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CHARLIE
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LESSONS IN
Seduction

A Cambridge Fellows Mystery

This time, one touch could destroy everything...

Cambridge Fellows Mysteries, Book 6

The suspected murder of the king's ex-mistress is Cambridge dons Orlando Coppersmith and Jonty Stewart's most prestigious case yet. And the most challenging, since clues are as hard to come by as the killer's possible motive.

At the hotel where the body was found, Orlando goes undercover as a professional dancing partner while Jonty checks in as a guest. It helps the investigation, but it also means limiting their communication to glances across the dance floor. It's sheer agony.

A series of anonymous letters warns the sleuths they'll be sorry if they don't drop the investigation. When another murder follows, Jonty is convinced their involvement might have caused the victim's death. Yet they can't stop, for this second killing brings to light a wealth of hidden secrets.

For Orlando, the letters pose a more personal threat. He worries that someone will blow his cover and discover their own deepest secret... The intimate relationship he enjoys with Jonty could not only get them thrown out of Cambridge, but arrested for indecency.

Warning: Contains sensual m/m lovemaking and hot men in black tie and tails.

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A Cambridge Fellows Mystery

Charlie Cochrane

Acknowledgements

My family have the patience of saints, putting up with me locking myself away over a hot keyboard and gnashing my teeth. I thank them.

The Regal Hotel exists, but not by that name or in Pegwell Bay. Forgive my necessary relocation of it.

Chapter One

Cambridge, 1907

Dr. Coppersmith and Dr. Stewart felt nervous, as anyone in their situation would, standing outside the hallowed sanctum of the Master of St. Bride's like a pair of naughty schoolboys summoned to see the headmaster over fighting in the dorm. It felt like the end of the world. Their future at the college, or at least the immediate part of it, was at present being discussed in Dr. Peters' study the other side of the heavy oak door. No matter how hard Orlando stared at the thing, willing it to yield its secrets, it was keeping them in ignorance.

"Now I know how young Ingleby felt when he was summoned here for playing his ukulele too loudly. I'm scared enough—he must have been petrified." Jonty grinned, but he was obviously nervous and not at all his usual witty, confident self.

"This is a serious business, Dr. Stewart. I just wish they would reach a decision more quickly. How long can it take to work out whether we're leaving the college?"

"Perhaps the longer they take, the better, assuming..." Jonty didn't have the chance to finish his sentence, as the door swung open, making Orlando jump and produce what Jonty always alleged afterwards was a squeal.

"Gentlemen, come in." Dr. Peters beamed, beckoning them into the room. Tall, handsome and rather austere, when he smiled his appearance changed from medieval abbot to chevalier. "Chief Inspector Wilson has persuaded me that *he* needs you much more than your university will these next few months. You're both to be granted a sabbatical." He indicated two august figures behind him. "And these gentlemen have reluctantly agreed, given the special circumstances of this case, to allow it. Mr. Wilson can be very persuasive."

Anxiety turned to smiles, they shook hands all round and a decanter of sherry appeared almost from thin air.

"Are we to be told exactly what's going on?" Jonty could barely stop the glass shaking in his hand, from what Orlando hoped was excitement, not fear. Whichever it was, this was clearly going to be a two sherries, at least, conversation. "All we know is that Chief Inspector Wilson requires our services but we don't know how long or what for."

"As much time as is required." The dean, Dr. Peters' second-in-command, spoke through clenched teeth. No one would have been pleased at being deprived of two such shining stars.

"I have negotiated a little something with the relevant parties to oil the wheels." Chief Inspector Wilson resembled neither abbot nor chevalier. He looked like a headmaster with an enormous intellect and radical views, and he carefully avoided the use of the words "bribe" or "douceur". Whatever had been employed, it had at least stopped the bursar vetoing things. He was clutching his sherry in a happy financial haze.

"Gentlemen, I refuse to agree to anything until I know who these parties are and what they expect of us." Orlando's commanding streak, which only appeared in moments of great importance—or high passion—asserted itself.

"A lady has been found dead, in a fashionable hotel just outside Pegwell Bay in Kent. I believe you know the area, Dr. Coppersmith?" Mr. Wilson raised both an eyebrow and his sherry glass in enquiry.

"I do. My grandmother lives nearby." The combination of a suspicious death and familiar ground eased the tension; so far, so good.

"Two doctors couldn't agree whether it was due to natural causes. A third doctor, one who said he could see nothing suspicious, swayed official opinion."

"And?" Jonty had finished the first sherry and was eyeing the decanter hopefully.

"The identity of the victim meant cogs got set into motion." Mr. Wilson inclined his head. "Lady Jennifer Johnson was the mistress of the king for the best part of two decades when he was still Prince of Wales. Those initial doubts have put a bee in His Majesty's bonnet. He wants his old friend's death investigated properly."

"I wonder if there would have been all this interest if it had just been one of the chambermaids found dead?" Orlando sniffed, derisive of the class system which seemed to make one death worth more than another.

"I can just imagine him talking to Papa." Jonty produced an uncanny impersonation of the king's tones. "I have a feeling in my bones that she's been murdered, Richard." He turned to Dr. Peters. "I'm right in assuming my father got involved in this somehow?"

"So I believe." Dr. Peters nodded his austere handsome head. "The chief inspector says His Majesty knows all about your penchant for sleuthing."

"No doubt. Papa must have bored him about it enough times." Jonty seemed pleased to see his glass refilled; one needed all the help one could get in this sort of situation. "I can imagine the palace applying pressure on the University."

Wilson nodded. "Quite so. And on the constabulary. What's needed here is efficiency."

Peters glowed with pleasure—probably totting up how many high calibre students would be attracted to St. Bride's on the back of another successful investigation. "I feel we should be paying for the privilege of you taking on the case." The Master ignored the bursar nearly dropping his glass. "This college's name was in the descendant at the turn of the century and the case of the St. Bride's murders didn't help. But for

a college to have its own Holmes and Watson is without precedent.” Of course it was—now Bride’s star shone and its fame had been renewed throughout the land.

Wilson inclined his head. “When I was asked in to solve a case needing the utmost diplomacy, where else would I turn? I wanted the very best men alongside me. Having someone—” he nodded towards Jonty, “—with a connection to the nobility will be a great advantage. This pair will prove invaluable.”

Orlando was deep in thought, wondering what attributes *he* could possibly possess which would make him invaluable. Apart from his brains.

“We’re to travel down there as soon as possible, I take it?” The sherry had worked its emboldening effect on Jonty. “Have we rooms booked?”

“Ah. For Dr. Stewart, yes.” Wilson suddenly found his sherry glass to be of great interest. “Dr. Coppersmith, we have a special commission for you. Almost in the nature of espionage.”

Orlando’s ears pricked up, like a horse in sight of the winning post. “Are you suggesting I take a post at this hotel to spy from the inside?”

Wilson nodded, at last brave enough to face Orlando eye to eye. “You would gain the confidence of both staff and guests, while Dr. Stewart works in a more obviously formal capacity.”

Jonty grinned. “Splendid. Even old Sherlock Holmes puts on his dressing-up clothes to further investigations.” It wasn’t the best example to give.

Orlando started. “Dressing-up clothes?”

“We thought the role of professional dancing partner would be an ideal one.” Mr. Wilson addressed a spot just behind Orlando’s left ear. “For accessing confidential information. His Majesty is relying on us. On you.”

The door bursting open forestalled Orlando’s disgruntled reply.

“Is it settled then?” The Master’s sister swept into the room, grinning broadly. “Dr. Coppersmith’s off to be a gigolo?”



Jonty almost danced all the way back up the Madingley Road, full of the prospect of the seaside, dancing and high society.

“Of course, you’ll love every moment of this investigation.” Orlando took a swipe at a branch which had dared to get in his way.

“Absolutely. And so will you. Don’t pretend you won’t be thrilled to have a murder to solve. You like them as much as your beloved mathematical puzzles.” Jonty’s broad, handsome grin made him look like a boy at Christmas, bouncing with excitement at the prospect of the weeks ahead.

“I suppose so. Only...”

“Yes?”

“I was just wondering—” Orlando felt himself colour, not just with annoyance, “—what a gigolo actually does.”

“I love Miss Peters more than any other woman to whom I’m not related, but I could cheerfully have killed her today, coming in and saying that. In front of the bursar and all. You will *not* be a gigolo.” Jonty sighed. “No one expects you to be anything more than a professional dancing partner at the hotel.”

“Why can’t *you* do the gigolo bit? Why does everyone say it has to be me?”

Jonty threw up his hands. “If we were going to the farthest-flung parts of the empire perhaps, but some of these people will have met me. Besides, look here.” He turned Orlando’s face towards his own. “This face, the Jonty Stewart fizzog, it’s a case of once seen never forgotten, isn’t it?”

Orlando looked at his lover’s fine profile as if seeing it for the first time. The bright blue eyes were as stunning and unnerving as when they’d first met, the nose perfectly formed and the mouth full of promise. He snorted. “It’s a face getting too big for its own flannel if you ask me.”

“For once I wasn’t being vain. My mother and father are both striking-looking creatures and anyone who’d met them would take one look at me and think *there’s a Stewart sprog if I ever saw one*. It just can’t be done.”

“But I’m hopeless with women. I can’t flirt or make small talk. They’ll turn their noses up at me.”

“You don’t have to flirt. You can dance, can’t you?”

Orlando nodded.

“In fact you dance very well. That’s all you’ll need to do, dance with them and talk a little about current affairs. You’ll be stern, aloof and handsome and it will drive them absolutely insane, just like it did me when we first met. They’ll be like putty in your hands and you’ll get all sorts of information out of them.” He drew closer to Orlando, laid his hands briefly on the man’s lapels and looked into his eyes. “Besides, you look absolutely gorgeous in a dinner suit. If there are any women who don’t fall in love with you they’ll either be followers of Sappho or have hearts of absolute stone.” He quickly spoke again, grinning as he did so. “And I won’t under any circumstances give an explanation as to the significance of that minx.”

They’d reached their house, a little Tudor cottage with a lot of recent refurbishment, and turned in by the gate and through the door into their haven of security from a world which wouldn’t approve of how they lived.

“But that can’t be all a gigolo does or why would everyone keep smirking when the term is used?”

Jonty produced a radiant smile. “Ah, well, you see, it’s a term that can also be applied to a man who—um—sells his services to women.”

“What sort of services?”

“If you have to ask the question I’m not sure you’ll understand the answer. Bed. You know.” Jonty tipped his head towards the stairs and winked.

Orlando worked his mouth, temporarily unable to speak. This was scandalous. “They never do.”

“Oh yes, it goes on all over the place. I told you when we were in Bath that there had always been male and female prostitutes.”

“But I assumed they were like the boys we came across in the course of solving that very first murder. Sold themselves to men, I mean.”

“They don’t restrict themselves to that, although whether it’s the same chaps doing the selling, or others, I have no idea and don’t want to find out. Women pay and these men oblige.”

“Well, I’m shocked. The absolute cads. And however did Miss Peters learn such a disgraceful term?”



Forsythia Cottage was becoming used to being the scene of discussion of crime and Mrs. Ward, the housekeeper, had become accustomed to the arrival of members of the constabulary to consult *her gentlemen*. Just so this fine late September afternoon when Mr. Wilson appeared bearing his most solemn look and praising her baking to high heaven. She’d borne forth the fruits of her kitchen then retreated there to leave her lads to their endeavours.

“I’ll have to find some excuse for being there, at the hotel.” Jonty had indulged in some pastries and while his inner man was satisfied, he wasn’t pleased about his position in the investigation. “It’s easy for you, you just change your name to hide the fact that you’re *the Dr. Coppersmith of The Times fame* and you can get away with anything. But even if I change my name, there are plenty of folk who would recognise me in the circles in which we’ll move. I bet some of them even remember dear old grandmamma and I’m said to be her image.”

“Could you invite your family along and make it some innocent Stewart excursion?” Wilson raised a distinguished eyebrow and gestured with his teaspoon.

Orlando shook his head. “I won’t have Mrs. Stewart seeing me dressed as a dancing partner. If she’s involved then I’ll give up the case, immediately.”

“What about Papa? We could pretend he’s had an operation or something and needs the sea air for convalescence. We’ll have to find a way to make him look in less than ruddy good health of course, but it might just work.” Jonty found the idea more and more appealing. “Then I could have a legitimate reason to be there, to look after the old geezer. And, Chief Inspector, if you think Dr. Coppersmith does the business in terms of charming the ladies, you should see my father. He can turn the heads of girls young enough to be his granddaughters.”

“I can’t believe that. Your father is such an adherent of the Ten Commandments—no adultery and all the rest.” Orlando found this a shock to top all the rest. “He’s the scourge of—what does he call them—*those who ought to know better*. I can’t imagine him chatting up women.”

“That’s half the appeal of him, Dr. Coppersmith. The women know they’re absolutely safe and so do their husbands or fathers, so he’s told all sorts of things that other men wouldn’t be privy to.” A thought occurred to Jonty. “Actually, do we need to have an innocent excuse? Ever since *The Times* printed that story we’ve been labelled as Holmes and Watson. No one would believe I was at Pegwell Bay for any other reason than to look into this business. Why not use that fact to our advantage?”

“It might work, you know. If people there think you’re doing the sleuthing they might be more likely to let some little indiscretion slip to Dr. Coppersmith. No secrets then—you can be there with your deerstalker and everyone can know it.”

Jonty grinned; he was looking forward to this case, not least because it postponed meeting his dunderheads of students. This new intake was said to be particularly obtuse. “Now, Chief Inspector, I have my notebook to hand and no doubt Dr. Coppersmith has his, sharpened pencil and all. Before he gets to the matter of writing his packing list, might we have a resumé of the case as you know it?”

“Of course, Dr. Stewart. I’ve prepared a set of notes for you to read—perhaps you might peruse them now, and then I can try to answer any of your questions?” Wilson produced two identical documents and let his hosts read them.

The matter as set out was fairly straightforward. Lady Jennifer Johnson had been found dead in her suite on September 21st 1907, just the previous week, at the Regal Hotel, Pegwell Bay. The chambermaid, bearing early morning tea and a biscuit, had found the body, spilt said tea and run to fetch the housekeeper and, via her, a doctor. His report said the woman had died peacefully in her sleep, probably of heart failure. Agnew, the hotel manager—who had seen Lady Jennifer taking plenty of exercise and always appearing hale and hearty—had called for a second opinion.

The second physician had some doubts that the matter had been entirely natural, but by this time the police had already been called in and the chief constable notified, via his godson, who happened to be the same Mr. Agnew. The third medical opinion—heart failure—had proved decisive in most people’s minds. No one had been ordered to stay at the hotel as the police supposedly had no case to pursue. They’d just taken contact details from all who had been present at the time, under the police’s favourite guise of *Routine, sir. Normal procedures, ma’am.*

Orlando and Jonty were struck by the similarity between this and the last case they’d tackled, except the thing seemed to be turned on its head. The last time, a suspicious death had been deliberately treated as natural to deflect attention from the important personages who’d been involved with the victim. Here was a case where what might well turn out to be an innocent event was being treated as suspicious, partly because the victim had contacts in very high places, ones who were determined to see that justice would be done.

“What was she like, Mr. Wilson?” Orlando laid down the papers and smoothed them.

“Lady Jennifer wasn’t a great beauty like her alliterative counterpart Lillie Langtry.” The chief inspector smiled. “I understand she was plump, pretty and more like a dairymaid than a great lady. They say she was sweet natured and exceedingly discreet.”

“I suppose she was.” Jonty rubbed his nose where his reading spectacles pinched a bit. “I’ve been on the telephone to Papa. He says her relationship with royalty went on for years, but it’s only coming to light now. Was she a great favourite of the prince, as he was then? I don’t remember her name being mentioned by my father until now.” Mr. Stewart had always taken a pretty dim view of the morals of royalty. Jonty remembered seeing some lady at a function wearing a huge brooch which she’d been given *for services rendered*. Papa had muttered under his breath that it would probably be easier to give some sort of a badge to those women who *hadn’t* rendered services to His Royal Highness. It would certainly involve fewer pieces of jewellery.

“I think she was someone with whom he could relax and be entirely himself. I’ve spoken to someone else who knew her and their opinion is that she was a genuinely nice woman who rarely spoke ill of anyone nor sought to further herself above her station. She was content in life and didn’t nag others about how they lived theirs. Both of them are endearing qualities.”

“And yet she was the mistress of a married man.” Orlando’s voice was quiet, disapproving.

“That’s the rub. Some nice people do things which horrify you and some nasty people obey every jot and tittle of what they believe to be the law. Remember Mrs. Tattersall?” Jonty smiled, knowing full well that the world was full of people who did things Orlando didn’t approve of. No wonder he got on so well with Papa.

“I shall never forget her.” Orlando shivered, even though it remained a mild and pleasant day.

“We must never judge those we seek to find justice for.” Wilson stared out of the window, addressing his sermon to the trees. “The law must be absolutely neutral, in spite of what some of my colleagues feel. Although I do worry that the investigation of this crime will be given much more precedence than if the victim had been of less illustrious stock. Money and influence talk.”

“I’d still seek to find the killer whatever the station in life of the victim, and even if I absolutely hated them.” Orlando cast a sideways glance at Jonty; they were both aware of the consequences of such a course of action.

“What happens next I will leave to you, but I believe the truth must be served, whatever the circumstances.” Wilson stared into his empty cup, as if he might find some desperate criminal hidden under one of the stray tea leaves at the bottom.

“Had the lady any family? Papa and Mama would be useful in gaining information about and from them, I’d warrant.” Jonty had his pencil ready to take down the names.

“She’d been widowed these last ten years, but she has a son, Sir Laurence Johnson—he’s been travelling in Egypt with his bride and was contacted with the sad news as soon as possible. Otherwise there

is a sort of cousin who acted as companion, a Miss Lynette Jordan, and she was at the hotel at the time. Those are the only close kin. You'll be able to see both of them in Kent, I hope."

"Are there any enemies spoken of?" Jonty had little hope that some threatening letter or wronged acquaintance might turn up and make life easy. In his growing experience, nothing about murder was straightforward and the only constant between their cases was that Orlando would try to seduce him at every opportunity. The thought that the chances for such fun would be rather limited this time around made him suddenly sad. Finding opportunities to be together would present just as much of a challenge as the solving of the case.

"Lady Jennifer doesn't seem to have made enemies, or so the initial gossip has it. But the fact remains that someone must have disliked her enough to kill her in cold blood—if this is murder—and we need to find out everything we possibly can about what's been going on down at Pegwell Bay." Wilson fixed Orlando with an intent but kindly gaze, like a headmaster outlining his expectations of a pupil's performance in an entrance examination. Orlando wouldn't let the policeman down. "Now, we have to find you an alias."

"An alias? Why?"

"Oh, for goodness sake." Jonty punched his friend's arm. "If I can't hide my face you can't hide your name. Coppersmith is becoming a bit too well known, with all those newspaper reports of our detective prowess. Here." He fetched a dictionary of names from the bookshelf.

What seemed like hundreds of names and their meanings were consulted, but the intended bearer rejected every one of them as inapt.

Jonty soon lost patience. "What about Duncan Disorderly or Ivor Grumpyface?"

"Don't be stupid." Orlando ignored all the suggestions, even when they verged on the obscene. "I rather like the name Hugh."

Jonty couldn't hide an enormous grin. "I can think of lots of surnames which would work well with that. What about Jamp..." Before he was allowed to divulge any more he was unceremoniously bundled out of the room and not allowed to return until he could be sensible.

Wilson suggested they use the initials O.C. "It would mean any monogrammed articles won't seem out of place and you might have more of a chance of remembering to respond to it."

"Oliver Carberry." Orlando put down books and notepad. "That's a name I could use."

"Oliver Carberry it is." Wilson made a careful note. "Now, you should travel to Kent as soon as possible—probably tomorrow—and have a day or two to settle in as the new dancing partner, escort, or whatever smart title they bestow upon you."

"And you can assure us that this Agnew is beyond all suspicion of murder?" Jonty had been looking through the police report again. "We can't have Mr. Carberry walking into the lion's den."

“White as snow. He was staying with the chief constable of the county the night in question. We’ve had him party to the plan from the start and we’ve turned his scepticism around. He sees it would be much better to have respectable persons, albeit ones incognito, conducting the investigations rather than clodhopping policemen getting into everything and upsetting the guests.” Wilson knew the value of maintaining the hotel’s reputation. “Once *Oliver Carberry* is ensconced and beginning to make headway, you can arrive, with your father.”

“Then the fun can really begin.” Jonty rubbed his hands in anticipation. “And I suppose you’ve some strange lines of communication established as neither of us can be in touch directly with Orlando.”

“And I daren’t talk directly to the police.”

“It’s all in hand, gentlemen.” Wilson rose to take his leave.

Jonty began to be excited at all these little aspects of the case. He loved subterfuge and playing games so the whole thing struck him as enormous fun. Only when he looked at Orlando, to find him casting a peculiar longing glance in his direction, did the glamour begin to wear off things. They would be apart but together, close but not intimate, able to talk but not in any depth, separated socially and physically. Most importantly of all, not able to kiss or touch, and this status quo would remain until the end of the case.

Suddenly, playing at detectives didn’t seem such an attractive prospect.

Chapter Two

Orlando tried hard not to think of the increasing miles of separation from Jonty as he sped down the railway track (and in a second-class carriage, which was a distinct comedown from the norm, but had to be used in case he was spotted). He had to focus all his energies into the matter at hand and try not to let his thoughts fly back to the cottage far to the north where his greatest joy was contained.

The train journey wasn't unpleasant, Orlando having the carriage to himself, which was just as well given the nature of his thoughts. These lascivious musings showed themselves on his face, as he noticed when he caught his reflection in the window. The last night at Forsythia Cottage had been wonderful, Jonty being his usual superlative self. Orlando was convinced there could be no more accomplished or more considerate lover than Jonty, although he hadn't anyone to measure him against. He'd have upbraided his dunderheads of students for having drawn such conclusions from a sample of only one, but he recognised that *in re* Dr. J. Stewart there was no greater dunderhead than Dr. O. Coppersmith. He was head over heels in love and it was amazing.

Such a night it had been, almost like those when they'd first shared a house and there had been no problems with being together in a double bed until morning. Suddenly no one was likely to come and interrupt them and they had every hour of the darkness to share together. Things had become steadier since those first heady times, the men accepting the double bed as natural and right for them and not needing to make love on absolutely every occasion that presented itself. Sometimes they would just read or talk or listen to the owls, then fall asleep contentedly like any married couple of a year or more's standing. Sometimes they would make love leisurely or madly as the mood took them and on occasions, like this last night, they would spend most of the time in amorous activity of some sort or another, whether kissing or caressing, lying in one another's arms and talking, becoming one flesh, parting, becoming one flesh again. It had ceased long ago just to be about gratification, although that never stopped being part of it. It was a statement of their affection, a means by which they supported and cherished each other, a visible manifestation of their innermost thoughts.

And while Orlando contemplated all this, he yawned, stretched and then saw himself in the window, clear against the dark background of a cutting. The idiot grin all over his face made him more than grateful that the real Sherlock Holmes hadn't been in the carriage at the same time, scrutinising and interpreting everything about him. *Well, what would Holmes say about you, then?*

“Observe this man’s clothes, Watson,” Orlando imagined the cultured but unnerving voice. “They are of the first quality and yet he travels second class and his suitcase is rather battered. It would suggest to me someone who has come down in the world.”

Or is playing a part, Mr. Holmes. You should know, you do it often enough, it’s said.

“He has recently been writing a letter and in some haste—observe the ink marks upon his thumb.”

Actually, I was tidying away a fountain pen that a certain mucky little imp had left out without the top screwed on properly. And I would have needed to scrub this with borax solution to get rid of the mark before I travelled.

“He yawns and stretches. He is obviously tired and appears to have been exerting himself—”

A bit too close for comfort there, sir!

“—then he sighs and looks wistfully from the window as if he has left behind something precious. Yet there is a smile playing about his lips and he is trying hard to hide it. What do you infer from all this, Watson?”

It would be wonderful if the good doctor got it absolutely spot on: “He’s been spending the night making rapturous love to the man he adores because they’ll be apart for longer than he would wish, which is why he is so unhappy. But every time he thinks of what happened in their bed last night, he can’t help but grin, the cad.” Chance would be a fine thing for Watson to give you your comeuppance—I suppose we have to listen to your old twaddle instead, Sherlock.

“No, no, my good doctor. He has not been playing the tables in an effort to regain his lost fortune nor has he made a small profit which he hopes to expand upon once he crosses over to France. It is obvious to me he has been with a lady—she was very much attached to him in her maiden days, but she wed another, which is why he is so sad. She has granted him one last evening of bliss and he has hastily written a letter to tell her that he is leaving for the continent and they must never meet again. But you are at least right to call him a cad, Watson, for such he is.”

And so much for your famous deductive powers, Mr. Holmes...



The cab sped down through Ramsgate and headed south, Orlando admiring the sea and striving for a view of the French coast. Then they rounded a corner and the hotel came into sight, all pastel shades of green, handsome and distinguished, looking every inch the sort of place where a king’s mistress might retire to. Orlando took in as much as he could, as if having a clear understanding of the geography would help one to sort out the recent history.

The Regal stood in its own grounds, with a splendid little nine-hole golf course to the south, tennis courts and croquet greens to the west and to the east a little road and an expanse of green to the clifftop, the beach and the sea. The view from the rooms at the front of the hotel must have been absolutely

magnificent—Orlando hoped Jonty and his father would be accommodated there, so they could see the ships and perhaps a lighthouse. Jonty was like a child when it came to the thrill of watching a distant light winking, or hearing the horn when fog descended and only aural signals were effective.

Orlando's first task at reaching the hotel was to present himself to Mr. Agnew in his office, one which outdid Dr. Peters' study for grandeur. Agnew was to act as the go-between with the Stewarts, an arrangement designed to raise the least suspicion as all the parties would be expected to have dealings with him. Orlando took an immediate shine to the man, admiring natural leadership and authority, which Agnew had in spades. He also had a letter from Chief Inspector Wilson explaining the plan of attack they'd use to solve this case as quickly as possible.

"And, Mr. Co...Carberry, I'm extremely grateful. All I want is for the culprit, if there is one, to be caught quickly and with the least adverse publicity for this establishment. That may sound callous, but I'm being practical."

Orlando appreciated that sentiment—he'd felt the same when there'd been murders at St. Bride's. He was shown to his room, up on the highest floor of the hotel but with mercifully about half a window's view of the sea. A sheaf of papers lay on his dressing table.

"There's no need to appear on the floor tonight." Agnew smiled. "If you'll present yourself in my office at five o'clock, I'll make sure you're properly introduced to the rest of the staff. Then you can decide whether you'll sit with the other dancing partners for the evening or maybe join the sports instructors." He indicated the bundle of documents, copies of informal statements. "These might help you make your choice."

Orlando thanked the manager, who left him to mull over his "entrees" of evidence. He was delighted to see that the topmost piece of paper was a note from Sergeant Cohen saying that Wilson had drafted him in to help with taking the affidavits. Cohen confessed his delight at working with his "two favourite doctors" again and his thrill at the thought of meeting Mr. Stewart. Orlando admired the fact that these two police officers had managed to extract information from most of the people at the hotel even though there was no official investigation and it was all—he imagined Cohen's measured Cambridgeshire tones—a *matter of routine in the case of a death which is most likely to be from natural causes*.

Cohen was someone else Orlando had a brisk affection for, which was amazing given that only two years ago he really hadn't liked anyone. But all that was pre-Jonty when the world was a very different place and he was a completely different person. Then a golden-haired idiot had come along, sat in his chair and overturned the universe for him. Now that golden-haired imp was far away and unless Orlando got his head into the statements, he was going to blub like one of the dunderheads pining for hearth and home.

He didn't expect much from the statements. No one was going to come and tell the police, "Well actually I did it, so put the handcuffs on now." His best hope was that there'd be a jarring remark for him to

follow up, or that someone might let slip a touch of animosity, envy or anything else towards Lady Jennifer. His best hopes crumbled in the face of one bland statement after another.

The most interesting thing was the pen portrait Agnew had produced, detailing the sort of life his guest lived.

Lady Jennifer has been permanently resident at the hotel, apart from the occasional visit to the dower house at her old home and every June, when she always took herself off to Paris. She occasionally danced and then always with one of the professional dancing partners. More often she would play cards, listen to the orchestra or chat to the other patrons. As far as I know, she never played golf or any other strenuous sport, although she was a great walker and would turn her hand to croquet on occasions. I have seen her, if the weather was very warm, paddling decorously, sometimes in the company of Lynette Jordan and sometimes with one of her friends from London.

The statements suggested Lady Jennifer was universally liked and there was no reason anyone should murder her. Only one thing jarred. The golf professional, Dougherty, who was obliged to take luncheon at the hotel once a week to talk Royal and Ancient with any of the old buffers who wished to bore him, revealed that the lady would sometimes come over to the clubhouse and they'd take a small sherry together. Dougherty was the son of the gamekeeper at Lady Jennifer's family estate and she'd always taken an interest in his career. Indeed, she'd been on the way home from meeting her beloved Bertie at Sandwich when she'd called in on a whim to see Dougherty and fallen in love with the Regal, marking it out as somewhere she might retire to.

Dougherty's statement said something was worrying the lady, although he'd not been made to privy to what it was. Orlando couldn't help rolling his eyes. How many times had people made such provocative, frustrating declarations and afterwards it had all proved to be a red herring?

He duly arrived at Agnew's office a little before five o'clock to be introduced to the rest of the staff when they had their daily briefing. The headwaiter and his second-in-command were in attendance, along with the housekeeper, chief receptionist and several of the sporting professionals. All three of the professional dancing partners had appeared to welcome their new colleague, an unusual honour as they normally took it in turns to attend.

"Mr. Carberry," Agnew said in brisk, efficient tones, "will be here until Mr. Ashton-Hall is recovered from his broken leg and fit to return."

Orlando wondered whether the broken leg was real or a matter of convenience, and if Ashton-Hall might be having an extended holiday at the king's expense. He took particular note of his new colleagues, not because he believed they were key to the investigation, but so he could fit in quickly. He could dance very well, he felt absolutely confident on that score, and if his recent experiences with the Stewarts couldn't help him make a decent shot at mixing easily with *the quality*, what could? But he was still reliant on being a quick learner and his largely untested, as yet, acting skills.

The dancing partners, two women and a man, bore good honest English names, despite Jonty warning him that they might well employ continental aliases. Paula Devonish, Christine Bellamy and John Wickham were names which heartened him, as did the genuine smiles with which he was greeted. The meeting ran on into hotel business, none of which seemed related to the case, but Orlando kept listening and making mental notes. Only at the very end did his detecting facilities leap into operation.

“Now, in relation to the recent *sad occurrence*.” The staff immediately seemed to understand what Mr. Agnew was referring to. It must have been a common euphemism, these past few days. “The funeral has been fixed for later this week. The housekeeper and I will be attending on behalf of the Regal. I’m sure you will wish me to pass on everyone’s condolences.”

Orlando cast a quick glance around the room, frustrated to see everyone looking suitably sombre. Unless he got a hint of a scent soon, Jonty was going to tease him unmercifully about slacking at his commission.



Three days later, Jonty was too busy with his own commission to worry about teasing his lover. He’d been on the telephone to the Master’s lodge, mysteriously instructing Ariadne Peters to have her best bib and tucker on at half an hour’s notice and she was now laying into him thick and fast, like an older sister rather than just an old maid.

“You’re five minutes late.” Miss Peters fixed her hat with a chiffon scarf. “I’d report such laxity to my brother if I didn’t think I’d have more fun reporting it to Dr. Coppersmith.” She’d always had a soft spot for Dr. Stewart and, if the man concerned believed she just felt maternal, all well and good.

“I had to help this chap from Emmanuel. Ninety if he was a day and hurtling down Castle Hill on a bicycle as if he were a schoolboy. Of course he came a cropper.” Jonty smiled and twisted his hat, as if trying to look like a schoolboy himself.

It cut no ice. “Dr. Coppersmith might fall for such stuff but I don’t believe a word of it.” Maternal the soft spot certainly wasn’t. There was a good deal of attraction involved on Miss Peters’ part and had been from the first time the young man had graced the Master’s lodge along with a whole raft of other freshers, every man jack of them nervous and eager to impress. She’d never expected it to be anything more than platonic. “Now, what is this about?”

“I’ve had the summons, Miss Peters.” Jonty had a telegram in hand, one which read, incomprehensibly, *Ferdinand, reference clothes—need more of everything. Collect suit and shirts at Waite’s en route, please. Oliver.*

“I must be being obtuse, Dr. Stewart. Who is Ferdinand, and what is he, that all his swains implore him?”

“That’s my codename, Miss Peters. I can’t correspond with Dr. Coppersmith directly so even the post has to come via our old friend Matthew Ainslie.” Jonty smiled, the affection shining from his face. “Anyhow, he must be getting through clothes at a rate of knots and the hotel laundry can’t be as fast or efficient as Mrs. Ward.”

“Is that *the* Waite’s the tailor? The ones down in London? You can’t help but admire Dr. Coppersmith’s ingenuity if he’s ordered a set of fitted items to be made for him.”

“Oh, that would have been easy. They’d have retained his measurements and he’s not put on an ounce, despite Mrs. Ward’s Eve’s pudding. Will you help me choose all these things, please?” Jonty put his head to one side, looking more than ever like an impish choirboy.

Miss Peters smiled in sudden glorious comprehension. Jonty was allowing her the privilege of accompanying him on a shopping expedition to purchase things for his friend. She lowered her voice, putting on her gloves in anticipation of leaving the lodge. “I can think of nothing better than helping you to buy Dr. Coppersmith’s trousseau. It’s the nearest I might ever get to purchasing said item.” She’d never had a need of supplying her own.

“There’s still time, Miss Peters.” Jonty’s face shone with such confidence that the lady, for all that she saw fifty looming on the horizon, almost believed him.

She stifled an uncharacteristic tear, like the one she’d shed in private when Jonty had gone off to take his doctorate at University College. Dr. Peters must have tired of the hints, subtle and blatant, dropped down the years that Jonty should be encouraged to return to St. Bride’s. Now he was here lighting up her life again. “Come on, let’s be going or there’ll be nothing left in the shops but sackcloth.”

When Orlando wasn’t in the heady environs of Waite’s, he frequented Prior and Bell, a Cambridge tailoring firm in which Miss Peters was well known, it being one of the places she visited on behalf of, or in tandem with, her brother. It wouldn’t surprise them to see her advising other college members, as well. Jonty was just opening the door for her to enter the shop when a tall, slim man came barging out, his head turned over his shoulder in the act of making some parting remark, who nearly sent her flying.

“I’m so very sorry.” The man concerned stepped back, leaving the entrance free.

“I should think so, old man. Let the ladies go first and all that.” Jonty grinned; he’d been prepared to take umbrage, but the man’s genuine apology and the sound of true remorse in his shy, deep voice had restored his good mood.

“I never intended...” The man raised his hat, bowing to Miss Peters, who coloured.

“No offence intended, so not the slightest bit taken.” Miss Peters bowed in return and swept into the shop.

Jonty raised his hat to the man and followed her in, where the pair of them immersed themselves in the business of vests, socks and other necessities. Afterwards, in the safety of a nice quiet corner of a nice quiet tea shop Jonty revealed what had been buzzing about in his bonce ever since the doorway encounter.

“Bit of all right, wasn’t he?”

“Who?” Miss Peters’ hands folded around a small tea cup. She had neither elegant hands nor graceful fingers—by rights she and Orlando should have traded hands—and the little vessel looked lost in her grasp.

“The man who bowled into you at the tailor’s shop. Very handsome, I’d have said, though I don’t know if he was your type.” Jonty considered his friend over the rim of his cup; she had flushed.

“I barely noticed him.” The lady’s cheeks turned a deeper red.

“Miss Peters! I have never known you to tell a fib, but this time I believe I’ve caught you out in a whopper.”

She began to laugh. “Have I no secrets from you, Dr. Stewart? What is a girl to do?”

“I would say that a girl should find out the man’s name and if he was already attached and if the latter was in the negative, try to see whether she could engineer a meeting with him.” Jonty grinned, then called for more tea.

“Now were I thirty years younger that might be a possible course to steer, but at my age...”

“What rot! Mama says that age is all in the mind and you’ve always struck me as being a mere slip of a girl in terms of your outlook. I know twenty-year-old undergraduates who are much older than you in their attitudes to life.” Jonty considered for a moment. “Is it the Master you’re concerned about? I’m sure he wouldn’t object to his sister having a little flirtation.”

“It isn’t Lemuel who concerns me.” Miss Peters was suddenly pale and serious. “It’s Tom.”

“Tom? I’m afraid you’ll have to enlighten me on that front.” Jonty poured her another cup and proffered a cake—some instinct told him he would be venturing into very deep waters.

Miss Peters took a deep breath and sighed. “Dr. Stewart, when I was in my early twenties I met the loveliest man it could be anyone’s pleasure to know. His name was Thomas Wilkinson and he was a lieutenant on one of Her Majesty’s ships.” She hesitated, sipping her tea. “I was very, very fond of him. We planned to be married after his next voyage—a simple run across to the West Indies—but the weather turned foul off the Scillies. The ship was lost and all souls with her. They said the storm threw her onto the rocks or she hit some submerged object. Either way...either way, planarian worms are only my second true love.”

