. They looked for Ainslie, as they intended to visit St. Brelade’s and Orlando had suggested they invite him along, much to Jonty’s pleasure. Stewart had even suggested keeping Ainslie’s acquaintance when they returned home; the man would enjoy coming up to high table as their guest and heaven knows he would need good friends to support him in the future. Mr. Ainslie, however, wasn’t to be found. It was said that he’d left early for the station—an appointment in St. Helier, Mrs. Tattersall believed—leaving no messages.

“Well, it’s just us then, Orlando. Shame, though. I think Matthew would have appreciated the church and its graveyard. Bet he’s as keen on the places as I am.”

Coppersmith frowned. He’d hoped that church visiting was done with for this holiday, but Stewart obviously had other ideas. He would need to hatch a little plan or two to get round it.

“Penny for your thoughts, Orlando? You seem unusually pensive even by your standards today.”

Coppersmith started, caught out in his fantasies about faking a bad leg or a rash or anything else that would prevent the torture of another set of pews. “Oh, I was just



wondering what business could have taken Mr. Ainslie into town at such an early hour.”

“Probably an entirely innocent motive, I’d say. Waiting for something or someone arriving on the early boat. Seeing a doctor. I don’t know, and I’m not going to spoil the day speculating.” He turned his attention to a particularly scrumptious sausage. “I must find out which butcher they use here, these are possibly the finest bangers I’ve ever tasted. We could have them sent to Bride’s, acquire a little stove, then I could cook them for you for Sunday breakfast, after our usual visit to The Bishop’s Cope.”

Orlando blushed, hurriedly raising his teacup to his lips to try to hide his burning cheeks. Visits to The Bishop’s Cope usually ended up with port in his rooms then a night in his bed. He hissed for his friend to be quiet, but Stewart just laughed. He was in a wonderful mood for some reason known only to himself, and nothing that Orlando could do would spoil it. They finished their meal in relative peace, returning to their room to read the previous day’s newspaper before they left for their excursion. Coppersmith found a scandalous tale about his old professor at Oxford which he could hardly bear to read, involving as it did not one but *two* kept women. They pored over every little story, feeling very out of touch with the real world in this almost fairytale land of sea and sand and long hot days. Once replete with news, they priddied themselves to a peak of beauty then set off to stun the world.

“Not another churchyard, please, Dr. Stewart, I beg of you. I’ve been in every church on this island, I’ve seen the grave of every man, woman, child and goat who has died these last thousand years.” Orlando sat on the little wall, refusing to budge. He’d been unable to devise any more effective a strategy than non-cooperation, but he hoped it would be effective. Perhaps Jonty would take a sympathetic view then they could go and play lawn bowls somewhere.

Or annoy squirrels. Anything except visiting churches.

"This is one of the loveliest places of worship on the island, Orlando. St. Brelade's, you know, has a great reputation. There's a little fisherman's chapel and..."

"You've said that every church we've been to is one of the loveliest; none of them have been in any way mediocre by your reckoning. Not before or during or afterwards."

"But we've seen such stained glass, such brasses." Stewart's eyes lit up with rapture.

Orlando remembered all of the brasses—he'd been made to translate most of them, his Latin being sounder than Jonty's. If he saw another parsimonious inscription to another saintly being snatched in their prime he would be adding Stewart to the list. He'd hide the body in the sand dunes and run away to sea before he was caught.

"Just this one, Orlando. Just this one then there'll be no more until advent. Just chapel on Sundays. And Wednesdays for evensong. Not forgetting St George's when we stay with the family."

Coppersmith capitulated, as he always did when Jonty had set his heart on something, but the long walk down to the church was done in relative silence, Orlando calculating how much sand it would take to bury a body and whether the rate at which it would be blown away would allow him to get to the other side of the world by steam ship.

The church was beautiful, unbelievably so, with a glorious roof which made the whole thing feel snug and welcoming, instead of overpowering as so many places of worship were. As soon as they stepped through the door, the atmosphere affected them. They dutifully processed around the building, reading the inscriptions, but even Stewart's heart was no longer in it. This was a place to be enjoyed in a different way. They sat in the pews, simply breathing in the smells of polished wood, the odor of the single candle burning, the aroma of the abundant leather bound bibles.

“I often think that places capture a sense of what people have done in them. People have prayed here and found a touch of the world beyond this one. Peace, they’ve found that too, the very stones of the building ring with it.” Jonty’s eyes were aglow. He knew that Coppersmith was a heathen at heart. He went to church like any good boy would do, but he didn’t truly believe, not like Stewart did. Jonty couldn’t stop trying to introduce his friend to the great secret he’d found. “Can’t you feel anything here, Orlando?”

Coppersmith looked very serious. “There *is* something Jonty, but I can’t put a name to it. Mathematical vocabulary rather lets one down in these circumstances, you know; you’re far better off with your soaring prose. It does feel peaceful here, and special. More than that I can’t say.” For the second time that holiday they sat holding hands in a house of God, until they were interrupted by the door opening and the arrival of the verger.

Their plans for the rest of the day had been to take lunch in some little hostelry en route to The Beaulieu, then get their bathers with a view to visiting *their* cove. The weather had other ideas, however, ensuring they reached the hotel, without umbrella or coat, extremely wet. They ended up lying on the settee, listening to the showers caressing the window panes, which was an enormously pleasurable experience when one was at last dry, warm and indoors.

“Do you recall your final exams, Orlando, or does your poor senile brain struggle to remember that long ago?”

There was no spoken reply, just the application of knuckles to Dr. Stewart’s head in a painful movement which was called a ‘nutmeg’ when Jonty was at school. He didn’t mind—the manifestation of mild violence was just a sign that he’d wound Coppersmith up slightly and there was nothing Stewart enjoyed more than teasing a cross Orlando.

“I have a very good recollection of them; indeed I can tell you exactly what the questions were. First there was...”

After ten minutes of details about not just the papers, but Coppersmith’s brilliant responses to them, Jonty

regretted that he'd ever asked. He held up his hand to stop his friend. "Fascinating as I find this, Orlando, I have to give a lecture in exactly," he consulted his watch, "six weeks, so I need to move our conversation on. What I meant to ask was whether there were any funny stories you had to tell from those times. I can vividly remember the first paper I took. This lad at the desk in front of me—he was huge, muscles in his spit—turned the paper over and simply burst into tears. The invigilators had to find someone to take him back to his college. Poor thing, he'd never once twigged in nearly three years that he hadn't been offered a place there on account of his intellects but because he was one of the finest rowers in England. Still, they gave him his degree. I suppose they had to, considering how much money his father had given to his college."

Orlando snorted, implying that *his* university would never have done such a thing, which was a lie, of course. He must have felt the need to go one better than his friend. "Now that you mention it, Jonty, there was a very peculiar thing happened in my final examination. We were all sitting working when we were aware of someone walking through the room—I distinctly remember every head going up at the same time to watch the man. Not that he made a lot of noise, just seemed to exude a rather noticeably cold presence that we had all detected." He paused to observe Stewart's reactions.

"Go on, Orlando." Jonty was fascinated.

"He was dressed in old fashioned clothes, Georgian, I think, and seemed oblivious to us all working there. He simply progressed up the aisle between the desks, then exited directly through the oak paneled wall. The invigilators didn't bat an eyelid, merely told us *gentlemen, please carry on with your examination*. Turned out this ghost appeared quite regularly."

"How extraordinary! Did they know who he was?"

"It appears that he was a student who had literally scared himself to death. When he was a child, his nurse had

told him that if his hand ever grew larger than his face, then he would be dead within the week. It had become an obsession, he used to hold his hand up to his face every day to check. One day when he did so, he found that it had grown larger overnight and he simply dropped dead from fright. So the nurse was proved correct!"

Stewart shook his head, whistling incredulously. Gradually he raised his own hand to his face; Coppersmith must have known all along that he would, so he bided his time. As soon as Jonty's palm was immediately in front of his nose, Orlando's arm flew up and slapped his friend's hand into his own face.

There was an *Ow!* An oath. A red, crumpled little nose. Stewart sore and sheepish, angry at having been caught out. Coppersmith, triumphant for once, avenged for the church visit. His smugness didn't last very long. Jonty suddenly leant forwards, put one hand to his face, cupped it as if catching something then dug in his pocket with the other. Great gobbets of blood started to stream from his nose, dropping into his hand and filling the hanky which was quickly stuffed to his nostrils.

"Jonty, what's wrong?"

"Nosebleed, you clown; give me your handkerchief." The clean linen stuffed into Stewart's bloodied, outstretched hand was used to replace his own, which he then thrust, red and wet, into Orlando's grasp. "Just need to pinch in the right place..." Jonty fiddled around until he'd found a particular spot on the bridge of his nose where applying pressure made the torrent stop.

"Has this happened before?" Coppersmith was white as a ghost, with a look of plain terror on his face.

"Often when I was younger, especially on the rugby pitch. Though I'd grown out of it. Wrong again." Jonty shifted his fingers to get a better grip. "Could do with another clean cloth."

Orlando didn't need to be asked twice—he quickly produced not only another immaculate handkerchief, but a

wet flannel, with which he gently cleaned Stewart's one free hand. "I'm so very sorry Jonty, I only meant to have a bit of a laugh, like you've gulled me many a time, if I'd known, I would never have..." He looked up into Stewart's face at just the wrong moment. A strange effect of the back pressure from the nose pinching had caused blood to leak into Jonty's tear ducts and start flowing out of them.

Orlando fainted.

Pressing his hanky even closer to his poor face, Jonty leapt from the sofa to set off in search of the Tattersalls, whose room was only a few doors from the young men's. Mrs. T opened the door, Aloysius being in the middle of his late afternoon nap, grasped instantly what Stewart's problem was, listened sympathetically to what had happened to Coppersmith then immediately offered to come along and help.

"Don't you go trying to pick him up, he's fine where he is. Just make sure he's on his side so he can breathe easily." He was; he could. "Now sit down with me and hold that nose of yours. Have you been pinching it a long time?"

"Hours it feels like, but I guess it's only been minutes."

"Well, hold it a minute more, then take the hanky away so I can get a look at it."