Jonty gently squeezed her hand, but didn’t speak—no words would have been suitable. When eventually Miss Peters’ tears stopped and she composed herself again, he smiled, speaking from his heart. “I’m sure Tom wouldn’t mind either. You’re far too sensible and engaging a woman to spend all your life cooped up at the lodge with your brother, as brilliant as he is.”

Miss Peters blew her nose. “You really don’t think I’m too old? I mean, assuming I ever caught up with that chap, or indeed any other, and they turned out to be fancy free?”

“Not too old at all.” Jonty squeezed her hand again. “Never too old.”

Chapter Three

Orlando's natural eagerness for Jonty to reach the Regal was enhanced by the need to get his hands on his extra supply of clothes. He'd decided, almost his first day in residence, that he'd need an entire change of clothes from his daywear into his evening attire, and since then he'd been itching with impatience. His supplies were dwindling and the hotel laundry was slow, if reliable.

He felt guilty about wanting some clean shirts more than he wanted his lover, but a man had to be pragmatic. John Wickham's words rang in his ears. *I always change my shirt halfway through the evening so that the ladies are presented with a snowy white starched façade, Mr. Carberry, as they prefer. No one wants to dance with a sweaty or grubby man; they could do that with their husbands at any point.*

Orlando had taken to John straight away, despite worrying that the man would see him as a rival, someone to wrest away the attention and the favours of the regular patronesses. This hadn't proved true, perhaps because they were such a contrast to one another, Wickham being along Jonty's lines although much less muscular. He was fair, red cheeked, seemed to be always smiling and—on the evidence of the first evening—was an accomplished dancer without being flashy.

The ladies obviously liked him and he'd never been without a partner from the first demonstration he'd danced with Miss Devonish. Orlando had been pleasantly surprised by Paula Devonish, as well, although he had his reservations about Christine Bellamy. There was something about her, the way her manners were almost too perfect, as if they'd been adopted, not learned, which gave him pause. Jonty was going to kill him for having become such a snob.

The system by which partners were allocated to the guests seemed complicated but not a patch on Boolean algebra, so Orlando soon got the hang of it. The first dance was always an exhibition, then the four professional partners might seek anyone to take the next. John confessed he always chose the ugliest or quietest woman, simply because it put the others' noses out of joint. The rest of the dances, either side of the break, could be booked in advance via the ballroom steward, who kept the cards for the four professionals.

Orlando spent a fair amount of time with his fellow dancers, finding out what his duties were to be outside the ballroom. As long as they weren't what Miss Peters had implied, he'd be happy. His first job was helping Miss Bellamy give a dancing class to the children of hotel guests and local gentry. It wasn't too unpleasant, although some of the little toads he could cheerfully have tied up to the radiators by their dancing pumps. The dancing partners took turns in leading the twice-weekly classes. Apart from this, their

obligations consisted of dancing six evenings a week and being available on one of the afternoons to partner people at croquet, putting or table tennis—anything and anywhere someone of reasonable athletic prowess was needed.

He soon learned, over a few drinks and a light supper after the second night's dancing was done, that Lady Jennifer had been popular with the staff and her death had been a shock to everyone.

"She never seemed worried about anything, or if she was she didn't let it show." Christine seemed to know a lot about Lady Jennifer, especially regarding the disposition of the lady's will. "She left a nice little trust fund for her Miss Jordan—I call that absolutely ladylike. There's many a companion gets left with nothing but her lady's old hair brushes or something equally tatty. The son was well provided for by his father so her ladyship's money could be used as she wished and none of it seems to be going directly to him. I believe the rest is for her grandchildren, should any appear. As I understand it, her jewellery goes to her daughter-in-law—she did have some lovely pieces."

Orlando asked how Christine had found out such interesting things and was told by Paula, who seemed rather put out about it, that she had a *young man named Dennis* who worked at a local solicitor's firm and whose ears were a bit too big for his head. Orlando had to employ his best arbitration skills—as practiced on the dunderheads when they couldn't agree on a point of algebra—and smooth things over between the ladies. It was easy, turning the subject of discussion from Dustbin-ears Dennis to the character of the companion. Now he knew why Mrs. Stewart said she preferred the company of men, especially men's men. Women often seemed happiest when performing a character assassination on some other poor member of their sex and she wanted none of it.

Paula and Christine rose to the bait nobly, each having a totally different opinion of Miss Jordan, a fact which fascinated Orlando but made John roll his eyes, although out of sight of the ladies.

"Mr. Carberry—"

"Please call me Oliver, if that degree of familiarity would be acceptable among the four of us."

Paula coloured but carried on with a smile, "Oliver, I've never really taken to her, although I couldn't for the life of me give you a concrete reason. It's nothing she's said or done but I don't feel that I can warm to her."

Christine took the opposing view. This must have been the usual state of affairs, one girl being prepared to swear that black was white if it meant confounding the other. "Well I always find her a lady. Not that I've had that much to do with her, apart from the odd game of croquet. She's a good competitive player but always fair. Wouldn't you agree, John?"

"John's bound to agree—he's one of her favourites. Or is it the other way around?" Paula almost snorted.

"She likes to patronise me with a dance or two and I must admit she's an excellent partner. She follows very well and if she makes a mistake, throws it off with élan. I enjoy taking to the floor with her."

“But you’ve not answered my question.” Christine seemed determined that John would stand by her estimation of Miss Jordan’s character.

He considered the issue. “Fair, yes. Competitive, yes. If you’re asking me if I like her then I’d have to say the jury’s out on that matter. But if what you really mean is do I think she killed her former employer, then I don’t.”

Orlando wasn’t surprised at the mention of murder. The fact there’d been initial doubts about the cause of death was no secret and people liked nothing more than speculating about some mystery. It only surprised him that this was the first time anyone had mentioned it. He pleaded ignorance, was soon enlightened, then confirmed in his view that tongues were already wagging. No one was going to be shocked at any investigation.

“But who could, or would, have killed the poor lady?” Orlando looked from face to face, trying to appear innocent.

“I think it was an old flame, Oliver. Someone from her days as a debutante. Almost romantic, really.” Christine’s eyes became rather dreamy.

“Oh what rot!” Paula took, as usual, to contradicting her friend. Orlando wondered how he was ever going to get to the truth if they were always at it hammer and tongs. “You’ve no evidence any man was hanging around. You just want it to be some dark stranger. I think it’s to do with the inheritance in some way. I know they’re not officially reading the will until after the funeral—irrespective of what your boyfriend says—so there may be some clues for the police when that happens. I bet they’ve already got all the details and are following them up.” She flicked her elegantly coiffured hair. “I have great faith in the abilities of the constabulary.”

“Well, that’s what you think, but Dennis says the police aren’t looking into it. There’s certainly been no one from Scotland Yard hanging around the office poking into things.” Christine flicked her own hair in an even more marked manner.

“And what do you think, John?” Orlando fixed his fellow dancer with a keen gaze; the man gave the impression he knew much more about all sorts of things than he let on.

John shrugged. “I really have no idea and I won’t speculate on what I don’t understand. However, I wouldn’t be surprised—if it was murder and I’m not convinced that’s true—if there’s passion at the base of it, irrespective of the lady’s mature years. Passion has a lot to answer for.”

Orlando chatted a little more then made his excuses. He wanted to get back to his room and write up his notes of this conversation for Jonty, who was due in the next day. Just the thought made him feel excited, although whether that was due to lust or new linen, he couldn’t tell.



As Jonty's cab turned the corner, the Regal hotel hove into view like a great ship breaching the crest of the promenade. The day was warm and sunny, with no hint yet of autumn, making the place look an absolute picture. He was even more delighted with the room he was allocated; it had a sea view and adjoined the one where his father would be staying. Best of all, a large packet awaited him, containing the same witness statements which Orlando had perused, accompanied by a smaller envelope bearing some notes his lover had made about his first few days at the hotel. There was also a small *billet doux* for Jonty's eyes only.

Please read these and see if you can make anything more than I can out of them. I've made a little progress over the last few days and will write it up this afternoon once I've checked a few things. I hope that you behave yourself and look forward to seeing both you and your father very soon. I have missed you.
O xxx

Four kisses on a note was unprecedented. Jonty swallowed hard at the thought of how much he must already be missed. He too had been pining for his lover and the uncertainty about the length of their separation had added to his melancholy. If only they knew that this thing would all be solved in—say—two weeks, it would make it all a lot easier to bear. Then he could count the days off on the prison wall.

He'd begun to read through the pile of statements when a rap on the door and a familiar voice announced the arrival of Sergeant Cohen, who came into the room looking every bit the sort of big, bluff policeman who inhabited Gilbert and Sullivan operettas or the books of Jerome K. Jerome.

Jonty greeted him with great delight, explaining why Mr. Stewart couldn't dance attendance at present. "He's off at the funeral, Mr. Cohen, being an old friend of the family. And it might help the cause."

Cohen smiled. "Mr. Wilson always likes to do that—you'd be surprised how much information you can pick up by watching the faces around the graveside. Not that we have much hope this time, although you never know what your father might find out."

"It would certainly be helpful all round if someone were to throw themselves into the grave with a great cry of *I did it, please forgive me*. I suppose it's all proving a bit frustrating in terms of progress, if these—" Jonty pointed at the sheaf of statements, "—are anything to go by."

"Dr. Stewart, I can honestly say I've never known a case where we had so little evidence. Almost all we can say with certainty is that the lady is dead, possibly murdered, and that's about all. Perhaps you'll find it really was natural causes, although a certain royal personage seems to have got a bee in his bonnet that it can't be. Still, we've heard no rumours of strangers hanging around the place and no one who seems to benefit to the extent of wanting to do her ladyship harm. It's all very vexing. Even the inquest was a straightforward thing, the coroner announcing the death was due to natural causes, based on what two of the three doctors said."

"And the third doctor?"

“He seemed to be wavering. By then the doubts had got into His Majesty’s mind and...well, we’re left to eliminate the other possibilities.”

“Dr. Coppersmith says he believes he’s made a little progress, although I’ve yet to be informed about what it is. Certainly Papa can shed very little light on things and he and Mama have been in full-blown gossip mode ever since we were first asked in. Chief Inspector Wilson had to go cap in hand to the great and good to get us permission to play hooky.”

“Now I notice you said *very little light* as opposed to no light at all. Was there the faintest glimmer in their tittle-tattling?”

“Only for the distaff side of the family. Mama had one of her usual strokes of genius and remembered that our cook had once served in the Johnson household. She took a bottle of our best sherry down to the kitchens to offer her condolences and a little comfort. Whether it was her natural charm or the effects of Mr. Croft’s best I’m not sure, but Mrs. Vickery became distinctly maudlin, harking back to the happy times she’d had in Lady Jennifer’s service. That’s when old Sir Laurence was still alive and there’d been *many a merry party given and sumptuous food to be prepared*.” Jonty produced a lively impression of the cook.

“And?” Cohen seemed to enjoy the impersonation, but he wasn’t a man to be fobbed off.

“Mrs. Vickery told a tale of how she’d once found Lady Jennifer in tears after one of these parties. Her ladyship had sneaked out into the garden, no doubt thinking she’d be alone, not realising her cook has a passion for bats and would go out on balmy evenings to watch the things. Her ladyship had been so upset she’d clung to Mrs. Vickery and sobbed herself hoarse.”

“Was there ever any indication what had caused her such distress?” Cohen made copious notes, just as Orlando habitually did.

Jonty swallowed hard again, unmanned by the recollection of his lover in best detective mode. “Our cook suspected, from what she described as an *atmosphere* in the house over the next few days, that it might have been to do with the husband, Sir Laurence. Obviously the incident was never mentioned again in the Johnsons’ household and would never have seen the light of day in the Stewarts’ if this tragedy hadn’t occurred.”

Cohen made another little note in his book, then smiled. “Now at last I can see where you get your talent from, Dr. Stewart. I look forward to meeting your father to see if he matches the standard achieved by his wife and son.” The sergeant rose, tipped his hat and departed, leaving Jonty to contemplate a nice bath before dinner, a meal to be followed by the glorious sight of Orlando in his tails trying to act a part.



Jonty’s first glimpse of Orlando came as he sipped his coffee at a table tucked away at the back of the ballroom; it made him swallow the brew in very short order. He loved Orlando in black tie and tails, shirtfront as firmly starched as if it were made of white iron and hair slicked down with some very subtle

pomade—he hated to smell common—so that not a curl might escape and annoy his partners. He was conversing with another handsome young man, who must have been John Wickham, and a pair of rather nice-looking girls who were dressed elegantly enough to impress the women although with just a hint of glamour to beguile the men.

Once the orchestra began to play in earnest, John and one of the girls took to the floor to dance a flawless exhibition of a waltz. At the end, all four dancers sought out a partner, leaving Jonty rather sad that he couldn't be the one to dance with the tall, solemn Oliver Carberry. They did dance at home, sometimes, although finding the music had been a trial until Jonty had happened upon a pianola. The noise was pretty vile, but at least they could jig to it together around the front room or garden, the high hedges and trees making certain they couldn't be overlooked as they took turns to lead. But dance in public they never would and Jonty for one thought it a crying shame.

"May I join you?" A familiar voice sounded at Jonty's ear to break his reverie. He looked up to see Ralph Broad standing nervously at the side of the table.

"Of course, old man. Wonderful to see you here." Jonty rose and shook his brother-in-law's hand. "How's Lavinia?"

"Oh, she's fine. Same as usual." Ralph smiled, sitting down heavily. *Same as usual* was no doubt euphemistic for *she still won't let me have sex with her*. "She's off to town for some new table linen, I think."

"What brings you to these parts? I thought the Broads all haunted Sussex."

"I'm glad you didn't make Clarence's awful joke about how he thought we should be from Norfolk with a surname like that."

"My beloved brother can be a bit of a cad at times, although he would term himself a card. Can I get you a drink?" Jonty motioned for a waiter.

"No thanks, need to keep a clear head, you know. Playing in a golf competition here tomorrow and want to uphold the honour of the old club. You don't fancy a bit of caddying, do you?"

Jonty remembered the little remark that Dougherty, the golf professional, had made in his statement. This could be just the opportunity he needed. "I think I might just do that. Any idea when you're teeing off?"

"About eleven, I think, so we'll need a good breakfast inside us—that drive from the first looks fairly ominous. I just hope it's an onshore breeze or I might be peppering the beach a bit. It's a good course though, and the professional knows his stuff, they say."

Jonty tried hard not to look interested. "Local man, is he? I can't imagine anyone from the depths of Surrey or some such inland place doing well on a links." He sipped his coffee nonchalantly.

"Not originally. Comes from old Laurence Johnson's estate, I think, according to the chap at our club. Talking of which, did you know that Lady Johnson was found dead here in mysterious circumstances

and..." A light suddenly, and very obviously, dawned in Ralph's brain. "Oh, I bet that's why you're here, isn't it?" He suddenly realised he should be keeping his voice down. "To investigate. Is Coppersmith here, too?"

"Yes, he is." Jonty's whisper was furious. "And if you blow his cover I shall brain you. He's incognito and so it must remain. In fact if you even mention him again, I'll tell your mother-in-law."

"I'll keep mum then." Ralph produced a vapid grin, although Jonty knew at heart he could be trusted to keep his word. "I suppose that's why you asked about Dougherty?"

"Indeed. Although I must add it's quite all right to acknowledge *my* role here. Papa—he's due to arrive tomorrow evening—and I are going to let slip that we're the private investigators, which will hopefully make the other folk give away a thing or two unawares to *our friend*."

"I wish I could help you more regarding Dougherty. He's a good player, made the Open a few times, and keeps a canny club, or so they say. But I have no gossip or relevant information." Ralph looked disappointed.

"Never mind. We'll just have to keep our ears open tomorrow and perhaps nab him after your round. Now, do you see that nice little thing who looks a bit like my sister? Go and see the steward and organise a dance with her. And if you can turn the conversation to Lady Jennifer, so much the better."



Dr. Lemuel Peters was a handsome man, in an austere way; his rather monastic appearance belied his sense of humour and enormous degree of human charity. St. Bride's was his whole life and had been since he was a boy chorister at the school attached to the college. He'd been an undergraduate, a fellow and now was Master of the institution. He'd never married, he lived in the lodge with Miss Peters as chatelaine and few men could have been happier than he professed himself to be.

He considered his sister over the breakfast table and a roguish grin, quite out of character with the ascetic appearance of his face, broke over him. "Ariadne, I do believe that letter has made you blush. Is it from an admirer?"

The lady in question, her face by now a bright crimson, blustered, trying to shake her head and gather her thoughts. "No indeed—it's from Dr. Stewart."

"And is he your admirer? I always thought he had no interests in anything but his sonnets."

"No, he isn't! He's merely provided me with some gossip which has taken me by surprise. And," she added, feeling she at last had possession of herself, "I won't divulge what it is as you're a terrible scallywag." She rose from the table and swept out, clasping her post to her bosom and leaving her brother to ponder whether any previous Master of Bride's had been called such a name.

Once out of the room she was able to read her letter in peace and the red flush on her face ceased to be an issue. The main part concerned Jonty's arrival at the Regal, the pleasure with which Orlando had

received his supplies—he compliments you on your choice of socks—and then some day-to-day doings of their case. The last few paragraphs had brought such giddy delight.

Much as it annoys Orlando to have achieved a degree of notoriety for sleuthing, it can have its advantages. Three years ago, had I gone into a respectable establishment to ask about one of its customers, I'd have been given short shrift and probably banned from ever darkening their doorstep. Not the done thing at all. But now I can go into the most exclusive of places; once I give them my name I can see the light dawning and they positively fall over themselves to provide me with the gen.

So were I to go into, for example, a high-class tailor's and see if I can establish the identity of the man I saw leaving the shop I would no doubt be successful. Not that I would do such a thing unless on police business. Even if a lady I admired were to benefit from it.

The letter then concluded with the usual pleasantries and kind regards. It had a little postscript. *His name is Dr. Sheridan and he's down at Apostles' College, where he is a dab hand at mammal-like reptiles, so you'd better bone up on the old dicynodonts or whatever they are. The rest I leave to you.*

Chapter Four

“Papa!” Jonty had inherited several things from his mother. One was his stunning good looks and the other was his ability, when he wished, to make himself heard over the entire band of the Royal Marines should the occasion arise, as it did now. The entrance hall to the Regal Hotel was packed to the gunwales with golfers who had come to attack the links and in some cases had brought their nearest and dearest to take tea or stroll along the promenade while they tried to hack their way out of the bunkers. All of these people were making a shocking racket, so when Jonty caught sight of his father’s bald pate shining across the room he had to make his presence felt.

“Jonty!” Richard Stewart forced his way, with charm and many apologies, through the throng and shook his son’s hand with pleasure. “Is there an auction going on here? Or has the pope agreed to make a public appearance?”

“It’s a golf tournament. Lavinia’s Ralph is playing in it, if he ever gets himself ready in time, and I’m caddying.”

Mr. Stewart frowned, then a visible light flickered on his face as the true importance of what his son had said struck him. Stewart senior was the one his son mostly took his brains from and he immediately put two and two together to get the correct amount. “Aha. You don’t usually indulge in this sort of flummery.” He dropped his voice. “Important that you, ahem, help Ralph out?”

“Come along and I’ll tell you all about it. We can grab a coffee and have a quick chinwag. Outside would be best.”

They took their cups out onto the front terrace and strolled to where they could talk in private. Jonty immediately explained the reason for his sudden enthusiasm for *think a niblick would be best here, Ralph* and told his father where he could find all the information Orlando had accumulated. They were housed in interconnecting rooms so that they could confer easily and Mr. Stewart promised to be fully briefed by the time his son returned.

“If I find anyone I know in the interim, and I’ve spied a couple who might be worth chatting to, then I might even have some news of my own.” Mr. Stewart grinned like a child at Christmas. “I do enjoy it when you allow me to play at sleuths. And of course, I have to keep His Majesty informed.”

“Of course.” Jonty’s smile mirrored his father’s. “Off you go then, Sherlock.”



“Richard! Richard Stewart!” Jonty’s father turned his head, looking for where the stentorian tones had emanated from and wondering if the only form of communication at the Regal was bellowing. He located a vaguely familiar face, raised his eyebrow and was greeted once again. “Come and join me for lunch—we’ve got years of gossiping to catch up on.”

Mr. Stewart took up the invitation with pleasure. He’d spent the morning studying all the police and unofficial notes, so was ready both for food and a little conversation. To be doing so in the company of Janet Allender was a real bonus. She might be eighty, a mass of wrinkles and with white hair that seemed to defy the hairdresser’s endeavours to control it, but thirty years ago she had been one of the most charming hostesses in England. And thirty years before that, Mr. Stewart’s father had been in love with her for a while. She had been a great friend of the family and was often down at Sussex until, in 1888, following a sudden transition to widowhood, she’d amazed everyone by announcing that she was going to travel the world. Being no great correspondent, letters to friends had soon become postcards—a welcome invention for her—and then silence. Even Mrs. Stewart wasn’t aware that she’d returned.

“When did you get back?” Mr. Stewart kissed the lady’s hand and squeezed it gently.

“Two days ago, on the steamer into Dover. I’m recuperating for a week or so before I head for London and no end of questions from people. Perhaps it would be easier to make lectures at Speaker’s Corner detailing my travels to save having to repeat myself endless times.”

“Then I shan’t ask you for the litany now, although only on condition that you come down to the Old Manor sometime and tell us all about the last twenty years.”

“Has it really been that long? I suppose it must be, nearly. I agree, then. All I’ll say is that I’ve had a wonderful time, feel positively juvenile again and would recommend it to anyone.” She paused while a waiter took their order. “Is that youngest boy of yours here?”

“He is. Off caddying at the moment but he’ll be around for dinner, should you want to meet him.”

“I thought he was. Mind you, he was a skinny little thing the last time I set eyes on him—legs sticking from his shorts like two sticks of celery. I saw a young man here and thought *my goodness that has to be Helena Stewart’s son* but he seemed far too muscular and athletic. It has been a long time...” Mrs. Allender took a sip of water. “So what brings you here?”

Mr. Stewart looked around him in a theatrically conspiratorial way. “Investigating a suspicious death. That’s to say Jonathan is—he’s rather well known for his prowess at locating killers and the police like to employ him on occasions.”

“Now, who has died here that warrants such cloak-and-dagger stuff?”

“Lady Jennifer Johnson.”

It may have been unladylike to whistle her surprise, but Janet Allender didn’t seem to care. “Lummy, old Bertie’s lady love? She was a lovely little thing—well, not so little but you get my drift. Who could possibly have wanted to do her harm?”

“That’s what we’d love to know. You’ve obviously not heard anything since your arrival.”

“Not a dicky bird. Funnily enough though...”

The conversation was halted by the arrival of two plates of excellent salad, rather frustrating Mr. Stewart who really wanted to know what was *funny enough*.

“I met her son on my travels. Out in Cairo, a few months back.”

“I believe he arrived home only two days ago. Still, he made a fine speech at her funeral. Very appropriate stuff and not at all mawkish as some tend to be.” Mr. Stewart, who abhorred lying as much as he abhorred the breaking of the commandments, was glad he could state that with absolute honesty.

“You were at the funeral? Ah, but I’m forgetting, you were great friends with old Sir Laurence, weren’t you?”

“I was. Larry and I were pals back in our childhoods. I’m sorry to say I didn’t much keep in touch with his widow. But *a certain personage* wanted me to be there.” Jonty had wanted him to be there, too—snooping about—and the process was proving interesting, although his son wouldn’t find out exactly how interesting until he’d finished gallivanting around the golf course.

“And did *he* show his face?”

“Oh yes, ostensibly, like me, as a friend of Sir Laurence—old Sir Laurence, that is—although I think there were a few in the know. I hasten to add her son was one of them. No sense in keeping it all a secret from him.” Mr. Stewart felt he’d profit from turning the conversation to Laurence Johnson junior again.

Mrs. Allender considered for a moment. “Are you really here to investigate this death or are you gulling me as you used to forty years back?”

“It’s the honest truth. I leave the practical jokes to my youngest son, now. And my eldest grandson, who seems to be continuing the tradition.” Mr. Stewart smiled in his most charming way.

“Oh put that smile away, Richard. Reminds me exactly why you were regarded as the catch of your generation. I suppose your youngest son is regarded as the catch of his.” If Mrs. Allender noticed her friend choke on his salad, she was too polite to mention it. “I think I should speak candidly. I don’t like the younger Laurence at all. He’s as unlike his father as you’re like yours and, no doubt, your youngster is like you. His bride is a charming thing, although she seemed very nervous when I met her. Now nothing he said or did when we met gave me pause—and I hadn’t seen him since he was a child, really, so there’s nothing historical, either—but it’s a feeling. I took an instant dislike which, for all his charm and obvious good sense, I could not shrug off. He struck me as being, underneath that pleasant exterior, the sort of man who in my younger days we’d have called a cad. But I mustn’t be putting things into your mind—his wife may well have been an anxious creature from out of her cradle for all I know. What did you think of her?”

“She certainly is a quiet little thing, not a commodity we’re used to in females in our family. I too have seen very little of young Laurence. He went off to school before Larry died, then he was at university and away with his archaeological digs somewhere or other.” Mr. Stewart made a mental note that he wasn’t

going to be a lot of use to this endeavour unless he pretty soon struck up a re-acquaintance with the house of Johnson.

The conversation turned to family news and the two old friends chatted away pleasantly enough, all the while Mr. Stewart making little mental notes of what he had to report back and the further steps he would have to take.

Lunch was a resounding success all round, leaving Mr. Stewart with the need—given that he wasn't getting any younger and he'd done a lot of travelling the last few days—to take a little nap afterwards. When he woke he noticed two things; he felt refreshed, if a bit crumpled, and there was a note under the door. Not Orlando's writing—he didn't recognise the hand at all—but both envelope and paper inside were good quality.

I know why you're here. Keep your noses out of things.

Mr. Stewart didn't know whether to be annoyed or delighted. This was like being a real detective.

The sleep had done Mr. Stewart the power of good; he felt chipper enough to bypass the clubhouse and accompany the golfers down the last two holes. Ralph was playing superbly, according to those in the know. Although he was unlikely to win the event, he hadn't disgraced himself and was in with a chance of winning a special prize for the nearest drive to the hole at the short fourth.

Jonty looked chipper, if a bit tired from lugging the bag around on what was a warm day, and smiled affectionately at his father. At least Mr. Stewart assumed it was affection—knowing Jonty, that grin might mean *I've found a juicy bit of information and you'll have to wait to have it shared with you*. Eventually they reached the final green, putts were knocked in, hands shaken all round and cards signed. Then they sought the consolation of the nineteenth hole, Ralph and Jonty pleased to find that pints awaited them once their golf shoes had been changed for proper footwear.

"Papa, you're a wonder. You must have read my mind." Jonty took a huge draught of beer and beamed. "Lovely stuff."

"Have you had a *good* afternoon?" Mr. Stewart hoped he'd implied enough in his tone, if not his words, for Jonty to get his drift.

"Oh yes, excellent in every way. We'll tell you all about the round—no doubt Ralph will want to relive all of his magnificent drives and rather skim over his encounters with the sand, but it's a story worth telling."

The conversation, appropriately for the surroundings, drifted off into stories of putts that lipped out, bunkers like the great north wall of the Eiger, and a very inquisitive rabbit which had tried to make off with Ralph's ball at the twelfth.



“You go first.” Jonty had hardly got through the door before he began. He was bursting with his own news but wanted to be polite and let his father have the honour, to keep up the golfing theme.

“Do I start with the information or the threat?” An idiot grin, the sort that Orlando always vowed Jonty wore, graced Mr. Stewart’s face.

“Threat? Blimey.” Jonty took the note and turned it in his hand. “I don’t think we’ve ever had anything as dramatic as this, Papa. Good sign, though, I’d have thought—someone has something to hide. I’ll get Orlando to look at this and see if he can recognise the writing. Is your information as exciting?”

Mr. Stewart brought out a little book. “I thought if I was playing sleuths I need the proper equipment.” He consulted his notes then related the events of lunchtime.

“I think it’s a splendid idea, you making the initial investigations with Lady Jennifer’s next of kin. But I’m itching to know about the funeral—did anything show up there?” Jonty had got it into his mind that some momentous thing was bound to have happened on this occasion, a totally illogical thought and not one he’d ever admit to Orlando. He desperately wanted to be proved right.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you...” Mr. Stewart waited a moment, his love of a prank to the fore. “No, actually there was something. Although I don’t know how, if at all, it fits in. I saw a chap there I recognised yet couldn’t put a name to. I made discreet enquiries but no one else I spoke to could name him either, so I’m not sure he was a recent friend of the family. I did wonder whether he was part of the crowd I used to hang around with when Larry Johnson and I were younger—he’d have been the right age—and he seemed incredibly upset at the service. He was openly weeping at one point. He didn’t come back to the house afterwards, he just arrived at the church, paid his respects, then departed on his own as he had come. Perhaps he was someone to whom Jennifer had been kind, or that awful thing beloved of romantic novels, a secret admirer. It’s the fact I recognised the man which is annoying me and until I have his name I won’t know whether there’s any significance in his being present.”

“And the family—the son and the daughter-in-law? Were your first impressions like those of Mrs. Allender?”

“Not in the case of the son. He just struck me, what little I saw of him—which was really just a bit of conversation and the excellent speech he gave—as being a normal, decent chap. Perhaps I’m not as perceptive as Janet, though she saw him under different circumstances. She could be right about the wife, though, she appeared to be a timid thing.” Mr. Stewart considered. “I believe they’re due to visit here for a few days, to collect his mother’s belongings and see how investigations are proceeding. He’s certainly keen to find the person who took his mother’s life, or so I was told by that companion woman.”

“That’s an odd way to describe Miss Jordan, not that I’ve seen her yet—Cohen says she’s due to come back here tomorrow. She seems to have made an impression on you.”

"I don't know what to make of her. Not the typical companion type would be the best way to describe her. I think you might be able to get her to talk, though. A brisk walk or two along the front and I'm sure she'd be confiding her secrets." Mr. Stewart was really enjoying himself now.

"Now, what about young Laurence Johnson's wife? Shall I whisk *her* along the promenade?"

Mr. Stewart narrowed his eyes in thought. "I don't suppose it would be done for the girl to be dancing or else we could ask Orlando to charm her. I believe she'd find the quiet type alluring enough. You'd frighten her off with all your bouncing about like a puppy."

"Me? Bouncing? I think all the bounce has gone out of my elastic after that caddying. I need a good hot bath before I could so much as hop a bit. But I take the point, and utilising all our resources would be sensible if we want to get this case solved."

"You won't be dismissed to get that bath until you tell me what you found out on the links."

Jonty smiled at his father's tenacity; it reminded him of Orlando and perhaps contributed to why he loved that man so much, too. "Well, I had a stroke of luck. I had planned to go off while Ralph was practicing, track down Dougherty and then be my usual subtle self—I can be subtle, you know, whatever Mother says—but when I found him he was in conversation. I earwigged a tiny bit and found that he'd been at the funeral, too. So when I got around to purchasing a half-a-dozen golf balls—I wonder whether I can claim them on our expenses?—I subtly mentioned that my father had been present at that same occasion and how well it had been conducted. I guessed that last bit, of course, but he responded and we fell into conversation about the deceased. It helped enormously that you'd been such a pal of her husband, I think our golfing friend even vaguely remembered you going to stay there once. Or so he said. Perhaps he was putting on an act and trying to get information from me."

"Keep to the point. I don't know how Orlando puts up with you at times."

"Anyway, he said that he'd been worried about her ladyship and that she'd seemed to have something preying on her mind for this last year. He also mentioned he'd no idea what the worry might have been, that he'd told the police this fact although they didn't seem particularly interested, and that he wasn't at all sure her death was due to natural causes."

"Did he have any reasons for this belief?"

"Only that he'd met her the day of her death and she seemed hearty as ever. He said he sees a fair few people going out on the links and there are some he's not sure will make more than a few holes without blowing like a whale. He watches them come in for a snifter and thinks *you won't see next year's spring medal*. And he says he's usually right; that you can see it in their faces and hear it in their breathing. He was convinced her ladyship had another twenty years in her."

Mr. Stewart whistled. "That was brave of him to be so outspoken, if it's generally supposed this was just a case of a mature woman who died in her sleep." He raised his finger, stopping his son before he could speak, as he'd had to do so often down the years. "You mustn't discount the possibility that this is a mare's

nest. I talked to our doctor before I came here and he's seen cases where fit young men have dropped down dead because of some blood vessel bursting in a vital part of their body."

Jonty wondered how his mind could have become so dirty that the phrase "vital part" forced him to bite his lip. "Anatomy isn't your strong point, is it, Papa? Still, I'll concede you're right, although your note would suggest otherwise. Unless the writer has something else on his or her mind, rather than murder."

Mr. Stewart grinned. "I hope I'm not right, boy. I want a case to solve. I'll console myself with remembering that people love to imagine the worst and that if Dougherty thinks she was too hale for her body just to give out, other folk must as well."

"I bet there's been loads of gossip since the inquest and the gossipers will be queuing up to give us their twopenn'orth on the tale." And with that happy thought, Jonty took his poor stiff muscles off for a soak, leaving Mr. Stewart to have another little forty winks.



After an excellent dinner, both father and son took their coffee into the ballroom to watch the dancing. Mr. Stewart gallantly insisted on taking Janet Allender for a stately waltz, while Jonty found an almost equally aged lady to accompany. He studiously avoided any of the younger women and tried his best not to look at Orlando, who looked stunning. Jonty had always admired Orlando both in clothes and out of them; the man's carriage made him look dashing in well-cut jackets and trousers. In this situation he was fiercely handsome, with his shirt as crisp as a new five-pound note. Jonty noticed that many female eyes were on the studious-looking, dark-haired man who glided over the floor.

Jonty found his table again, where his father soon joined him. They watched the dancing companionably. "Were you ever jealous when Mama was dancing with other men? In your courting days, I mean?" Watching Orlando squiring a variety of women around the floor made Jonty less than comfortable, although he couldn't say why.

Mr. Stewart smiled and nodded. "Oh yes, when I first saw her. Young Helena Forster had taken over from where her own mother had left off a generation before. *The* beauty of her cohort and all the men wanting to have the chance to whisk her around the dance floor. I used to bide my time, hoping at first that someone would formally introduce us and that I'd catch her eye from time to time."

"I understand she had a few adventures at some of those dances." The story of George le Tissier and Helena's right hook was a favourite one for her favoured son.

"She did, indeed." Mr. Stewart smiled at the memory. "One of the reasons I knew we were made for each other was the lack of aggression she showed in my direction. By then I think she'd made up her mind that I was *the one*, only she found it quite hard to believe I felt the same. We were both awfully shy in those days."

“That I don’t believe for an instant.” Jonty’s eyes were still following Orlando greedily around the floor, no matter how hard he tried to fix them elsewhere.

“Believe what you like, my lad, but it’s true. I think her bold exterior hid a bashful heart. She could give and take the banter with all her would-be suitors, except me. Time was your mother was lost for words, hard as that may seem to believe now.”

“That’s simple to account for. It’s because you were the only one she cared for and that simple fact paralysed her tongue.” Jonty understood his parents well.

“So I found out, when at last we summoned up the courage to discuss our true feelings. In answer to your original question, I was green with envy every time another man had his arm around her waist, but not after we became engaged. Then I knew that anything out there—” he indicated the dance floor, “—was all pretend. It was only real when *we* danced together.”

“You never cease to surprise me, you and Mama. Long may it continue.” Jonty raised his glass of brandy and they drank the toast together.

“And him?” Mr. Stewart lowered his voice diplomatically. “Do you feel jealous when he’s escorting all those women around the floor?”

Jonty immediately shook his head, then took his time for sober consideration. “No. It’s as you said, what he’s doing out there is all make-believe. It’s like courting some young actress and then getting jealous when she plays Juliet or Gwendolyn What’s-her-face. If I thought it meant anything at all to him, I might get agitated, but it doesn’t, so I don’t.” *Although it doesn’t stop me desiring him, all the more so because I can’t have him at the moment.* Jonty cast a glance in his father’s direction and saw a momentary look there proving that he understood his son, too. “I think I’ll just finish these and then I’m for my bed. The old shoulders are starting to suffer from the weight of Ralph’s bag.”

Mr. Stewart nodded. “I won’t be far behind you. Been a lot of miles covered these past few days and I’m not as young as I was. Need to conserve my energy.”

“I’ll wait for you, then.”

They left the note for Orlando, via Mr. Agnew, then walked to the lifts together, Jonty insisting his poor back couldn’t manage the stairs.

“I watched him, you know.” Alone together in the little cabin, Mr. Stewart leaned forward in confidence. “He registered, if only infinitesimally, that the room was darker, now that you’d departed.”

“Oh.” Jonty couldn’t say any more, a great, empty feeling welling inside, threatening to unman him if he tried to speak again.

Chapter Five

Orlando lay in his bed fretting; no other word could adequately describe what was going on. Jonty lay in a south-easterly direction—Orlando had roughly worked out the distance between where their respective heads lay—and he wished that space was only a matter of inches, not many yards. Then he could protect Jonty from people unknown—he didn’t recognise the writing, either—who sent threatening letters. And “do his duty” with him in the process.

Notes sent back and forwards via Mr. Agnew weren’t good enough, even if what had gone to and fro so far had been passed quickly and efficiently. Orlando was reluctant to commit anything too personal to paper, though he felt reasonably certain he could trust Agnew; it might be intercepted and this case had enough potential for scandal without adding to it by their own folly.