Gingerly, Stewart took his hand off his face, although he held it cupped below his nostrils just in case. A terrible few seconds passed until he could conclude that the flow had been stemmed, at which point he immediately slipped onto the floor next to Orlando. "What should I do, Mrs. T? Will he be alright?"

"Of course he will, love. Just give him a moment. It must have been the shock of seeing that blood everywhere made him pass out. Is he on the squeamish side?"

"Not that I'd ever realized. He gets a bit upset sometimes if he thinks I'm in distress." He remembered the temper tantrum thrown at the rugby game, where Orlando had been convinced that Stewart was going to be killed in every tackle. "Bit of a mother hen, I'm afraid."

A slight groaning noise indicated that mother chicken was coming round. Jonty encouraged him to sit up, while Mrs. T fetched a cup of water. "Here, ducks, have a little of this," she fussed over him as if he were her own son.

"What happened?"

"You fainted, old chap," Stewart placed his hand on Orlando's shoulder, as brave a gesture as he could manage, even though they had no real secrets from their guest.

"No, not that. I knew I fainted, it's happened before, after a rugby game. I mean your eyes."

"Oh, my nose is just a bit too small for efficient first aid, it sends the blood the wrong way sometimes. Mama fainted the first time she saw it, too. Sorry, I should have warned you."

Coppersmith produced a wan smile. "Bit of a shock to the system." He turned to Mrs. Tattersall. "I'm sorry if I caused you any trouble."

"Oh, don't fret about that. Dr. Stewart came to get me because he was so worried and needed a bit of reassurance. I was only too glad to help, I've seen many a nose that wouldn't stop bleeding, my father being a doctor and asked to deal with all sorts of things." She smiled to see the discomfort of a robust young man for whom such spectacular bleeding was a distinct source of concern. "Now, I'm going to ask Mr. Greenwood to have your dinner sent up on a tray tonight, and I shall make sure it's got beef in it, with a nice bottle of red wine on the side. Need to build you both up." She reached out her wrinkled hand and pinched first one man's cheek, then the other's. "Daft pair, you are."

Once she had departed, full of *things to be doing* which was obviously her delight, Orlando grabbed Jonty's hand. "Thought you were dying. Never seen anything like it. Made a bit of a fool of myself."

"Nonsense, Orlando. I'm just concerned that you're well; shock can be a terrible thing, Father says people can die of it. Oh, I say, perhaps mentioning that wasn't very

sensible, you look all pale again.” He squeezed Coppersmith’s distinctly clammy mitts. “Think we could do with a nice cup of tea before dinner, not a stiff drink—I think that would do you more harm than good. I’ll ring for the maid.” He rose, but Orlando pulled him back.

“No, don’t go...”

“It’s only as far as the bell pull, Orlando.”

“No, not yet. Can’t be without you at the moment.” His eyes began to well—the flow of tears, once started, couldn’t be stemmed as easily as Jonty’s nose had been. “Really did think you were expiring, and it would have been all my fault.”

Stewart produced the only hanky he had to hand, a rather sanguine one, to attempt to wipe his lover’s face. “Sorry about this, Orlando, but it’s the only cloth I can get hold of until you let go of my paw. Hope the laundry returns some of these soon or we’ll be in terrible trouble. Gone through a few today.”

Coppersmith produced a rather wan smile at Jonty’s indomitable spirit. “Thank you. Perhaps I could let you go as far as my drawer to get another one or else my face will end up as smeared as yours. We must look like Roman gladiators or something equally bloodthirsty.”

“Dare say we do,” Stewart’s voice reached through from the other room. “But I don’t care at this particular moment. Here you are,” he proffered a clean cloth. “Can I go and sort this out?” he indicated the bloody flannel, waited for Orlando’s nod, went off to rinse it, then brought it back to use on Coppersmith’s streaky face. “Just a bit of mess, eh?” He looked down at the carpet, where little red drops, eluding his hand, had left a strange pattern. “Bit gory that. Looks like my room did after...” He stopped, not wishing to carry on with the inevitable next parts. Student. Throat. Razor.

“Not as bad as that, Jonty. Even that wasn’t as gruesome as our dining table when my father did the deed.”

Stewart looked up in surprise. It had taken him months



to winkle the true story of Coppersmith senior's death out of his son, at a great cost, and now Orlando was talking of the event very calmly. He smiled, putting his arm around his friend's shoulders. "All better now, Orlando." A kiss would have been the next logical step and certainly would have occurred had Matthew Ainslie, with his immaculate timing, not come to knock on the door.

The men shared a look of mutual regret, then called for the man to enter. Ainslie's handsome face came round the door, saw the scene of carnage then raised an eyebrow. "Have you two got fed up with each other and decided to fight it out over fifteen rounds? I'd offer my services in your corner, but I can't do the job for both."

"Suppose we do look a sight at the moment, Matthew. Orlando decided to play a schoolboy prank which ended up giving me the king of all nosebleeds. Then to add insult to injury, he fainted and left me to get help. Idiot." He gave Coppersmith what he hoped looked like a glare, but Matthew must have seen the affection in it.

"I'll go, shall I?" Ainslie looked unsettled, someone who realizes they're an uninvited guest upon hallowed ground.

"No, not at all. We have a while before dinner, which Mrs. Tattersall is at present insisting that we have served in our rooms. If you can stand the sight of exsanguination," he indicated the carpet, "you're welcome to stay."

Ainslie perched on the edge of a chair, still awkward. "I'd hoped to share a little bit of information with you, but if it's not convenient..."

"Matthew, how many times do we have to tell you that it's perfectly fine. Isn't it, Orlando?"

Coppersmith had recovered some color and nodded fairly positively. "Any time is convenient if it's news related to this ghastly business."

"I believe it is, as it concerns Alec, the barman. I understand that he's denied everything to the authorities, who've been left to try to find a way to link him either to

the letters or my father, if not to the murder.” His eyes took on a steely glint. “I have a link.”

“Tell us.” Stewart’s eyes matched his gleam, twinkling like the stars which would soon grace the summer’s night.

“My little pal Alice. She’s not daft—my questions, and le Tissier’s, have given her pause for thought. Where do you think she saw Alec Bonds on Monday morning?”

“Coming out of your father’s room?”

“Absolutely, and she hasn’t seen fit to share this with the authorities yet, only me. She thinks that because it doesn’t accord with the time of the killing, she doesn’t have to tell them, but I think it’s an interesting little tidbit.”

“It is indeed,” Orlando now had the scent of the quarry. “What time was this?”

“After breakfast, while we spoke on the terrace; my father had returned to his room to complete his ablutions. There would have been no legitimate reason for Alec to have been there, as far as I can recall.”

Coppersmith beamed. “It’s more than an interesting tidbit, Mr. Ainslie. It’s downright fascinating.”

## Chapter Twelve

“One of the last chances we’ll have to do this for a while, Jonty.” It had been Orlando’s turn to bring his early morning tea into the room where they’d spent the night—a hot, humid one, with windows wide open and not a breath of air to be had. They’d abandoned all forms of nightwear in favor of what Jonty called his ‘birthday suit’, a term which had never been employed in the Coppersmith household. His mother had tried to better herself, had sought to act and dress as the gentry did, but she would have been astonished at how the Stewarts led their lives. There was more light and life in that family, yet fewer airs and graces, than in a dozen others combined.

As for the Sunday school notions that Mrs. Coppersmith had tried to drill into her son’s head, they’d seemed to entirely consist of great lists of things which were not to be done, implying that the only way to live as a true Christian gentlemen was to be miserable all the time and to regard anything that was in any way pleasurable as sin. Charity was only to be given to the deserving, those who conformed to your own narrow viewpoint. God was the one from the Old Testament, all vengeful judgment. It was no wonder

that Orlando had lost any faith he'd ever possessed so early on in life.

Jonty had been, again, the source of revelation here. The Stewarts were a devout family, but *thou shalt not* was rarely heard uttered, despite Papa's assertion that the Ten Commandments were the basis for life. *Thou shalt* was used frequently. Helena Stewart had instilled into her brood that they should be civil to everyone, from the highest nobility to the beggar in the street. That there was no point in having wealth unless some of it was shared with people who were less well off and not just via the route of sending the Ascot bookies home happy. That there were plenty of things in life given to be enjoyed—if you didn't get stuck in and make the most of them, then you'd have a lot of explaining to do come the day of judgment.

Unusual, refreshing, controversial, yet all of it based on knowledge of scripture that astounded many people who should have known better. Mrs. Stewart seemed to have entire chunks of the New Testament off by heart and wasn't afraid to quote it mercilessly. Orlando had seen a Methodist minister, an ardent teetotaler, reduced to tears by the sermon he was given on how the bible not only condoned drinking but on some occasions positively encouraged it. Mrs. Stewart had cited chapter and verse until the man had bleated his surrender.

Not for the first time Coppersmith indulged in his private fantasy that he'd been adopted into the Stewart household as a baby. He pictured himself as a waif left on the doorstep, Helena being totally enamored of foundlings or orphans and unfortunate girls who'd been led up the garden path then left in the family way. He would have been taken in, raised as one of the brood, given a childhood happy beyond all measure. He could have been at school with Jonty so could have protected him—Orlando was convinced that between them they would have seen off the predators, no matter how unrealistic that conviction was. Maybe they'd have been at University together, perhaps the

same college, perhaps sharing rooms. It was a fantasy beyond all compare, especially with the holidays, excursion after excursion, days without number of beaches and fields and getting into trouble.

There was only one problem with this dream world, apart from the fact that it had never, nor would ever exist. Jonty would have been his brother and while there would have been no biological link, the likelihood of their indulging in a romantic liaison became much reduced, all sorts of taboos being invoked, despite the lack of common parents. But the fantasy remained, being taken out for an airing on suitable occasions, such as now.

"Lost in thought are we, Orlando? Formulating some wonderful new theorem about the square roots of negative numbers?"

"I was actually thinking about the lady whom I love." It was a deliberately provocative remark, one which produced the desired effect of Jonty spilling his tea down himself. "I mean your mother of course," Orlando continued, with an insouciant air.

"Miserable bugger, you did shock me there. Thought you were going to produce some ghastly revelation about a college servant whom you'd produced a child with on the wrong side of the blanket."

Coppersmith didn't even bother to deny it; Jonty was probably sparring for an argument which would lead to a romantic reconciliation, Orlando having been insistent the night before that there would be *no hanky panky, thank you*, due to the state of Stewart's nose. He'd been right, as there had been some more bleeding in the night and his lover's face still bore streaks of dried blood. Coppersmith gently wet his hankie with a bit of saliva, gently wiping it away.

"Well, that's a trick you've learned off your fancy piece, if I can take the liberty of referring to Mama as such, as she's a great one for the spit wash. Still does it now if she catches me." Jonty flinched as a particularly wet piece of cloth dabbed at him. "Would you leave off, please? I am not

a kitten to be licked by its mother.”

Coppersmith smirked; it was a look full of naughtiness and what might just have been lust. Whatever it meant, the gaze was pretty lascivious. “Now that’s an exceptionally good idea, Jonty,” he leaned over, applying his tongue to his lover’s cheek. “A bit like licking sandpaper at this time of the day but not unpleasant.” He began working his way down to the neck. “I think this bit is ridiculously dirty.”

Stewart squirmed and giggled, excited out of all measure by this display of stupidity. “Orlando, if this continues, it might have the most untoward consequences. What if the maid then comes in to get the cups, thinking we’ve gone to breakfast?”

“Don’t care. Let her.” Coppersmith had found the piece of flesh above the collarbone which drove Jonty wild when it was kissed. But it did him no good; for possibly the only time that he could recall since the previous March, his advances were well and truly rejected. With a great laugh, Jonty threw him off, whacked him with a convenient pillow then took himself off for a wash with a flannel rather than a tongue. Not, it has to be said, without a touch of regret.

The day promised to be fair again—they couldn’t believe their luck with the weather this holiday—so they plumped for a leisurely walk into St. Aubins to view the fishermen, followed by an equally leisurely stroll back to the hotel for a spot of lunch before taking a cab across the island. The cab ride never happened, as lunch was followed by the arrival of Wilson and le Tissier. They conferred with a worried looking Greenwood, then came over to the young men, confiding that both Mr. Ainslie and Alec, the barman, had gone missing. This pair had been spotted conversing in a heated manner after breakfast; at lunch the barman had failed to report for his shift and was nowhere to be found in the hotel or grounds. Ainslie, too, was in none of his usual haunts.

Wilson was fairly certain that his old friends might have light to shed on the matter. “Gentlemen, if you have any

idea about these mysterious disappearances, I beg you to share them with us."

"Matthew—Mr. Ainslie—told us last night that he had been talking to Alice. She told him that she'd seen Alec coming out of Ainslie senior's room on the morning of the murder. We assumed that he might have gone off to tell you all about it, but I suppose..." Jonty tailed off. It was a pretty weak assumption.

"He has quite a habit of taking things into his own hands, doesn't he, our Mr. Ainslie? Rather like two precipitate men whom I could mention who saw fit to confront a murderer." Wilson's voice had a cutting edge.

"Now, that's unfair, Inspector," Stewart bridled. "It was the murderer who approached me, in what seemed all innocence; to discuss Othello, I seem to remember. How was I to know that he'd produce a razor?"

"I'd have thought you'd have got it into your brain by then not to let yourself be alone with any of that inner circle of young men, the ones who kept cropping up throughout the investigation."

Orlando leaped to his lover's defense. "That's unfair as well, Mr. Wilson. It would have been impossible for us to cut off all contact with that coterie and still perform our college duties. You of all people should appreciate that. We never deliberately set out to put ourselves in danger."

"Not even when you went straight to Dr. Stewart's room to intervene when you realized he might be incarcerated with a murderer? Don't you describe that as putting yourselves at risk?"

Coppersmith had turned very cold, detached. "No. I call that trying to protect a very dear friend and colleague, as you might have done for the inimitable Mr. Cohen."

A standoff having been reached between the two men, open hostility wasn't far away. Le Tissier intervened. "Gentlemen, it would do us no good at all to rehash all our old cases and whatever shortcomings were revealed in them, if we were then to commit the error of letting another

killing occur. We can surmise that Mr. Ainslie believes Alec had something to do with his father's murder—it sounds as if they've already had words on the matter. Perhaps they've gone to talk this out somewhere they can't be overheard or overlooked. In which case they are both probably at risk; there will be no love lost and feelings running very high. I suggest that we confine our efforts to ascertaining where they might be. Can you enlighten us?" He turned to Stewart.

"I can't, I'm afraid. Don't know where Matthew's haunts are." He smiled rather ruefully. "Why not ask Mrs. Tattersall? Ainslie always says she knows everything."

They consulted the great oracle of The Beaulieu, who, after a moment's reflection, speculated that he might well have gone up along the path through the woods by the tennis courts. That brought you out on a rough piece of land which stretched away all along to St. Brelade's, open heath to the north and the cliffs to the south. Plenty of places where people could talk without being overheard and could see anyone who approached for miles in either direction. Matthew had often gone up there, since his father died, she averred; he'd told her it helped him to think.

"You've money enough to spare, Mr. Ainslie, anyone can see that. Bit of cash coming my way wouldn't hurt you, would it? It'd mean the world to me, get me set up in my own place instead of having to bow and scrape every five minutes." Alec Banks had met his adversary—or was it victim—as agreed, up on the barren heathland where Hare's-tails whipped at their legs.

Ainslie felt particularly grim. "If you'd come to me with a business proposition, in search of a bit of capital to set up your own project, I'd have been more than willing to listen. I like a bit of enterprise, and I'm all for encouraging it. But demanding money with menaces is quite another matter. My answer on that front is no. Always would be."



“Shame that I’ll have to go to the police about it, then, it’d be terrible to see you up in court for such a dirty little crime.” Alec scowled. “Ought to be ashamed of yourself. People like you are the lowest of the low. Perverts, that’s what I’d call you, and you’d get a lot more than two years hard labor from me, if I was the judge.” He spat on the ground, grimacing. “It’s a disgrace. Nasty little buggers like you rolling in it while decent blokes like me have to scratch around to earn a living.”

“I’d hardly call blackmail decent.” Ainslie was icily cold in his speech, blue eyes like hammered steel glinting in anger. “Nor snooping around among other people’s property, reading their letters, or killing their fathers.”

“Your father.” With a snort of contempt, Banks was ignoring all accusations in favor of his own narrow line of thinking. “He was no better than you. You should have heard what Mr. Sheringham was telling everyone about him that Sunday night. Hardly a good example.”

Ainslie colored. Heaven knew he was aware that his father was no saint, but he wouldn’t hear him vilified so, not out of the mouth of the man who had probably killed him. “You’ll take that back, or you’ll get the taste of my fist. Then we can discuss why you were coming out of our room that Monday morning.” He saw Alec blanch, knew that he was getting somewhere. “Were you fixing up a time to come back and confront him? Giving yourself time to go fetch a blade?”

The other man still didn’t deny the accusations about the murder. He was either so fixed on his own notions of inequality and unfairness that he was oblivious to all else—or he was guilty as sin. “Who said I’d been to see him?”

“Your friend Alice. She saw you, but she’s been misguided enough in her loyalty not to share the fact with the police. But she did tell me and I’d like to know exactly what you were up to.”

Alec smirked. “I was just having a little word in your old man’s ear. I thought he might be prepared to cough up a

little contribution to my funds, but he was as hard nosed as you are. Tight fisted, the lot of you and us poor workers left to put up with the scraps.”

Ainslie exhaled loudly. Banks’ constant theme of unfairness, injustice, his own self righteousness, was beginning to really madden him. “So you decided to come back later to apply a bit more pressure?”

“Should have done. Should have squeezed the pair of you till the pips squeaked.”

Ainslie advanced on him, fury mingling with the desire to avenge his own. “You’ll tell me here and now whether you killed my father. Then we’ll find Mr. le Tissier and you can tell the same to him.”

Banks laughed. “Want to fit me up for what you did yourself, do you? You’re not going to con me like that, Mr. Ainslie. Think I’m stupid or something?”

“On the contrary, I don’t think you’re stupid at all, I think that you’re very clever. You very nearly got away with murder, and that takes some doing.”

“I dare say it does, but it takes one to know one, as they say. Same as whoever wrote those letters about you to Sheringham. I bet he was a man with a touch of the Sodom and Gomorrah, so he recognized another. Perhaps he was one of your friends, Mr. Ainslie, one of those you treated nicely, were free with your money around.”

Ainslie started, violently. All his life he felt that he’d been holding part of himself in reserve, and very efficient he had been at it. Now Alec had cut too near to the bone, got uncannily close to the reality of the letter writer’s identity, he couldn’t help but react. He grabbed the man’s lapels, shaking him roughly. “You’ll tell me right now why you killed my father. This charade has gone on for far too long.”

Alec wasn’t a weak man, but he couldn’t match the formidable grip which Matthew possessed, struggle as he might. “I’m not telling you anything, not till you get your filthy bloody mitts of me. Dirty bugger, don’t you touch me.

I could catch all sorts of stuff from you.”

Ainslie tightened his grip, pulling Banks towards him. A sudden shout from behind—an instantly recognizable voice—caused him to jolt and the man pulled free. Ainslie made a wild grab, too late to stop his adversary bolting up the slope towards the cliff path.

“Mr. Ainslie,” Wilson called again, “that’s quite enough. We have him in sight.”

“He’ll get away, man. Do you want to lose hold of a murderer?”

“I think that unlikely. Mr. le Tissier is coming along in the other direction with some of his local lads.” The Inspector approached, only slightly breathless at his rapid ascent. “I have my back-up here,” he grinned, pointing to Stewart and Coppersmith whom he’d easily outstripped, despite his greater age.

When those two eventually caught up, the pursuit picked up again, their quarry clearly visible against the skyline. Banks was effectively trapped in a pincer movement between the two parties, the other of which could be seen approaching from the northwest. There was no path down from the cliffs, just sheer rock faces with jagged outcrops at the bottom which could tear a man in half. Alec couldn’t help but come back towards one group or another, unless he suddenly acquired the power of flight.

“What has he said to you?” Wilson’s age had at last seemed to catch up with him, making him puff slightly as they neared the cliff path.