More important was the issue of getting to spend time with his lover. They’d said hello at some point each day since Jonty had been at the hotel and had exchanged a few bland words about the weather or the music. Any more than that hadn’t proved possible. How on earth they were going to get a chance to kiss seemed beyond all engineering. They were located two floors apart and, while Orlando could perhaps walk through the guests’ part of the hotel without anyone assuming anything worse than that he was visiting a lady there—scandalous enough but allowable—he was reluctant to do anything to tarnish his veneer of absolute respectability. Jonty wouldn’t even be able to go poking around the floor reserved for the staff; that would definitely imply he was having an assignation, maybe with one of the waitresses.

And even if they managed to find an innocent reason to be on “the wrong floor”, once they’d got to the corridor in question, how were they going to get into and out of each other’s rooms unnoticed by the rest of the world? Especially when they weren’t even supposed to know each other. Still, a solution had to be found and as far as Orlando was concerned it needed to be found fairly soon.

He wanted at least to talk to his friend, even if only to let Jonty remind him how much he was loved, something he found hard to believe when he didn’t have that sun-like grin turned upon him. Of course he loved Jonty without qualm or question—freely, wholly and without reservation. But he needed to tell him, often, and have the same told to him in reply.

The arrival of a note, pushed discreetly under his door by what might well have been the diplomatic hand of Mr. Agnew, got Orlando out of his bed of moping.

You’ll never guess what. Orlando adored his lover, but the little toad had the habit of writing as he spoke, which led to going around the houses. *Papa has come up trumps as usual. He came here armed with*

the ridiculously simple plan of hiring a cottage on a short-term let, one near a train station so you could get there easily enough in your free time. I could hire a cab and no one would guess we were meeting up. I did think the logistics of keys and whatnot would be a bit daunting, but Papa calmly suggested Mrs. Ward, on the principle that she could no doubt be down in Kent at about three and a half minute's warning. She can keep the place welcoming and she'll add an air of respectability to the scene. She'll probably tell the neighbours we're her nephews or something.

Orlando was already formulating theories about how quickly such a plan could be got into action, but his mental effort wasn't necessary.

Of course, there's another formidable female in this conspiracy; Mama and Mrs. Ward between them have found the ideal place and within what was I'm guessing a matter of seconds, have rented it for a month. Apparently, by the point at which I was lugging Ralph's golf bag around the links, our housekeeper was lugging her case into a two up, two down, bathroom-added whitewashed cottage, with a name that Papa says reminds him of us all having the chicken pox. It's near Sandwich, on the Deal Road.

I'll see you there today, at eleven. Place is called Shingles. We can discuss the case and plan the next few moves. Jonty.

It struck Orlando immediately—once he'd overcome the shocks of the people whom he loved being in a conspiracy behind his back and knowing exactly the sort of filthy thoughts which had been going through his mind that morning—that this arrangement smacked of genius. Not only would it let them discuss the case, something that had always led to progress one way or another in the past, it would of course allow for a little snuggling on neutral ground, so much safer than arranging an assignation within the Regal. No one could barge in through the door without getting past the bastion of Mrs. Ward, and if she was armed with her rolling pin she'd be able to keep a regiment at bay long enough for her boys to make themselves decent and appear to be doing no more than talking in the parlour. Because, even if they were found meeting in this cottage of ease, they could always reveal the truth. They were investigating a possible murder, under authority of the highest in the land, and needed a place to meet to consult each other.

Richard Stewart was a genius, nothing less.



Jonty arrived first at Shingles, greeting Mrs. Ward with a warm kiss on the cheek and accepting her offer of coffee with alacrity. He took a turn around the garden while it brewed, deliberately not looking along the road more than ten times to see if Orlando was approaching. Called in to take his drink, he sat in the window seat—just to admire the shrubbery—until his eye was caught by something red making progress along the lane in the direction of the cottage. He nearly spilt his coffee when he realised it was Orlando, wearing the velvet jacket which Jonty had secretly had made up for him at Waite's during one of their earlier cases.

Jonty adored that jacket; it filled him with the most inappropriate thoughts at the most inappropriate times. It was unfair of Orlando to wear it to boat club lunches down at St. Thomas's or in the Senior Common Room on informal occasions—it led to all sorts of awkwardness. Orlando knew that, of course he did, and had probably just been exploiting it, eager to amuse himself watching Jonty cope with his physical reactions. Even when Lumley, St. Bride's chaplain, had remarked that such a garment would *make many a man look a cad but Dr. Coppersmith seemed to get away with it*, Orlando had been determined to keep on producing the outfit. When he wore it to stroll along the Champs d'Élysées it had driven Jonty berserk and he'd had to hold a newspaper in front of himself until they reached the Arc de Triomphe.

Jonty waited for his friend to come through the door, reluctant to rush out and nab him in the garden. "Orlando! Lovely to see you." They shook hands, pumping them up and down as if they'd been apart years. "Very brave of you to wear that jacket in broad daylight."

"I had my greatcoat on for most of the journey—I'm not that daft." Orlando flung the overcoat down, his face awash with great tenderness.

"Better start with a letter for you." How odd; they'd only been apart a matter of a week or so but to Jonty it seemed like months. He felt awkward and shy, as if he were beginning their courtship again.

"Is that Dr. Peters' writing?" Orlando pointed to the envelope his lover drew from his jacket pocket. He too seemed not quite sure what to do or say—they could hardly drag each other up to bed straight away, no matter how much the idea appealed.

"It is. He has things to impart to you, mainly related to college matters or so his covering note says, and wouldn't dare address it directly. I could have sent it via Mr. Agnew, but it didn't seem appropriate. Much nicer to put it into your own fair hands." Jonty placed the letter carefully in Orlando's palm, touching it with his own fingers. A little crackle of electricity, just as there had been nearly two years previously when they'd first accidentally touched hands, passed between them with the paper.

Orlando grasped his friend's fingers, held them for a moment then brought them to his lips. "Have you no kiss for me?"

"I have all the kisses in the world, although I don't want to waste even one in haste and not enjoy every second of it." Jonty smiled, caressing his lover's wonderfully smooth cheek with his free hand. "Want to be courted again, I suppose."

"You big soppy romantic ha'pporth." Orlando kissed the fingers again then drew Jonty into his arms, holding him there without caressing or making any sorts of movements that might be interpreted as *forcing matters on*.

Jonty knew, before he was held close enough to make the truth of things undeniable, that what his lover wanted was to be kissed even more stupid than normal, even here in the parlour, then to go upstairs and make use of the nice goose-feather bed. Jonty wanted things to be much more leisurely. And they had a case to discuss, an unromantic if pragmatic thought. "Before or afterwards?"

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t intend to voice my thoughts. I was wondering whether there’s time to both discuss the case and let you make sufficient romantic overtures towards me. And if so which should come first. Conversely, if there isn’t time, which should go to the wall?”

“I don’t think I could hold a lucid conversation about this case, or about anything at all, if you don’t let me at least have some sort of amorous liaison with you. It doesn’t have to be...” Orlando glanced towards the door, doubtless checking that both it and the walls were stout enough to allow for fairly free speech, “...it but a substantial snogging is required at the very least.” At which point he set out to achieve that lesser aim.

They shared kisses—gentle then fervent—until the call of the mattress became too much for both of them. They could hear Mrs. Ward clattering about in the kitchen in her usual subtle *I’ve made myself busy for a while so don’t you worry* manner, leaving them free to climb the stairs like a pair of illicit lovers rather than an established couple of two years’ standing. The whole situation smacked of naughtiness, but not as much as the mischief that took place once the door to the bedroom was shut.

“You seem to be in a tearing hurry.” Orlando had thrown Jonty onto the bed. Not the gentle lowering that was what usually passed for Orlando being masterful, but a real, strapping pick up and plonk down. Jonty may have wanted wooing but he was getting it caveman style. And it was none the worse for that. “Let me at least get my clothes off.”

“No time for that.” Orlando laid a trail of kisses along his lover’s face and neck, got frustrated at the collar line so headed southwards. “Getting these sorted will be enough.” Hands tugged at Jonty’s trousers, achieving in their haste little in the way of removing obstructions.

“I think I’d better be in charge of this. For both of us.” Jonty slapped Orlando’s hands away, dealt with both sets of buttons in a calmer way than his lover was capable of. “Where’s the Orlando who usually insists that everything’s off before the fun can start?”

“He temporarily expired on the dance floor. You have no idea what it’s like, dancing with other people and never the one you want.” Orlando’s voice was hoarse now. “I want you, Jonty, now. Please.”

“You can have me. Just let me catch my breath.” Jonty tried to stop giggling, but soon gave up. “My Neanderthal man.”

“Can you blame me? I’ve been trussed up in shirt and tails and had to act respectable far too long. Now—” he laid his hand over Jonty’s mouth, “—shut up. We’ve work to do.”

Not the normal work, though—the progress made by inches, part of an inch, hands moving downwards slowly, touching and letting go, almost as much pleasure in each measured step as in the final, glorious climax. This was like when they’d first made love, rolling together in front of a fire in a study at St. Bride’s and the thing had been all done in an instant. Now they hardly had time to achieve union when

the culmination came, Orlando's hot breath against his lover's neck, whispering "Jonty, Jonty" over again, brow sweating and body shuddering with pleasure.

"Missed you too," was the contented reply.



"So we have a lady whom people say was in prime shape suddenly dying of heart failure. It can happen, we know that, but I think we must assume it's murder." Orlando was happy, satisfied, rather muddle-headed although at least aware there were other matters in hand rather than just those of the double bed.

"That's obvious. Is all this dancing affecting your acuity?" Jonty grinned and rubbed his friend's noddle as if to rouse his brains from the depths. "Or is it what happened here?" He patted the crumpled sheets.

"Some people need the obvious stated to them. I think the note you got sent would add weight to the argument." Orlando ignored the idea buzzing around his head of braining the note's writer. "Have there been any more?"

"No. Not even 'Go home now or take the consequences' written in the condensation on the bathroom mirror."

"Don't joke. One person is dead and I don't want you being another." Orlando held his lover closer, as if he could form a shield against any evil.

"Ralph left his putter on the eighteenth green. I'll sleep with it by my bedside. Papa can slip that old army knife of his under the pillow." Jonty snuggled onto Orlando's chest. "Now, Jennifer Johnson, please."

"Lady Jennifer to you, even if you're probably her social equal. We should start with how it was done, although I suspect that won't get us far, unless it proves it couldn't have been done at all."

"Blimey, your brains are going to bits. I'm not sure I even understood that question."

"Yes you did, you're being annoying as usual. Tell me if you managed to get Dr. Panesar to give his opinion or they'll be solving another unexplained death." Orlando pinched his lover's bottom, as that normally brought him back to his senses.

"Give his opinion? I couldn't shut him up. You know what Maurice is like when he gets a bee in his bonnet—he gave me a lecture on all the possibilities, or at least all of them he could bring immediately to mind." Jonty reached for his notebook, which had fallen onto the floor sometime in the height of passion. "We had the usual rubbish about untraceable poisons unknown to western medicine, but I hurried him through that. Pleaded Ockham's razor. Then he said he believed you could inject someone with a bubble of air and if it went in to their heart that would be night-nights..."

"I don't believe Dr. Panesar would use such a coarse expression."

"If you want what he literally said, we'll be here an hour. I'm giving you a précis. Maurice's money would be on someone drugging her ladyship into a deep sleep and then slipping a pillow or cushion over her mouth. Nice and simple, so long as they could slip in and out of her room unawares."

"Wouldn't the doctor have noticed a needle mark or the like?"

"Not if they weren't looking for it, I suppose, and a nice gentle suffocation mightn't leave any signs at all." Jonty turned and picked up the pillow, letting it hover over his lover's face as if they might try a reconstruction. "Anyway, that's something we'll need to ask when we meet one of them."

"Put that into the pending tray, then. Next is the old question of who'll benefit? The companion seems to have come out of this well. We must try and find out if she needed that money." Orlando reached into his jacket pocket, where his precious notebook, an increasingly important element in his investigative toolbox, was tucked away. That wouldn't ever be at risk of going flying with the bedclothes.

"I'll get Papa to tackle the son and I'll chat up the cousin. You should be seeing if you can make any headway with Lady Laurence Johnson—my father thinks she'll succumb immediately to your charms. Perhaps her husband will have lots of business to deal with so he'll leave her here alone on occasions. That could be very useful."

"I have that on top of my list of things to do." Orlando indicated the page of his notebook, although it did Jonty little good as he wasn't wearing his spectacles. The coincidence of thinking didn't surprise them. Like a married couple understanding each other better with each passing year, so their thoughts had begun to converge, at least the romantic and detective if not the academic ones. It seemed natural that, sharing their bodies, they might unite their minds. "I also wondered whether there could have been an element of covering up in this case. Relating to Lady Jennifer's past as a royal mistress, I mean. Would anyone want to kill her just because of the position she'd held?"

"I doubt it, Orlando, or else loads of ladies would be at risk. We've usually found these things have a personal element. I bet there'll turn out to be a grievance or something at the root of this case and I'd love to know why her ladyship was out in the garden crying that night like our cook said. And what the *atmosphere* was about. Perhaps the companion would know—I'll have to flirt with her to the best of my ability."

"Your talents in that regard are well known to be enormous."

"How have you got on with the dancing girls? Surely they've been able to shed some light on things?"

Orlando shuddered at the thought. Christine and Paula seemed to be making concerted attempts to get him alone and he'd been fighting it off valiantly. "I doubt it. We were chatting over coffee last night and John was asking if Dustbin-ears Dennis had been listening in at doors again and whether he'd progressed to knowing who would benefit most from the murder."

"Great minds obviously think alike. Or dancing ones do..."

“The dancing girls, as you call them, gave him short shrift. Yesterday they’d decided it wasn’t a murder, or at least Christine had, and they argued for a full ten minutes over the pros and cons for natural death or unnatural. I was all excited because I thought they might let slip something, but not a single bit of useful information came out. They know nothing more than we do, unless they’re very clever at dissembling and I don’t believe that’s true.”

“Ah well, keep your ears open, just like Dennis!” Jonty smiled and slapped Orlando’s rump, just because it was there and convenient.

Orlando reached for the letter from Dr. Peters. Time was when a missive from the great man would have been his number-one priority and nothing would have come in the way of his reading it. Now both love and murder had intervened and the Master of St. Bride’s had come a distant third. He read it quickly, decided it needed an answer but that could wait until the morrow. The note at the end intrigued him. “There’s something in this letter for you—a strange little addendum from your beloved Miss Peters. It says *tell Dr. Stewart we’re at high table at Apostles’ tonight, more news to follow*. Are you going to enlighten me to the meaning of this cryptic message?”

“Not at the moment, Orlando. We must await developments and then I suspect the whole world will know, although you’ll be first, I promise. All I will say is that it involves mammal-like reptiles.”

With an enigmatic smile, Jonty slapped Orlando’s backside again, then got up from the bed to make himself decent.



Richard Stewart hadn’t been idle while his son was away. He’d had a frisson of guilt when he considered he’d been privy to the commission—probably—of an act that was frowned upon in law and condemned by the church. Indeed, he’d been a catalyst in setting up the right conditions for said act to occur. The nature of his son’s inclinations, which he’d suspected long before Jonty confessed to his parents about his first love Richard Marsters, had troubled him. Mr. Stewart wouldn’t have cut off his youngest child without a penny or forbidden him the family home, as he’d always believed one had to love the sinner if not the sin. So he’d thought hard and studied long to find if it actually was a sin to love one’s fellow man instead of one’s fellow woman.

Yes, the Old Testament was vociferous in its condemnation of the sort of relationship his son had with Orlando, but then it also condemned handling leather, being rude to one’s parents and officiating at the altar if one had an eye defect. All of those, and many other things, seemed to be ignored or reapplied by the same people who would have censured Jonty. The more he read, the more he became convinced that people were picking any little bits out of the Bible to suit their own points of view, or interpreting it afresh. He’d long ago become cross with anyone quoting the Bible about the Sabbath, as that applied to Saturday, and short shrift he gave them when they tried it.

His opinion began to change and he could find nothing in the words of our Saviour that made him want to reverse it. On the contrary, there was plenty about not judging other people and being tolerant of their faults, something to make him reassess his own attitudes to those who broke his beloved Ten Commandments. And he couldn't find anything to charge Jonty with in *them*, either. The man was as true to Richard and then to Orlando as the day was long, so the seventh law—the one which Mr. Stewart cherished above all the rest—remained inviolate.

He didn't, however, want to consider the exact nature of what might be going on at Shingles. He found it hard enough to contemplate what anyone else did in their beds, not being of a prurient disposition, and hadn't been able to discuss anything related to sex with his two elder sons prior to their nuptials. Giving them each a book and an embarrassed "I think you had better read this" had been all he could manage. He regretted it now, particularly as his neglect of his offspring's education about the marital bedchamber must have contributed to his only daughter's disastrous wedding night. But he couldn't have done otherwise; at heart he was a very shy man.

He turned his mind to the happier matter of sleuthing, his sights firmly fixed to note the arrival of Laurence Johnson. Jonty wanted him in charge of coursing that hare; after all, he had the natural means of introduction. In the interim he thought he'd talk to Dougherty, Jonty not having really had the chance to ask the sort of questions he might want to. And Mr. Stewart had a natural introduction to the golf professional, too.

He found Dougherty in his office studying a new range of clubs and appearing not to be impressed by them. Mr. Stewart introduced himself and immediately told a little, guilty white lie regarding the cook at the Old Manor. "Mrs. Vickery wishes to be remembered to you."

"Mrs. Vickery?" Dougherty held a niblick in his hand and considered its weight. "Ah, not Mrs. Vickery of the butterfly cakes?" He put the club down, beaming.

"The very same. She still has a marvellous touch with a sponge or a Yorkshire pudding. Like an angel has made it." Mr. Stewart didn't need to lie about the prowess of the culinary genius who ruled the kitchen in Sussex.

"She used to spoil me as a child. I never dared tell anyone at home but she let me have the lickings from the cake bowl."

"My son always says they're the best bits." Mr. Stewart was offered a seat and accepted, was offered a beer but declined and settled for a cup of tea, should that be no trouble. "Naturally Mrs. Vickery is rather upset by the news from here."

"We all are, those who knew her ladyship. She was like yourself, sir, no airs or graces—genuine quality and a kind word for everyone. I'll miss our little chinwags here."

Mr. Stewart was struck by how sincerely the sentiment had been voiced. Hopefully it was a good omen for the questioning to come. He sneaked a look at Dougherty's desk, but couldn't see any evidence of

his writing. "I haven't seen her for a long time. I was really more friendly with the late Sir Laurence, God rest his soul."

"Now that's where I've seen you before, sir. You were up for the shooting and I was helping my father out. A good haul that day, I recall." Dougherty's smile spoke of real pleasure.

"Almost beyond counting. Your father must have been very sound at his trade to produce such a clutch of birds."

"He was that. And a fine shot—I suppose the co-ordination of hand and eye got passed on and manifested itself rather differently in me." He indicated the range of clubs, but Mr. Stewart had already got the point.

"I believe you met my son yesterday, he was caddying for Ralph Broad."

"Ah yes. Shame he's a gentleman, you know. He has just the build for taking that job up full time." Dougherty grinned. "If you'll excuse me being so forward, sir. I've been brought up not to worry about being a tradesman in the presence of nobility. Although I wouldn't say that to anyone other than a Stewart, or her late ladyship."

"No offence taken, Mr. Dougherty. And you're right about my son, he could have been a useful golfer too, had rugby not captured his heart. He has the arms and shoulders for it."

"You've not come here to discuss golf, though, either of you?" The professional smiled again. It didn't seem an accusation, merely a statement of fact. "One of the members here was telling me this morning he'd seen your son and caught his name. Apparently when he's not teaching about Shakespeare he does a little amateur sleuthing and is very successful at it. It isn't hard to make a connection between Lady Jennifer's death and his sudden presence here."

"I shan't lie to you. We've both been commissioned to make enquiries into what isn't universally regarded as a natural death. I'm aware that you doubt her ladyship's heart would have given out in so unexpected a way. Is there anything else you could tell me which might point me in the direction of the truth?" Mr. Stewart produced his notebook—it made him feel like a real detective—and a pen.

"Lady Jennifer didn't tell me anything to make me suspicious, or at least nothing I didn't already know. I'm sorry, I should make myself clearer. She didn't appear to have any new worries. Her life here was peaceful and interesting for her. I believe she would have enjoyed it for many more years if..."

Mr. Stewart nodded, waiting for Dougherty to speak again.

"I suppose you know she'd decided not to live permanently at the dower house at Kimpson after her son came of age, although she was happy to return there on occasions."

"Was there any tension between her and her son? I realise that's an intrusive question but in these sorts of cases one doesn't always have room for delicacy."

The professional considered for a moment. "I think that when he married, she wanted the new bride to have space and time to establish herself, without a mother-in-law hovering. It seems reasonable. I also think she was happier in the company of her companion than in that of her more immediate family."

"Did Miss Jordan get on with Sir Laurence and his wife?"

Dougherty shrugged. "Her ladyship said one or two things which implied they were a bit at daggers drawn at times. Along the lines of both believing they had her best interests at heart but different ways of manifesting it. She found it less wearing to simply keep away from Kimpson."

"But it was her home, surely? Didn't she feel a wrench?"

"Not as I understand it. She'd come there by marriage, of course, and she implied the house had unhappy memories for her."

"Now that's interesting; can you be any more specific?"

"I'm afraid not. I do remember, before I left home, the odd whisper I overheard about her being unhappy although I never found out why. It didn't interest me until now that, I suppose, it might have bearing on her death. If I can remember any more I'll certainly tell you."

"You've been most helpful, thank you." Richard shook Dougherty's hand and left.

When he reached the Regal again it struck him the timeline didn't work. Laurence Johnson wasn't that long married and his mother had taken to living in Kent long before, so whatever her reason for leaving Kimpson it couldn't have been the imminent arrival of another woman. Worse still, he hadn't looked at the notice board, where he might have seen something Dougherty had written. A weary trudge back to the clubhouse gained little; there was a letter the professional had signed on display, but the writing wasn't the same as on the note.

Chapter Six

“Well, well.” Jonty had listened to all his father had to say, briefed him on what Orlando had imparted—as they lay on the bed, although Jonty wasn’t prepared to divulge that fact—and was now trying to work out what he should be asking Miss Jordan. “There are beginning to be glimmers in this case. Discontentment for more than one lady, little rumblings that may or may not mean something.”

“I wish I could be clearer about sifting the wheat from the chaff.” Mr. Stewart scratched his head in as eloquent a dumb show of perplexity as any of Shakespeare’s mummers could have managed.

“That’s where we need to get you more experience of things, Papa. Orlando says it’s just like any sort of scholarship. You see if two or more sources are contradictory or complementary and you apply your methods to work out whether a sequence of events is likely.”

“And is that all you do? Rationalise? Isn’t there any concrete way that you can tell whether someone is telling you a whopper?”

Jonty grinned. “I think you can develop a bit of a nose for it. Our good friends Chief Inspector Wilson and Sergeant Cohen would agree. Orlando, naturally, says it’s probably some subconscious psychological analysis, picking up little clues about how furtive someone is looking or what they’re doing with their fingers. He might have a point, although I prefer to call it intuition. You’ll get a feel for it soon enough—you always seemed to know if *we* were lying.”

Mr. Stewart laughed, his handsome face crinkling in pleasure. “You lot were very easy. Sheridan’s ears always turned red when he was fibbing, and Clarence couldn’t look me in the eye, so if he was addressing my shoulder I always had a hint that all wasn’t well.”

“And me? How could you tell when I was passing off some tale?”

Mr. Stewart leaned across, to touch his son’s knee. “Tell me honestly, how often did you lie to me?”

Jonty thought long and hard. “Not often. I usually stayed quiet and let the other two dig us deeper into the clart. There’s only the once that comes to mind. About who had broken that cut-glass vase.”

“And then you confessed about three seconds after telling all that cock and bull about a fox which had got into the house and knocked the table over. I didn’t need signs with you, Jonty. If you had things you didn’t want known, you never spoke at all.”

A silence fell on the room as both men considered the import of what had been said. When Jonty was at school there’d been plenty of things he hadn’t wanted to discuss, for risk of being seen straight through. Mr. Stewart cursed himself for touching on painful things and was on the verge of changing the subject

when Jonty suddenly smiled, said he *wished he'd got certain things off his chest a lot earlier*, then ploughed on.

"The trouble with this case is we seem to have absolutely nothing to go on. Not even a sniff of an idea to get our heads around, except that Lady Jennifer seemed to have been upset about something when she was at home and that her son might be a bit of a rotter. I've never known us to be faced with such a blank. It *was* murder I suppose? I mean, that blessed doctor couldn't have got it wrong, could he?"

"I suppose we have to consider that eventuality—and the possibility of failure. What does your instinct tell you?"

Jonty wrinkled his brow in thought then got up to look out of the window at the sea, something which always both reassured and inspired him. He thought for a few minutes then turned, beaming, to his father. "It tells me that there's something fishy going on somewhere and we're soon going to make a breakthrough. But don't tell Orlando I said so, I'll be told off for excess of subjectivity. And don't go bothering looking at anyone else's writing. I've decided it's not worth it."

"Why have you made that momentous decision, child?"

"Because if I wrote a warning note I'd disguise my handwriting and I can't believe anyone else would be stupid enough not to do the same."



Orlando wasn't concerned, at that moment, with anything bar his four o'clock dancing class. Strictly, it had been John Wickham's turn to preside, but he had a terrible cold and "Oliver" had suggested he go back to bed to preserve his strength for the evening. Orlando's motives hadn't been entirely altruistic—a Mrs. Southwell, with whom he had been dancing the night before, had twin four-year-olds who were taking part in the lesson. She, her children and their governess were staying in Kent while her husband was in London on business, being keen to keep the children out of the capital and in sight of the sea. Originally from Philadelphia, they were en route to a short tour of Europe which was being tacked onto matters of business. Mrs. Southwell had struck Orlando as being sensible and demure, but it had been a chance remark that had made him want to talk to her some more.

Generally, the women he'd danced with had been happy to chat with him and on the occasions when he'd alluded to the unfortunate lady who'd died not long before, the usual response had been to give him a knowing look and a sigh, both implying that he was an innocent lad who didn't know the half of it. No one had been brave enough to tell him the other half of it yet and he was losing hope.

While "Mr. Carberry" was dancing with Mrs. Southwell, he'd mentioned he'd heard the hotel had been represented at a funeral of one of the former guests, and how sad everyone must have been for such a popular person to have passed on so suddenly.

Mrs. Southwell had expressed her sympathy and also mentioned, quite naturally and with little sign of an ulterior motive, that she'd heard there'd been some doubt about the cause of death. "Oliver" had expressed his surprise, leading his partner to divulge what she knew.

"Well, Mr. Carberry, it seems fairly common knowledge among the guests that Lady Jennifer was murdered, even if the police are pretending she wasn't. And what's more, someone else suspects it. I've heard them say..."

At that supremely inconvenient juncture the music had stopped and "Oliver" had been forced to bow politely, gritting his teeth at the unfortunate timing, and join his partner for the next dance. At the class, Mrs. Southwell seemed to pick up the conversation in mid flow as if there'd never been a gap of nearly a day.

"As I was saying last night, Mr. Carberry, someone else knows something about that poor lady and they want it looked into." They were taking a break for tea and cakes, which Orlando hoped would be both a prolonged and fruitful one. "You might not believe this, but—" she lowered her voice and raised Orlando's hopes, "—there are private detectives at work here."

Orlando tried hard not to show his disappointment. This, which was probably "the half of it" he hadn't been privy to, was hardly news to him. "Never! I've read of such things in books, naturally, but that can't be the case in real life, surely?" He tried to look as stern as possible and the hearts of all the ladies in the vicinity began to melt.

"Why, it is, I assure you. And what's more *they* know who it is." Mrs. Southwell didn't say who *they* were but Orlando assumed it was the more gossipy members among the guest fraternity. Or sisterhood. "And the detectives are members of your aristocracy." She nodded her head as if that set a seal on the matter, her eyes bright. "I can't believe your wonderful English class system would permit such a thing."

"I'm truly astonished." Orlando didn't wish to appear too eager for knowledge. It didn't go with his adopted character, although he didn't need to try too hard on that front anyway. Ladies clearly wanted to tell him all sorts of things.

"Oh, yes." Mrs. Spreadbury joined the conversation, much to Mrs. Southwell's annoyance. Perhaps she'd wanted to keep this handsome young man to herself. "They don't use their titles, of course, but it's well known Richard Stewart is a lord and his son is renowned for indulging in a little amateur sleuthing. Although it's usually alongside some chap he knows from the university, not his father as it is this time."

"Haven't you read about them in *The Times*?" Lady Samantha Lewis chipped in, making the American matron even more annoyed at being edged out of the conversation.

Orlando tried to look blank, shaking his head and giving the impression that reading *The Times* was an activity far beneath his notice.

"There's two of them, both leaders in their academic fields." It was Mrs. Spreadbury's turn to try and monopolise the good-looking dancer. "Jonty Stewart and...I can't remember the other chap's name."

“Copperfield,” Lady Samantha asserted, oblivious to her error. “And I’m told he’s a terribly morose old thing, even if he is brilliant.”

Orlando took refuge in his teacup and hoped he wouldn’t colour.

“Oh, they’re absolutely marvellous, you know.” Mrs. Spreadbury looked patronisingly at Mrs. Southwell as if she couldn’t possibly have examples of such paragons in her home country. “Always able to solve the sort of cases which foil the police, some of them donkey’s years old. I do wonder why Dr. Copperfield isn’t here?”

“I’ve heard,” her ladyship clearly lied, “he has a very important lecture to give and absolutely can’t be spared. Or that’s the official story. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if he’s involved with espionage on the continent.”

Orlando hid his nose in his cup again and prayed for the break to end so that he could get back to the children, who were a lot less formidable than their mothers.

“Aha, that’s the story I’d been told.” Mrs. Spreadbury was indulging herself in a little dishonesty. “It’s definitely spying he’s up to. The government is so worried about events in Europe, they’re desperate to obtain any information they can. They regard him as a key man in all this.” She smiled sweetly at Orlando, who nodded politely.

“And what are these Stewart chaps like?” Mrs. Southwell was clearly determined not to be entirely forgotten.

She didn’t, at that point, get her answer as the class recommenced, but the conversation carried on and Orlando was infuriated to be only hearing snippets of it as he instructed the children in the finer points of the waltz. He was convinced that someone—the women had formed a little coterie—had described Richard as being very handsome for his age, with which sentiment he couldn’t disagree. He also heard mention made of Helena, although he hoped the description of her included the word *battleship* and not *battleaxe*. He was preparing to tread on the feet of one of the hussies in question if they turned their diatribe to the Stewarts’ third son, but was relieved of the need to when the talk turned to the ladies’ own offspring and their prodigious qualities.



Jonty had been glowing since his return to the Regal and was in excellent spirits as he sought out Miss Jordan; not an arduous task as she often took her tea in one of the smaller lounges. He smiled his most charming smile, explained that his father was an old friend of Lady Jennifer and pleaded to be able to join her as he had one or two things to ask on behalf of his papa, which the old bird dared not broach himself. Whether Miss Jordan believed him or not made no odds, especially when she smiled graciously and indicated the seat next to hers.

The gesture made Jonty think of his very first meeting with Orlando, whom he hadn't many hours ago left looking very handsome and extremely indecorous in the bedroom of the cottage. He hoped he was neither smirking nor blushing as a result of the recollection.

"I know my father paid his respects at the funeral, but I too would like to offer my most sincere condolences." Jonty had donned a sober tie, which, if not black, indicated the proper degree of respect.

"Thank you." Like many women, Lynette Jordan looked more than handsome in her well-cut mourning clothes. Mr. Stewart swore that the fairer sex were often much more attractive when dressed for a funeral than for a wedding. An internment seemed to bring out the resilient, gallant nature in them. The fact that this woman was in her prime—perhaps her early thirties—helped the effect. "Did you ever meet her?"

"I think I must have done, as a child, but I'm ashamed to say I have no clear recollection. Terrible sieve head, that's me. Unless it's something to do with Shakespeare, of course." Jonty grinned; there was no point playing the *absolute* twit when it was probably well known one held an impressive teaching post at Cambridge.

"That must have been instilled in you from your mother's knee. They say the Bard stayed at the Old Manor, don't they? When it wasn't quite so old."

"They do indeed." Jonty caught a waiter's eye, ordered a pot of tea and the merest soupçon of cinnamon toast. "And are you well? Have you someone to keep you company while all this gets sorted out—I mean the estate and whatnot? I'd volunteer getting my mother down, except she's tied up with her various ventures."

"That's very kind, but I have a friend who is due to arrive soon and she'll be able to help me if anything needs to be done. Although I dare say there will be little to do, except perhaps helping her daughter-in-law sort out Lady Jennifer's effects. I've been well provided for. She was always considerate to those she liked."

"So it appears. I know many a companion often gets left out in the cold."

"Lady Jennifer had her own money, and plenty of it. She set me up a trust fund long ago so that I wouldn't always be beholden to her for anything I needed. She was a very wise woman." Miss Jordan finished her cup and laid it on the table with a deliberate motion. "And now, Dr. Stewart, we both know you're here to investigate her death so let's cut through all the preamble, shall we? What can I tell you?"

Jonty grinned and drained his own cup. "I think the whole of Kent must know why Papa and I are here, and a fat lot of good it's doing us. Papa's trying to track down some old chap he saw getting upset at the funeral but couldn't put a name to and apart from that we haven't got a sniff of a clue. Only that her ladyship seemed to have something worrying her, and that at some point in the past she'd been very upset, back at Kimpson. You could say that about almost anyone at some point in their lives so there may be no significance to it at all."

"Tell me, Dr. Stewart, what concerns most women and makes them worry?"

“I would guess the answer would be their husbands, or so I suppose.”

“Perhaps that’s the wrong question.” Miss Jordan smiled. “What worries your mother most?”

“Me, usually. Or her children in general. Ah, I see.”

“I hope you do. Lady Jennifer didn’t want to live at home once her husband was dead. She waited till her son was of age and then she came here with me, where she could be content.”

“She wasn’t content at Kimpson?”

“The dower house would have felt like a prison for her.”

“Was this because of her son’s marriage?” Jonty struggled to get the timeline clear in his head.

“No, matters date back far earlier than that. The bride is a nice little creature, if a bit mouse-like. I don’t think Lady Jennifer really liked how her son had turned out. Odd that, both parents as decent and loving as you could make them and the son, well I don’t mind saying he’s a cad, Dr. Stewart.” Miss Jordan flushed.

“I believe you if you tell me so, Miss Jordan. Is there any specific evidence of his caddery, as it were?”

“Nothing that many another man hasn’t indulged in. Girls, gambling, sailing a bit too close to the wind, but all of it done with a nasty air about him. I know plenty of lads who’ve been a bit wild but who’ve gone on to settle down into decent chaps, good husbands and all that. Perhaps Lady Jennifer hoped he would too, yet he’s as bad as ever. A great overgrown schoolboy, although with none of the endearing qualities of youth.”

A little bell jingled in Jonty’s noddle. “Sailing too close to the wind, you say? Any money worries at all?”

“I’d love to know. Just the once Lady Jennifer said something about being pleased she had her own funds and would always be provided for. She never really spoke about such matters.”

“Did she speak about her son?”

“Not as often as I bet your mother talks about you, nor with as much affection as she does, I’ll warrant. Laurence was always his father’s favourite.” Miss Jordan looked up, smiling at the sight of a familiar face entering the room. “And talking of fathers, it looks as if yours is looking for you.”

Jonty rose, called his father over and reflected that, although Miss Jordan hadn’t spoken much, she had said a great deal. Perhaps she might at some point be persuaded to say even more. “Papa.” Jonty cuffed his father’s arm. “Miss Jordan has proved most helpful. I would hasten to add she’s worked out exactly why we’re here.”

Mr. Stewart bowed to the lady then took a seat. “Do we have ‘detectives’ tattooed on our foreheads and everyone else can see it, except us?”

Miss Jordan laughed. "It's the talk of the hotel. Not sure who started the story, but everyone seems to be aware of it. And I have to say I'm jolly pleased. If someone did kill Lady Jennifer then I want to see him or her brought to account. She meant a great deal to me."

"Will you stay here until the matter is resolved? If we can find a resolution, that is?" Mr. Stewart adopted his most avuncular air.

"That's my intention. I have a friend joining me later today. Now, imagine that." Miss Jordan shook her head. "Engaging my own companion!"

"And then what would be your plans?"

Jonty admired the direct way in which his father tackled the people he spoke to; he didn't pussyfoot around. Maybe it was the privilege of grey hairs, or a bald pate.

"We intend to travel. I have enough money now so that both of us can be independent and do as we please. There's a lot of the world I would like to see—we shall start with Paris, my friend has always wanted to go there."

"Paris is truly delightful. I would love to have your opinion on the Venus de Milo." Jonty grinned in recollection of Orlando's outrageous judgment on the statue. "Perhaps you and your friend would be so kind as to join us for dinner one night. Unless she has travelled a long way, in which case we wouldn't think of imposing."