“He admitted both the blackmail and seeing my father on the morning of the day he died. He’d been trying a little extortion on *him* too.”

“The murder—what about that?” Stewart caught up, red in the face from too much activity after a large lunch.

“He’s not denied it, but he’s not admitted it, either. I honestly am no closer to knowing, though not for want of trying.” Ainslie suddenly felt as if the whole exercise had been hopeless. “I’m sorry, Inspector, I should have left this

to the experts. Got rather carried away by the exploits of our friends here."

"Well, they're no great models for anyone to base themselves on, Mr. Ainslie. They nearly got themselves killed last time around, getting too close to the murderer."

Stewart grimaced. "I suppose we're never going to be allowed to forget that fact, except..."

Wilson suddenly halted, holding out an arm to make the other men do the same. Their prey had stopped walking and was clutching his ribs as if suffering from a stitch. His head was turning from side to side, taking in the two approaching parties.

"Mr. Banks! We only wish to speak with you. I beg of you to come here so we can talk about this sensibly." Wilson spoke as calmly as he could.

Alec shook his head. "Nothing to talk about as far as I'm concerned. If you want someone to question, start with that bloke next to you. Threatened me, he did. Waved his pistol at me."

Matthew wondered how Banks could have known about the existence of the gun. Either the servant who had found him threatening suicide had blabbed or Alec had done even more poking about than they'd realized so far. Wilson smiled, shaking his head. "You'd be surprised just how visible you are up here; there was no pistol being waved about. Anyway, I believe the weapon you're thinking of is firmly in my possession." He patted his pocket.

"But you must have seen him grab me. He made all sorts of threats and accusations. Lies, all of it. I never done a thing wrong."

Wilson edged gradually forward, motioning with his hand for the others to stay where they were. A dangerous point had been reached, the cliff edge looming perilously close for all of them. He hoped that le Tissier's keen sight would take in the situation and he would hold his forces back. Their quarry was frightened; a nervous man was much more dangerous to approach than a calm one.

"I never said that you had, Mr. Banks. We just need to clarify one or two things. There's a good chap." The Inspector edged closer again, provoking his prey to move back. Banks was now uncomfortably near to the edge so discretion called for Wilson to retreat.

Alec sneered. "Afraid of heights are you? Shame. Perhaps if I could just keep walking along here, you'd be too scared to come and get me." He looked over the edge. "Long way down. It'd be such a pity for your wife to see you lying at the bottom. Don't think anyone would survive it." A strange recklessness had overcome the man, making him edge nearer to the rather unstable ground at the very boundary of the cliff.

"For pity's sake, you'll fall!" Ainslie could restrain himself no longer. He didn't want Banks dead; he wanted to see justice done, even if it meant his name being brought up in court then smeared over the newspapers. He owed that much, at least, to his father.

Banks laughed, hollowly. "Bet you wouldn't really care if I went," then, as if he read the other man's mind, "means that you'd not be dragged through the courts. Keep your revolting little secrets to yourself then." He began to stab his finger towards Ainslie. "Oh, to hell with it. You both needed it, the pair of you bastards. Deserved all you got and all that's coming." He flung his arm out in a dismissive gesture, lost his balance then stumbled backwards. Wilson reached for him, a reflex reaction, no doubt, to stop him tumbling over the edge but this very action precipitated what it hoped to avoid. Alec jerked away from the policeman, lost his footing entirely on a crumbling piece of earth, fell backwards, plummeted like a stone, was broken on the rocks.

The news was brought back to the hotel by a very somber party. The local lads were offered a beer in gratitude for their help, but Ainslie and Stewart called for stiff

whiskies all round, then were left to reflect on the afternoon's events. The police had already searched the dead man's room, the previous day, but Banks' presence then hadn't made the exploration very easy. Sadder circumstances might provide richer pickings.

"I wish I had Sergeant Cohen here," Wilson said ruefully, "that man has a habit of nosing out hidden items. You'd be amazed where he's produced vital evidence from. He likes secret drawers and patent hidden safes or loose floorboards with a cache beneath. Perhaps," he nodded to Coppersmith, "you might like to come with us to play his part?"

"I'd be honored." Orlando, chest swelling with pride, felt like a boy who'd been given his school prize. Their detective skills were being truly acknowledged at last. Better still, he'd been asked and not Jonty. He hid the smile that was threatening to crack his face then followed the policeman up to Alec's room, where they began by gingerly testing the floor. In one corner, beneath where the bed had been before they'd dragged it out, the board wasn't safely nailed in place and could be easily prised up. Wilson did so, whistling with delight at the treasure trove it revealed. Two little books.

They had no solid evidence against Alec so far, except for Ainslie vowing that the man had admitted to writing the blackmailing letters, and Alice's testimony. The little black notebook that had been so carefully hidden away under the floorboards changed that, albeit circumstantially. It contained, among some fevered writings, the detailed financial plans for a business venture. The first few drafts were vague, with much scribbling about rates of saving, then there was a very clear plan, based on the investment of an amount which exactly matched that asked for in the first blackmail letter. A revision of this plan dealt with an investment totaling the sum requested in the second letter. More chillingly, there was a subsequent revision that appeared to be based on similar regular payments being

made over a period of time. Bank's intention had obviously been, like so many blackmailers, to keep coming back for more, like the proverbial Dane for the Danegeld.

The handwriting in the book gave few clues. It was sufficiently like that in the threatening letters, the unusual misspellings of words like *disgracefully* which occurred in both the letters and notebook, seeming to seal the case. If Alice verified that this was her Alec's writing, then the blackmail case was probably solved. Now, they only needed to find a link to the murders. The words which Banks had spoken out on the cliffs, both to Ainslie and to Wilson, had been analyzed repeatedly to see if the full tale could be established, but the police were still uncertain.

Le Tissier had hold of the second book. It was what was known as a 'shilling shocker', a cheap little volume which contained 'true' stories of crimes and misdemeanors. There were similar books on the bookshelf, this one alone being secreted. A little passage was carefully marked up inside it, concerning a woman who had killed her husband's mistress using one of his tie pins, by inserting it into a similar spot to the one which had caused Ainslie senior's demise. Le Tissier showed the book to the other men.

"Close, my friend, but not enough, is it?" Wilson shook his head in frustration.

"No, not for me, anyway. Perhaps for some of the more leaden footed of your colleagues who feature in these," le Tissier waved the sensational little book. "I want something much more tangible."

Coppersmith knelt down by the bed. "We could just see if the angels are smiling down on us today. I've a longer arm than you—I could have one more poke around in here." He produced several grimaces as he fished around for anything which was more than simply dust or a mouse dropping. His face suddenly registered success, as he pulled something white with rusty colored streaks from the hole. "I think you might have just got your evidence, Mr. le Tissier."

In his hand Orlando bore a man's handkerchief which looked like it had been used to wipe a bloody stiletto at some point in the not too distant past. Embroidered in the corner was the initial A. For Alec.



## Chapter Thirteen

When Friday dawned without a cloud in the sky and just the faintest of sea breezes coming in across the little harbor, Orlando was determined that their last day should be spent in *their* little cove along the cliffs. There was no more investigating to be done, something that he actually felt a tinge of regret for, although this only slightly dampened his enthusiasm. If he could have persuaded Jonty to miss breakfast—a crime of the first order in Stewart’s book—then they would have been in their bathers, in the sea, by eight thirty. As it was they bolted down their sausages, hitting the waves by half past nine. They swam, basked, lay on the rocks, and chatted contentedly.

“Let me get this absolutely plain, Jonty. A lifeboat, a pumpkin and the giant rat of Sumatra?” When Stewart had begun to relate some strange tale of his childhood, Orlando had only been half listening so had only just picked up this strange combination of elements which had entered the story.

“I have to admit that, technically, it wasn’t a giant rat nor was it from Sumatra, that was just a little fancy of mine based on Sherlock Holmes. It was a coypu belonging to one

of our neighbors who was contemplating going into the fur trade and needed to see what the raw material was like.” Stewart carried on without batting an eyelid as if these three things went together every day.

“Presumably you stole it?” Coppersmith decided that he must just go along with the strange logic of the tale.

“No. To be precise, we just borrowed it for the day, as he was away in London and wouldn’t have missed it for a week.”

“You went to the coast?”

“Absolutely. Selsey Bill, to be correct, which isn’t far from our country place, the refurbishment of which will be finished now, just in time for you to see it. Taken their time, but Father says it was worth it. It’s a glorious place, Orlando, in the middle of the rolling Sussex downs, not far at all from Chichester should you get the urge to visit the cathedral.” Stewart grinned at the thought of his friend willingly expressing the desire to visit any such place.

Coppersmith snorted. “Don’t change the subject. You and your brothers took this coypu thing down to the sea then put it in a lifeboat. Why?”

“Because it was *there*, right on the beach. We’d intended just to run the creature around a bit on a lead scaring the locals, as it was quite tame, if a bit fierce looking. However, Sheridan saw this boat and thought it might like a journey out to sea. So off we went.”

“Did it enjoy its little outing?”

“Sick as a dog, Orlando. Worse than you coming here. And the mess stank to high heaven. We had to row back to shore against the tide, luckily we’re all built like navvies, then try to clean the boat up. Cost us a pretty penny when the lifeboat man saw us. Well, it cost Father a pretty penny in mollifying money, and we all had our backsides leathered. But it was worth every sixpence, every stripe.” Stewart grinned.

“I still don’t understand where the pumpkin came into it.”

“Ah, that was ‘acquired’ en route for a threepenny piece. It was for the coypu’s dinner and that’s what we ended up scraping off the bottom of the boat. It wasn’t pleasant.”

“You still say it was worth it?”

“Oh yes, Orlando. Such a lark. If only you’d been there.” He smiled wistfully. “If only you’d been born in Sussex in the little village near us. I’m sure that your parents couldn’t have disapproved of you wanting to be friends with the squire’s sons. Then we could have had such wonderful times in the summer holidays; you would have ended up twice the size because Mother would have been continually feeding you up. My brothers would have bruised you black and blue like they did me.” He suddenly stopped. “Oh, please don’t cry. Please.”

“Can’t help it, Jonty, it’s just what I would have wanted for myself could I have chosen.”

Stewart put his arm round his friend, settling them back against the rocks, out of the stiffening breeze and out of sight of the rest of the world. “I’m sorry, Orlando, my big mouth gets me into such trouble at times.”

“No, it’s fine, I shouldn’t be so sensitive. It’s just the end of our holiday is rearing its ugly head and I can’t bear to think of us leaving here. Funny when you think of how reluctant I was to leave Bride’s. Now I don’t want to return there.”

Jonty didn’t speak, just tightened his grip round Coppersmith’s shoulders.

“Truth to tell, I’ve felt like a child again here, only this time it’s been happy. All the daft things we’ll have to remember like catching prawns and rolling down hills. I really don’t want them to end.”

“Ah, there’s always next year, Orlando. Christmas and Easter holidays in between, as well. We can do whatever we like, go wherever the whim takes us. Just imagine.”

“I’ll try to, but I just can’t see how it will compare to this.”

“Better than Margate or Ramsgate, eh?”

“Oh, there’s no comparison. The company here is far better than my grandmother and her maids.”

“Not a patch on Mrs. Tattersall, I bet. Your granny, I mean?”

“Indeed not, apart from the knitting. Grandmother Coppersmith is all black bombazine and starch. I can see her so clearly now, with her big bag of knitting, needles sticking out like Boadicea’s knives. She always had letters everywhere, too—being written, being read, being opened by her great, ugly letter opener.” He stopped abruptly, turning white.

“Whatever is the matter, Orlando?” Stewart dreaded another revelation about his lover’s family.

“I’ve just had the most awful thought. I need a moment to follow it through.” He sat contemplating, his face setting harder by the minute.

“It must be appalling to turn you that color. Would you like to share it?”

He did, which made Jonty turn even paler than his friend. “You realize what this might mean, Orlando?”

“I’m very much afraid that I do.”

“Dear God, we need to talk to Ainslie straight away.”

“I hope beyond all hope that I’m wrong.”

“Oh, so do I.”

The journey back to The Beaulieu was agonizing, the walk along the cliff path seeming to taking longer than it ever had before, all the time their minds racing. They’d assumed the murder had been solved, Alec Banks lying dead at the bottom of the rocks, waiting for the tide to be favorable to recover his body. He had surely taken his guilt with him, not just about writing the letters but of killing the man whose son had received them. They’d all accepted that Ainslie senior had decided to confront Banks, with disastrous consequences. The stained handkerchief had been witness to it. Perhaps they had got it totally wrong.

Coppersmith rushed into the hotel, enquired for

Matthew, found him in his room packing some of his father's things then dragged him bodily downstairs to the garden, where Jonty had located Mrs. Tattersall. They told Ainslie just to listen and be sensible, as they weren't sure but they *had an inkling which, if it were true, meant the fat was in the fire.*

"Hello, you young scamps. Now, why aren't you out making the most of your last afternoon here? You should be swimming or frolicking, not talking to an old woman."

"Mrs. Tattersall," Orlando assumed his most solemn and dignified face, reminding Jonty of how he'd appeared the first time they met. "Please would you tell us about your brother? How he died."

A wistful smile came over the lady's face. "Ah, I did wonder. My brother? He took his own life. The official report said that it was a terrible accident with a gun, that he'd been cleaning it out and it had gone off accidentally, but that was all down to the friends he had—we had—in authority. It was suicide."

"Did he say why he had done it?" Stewart's voice was as soft as a cooing dove, coaxing Mrs. Tattersall through the difficult conversation, not that she seemed to need much coaxing. She appeared the least perturbed of all those present.

"He left me a note. Our friends kept quiet about that too, only I was given it after the funeral. He said that he'd been accused of cheating at cards, my Arthur, who never cheated at anything in his life, even when we were little children. It broke his heart. While he could have stood up to fight any accusations, he lacked proof of his innocence and couldn't see how to get any. He couldn't face going through life with the shame hanging over him. Even if he'd been found not guilty people do tend to say that *there's no smoke without fire* which is such a very wicked saying. No smoke without the fire of people's jealousy and hatred, in my experience." She sighed heavily, put aside her knitting, rubbed her hands. "So he decided to end it all."

Jonty looked at Ainslie, saw him shudder. Was he thinking of how close he had come to taking the same option?

"Mrs. Tattersall," Orlando broke the silence, a quietness heavy with deep thoughts, painful memories. "What was his name?"

"Arthur Featherstone."

"But that's..." Ainslie suddenly sprang out of his thoughts and into the conversation.

"Yes, dear. That's the man your father accused of cheating. It was his charge which led Arthur to kill himself." The lady quite unexpectedly reached out to pat Ainslie's hand, as if he were the one in need of comfort.

"Is that why you killed him?" Coppersmith spoke with no trace of coldness or malice in his voice, just calmly stating a fact as if he were discussing something with his students.

"I suppose it was, in the end. I hadn't intended to. Let me explain." The three men turned attentively to her, like little boys awaiting a story from their grandmother. "On that Sunday night when you were so very talented at bridge," she smiled at Coppersmith, "Mr. Sheringham had been talking to my Aloysius over at the bar. I think that your father," she nodded to Matthew, "must have become aware of it, because he got very agitated all of a sudden. I think he might have heard the name Featherstone mentioned; Mr. Sheringham does have such a loud voice. Anyway, Mr. T told me all about it afterwards. I had only ever known the surname of the man who made the accusations against Arthur, nothing else about him, and Ainslie is not uncommon, is it? I did so want to just speak to your father to see what it was all really about, set my mind at rest."

Mrs. Tattersall seemed suddenly very tired, not to mention breathless, so Jonty went off in search of a waiter and a pot of tea. They awaited his return before recommencing the story. "Sorry about that, my dears, sometimes get a little drained. I suppose it's my age. I

arranged to meet your father when you were playing tennis with Mr. Coppersmith. I'd heard you two out here making the arrangements, so it seemed like an ideal time. Well, I asked him straight out and he said that he had been the very man to catch my Arthur red-handed. Oh, it made my blood boil; as I've said before, my brother would never do such a thing."

The refreshments arrived, carried by a rather pale waiter, all the staff having received the most terrible shock when they heard of the barman's demise. Mrs. Tattersall was poured a cup of tea by the son of the man she had killed, something that could probably only have happened among an English gathering in an English Hotel. "I'm afraid that your father wasn't very sympathetic, my dear. He didn't realize that he was talking of my brother, I'd just said that Arthur was a young man I had known. He started to brag a bit, and while he didn't quite say as much, he implied that it had been *he* who had been pulling a sharp trick or two at the tables, not Arthur. He seemed rather pleased with himself that he'd got away with it. He was sitting at the desk all the time, I had my knitting bag with me as usual and I suddenly remembered how sharp the thinnest needles are. I recalled my father telling me about the sort of places where it would be fatal to insert a thin, sharp blade. So I just did it. Straight into the back of the neck and up into..." she stopped, reached over as if to pat Matthew's hand again, then seemed to think better of it.

"I'm so very sorry, my dear," Mrs. Tattersall looked into Ainslie's eyes with great pain. "I would have given anything not to hurt you, but I didn't consider anything else at the time. All I could think of was my brother and how much I loved him. And how unfair it had all been." As she started to cry, she was offered three differently monogrammed handkerchiefs simultaneously. The tears didn't last long, as Mrs. Tattersall was one of the old school, tutored not to show her feelings excessively. She dabbed her eyes then put on a brave face. "You're bright little buttons,

aren't you? How did you guess?"

Orlando sighed. "It was today. I was thinking about my grandmother, who always carried her knitting bag around, as you usually do. I suddenly wondered why I hadn't thought of her when first we met, then I realized that you hadn't got your knitting that first night. If you hadn't got your knitting, you couldn't have lost a needle, then, could you?" Mrs. T shook her head while Orlando continued. "So if you hadn't lost the needle, why tell such a blatant lie? I don't think that your memory lapses, like other," he searched for a polite term, "more mature ladies. Then I remembered you saying how sharp your needles were. I wondered whether they were sharp enough to kill someone with, how easy it would be just to wipe them on a handkerchief and put them back into their bag. Mr. Tattersall is Aloysius, isn't he? So his hankies might well have an A on them."

Mrs. T nodded.

"It all fell into place then, such a simple theory to explain what had gone on, no need for 'multiplying entities' as Dr. Stewart calls it." They all sat in silence, the solution of the day before thrown out and the world turned upside down once more.

Stewart looked from Coppersmith to Ainslie then back again. "What now?"

Mrs. Tattersall blew her nose. "I'm afraid that I'm not sure that I'll make it to trial, you know. Bit of a shame, really, as I'd like to stand up in court and tell the truth. Perhaps they wouldn't believe me, but at least I could try to clear Arthur's name. However, that's all a vain hope. The doctors say I'll just about live to see my great grandchild and then that's it. Off to a better, fairer place, I hope. This was to be our last holiday—it's been a lovely one really, apart from..."

Orlando felt the time had come to break the gathering up. "Come on, Mr. Ainslie, need to find you a good stiff drink."



Jonty watched the two men walk over the lawn to the hotel, pleased to see Orlando tentatively clap Ainslie on the shoulder and offer some words of comfort. He turned to Mrs. T then patted her hand. "I would never have believed that you had the strength in these to do the deed."

"Well, it was odd. My old dad used to tell a tale or two about people who had almost superhuman force in a crisis. He'd known a frail little woman whose son got trapped under a huge cartwheel; she'd gone over and picked the thing off him as if it were a dandelion clock. Same thing happened to me, I could have taken on Samson at the time. But your friend got something wrong, you know. You can tell him later if you like, make him a bit less smug." There was no spite in the remark, it was as if they were two little children having a laugh on their pals. "It wasn't Aloysius' hankie, it was Arthur's. I've kept one freshly laundered in my knitting bag all these years. Never used it, which is ironic considering what happened to it in the end. I found that I'd lost it just this weekend. I'd had it in the garden in my knitting bag, blood and all, because it seemed wrong to wash it. That barman must have picked it up, kept it for some nasty little purpose of his own. Well it's all out in the open now. I'll have to find a vicar to confess it all, though I've made my peace with God about it."