Miss Jordan laughed. "She's coming all the way from Ramsgate, which is barely more than a stroll, so I'm sure she won't be so fatigued she couldn't enjoy the company of two such charming men. And then you can interrogate her over the murder, which is no doubt your intention." The words could easily have been offensive, but the twinkle in the lady's eye and the amusement in her voice put her hearers at ease. "All joking aside, I really do hope you find the culprit. As soon as is expedient."

"So do we." Jonty rose and the men took their leave. "So how do things go?" he asked as they left the lounge.

"Not so bad. As you know I've been on the phone almost all the day sorting out bits of business. How you lads—" his father dropped his voice, even though they were by now well clear of anyone else, "—keep up your research and teaching and who knows what else, as well as solving crimes, I have no idea. I take my hat off to you."

"Well we don't have two large houses to keep tabs on, or all those pieces of property you seem to own hither and yon. Nor do we have Mama to keep under control."

"I've never been able to control your mother. I gave up on that before we were even married. She's a law unto herself and I hope she remains so until she's taken from me or I from her. Dear me, if I had to sort out her affairs too I wouldn't have a moment free from waking to sleeping. Any luck with the young lady?"

“Seems to confirm a bit of a pattern, no love lost between mother and son and I’m now desperate to know why. I can’t believe he did it, however, seeing as he was gallivanting over the pyramids or something when it happened. But I can’t help feeling there might be a connection. It’s all we have so far, really.”

Mr. Stewart laid his hand on his son’s shoulder, a habitual gesture that both of them enjoyed. Jonty had always taken pleasure in his father’s company and to have him at his side eased the discomfort of not being as close to Orlando as he would like. “Jonty, I always understood you had no truck with alibis, that you take a great delight in demolishing them. What was your theory about the man in the room full of bishops?”

“That someone could arrange for his twin brother to take his place, then go off and commit all sorts of mischief. Only Laurence doesn’t have a twin, does he?”

“No, he doesn’t. Nor a cousin who resembles him or any other such nonsense. But just because someone is supposed to be in the back end of Alexandria doesn’t mean that they necessarily are, you know. It would be worth finding out more. I think I’ll ask my friend Mrs. Allender about it. Now, who’s that with the foghorn?” A loud male voice booming over the reception desk made them turn around. “Aha, that was a bit of perfect timing.” Mr. Stewart tipped his head in the direction of the noise.

“The son, I presume? In which case that rather frightened-looking little thing must be the wife. Very pretty, although she hardly seems his type, if what Miss Jordan says is true.”

“That sort never marry the type of women they like to indulge in pleasure with.” Mr. Stewart sniffed in a significant way, the sniff encompassing a wealth of meaning and none of it complimentary to the son of his old friend.

“She reminds me of Lavinia.” Jonty smiled in affectionate remembrance of his favourite sibling.

“Lots of nice girls seem to remind you of Lavinia. I wonder...” Richard didn’t add anything. A shared glance between the two men, who knew each other’s minds very well, supplied the rest of the sentence. *I wonder if she’s suffered the same difficulties.*

“It would explain the unhappy demeanour.” Jonty answered the unspoken question.

“It would indeed. And if he couldn’t get his pleasures at home he’d be the type who’d seek them elsewhere. Probably would still do so, even if they were in plentiful supply at his own hearth.” Mr. Stewart clapped his son’s shoulder again as they turned towards the stairs. “Never do it, my boy. Never let yourself turn astray.”

Jonty let a fleeting memory of a visit to Bath pass through his brain and equally quickly leave it. “Papa, let me reassure you, I never will.”

They reached their rooms with plenty of time to spare before they needed to change for dinner. “Make sure I haven’t dozed off, will you? I hate having to rush...” Mr. Stewart stopped in mid sentence as he opened the door. Another envelope had been slipped under it, exactly like the first.

“Come on, Sherlock. What does it say?” Jonty couldn’t entirely hide the worry in his voice.

“Something a bit disturbing. *Stop now. You’ll regret it otherwise.*” Mr. Stewart smoothed the paper between his thumbs.

“Would you rather we stopped, Papa? I’m not worried for myself, but you...”

“Not now. This makes me twice as determined.” He folded the paper and carefully slipped it back into its envelope. “But don’t tell your mother.”

“I won’t. And don’t you tell Orlando or *you’ll* regret it.”

Chapter Seven

“Well, she didn’t hang about.” Paula Devonish rolled her eyes and sipped her hot chocolate.

The four dancing partners were, as usual after an evening on the floor, taking a nightcap together in the bar and resting their feet before they tramped off to their respective rooms. The Regal was perhaps unusual in providing each of its dancers, if they wanted to take up the offer, with a small but serviceable room on the top floor rather than expecting them to board out. Not an entirely altruistic arrangement, as it meant an eye could be kept on them and the likelihood of hanky-panky with the guests or fellow staff would be reduced.

“Lillian at the desk says that they’d hardly been in the hotel five minutes before they wanted all the things out of the safe. And then they’ll be going over the stuff in her room tomorrow, no doubt.” Christine had found something she and Paula could agree on—their dislike for the new arrivals.

“She doesn’t look half as nice in those black pearls as her mother-in-law did. They may go with the mourning but they looked much nicer against that dove grey frock.”

“It’s the cheek of it gets me. Lady Jennifer hardly a matter of days in the ground and her private stuff being flaunted. At least *her ladyship* won’t be able to wear some of it. Wouldn’t go with mourning at all.” The girls’ conversation turned to what sort of jewellery was suitable to be worn by the newly bereaved, so John and Orlando took refuge in discussing the recent rugby results, Orlando only pricking his ears up when he realised the discussion had turned financial.

“I bet he’ll get his hands on those diamonds and sell them. She doesn’t look the type who would stand up to him.” Christine rolled her eyes in a theatrical manner.

“And why should he do that?” A deep and rather sceptical-sounding male voice broke into the female conversation.

Orlando was glad John had asked the question; it was easier to sit and take in what was said, rather than appear too eager and raise suspicions.

“His archaeology lark must cost him a pretty penny—that ruby necklace would let him dig to his heart’s content.” Christine spoke with authority, making Orlando wonder if Dustbin-ears Dennis had been listening at doors again.

“Well if he does, those detectives will be on to him like a shot. It’ll look highly suspicious.” John cradled his port, savouring the sweet aroma.

“Detectives?” Orlando ventured. “Are the police here?”

“Oliver, you disappoint me. Don’t you listen to any gossip?” John cuffed “Carberry’s” arm. “There are two amateur sleuths in our midst—the whole hotel is buzzing about it.”

“Oh. Some of the ladies at the dancing class were talking along those lines. I didn’t really take any notice.”

“Mr. Carberry, you don’t see beyond the end of your nose, do you?” Christine shook her head. “Do you know, all the ladies here say you’re a lovely dancer, not a bad conversationalist, but you’ve got no curiosity about what’s going on. That father and son—the Stewarts—they’ve been sent here to look into things.”

“Oliver wouldn’t necessarily notice them—” Paula couldn’t resist a little dig at her colleague, “—because he isn’t smitten with the son like you are.”

“Got yourself a fancy man, have you, Christine?” John tapped her arm. It wasn’t uncommon for him to tease the girls over the handsomest young men in the hotel and this was generally returned with interest.

“She wishes she had,” Paula chirped on, obviously relishing her colleague’s discomfort, “but Dr. Stewart never dances with us. Takes to the floor with all the older women and they smirk like anything to be in his arms. He even did the waltz with that Mrs. Allender and she must be eighty if she’s a day.”

“Perhaps he doesn’t like women. Not in that way.” John considered his drink as if it might answer the question for him.

“He’s never a Nancy boy.” Christine at last found her voice, after a bout of spluttering. “I won’t hear him besmirched in that way, even if he never wants his name on my card. We girls can always tell, can’t we, Paula?” She suddenly wanted to promote feminine solidarity and all bitching was temporarily forgotten.

“Oh yes. Like the chap you’re replacing, Oliver. Mr. Ashton-Hall. He’s, well, he’s a wonderful dancer and very popular with the ladies, but none of the husbands need to worry about him running off with their wives. That wouldn’t apply to Dr. Stewart, of that I’m certain.”

“I’m pleased to hear it.” Orlando stuck his nose in his brandy and finished it off. “And if they’re here to solve a murder then I hope they do it quickly and efficiently. You don’t know who did it, do you? That little nugget of information might just raise your chances of getting a dance with your fancy man.”

“Oliver!” Both girls were surprised at the sudden outbreak of flirtatiousness from “Mr. Carberry”, but they didn’t object to it. They’d probably been waiting for him to loosen his stays a bit. The four of them began to laugh, slightly too loud for the comfort of the night porter who came to *shush* them and send them off to their beds.



Dear Dr. Stewart,

I hope that your investigations are proceeding well. No doubt you will bring the culprit to book very soon; Lemuel and I have every confidence in your abilities. We miss you very much here in the college—to see those two chairs empty in the SCR makes me rather sad. And Dr. Panesar has no one to laugh at his jokes.

Our dinner down at Apostles' College was very nice. I was introduced to a certain Dr. Sheridan over a pre-prandial sherry, although he seemed very shy and all I gleaned was that he was particularly interested in establishing just how much his mammal-like reptiles were indeed mammal-like. I believe he has a bee in his bonnet about the possibilities of them having had hair.

I sat next to the Warden of Apostles' over the meal and he painted a word portrait of all his most accomplished fellows. It appears that Dr. S is a shining star in his department and very well respected throughout the world. I was astonished to find out he is a widower, having been married before he came here, his poor wife having died while delivering their first child, which was itself stillborn. I have to admit I regard myself as being quite unemotional, but the story brought me close to tears. Poor man.

We took port in the Senior Common Room and I managed to have another little word with our fossil-admiring friend, a most interesting conversation about anapsid and therapsid skulls. The time quite flew by and soon I was being whisked off by my brother and taken back to the lodge. It was the most delightful evening and we will have to consider how best to return the invitation.

Please give my very best to Dr. Coppersmith; I do wish I could be present to see him trip the light fantastic, but I dare say the very thought of that would horrify him.

Your friend,

Ariadne Peters

Jonty read his letter over the breakfast table and grinned like an idiot.

"Whatever is so very amusing?" Mr. Stewart put down his own letter—nothing half as interesting by the look of it—and peered hard at the back of the stiff lilac-coloured paper in his son's hand.

"It's a letter from Miss Peters, just the latest gossip from the college. And an account of all the mischief Dr. Coppersmith is getting himself into." The last part was added in a loud voice; Jonty didn't want anyone overhearing to speculate any further about where the other half of the usual partnership was.

"He needs you there to keep him under control." Mr. Stewart's voice was loud enough for Mrs. Spreadbury, who was only a few tables away, to turn around.

Jonty wondered if she'd soon be reporting back to the gossiping classes. "I seem to be awash with post today." He ignored the little frisson up his neck reminding him of their unwanted correspondence. He had his letter from St. Bride's to enjoy and a short note from his mother making sure that his father was behaving himself and wishing she was there to dance with Orlando. There was also a chipper little epistle from Ralph Broad to thank Jonty for his magnificent effort at caddying. And another one, with Mr.

Agnew's clear hand on the front, which was so intriguing that Jonty went silent and read it three times over, refusing to discuss the matter until he and his father were in the safety of a nice, secluded lounge.

"I've been summoned." Jonty flapped the letter around, feeling rather perturbed.

"Have you, my boy? I always said your sins would catch you out one day." Mr. Stewart smiled, although his son could tell he was genuinely concerned at what might be afoot.

"Not by the law, Papa, but possibly I'd prefer facing the courts to facing the person who's served me with the subpoena. It's Grandmamma Coppersmith—she wants me to go to Margate—well not just me, Orlando too."

"That letter's probably travelled half the country to get here, from a few miles up the road."

"So Orlando's note says. Apparently old Mrs. Coppersmith sent her missive about the time I left Cambridge, stating that Orlando must go and see her as soon as was possible and bring *his friend* with him to Lighthouse Cottage. Mrs. Ward knows she had to open all the post to deal with any domestic matters. This is personal so it's ended up back here again, addressed to Mr. O. Carberry, the Regal Hotel, no doubt. We have to be there the next Sunday." Jonty scratched his head.

"Won't she notice the postmark if he replies to her, and wonder what her grandson's doing in Kent?"

"Oh, she knows about our penchant for amateur detecting and will probably put it down to that. If I get my brains from you, there's no doubt that Orlando inherited his considerable intellect from his granddame."

"I wonder what it's about? Orlando has never taken you to see her, has he?" Mr. Stewart's interest was piqued; all he knew about this lady was that she was said to have been quite formidable and was the only one of her family to have spoiled Orlando rotten. Or as near as any Coppersmith managed to get to spoiling him.

Jonty shook his head. "He only visits her once or twice a year, and the last few times he hasn't felt it appropriate for me to tag along. Not sure she's ready for the reality of..." He didn't finish and didn't need to do so. His father would understand all that was said and, more importantly, what was meant.

"So she doesn't know about the domestic arrangements at Forsythia Cottage?" Plenty of folk would have been convinced the sort of ménage prevailing up the Madingley Road was the depth of sin.

"She knows that we share a house but not..." Jonty didn't add *a bed*. It was hardly done to flaunt the situation. "Anyway, I'll have to wait until Sunday to have my curiosity slaked. It'll be nice to meet up with Orlando again and have a day out. Quite like a holiday."

"The cottage—Shingles, is it?—not to your liking?"

"The cottage is wonderful and I'm pleased Mrs. Ward is getting a break—she didn't have much of a holiday this year. But it felt a bit hole in the corner, Papa. I'm used to being out and about with Orlando at my side and I hate hiding." Two small spots of colour rose in Jonty's cheeks. "I'm sorry." He sighed. "That

sounded ungrateful and I didn't mean it to be. I just don't think I'm cut out for this sort of subterfuge. I shan't agree to attempting it again. We're either both undercover or neither."

Mr. Stewart patted his son's shoulder. "There's nothing glamorous or exciting in having to pretend you're not yourself. At least you have me to tell your troubles to. What about poor Orlando?"



Poor Orlando was, at that precise moment, reaching out lazily for a piece of toast. He had *The Daily Telegraph* to hand and was enjoying reading it without worrying that, as happened at home, Jonty would nick it. Breakfast in bed was a treat allowed to the dancing partners in recognition of their being on their pins pretty well until midnight. The two girls always took advantage of it as did John Wickham most of the time. Orlando hadn't indulged much, preferring to eat with the other staff in case anything of note was mentioned, but they'd proved so taciturn in the mornings he'd decided his bed was a better place to be.

His mood was much improved, not least for having *done his duty* with the light of his life the day before. Having the cottage to run to had improved his mental state enormously. Now he knew they could repair there should they desire, the desperate longings had begun to abate and he no longer got into quite such a state when he saw Jonty across the crowded ballroom.

Today he would have to somehow manoeuvre an encounter with Laurence Johnson's wife, although he wasn't sure how to do it, short of just lurking about all day and hoping he might bump into her. He rose, showered, dressed and took a look at the tiny bit of sea he could spy from his window. It appeared calm and the sky was blue—perhaps her ladyship might see fit to take the air and he could innocently run into her on the esplanade. He decided his course lay that way, unless events intervened.

He would head northwards along the promenade into town and then make a few little purchases, having gone through more soap and other toiletries than seemed possible these last few days. Then he could return by the path along the stream, ending up on the other side of the golf course and coming back to the hotel from the south. That would cover most of the places where ladies of quality liked to walk. It being his turn to volunteer for sporting pursuits, he'd offered to make himself available as a bridge partner. He'd already done so on the spur of the moment the day after he arrived, in the hope of hearing some gossip, but his partners had been so intent on the cards and so cutthroat in their play he'd given up all hope of finding information in that way. Maybe today his luck would change—they certainly needed it to.

The walk was pleasant, the shopping satisfactory and he even caught a glimpse of Jonty's head in the distance, his stance over a croquet ball unmistakable. This time he felt no pang, the previous day having eased his problems, at least for the time being. As the stream reached the grating where it darted under the road and made its way eventually down a little chine into the sea, Orlando turned to cover the half a mile or so to the Regal. Halfway back, a little path led off zigzagging along the cliff face and down to the beach. A hundred yards or so past it, a single figure was resting its arms on a fence and looking at the tangle of low

plants along the sloping cliff edge. He guessed it was his quarry, being as longsighted as Jonty but not yet needing the reading glasses. He wasn't sure what to do next apart from raise his hat and smile politely, both of which he did.

"Excuse me." Lady Mary Johnson spoke, her rather nervous voice becoming drowned against the washing of the waves down below. "You couldn't by any chance help me?"

"I'd be delighted." Orlando produced his most winning smile. "How can I be of assistance?"

"I've dropped my brooch. I was adjusting the pin and it slipped from my hands. It's gone down there." She indicated a crevice on the other side of the fence, about five feet below them. "I can't reach it from here and if I go round I shan't be able to find the spot again."

"I can appreciate that. Please remain exactly where you are while I find somewhere to get over and fetch it."

"Do be careful, then. It looks dreadfully unsafe."

"I'll take the utmost care." Orlando retraced his steps to the point where the path let him get round to the other side. He hoped he could both find the brooch and take his time over it, as it might allow for chat. He suddenly thought of Jonty; if that little tyke had been present he'd have been murmuring about guardian angels and "someone up there looking after us", while *he* would argue it was all coincidence. "What is it I'm looking for, exactly?" Orlando had reached the spot, trying to look as eager as possible.

"It's a silver brooch, about an inch long, oval shaped, with a large garnet in it. It went down here." Lady Mary pointed with her neat, black-gloved fingers. "I do hope you can find it. My husband would be terribly upset if not. It belonged to his mother."

"I'm sure we can winkle it out." Orlando had a feeling he could see where it might be. He spotted a slight reflection of light that looked like it came off metal, but he wanted to cast about a bit and lengthen the conversation. "Was that the lady who died at the hotel? She seems to have been well respected."

"It was indeed. I didn't know her well, I'm afraid, but what I saw of her I liked a great deal. She was very kind to me."

"I'm glad to hear it." Orlando began to lift up stones and inspect underneath them, deliberately avoiding the key one. "Not always true, for women in a family to get on."

"No, indeed. I think a little to the left might be an idea."

"Thank you." Orlando could prevaricate no longer, turning over a large grey stone to reveal the missing article. "Aha! I'll bring it round, in case it gets dropped again." He placed the brooch in his pocket.

"Thank you. I think that would be a good idea." Lady Mary watched Orlando as he walked along the fence then turned to approach her. She held out her hand to accept the errant bauble and received it with a smile. "My father-in-law gave this to his wife on their honeymoon—I couldn't have borne to have lost it."

"It must have great sentimental value to your family."

“It does. My husband was very close to his father, or so he tells me. I never knew the man but he sounded absolutely wonderful—such a shame he died when Laurence was still young.”

Orlando wondered what had made this seemingly timid creature begin to pour her heart out to a stranger. Perhaps that was her natural way, although he doubted it. It could just be she was desperate to talk to anyone. “My father died when I was in my formative years—it is a great shock to a son.”

Two years back he would never have referred so lightly to such an event. Gradually, with Jonty’s help, Orlando was overcoming the pain of his father’s suicide but it hadn’t been removed entirely, in part because he still yearned to know what had prompted both his father taking his own life and his terrible bouts of depression. Now he could mention it, but only to Jonty or in the beloved cause of investigating.

“Then you’ll understand how hard my husband took it. I first met him not long after the bereavement and he was very low. He’s taken this death badly too, although naturally not quite so hard.”

Orlando was puzzled. “Because he loved his father more?”

“That would be part of it, but he wouldn’t feel quite so strongly, would he? Her ladyship not actually being his mother and...” Lady Mary stopped, horrified she’d let her tongue wag on so much in the company of this stranger. “I shouldn’t have said that, should I? I mean, some people know but obviously not everyone. You won’t say I mentioned it, will you? Please?” Her eyes took on a wild, haunted look. “Oh, please say that you’ll forget everything I said.”

Orlando raised his hat and bowed. “Madam, in my profession I have learned to be discreet above all things. What is said to one on the dance floor should never be repeated elsewhere. I promise you that my lips will be sealed, forever.”

He bowed again and moved off, fully intending on keeping his promise. He wouldn’t need his lips to write a note to Jonty and he would even refrain from kissing the seal this time, so that he could literally keep to his word.



Mr. Stewart had just finished thrashing his son, albeit only at croquet, when he saw Janet Allender taking a spot of air, so he left Jonty to collect up balls and mallets then bounded over to see her.

“Hello, Sherlock! Got a question you’re dying to ask me?”

“Only if you don’t call me Sherlock, Jonty’s already driving me mad with it. I can’t say I like the man.”

“Neither do I. Always strikes me as being a bit of a cad and the way he treats Watson...” Mrs. Allender rolled her eyes. “So what is it you want to know?”

“Laurence Johnson. You said you met him on the continent—any chance he might have been home at some point in his honeymoon?”

“Do you mean could he have been home when his mother was killed? I can’t be sure, yet I doubt it. I could check in my diary about when I saw him, but I have the feeling it must have been not long before she died. He’d have had to overtake me on the way home and then go back again—they say he had to be reached in some outlandish place to be given the news.”

“Ah, well, it was just a thought. He doesn’t have a twin brother hidden away anywhere, does he?”

“Richard Stewart! Are you suggesting that somehow the Johnsons managed to misplace one of their children? And are you insinuating that Laurence might have let said sibling go off bedding his wife while he was home killing his mother? I shall make Helena wash your mouth out. You’ve been hanging around that imp of a boy of yours too long.”

“That’s probably true, although I had to do my job and check.” He bowed, like his father must have bowed to this lady in her youth. “Thank you.”

“My pleasure. If I hear news of a twin you’ll be the first to know.” Mrs. Allender made a mock curtsy and wandered off in the direction of the golf clubhouse and a small sherry.

“What news?” Jonty was loaded down with equipment and as his father related his conversation, he also relieved his son of some of his burdens.

“Seems like our friend Johnson junior was definitely out on far-flung shores when all this happened. Unless he sprouted wings, of course.”

“Or produced an exact copy of himself.”

Father and son discussed doppelgangers they had known while they returned the equipment to the hotel desk—Agnew himself was in attendance and smiled broadly.

“Dr. Stewart, I have something for you.”

They restrained themselves from opening the envelope until they were in the safety of Jonty’s room; as soon as the door was closed, the note was out of its enclosure and pored over eagerly. Mr. Stewart was so surprised he even whistled, something he’d always insisted was an unmanly thing to do while still indoors.

“Orlando’s come up trumps, Papa. Not Laurence’s natural mother? Perhaps there is a twin to put into the mix somewhere. A twin who gives his brother an alibi so he can kill the woman who adopted him?”

“I don’t care what you say, child, I’m going to wangle a look at young Laurence’s writing in the hotel register and compare it to those notes.”

Chapter Eight

Laurence Johnson readily accepted the invitation to take a drink over at the golf club. Richard Stewart knew he would, not just for politeness but for his father's sake.

"Please ask her ladyship to excuse me stealing you away for an hour." Mr. Stewart adopted his most patrician smile.

"I will do so, although I'm sure she'll be pleased I have a diversion. She has a terrible headache and has had to go upstairs for a nap." Sir Laurence settled into his chair, sighing as though grateful for some time he could spend in male company.

Mr. Stewart's speculation about whether Lady Johnson often produced the "headache" excuse came to a sudden end as his guest dispensed with pleasantries.

"So you're here to investigate my mother's death?"

"We've been commissioned to do so." Mr. Stewart waited for the expected angry outburst but it didn't come.

"I have to say I'm pleased. If someone really did murder her, then I want to see the boulder brought to book." Sir Laurence slapped the table, decisively.

"I'm glad to hear it, especially as I have one or two delicate questions which I was rather dreading asking you. This rather clears my way, doesn't it?" Mr. Stewart smiled paternally, unsure if he was facing bluff or innocence.

"Ask away, if it'll help find a killer."

"You weren't Lady Jennifer's son, were you? Not naturally." Jonty had suggested a strategy based on bravado which had worked for him in the past. You could be successful just pretending you already knew something and let the other person reveal all the facts unwittingly.

"How do you know that?" Sir Laurence nearly spilt his whisky, putting it back down on the table with an unsteady hand.

"Your father and I were great friends, almost since boyhood. He told me a great deal." Mr. Stewart tried very hard to make everything he said the literal, if not the figurative, truth.

"Of course." Sir Laurence relaxed. "I still regarded her as my mother, for all that she didn't bear me into this world. I know at times she found my existence a bit of a trial but she tried her best."

Mr. Stewart decided his boldness had so far paid off and should be used to probe further. He'd weighed up certain possibilities in his mind, like the fact that Jennifer Johnson had been the king's mistress

for years without any little *occurrences* and so drew a bow at the proverbial venture. “Your mother couldn’t have children?”

“That’s right. Once the fact was established, she and my father decided to adopt a child—they both wanted to carry on the line and my mother was very fond of little ones. She thought the world of me when I was a baby, but as I grew up I think she had her doubts about things.” He faced his interrogator steadily, a fighting spirit in both his face and voice. “Whatever you may have heard, I was *not* my father’s natural child.”

Mr. Stewart was so shocked he had to take a huge swig of whisky. He relied on quick thinking once more. “It was the growing resemblance, I suppose, which caused the doubts in her mind?” That was true. There was a lot of the young Laurence Johnson in his son’s appearance.

“So I believe. I know I did resemble him in many ways, but I wasn’t his by-blow.” Sir Laurence picked up his glass and studied it for a while. “I have Johnson blood in me, there’s no doubt, although not his. He had a cousin or some such relative, a young girl who got herself into trouble when she was barely sixteen. When my father heard, he proposed that both this lass and my mother go into semi-retirement, then when the babe was born it could be passed off as my mother’s own. The plan worked admirably well until mother began to have her suspicions that there’d been more involvement between my papa and this relative than had been made plain to her. I refuse to believe it.”

“So do I. I knew Larry very well and I can’t believe him capable of such deception. Are there...” Mr. Stewart sought for the right words. “Are there any other children? I mean, do you have any siblings?”

“Not that I am aware of. I never met the woman who gave birth to me—they said my delivery affected her badly, leaving her very weak. Two years later she succumbed to consumption.”

“I’m sorry.” It wasn’t just a platitude; Mr. Stewart felt genuine concern for this son, albeit adoptive, of someone he’d had a lot of affection for. Until he remembered why he was supposed to be interrogating him.

“Thank you. I’ve lost two mothers, I suppose, yet the one who raised me I miss the most. If there’s anything I can do to help catch her killer, if killed she was, then I hope you’ll let me do so. I’ll remain here until you’ve concluded your investigations.”

Mr. Stewart thanked him, hoping all the while his son would forgive him for being so easily distracted from the business in hand.



Mr. Stewart’s bath proved to be one from which he leaped Archimedes-like with a great revelation. Dripping all over the carpet, despite the two towels draped around him like a toga, he burst through the interconnecting door to his son’s room. “Billy Mustard!”

“Is that a minced oath, Papa? Because if it is, I shall spend the whole evening wondering what it’s supposed to be.”

“And I shall spend the whole evening wondering why Orlando hasn’t succumbed to temptation and murdered you. I’d defend him. I’d say he was provoked beyond the point that any man could endure.”

Jonty grinned, knowing his father was demonstrating, in some obscure fashion, that he knew just how deep the affection ran between his son and his colleague.

“Billy Mustard, my idiot child, is the man I saw at Jennifer Johnson’s funeral—the one who was so upset. I’ve been racking my brains for days and at last I can place him.”

“Does it help us in our investigation?”

“It might. We were all up at Cambridge together, Larry and Billy and me, although I didn’t really know him that well, he was more a friend of a friend. But I know he was very smitten with Jennifer—she and Larry were courting at the time and when she visited, Billy would go all moony over her. I’d totally forgotten, but recalling his name brought it all back. We used to say he was *keen as mustard*, a terrible pun but highly appropriate.”

“The old lover, eh? Do you know, Orlando told me that one of those dancing girls of his, the misses Bellamy and Devonish, had said from the start that this would turn out to be something to do with an old lover. It would be rather clichéd and a bit galling were she proved correct.”

“Perhaps there is a connection, although it beats me. He was very taken with her, so why should he want to kill her now? I tell you what, I’ll find some way of contacting him, then I’ll go and see the old bird. It won’t hurt to do it, even if it’s just to eliminate him from our list.” Mr. Stewart beamed; even old Sherlock Holmes would have been pushed to recall a name after all this time, without consulting his books.

“That sounds splendid. You’re proving worth your weight in gold to this investigation, Papa. Now, while you’re being a genius, answer me this—do you think Laurence really is his father’s son? Set all enduring loyalties aside for a moment.”

“I truly can’t say one way or another. The resemblance is there but it’s so easy just to see what one’s looking for. Like Orlando getting the bee in his bonnet about the Venus de Milo having a man’s face.” Mr. Stewart resembled a Roman statue himself, draped in towels and looking imperious. “Now every time I think of her, I imagine an Adam’s apple.”

Jonty laughed. “*Himself* went round and round her determined to find one. He looked like a judge at a dog show. But the point’s taken—if Lady Jennifer believed it, then she’d have kept seeing her husband’s face in her son’s.” A strange grumbling sound stopped him. “Excuse me, Papa. My stomach tells me it’s imperative we get our teeth into a canapé or two before dinner.”

“I’d better make myself decent. Turning up in the restaurant in two towels would cause an even bigger scandal than this business.”



John and “Oliver” were having a light meal together, as was their habit before they had to turn to their duties. The girls rarely joined them, taking a sandwich and some soup up in their rooms while they bathed, creamed, and powdered themselves to the height of respectable seductiveness. The men didn’t mind, always enjoying a talk together without the worry that there might be a catfight at any moment. They’d even been known to swap tips about some new step or sequence of movements that could be incorporated into their dancing. Unlike Paula and Christine, no rivalry manifested itself between them.

“Are you enjoying yourself here, Oliver? Must be a bit of a change from London.” The staff of the Regal knew—from what Agnew had said and from allusions that Orlando had made—that the man normally plied his trade at the Ritz in London.

“It’s a pleasant one. I much prefer the sea air and if truth be known I prefer to have regular dancing. I was one of a large team up there—we didn’t all dance every night and I found it rather frustrating. Had to eke out things with taking youngsters for lessons and all that. Private jobs, well paid, but not what I really enjoy.”

“No, I can sympathise with that.” John shook his head, picking a miniscule fleck from his cuff. “And the clientele are very pleasant.”

“Can I ask a personal question?” The answer was irrelevant, Orlando was going to ask it anyway. “Do you have a favourite partner here? One of the ladies you like the most?”

John considered. “I can’t say I have. There have been women who have been lovely to dance with—that’s what we all want, isn’t it? Someone who doesn’t have bad breath or tread on your feet. I’d rather that than a pretty face any day.”

Orlando nodded. “You’ve never spoken a truer word. Perhaps I’m speaking out of turn here, but there’s one lady, Samantha Lewis I think she’s called, who’s an absolute nightmare. I had a swollen toe this morning after attempting the Dashing White Sergeant with her.”

“I watched you both—not a pretty sight. Still, at least you can be assured anyone who knew about dancing would recognise that the fault lay with her and not you. As much as you were trying to cover up her lack of expertise.”

“Who would you say is the best of the women? I find Mrs. Southwell has a neat turn of foot.”

“Oh she has. Very nifty and follows well. She’s one you can try out the new steps on. And Miss Jordan, she’s a lovely dancer. I always enjoy if she appears on my card.”

“Miss Jordan who was the companion to the lady who died?”

“That’s right, and now she’s brought her own friend down here—I danced with her last night. Miss Robinson, I believe she’s called, but she wasn’t quite so blessed with her steps. Lacked confidence, I felt.”

Orlando nodded. “Perhaps I should invite one of them to start the evening off.”

“And break with the tradition of asking the old and the plain? You’d cause a sensation, although I suppose I could do the same.” John’s grin spoke of the mischief this could cause. “It might be worth it.

There are one or two women who get themselves on my card with alarming regularity, whose noses I wouldn't mind seeing put out of joint."

"I suppose it wouldn't be done at all to invite Lady Laurence Johnson to dance? She looks such a sad little thing, I feel sorry for her." Orlando tried to look rather avuncular but feared he'd overreached himself. *Jonty would ask if I had dyspepsia.*

"I'm not sure it would add to the lady's happiness. I've heard talk that all isn't as well there as it could be. Sir Laurence has a bit of a reputation, one could say, and he might not be quite as faithful as she wished he were. Mind you, I may well be doing the man a disservice—just because someone is keen to sow his wild oats when young doesn't mean he continues the process when he's married. He might well be a paragon of virtue now."

"It would explain her air of melancholy were that true. But then there might be a hundred other equally valid explanations. I just hate to see someone so miserable when they're fresh from their honeymoon."

John laughed and slapped Orlando's back. "You really are an old romantic, aren't you? Well I hope you're right and that *himself* has turned over a new leaf." He finished his drink, pushed his plate away and looked thoughtful. "Miss Jordan will be pleased as well."

"Miss Jordan? Why her in particular?"

"Because, my friend, before Sir Laurence tied the knot, he—well, let's say he tried to persuade his mother's companion to indulge in a little weekend of pleasure. A last fling before the prison doors closed upon him, as it were."

"I suppose she told you that?" Why didn't the women at the Regal indulge him with such useful snippets of gossip?

"Of course she did. It's hardly the sort of thing to become a subject for general tittle-tattle. It was months ago, and the proposition was even made here in the Regal. She was very upset afterwards—I met her walking out on the esplanade and she had a face like thunder. I took her for a cup of tea to try to get her to calm down, and then she told all."

"The cad." Orlando rapped the table with his hand. "I hope she slapped his face."

"I suspect she did worse than that, although she never told me the exact details. She can take care of herself, that one. And now—" John rose from the table, "—we need to look after ourselves or else we'll be in no state to impress the ladies. Will you wear white tie or black tonight?"

"White, I think." Orlando smiled in fond remembrance of how much Jonty liked him in that getup.

"Then I'll match you. We'll stun them all with our elegance." Slapping each other's shoulders, they set off for a bout of priddying that would have rivalled their female counterparts in its complexity.



“Dr. Stewart!” Chief Inspector Wilson alighted from the ten o’clock train with a jaunty leap. “I’ve read—” he lowered his voice, although they were both aware that Jonty’s role at the Regal was no longer a secret, “—yesterday’s report, although at the rate information’s coming out it might as well be a monthly one.”

“Mr. Wilson, if you knew the rate at which clues have suddenly decided to pop up, you’d be astounded.” Once settled in the station buffet, Jonty produced a set of notes but couldn’t resist explaining what they contained. Doubts over paternity, an old admirer, a pass at the companion, a warning to leave well alone. All sorts of vistas were opening up.

“I’m a firm believer that there are turning points in cases, perhaps this is one of them. If only Dr. Douglas proves to be as forthcoming, we’ll be making real progress.” Douglas was the doctor who had been unhappy about signing the death certificate. He’d been fishing in Scotland since just after the inquest, content he wouldn’t be needed after the verdict had been decided. “Although his letter said he’s been less certain than he was initially that Lady Jennifer’s death was unnatural. *Still some doubts but little concrete evidence for them* was the phrase he used.”

“We’ll soon have those doubts from the horse’s mouth.” Jonty smiled and pushed away his cup. Nosebag time was done with. “Now let’s find a cab.”

Dr. Douglas was a great bear of a man who inhabited a sprawling Victorian house full of evidence of his love for rod, gun and net. “Gentlemen, I couldn’t put my finger on it, not being a toxicologist or indeed a cardiac specialist, but I felt a definite uncertainty that Lady Jennifer died naturally.”

“That’s not what you said at the inquest. Then you gave the impression you agreed with your colleagues that the death had been a matter of heart failure.” Wilson read from his notes; Jonty suspected he didn’t need them but did it for effect, like Orlando.

“Chief Inspector, I’ve made the wrong diagnosis before, and I’ve never been ashamed to admit to uncertainties or learn from my errors. Luckily I’ve never erred when the case was one of life or death. My colleagues seemed so certain her ladyship had died in her sleep that I began to re-examine my ideas and came to the conclusion I might have been in error. I certainly wasn’t confident enough in my reading of the situation that I’d stand up at an inquest to argue my corner on such shaky ground. I’d be left looking like a fool.”

“You don’t strike me as in any way a fool—you have more humility than most medical men I have known, for a start. Indulge me. Go back to that first morning when Mr. Agnew called you to look at the body. Was it his misgivings which swayed you?”

Douglas considered, then shook his head. “I came along quite prepared to back up my colleague. Rose is a good doctor and I anticipated purely a case of overreaction by the hotel manager. But when I saw the body, something jangled in my mind.”

“Something you saw? A particular symptom that perhaps you find it hard to put your finger on? A range of little signs?” Jonty couldn’t keep quiet. Little things which jangled in people’s minds were the stuff that, in his increasing experience, solved cases.

Douglas shook his head again. “I’d have had more confidence at the inquest if I could have said that, but there really was nothing tangible. I’m fairly certain she wasn’t given digitalis or anything similar as there were no other symptoms, like vomiting, which you might get if a poison had been administered.”

Unless it was Maurice Panesar’s beloved, theoretical, untraceable one. “No sign of a needle mark?”

“Not that I saw. And I looked. I always look.”

“Then what,” Wilson asked, “made you think it might be murder?”

“When I was a medical student I attended, with my mentor, a case of deliberate smothering of an elderly gentleman. It later turned out to be the handiwork of a member of the family who sought to speed up the arrival of their inheritance. Lady Jennifer had the same untroubled, peaceful appearance.”

“So you would suggest she might have been smothered? There’s merit in the theory.” Wilson looked rueful. “I’ve seen at least one child who might have been peacefully put in its grave and the insurance money claimed had it not been for the eagle eye of the local doctor.”

“If she’d been in a deep sleep, and someone might have administered a sedative to make her incapable of normal response, then they could have put a pillow or some such over her mouth and nose without too much of a struggle. She would simply cease to breathe after a while and the death would most likely look natural and peaceful.” Douglas spread his large hands in an eloquent gesture.

Dr. Panesar was going to be delighted at having his pet theory agreed with, if not yet vindicated. “Were there any other signs that this happened?” Surely the slightest indication had been left? If this had been the handiwork of a murderer, the culprit was either very clever or very lucky.

“Not that I could see. No obvious fibres in the mouth or nostrils, although they may have been cleared away if the killer was attentive enough. Without a full examination of the body to establish whether there were any signs of anoxia, it would be hard to say. And two other doctors assured the court that she’d merely died of natural causes, heart failure or sleep apnoea so perhaps I did get it wrong.”

“And what do you think now?” Wilson spoke slowly, with great authority.

There was a long pause. “It is illogical and unscientific, yet I assure you my initial gut instinct was that the lady was killed. I know I changed that opinion, but from what my housekeeper said yesterday—oh yes, Chief Inspector, the gossip has started and my Mrs. McKay being friendly with the housekeeper from the Regal, she gets to have it all fresh from the field as you might say. The word is that the old lady had seemed far too hale and hearty just to have expired on the spot without even waking, feeling unwell or asking for help. I wish I’d stuck to my original feelings with the coroner.”

With this there was little more to be said and the interview concluded.

Jonty led the policeman in the direction of a pleasant little hostelry where they might get a soupçon of lunch. They were barely out of earshot before he had to speak or else burst. “And that’s all?”

“It seems so. Without more evidence that something was amiss, there’s no way I can get an order to allow an exhumation, not just on the chance we’d find some evidence indicating foul play.” Wilson sighed, frustration plain on his face. “Talking of which, I don’t want a call in the middle of the night to say that you’ve been found dead. If you get any more of these notes you should stop the investigation. We’ll pull all three of you out of the Regal and go in ourselves, to hell with propriety. Do I make myself plain?”

“Yes, Chief Inspector.”

“Good. Now, explain to me again all this business with Laurence Johnson’s provenance...”

Jonty did, glad to change the subject. If a third note arrived, now they’d have to keep it secret from three people.



“Have you a moment?” Janet Allender sidled up to Richard Stewart’s table, bobbing graciously to the two men stationed there as they rose and bowed to her.

“Of course.” Mr. Stewart drew out a chair, helping the lady into it with charm and style.

“Shall I make myself scarce?” Jonty beamed brightly at their unexpected but welcome guest.

“No, silly goose. Especially not if you keep smiling like that. I feel sixty years younger. And this concerns you too.” She glanced around in what she probably thought was a subtle manner although she was actually drawing more attention to them. Everyone knew what the Stewarts were here for. “It may relate to the matter in hand.”

“We’d be more than happy to hear what you have to tell us. Would you like some coffee?”

“No, thank you, I’ve had an adequate sufficiency of that tonight.” She drew her head closer to her fellow conspirators. “It’s about that necklace young Laurence Johnson’s bride is wearing. The emerald one.”

“It’s a handsome piece—it belonged to Jennifer’s mother, you know, Jonty.” Mr. Stewart enlightened his son not just for his benefit but for that of Mrs. Allender, who might or might not know the tale. “He showed it to me years ago, both on the portrait of her which graced the great hall and in the flesh. The tones of the gems were fabulous. It had been put into store for the benefit of her grandson’s wife, so I suppose it appeared at the time of the honeymoon?”

“Perhaps it was part of the treasure trove Lady Jennifer left to her daughter-in-law.” Jonty nodded vaguely in the Johnsons’ direction. “We understand its new owners quickly appropriated it.”

“They seem slightly unsuitable for someone in mourning, but I suppose there’s a limit to black pearl or jet. These young folk seem to like being a bit more flamboyant than we were.” Mrs. Allender rolled her eyes.

Jonty bit his lip to hide the smile. Their guest seemed to be decked out in every colour of the rainbow and in a dress that might be the height of fashion somewhere up the Euphrates, but not in the Home Counties. “Very true. Although it must be hard when you’re young to resist wearing such a lovely necklace.”

“Well, let me tell you something. I was talking to her tonight and had the chance to admire the thing close up. My eyes may not be as sharp as they were but spectacles are a wonderful invention. Those gems aren’t real.”

“What?” The two Stewart voices spoke in unison.

“Paste, I’d have said, excellent imitation but not quite right. When I was a gal I took a great interest in these things—my uncle was fascinated by jewellery and on the quiet he used to produce imitation items to a great standard. For the theatre, mainly, although one or two pieces he made were for friends who’d hit hard times and needed to raise a bit of cash. They’d use my uncle’s imitations to cover up the fact that the real things had been popped. He told me all the sorts of ways you could tell the genuine article from the reproduction. And I’d bet twenty pounds, at least, that those things aren’t real.”

“Are you absolutely sure?”

“Not one hundred per cent without seeing the necklace close up and getting my hands on it, but enough to warrant you two putting the idea into your investigative pipes and smoking it.”

Jonty rocked back on his chair and shook his head. “I shall never again complain of not having enough leads. I feel so confused now I wish I could chuck half of them, like undersized fish, back into the sea with all the other red herrings they’ll no doubt turn out to be.”

“But one of them might turn out to be the genuine article, mightn’t it? Unlike those paste gems.” Mrs. Allender’s eyes glinted like diamonds; real, not paste.

Jonty groaned. “They’re the fishiest things of all. Who popped them, if popped they were? And where has the money gone?”

Chapter Nine

“Is this where Grandmother Coppersmith brought you when a boy?” Jonty viewed the beach with pleasure. He loved the sea, adored *the seaside* and was a total idiot over anything which involved sand and shells or annoying little creatures that lived under stones.

“It was indeed. This very spot—well, perhaps fifty yards further on—was where we would paddle. Then we’d look under the rocks or in the pools and she would tell me about the creatures. I’m not sure that everything she said was accurate but I believed every word.” Orlando frowned and tipped his head to one side. “Can anemones really maim you with their stings?”

“I don’t think so. Some of them can give you a very nasty nip, but those dark red jobs hardly touch you. I think she may have been getting mixed up with jellyfish—they can be distinctly nasty, especially some of the foreign ones. What else did she tell you?”

“She taught me to hear the sea in shells even when I was far from it. I still have one in my desk that I take out and listen to sometimes. Makes me very nostalgic.”

“You sly old thing, I had no idea. You never cease to amaze me, Orlando. I think you’re sitting in your study dry as dust fathoming out your integrals and powers and series and you’re listening to the sea like some moony schoolgirl.” Jonty broke out into one of his most glorious smiles. “I do love you and it’s such a shame I can’t take you anywhere private and quiet right now to give you a thorough demonstration of same.”

Orlando looked at the shell in his hands, at Jonty and out to the sea. He was obviously full of thoughts and finding it difficult to express any of them. “I’m glad we found a way to engineer it. It’s nice to be out for an afternoon but it’s better to have enough time to...well, to...you know. Don’t make me say it, it’ll just make things worse.”

“Daft ha’pporth. Come on, we’ve an appointment for lunch and we can’t keep the lady waiting. I for one am desperate to meet her.”

It appeared the lady was desperate too, or if not desperate then very keen, to meet Jonty. The house was much as he’d expected; small, well furnished, with a glorious view over a patch of green and down to the sea. Mrs. Coppersmith was also as expected, dressed in black and carrying her large black bag Orlando had mentioned so often. She’d met them in the hall, eagerly greeting her grandson with an affectionate kiss to the cheek and shaking Jonty’s hand. Her grip was firm, her eyes bright and her smile as attractive—if seemingly as rarely used—as Orlando’s.

She made sure she gave her grandson plenty of attention over the meal, enquiring politely if a little too abstractedly over the various projects Orlando was involved in. Yet all the time she seemed to have part of her attention fixed on Jonty, as if she were trying to weigh him up or come to some momentous decision. He couldn't help weighing her up, too; something about the room didn't quite ring true to the impression he'd built up in advance. Unlike the allegedly fake necklace, there seemed to be an air of quality masquerading as something less. *I've been playing detectives too long, it's becoming habitual.*

The meal ended with apple crumble, with a few late blackberries thrown in for good measure, and coffee was being prepared when the door knocker sounded. Mrs. Coppersmith smiled and got ready to greet her latest visitor—her solicitor, whom she'd summoned as well.

He explained he didn't usually do business on a Sunday, but as Mrs. Coppersmith had made clear there were exceptional circumstances involved, he would oblige. Orlando was sent off with him to address setting up a small educational trust fund for bright but impoverished children, leaving Jonty to drink his coffee with what amounted to his grandmother-in-law. It didn't take her long to address what she had on her mind.

"Dr. Stewart, what have you done to my grandson?"

Jonty swallowed hard, unsure what Mrs. Coppersmith might be implying about his relations with her obviously beloved boy. Just how perceptive was this keen-eyed and sharp-witted lady? "I don't follow..."

"He has become content—I would even say positively blooming with happiness—in the last few years and I can only put it down to his friendship with you. Happiness isn't a commodity the Coppersmiths have been blessed with in recent generations."

Jonty relaxed a bit. "He has changed enormously since first we met, but then I suppose a lot has happened. All these investigations for one thing." He was avoiding the real point and guessed that Grandmother Coppersmith was aware of the fact.

"Can you be trusted to keep a secret?"

Jonty nodded. He and Orlando had plenty of experience of keeping things close to their chests.

"Even from Orlando?" The lady looked keenly at her guest, as if she were trying to see every recess of his thoughts. She suddenly smiled, maybe finding what she wanted without a formal answer. "Very well. I want to tell you a story and I don't want my grandson to know a word of it until after I am dead. Will you agree?"

"I will. Although I hope I'll have to harbour your confidence a long time."

"I can see why Orlando likes you. You could charm the stars out of the sky and make them think they flew down all of their own volition. I bet that when you stole his chair—yes, I've been told that story and more was revealed in it than was ever put into words—you inveigled your way into his heart good and proper. And he would have thought it was all his own doing." Mrs. Coppersmith produced the most

glorious smile, almost up to anything that Mrs. Stewart could generate. “You’re dangerous, Dr. Stewart and I’m glad you have my dear boy to keep you under control.”

Jonty blushed, unable to think of a word to say.

“Now, I don’t have that long to live. The doctors say they hope I’ll last a year, perhaps, but any more would be beyond expectation. When I’m gone I want Orlando to know the whole truth. He has no doubt told you about his father and how he died?”

Jonty nodded. “He has, although it cost him a great deal to do so, I believe. He has always found it hard to talk of his parents, although not of you. He’s told me often about the beach and the shells and the sweets.”

The lady smiled. “Such a stern and lonely little boy. I hope that he had fun when he came to stay here—I suspect he had precious little at home. I have heard of your family, Dr. Stewart, and Orlando has told me much in his letters, also. You are truly blessed to have such a home to return to—my Orlando was not so fortunate.” There was a twinkle in Mrs. Coppersmith’s eye. “Although he seems to have acquired a foster mother in your mother, if one reads between the lines of what he says.”

“My mother adores him. More than she loves me, I suspect, and that’s an enormous amount to begin with. I’m very pleased.” Jonty hoped the uncomfortable lump in his throat was overindulgence in crumble rather than impending tears.

“And I am too. Believe me, Jonty—I may call you Jonty, I hope, as you feel like a member of the family—there has been precious little love and understanding among the Coppersmiths. Am I correct to say your father has a title and chooses not to use it?”

“Indeed he does, although he refuses to tell me why.” Jonty smiled. “And feel free to call me by my Christian name, it would be an honour.”

Mrs. Coppersmith beamed her glorious smile again, looking the image of her grandson when he deigned to smile, which was quite often when Jonty was in the offing. “Now that expression has rubbed off onto you from him. I’m glad to see things haven’t been all one way. Now, Jonty, my father too had a title. He was the son of a baron—Orlando knows nothing of any of this—and inherited the title and lands. I was his youngest child and only daughter and he called me his pet until I was seventeen. At that point I was no longer the favoured one.”

Jonty didn’t know what to say, settling for just looking solemn and interested. Suddenly the quality of the things on display, the excellent watercolours, the elegant china, made sense. Orlando should have spotted it for himself, if he was half the detective he thought he was, but it was like the needle mark. If you weren’t looking...

“I had a child, Orlando’s father, out of wedlock. I refused to marry the father, indeed even to name him, and so I was disowned. I was provided for, although not to the standard of the rest of the Coppersmith

family—a house, an income and a small fund for the child. But I wasn't allowed to contact any of my relatives nor was I to tell my son about his heritage.”

“So how much did Orlando's father know about this?” Jonty was astounded. Of course such things went on, women being turned out, punished, for indiscretions while the men involved usually got away with their behaviour, but a total severing of ties seemed barbaric.

“He was *told* his father had died before he was born, which was actually true, and that I had no living relations. What he *knew* I don't know—I think he suspected something was awry but he never spoke to me of it. I can't help feeling the whole thing contributed to his fragile state of mental health in later years. If he suspected he'd been disowned...” Mrs. Coppersmith, for the first time, couldn't face Jonty directly. This must have been painful enough for her and now she had few resources left.

Jonty took her wrinkled hand and gently pressed it. “You've said enough. If there's any more to come, then write it and send it to me at the Regal. I promise I'll burn any correspondence after reading it. And Orlando won't know any of this until...well, until the time you stipulated. And only then when I think he's ready.”

“You're very wise.” Mrs. Coppersmith, although by now Jonty realised she could be that in name only, sighed and blew her nose. “I'm delighted beyond all measure that he has you to look after him.”



They walked to the station, accompanied all the way by Orlando's overture on the twin themes of the educational fund and how much his grandmother liked Jonty. They eschewed the train and took a cab all the way to Shingles, despite the risk of being seen together. Mrs. Ward had the kettle already on as if some sixth sense had alerted her to the imminent arrival of her “boys”. Tea was brewed and served with Dundee cake then they were left to talk. And kiss, which they did passionately as soon as the door to the parlour was closed, Jonty settling into Orlando's lap and snuggling there until he was tipped off because his lover's legs had developed pins and needles.

Jonty pretended to get the huff and grabbed the biggest piece of cake on the plate. “This case seems to have reached the point where things are actually happening. For so long I've felt like one of the chaps at the athletics field, his marks all dug and having to crouch there until some obliging bloke shouts ‘go’.”

Orlando nodded; he desperately wanted to discuss the case but the heretical thought was passing through his mind that he would rather go upstairs with his lover. “Jonty, do you suppose there's time...”

“No, there is not. As I've told you six times already—and I know it's six because I started to count them—I'm expecting a very important phone call from Chief Inspector Wilson to tell me whether he's been successful today in his endeavours. There simply isn't the capacity for detection and canoodling, so the latter must go to the wall. Regrettably.” Jonty grinned and bit into his cake, scattering caraway seeds everywhere like some demented budgerigar.

“Why is it I’m always desperate to have a new case to solve and then, when it appears, it inevitably causes problems?”

“That’s life, Orlando. You can’t have your cake and eat it, even in the case of this excellent concoction. Fireworks are always over too soon and what you fervently desired for Christmas never turns out to be quite as nice as when you only wanted it. Crime is the same. You can’t be catching a murderer and nipping upstairs to ro—” Jonty was cut short by a hand over his mouth and a hurried *Sh*.

“Fine, Watson, have it your own way.” Orlando grinned. Actually solving a problem was almost as nice as making love to Jonty. Almost. “So let’s go right back to the start. We have a lady who might or might not have been murdered and we’re still no clearer on that front.”

“Ah, but at least there’s hope, if only Chief Inspector Wilson can persuade Laurence Johnson there’s enough doubt over his mother’s death to let him allow an exhumation and postmortem. That phone call will hopefully bring news that he’s been successful. Father says the son does seem keen to get the business settled.”

“Which is odd if he had something to do with it.” Orlando frowned; he wanted the son to be responsible, although he wasn’t sure why.

“Not necessarily odd. Any guilty person might give the impression he wants the culprit caught—it would look suspicious if he obstructed matters. Anyway, to get back to things in order. The next fact we learned, or at least it was only opinion then, is that the lady had been unhappy for some time, even when her husband was alive.”

“And now we know that’s true. The picture we’ve built up is of someone who preferred to be here rather than at her home, who wasn’t on the best of terms with her son and who seemed to prefer her companion to the extent of making her the main legatee to her estate.”

Jonty sighed. “Everyone seems to paint an equally vivid portrait of the son as a bit of a cad—that word seems to be cropping up a lot in this case—with a distinct eye for the ladies and the tables.”

“Do you think your father’s old friend will be able to shed more light on this aspect of the case?”

“The famous Billy Mustard? Papa seems to think so. He should be just about finishing off his entertaining at the club right now, and I hope he has a big smug self-satisfied look on his face. Although what some old flame of Lady Jennifer can tell us, I’m not quite sure. Father has enormous faith in his hunches, of course.”

Orlando, for all that he adored Mr. Stewart, couldn’t resist rolling his eyes at the thought of the man’s hunches. Especially if they turned out to be accurate. “Then there was that note. I can’t help wondering if that’s the most significant thing we’ve got, although I don’t see what we can do about finding out who wrote it. There’s been nothing more?”

“Not a sausage. Papa wonders if it wasn’t one of the gossipers making mischief.”

“You would tell me, wouldn’t you, if you were threatened again?” Orlando scrutinised his lover’s face for any sign of guilt. It would be just like him to bottle it all up.

“I’d send a pigeon with a note strapped to its leg.” Jonty’s grin seemed innocent enough. “Now, I must talk to Miss Jordan again, and perhaps her companion, while I’m at it. I’d love to know how much she dislikes Sir Laurence, although how that could relate to the murder of his mother beats me. I’d like her opinion on that jewellery as well.”

“Ah.” Orlando’s eyes lit up. “Those jewels, if they turn out to be fake, are a real glimmer of light. If someone has been surreptitiously replacing them and selling the real ones then they’d have something to hide. And we know people commit murder when they’re threatened with exposure.”

“I do wish we could think of some way of getting an expert down to look at the things—although it’d be a bit rich, having just, I hope, coerced Sir Laurence into having his mother exhumed, for Mr. Wilson to ask to inspect the jewellery as well.” Jonty took solace in another piece of cake.

“Did you say that Sergeant Cohen has started looking into the financial situations of those who were nearest to her ladyship?”

“I did. He is. It would be convenient if the companion or the son turned out to be rather short of the readies and in need of a boost to their cash flow. He said he’d ask around about the jewels too but he thought it unlikely that anything would turn up. *Those sorts of transactions might well be made abroad—*” Jonty broke into an excellent impression of the policeman’s earthy tones, “—*for discretion’s sake, you know, sir.*”

“It’ll cause a nice stir at the hotel if word gets around—as it inevitably will, the place is a hive of gossip—that you’re casting aspersions on the veracity of that jewellery. Actually, that could work in our favour. Sir Laurence might be forced to get an expert in to settle things one way or another.”

“Not if he’s the one who did the substituting. I’m not sure who else would have had access to them, though, apart from close family or friends. And I wonder *when* the things were changed. Do you think it went back to the days of the royal entanglement?”

“That seems unlikely to me. If Mrs. Allender spotted they weren’t the real thing, then anyone else might have done the same if they had the expertise. The longer the time, the more likely any substitution would be noticed. Unless...”

“Unless what, oh genius of my heart?”

“Unless the son had already made the switch and it caused the coolness between them, when she found out.”

“Rather than the fact that he wasn’t her natural son? It’s possible, certainly. Otherwise we have to come back to the issue of paternity and Lady Jennifer being upset because she thought her husband had pulled a fast one and passed off his own child as that of his relative. Would she bear that belief as a grudge on both her husband and son?”

“What does your father have to say about it?”

“That if old Sir Laurence said the child wasn’t his natural son then he wasn’t. Seems the old man had a similar adherence to the Ten Commandments and the truth as Papa. Or so he always averred.” Jonty considered for a moment. “Now everyone seems to have a task in hand except you, prince of the paso doble. What about making eyes at that young bride of Sir Laurence’s? She seems to be very taken with you. It must be the air of the caveman under the respectable veneer.”

“Oh, hush.” Orlando turned rather red on his neck and ears.

“How do you do that? Have you trained your cheeks not to blush?” Jonty snuggled closer. “She certainly became confidential with you on very short acquaintance, which reflects well on her and suggests she has excellent taste. Maybe if you played cards or croquet or something else you’re equally good at—I shan’t suggest anything involving beds so don’t roll your eyes at me—she might feel the need to open her heart to you.”

“Despite the fact of that being an excellent idea, I think I’ll ignore it just to spite you. And as you won’t come to my bed because you say you have to get back for a phone call—” the twinkle in Orlando’s eye indicated he was teasing, “—perhaps I should find myself my own amusement for the evening and say *pfft* to the investigation.”

“Idiot. Budge up.” Jonty squeezed up as tightly as he could to his lover without actually getting back onto his lap. “We have time for kisses flavoured with parting and regret then I must be away. Are you catching the same train or staying here overnight?”

“Here. I want to think awhile and that hotel room is not always conducive to doing so. As long as I’m on duty for bridge or whatever—and yes, I will try to engineer my partner carefully—then I’ll be fine.”

“They probably think you keep an irregular establishment. Which you do really, don’t you?” Jonty kissed his lover tenderly, running his hands through his dark curls and making them as dishevelled as possible. “I wish Paula and Christine could see you now...”



When the telephone call came it was worth the wait. Against all expectation, Laurence Johnson had agreed to his mother being exhumed and a proper postmortem performed. Wilson was bouncing with the news; if it were proved to be murder then he would be allowed to have an official role; if not, then he could turn his attention to more important things and the Vice-Chancellor of the University might get off his back with his incessant messages about *When are my men coming home?*

Mr. Stewart rang, too, saying he was spending the night with his wife in their London home, which made Jonty think wistfully of Shingles, then wonder whether his parents would be getting up to the same sort of things as he and Orlando had.

Stewart junior slept well that night, his only dreams being pleasant ones involving Grandmother Coppersmith's jewellery, which had been left to him in some dream-world legacy because she thought he was looking thin and needed feeding up.

The next day began even more agreeably when the morning post brought a letter from Cambridge.

Dear Dr. Stewart

I hope your enquiries are making progress; we need you back at St. Bride's as no one can quite pour Shakespeare into the heads of the undergraduates as you can. While the man from St. George's is very sound and has been supervising and lecturing in a most satisfactory way, I much prefer to have one of our own men delivering the tuition. The same applies to Dr. Coppersmith, whose unique style is greatly missed. You may or may not want to mention it to him, but some of the students were positively clamouring for his swift return, saying no one could make them understand calculus as he can. Yet more evidence, I suspect, of the remarkable changes which have been wrought in him over the past two years.

My sister sends her fondest regards but is rather too busy at present to add her usual little addendum to this missive. We are having one or two of the fellows from Apostles' up to supper this evening. Dr. Panesar suddenly asked me if he might invite some of the men who specialise in fossils to come and look at that rather unusual skull which turned up when we had the lodge renovated, the one which was packed in with all the other strange things and those marvellous documents which helped you to solve the Woodville Ward's disappearance. They apparently want to look at the bones and their articulation at the end of the jaw.

Ariadne was here when he came with the proposal and suggested that we should entertain the fellows to a little cold collation and a glass or two of wine while they made their investigations. Dr. Panesar was absolutely delighted and I felt I had to indulge them both. I know my sister and she has, I'll warrant, some hidden purpose in mind. No doubt she will be getting her magnifying glass on that specimen and asking all sorts of unladylike questions.

Please let me know as soon as you have any idea when we might expect your return.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. L. Peters.

Jonty smirked and shook his head. *Dr. Panesar suddenly asked me if he might invite some of the men who specialise in fossils to come.* He imagined how deviously Miss Peters had coerced her brother into thinking it was all *his* idea to invite Dr. Sheridan—he was bound to be one of the men from Apostles'—to look at the strange fossil. The innocence of the Master of St. Bride's, in believing that he'd hit on his sister's intentions and then being far wide of the mark, made Jonty laugh. *No doubt she will be getting her magnifying glass on that specimen and asking all sorts of unladylike questions.*

"I bet she would, given half a chance."

Chapter Ten

Richard Stewart came back from London beaming. Jonty had an inkling that his parents had become particularly friendly the night before, making the man's spirits even better than they usually were. The pair took coffee together while Jonty gave an account of his meeting with Mrs. Coppersmith—omitting the proprietary elements, naturally—and his discussions with Orlando. “And to top it all, Mr. Wilson told me that Laurence Johnson has agreed to his mother undergoing a full postmortem examination, so we might be getting somewhere at last.”

“Those doctors aren't going to be happy if it turns out they had a suspicious death right under their noses and simply ignored it.”

Jonty wrinkled *his* nose, emphasising his low opinion of medical men. “How was Billy Mustard? I really can't believe that's his real name, Papa, it sounds like something out of *The Pickwick Papers*.”

“You young scamp. That's the name he was registered with, the son of the Reverend and Mrs. Mustard, or so he reminded me when we fell to talking over old times. Which is what our meeting consisted of, mostly.”

“I bet it consisted of two bottles of wine and a Chateaubriand, as well.”

Mr. Stewart ignored the comment, which suggested his son had hit too close to the truth. “He'd seen me at the funeral and had been too upset to come over for a chat, so was delighted I'd got in touch.”

“And was he still carrying a torch for Lady Jennifer?”

“Oh yes. He became quite maudlin about her, especially as the wine loosened his tongue. Worshipped the very ground she walked on, always had—those are his words, not my embellishment—and had been a gentleman about things when she'd decided on old Sir Laurence instead of him. Still kept in touch, taking lunch or dinner with 'his Jennifer' and writing to her every week.”

“Had he never found another woman he could love?” How sad to be so devoted to one person to the exclusion of all others—and all other pleasure. Maybe Grandmother Coppersmith had carried the same sort of torch for the man who'd sired her son.

“It seems not. He likes women, there's no doubt—the companion, Miss Jordan, has made a great impression on him, as has her friend. I think the torch might well be carried the other way, there. If you get my meaning.”

“I think I lost you at the second torch.” Jonty took a deep breath and regathered his patience. “What did he think about 'his Jennifer' being the king's mistress, or wasn't that mentioned?”

“Oh, it was.” Mr. Stewart’s eyes twinkled. “He’d been most put out about it, but then he let his thoughts brew a while—his words again, Jonty—and decided she’d probably had little choice in the matter. So he’d forgiven her indiscretion and renewed his chivalrous love.”

“Indiscretion? They carried on for years, didn’t they?” Jonty shook his head, truly unable to understand the situation. “You know, I do wonder why she did it.”

“Plenty of women have been in the same position, if you’ll excuse the expression.”

“I’m going to find Miss Jordan today and that’s one of the questions I’ll ask her, along with the list of things Orlando has for me to tackle.”

“Hard taskmaster, that boy. I saw him as I came in and he seemed like a particularly keen beagle on the scent. Only he’s too rangy for a beagle and greyhounds don’t make good trackers.”

“I’m sure he’ll appreciate the canine analogies. Anyway, back to Mr. Mustard. Anything of use emerge?”

“I’m not sure. When he was slipping into his cups he did divulge he’d been in a bit of a tight corner financially, but that was at least ten years ago and he is now on a nice even keel. So he wouldn’t have been killing his light of love for her money and it wasn’t left to him anyway. Not even a nice little gratuity.”

“Perhaps he has designs on Miss Jordan. They will elope to Gretna Green as soon as the money is in her little paw. Is he good-looking? For his age?” Jonty grinned and hid his face over his cup.

“For his age?” Mr. Stewart roared. “For his age? He’s *my* age, you tinker. He’s pretty trim, taken good care of himself by the looks of him, and I dare say those few lean years prevented him running to corpulence as many of our group did. If I were a young gal...”

“I don’t think early thirties, or whatever Miss Jordan is, counts as a young girl.”

“It does to me. Were I in her position I might think him not bad at all. But aren’t we getting a bit speculative here? Orlando isn’t going to approve of this cavalier attitude.”

“Orlando isn’t going to know. I don’t have to report every word back to him.”

“That’s mutiny. He’ll have you hung.”

Jonty laughed, rose and set off in search of Miss Jordan. “He can’t. He’s not the captain of my ship, much as he may think he is.”

Jonty found his quarry and her friend sitting on the terrace, enjoying the sunshine and watching two children playing with boats in the small pond which graced the lawn. He raised his hat and bowed in the exceedingly polite manner his mother had taught him. “Ladies, may I join you for a moment or two?”

Miss Jordan indicated a seat and gestured gracefully towards the other woman. “This is Miss Robinson. Geraldine, this is Dr. Stewart. He’s the son of that very dashing man I pointed out to you last night.”

“The one who’s so remarkably handsome for his age?” Miss Robinson turned her attention to Jonty, eyeing him as if she were disappointed he didn’t come up to the standard of his father. “Pleased to meet you.”

“The pleasure is mine entirely.”

“Hark at him. You do know what he’s come for, don’t you? He wants to interrogate us about Lady Jennifer’s death. We’d better prepare for the application of the thumb screws.” Miss Jordan nudged her friend.

“Am I that bad?” Jonty grinned in what he hoped was a winning manner.

Miss Jordan launched her deep laugh, her companion following suit with a more tinkling giggle. “No, you’re not. In fact, for a man, you’re really quite acceptable. I know you have a job to do and you’re just trying to find out the truth.”

“My grandfather was a St. Bride’s man, you know.” The sudden change of conversational direction earned Miss Robinson surprised looks from her hearers. “Like your father and yourself. And old Sir Laurence and that nice Mr. Mustard.”

“I didn’t realise you knew him. I wish I’d asked you before and saved Papa days of wracking his brains trying to dredge the name up from the past. Ah, yes please.” A waiter had sidled up to the table, offering tea and biscuits; Jonty would never turn down either of those, especially when sleuthing. It was hungry *and* thirsty work. “At least he got a nice dinner out of it when he did remember—Mr. Mustard has been having the thumb screws applied, too.”

“I’ve known William Mustard for years—such a regular visitor to Lady Jennifer.” Miss Jordan indicated her cup needed a refill. Being interrogated must be even thirstier work than asking the questions. “My friend always says we have a soft spot for St. Bride’s men.”

“Then would you mind if I asked you another rag-bag of questions?” Jonty wondered how far that affection went but wasn’t sure he dared ask just now. That soft spot for *him* might easily turn hard.

“If they help to get to the bottom of this wretched business then ask away.” Miss Jordan’s mouth became a thin, determined line.

“Do you know why Lady Jennifer became the king’s mistress?”

Miss Jordan coloured, discomfort plain on her handsome face. “Oh. Is that really relevant to this case?”

Jonty spread his hands. “I simply don’t know. You’d be surprised at the little things that have been key to solving cases in the past—a picture on a desk, a bag of knitting. You can’t tell until you have all the facts.”

“And then? Can you always tell then?”

“You should be able to, or that’s what I feel. Hindsight is a wonderful thing but you know there have been times when we should have spotted some seemingly unconnected fact and jumped to the correct

conclusion. Like a young student not being able to understand *Othello*.” Jonty shuddered at the remembrance.

Miss Jordan studied him then seemed to decide on frankness. “As I understand from what her ladyship told me, when the opportunity arose to become close to the prince, as he was then, she wrestled with her conscience mightily. But, luckily for Bertie, it had come at the right time, psychologically that is. She had doubts about her own husband’s fidelity and decided...”

“That what was sauce for the gander was sauce for the goose?”

Miss Jordan smiled. “You could put it like that. If he wasn’t being faithful, why should she?” Miss Robinson smiled too and broke out in a rash of dimples.

“You see, the funny thing is that my father is quite convinced old Sir Laurence would never have been adulterous. He knew him very well...”

“Did he know about the present Sir Laurence? His antecedents, as it were?” Miss Jordan reddened, as she always seemed to when the younger Laurence was mentioned. Who could blame her for flushing? The man was a bounder.

“He does. And he sticks to his belief that the resemblance is just because of the family connection. You should see some of the far-flung Stewarts—we could all pass for each other in the twilight.”

“Lady Jennifer couldn’t believe her son was anything but his father’s own. It gnawed away at her all her life.” A tear formed in the corner of Miss Jordan’s eye and Miss Robinson proffered a handkerchief.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to upset you.” Would he ever get used to prying so much? “I just need to get these things clear. Did she ever contemplate leaving her husband?”

“No. She had offers enough before she was married and she kept in touch with some of the gentlemen in question, but she would never have just run away with one of them, not even Billy Mustard. For all that she was aggrieved, she loved her husband dearly and they were reconciled about everything before he died.”

“Thank you for your frankness. May I order some small glasses of sherry? I’m afraid your ordeal isn’t yet over and tea might not be enough to sustain you.”

The ladies nodded, Jonty summoned a waiter and the interrogation went on. “I have to ask another very personal thing. I believe that young Sir Laurence—I really can’t think of a delicate way to put this...”

Jonty didn’t need to rack his brains for a suitable expression as Miss Robinson leapt in to help him. “Propositioned Lynette? You’re quite right, he did. I wish she’d let me hit the cad over his ugly head with my umbrella.”

Jonty smiled, admiring the spirit shown. This girl could even have taken on his mama. “Did his mother know?”

"If she did, I didn't tell her. I walked up and down the front for nearly two hours until I was calm enough to face her. And to face *him* without resorting to spifflication." Miss Jordan looked ready to hit any convenient male over the cranium with any object to hand.

"How did he take your refusal?" Jonty hoped she wouldn't want to take out a general revenge on the male sex as he was the only one to hand now that the waiter had gone.

"As if I was just a card on the gaming tables which had turned up the wrong colour. As easily as a loss at the roulette wheel. He'd taken his chance, it didn't work and that was all there was to it. He never referred to it afterwards."

"You still resent him for it, though? Not that I blame you."

Miss Robinson again answered for her friend. "I'm glad you understand. It was the action of an absolute scrub. No wonder his poor wife looks so unhappy."

"Geraldine..." Miss Jordan touched her companion's arm. "You will excuse my friend, Dr. Stewart, she feels even more strongly about this business than I do."

"If Lady Jennifer had known, what might she have done?"

"Read him the riot act, no doubt. But if your question really means *could they have had an argument which led to her death*, I doubt it. This wasn't a violent, unpremeditated affair, I fear."

"No, but someone might kill to prevent a scandal. Sir Laurence wouldn't want all his dirty linen washed in public."

"I suspect he wouldn't care less. He has a reputation and doesn't seem to want to diminish it."

Jonty made a few notes, then tapped his pad with his pencil. "There's just one more thing and I'm not sure this isn't the most delicate of all. Her ladyship's jewels, the pieces she's left to her daughter-in-law, do you know anything about them?" He tried to look insouciant.

Miss Jordan seemed puzzled. "I don't understand, do you mean their provenance? Many of them were family pieces from her mother and grandmother."

"Well, they may have been once, but we believe it's possible some of them may not be the originals. Unless they were paste to start with."

"Paste?" Miss Jordan's voice rose, prompting a hasty *sh* from her friend and a few odd looks from the occupants of the nearest table, which was luckily well out of normal earshot.

"Someone who has experience in the matter of trinkets feels the necklace her ladyship was wearing last night wasn't a real piece. Is it possible that somebody got access to those jewels and had them copied and exchanged? For their own profit?"

"I have no idea. Any member of the family might have accessed them at some point—Lady Jennifer kept them all in her bedroom, in a jewellery box that wasn't usually locked. And they would go off for cleaning at times." Miss Jordan looked genuinely mystified. Or she was proving an excellent actress.

“Hm. That would suggest whoever was responsible knew that fact, otherwise the exchange would have been spotted soon enough. Perhaps they waited until after a piece had been sent for cleaning so that any change in appearance wouldn’t be noticed.”

“Or, as you said, perhaps they were always fake, from the moment Lady Jennifer had them. Or were replaced years ago and she knew. Maybe this was something else she laid at the door of her husband, another resentment.” Miss Robinson produced a surprisingly perceptive look—there were hidden depths to this woman.

“She couldn’t have changed them herself?” Jonty wanted to leave no stone unturned.

“Why would she? Are you sure the pieces are imitation? I really can’t believe anything underhand went on.” At least Miss Jordan appeared to believe that.

“We’re not entirely sure—we need to find a way to have our suspicions confirmed. Well, I thank you both for your help. I do hope we can get a move on regarding a solution.”

“So do we. If we can help further, about Lady Jennifer I mean, let us know.” Miss Jordan extended a neat, well-cared-for hand.

Jonty rose and bowed. “Before I forget, we asked you to be our guests for dinner but haven’t furthered the matter. Would you join us tonight?”

“That would be our delight, wouldn’t it, Lynette?” Miss Robinson smiled, making her cheeks break out in dimples again. “And I understand there will be dancing again this evening?”

“Oh indeed. You’ll have to try the other professional partner this time. If you monopolise the fair-haired one too much, people will talk.” Miss Jordan giggled excitedly and the talk fell to feminine matters such as which of the pair was alleged to like which man of their acquaintance. Jonty was allowed to escape and get on with thinking about this ridiculous case.