They sat and watched the birds circling up over the woods. They were honey buzzards, Jonty suspected, which was beautifully poignant. It seemed only a few minutes before Inspector Wilson appeared by the Hotel door then slowly crossed the lawn. Whether Orlando had summoned him, or he'd been in the offing anyway, or perhaps—as Stewart suspected—he had some sixth sense that alerted him to a confession, he was there at the appropriate time.

"Mrs. Tattersall, Dr. Stewart, I believe that you might want to talk to me."

They didn't, although they had to oblige. When the story was complete, a tale that they were allowed to tell with the minimum of intervention, Wilson nodded, not just

to his companions, but seemingly to himself. "I was never happy that Banks had been responsible for everything. Neither is Mr. le Tissier. We've only been discussing today the preponderance of men with the initial A at The Beaulieu and how we'd perhaps have to look at them closely. It was going to prove a difficult exercise, what with people going home and the culprit apparently named." He considered. "Maybe it would be a lot easier if we just stuck to that. I can't see this coming to trial in the short term; surely it wouldn't serve any great purpose to open it all up again with no proper end in sight. As long as Mr. Ainslie would agree?"

Stewart rose. "I'll go and talk to him." He found Matthew with Orlando in the bar, with glasses empty and all conversation ceased. He plonked himself down at Ainslie's side, explaining the rather unusual discussion he'd just had. "It's unorthodox, I know, yet it may be the best solution. Less chance of things coming to light in court, things which you'd rather not have known. Oh, I know that the letters shouldn't be brought up at the trial, but you never know what people will turn up once they start prying into things."

"It doesn't seem right, Jonty," Orlando stared into his empty glass. "For all that the young man who's waiting to be picked off the rocks was a nasty piece of work, no-one denies that, it would only be fair if he too received some sort of justice."

"Justice, Orlando? You want to talk about that? I can think of two young men in particular who did a lot worse than Banks, and they're still walking around free. You know what I'm referring to, so I'll not bore Matthew with the details. Sometimes justice can't be served, she has to turn her blind eye and just let life go on. Would there be any use served in pursuing this? That only Matthew can decide. It's fair dealing for his father which counts, not for a blackmailer."

Ainslie had been very still, contemplating his fingers as they lay motionless on the table next to his glass. "I would

have justice for my father, but not at the expense of someone who has shown me more kindness than many of my so called friends.” He saw Orlando’s frown then clarified himself. “I don’t include you in this; you’ve both been more than sympathetic. Mrs. Tattersall has had to suffer injustice for one of her closest relatives, so perhaps there would be an ironic kind of morality if we were to leave the situation as it is. I can see no black and white case here. All solutions seem equally unsuitable.”

“Then the murderer lies dead on the rocks.” Stewart sighed, rising swiftly from his chair in his anxiety to deliver the verdict to Wilson. He stopped at the door then turned. “Will you join us for dinner tonight, Matthew? I understand that the dance has been cancelled, so we’ll be able to have an uninterrupted game of whist afterwards. Seems the proper way to end this holiday, being quiet and civilized.”

*Ginger ale before the journey, that’ll stop the sickness.* It was the last thing that Mrs. Tattersall had said to the young men before they set off for the boat. It was typical of all that they knew about her, concerned to the last with their welfare, just as she had cosseted and looked after Matthew Ainslie after killing his father in cold blood. But then she had felt no animosity towards the son—her concern for him had been entirely genuine. They felt a pang of regret in leaving her behind, to spend the last week of her last holiday in relative peace and with the prospect of new bridge partners arriving soon.

They left The Beaulieu with regret, too, having seen such happy times there. Now these were just memories to be taken out for airing when the days in Cambridge were long, cold and dark. The cove had been wished *farewell* the day before and Matthew had shaken their hands just before they boarded their cab.

“Keep in touch with us, Mr. Ainslie. Addressing a letter to the college will get it there soon enough.” Stewart

beamed at their new ally.

"I'll do just that. I'll be following you home across the Channel once the business of an enquiry into Alec Banks' death is sorted. Le Tissier thinks it'll be straightforward, there having been plenty of witnesses to it. Perhaps we can meet again?"

"Of course," Orlando smiled then clapped him on the shoulder, "just as long as there are no honey buzzards in the vicinity." It was a brave joke for him but they all saw the funny side.

"Hit you hard this, hasn't it, Orlando?" The voyage home was a quiet one, the Channel like a mill pond with hardly a ripple. The two fellows of St. Bride's stood, all alone, by the very rail where two weeks since Orlando had felt like the only welcome option was death. Now he seemed almost content with traveling and a wistful smile played on his lips as he looked back, straining to catch a glimpse of the islands.

"Aye, Jonty. I had such a fondness for Mrs. Tattersall, you know; a true lady, I thought her. Then to find out..."

"She was every part a lady, Orlando. I saw so many qualities in her that my own mother has, like kindness, courage and an absolute need to stand up for those she loves. Put yourself in her shoes, my dear. Imagine it was someone that you held very precious who had suffered terribly at the hands of a third party, someone who was totally innocent."

"I wouldn't have killed over it."

"Wouldn't you? What if you met one of the men who hurt me at school? Could you really say that you wouldn't drive a spike into his neck?" Jonty looked at his lover closely, trying to penetrate through the veneer of reserve deep into the passionate heart and brain.

Coppersmith sighed. "You're right. I'd have done the same in the circumstances, perhaps much worse, especially

if I felt he was gloating.” He fingered his little onyx tie pin, staring down into the waves. “I keep having to learn again what it means to love someone beyond all reason. It makes you do irrational things, I suppose.”

“Oh, I think Mrs. Tattersall was being totally rational. She would do it a thousand times over given the chance. Only human, like the rest of us.”

They took a cab from the ferry terminal across to a little hotel in the middle of Southampton where they’d arranged to spend the night before being picked up by the Stewart carriage. The contrast to The Beaulieu was amazing, harboring a much more down to earth clientele, including one or two ladies who would have made ‘The Misses’ blush. The smell of cigarettes and ale pervading the bars bothered the pair not a jot, wanting only their beds, their own, single beds for once, being exhausted from the journey.

Southampton presented her most handsome face to them the next day as they took an early walk along the old walls, a blue mist over the water matching the color of Jonty’s eyes, the gulls mewing and swooping, the stones warm to the touch as they explored the fortifications. It was a perfect last adventure, rounding off a marvelous two weeks with a delightful morning. They spotted the coach long before they reached their hotel and it was with a slight sense of regret that they embarked.

They drove off eastwards, through Hampshire then into Sussex, urban bustle and industry giving way to little villages or farms. Parts of the countryside reminded Coppersmith of Kent, so he was lost in childhood memories until Stewart nudged him with a happy *we’re here*. The buildings were hidden by the impressive village church meaning only a glimpse could be seen along the road that ran by the gatehouse, and that glimpse was of ruined walls. Orlando felt slightly disappointed, but as they came through

the gate then drove along a bit, the road turned and the actual edifice came into view. He was stunned.

It was a castle, nothing less. For all that Jonty had waltzed around the subject, saying that it was just a half built property which his great grandfather had acquired and done up a bit, a process which succeeding generations had continued, it could not be denied that it was a castle. One probably dating back to Tudor times, if Coppersmith's slight knowledge of history was anything to go by.

They passed through the main portal into something that resembled one of the courts at Bride's, except for only having three sides, and no Cambridge college had ever had a chatelaine the equal of Helena Stewart, who came bouncing up wearing a floral patterned costume of dazzling hue.

"I thought you would never get here." She embraced Jonty with great force, smothering him in face powder which left patches on his bronzed cheeks, then turned her guns on Orlando. He was cuddled even before a word was said to him, leaving the man totally winded and incapable of reply. "Did they actually feed you at that hotel? Skinny as a rake as usual, but just in time for tea as is your wont. Apple cake; that's your favorite, I believe?"

Coppersmith managed a nod before they were led off to the library where Mr. Stewart beamed at them and immediately tried to whisk Orlando off for a conversation on bridge, much to his wife's consternation. "No, Richard, I won't have it. You can wait your turn. I've missed these boys enormously so I'm going to have my fill of them before I relinquish them to you. When they have told me about every moment of every day of their holiday—I got your postcard Jonathan, you really must improve your handwriting—then you can borrow Orlando." She beamed at her 'boys' then began the inquisition, relishing every little detail, happily marveling at their prowess both in the matter of swimming and in detection.

Eventually they were allowed time off for good

behavior and were taken to rest before changing for dinner, being led across the courtyard then up a little spiral stair. It was just like the ones in the turrets at Orlando's old Oxford college, making him feel exactly as if he were a nervous first year again. The butler opened the door of an imposing room, revealing a mass of ancient tapestries which had seen many a better day, original fireplaces, arrow slit windows facing out, newer leaded light windows facing in. With a huge four poster bed against one wall.

"You are to stay here, Dr. Coppersmith. Your cases are already unpacked and the laundry in hand." The butler bowed slightly then smiled at Jonty, who almost counted as an old friend. "You, sir, are just next door." He led Jonty across to a similar room that faced Orlando's across the narrow stone flagged corridor, leaving him to make himself once more at home

It wasn't long before a rapping came on the door, then Coppersmith's head appeared round it. He swiftly took in Stewart's apartment, grinned, took a run at the bed—another four poster, this one with magnificent drapes—and leapt on it.

"It's been a wonderful holiday, Jonty, but I'm glad we're home." He felt odd hearing the remark escape his lips, as he'd never been to the house before, could have no concept of the building as native soil. He'd previously invested all sense of belonging to a Cambridge college; now it seemed as if this loyalty had been transferred to a family. Coppersmith felt like a Stewart, a fourth son, so where they were at home, so was he. It was a triumph for Jonty's patience, kindness and love for this once solitary young man.

"Glad to be back too, Orlando, it was a wonderful holiday, indeed. Now there's almost a whole year to plan the next one."

"Next one?" Coppersmith could feel an inane grin spreading over his face. "It never occurred to me that there'd be more holidays, but of course there will, it's only

logical.” He lay back on the gloriously soft bedspread. “You plan them, Jonty. I’m always safe in your hands.”

“Of course you are.” Stewart ranged himself alongside Orlando, placed his arm over his lover’s chest in a gesture both protective and possessive. “Next year we’ll go somewhere there are no hussies to spy on us while we bathe.” Jonty stretched, looking even more like a cat than usual. A great, golden cat, more lion than moggy, soft exterior hiding enormous strength and a massive heart.

Coppersmith found it impossible to believe that he could ever love anything, or anyone, as much as he adored Stewart. Not even differential calculus. “Jonty,” he murmured, thoughts turning in amorous directions until a sudden, chilling idea struck him. “Jonty...”

“Hm?”

“Next year, when we go to the place without hussies; can we go somewhere they don’t have honey buzzards, either?”



Turn the page for a look at

# **LESSONS IN DISCOVERY**

Book Three:

A Cambridge Fellows Mystery

CHARLIE COCHRANE

Coming in May 2009

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# Chapter One

Champagne. A dressed Cromer crab. Strawberries.

How Jonty Stewart could have got hold of strawberries on the fifteenth of November, only the angels could say, but there they were on the table, along with a jug of cream and a bowl of sugar to indisputably prove their existence. Orlando Coppersmith reached to take one of the little ruby-like fruits but a sharp slap to his hand stopped him.

"No pudding until firsts are done with, you know that!" Dr. Stewart grinned like a schoolboy and began to heap crab upon their plates.

"Why all this opulence, Jonty? I've not seen such a lunch in ages."

"Do you really not know, Orlando, or are you teasing me again, in revenge for all the times I've teased you?" The blank look on his friend's face seemed to show that he really had no recognition of the significance of the date. "It's exactly a year to the day that I came back to St. Bride's and so underhandedly stole your chair in the SCR. Don't you remember?"

Coppersmith smiled. "The day is forever etched into my memory. That afternoon was the last time I enjoyed any

peace and quiet, for one thing." A crab claw came flying through the air but he swerved neatly to avoid it. "This champagne is truly extraordinary."

"Mother sent it; she always has champagne on her wedding anniversaries." Jonty took a deep draught. "Do you know, the man who invented this compared it to tasting stars. He was absolutely right."

Coppersmith looked at his glass with something like suspicion. "Just why did your mother send us champagne?"

"For our anniversary, Orlando. Do I need to spell it out to you like I spell out 'As You Like It' to my dunderheads of students? She wanted us to have something special today, as she and Father do."

Orlando wasn't mollified by the answer. He knew that Helena Stewart was aware of exactly what went on between him and her son, but this gift seemed a touch too blatant. He drank it though, and enjoyed the food which he guessed that Mama had also had a hand in providing.

"Seems appropriate, really," Jonty had finished his seafood and was ready for more chatter, "as I often feel like we *are* a married couple in all but name. Oh, I say, let me slap your back."

Coppersmith's food and drink had conspired to attempt an attack on his lungs and he began to choke. A whack from Stewart's strong hand dislodged the offending items and he was able to take several breaths, and another glass of bubbly, to recover. "You feel like we're married?"

"Of course I do, Orlando, don't you?"

"I've never thought of it, but then I guess that marriage of any kind has never really entered my head." He frowned, having to mull over that common thing, a revolutionary thought from Dr. Stewart.

"Consider this. We spend as much time as we can together, we often share a bed, we take holidays with each other, and we are absolutely faithful. Well, I am at least; I have my suspicions about you and that chap from *the college next door*. So many things that any respectable

married couple would do. It's only the matter of getting children that makes us different and neither of us have the anatomical requirement to oblige on that score."

"And we can't take the vows Jonty, the marriage vows. We have no respectability in the eyes of either the church or the law. Quite the opposite." Coppersmith knew it galled with his lover, not being able to walk hand in hand together along the river, never to be able to dance together or show any untoward display of affection. Perhaps one day the world would be a more understanding place, but not now.

"Bit of a shame, if you think about it, because we live by them. *For better or worse, cleaving only to one another*, and all that. Think we might do a rather better job of it than some of my father's friends." Jonty sighed and refilled their glasses. "Such a shame that I can't show everyone how much you mean to me."

Coppersmith's bosom began to swell with pride; he knew exactly how much they loved each other, and he couldn't help but bask in the glow every time Jonty said something like this. He reached for Stewart's hand, "You mean the world to me, too."

Jonty looked at him, as if he was making absolutely sure of what he was about to say, which wasn't a usual Stewart trait. "The university is modernising. These are new times, Orlando, and we don't need to live in college any more, you know. We could take a nice property up on the Madingley Road and set up house together. All we'd need would be a housekeeper who wouldn't be too fussy about how many beds had been slept in. Miss Peters could probably find us a suitable one."

"A house?" Dining out of college had been shock enough, going on holiday a jolt to the system, but to live outside of St. Bride's, that was unheard of. "And why Miss Peters? You don't think that she suspects about us, do you?" Miss Peters was the sister of the Master of St. Bride's and the only woman, apart from the nurse, to live in the college's hallowed grounds.

"I think it quite likely that she does, she being possibly the most perceptive person in St. Bride's. In any case, she'd be far too discreet to say anything as this college has seen enough scandal. Nonetheless, think on the idea of a house. I don't propose it idly."

"I will think on it, Jonty, but you must let me recover from my surprise at the suggestion before I can make a rational decision."

Stewart nodded his head in acknowledgement and they refilled their bowls with the last of the fruit. When there wasn't even the merest hint of the existence of a strawberry left, Coppersmith carefully wiped his hands and reached into his pocket. He drew out a small red box and handed it to his friend. "Thought you might like this, as a memento of the last year."

"So you did remember, you cunning old fox." Stewart opened the lid and immediately shut it. "I can't accept this, Orlando; it must have cost you a small fortune. Take it back, get the money and put it in your savings." Jonty had flushed red and couldn't even look his lover in the eye.

"I will not take it back and you will accept it. You were the one who spoke of marriage so perhaps this is an appropriate gift." Coppersmith opened the box himself and took out an exquisite signet ring—Welsh gold of an amazing hue—that had been made specially to his order, great subterfuge and a piece of string having been used to gauge the size of Stewart's little finger as he slept. "Please put it on for me." Orlando admired the golden circlet as it twinkled in the late autumn light. Stewart could walk around Cambridge wearing *his* ring and it would always be symbolic of their union.

Jonty slid the band over his finger, pronounced amazement at the accuracy of fit, and grinned. "I'm ashamed to say that I have no equivalent gift for you."

"No need; strawberries in November are priceless. And you've given me the best year of my life."

*Lessons in Desire*

"Truly? Even including four murders, an accidental death and a suicide, an unwanted suitor, and both our lives endangered?"

"Absolutely. Never been so happy."

Stewart put his head to one side, like a bird. "And is that you talking or the champagne?"

"Oh, definitely me. The drink would make me say much naughtier things." Coppersmith's attitude to intimacy had changed beyond all recognition this past year. Before Jonty had come and *stolen his chair*, he'd viewed intercourse as something like the preparation of Egyptian mummies—he knew the procedures existed, but the mechanisms were a puzzle and the process itself was of no interest. That had all changed now. He grinned, another thing he would never have done a year before. Grin, play bridge regularly at another college, make love in a punt at midnight under the drooping branches of a willow; none of these would have been possible before Jonty came along. Anything was possible now.

Stewart smiled indulgently. "Let's take a walk up to the lock and enjoy this unseasonably mild weather, then we can come back here and read the sonnets together. Even Number Eighteen." Jonty liked the early sonnets, although Coppersmith had been terribly shocked to find out that the intended recipient had been a man. When he'd discovered Number Twenty-nine, it had brought tears to his eyes, speaking to him so clearly of his own situation—the death of his father, the years of brooding, and then the arrival of Stewart.

*Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate*

Orlando read it every time he felt low, which was less and less often, now.

It was such a fine afternoon that they ventured far beyond the lock to a stretch of river where a few rowing eights were practicing, their red-faced coaches cycling along the towpath, scattering ducks and little old ladies as they went.

"Did you ever attempt rowing, Dr. Coppersmith?" They'd been content to use Christian names when they were in public on holiday, but back in their own city they'd returned to their usual formality.

"I did, but with no great success. Every time I took to a boat I seemed to have acquired an extra pair of knees and all four of the bony things kept trying to smack me in the ear." Orlando laughed and Jonty laughed with him. It was another sign of how far Coppersmith had come this last year, his being able to take the rip out of himself with such aplomb. Everyone within the university recognised the changes in this once surly young man and they were delighted to see them. There had been so many "firsts" for him over this last year. First kiss, of course, at a time when life in the college had been wrenched apart by a series of murders. Initial forays into pub visiting and punting, Coppersmith usually wide-eyed with wonder at the novelty of it all. And the first time they had *shared the last favours*, as Orlando coyly described it.

They'd shared a bed often before their holiday, and made love of a kind, but Jonty had been reluctant to take things to their ultimate conclusion, wary of scaring the life out of his still skittish friend. If he'd been without scruples, he would have forced the issue back in the spring when they were recovering from the St. Bride's killings and Coppersmith would have done anything for him. But he had scruples a-plenty and knew they would both have regretted it, perhaps ending up hating each other for having taken advantage. So it had been on Jersey, in August, when the sea shone and the flowers smelt intoxicating, when Orlando had begun to learn to be at peace with himself and with the



## *Lessons in Desire*

world, that their relationship had been well and truly consummated.

*Sharing the last favours.* It was a term Coppersmith had found in an old book when they stayed with the Stewarts and it had struck him as being one he could even dare to utter aloud, which made life a lot more simple when he wished to make his desires plain. Jonty loved the phrase as it was so old fashioned, so gallant, smacking of the Napoleonic wars and gentlemen in uniform meeting their ladies for one last time before departing overseas.

So *sharing the last favours* it became known as, and share them they often did. Now they made love for all sorts of reasons, not just for gratification but in friendship, for consolation, because they were happy or because they were sad. And Orlando enjoyed the union, the melding of their bodies into one flesh and the sacred bond between them that it reinforced. In Jersey their joining together had spoken of renewed resilience in the face of adversity and celebration that the first set of murders had ended at three victims, not four.