Orlando spotted his quarry setting off south from the hotel, along what perhaps was her favourite walk. He decided to overtake her by cutting inland, dashing a bit, then approaching her as he had before, coming across her as if by accident. As he turned onto the road and headed north towards the Regal, she was standing looking out to sea as she had before. It didn’t surprise him; Jonty could spend ages just standing contemplating the waves, so maybe she had the same fascination and compulsion with the vast ocean. Her elegant, well-cut mourning clothes emphasised her trim figure—she looked young, vulnerable and a little lost.

She was also fighting a losing battle against the wind, her hat pin unequal to the gusts from the sea. This time Orlando had to rescue a large bonnet, rather than a brooch, catching it as it scudded along the path, the black veil acting as a sort of sail.

He raised his own hat, which wouldn't dare have been so skittish. "I hope you haven't lost any jewellery today, to go with this miscreant." He returned the lady's bonnet with a flourish.

Lady Mary Johnson smiled shyly. "No indeed. I've been most careful."

"Apart from that breeze, it's another fine day. We've been very fortunate with the weather."

"Indeed we have. I'd like to return here when all this wretched business is settled so Laurence and I can take advantage of being in such a beautiful place." She turned to face the sea with the first look of real pleasure Orlando had observed her wear.

"Your husband is busy today?" Orlando had a good idea what the man was up to but it would prove enlightening to see if his wife acknowledged the fact.

Her ladyship nodded. "He agreed yesterday to allow an exhumation and have a medical examination made, one which might resolve the question of his mother's death once and for all. Don't look so surprised..."

Orlando tried to hide the look of pride at his being such a good actor behind the look of surprise he was manufacturing.

"It seems to be the talk of the hotel, the murder that everyone is calling a natural death. Or is it vice versa?" Lady Mary held her hat tightly, defying all the attempts of the wind to steal it again.

"I have heard some talk, although I try to avoid gossip, both listening and repeating." Orlando tried to produce the sort of look which would suggest that idle talk was beneath him.

"At least they've managed to install some private detectives in the hotel—my husband says they're decent enough chaps. He hopes the police will be able to further things today, he would be so very grateful if they could. It's all so unsettling."

Children ran along the beach below, trying to get a kite to fly in the swirling breeze, chattering and laughing. Evidence of life carrying on as normal, unnatural death or not.

"It must be." Orlando resisted the temptation to go down and tell the children exactly where they were getting their calculation on wind velocity wrong. "Would you like to join me for a hand of bridge or whist this afternoon? There'll no doubt be plenty of people in the cards room who'll be seeking to make up a four."

Her ladyship blanched and fingered her necklace. "I'm not sure I should. My husband might not approve..."

"I think it wouldn't show any disrespect to the departed to play a hand of cards, if that concerns you. And we could find irreproachable partners. I understand Mr. Stewart is very keen and is a true gentleman."

"I saw him at the funeral. I believe he's been a good friend to the Johnsons over the years, and he's serving them again now." She shrugged. "It's not that, though. My husband..." She didn't specify why her husband would disapprove. Was this about disrespect for the dead or plain jealousy at her associating with other men?

“Well the offer stands, should you change your mind.” Orlando raised his hat and bowed again, moving off with great dignity and plenty of curiosity.



Lady Mary Johnson didn't attend for cards in the afternoon, the Regal gossip machine stating she'd felt a migraine coming on and taken to her bed. She was there at dinner, looking pale and worried. Mrs. Allender joined her, insisting they watch the dancing and nurturing the girl to the point where she began to smile.

“Oliver” chose Miss Robinson for his first dance, which made the dimples flash again, while John shimmied over in the direction of Samantha Lewis, carefully sidestepped her and took the hand of Mrs. Allender. The couples glided around the floor in a waltz, the professional dancers capably bringing the dance to an end in the vicinity of the tables they'd taken their partners from.

Mrs. Allender chatted away to John as they danced and seemed to be persuading him to do something; when they arrived at her table he bowed to Lady Mary and proffered his hand. He was declined with a shake of the head and a shy smile, in reply to which he bowed politely and moved away.

Orlando watched it all, his second and third set of eyes not being present as they were involved in chatting over cards in the bar. He didn't observe when Lady Mary retired, being too involved with a sequence of steps, and passed the rest of the evening in dancing. And wondering whether Jonty had got his note about what had been said out by the sea wall.



Jonty sat up late over his hands of canasta and, when his father mounted the wooden hill to Bedfordshire, decided he would take the opportunity to step outside and enjoy a cigar under the stars. He rarely indulged in this pleasure nowadays, the martyred look that Orlando always adopted when he suggested his lover was *quite at liberty to light up* taking away any satisfaction he might have in the activity. He hadn't taken a cigar since they were strolling along the Champs d'Élysées and he was anticipating the taste keenly.

The night was fairly mild, no sign of frost yet, allowing him to wallow in the delights of being out in the grounds with the odd bat flitting around and the nightjars calling. He watched a cab come up to the front door of the hotel, then a passenger, whom he was fairly sure was Laurence Johnson, disembark and enter the building.

It suggested several things. That the exhumation had been postponed—he would surely want to be present—or that it had already been held and come to its conclusions. If it had been the latter, then there'd likely been intervention at a high level to expedite matters and the results of the postmortem must have been fairly conclusive, one way or the other. He finished his cigar, carefully discarded the stub in the

shrubbery—partly as an act of defiance to Orlando, who would never approve of such a thing—and set off to bed keenly anticipating the news that the morrow would bring.

He'd got out of the habit of checking for a note; the written threats didn't seem to be materialising into anything physical and he'd almost forgotten about them. It took several seconds for him to register the significance of the envelope he found pushed under his door.

"Papa." He slid open the interconnecting door, his voice barely more than a whisper, but Mr. Stewart was still up, nose in a Conan Doyle book (but not one about Mr. Holmes).

"Another note?" He couldn't miss the stiff little envelope his son carried. "What does it say this time?"

"You won't let things alone, will you? Someone's going to suffer." Jonty shivered, even though the evening was still mild. "Keep that army knife under your pillow. This is getting beyond a joke."



The Stewarts hadn't been rising early, there being an agreeable naughtiness in lying abed later than Mrs. Stewart would find acceptable. By the time they made a leisurely toilette they usually weren't getting outside breakfast until nine o'clock or so. Tuesday was no exception, threatening notes or no; the pair sauntered into the dining room and headed for their table, gradually becoming aware that some tense and unpleasant chord resonated in the habitually calm atmosphere.

"Something's afoot, Papa, and we weren't early enough to be in on it." Jonty was interrupted by the appearance of Sergeant Cohen at the entrance to the dining room. The man spotted the Stewarts and made his way across, a look of consternation on his usually impassive face.

"Dr. Stewart, Mr. Stewart, I'm sorry to interrupt your breakfast..."

"Don't worry, we haven't even started. Papa, this is Sergeant Cohen." Hands were shaken all round. "Do sit down and join us."

"I had a bite on the train down, sir, but I'll take a seat. Don't want to make myself any more conspicuous. You carry on, please." Cohen let the waiter take their orders before continuing. "I have some news for you. Chief Inspector Wilson should by rights deliver it, but he's rather occupied."

"Why does this all sound rather ominous?" Mr. Stewart may have never met the sergeant before but he'd immediately got the measure of his expression and tone of voice.

Cohen smiled, softening his rather unyielding countenance. "It's not all ominous. The postmortem yesterday was pretty positive. We were going to come down and tell you anyway, although that could have waited until a more sociable hour."

"And?" Jonty almost bounced with anticipation in his seat.

"Lady Jennifer Johnson died of a brain haemorrhage, quite natural and with no sign of foul play. It became obvious as soon as—well, as soon as the doctors could get a proper look that there was no evidence

of anything being put over her face. The police surgeon had an inkling it was something cranial and soon found what he was looking for. A massive clot on—”

“Thank you, Sergeant Cohen, I’ve ordered black pudding and I’d rather not be put off it.” Mr. Stewart smiled ruefully.

“I beg your pardon, sir. They’ve taken samples to look for poisoning but I think everyone agreed it had been natural causes after all.”

“And those who swore she had nothing wrong with her heart have been vindicated as well.” Jonty poured three cups of tea from the pot which had appeared on the table. “Well, that’s splendid. Dr. Coppersmith and I can pack our things and get back to the dunderheads. Dr. Peters *will* be pleased.”

“Ah, sir. I think that might be slightly premature.”

“Premature?”

“Yes. You still have a murder to help us with, if you’d be so kind. Mr. Wilson is on the phone to Cambridge as we speak to clear the way.”

“But you said it was natural causes. Am I being particularly thick?” Jonty had no idea what was going on, although his father had a look on his face of sudden enlightenment.

“There’s been another killing?” Mr. Stewart tried hard to hide the keen look in his eye; he resembled a hunt puppy on its first tracking of the fox.

“Aye, sir. Sir Laurence Johnson was found with his head battered in at five o’clock this morning.”

Chapter Eleven

“Aren’t you hungry?” Mr. Stewart eyed the abandoned breakfast plate with concern. When his youngest son was off his fodder it always signalled worry or depression.

“Don’t feel like eating any more, Papa. Seems a bit...”

Stewart senior considered his son for a minute or two, this boy he knew so well and who remained a constant surprise to him, then measured his words. “It’s been a shock, this news, hasn’t it? Not at all what we expected.”

“I can’t help worrying about it. Wondering if we were the cause of Laurence’s death. Coming down here and raking up muck when there wasn’t even a murder to solve in the first place. It’s all a bloody mess.” Jonty ran his hands through his hair.

“Language, Jonathan.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t help feeling he might still be alive if we hadn’t been poking around and bringing all sorts of things to the surface.” Jonty picked up his cup of tea, looked at it in a defeated manner and put it down again, not a drop consumed.

“I have to disagree with you. We’ve hardly raked up any muck, and what we have we’ve garnered to ourselves in a nice, tidy, private little pile. The only thing that seems to have become fairly general knowledge is the pass he made at Miss Jordan, and the lady herself let that be known. All the business about Laurence’s paternity and the provenance of those jewels is still hush-hush.”

“I’ll concede your point there.” Jonty sighed and looked out the window at the drizzly day which had emerged from the morning’s lingering sea fret. “I need to talk to Orlando.” He lowered his voice. “We both do. We can send him a note, once we have all the details from Chief Inspector Wilson as Sergeant Cohen promised, but that’s not enough. This changes everything and we need to be able to exchange ideas.”

“Back to the beginning, I suppose?”

“No, I can’t believe that. I bet we have the key to things already, or at least an inkling. And we’ve established a good working relationship with all those who are here and were close to both parties. It’s not a new beginning, rather a realignment of ideas. I say, this teapot’s cold. Shall we order another?”

“I’d prefer to turn to coffee, if you’d be so kind as to rouse up a waiter. I want to have my head clear to go through all our case notes but from a different viewpoint. Not anymore a matter of who might have a motive for killing Jennifer, is it? You’ve said all along this case was frustrating both in its initial lack of evidence and then in the bewildering flurry of stuff that turned up out of the blue.” Mr. Stewart scratched

his bald pate. “None of it helped us before—perhaps it might suddenly make sense if looked at in terms of a different victim. Although, you know, I was certain I had that case solved.”

“Really? You kept very quiet about it.”

“I was convinced, in the back of my mind, that Laurence Johnson was at the bottom of his mother’s death. She found out he’d been replacing her jewellery and sent him an ultimatum. I was hoping it would turn out that he really did have a younger brother who’d taken his place on honeymoon. I even asked old Billy Mustard about it.”

“Did you? How did you cover up being rabidly inquisitive so he wasn’t wary of all the questions?”

“I didn’t bother covering up. I said we’d been asked in to solve what was regarded as a suspicious death and that I needed to pick his brain. He was more than happy to oblige, given his affection for Jennifer. Not that he had anything of real interest to impart. She’d kept in touch with him right up till her death, regularly but not frequently—he said he could shed no new light on things.”

“Did you have anything at all to support your wonderful theorem? Any nice hard-as-concrete type facts of which Orlando would approve?”

“I did think the nervous demeanour of Lady Mary could be explained by her being an unwilling partner in the crime—an accessory before the fact, do they call it? You know, giving her husband some sort of an alibi.”

Jonty considered. “Pretending he was still on honeymoon with her rather than it being some impostor? It’s a neat little solution, but how does it look now in the light of his death?”

“It’s all shot to pieces and I can’t even get it to reassemble itself into something sensible. Not until I’ve had a coffee or two, anyway.” Mr. Stewart smiled and took out his notebook, which was due to be having a lot of “scribblings out” soon.

“Let’s ask for our coffee in the lounge, then—the chief inspector can find us there. And we must get our heads together with Orlando. He has a class this afternoon, assuming it isn’t cancelled out of respect, and dancing tonight, so a trip to the cottage is out of the question.”

“Oh, that’s easy enough, you know. I came up with some additional stratagems in case we ever needed to have a conference with him in an emergency. We could use one of those. You’ll enjoy it.” Mr. Stewart smiled, a smile with even more cunning than his youngest son could manage.

“You sly old fox. Come on, let’s get that waiter and then you can tell me all about it. And I’ll have to tell Mama what a devious thing you’ve turned out to be.”

“You won’t need to tell her, my boy. She already knows it all.”



Chief Inspector Wilson looked tired, more tired than Jonty had ever seen him in all the cases they had worked on together. They ordered coffee for three and let him enjoy a cigarette prior to getting down to the

business in hand. Before Wilson would tell them what had transpired—the accurate version, as opposed to the various ridiculous stories already circulating—he wanted them to go over, again, all they’d learned since arriving at the Regal.

“I know you’ve told me, but you can’t impart on paper the full nuance of what’s been said. I want to get all the information I can before I cloud your minds with details of this murder.”

As they related all that they and Orlando had found out, the information began to take on a new perspective, making more sense in the light of the revelations of the morning. The things which seemed illogical, like the fact that all the bad feeling in the case seemed to be aimed at the son rather than the mother, became significant now *he’d* been the victim of a vicious crime and not her.

“At least we have every reason now to get someone in to establish whether those trinkets of Lady Jennifer’s are genuine.” The policeman sighed, taking a long draught of coffee. “They might be relevant to the case. Once we’ve established whether there has been an exchange, Sergeant Cohen can follow up what might have happened to the originals and when.”

“Do you think that might be important?” Jonty was gradually realigning his thoughts, turning what he knew around one-hundred-and-eighty degrees.

“We can’t know what is or isn’t relevant, but I like to have something tangible to focus on and fake jewels are tangible—and sufficiently unusual to arouse my suspicions. Laurence Johnson is said to have had a bit of a bust-up with his mother just before his honeymoon. I wondered if the old paternity issue was raising its head again, although it could have been related to the trinkets. You know, you’ve done a lot of the hard work for us. It might have taken months for that story about Laurence Johnson’s true paternity to have emerged, if it did so at all.”

“Do you want us to continue investigating? Sergeant Cohen implied you would.” The first glimmers of regaining his appetite had emerged, both for food and for the case.

“Jonty, before Mr. Wilson answers that question, you’d better tell him about the notes. All of them.”

There was no point in arguing; Jonty took the things from his wallet, laying them in a neat line on the table. “I promise, Chief Inspector, this is the entire collection.”

“Why on earth didn’t you tell me you’d received more?” Wilson fingered the notes carefully, holding them to the light as if they might have the solution to the case engraved in the paper’s watermark.

“There was no specific threat, nothing concrete.” Jonty looked at his father for support.

“It would have felt like crying wolf, Mr. Wilson, the threats seeming so vague...”

“It’s the vagueness which worries me, gentlemen.” The policeman jabbed at the notes, tracing the words. “How can we be sure the threat was directed at you? ‘Someone’s going to suffer.’ That could be anybody.”

“Orlando. Dear God.” The teaspoon Jonty had been fiddling with crashed onto his saucer. “We must warn him, Chief Inspector.”

"You haven't told him, either? I see. I'll get Sergeant Cohen to pass the word on, while he's taking his statement—it seems you can't be trusted." He pointed again to the word "someone". "Have you thought that this might mean Laurence Johnson?"

"We've already been wondering whether we were the cause of Sir Laurence's murder, Chief Inspector. Please don't heap more coals on our heads." Mr. Stewart sat as straight as a ramrod, cutting an impressive figure. "If you don't want us to continue investigating, we'll understand."

"We needn't take it that far. I have coals heaped on my head, too—I was party to stirring this up from the start And I knew about the threats, if not the extent." Wilson's troubled face eased into an unexpected smile. "I've always welcomed your input, even when you've had a habit of going off at your own tangents. And now I think I owe you an explanation of what happened today." It was a sign of absolution.

The policeman laid before them an account—which was duly noted in their little books—of Lady Mary waking at about four in the morning, finding her husband not present and the door unlocked, slipping into a dressing gown then setting off in search of him. She'd found him in the grounds, with the back of his head a bloody mess and obviously dead.

"But why should she venture into the grounds at all?" Mr. Stewart clearly found this all too puzzling.

"I'm afraid I've left out a crucial part of the narrative. You must excuse me, it's been a busy few days. She came down and spoke to the night porter, who told her that her husband had passed through the hall saying he was going to take some air. She insisted on trying to find him, the porter tried to dissuade her but she wouldn't be gainsaid. Ten minutes after going through the door she was back, in distress. It took her several minutes and a glass of brandy to calm down enough to explain what she'd found. Even then she was unclear about where the body was."

"That must have meant a delay in calling for the police, and for a doctor." Jonty tapped his notepad with his pen and wondered whether some deliberate prevarication had been gone on.

"It did. The night porter was unsure what to do for the best so he rang Mr. Agnew, who told him to call for a doctor first and then the police. He was then to rouse some colleagues—one to look after Lady Mary while he and the other went to find the dead man and see whether anything could be done for him."

"Was the doctor able to say when Sir Laurence died?" Jonty kept noting everything down—Orlando would complain if anything was missed out.

"Not to the minute. They can't always, despite what some of those penny dreadfuls say. But he hadn't been dead long—we know that because he'd passed through the hall only a matter of twenty minutes or so before his wife went to find him."

"Is it possible that he was actually alive when she located him?"

"Now, Dr. Stewart, do you really mean 'could she have dealt the blow?' I think it at least possible." Mr. Wilson's rueful smile suggested he'd encountered that eventuality before.

“And the strike on the back of the head was the thing that killed him? We’ve had one case where doctors have got it wrong. Is your man sure of what happened?” Mr. Stewart had a keen look in his eye, keener than a foxhound on the scent.

Wilson nodded. “*Our* man is. The doctor who attended here felt the blow was enough to cause unconsciousness but wasn’t sure it caused death. We had one of our own experts follow us down and he’s been having a good look into things. He’s of the opinion the blow just knocked Sir Laurence out and he was then smothered with his own scarf. There were fibres in his mouth and nose.”

“How long would this have taken? Was there time for her ladyship to do it?” Jonty felt a bee buzzing in his bonnet, but he needed the timescale clear, irrespective of whom he suspected. Orlando would certainly enquire about it.

“A matter of minutes. Once he’d been hit, as long as you got the right spot first time, he’d have gone down like a stone. Then you’d cover his nose and mouth and possibly squash his chest. If he was in no state to resist, it wouldn’t have taken that long.”

“Did the person get the right spot at the first attempt? I suppose they would have had to or else Sir Laurence would have put up a fight or shouted or something.” Mr. Stewart shook his head. “I find it hard to believe that such a thing could have taken place so quietly.”

“It seems to have been just one very lucky, or very accurate, blow. If you had good hand-to-eye coordination then you’d be fine. I think the method can’t rule anyone out. The doctor thinks they were right-handed—the assailant I mean—and either a bit taller than Sir Laurence or came upon him sitting down.”

“So what happens now, Chief Inspector?” They mustn’t get in the way of proper procedure. “What do you want us to do?”

“Much the same as you’ve already done—you’ve turned up a fair amount one way or another. Just keep your ears open, especially if you feel like exploring the feminine animosity towards the man, by which I don’t just mean Miss Jordan’s. We’ll establish what’s going on with those jewels and Mr. Cohen should have some results soon about the financial situation of the key players. That would seem particularly apt now.”

“Why so? Because of the possible replacement of the jewels for profit?” Mr. Stewart thoughtfully rubbed his bald pate.

“No, Papa. It’s not just that, is it, Mr. Wilson? As far as we know, Laurence Johnson was comfortably off, unless the good sergeant finds out he was in some sort of muck and was looking to bail himself out with those trinkets of his mother’s. If he was financially secure then someone may be benefiting nicely from his death.”

Wilson nodded. “That’s where we’ll be looking. And at alibis, although I know Dr. Stewart has no truck with them. We’ll content ourselves with bank balances, times and locations. You two can be alive to the tittle-tattle.”

“We’re your men for that. Papa is an expert and even—” Jonty stopped himself short from mentioning their spy, “—well, let’s just say that *someone* is proving rather successful at accessing surprising sources.”

“It’s just as well we set this whole thing up, isn’t it? As it turned out.” Wilson looked almost amused.

“I’ve just had an awful thought.” Jonty laid down his notebook. Orlando sometimes read it, so this part of the conversation must remain unrecorded. “Laurence Johnson was my height and build, and I was out in the gardens last evening, having a cigar. Given those notes and all, is there any chance whoever it was mistook Sir Laurence for me when they whacked him one? And then had to smother him to cover it all up?”



As “Oliver Carberry” entered the hotel card room, he was pleased to see the required persons were present, and in the right number, for Mr. Stewart’s plan to work. Enough to witness, not enough to cause a scandal. He lingered in the door until a small, solid, muscular object—its head facing behind it as if it were looking at something over its shoulder—barged into him and sent him flying.

“I say...” Orlando reached for the back of a chair to steady himself.

“Must you stand blocking the door like that? A chap can’t get through.”

“If a chap was looking where he was going he might have had the wit to say *excuse me* or some such thing rather than ploughing ahead like a steamroller.”

“If a chap hadn’t got his head full of dancing and shimmying he might notice that someone wanted to get round him.”

“You are a cad, sir.” Orlando’s face was puffed out, his eyes blazed and he had started to colour. It was an impressive sight.

“And you, *sir*—” the last word of the phrase was spoken in such a sneering tone that it sounded like the very worst sort of insult, “—are a Nancy boy.”

Orlando raised his hand as if he meant to launch a fist and then thought better of it. “You will take that back, young man. I’ll hear no slurs on my masculinity.”

Jonty harrumphed. “Masculinity? Fine sort of man you are, Mr. Carberry. My father has a name for your type and I’ll not sully my lips with it. You describe yourself as a professional dancer, a companion for the ladies of quality. I say you’re just a common gigolo.” He squared up to Orlando, drew back his fist and felt his arm being firmly grabbed.

“Dr. Stewart, I would be grateful if you two gentlemen could come to some sort of an amicable arrangement vis-à-vis your disagreement.” Agnew had arrived exactly on cue and eyed the two opponents,

playing his part magnificently. He'd been especially attentive during his briefing from the Stewarts and, while he thought the plan a bit dramatic, it would also allow him to establish that he was still completely in charge of what went on at the Regal. Police, detectives and murderers notwithstanding.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Agnew, I quite forgot myself. I'm only pleased no more than a handful of guests were present." Jonty turned to the two ladies who'd witnessed the scene and would no doubt be reporting it in detail as soon as they got the chance. A very likely event given that one of them was Mrs. Spreadbury. The story would put a spoke in anyone's wheel who had even the vaguest suspicion that Orlando might be Oliver. Jonty bowed, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself. "Ladies, my profound apologies. That was conduct most unbecoming and I throw myself on your mercy. The events of today—an old friend of the family, you will understand—have quite unnerved me. Please forgive me."

The ladies fluttered their hands, bowed their heads and murmured that it was quite all right and that the terrible news of the murder was likely to affect anyone.

Orlando bowed too. "Ladies, Mr. Agnew, I am most contrite. I've let my feelings get the better of me in a way which is most improper. I hope I'll receive your forgiveness, although I acknowledge you might find that hard to bestow, given my ungentlemanly behaviour." His face bore such a contrite look—as that of a child who'd been fighting his friends and was now desperate for absolution from his mother—that the women couldn't help giving *him* their clemency too. One of them found his look of contrition so very becoming she asked if he would dance with her later as a sign he'd been absolved.

"Mr. Agnew, I beg you not to blame Mr. Carberry. I'm ashamed to say I provoked him most unfairly. I hope he'll shake my hand and let the matter rest if I offer my sincere apologies." Jonty offered his hand and there followed a little scene of manly reconciliation which filled the female bosoms with joy. "And in token of my contrition, might I ask him to join my father and myself for dinner tonight? If that would be acceptable, Mr. Agnew?"

"It isn't something we usually encourage, but under the circumstances I believe it would be tolerable. Would you agree, ladies?"

Being addressed by three such handsome men and all with such charming turns of phrase had quite turned the heads of the women in question and they probably would have agreed to anything. A time was set for the men to meet and all parties retreated, Jonty with a grin, Orlando with renewed admiration for the ingenious mind of Richard Stewart, and Mrs. Spreadbury with a marvellous piece of tittle-tattle to disseminate.



"Oliver Carberry" presented himself, ramrod stiff and as neat as an entire pack of new pins, at the Stewarts' table (which Mr. Agnew had arranged to be out of earshot of the other guests), shook hands with them both awkwardly, then equally stiffly sat down. Half the eyes on the dining room were on them and the

other half were as deliberately not on them—although the accompanying ears were strained. Probably just in case a blow or two might be delivered. When it was apparent no mayhem was going to be forthcoming, much of the interest in the men's doings was lost and they were able to get down to the matter in hand.

"Did Sergeant Cohen brief you?" Jonty had a frosty look, as if he were still trying to come to terms with being called a cad.

"He did. The whole thing has turned on its head." Orlando didn't have to work hard at creating an image of lingering resentment at being called a Nancy boy. He was annoyed enough. "And why did it take Mr. Cohen to tell me about the notes? Am I not to be trusted?" He focussed on his napkin, shaking it out with such ferocity it made a crack, like a sail in a stiff breeze.

"Jonty would trust you with his life, surely you know that." Mr. Stewart didn't need to act like he was trying to bring about a polite rapprochement. "He just didn't want you worried. As I didn't want Mrs. Stewart worried. We may have been wrong, but we acted from the best intentions."

Mr. Stewart's paternal smile worked where Jonty's bluster would have failed. "Hm. I understand the road to hell is paved with them, so I'd advise you not to indulge them in future. To the case, gentlemen."

"It makes a bit more sense now, at least to me." The relief in Jonty's voice was clear, but he wasn't off the hook yet. "Papa and I have talked ourselves hoarse on it and now we're anxious to hear what you have to say."

"Well, before I tell you my thoughts, I have a bit of news and you must try hard not to look too surprised, Dr. Stewart. We're supposed to be re-establishing civilities at present."

"We really will come to blows if you don't stop being such a smarty-pants." Jonty was fighting a grin, one inappropriate either to the real situation or their pretence. "Out with it then. I shall stay poker-faced."

"Mr. Stewart, your old friend Billy Mustard is staying in the town." That would serve them right for keeping secrets.

Stewart senior couldn't hide his astonishment and had to pretend to choke on a piece of bread.

Jonty slapped his father's back. "How do you know?"

"I gave a lesson today—Mr. Agnew didn't cancel it as he wants life to carry on as much as normal. There's been too much disruption for his liking. Some of the little darlings were singing about 'Billy Mustard, silly Custard' until their mothers stopped them. It seems someone's governess is friendly with the housekeeper at the Crown Hotel, who passed on the news about the unusual arrival of a guest very late on Sunday. This man turned up on the last train, wanting a room, and his name had been odd enough to stay in the children's minds as they earwigged—not something you ever do, Jonty. They'd made up a rhyme about him."

"Well, it seems you have your first commission of this restructured investigation, Papa, finding out what brings him here in such a hurry. I bet it was to find out who killed his lady love—he wouldn't at that point have known about the results of the exhumation." Jonty stopped, counting something off on his

fingers under cover of his napkin. "I'm trying to get my head around days, here. Could Billy Mustard have put the notes under our door?"

"Not that first one, unless he's grown wings. He was up at his club, or so he told me." Mr. Stewart looked smug over his soup spoon. "And when I took him back there after dinner and poured him into his room, I went and checked."

"Cunning old fox. Still, you know how sceptical I am when people definitely prove they're elsewhere." Jonty stabbed a scallop as if it were a false alibi.

"Did I ever tell you about Freddie Franklin-Featherstonhowe?" The soup spoon was twirled like a school master's cane. "He—"

Orlando decided someone needed to start talking sense. "Can we get back to the matter in hand? Thank you. First of all, I believe the change of track in this case gives us the ideal opportunity to rework our strategy. We've been successful so far but I think a modification is due. A sort of *excuse me* where we change partners."

"Mr. Carberry, what are you going on about?" The soup spoon was laid down in confusion.

"What I mean is that we've been tackling a small group of people each—now we need to swap them around. I believe we'll get a fresh approach on things. Jonty, you should tackle Billy Mustard and with your officially-asked-in hat on, to boot. We need to know what's brought him here."

"We do indeed, Oliver, but don't you think he'd open up more to Papa?"

"He might, although not in the same way. I mean no disrespect to you, Mr. Stewart—I believe you'd be better employed tackling our young widow. She'd find you paternal and not as threatening as some young gigolo." Orlando hazarded a smile and Jonty risked rubbing their legs together under cover of the ample tablecloth.

Mr. Stewart nodded his head. "You do have a point. She seemed nervous of her husband, although we've yet to establish the reason. If it was at all to do with jealousy or possession on his part then she would be most unlikely to wish to discuss it with a stranger."

"And you, Oliver?" Jonty kept to the assumed name. He didn't think they could be overheard and they'd been very careful to be quiet when a waiter approached, but a stray *Orlando* might just be picked up by Mrs. Spreadbury, who could probably hear scandal at two hundred paces.

"I'd like to talk to Miss Jordan and her friend. I've managed to arrange to play cards with them tomorrow afternoon, a rather fortunate by-product of this afternoon's altercation being that I'm much in demand. My dancing card for this evening is already full and I'm having to turn down offers of tea and lunch for tomorrow. No doubt they see me as the injured party and all and sundry wish to make amends."

"No doubt I'm seen in that position and they want to give you a good wiggling." Jonty grinned then refilled Orlando's glass of water; the man was being strictly abstemious, with the rigours of the dance floor to come. "And what will you ask the young lady?"

“I’m not going to ask her anything. I’ve come to the conclusion that John Wickham fancies her—we’ve roped him in for the bridge four and I’m going to nudge him into getting her to talk. He was the one she confided in about Sir Laurence’s obscene suggestion. I’d like to see what else she’ll tell him.”

“You crafty beast.” Jonty wrinkled his nose. “This whole exercise has brought out all sorts of new aspects to your personality—I just hope it’s a good thing.”

The arrival of the main course meant a sudden change of conversation to rugby international matches. The case was put to one side, apart from a final plea from Jonty that “Mr. Carberry” make sure he didn’t go into the grounds at night—and find something like a putter to keep by his bedside. Golf clubs made excellent weapons.



As Jonty prepared to take to his bed, he picked up both his spectacles and a small blue envelope. The letter had come in the afternoon post and, despite the Cambridge postmark, he’d merely laid it down to attend to later. It seemed a pleasant thing to contemplate before he dozed off, especially as he’d known who’d sent it, as soon as he’d seen the sloping hand.

Dear Dr. Stewart,

I do apologise most profusely for failing to update you on developments here in Cambridge but I have been very busy. Not, before you ask the question, exclusively with mammal-like reptiles. I’ve been helping Nurse Hatfield with the epidemic of mumps which has been sweeping the university. Not only have we had our own cases to deal with, we’ve been helping them out at another college (you can guess which one I mean) as they have been swamped. I am far too well bred to be making any comments about the situation some of these poor chaps find themselves in but I’m sure your mother will have been wise enough to make sure you caught the disease as a child. Not the sort of thing any virile young lad wants to have happen to him. Worse than being caught by a cricket ball without your box on.

Anyway, our little tête-à-tête in re the unusual skull proved most interesting. I’ll warrant you could not imagine therapsid and diapsid conditions being such an amusing topic for conversation. Naturally we turned to dinosaurs and Dr. Panesar astounded us—but then when doesn’t he?—with his theories on the physiology of the beasts. Dr. Sheridan agreed. He says too many people have jumped to conclusions about them and that hearsay has become fact without enough evidence to back it up. ‘Calamitous for true scholarship’ were his very words.

Dr. Sheridan is convinced that our friend the iguanodon down in the museum is constructed inaccurately. He’s certain the tail has been broken or dislocated to produce the stance and he believes the things actually ran around like enormous pheasants, but with arms and hands instead of wings. When he got onto opposable digits we all became very excited. Such stimulation for the mind!

He has promised to take me down to the geology department and show me the arrangements of bones in the iguanodon hand if I'm a good girl. He invited Dr. Panesar too, but alas he says he'll be rather busy over the next week or so. I guess I shall have to bite the bullet and venture down alone. I'm sure I don't need a chaperone at my age.

Please give my very best to Dr. Coppersmith. I dare say he is cutting a splendid dash amongst the ladies; has he had any proposals of marriage yet? I also hope the investigations are making progress and that you are able to get back soon. Two empty chairs in the SCR make a very great hole.

Fondest regards,

Ariadne Peters.

Jonty folded up the letter and put it away, grinning all the while. *Doesn't need a chaperone at her age. I wonder if Dr. Sheridan needs one?*

There'd been something else in that letter, too, which had taken root at the back of his brain but hadn't yet sent up a shoot of enlightenment. Perhaps it had been the iguanodon. With strange thoughts running through his noddle of dinosaurs with opposable digits and good hand-to-eye coordination, Jonty settled down for the night.

Chapter Twelve

Wednesday dawned grey and gloomy, reflecting the mood that lay over the Regal. The gossips had got their murder, fair and square, but instead of it being a pleasure to talk about, all of sudden it had become a too-real and present danger. An old lady who may or may not have been smothered for whatever reason seemed to be a lot less daunting affair than a man with his head smashed in—the word about suffocation hadn't reached the gossipers. People were feeling nervous that they might be accosted next and were avoiding walking alone in the grounds. Having a real statement taken this time, their whereabouts being noted, and having to sign for what they'd attested changed public opinion. The matter had ceased to be a topic for idle speculation and vicarious thrills.

Mr. Stewart decided to pay his respects to the young widow as soon as possible and to come absolutely clean about his presence at the hotel. He'd expected to be denied an audience and to have to plead so felt rather disappointed when her maid brought back the message that her ladyship was quite willing to receive him.

Mary Johnson looked pale yet determined, apparently no longer quite as nervous or naive as she had seemed before. She wasn't a beauty but she looked neat and dainty in her widow's weeds—those garments which made many a plain girl look like a princess—and rose to greet him.

"Mr. Stewart, I'm so pleased to meet you again. I didn't realise before how great a friend you were to my father-in-law. Thank you for taking the time to visit me." She sat down, indicating a chair the other side of the table from her own.

Mr. Stewart bowed and seated himself. "Lady Mary, I wish we'd had the chance to meet on more happy occasions. First a funeral and now..." He spread his hands and let the gesture speak for him. "I have something to tell you that might prove painful. I apologise in advance that it comes at such a time but there's no way to avoid it. My son and I were asked in by—well, let's say by high authority—to investigate your mother-in-law's death, which certain people felt was suspicious. We have now been retained to help the police in settling the matter of her son's untimely demise."

The young widow nodded. "So I understand. I didn't realise that fact but my maid has been talking to some of the other servants and it seems to be common knowledge. You would have thought people could find something more suitable to gossip about although I suppose life here may be dull at times and any occurrence gets grasped as an opportunity for a little excitement." She rubbed her fingers pensively, clearly in distress. "And now the police have taken my jewels to be inspected. They say it's routine. Routine! I've

never heard of such a thing. No doubt it will give the gossips more things to whisper about behind their hands.”

Mr. Stewart felt more than uncomfortable, having been the catalyst for all the suspicion about the jewellery coming out. “I wouldn’t concern yourself too much. I believe it relates more to your late mother-in-law than to you. Some question that needed to be answered.” He smiled, content with the truth of what he’d said—it really did seem unlikely that Lady Mary could have been implicated in swapping fake gems for real.

Her ladyship sighed, relaxing the grip on her fingers. “Would you like me to call for some coffee? I would welcome a hot drink at this moment.”

“That sounds like a splendid idea. I have, as you can imagine, several questions I’d like to ask you and it might be easier to do so over a cup of something. If it wouldn’t be an intrusion.”

“I’ll try my best to help you, although I have told the police all I know.”

“Have you?” Mr. Stewart adopted his most avuncular manner and voice. “Do you know, I have a daughter of a similar age to yourself. I can imagine that if she were in a similar position there might be things she would feel reluctant about revealing to even Chief Inspector Wilson. Not things that would necessarily mean she was involved in anything untoward, but personal matters. Things she would rather discuss with a friend, someone of discretion and judgement who could decide whether they needed to be told to the authorities. Then that person could pass the information on, saving embarrassment all round.”

“Elspeth.” Lady Mary lifted her voice to reach the other room. “Elspeth, could you please go into the town and get some soap and a fresh flannel for me? I trust your judgement in these things much more than I would any member of the hotel staff. You’ll find plenty of change in my bag.”