Stewart reflected on the past year as they walked along, even while he was sniggering just a little at the sight of a seven foot oarsman suffering a tongue lashing from a cox who was all of four-foot-eleven. For Jonty too there had been times of learning and growing, like the moment one lazy Sunday when he'd been planning to take Orlando out to lunch, with an afternoon in the Botanical Gardens if the weather held and in the couch of Stewart if it didn't. Only Coppersmith had plans involving practicing bridge and Jonty, for the first time, had to learn to be content with second place.

Coppersmith had grown up a great deal as 1905 turned into 1906 and the year wore on, emerging as a confident, determined, adventurous young man, nothing like the shy and sullen chap Jonty had encountered exactly a year before. It had been a remarkable twelve months and if Orlando thought it the best one of his life, so did Stewart.

He could see life stretching happily into the future, God willing, with his true love by his side and a bank balance full of his grandmother's money to support them in whatever they decided to do. To buy a little house, with an apple tree in the garden and a flowering cherry outside the bedroom window, that would be ideal. Some of the furniture held in store for Stewart up in London or down in Sussex could grace it, although they might seem rather grand for a little villa up the Madingley Road. If Coppersmith would ever agree to their buying one.

Tired of watching the rowing, the two men turned and began to amble back to the college, a slight anticipation in Jonty's stomach starting to bubble up. There was every chance that he could get Orlando into a bed this afternoon and that would be an absolute delight. Even if the mattress wasn't reached, there would still be at least a hug or two on the sofa which was always very pleasant. They'd reached a stage where *the last favours* were not the be all and end all, wonderful as they were. Jonty cast a glance across at his lover and caught him in the very same act of anticipation.

Coppersmith blushed, something that hadn't happened for a very long time. *I know what you're contemplating. Great minds definitely do think alike.* Their pace quickened slightly and by the time they'd reached The Bishop's Cope they were no longer just ambling, but striding along with great purpose. Their tempo was very brisk by the time they passed the porters' lodge and they positively sped up Stewart's staircase, eager to find themselves alone and safe to express their affection.

Orlando was taking the steps two at a time, as usual, in his desire to be in the room as soon as possible. He misjudged the edge of a particularly worn stair, which had endured hundreds of years worth of treading and wasn't inclined to be kind anymore, and slipped. Perhaps nine times out of ten a man might have done that and suffered no worse than bruised knees or a scraped hand. Orlando

## *Lessons in Desire*

suffered the ignominies of the tenth and went clattering halfway down the flight.

It was ironic. He normally led the way, making the joke that Stewart should be behind him in case he slipped, so that there would be adequate padding to break his fall. But this day Jonty was ahead, even more eager to reach the room than his friend was. He heard the tumble, turned—dismayed—and rushed back.

“Orlando!” The rule about names was immediately broken. This was a moment of crisis, as Stewart could see the minute he looked down that his friend wasn’t moving. “Can you hear me? Are you alright?” He reached the crumpled body, relieved to see the chest rising and falling and to hear that the breathing sounded clear. But there was no response, not even a moaning, and blood had begun to trickle very slightly from the back of Orlando’s head.

Jonty leapt up, his heart racing and a nauseous feeling filling his stomach. He knocked at the nearest door and demanded that the occupant go to the lodge and get the porters to fetch a doctor. The inhabitant of the next room was sent for Nurse Hatfield. Stewart returned to keep an eye on Coppersmith, making certain that he was comfortable and not about to do anything dramatic like swallow his tongue. It was all he could do, apart from worry himself sick.

Nurse Cecily Hatfield steamed up the stairs like a great ocean liner, cleaving a path through the knot of ghoulish students who’d formed to observe the scene and who’d ignored Stewart’s instructions to *bugger off*. They didn’t dare ignore the nurse’s slightly more politely worded invitation to do the same.

“Don’t know why they do it,” she complained, kneeling down and efficiently checking Orlando over for breaks and bleeding. “Nothing interesting in another person’s distress, is there? Well, there are no bones broken as far as I can

Charlie Cochrane

see and I think," she very gingerly felt around Coppersmith's head, "the skull's intact too. Bit of bleeding, but his breathing's nice and steady. Not been sick, has he?"

Stewart shook his head, afraid to speak in case his voice betrayed him. He was petrified that the words "No, he's just lain there" would actually come out as "Please don't let him die, I love him so much".

The doctor arrived fairly promptly, the same man whom Jonty had first met over the dead body of a murdered man. He made his own examination, confirming Nurse Hatfield's initial diagnosis and advising that Coppersmith could be moved on a stretcher to sickbay. Stewart sped off to the porters' lodge to organise the people and equipment to do this, glad to have something to do that was helpful and practical, and took his mind off the poor bloodied head that lay on his staircase.

The time began to become distorted and things passed in a daze. It seemed to take forever to get Orlando onto the stretcher, then only a matter of seconds before he was being put onto a bed in the sick bay and the nurse was thrusting a piece of paper into Jonty's hand. It was a list of things that the patient might need, carefully written down *because I'm not sure you'll remember otherwise, Dr. Stewart. Not in your present state.* She'd no doubt recognised his need to be busy, filling him up with heavily sugared tea to give him the resources to do it. *I don't want another young man falling down those stairs, this time because of fainting or delayed shock.*

While Stewart was away fetching Coppersmith's nightclothes and wash bag, Orlando recovered consciousness and the extent of his injuries became clear. As Jonty returned he met the Master, Dr. Peters, who stopped him barging straight in to greet his now awakened friend.

## *Lessons in Desire*

"Dr. Coppersmith's just with the doctor at present," Peters saw Stewart's worried look and smiled kindly. "He is in no danger, our medical friend seems quite confident about that. But there is something you should know; he has lost some of his memory."

"I don't understand. Is this usual with a head injury?" Stewart was full of renewed concern. He'd heard Coppersmith go flying and seen the way his skull had struck the step; it worried him enormously.

"The doctor assures me that it is not abnormal. He may regain all that he has forgotten, eventually. He can remember the students coming back for the start of Michaelmas term..."

"Poor Orlando. He's been hard at work on a treatise these last few weeks and now I suppose he'll have to rethink it." Jonty smiled tentatively.

"No, Dr. Stewart, I have expressed myself poorly. It is the Michaelmas term of *last* year he remembers, nothing since. I think it's even possible he will not recognise you. I had to make this plain."

He stepped back from the door and let them both into the room, one that Jonty was familiar with from spending time here recovering after the murders that had ripped into the heart of St. Bride's. Orlando looked up, black curls peeping out from a bandage that Mrs Hatfield had made the apotheosis of neatness. He inclined his head to the Master but then eyed Jonty with a blank and puzzled look.

"I have brought Dr. Stewart to see you. He was with you when you took your fall." Dr. Peters spoke kindly, in a voice suited to the sickroom.

"How are you feeling now, Orla... Dr. Coppersmith?" Jonty tentatively moved to the side of the bed, but not too close, not until he knew the worst. He smiled as brightly as he could manage.

"I am so sorry, but I don't know who you are." Orlando looked to Peters for enlightenment.

*Charlie Cochrane*

"Dr. Stewart is one of our English fellows; he came here last November. You two are the very greatest of friends."

Coppersmith's jaw dropped slightly, but he soon recovered his poise. "I apologize, sir. I am pleased to make your acquaintance." He held out his hand for a dumbstruck Stewart to shake. "I can't remember in my life ever having a friend, but if the Master says it is so, it must be."

Jonty felt his eyes become distinctly watery. He said—blustering, turning his face to hide the tears—that he'd return when Dr. Coppersmith had been given a little time to recover. He'd barely made it back to his own set of rooms before bursting into inconsolable tears.

## About the Author:

Charlie Cochrane's ideal day would be a morning walking along a beach, an afternoon spent watching rugby, and a church service in the evening, with her husband and daughters tagging along, naturally. She loves reading, theatre, good food, and watching sport.

She started writing relatively late in life but draws on all the experiences she's hoarded up to try to give a depth and richness to her stories.

# Also by Charlie Cochrane:

## **Lessons in Love**

(Book One: A Cambridge Fellows Mystery)

St. Bride's College, Cambridge, England, 1905.

When Jonty Stewart takes up a teaching post at the college where he studied, the handsome and outgoing young man acts as a catalyst for change within the archaic institution. He also has a catalytic effect on Orlando Coppersmith.

Orlando is a brilliant, introverted mathematician with very little experience of life outside the college walls. He strikes up an alliance with the outgoing Jonty, and soon finds himself having feelings he's never experienced before. Before long their friendship blossoms into more than either man had hoped and they enter into a clandestine relationship.

Their romance is complicated when a series of murders is discovered within St. Bride's. All of the victims have one thing in common, a penchant for men. While acting as the eyes and ears for the police, a mixture of logic and luck leads them to a confrontation with the murderer—can they survive it?

## **Aftermath in Trilogy No. 111: Speak Its Name**

*Expectations riding on a generation of young Englishmen are immense; for those who've something to hide, those expectations could prove overwhelming.*

When shy Edward Easterby first sees the popular Hugo Lamont, he's both envious of the man's social skills and ashamed of finding him so attractive. But two awful secrets weigh Lamont down. One is that he fancies Easterby, at a time when the expression of such desires is strictly illegal.



The second is that an earlier, disastrous encounter with a young gigolo has left him unwilling to enter into a relationship with anyone. Hugo feels torn apart by the conflict between what he wants and what he feels is “right”. Will Edward find that time and patience are enough to change Hugo’s mind?

# Recommended Read:

## **Captain's Surrender by Alex Beecroft**

Ambitious and handsome, Joshua Andrews had always valued his life too much to take unnecessary risks. Then he laid eyes on the elegant picture of perfection that is Peter Kenyon.

Soon to be promoted to captain, Peter Kenyon is the darling of the Bermuda garrison. With a string of successes behind him and a suitable bride lined up to share his future, Peter seems completely out of reach to Joshua.

But when the two men are thrown together to serve during a long voyage under a sadistic commander with a mutinous crew, they discover unexpected friendship. As the tension on board their vessel heats up, the closeness they feel for one another intensifies and both officers find themselves unable to reign in their passion.

Let yourself be transported back to a time when love between two men in the British Navy was punishable by death, and to a story about love, about honor, but most of all, about a *Captain's Surrender*.

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