The maid, who’d been in the bedroom attending to various things, took the commission as a genuine one and happily set off on her errands. Mr. Stewart, who recognised when someone was trying to make the way clear for matters of discretion, smiled and settled down to hear whatever confessions would ensue. He’d deliberately not produced his notebook in case it created an inhibiting effect.

“Mr. Stewart, I know you’re a man of his word and if you say you’ll be discreet then you will be. Laurence told me you knew about his parentage, had done for some time, and had kept it a close secret. I appreciate that very much. It gives me hope that if I open my heart to you then you won’t rush to share what I tell you with all and sundry.”

Mr. Stewart nodded, assuring himself he could make such an assertion, as Orlando and Jonty were hardly all and sundry. The fact he’d taken in Laurence Johnson with a lie was conveniently ignored.

“My husband and I didn’t start married life off on the best footing...”

Mr. Stewart prepared himself for the Lavinia-type story which he felt sure was going to emerge, of a lass unprepared for the realities of her wedding night. He hoped he would make a better fist of dealing with it than he had with his own offspring.

"I'm afraid I'd been rather imprudent shortly before we wed. There was an old friend, he was charming—too charming—and rather took advantage of my high spirits and good nature in the run up to my nuptials."

"I'm sorry, I don't follow..."

"I strayed. It wasn't adultery, not technically, as we weren't yet man and wife, Laurence and myself, but I erred."

"Oh." Mr. Stewart almost had to shake himself to take in the information; yet again this case was turning his preconceptions on their heads. "Laurence found out?"

"On our honeymoon. We were confessing our past peccadilloes—I know he was a bit of a maverick, you even might say *cad* in his younger days, but he'd vowed to turn over a new leaf once we were wed. He'd been faithful to me from the moment we became engaged, I know that because he'd quite happily confessed to me about all the women who'd gone before. '*What does it matter,*' he would say, '*as long as you're the last?*'"

Mr. Stewart thought of Sir Laurence's propositioning Lynette Jordan and took a long draught of coffee to hide his irritation. "And was he understanding? Of your indiscretion?"

Lady Mary shrugged. "He said he was, although I noticed he was always watchful after then. If I was talking to another gentleman he would hover around. He never said anything or made any accusations and of course I assured him such a thing would never happen again. I believe in the sanctity of the marriage bed, naturally. But the way he looked at me and at the men around me made me very uncomfortable at times."

Mr. Stewart wondered if it had made her uncomfortable enough to end up thumping her husband one and then smothering him. It would make sense, if he'd started to accuse her of dallying with someone here at the Regal. The thought of Oliver Carberry being the one under suspicion flitted through his head, making another swig of coffee necessary. "I appreciate your candour, my dear. I would ask you to indulge me further. Had your husband received any specific threats?"

"I don't think so. No." Lady Mary shook her head. "He would have told me if that was the case."

Mr. Stewart doubted that was the truth. "Can you tell me exactly what happened the night you found your husband dead? I know it will be painful but there might be something you noticed, something which means little to you that we could put together with another little trifle. The picture we weave could lead us to identifying his killer."

Lady Mary took a fortifying draught of coffee then began her narrative. It followed nicely all she'd told the police, or at least the version the Stewarts had received from Mr. Wilson.

"And you saw or heard nothing suspicious either while you were here or out in the grounds?"

"What sort of thing do you mean?"

“A noise, perhaps? Maybe someone casting gravel up at the window to attract your husband’s attention or a voice calling out? It puzzles me how Laurence’s murderer came across him, unless the meeting was prearranged and there seems precious little time for that to have been organised.”

“I didn’t hear anything, which isn’t to say there was nothing to hear. I can sleep through any amount of noise—we were raised close to a farm and you wouldn’t believe the din cows make when they want to be milked in the morning. One soon learns to sleep through their lowing, and the rooster too.” Lady Mary briefly smiled in remembrance of earlier, happier times, but the sadness soon returned. “It was only my husband’s absence from the bed I noticed.”

“When you went out to seek him, did you hear anything then?”

“Do you ever go out at night, Mr. Stewart? It’s hardly the deathly hush that the poets and writers depict, not at this time of the year. I’m not sure it’s understood by those who are only used to London. There’s always a rustling in the undergrowth and the wretched foxes make the most unearthly din, like a child being attacked, all that screaming and whining.”

“Did you hear foxes last night? Or any other animals?”

“I did, or so I thought.” Lady Mary, suddenly very pale, laid down her cup. “Oh. It couldn’t have been Laurence, could it? Making some noise while he was being...oh.”

“Hush, don’t fret.” Mr. Stewart gently patted the young woman’s hand. “I’ll ask you no more now. I hope I can spare you any further inquisition.” He swallowed hard at his newfound ability to lie. “Shall I ask Mrs. Allender to come and sit with you until your maid returns?”

“Thank you, it would be most kind of her if she could. I’m expecting our solicitor later today, and he’ll be able to help me with any business that needs to be dealt with, but the presence of another woman would be welcome.”

Mr. Stewart made his goodbyes and went off to find Mrs. Allender, determined that, in the interests of research, he should venture out at night and try to remind himself whether foxes really did sound like people being murdered.



Jonty sent his card to be presented to Mr. William Mustard (MA Cantab) and was soon ushered into the man’s presence in the little lounge of the Crown, where he was offered both a chair and coffee. The former looked comfortable and was accepted with alacrity but the latter was likely to be a disappointment, so was declined.

“Are you Richard’s son? He said you and he were down here looking into matters.”

Jonty had expected Billy Mustard to be the epitome of a blustering ex-army chap, probably red nosed, the sort who’d taken refuge in the bottle—especially when his father had told him about their rather sodden

afternoon at the club in London. He couldn't have been further from the truth. Mr. Mustard was tall, neat, dapper, a little prim and almost effeminate. His eyes were clear and he looked as if he was sharp as a pin.

A quick re-think of strategy was required, so Jonty started with shaking the man's hand energetically. "Mr. Mustard, I hope you don't mind me calling on you—we rather hoped you might be able to sort out a few things for us. Papa didn't want to ask too much when he met up with you. Didn't seem right and all that." Jonty cocked his head to one side and smiled, a gesture that usually brought success.

"He always was a great stickler for form, your father. We were all great friends together up at Bride's, you know—him, Laurence and me. You're there now, I hear?"

"I am. They must have short memories."

Mustard grinned. "They have, if they've forgiven you about the goat in the porters' lodge."

Jonty groaned. "Will I ever live that down? Will it have to be etched on my tombstone? *Here lies the body of Jonathan Stewart. He took a goat into the lodge and tried to milk it.*"

"Probably. As it will be etched on mine that I lost my love twice over, once to my best friend and the second time to the Prince of Wales."

Jonty was taken aback at the man's candour. "Oh. Would it be disrespectful of me to ask whether you ever entertained hopes of winning Lady Jennifer away from her husband? When the—I'm not sure how to put this..."

"When all the hoo-hah over the child and its paternity sprang up? I have to say I did, Dr. Stewart. I'd waited patiently in case I'd ever get a chance to step in and try my luck. Carried a torch for her all my life, really." Mustard looked wistful, wiping his eyes briefly, although Jonty couldn't tell whether that was from tears or the smoky atmosphere still lingering from the night before. Someone at the Crown needed to learn how to properly air a room.

"Did you—I promise I won't inform the police of any of this but it might be germane to the case—have an affair with her at any point?"

"No. That's what's so galling. She was good to me, like a sister, so kind and gentle. She helped me out many a time, one way or another, but for her the friendship was simply platonic. For me it was the love of my life."

Jonty was moved beyond words by the simple tone this man employed. He understood entirely how he felt, and might have been just the same if Orlando had turned out not to be interested. His father certainly would have pined had the young Helena Forster gone off with one of the ninety thousand men who were said to be courting her. How could they have ever contemplated that this chap might have killed Lady Jennifer? No one speaking to him could think him capable of the deed. "I am sorry, truly."

"Quite alright, old lad. Now, what else did you want to ask?"

"Why you came here, for a start. Papa was a bit surprised to find you in the offing."

“Had to come, Dr. Stewart. Had to come and find out what was happening about my Jennifer. If someone has murdered her I want to be here when the boulder gets caught. I know you’ll be able to do it, I’ve read what Richard put into *The Times* about you solving the Woodville Ward case. Anyone who could lay that old mystery to rest will be able to name which dirty swine suffocated my poor girl.”

Jonty laid his cup down with a thump. It had never occurred to him that news could pass so slowly in this gossip-ridden place but he supposed now, on sober reflection, that the latest murder had rubbed out the murder-that-never-was from the gossiping agenda. “I’m sorry, I thought you would have known. They held an exhumation on Monday. The police have established that her ladyship had a massive brain haemorrhage. She died of natural causes.”

Mustard flinched. “Natural causes?”

“Yes, she was never murdered. Oh, I say...” Jonty leapt forward as his father’s friend suddenly stood up, turned ghostly pale then sank to the ground like a stone, catching his head on the table edge.

“Mr. Mustard, Billy...”

The man was out cold, a nasty red mark above his temple already starting to swell. Jonty called for assistance, insisted a doctor was fetched immediately, and wondered how he was ever going to explain all this to his father.



Sergeant Cohen poked his nose around the door to the lounge at the Regal, saw Richard Stewart with his head in *The Pink un*, smiled and sidled over. “Mr. Stewart, can I interrupt you for a moment? I have *news* and as your son isn’t here and I’m short of time I’ll tell you and you can pass the word on.”

“Of particular interest, is it?” Mr. Stewart emphasised the second word of the phrase.

“Perhaps. Not quite what we expected on one front but exactly what you guessed on the other.” He drew up a chair and edged closer in true conspiratorial fashion. “Those jewels, about half of them are fake. I’ve had a man looking at them and it didn’t take him long to sort the wheat from the chaff. Now we just have to try to sort out when they were changed and by whom. He had a feeling the pieces weren’t that recent although he did say they were excellent copies, right degree of aging and everything.”

“So someone profited a few years back, perhaps? Now I’ll assume that news is what we expected. What else did you have to communicate?”

“The fruit of my researches into the family’s finances. They’re all sound as a bell. Lady Jennifer had capital of her own and a steady income from it. She’d made a trust fund for her companion a while back and Miss Jordan lived well within those means. Now she has all her ladyship left and will be very nicely off, even if she’s never seemed to have needed the money. There’s not a whiff of scandal and all her ladyship’s accounts are as straight as you would wish.”

“And the son?”

“He’d been well provided for by his father. The estate isn’t large and is in good fettle. It’s well looked after by the steward and the other business, property and the like, produces a steady income. There have been a handful of largish amounts which went into Laurence’s bank account over the years, all of them said to be associated with luck at the tables. He has some fair outgoings with all his archaeological digs and whatnot although he’s never spent outside of his means, and that’s a pretty substantial pot. Those winnings, or whatever they are, just helped to make the pot bigger.”

“So who’ll now inherit this nice little crock of gold?”

“That’s my next task, to establish the lucky person. A will had been made, or so I’ve been told, and Lady Mary is well looked after. They do seem to have been a sensible family, making sure that their own were adequately provided for. But the entail and the title, some distant relative will swoop in and take that, I’d guess. Some second cousin or the like. Now I have to find out who that person is.” Cohen rose and bowed stiffly, the only way he seemed to know how. “Please give my best to your son.”

“I will, thank you.” Mr. Stewart watched the policeman’s retreating back, considering the new information and trying to fit it into the jigsaw. Laurence had himself been a second cousin or some such distant relative to the man whom the world thought was his father. Was there any significance in the identity of the person who was going to succeed to his title?



“Oliver Carberry” presented himself with admirable promptness in the card lounge just as the clock struck two thirty. Miss Jordan and Miss Robinson were just settling themselves in, although the other player had yet to arrive.

“Ladies.” Orlando bowed stiffly. “I hope we’ll be able to enjoy a nice game or two of cards this afternoon. Do we have our fourth?”

Miss Jordan nodded. “Mr. Wickham will be here soon. Oh, do stop giggling, Geraldine. You will excuse my friend, Mr. Carberry, she can’t think of your fellow professional dancer without musing on Jane Austen.”

“I suspect he’s had to endure that since he was in his infancy—it must be hard to have a name that bears associations. Ah, here he is now.” Seats were taken and they cut for partners. They’d decided upon bridge and Oliver was pleased to see he’d be paired with John for at least the first set of hands. He’d formed an excellent impression of the man’s common sense, leading to high hopes of his bidding.

“Ladies, Mr. Carberry, I’m looking forward to this afternoon.” John deftly dealt the cards as he spoke. “I’m sorely in need of some good company, good conversation and a chance to rest my feet. Do you agree, Oliver?”

“On all points.” Orlando smiled in eager anticipation. John was sufficiently chatty to allow some general talk about the murder to be dealt into the conversation.

“We’re looking forward to not being interrogated.” Miss Jordan picked up her cards and rearranged them as if they were naughty children in a line in the playground, ones who needed to be sorted out.

Orlando’s heart sank. Part of him wondered whether this was some subtle hint they’d seen through his disguise and were shutting the door on questioning, although their expressions gave no hint this was the case. “Now why should that be, Miss Jordan? Have the police had their thumbscrews out?”

“We spent ages yesterday giving statements—as everyone has had to, I admit—but our grilling was protracted because of our closeness to the family. Or I should say mine was. Miss Robinson had only met Lady Jennifer a handful of times and usually among company.”

“And were you really grilled?” Orlando had decided that extreme naivety was the only trump card he had to play out of his investigational hand. “Sergeant Cohen seemed surprisingly like a gentleman when he took my statement.”

“I am being perhaps a little harsh to the constabulary, who have their duty to do.” Miss Jordan laughed and put her cards into a neat pile. “It’s merely that they came on top of being questioned by Richard Stewart and his handsome son, and then poor Miss Robinson being nabbed by yet another inquisitor on Monday morning. One heart.”

The bidding commenced, the hands were played out and the men won their contract of three spades. Miss Jordan took the cards to shuffle and, much to Orlando’s relief, John took the conversation back a chapter. “Now who could be nabbing you who wasn’t a policeman or our good amateur detectives? That Dr. Coppersmith hasn’t shown up, has he?”

Orlando suddenly had to blow his nose, but the ladies didn’t seem to notice anything amiss.

“Oh no.” Miss Robinson, seemingly flustered to have so much attention paid her by two handsome men, and that on top of being allowed to dance with Stewart senior and junior, was happy to give chapter and verse. “It wasn’t a stranger, it was an old friend. Well, I think of him as an old friend, even though he was Lady Jennifer’s friend really. I’d gone to the chemist in the town to make some purchases and there he was, offering me a share of his umbrella when mine caught a sudden gust of wind and blew inside out. He walked me back to the Regal, as he was coming here himself. He asked me all about what was being said, naturally given his fondness for her ladyship.”

“He was too curious by half, Geraldine. I don’t know how you have the patience with him. I don’t know how Lady Jennifer did, either.”

Orlando wondered whether Miss Jordan lacked patience with all men. Enough to belt them one if they made passes?

“He’s a lovely man, Lynette, and it’s a crying shame Lady Jennifer kept him hanging on so long.” The colour in Miss Robinson’s cheeks rose to match the vivid backs of the cards she held. “It’s time someone stuck up for him.”

“He must have been very devoted.” Orlando put his new conciliation skills, acquired in dealing with Paula and Christine, into action. “I find it noble that an older man should aspire to such gallantry.”

“Less of the *older*, Mr. Carberry. He’s very well preserved for his age, rather like Mr. Stewart. But he is gallant, there’s no doubt.” Either Miss Robinson didn’t see her friend roll her eyes or ignored it. “He seemed most relieved when I said I truly didn’t believe any of the other women at the Regal were in danger, that if there’d been foul play with Lady Jennifer it was most likely a personal matter.”

“I think that was rather unwise, Geraldine.” Miss Jordan shook her head and wagged her cards. “Whatever would he think?”

“I know what he thought, because he told me. ‘Miss Robinson, with all this gossip, how can a mere man tell what’s true and what’s just the product of feminine exaggeration and cattiness?’ Three no trumps.”

A rather excited bout of bidding ensued and a hand was played out that Miss Robinson executed with such dash and élan that even Orlando couldn’t prevent her winning it.

“And what happened to your friend?” John collected the cards again to organise them neatly.

“Oh, he went off in the direction of the clubhouse—I haven’t seen him again.”

Orlando carried on with his bridge for the next hour or more although only half of his formidable brain was on it. Jonty had reported word for word, or as near as his vacuous noddle could get to it, what the police had said about Laurence Johnson. *The blow had seemed to require good hand-to-eye coordination.*

And Orlando had remembered someone who possessed those very attributes.

Chapter Thirteen

“Heads. Oh, bums.”

“Jonathan! I’ll tell your mother what you said.” Mr. Stewart pocketed the coin, content to win the honour of questioning the golf professional.

Perhaps the ward of a cottage hospital wasn’t the most appropriate place to be having a game of chance, with the possibility of matron—who made Mrs. Stewart look like a shrinking violet—catching them and sending them packing.

Jonty had accompanied Billy Mustard to hospital; the man was still out cold and the doctor couldn’t predict when he would regain consciousness. He’d sent for his father, who’d come down bearing the financial news from Sergeant Cohen. He also bore a little note from Orlando suggesting one of them might want to go and talk to Dougherty, given that Mr. Mustard seemed to have been on his way to see him on the Monday Laurence Johnson was killed. Their inability to resolve by discussion alone who should do the honours of waiting for Mustard to wake had led to leaving it to chance.

“It makes sense, anyway, what the coin’s decided.” Mr. Stewart tapped his pocket. “You stay with Billy the rest of today and I’ll do the same tomorrow, then at least you can get off to ‘Shingles’ and have a chinwag with Orlando. This case needs solving, Jonty, and you two are the lads to do it.”

“Do we watch overnight? I’m not sure matron would approve. It’s only because I played the investigator card and got her to contact Mr. Wilson that she’s let us hang around outside normal visiting hours.”

Mr. Stewart thought, then shook his head. “No, that would mean you’d get no real rest. We can ask them to be in touch if he wakes and we can get down here fairly sharpish.”

He cuffed Jonty’s arm then set off for the golf club, leaving his son to re-read Orlando’s note and attempt to put this strange puzzle together. Jonty also had another commission to fulfil and went off to cadge some decent paper.

Soon re-seated at the bedside with his pen in hand, Jonty had ample time to put together a short letter while he waited. He was racked with guilt that he’d not made as much contact with people in Cambridge as he should have done, especially a certain lady to whom he’d only sent a couple of postcards. He suspected she’d hardly notice the lack of communication—there’d be other things on her mind and he could guess at some of them.

Dear Miss Peters,

Well, what can I say, except I truly hope you will enjoy every moment you spend examining that iguanodon's metacarpals—if they had such things. I might add that I admire your perspicacity and, were I being rather risqué, would venture that you don't waste your time, do you? My goodness, if we'd had people like you at Trafalgar we might have taken the whole fleet as a prize and got it home safely in its entirety. All joking apart, I'm so pleased you've made a new friend and look forward to hearing every development.

I wish you all the very best.

Jonty Stewart.



Mr. Stewart just caught Dougherty as he was leaving the golf club and immediately invited him over to the hotel bar for a drink. The professional accepted, although he turned down the accompanying invitation to dine, having a prior engagement, or so he said. They took their pints into a nice quiet corner, both of them aware what the next few minutes would hold. Everyone at the hotel now knew that an assignation with the delightful Richard Stewart could only mean an inquisition was on the way.

“Mr. Dougherty, we're in a strange position, my son and I. We were picking apart the strands of one Gordian knot only to have it dissolve in our hands and another appear, one in which all the threads we discovered first time around now seem to make a lot more sense. I never met anyone who seemed to have a motive to kill Lady Jennifer but her son is quite a different matter.”

The golfer nodded then took a deep draught of beer. “He was never the most popular man in the world—perhaps only his father really loved him, which is a sad thing.”

Mr. Stewart nodded. “He certainly doesn't seem to have gone out of his way to avoid making enemies. So we have to consider who hated him enough—or who profited enough from his death—to warrant such a brutal attack. It must have taken quite a whack to lay him out.” He remembered seeing Dougherty trying out the new golf clubs the last time he'd been interviewed; the man had remarkably strong forearms.

“And it must have been someone he knew, unless it was all chance. I assume some arrangement had been made to lure him out into the grounds? No sensible chap would go out to meet a stranger.”

“That's what we have to suppose. It cuts down the field a bit, unless someone came here just to commit the deed then returned to London or wherever...” It sounded even more feeble a theory in words than in Mr. Stewart's head.

“Is that likely?” Dougherty seemed rightly sceptical. Whatever else he was, this man was perceptive, forthright and capable of logical thought.

“It's always possible, although I understand no one was reported coming in and out on the train at times which would tie in with the death. No man with bloodstained hands going up to the town with the

milk.” Mr. Stewart shrugged. “So we have a handful of people who were known to Lady Jennifer, some of whom may have had good reason to want her son dead.” He left the conjecture there, enigmatically, hoping the other man would want to speculate further.

“And these people are?”

“Miss Jordan and her companion Miss Robinson, Lady Mary, yourself.” If Mr. Stewart had expected Dougherty to bridle against his name being on the list he ended up disappointed.

“I think you’re forgetting a few people there, you know. What about Billy Mustard? He’s suddenly appeared—came up to see me, wanted all the gen on what had been going on here and who I thought had murdered her ladyship. And of course there’s you. You knew the family well enough, shouldn’t you be classed with the suspects?”

Mr. Stewart hadn’t anticipated having the wind taken out of his sails quite so abruptly. “Me? Why should I want to kill Laurence? What good would it do me?”

“What good would it do any of us? Except the satisfaction of ridding the earth of a particularly odious specimen and perhaps avenging his father in the process. You and old Sir Laurence were very close, weren’t you?”

Mr. Stewart had the sensation that his mouth was opening and shutting with not even a squeak coming out. “Avenge his father? I have to say I really don’t follow your way of thinking.” He took another swig of beer, in the hope it would oil his brain cells.

“I’ve always wondered whether young Laurence rather played up the ‘father’s by-blow’ side of things once matters started to go downhill with his mother. Maybe hinted he knew that he was the actual, bloodline son of the man who was supposed to have adopted him. Oh yes, I know the story, all the staff did.”

Mr. Stewart recalled the story his wife had got out of Mrs. Vickery the cook right back—millennia it seemed now—when the investigation had begun. “The cad. If that’s true, it’s monstrous.”

Dougherty shrugged. “It’s just a theory. I suggested it to your friend Mr. Mustard but he didn’t seem to buy it. You might have done, though, enough to give young Laurence his comeuppance.”

“Let me assure you, Mr. Dougherty, I would never do such a thing. I’m a stickler for the Ten Commandments and I’d never ignore that one of them is a specific injunction not to murder.” Mr. Stewart finished his beer and took his leave, along with great umbrage.

A good thirty minutes later he realised he’d quite possibly been had good and proper. He’d been put so much onto the back foot he’d completely forgotten to ask the golf professional what *he* had been doing on the Monday night, whose name he had given to Billy Mustard in connection with Lady Jennifer’s death, and whether *he* felt like avenging old Sir Laurence.

So cross with himself that he used a variety of words far worse than any Jonty usually employed, Mr. Stewart stomped off for a bath, wondering how on earth he was going to explain this abject failure to his son. The little note under the door was the last straw.

Look what you've done.



The parlour at Shingles was warm and welcoming. The soup, cheese and homemade bread tasted like a feast and they had the whole afternoon to spend together, meaning plenty of time to discuss the case and do anything else they wished.

Jonty smeared his bread thickly with butter and waved his knife around—mid-spread—to illustrate his point. “Miss Jordan wasn’t quite what I expected, you know. I’d pictured a rather birdlike little creature, lacking in spirit. In my admittedly limited experience that’s what these companions tend to be like, all the life crushed out of them from having to bend to the whims of their benefactresses. That could hardly be applied here—she’s a fine-looking woman who’ll find her own way in the world.”

“She certainly doesn’t seem to live up to the cliché. I’ve been most impressed with her, she seems honest and hardworking and not at all sorry for herself.” Orlando cut his bread neatly, hardly a crumb daring to escape; perhaps he’d threatened them with one hundred lines if they fell on the floor. “I know she’s been left well provided for, but it must have been hard to lose someone so close. I’m glad her friend’s turned up to keep her company now things have become even more entangled. Although why women feel the need to bicker so much beats me.”

“It seems to be in their nature. What was it about? Anything to help our cause?” Jonty licked the last smear of jam from his fingers.

Trying to keep his thoughts above waist level, Orlando marshalled his pieces of bread. “I doubt it. Miss Robinson seems to have a bit of a thing for Billy Mustard, that’s all.”

“Poor thing. Not that he’d notice.” Jonty sighed. “Now, we’d no reason to suppose either of them killed Lady Jennifer, but they’d ample motive to whack the son one. Miss Jordan really is very angry about his unwanted attentions and the general way he annoyed his mother with his behaviour. And she’s still under suspicion now it turns out those jewels were replaced. *She’s* the one who had the best access to them. You need to keep working your charm on those two, Orlando, you and your mate John. You both seem to enjoy dancing with them—you were almost smiling the last time I saw you put Miss Jordan through her paces.”

“Miss Jordan is an excellent dancer, her companion less so but still agreeable. It’s a pleasure to escort them around the floor.” Orlando stopped short and looked puzzled. “I hope one of them hasn’t got a crush on me, as well.”

Jonty shrugged. "I suspect all the women at the Regal have a bit of a crush on you, Orlando, or should it be Oliver, if we're talking dancing? I must try to be consistent. I have a huge crush on you, had one for weeks before you were brave enough to entice me up to your room and try to seduce me."

"I never did that. You are such an idiot. It took me an awful long time to even summon up the courage to touch your hand. Good grief, Jonty, I was such a twit back in those days, I may not have wanted to admit it then but I freely say so now. I hadn't the first idea of what it was like to kiss someone, let alone seduce them, and my ideas of what was proper to pass between two people who loved each other, I simply blush to think of it. If we'd gone with my ideas we would have never..." Orlando was quietened with a huge kiss.

"We would never have done anything but kiss or hug and I would have ended up with grey hair by now. And a nervous twitch. What we *do* do—quite legitimately as far as I'm concerned as we're deeply in love with each other—is much preferable." A sly expression crept over Jonty's face. "I wonder what Miss Jordan does, up in her suite with Miss Robinson?"

"Plays bezique and crochets scarves, I would imagine. Why are you grinning like that? What are you talking about?"

"Crush on Billy Mustard notwithstanding, I wouldn't be surprised if those two ladies have a similar relationship to us."

"Never. Women wouldn't do that, would they?" Orlando looked both blank and horrified. "I mean *how* could they? It's not as if..."

"I don't want to even contemplate how such things are organised and I bet we couldn't even ask Miss Peters, as this would be out of her purview. But I've seen the glances that pass between them and they remind me of Papa and Mama or you and me. I'm talking about love, Orlando."

"I don't believe you. I think they're just friends. And I don't think women do that sort of thing amongst themselves. Ever."

"And I think the mathematician protests too much, actually. If you ever lose this divine innocence I will go mad. Once it gets to the point where there are no longer things to amaze and shock you I'll have to get Mrs. Ward to sew me into a hammock and cast my body into the Cam. Down near that place we went punting." Jonty leaned forward and kissed his lover with a wonderful mixture of tenderness and sheer hunger. "We were a bit hurried last time. We should make it different this."

"Now that's one thing I won't argue with." Orlando gently caressed the hair at the back of his lover's neck. "I love you more than anything. I hope you realise that, you great idiot."

"You should give lectures about amorous speeches. Romeo could produce nothing to equal the beauty and wonder of that last phrase. How I haven't melted at your feet is beyond me."

"One day I shall murder you and not even your father and Sergeant Cohen combined will be able to solve it. I have plans written in my notebook..." Orlando kissed his friend again, with an enormous amount of passion, drawing him closer and closer, "...but I won't execute them quite yet."

“And what is that supposed to mean?” Orlando lay in an attractive heap, watching Jonty thrust his chest forwards and beat it with his fists.

“Uggamugga. Don’t laugh—I’m trying to be all wild and dominating and you’re supposed to be either cowering and pleading for mercy or swooning in my arms. Either would do but laughter will not.”

“I’m sorry to be such a disappointment. Would it suffice for me to lie back and let you have your wicked way with me?”

“That would be more than adequate, or—as we troglodytes put it—oogahmoogah. You could struggle a little bit but only a token amount or else it gets unpleasant.” Jonty drew back, made a bound for the bed and bounced onto it next to Orlando, then took a slightly softer spring to land on top of him. “Umgamunga.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? And aren’t you cavemen a little short on original dialogue? Everything sounds the same. How would they know if you wanted a romantic encounter or were just trying to find your way to the nearest rhino hunt?”

“They would have used a lot more gestures than I do. Anyway you’re supposed to be looking at least a little timid, or in thrall to my manliness. Could you decide which and then attempt it. Hm?” Jonty removed his jacket, quickly slipping off his uncavemanlike cufflinks and tie.

“As I am always in thrall to your intense masculinity I’ll opt for the former, then.” Orlando thrust his hands under his lover’s armpits, ticking without mercy.

“That’s not fair—hardly within the spirit of a *bit* of resistance. Anyone would think you didn’t want me to seduce you.”

“Perhaps I don’t.” Orlando tried to look convincing.

“Rot!” Jonty extricated his lover’s hands; it wasn’t difficult, Orlando only playing at hard to get. “Come here, you big daft pudding.” He pressed him onto the bed, madly grabbing at buttons and buttonholes.

“If you’re not a bit more gentle, you’ll have most of those off and Mrs. Ward will go mad. You had a hard enough time explaining away the last lot of bodice ripping you did.”

“Never ripped a bodice in my life.” Jonty attacked the maddening little fly buttons.

“Don’t prevaricate, you know what I mean. Oi! Gently does it.” Orlando didn’t want his clothing assaulted in quite such a violent fashion and was afraid that the fly buttons would start springing off in all directions. They’d never be able to explain that to Mrs. W. She had only just believed—or pretended to believe—the nonsense about the shirt and the door jamb.

“We cavemen are never gentle—rough by visage and by nature.”

“You cavemen will be doing without if you can’t learn a few rudimentary Cro-Magnon manners.” Orlando drew Jonty close and kissed him roughly, unable to resist the primitively driven pile of muscle pinning him down.

“That’s more like it. Kisses are meat, drink and antlers to us cavemen.” Jonty returned the kiss with interest and finally managed—in the process—to get Orlando’s shirt open and his vest up to his collarbones. “Now that’s hardly a Neanderthal chest. Thou art veritably a smooth man, whereas we—” he finished unbuttoning his own shirt and drew up his vest, “—troglodytes are a hairy men.”

“That’s not proper grammar.”

“We hunters of the great mastodon sneer at grammar. We eat our meat raw and take our pleasures at will.” Jonty dived for his lover’s chest and began to pepper it with kisses and the odd bite.

“If you’re hungry for some raw meat I’m sure Mrs. W has some sausages in the larder.”

“We pursuers of the great brown bear spit on sausages. Only fit for children and toothless grannies. We like our meat straight off the hoof.” Jonty nibbled his friend’s shoulder, having managed to expose that much of the *smooth man*.

At this point Orlando decided he’d had quite enough and didn’t want to be on the menu, so flipped his lover over onto his back and pinned his arms down. “Dinner is fighting back, I’m afraid. It might be nice to be nibbled by you but you’re getting perilously close to where any marks will be visible and I suppose you’ve forgotten that I’m dancing tonight. I don’t want to appear with bites up my neck, thank you. Or do troglodytes sneer at dancing, too?”

“They do but I don’t.” Jonty sighed languidly and let himself go limp. “Fed up with being all Attila the Hun. Far too exhausting. If you’d fancy a nice naughty time with a slightly tired Kildare Fellow in Tudor literature then he’d be more than willing to oblige.”

“That would suit me very well.” Orlando didn’t have much work left to get his “pursuer of the brown bear” entirely undressed. The magnificent hairy chest and smooth thighs, the delicate curves of the hip bones, were enough to drive anyone wild with desire, although he didn’t need any such stimulus. Jonty in shirt sleeves and braces bent over a hoe in the garden was just as exciting; Orlando wondered if he’d spend his whole life catching a glimpse of his lover, having inappropriate thoughts and having to wait for the right moment to put them into action.

“Come on.” Orlando ran his fingers down his lover’s breastbone, outlining the ribs and letting them wend their way through the concave hollows down to the edge of his pelvis. Strong bones, encased in strong muscles. Tracing their curves was a delight, exploring the nooks and crannies of Jonty’s frame was as powerful an aphrodisiac as any man so inclined might want. The smooth skin of his thighs led round to the softer skin on his buttocks, skin which hadn’t suffered in rucks on rugby pitches. Orlando sighed. “Extraordinary.”

“What is? My magnificent body? Taken you a while to realise, then.” Jonty’s hands and lips were making explorations of their own, finding those parts of Orlando’s flesh which drove him mad when they were caressed or kissed. The small of his back, the little depression above his collarbone, the back of his arm, between his legs.

“I’ve always thought you had a wonderful body, although why I should tell you so astounds me. You’re vain enough already. I was just thinking how tender your skin is—like a baby’s.” Orlando caressed the downy flesh around his lover’s navel, the immaculate hide which curved over his abdomen. “Why isn’t this like a battlefield from all that diving under forwards’ feet you insist on doing?”

“I’d say because the angels watch over me, but that’s a lie. Luck, simply luck.” Jonty traced the ugly red scar on his lover’s thigh where a stray boot had made a mess of it during some ugly match. “Medals of honour, these things. To be treasured.”

“Then you should have your fair share, for me to admire.” Orlando’s hands moved towards the other parts which earned his admiration, both for beauty and prowess. Strange how the innate absurdity of the human frame could be so wonderfully employed and look so beautiful when seen through the eyes of love.

“Turn or turnabout?”

Orlando knew what the question meant. Maybe all pairs of lovers had their codes, secret ways of making desires known which anyone could hear and be none the wiser. He wouldn’t speculate—the matters of his own bedroom were enough for any man. “Turn, please, unless cavemen sneer at that, too.”

“Cavemen can go hang themselves.”

Rain began to beat the windows, the gloomy sky which had darkened this last hour producing its threatened burden of drizzle. There was no dampening of mood in the bedroom, the heat of entwined bodies and impassioned spirits filling the air with an almost perceptible ardour. They were close now, both of them, Orlando barely able to keep himself in check until they’d become one.

Even then, it wasn’t their usual long, drawn-out union—coupling and separating, calming down and beginning again—they’d been too long apart, under too much tension to take things slowly. It seemed only a matter of seconds before Orlando buried his face in his lover’s shoulder, holding back the embryonic moans. The floors and walls of Shingles weren’t as thick as those of Forsythia Cottage and there were limits to what even Mrs. Ward should be made to endure.

Jonty was silent, the only indication on his face of the earth-shattering feelings within being the look of deep, wild concentration—seen only when he was in ecstasy and trying to keep quiet about it, or lost in consideration of the early sonnets. They stayed coupled, breath slowing, bodies relaxing and ceasing their untamed trembling. It felt right. It always felt right.



Orlando didn’t sleep, unlike Jonty who almost immediately afterwards snuggled down into the crook of his lover’s arm and dozed off, oblivious to the animal scents of sweat and passion which lingered in both bed and air. Instead he watched and noted every little thing about Jonty’s face, body, hair. For all he knew it might be days before they had such an opportunity to be together again—he didn’t wish to waste a minute of it.

Jonty always seemed to lose a good five years when he was asleep. The miniscule wrinkles that had begun to arise about his eyes and brow disappeared, to leave him looking boyish and vulnerable. For all the well-developed muscles which graced his arms and shoulders, he looked just like a cherub or some statue of Antinous, an ideal of manly beauty. His bright blue eyes were mercifully shaded. Orlando sometimes found the full gaze of them rather disconcerting and at this point, after an ecstatic reunion, he would feel them penetrating to his very core and saying, *Isn't it wonderful? We're together and you lose every ounce of control.*

A smile played about his lips, speaking of satiation and supreme joy. Jonty Stewart was clearly fulfilled, happy and possibly dreaming a rerun of the events of the last half an hour—who knew what precisely went on in that aristocratic and mischievous noddle? This smile completely unmanned Orlando, almost bringing him to tears, especially when he remembered only *he* could produce that particular look on that particular face.

“Hello, Orlando.” Jonty stirred. Even his sleeping brain must have known there was no capacity for long slumbers in his lover’s arms. “It truly is lovely to see you. I suspect you’ve not slept a wink, what have you been up to?”

“Gazing upon perfection.” Orlando fingered the little crucifix that danced around Jonty’s neck as he turned to make himself comfortable.

“Ah now, that can’t be so.” Jonty yawned and stretched, his muscular arms quite distracting Orlando, making him have impractical desires. “You have no glass to hand—you would need a mirror to be truly studying perfection. And you’re blushing. My joy is now complete.” Jonty drew his lover to him for a soft kiss. “I have missed sleeping with you so much, my only love.”

“I’ve missed you terribly, too. To be so close and not to be able to touch you or talk to you, apart from everyday pleasantries. If we didn’t have this cottage I would have gone mad.”

“How do you think I’ve felt? Seeing you squiring all these ladies around the floor? I’ve had the most inappropriate thoughts for the ballroom of such a respectable hotel. I keep worrying that someone will notice.” Jonty grinned, wriggling his little nose along his lover’s chest.

“It’s not just the sharing the last favours I’ve missed, it’s this. The intimacy, the sharing of thoughts and time together. It would have been easier almost for us to be at opposite ends of the country. Then I wouldn’t see you and wish...” Orlando swallowed hard.

“Come on, we have a murder to solve and while it may not be a romantic thing to contemplate, at least it’ll stop us getting too maudlin. We must be getting closer. Who’s in the frame?”

Orlando surreptitiously wiped his eye as he reached for his notebook. “The grieving widow first and foremost. Let’s say that Sir Laurence found out she’d been having another dalliance. I wouldn’t put it past her, she has the potential to be quite brazen.” Orlando remembered how he’d been accosted out by the sea wall—it hadn’t accorded with the image of the *quiet little thing* they’d built up. “Does that really work?”

“It’s the quiet ones you have to watch, Orlando. I know that from experience with you. Ow.” Jonty manoeuvred his bottom out of slapping range. “It’s possible, given the amount of time she was in the grounds ostensibly looking for her husband, but it doesn’t feel right. Those jewels come into it, I’m sure.”

“Lynette Johnson, then, has she motive enough?”

“If Sir Laurence started trying his old nonsense, perhaps. Although it does seem extreme to resort to murder when a kick in the unmentionables would do the trick. How she got him out into the garden would be a mystery, although a promise of an assignation might have worked.”

“Ah, but what if she’d been substituting the old girl’s jewels and ‘himself’ had found out? He might have been the one to organise a showdown.”

“That’s a neat word—showdown. Not heard you use it before. Learned it on the dance floor, did we?”

Orlando rolled over and slapped his lover’s bottom, again, extremely hard.

“Thank you so much, greatly appreciated. Trouble is there seems to be no evidence of money finding its way into Miss Jordan’s account, does there?”

Orlando had hoped his friend would say some such thing; it gave him an opportunity to deliver a lecture. “And you say I’m naïve. Jonty, you take the biscuit sometimes. If I were to begin selling off all your valuables I wouldn’t be so daft as to put the money in my bank account or even hide it under the bed. I’d have someone I trust take care of it, as Miss Jordan might have Miss Robinson do. Have the police checked *her* financial dealings?”

Jonty whistled. “I don’t think they have, you know. That’s a very good point—we’ve probably been looking in too tight a circle for the proceeds from those jewels. We need to widen the net.”

Orlando felt full of himself. He had more smug little points to make and was going to enjoy them all. “Now, there’s been someone in this investigation I’ve had my eye on from the start, that golf professional. It pains me to say it but your father made a bit of a hash of things there.”

“Poor old bird, he looked so dreadfully ashamed of himself. Although it’s happened to both of us, that sinking feeling of coming away from an interview and realising you’ve left the key question unspoken. At least Dougherty won’t be able to play the slippery eel with Mr. Wilson. The chief inspector will play him like a fish on a line and we’ll all be the wiser come tonight.” Jonty leaned up on one elbow, his muscular chest emerging from the covers and momentarily distracting his better half. “Now why did the master of the mashie niblick attract your attention?”

“Partly because he was so pally with her ladyship. It made me wonder all sorts of things, like whether he was involved in a relationship with her—don’t snigger, she’d been one man’s mistress and she must have enjoyed *that sort of thing*.”

“Like you then, in that respect. Ooh. Don’t pinch. Especially don’t pinch *there*.” Jonty rubbed his sore bottom. “If that bleeds I’ll never get a plaster to stick.”

“Shut up then. When the matter of the dodgy jewellery came up I contemplated whether he might have been involved—there can’t be a lot of money in golfing, really. I could never make any sense of his being the murderer, so I sort of forgot about him. When this case got turned on its head I remembered how much he seemed to dislike young Sir Laurence, then I thought of the police and how they thought the blow might have needed good hand-to-eye coordination. So he came back into my mental limelight.”

“It’s a point. I can see him wielding a rather heavy wood and clonking the bloke one. However, as a theory, it doesn’t bring those jewels in—unless he knew Laurence had been the one to pop them—or found that out from Billy Mustard or something. I do wish I knew what they’d said to each other, if Mr. M made some remark which encouraged Dougherty to want to go on a killing spree.”

“One victim hardly constitutes a spree.” Orlando swallowed hard, the entwined memories of the notes pushed under the door and Jonty’s sleeping face threatening to unman him. “Unless he or she has further plans. Any more notes?”

“Yes, but more admonitory than ominous.” A quick rummage in Jonty’s pocket produced the slip of paper. “See? Is it the killer taunting us for having driven him to murder or the person who substituted the jewels annoyed because now the trick’s out in the open?”

“Maybe it’s neither.” Orlando had the seed of a thought, one which needed to germinate without little muscular annoyances grubbing it up. “How is our Billy Mustard, by the way? Regained consciousness yet?”

“Not yet, poor old thing. He must have been so relieved to hear his lady love hadn’t been murdered he just fainted right away. Awfully bad luck to land where he did, something hard whacking the old noddle.”

Orlando lay back, screwing up his face in thought.

“You look very theatrical when you do that, as if this constant playing a part is starting to rub off in real life. I shall resist whacking it out of you.”

“And I’ll ignore you, as usual. To *nos moutons*, Jonty. Stop wondering who said what to who and concentrate on the facts.”

“You sound like our friends Drs. Panesar and Sheridan with their dinosaur theories. Blimey.” Jonty shot upright in bed, sending both counterpane and his lover flying. “I knew there was something in that letter from Miss Peters.”

“What letter?”

“The latest account of her pursuit of Dr. Sheridan. He said something about *hearsay becoming fact without enough evidence to back it up*. That’s what’s happened here, hasn’t it?” Jonty lay down again, pulling up the cover. The air suddenly felt awfully cold. “You understand what I mean?”

After only a moment’s thought, Orlando nodded. “I’m afraid you’re right—and that would fit an elegant theorem to work on all sorts of fronts. The one person who needed money and then got it, and the fact it happened a while back is suggestive. Lady Jennifer wasn’t daft, or blind.”

Jonty sighed, snuggling further into the covers. “No, she wasn’t. She was her own woman, independent and ready to look after those who mattered to her.”

Orlando ruffled his lover’s hair, not that it needed much more tousling than it had received already in this bed. “I think that would neatly wrap up the mystery of the paste gems.”

“And the murder? Can we be sure?”

“It all depends on what passed between two people on Monday.”

“There were lots of pairs of people in the offing that day, and plenty of meetings, intentional and not. On such simple things the course of events turns.” Jonty sighed and lay back. “Can you work the notes into your theorem, as well?”

“I can. That’s possibly the most ironic part of it all.” Orlando slid out of bed, in search of clothes, paper and pencil, in that order. There was only so much shocking Mrs. Ward could take. “Let’s work through from the start, who was where when the notes came, who knew what at which point, how long it takes to walk from Ramsgate and whether it’s easy to get your room number from the hotel register.”

“Any more ‘wh’ words to throw in?” Jonty wrinkled his nose and reached, reluctantly, for his shirt. “I think you’d better kiss me again and give me a hug. I’m going to need all the strength I can muster.”

Chapter Fourteen

“You can come in now, but you mustn’t worry him unduly.” The matron of the cottage hospital was starched beyond even the excesses that Nurse Hatfield, the tyrant of St. Bride’s, could manage. Jonty wouldn’t bet against her slicing a man’s finger off if she turned her apron too quickly. “He’s awake but he’s still weak and I don’t want him to take a turn for the worse.”

Mr. Stewart produced his most winning smile although neither his nor his son’s radiant beam could melt the heart of this Amazon. “I promise we’ll be as gentle as possible. Mr. Mustard is an old friend of mine and I wouldn’t have him distressed for the world.”

Matron looked as if she didn’t believe a word of any of it, yet she allowed them to enter the little side ward where the man was staying.

“Dickie, how lovely to see you, and your son as well. Dr. Stewart, I would offer you my hand but I’m feeling extraordinarily weak at present.”

“Now don’t you worry, Billy, we can do without the handshakes just for today. We wanted to make sure you’d started to recover from that bump of yours. You did give my son a turn.” Mr. Stewart gently cuffed his friend’s arm and took a seat on the leeward side of the bed, leaving the *weather rail* to his son.

“Very nasty fall, Mr. Mustard. How’s the old noddle feeling?” Jonty adopted tones suited for the hospital bedside rather than interrogation. The whole situation was extraordinary.

“Not so bad, Dr. Stewart.” The invalid was obviously not just being brave; he really did look remarkably chipper for having received such a blow.

“Are you up to answering a few questions? I know it’s a pain but we’d love to get this matter sorted.” Jonty produced his notebook, more for show than for practicality.

“I’ll do my best. What do you want to know?” Mustard wriggled himself into a comfortable position on the pillows.

“A few years ago you were in a spot of bother, financially. Did Lady Jennifer help you out?” This was Jonty’s pet theory now, ever since the revelatory sojourn in the bed at Shingles, and he was going to pursue it. Mr. Stewart would have his turn soon enough.

“She did.” Mustard smiled contentedly, as he always did at the mention of his sweetheart’s name.

“And did the money come from the sale of her jewellery?”

“That’s correct. My, Dickie, I knew your son was bright but he’s really worked this out well, hasn’t he? Would you like to hear the whole tale?” Mustard waited for both his interrogators to nod then

continued, “She was such a kind woman, as openhearted as they make them. When she heard I’d fallen on hard times she decided the best thing she could do was to have some of the jewels she’d inherited, or been given, replaced with good imitations then send the profits my way.”

“Why go to all that palaver? Lady Jennifer had plenty of other financial resources.” Jonty thought he could guess the answer but wanted to hear it said.

“She had a variety of reasons and they all added up to making it the right thing to do. Not wanting old Sir Laurence to know was the main one. If she left her capital and investments alone there wouldn’t be a trail to follow, as it were. She said it felt like poetic justice when she sold some of the jewels she’d got from her husband. As far as she was concerned he’d faked the matter of young Laurence’s provenance—if he was passing off his own son as being unrelated to him, a counterfeit if you like, then why shouldn’t she do the same to some of the stuff he’d given her? It all made perfect sense to Jennifer.” Mustard shrugged. “I confess, I find it hard to condemn anything that Jennifer did, even if I don’t fully understand it.”

“Do you think he was Larry’s son? I can’t for a moment imagine the Laurence Johnson I knew being both so unfaithful and so devious.” Mr. Stewart looked pained; he couldn’t hide his worry that the answer he’d receive wouldn’t be the one he wanted.

“I really couldn’t say, old chap. Laurence certainly looked like the old man and people do go astray—even loving, faithful husbands can have their moments of folly.”

Mr. Stewart, who’d never had a moment’s adulterous folly in all his married life, looked dubious. “Thanks for your candour, Billy. Such is the way of the world.”

“Mr. Mustard.” Jonty smiled. He couldn’t help liking the man and hated having to carry out this commission. “Did anyone else know what had happened to the jewels?”

“Of course. Miss Jordan knew all about it, and approved. She even helped with the latest batch.” Mustard smiled his benign, slightly patrician smile. “Lovely pair of girls, her and her friend, very loyal.”

Jonty nodded; he wouldn’t argue with that. “When we talked before, you said you’d come to find out what was happening about *your Jennifer* and if someone had murdered her. You assumed we would be able to put our finger on the killer. Is that what you discussed with Mr. Dougherty?”

Mustard nodded. “It was indeed. Your father had made me suspicious of a certain person and I wanted another opinion on things. Mr. Dougherty was able to fill in many gaps in the family’s history and confirmed my opinion that Jennifer’s heart had been too strong to give out. We assumed it had to be murder, especially as you’d been called in, and we were both inclined to think that *certain person* responsible.”

“But he was abroad, on honeymoon, if I’m right in assuming you meant Laurence Johnson. How could her son have been in two places at once?” Jonty sighed. How could this man, a St. Bride’s man after all, be so lacking in powers of logic?

Mustard smiled again. “Dickie, does your son know about Freddie Franklin-Featherstonhowe?”

Jonty had enough problems believing that Billy Mustard was a real name; this latest mouthful totally floored him. "I'm sorry?"

Mr. Stewart grinned. "That's not a story I've shared with you recently, although I tried to before Orlando interrupted us. I'm sure I told you when you were a lad and I've always assumed that's why you have no truck with alibis. Freddie nicked the halo off the statue in the main court at Apostles' college when we were all up at Cambridge together. We know he did, we saw him do it, but he produced an immaculate alibi that he was dining—with a viscount no less—twenty miles away at the time. We have no idea to this day how he managed to seem to be in two places at once."

"Did he have a twin brother? Or a cousin who might have resembled him enough to take his place?"

"Nothing of the kind." Mustard's eyes shone with excitement as he referred to college life, the days when he was still aglow with hopes. "That's the first thing we thought of. I always believed that somehow he coerced the people he was supposed to be with into saying he was there—a form of blackmail, perhaps."

"I think he used corporal prestidigitation." Mr. Stewart said the words very deliberately, obviously savouring their feel. "The viscount was hosting a large party—I think he just made out to one or two old dodderers afterwards that he'd been next to them at the time. They didn't dare admit they couldn't remember in case anyone thought they were going senile."

"However he did it, he did it. And I assumed Laurence had done the same, been here and got other people, like that wife of his, to say he'd been miles away. Dougherty thought similarly."

A nurse appeared, bearing tea and biscuits and warning them not to overexcite the patient or matron would be shooing them out.

Mr. Stewart wore a look of innocence until she'd left. "Dougherty said that to you? He believed Laurence had killed his mother? But why? What motive could he have had?"

"When I told Dougherty about the jewels, we both wondered whether Laurence had found out that Jennifer had been stripping his bride's inheritance and was leaving her with a load of rubbish instead of the proper stuff. We thought he'd killed her to prevent any more of them being replaced. You believed it, Dickie, or so I concluded from our discussions up at the club."

"I know, but it all seems so thin and trivial now, even if she had been murdered."

Jonty wondered how much of his father's bluster was motivated by guilt at entertaining such notions, especially as they'd acted as a catalyst in the affair. "Why should Laurence come all the way home now to make a fuss? Couldn't it have waited?"

"Because she was in the process of selling off another batch of the stuff. It's being made now, unless someone's put a stop to it. She wanted to make sure I was set up for life—I've been comfortable but she insisted I have more."

“And you anticipated we’d find this out and bring him to book. Or so you said.” Jonty was becoming a little tired with the old boys’ double act. For all that he loved his father, he wished he had Orlando at his side. The man produced a commanding streak at times; it was sorely needed here.

“I did. I had confidence in you.” Mustard seemed less confident now, for the first time faltering in what he said.

“Then why did you take it into your mind to kill him?”

The question hung on the air, unanswered, for what seemed like an age. Jonty resisted the temptation to add another one—he had to make Billy Mustard speak.

In the end he could forbear no longer. “Did you want to get in first? Before the hangman’s noose tightened?”

“Billy, you have to tell us, did you kill Laurence Johnson to avenge his mother?” Mr. Stewart laid his hand on his friend’s arm—clearly the bonds dating back to their time at Bride’s hadn’t weakened. If anything they’d become stronger, Larry and Jennifer, who stood between them in one way or another, now having gone.

“I didn’t know she’d died of natural causes, how could I? I believed she’d been murdered, believed it right up until the time young Jonty here told me and gave me the shock of my life. All for nothing it had been, do you see? All for nothing.” Mustard began to pick at his coverlet.

“I still don’t understand why you sought to take the law into your hands just then. Or how you lured him out into the grounds for that matter. He’d not been in the hotel long—I saw him arrive the evening before he died.” Jonty still couldn’t connect up the last part of the puzzle. In all the cases they’d solved before he’d been able to follow through the chain of reasoning eventually, but not this time. Not yet.

“Oh, that was easy. I left a note for him at the desk saying I knew what had happened to his mother’s jewels and asking him to meet me to discuss them.” Mustard seemed happy to discuss his *modus operandi* even if he was keeping quiet about his motivation.

“A note? The police never told us.” Jonty would spifflicate Sergeant Cohen if he was keeping secrets. He and his father would *never* stoop so low. Well, hardly ever.

“They probably don’t know. I just left it on the counter in a quiet moment and they’d have taken it up with the second post, probably. I addressed the envelope fully so it wouldn’t be obvious at first glance that it came by hand. I assumed he’d get it when he returned—I just said that I’d be in the gardens near the putting green at four o’clock and would come back each night until we’d met.”

“You were determined to see him, then? It was so very important?” Again Billy Mustard became quiet, so Jonty changed tack. “Yet you stayed afterwards. Why not kill him and leave? We mightn’t even have found out you were here, not for a while and maybe not ever.”

“I wanted to see what happened, whether you and Dickie would come across my trail.”

“But I ask you, Billy, why?” Mr. Stewart could remain quiet no longer. “None of this makes any sense. You felt we were going to bring Laurence Johnson to justice yet you killed him, deliberately luring him out to meet you. Then, instead of disappearing quietly, you lingered to see what we did? Why on earth would you do all that?”

“Because Jennifer told me to.”

“What?” Both Stewart voices joined in unison, earning them a visit from matron with a stern injunction that if such behaviour was repeated they’d be out on their ears.

“Before she died, she sent me a letter. She told me she was having another set of jewels replaced and she wanted me to use the money to tour the world or some other outlandish thing by which to remember her. That I’d been a wonderful friend to her and she wished she’d realised the fact at the other end of her life.” Mustard smiled wistfully at what might just have been, had he been a fraction luckier.

“And?”

“And she said I was her champion—that’s the exact word she used—the only man to have stayed true to her all the while. And she asked me to remain loyal, to always take up her cause, to fight her corner.”

“So you took that as enough of a justification to kill her son and then to hang around and watch justice play out?” Jonty was beside himself; they were getting closer but still the logic at the heart of the case seemed to be missing.

“I believed he’d killed her and I wanted to be the one who took her part, for once. Sorry, Dickie. I knew you and your son would get to the bottom of things but I didn’t want to come second for once. Always been second where Jennifer was concerned and had to be first this time.”

Now, at last, Jonty understood Mustard’s plight. How awful to be trapped in a hopeless affection, never to be consummated. “What did Laurence say when he met you? Didn’t he think it odd to be summoned in the middle of the night?”

“A bit, but I’d made it plain there were people in the Regal who were spying every bit of scandal out and I wanted to give them the slip. Sorry, Dickie, had to be done. He must have understood. He turned up that first night.”

“And what in heaven’s name did he say?” For the first time in his life Jonty wished his father was a thousand miles away.

“He was hopping mad, right from the start. Asked what I knew about his mother’s jewellery that was so damned important. Had she really been pawning it or some such nonsense?”

“So he knew about the substitution?”

“He said he’d suspected it from the time of his wedding. He’d been looking closely at some of the pieces his bride already had and, although they were the real thing, there were some other pieces he wanted checked over. He’d confronted his mother about it straightaway and they’d had a blazing row. I explained it had all been Jennifer’s doing, it being her own choice what she did with her own things and he went—well

it's the sort of thing old Freddie Franklin-Featherstonhowe would have called *flipping berserk*. Said that his mother had no right to substitute some of the things, said that old Sir Laurence had always meant them for his daughter-in-law. He was so mad I thought he was going to thump me."

"So did you hit him in self-defence, Billy?" Mr. Stewart desperately wanted that to be the case, although the subsequent smothering of a helpless man suggested more calculation than acting in the heat of the moment.

"Ah. I could say *yes* but that wouldn't be entirely accurate. I didn't strike him until I'd asked him what he'd done to his mother. Then I couldn't stop myself from, well, carrying out the deed. Not too proud of myself, but where Jennifer was concerned I never had any restraint or logic."

Jonty wished he knew the exact words spoken. Had Billy Mustard been in total ignorance or had the murder been for another reason, one that didn't seem likely to come to light? "But he knew by then that she had died of natural causes."

"Then I wish he'd told me and saved himself. But he didn't. He just kept telling me she'd played him false and then rambling on about how he bet she'd never touched any of the pieces that Bertie gave her, only the ones from Larry. He called her a—I can't utter the word, Dickie, not here—but when I heard him say it I just snapped and belted him one with my walking stick. Always was a good aim—he went down like a bird at a shoot and then I, well, I finished him off. Not proud of it, should have given him a chance to explain himself but he called her...he called his mother..." Mustard didn't need to finish the sentence. His hearers could guess what sort of name had been used and how it must have inflamed a man whose love had suffered much but who'd worshipped without question.

Jonty sighed. Why was life so ridiculously complicated and why did nice people do stupid and illogical things?



The garden terrace of the Regal was awash with both sunshine and ladies disporting themselves in what might be the final outing for their summer day dresses. Evenings were turning nippy and the days would soon follow suit. The Stewarts, father and son, had a last commission to carry out and were fortifying themselves with a glass of sherry when an attractive feminine voice behind them caught their attention.

"Miss Jordan." Jonty bowed.

"Geraldine has an apology to make." Miss Jordan nudged her friend forwards, the pair of them sporting cheeks redder than the roses on Miss Robinson's dress.

"You've saved us the trouble of finding you." Mr. Stewart indicated a bench, but the ladies declined the offer to sit.

"I was such an idiot, gentlemen. When I saw you at the funeral, Mr. Stewart, and then Lynette told me your son was here, I knew you'd soon be rousing out all that stuff about the jewels and poor Mr. Mustard's secret would be revealed." The words tumbled out, accompanied by flustered movements of Miss Robinson's hands. "If I sent those notes, you might leave things alone. That's what I thought..."

"The trouble is you don't really think, do you, Geraldine?" The words were spoken kindly, as Orlando might upbraid his lover for being woolly headed. "We're sorry if we distressed you, Dr. Stewart, Mr. Stewart."

"Distressed us? Papa was delighted when the first one came. Made him think he was a real detective." Jonty glossed over things; he really didn't want to dwell on the matter. And the thought of Miss Robinson strolling nonchalantly the short distance down from Ramsgate to post the note under their door, as if it were nothing more than an invitation to tea, unsettled him. "Will you dine with us before we leave? To show all's forgiven?" The sooner he could get these women away, the better.

"It would be our pleasure. Come, Geraldine, let's take a stroll along the beach, I fear the weather's due for a change." Miss Jordan bobbed a little curtsey. "Excuse us, gentlemen."

"Perceptive girl." Mr. Stewart eyed the women as they took the path to the esplanade.

"Why do I have the feeling that Miss Robinson's letters are the only part of this saga which she hadn't worked out before us?" Jonty shivered, despite the sunshine. "I wish we'd taken their advice, Papa. Gone before someone got hurt."

"If we hadn't been here, Billy Mustard would still have come down to nose around. It may have been later rather than sooner—the mills of his brain always ground slow—but he'd have talked to Dougherty and those girls would have thrown in their two penn'orth." Mr. Stewart tipped his head towards the hotel grounds. "The outcome would have been the same, you know, here or somewhere else. The same conclusion would have been jumped to."

"But he'd have known Lady Jennifer's death was natural. The exhumation..."

"There'd have been no exhumation if we hadn't been here. Everyone would have still been whispering that there'd been a murder."

Children were playing on the green; their joyful cries and shrieks drifted over, lightening the atmosphere which had fallen over father and son. "There's been a lot of jumping to conclusions, hasn't there? Billy Mustard, Miss Robinson, Lady Jennifer herself about her son's paternity. What a mess."

"The world is a mess, my boy, no matter how much I, or that lad of yours, would like to impose some order on it. Come on." Mr. Stewart put his arm around his son's shoulders. "Cheer up, we'll have company soon and we daren't be caught looking glum."



“Oliver Carberry” was preparing for his penultimate session on the dance floor; he was in John Wickham’s room and the two men were priddying themselves to a state of near perfection.

John chatted happily as he struggled with his black tie. “I see this case is all solved now. The police have decamped with their man, or they will do once matron lets him out of her clutches. I suspect he’ll find prison a lot less of a restrictive regime than the one she imposes. I was in her hospital with an infected toe—one of my particularly hefty partners squashed it during a waltz—and it’s not an experience I would care to repeat.”

“The dancing or the hospital?” Orlando grinned. He would miss John’s friendship—he’d proved to be good, sensible company. If it didn’t mean that all his cover would be gone, he would have invited the man to come up to Cambridge for the Lent bumps or something. But Mr. Wilson had suggested Orlando remain incognito for a few days, until Ashton-Hall returned in all his glory to whisk the ladies around the floor and make surreptitious overtures to some of the men who might just be *that way inclined*. It would allow the whole episode to be rounded off without any further scandal; Mr. Agnew wasn’t sure he wanted word to get around that yet another deception had taken place at his hotel. “I shan’t miss dancing with Lady Samantha Lewis when I return to London. I just hope she doesn’t turn up at the Ritz.”

“Don’t you mean when you return to Cambridge, Oliver? Or should I say Dr. Coppersmith?” John watched contentedly as Orlando yanked at the shoelace he was tying and snapped it in two with a curse.

“How long have you known?”

“Since you arrived. Don’t worry, I haven’t told anyone and you never gave yourself away. I’d seen you before, that’s all, you and Dr. Stewart, at Bath of all places. A very nice young lady whom I know—she’s a nurse there—had got tickets for an open-air production of *Macbeth*. While we didn’t get to sit anywhere near you—hobnobbing with the Duke of Connaught and all, eh, Oliver?—we saw you and Mrs. Stewart. Someone my friend knows who was in the cast told us all about the two Cambridge dons who liked to solve crimes and who’d been helping with the play. I believe Dr. Stewart was a tree?”

“He was the chief part of Birnham Wood,” Orlando said with great pride. “John, I have to thank you for keeping my secret.”

“That was my pleasure. I guessed you were here incognito and I didn’t want to get in the way. Although I did wonder whether you would realise I had twigged about things.”

“I guess I should have done. You were always very helpful in terms of seeming to ask the right question at the right time, to Christine and Paula for example.”

John grinned. “It was fun to be in on the game, only it’s not really a game, is it? I can see why the thrill of the chase is so attractive but that poor old chap having to go to court and face the noose, that’s the ugly side, isn’t it?”

Orlando sighed. “It is. Although if people commit murder they must expect to face the consequences at some point. We’re just agents making it happen—if it weren’t us, it would be someone else.”

John rummaged in a drawer and offered a fresh pair of shoelaces. “So are you going to ‘come out’ about it all? Stand up on the dance floor and declare to the ladies of the ballroom that they’ve not been dancing with Oliver Carberry but with the famous mathematical detective Dr. Coppersmith of St. Bride’s?”

“I’d quite like to, but Mr. Agnew doesn’t think it would be quite the thing. He wants me just to slip away quietly, the day after tomorrow. It’ll be nice to get back to the old college.”

“Educating the sons of the rich much preferable to dancing with their wives and daughters, I suppose? And talking of wives, I understand that Mrs. Stewart is due to arrive this evening.”

“What?” Orlando stopped a fraction short of snapping another shoelace in his alarm. “Mrs. Stewart, here? She can’t. I won’t let her see me like this.”

“Then you’d better adopt another disguise because I have it on good authority she’ll arrive in time to be seeing you trip the light fantastic. I say, do up those laces, you’re going to...” but the injunction not to trip over was lost on Orlando’s back as the man sped out of the door and with no compunction regarding propriety legged it straight to Jonty’s room.

“What’s all this about my mother-in-law?” Orlando didn’t even bother to knock on the door, just barging in and finding Jonty in a state of undress, trousers still over the back of a chair waiting to be slipped on.

“You don’t have a mother-in-law, unless you’ve married that Paula on the side.”

“Don’t play the innocent with me. Your mama, I hear she’s due to arrive at any moment and then she’ll see me dancing.”

“Oh that, yes. The old girl insisted on coming down now that the case has been solved. She assumed you’d be coming out of your disguise and would squire her around the floor a few times. The broomstick is due to land on the roof at any moment, or perhaps she’ll bring the chariot with the knives on the wheels, the one drawn by fire-breathing—”

“Will you never shut up? I can’t dance tonight, not if she’s going to see me. And that’s final.” Orlando sat down and crossed his arms, looking for all the world like a seven-year-old in a paddy.

“Can you two keep the noise down?” Mr. Stewart strode through the interconnecting door like Jove en route to finding out which of the minor deities was making such a din with their lightning bolts. “And put your trousers on, Jonty, for goodness sake, this is not a bordello.”

“I can’t let Mrs. Stewart see me in such an undignified state. I said that from the start.” Orlando folded his arms even tighter.

Mr. Stewart sighed. “Then I’m going to have to talk to Mr. Agnew, aren’t I, and persuade him to let the cat out of the bag.” He produced a theatrical roll of the eyes. “Helena will be so very disappointed, though. She was desperate to dance with you, Orlando. Do you know, apart from a few reels at the Hogmanay ball, she’s never had the opportunity.”

The folded arms relaxed slightly. “I would hate to deny Mrs. Stewart anything she wished, but I can’t let her see me as a *gigolo*.” The last word was whispered as Orlando felt befitted its scandalous nature.

“Then we need to tell Agnew your true identity must be revealed, then you can dance the night away with Mama to your mutual hearts’ content.” Jonty buttoned up his flies.

“I promised Mr. Agnew I’d dance this evening, though. It’s going to be difficult for him to get a replacement at a few hours’ notice. Couldn’t you keep her away from the ballroom, just for tonight? Then tomorrow I can take off my metaphorical mask and I’ll dance with her, and Mrs. Allender and that nice Miss Jordan. All of them, till the cows come home.”

Jonty grinned. “I will. She’ll be disappointed but I’ll explain that her pleasure will be simply delayed not cancelled. And we’ll all three of us persuade Mr. Agnew to let you reveal your true identity. On one condition.”

“What’s that?” This—one of Jonty’s harebrained schemes no doubt—was just the sort of thing he should dread, but anything was better than the alternative.

“Do you remember in France, some of those new dances we saw? Well...”



The ballroom at the Regal was full to bursting. Word had got around that Oliver Carberry was really the famous Dr. Coppersmith and everyone wanted to take what might be their last chance of seeing him whirl around the floor. He’d been hiding away most of the day involved, it seemed, with something highly secret, and Mrs. Spreadbury, who was trying to regain the ground she’d lost in the gossiping stakes, had been trying to imply she knew exactly what he was up to. No one was prepared to listen anymore.

He’d emerged at dinner, making a four with Jonty and his parents, looking as handsome as ever, if not quite so stern. Several females were whispering jealously about how a woman of Mrs. Stewart’s age could work such wonders on this young man, to the extent that he was smiling, laughing and very much at ease.

The four moved into the ballroom where a table had been reserved for them by Mr. Agnew and they watched John expertly taking Mrs. Allender for a waltz. Christine made a beeline for Orlando but he turned and talked to Miss Jordan at exactly the right moment, making it impossible to be invited to dance without being actually rude. Poor Jonty ended up being waltzed around the floor, much to Paula’s annoyance.

And still Orlando didn’t take to the floor, not until the leader of the orchestra began to play the introduction to a rather unusual dance—spiky, almost aggressive-sounding music, unfamiliar to almost all the ears present. At this point Orlando rose and bowed to Mrs. Stewart, who took his hand and let herself be led to the dance floor. The music swelled and the couple, who were the only ones present familiar with the steps, began to flick their legs and promenade sinuously up and down.

“By George!” Mrs. Allender, who’d joined their table, had recognised the music straight away, she being so well travelled. “It’s the tango! Richard, I never knew Helena had it in her.”

“The lads saw it in France in the summer and they’ve been trying to walk her through it all afternoon, with help from that nice lad who waltzed you. I think she’s doing a grand job.” Mr. Stewart’s bosom swelled with pride—his wife was still a magnificent creature. “Don’t you think so, Jonty?”

“She is indeed, Papa. I think this will be talked about at the Regal long after *the murder that wasn’t* and *the murder that was* are forgotten.”



“It’s good to be home, Orlando. Shingles was nice but it wasn’t ours, was it? And it always felt a bit hole-in-corner. I want to be back in my own bed—or yours, not fussy—with my own things about me. And it’ll be an awfully long time before I enjoy a game of charades again.”

Jonty picked up the small pile of post, Mrs. Ward having gone home as soon as the case had been solved and been in residence sufficient time to get things sorted out. There wasn’t a lot to deal with, their ever-resourceful housekeeper having arranged to have their letters picked up daily and forwarded to Shingles post-haste. Although one particular missive, in a very distinctive hand, had arrived in the interim between leaving Kent and arriving home and Jonty was desperate to open it.

“Well, I’m blowed!” He broke out into a huge grin and waved the letter at his lover. “Get a butcher’s at this, Orlando, it’s most sensational thing to come out of St. Bride’s for years.”

“Even more sensational than you and I setting up house and bed together?” Orlando took the little missive, read it, then he too whistled. “Stone me, she’s only gone and done it.”

“She has indeed, and at her age, too. Well, it’s a long time since I’ve been to a wedding, and I shall look forward very much to brushing down the old morning suit and donning a white carnation. Shame we’ll never have our own but perhaps we could whisper the words of the service under our breath and it would sort of count.” Jonty gently caressed his friend’s cheek. “I don’t think Miss Peters would begrudge us part of her pleasure.”

“I’m sure she wouldn’t. Mrs. Ariadne Sheridan. It’s a bit of a mouthful but I hope she’ll be happy.”

“Even if she knows rude words?” Jonty drew his lover to him, to share a kiss.

“Even then. I’d never begrudge anyone the satisfaction of finding their true love, like I have.”

“Soppy pants. I’m so glad you’re back to being my Dr. C. again. You were lovely to look at as a dancing partner but I found it hell not being the one you whisked around the floor. We’ll have to find a way to dance together, won’t we? Even if we have to hire a hall and a band and blindfold them.”

Orlando laid his face on his friend’s hair. “We might just have to do that, you know. To celebrate our next anniversary.” He kissed Jonty’s face, brow to jawline. “I know. We’ll sell off some jewels and rent the whole of the Regal.”

“Splendid idea, Orlando. Then you can be my own private gigolo.”

“I was *not* a gigolo...”

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, especially rugby. 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.

To learn more about Charlie Cochrane, please visit her website www.charliecochrane.co.uk. You can send an email to Charlie at cochrane.charlie2@gmail.com or join in the fun with other readers and writers of gay historical romance at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpeakItsName>.

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He thinks he has everything. Until someone tries to steal it.

Lessons in Temptation

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Cambridge Fellows Mysteries, Book 5

For friends and lovers Orlando Coppersmith and Jonty Stewart, a visit to Bath starts out full of promise. While Orlando assesses the value of some old manuscripts, Jonty plans to finish his book of sonnets. Nothing exciting...until they are asked to investigate the mysterious death of a prostitute.

Then Orlando discovers that the famous curse of *MacBeth* extends far beyond the stage. It's bad enough that Jonty gets drawn into a local theatre's rehearsals of the play. The producer is none other than Jimmy Harding, a friend from Jonty's university days who clearly finds his old pal irresistible. Worse, Jimmy makes sure Orlando knows it, posing the greatest threat so far to their happiness.

With Jonty involved in the play, Orlando must do his sleuthing alone. Meanwhile, Jonty finds himself sorely tempted by Jimmy's undeniable allure. Even if Orlando solves the murder, his only reward could be burying his and Jonty's love in an early grave...

Warning: Contains sensual m/m lovemaking and men taking hot baths.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Lessons in Temptation:

Jonty and Orlando were taking a small pre-prandial sherry in the bar when Jimmy Harding appeared, looking rather flushed.

"Gentlemen, I hope you will pardon me. I've had to run these last ten minutes so as not to be late." Jimmy beamed, looking from man to man as if expecting an immediate flurry of forgiveness.

"Did your meeting with the council go on so long?" Orlando's tone was as stony as his face.

Jimmy shook his head and grimaced. "No, not at all. Although it took a while for them all to turn up and then discuss for half an hour or so exactly *why* they were meeting."

"Sounds like a typical council. It can be like that at Bride's." Jonty sought to provide some warmth of welcome amid the glacial chill his lover emanated.

"It's like that anytime people meet with bees in their several bonnets. Once things got under way I persuaded them fairly quickly that we weren't about to engage in some lascivious production which would sully the morals of the good folk of Bath. And the fact that the Duke of Connaught is coming down to see our first night sort of tipped the balance." He signalled for the waiter, then ordered a glass of beer. "It was afterwards the trouble started. I got accosted, Jonty. Barely escaped alive."

Orlando started, horrified. "A physical assault, in broad daylight?"

Jimmy laughed. "No, that would have been a simple matter of fisticuffs from which I could have made my escape merely bruised and battered. I was accosted by a woman."

“Some people would envy you that.” Jonty smiled. He vaguely remembered a string of women who’d flirted with the handsome Mr. Harding, fascinated by his looks and mellow American accent. He also recalled how disappointed they’d all ended up.

“Well I’d have been glad to swap places with them. This lady was on the matronly side—she was part of the moral majority on the committee. Once she’d decided that I wasn’t about to try to corrupt the city, she insisted I come home for tea, cakes and meeting her daughters. All of them eligible and every one with a face like a barn door, if you get my meaning, Dr. Coppersmith.” He nodded to Orlando, who was finding it hard to remain civil to the man, as he was demonstrating an inclination towards flirting with Jonty again.

“And did the lady in question seem determined that you wouldn’t escape until marriage had been proposed to one of them?” Jonty spoke lightly although he was well aware of the nervous tension in his voice.

“Well, that’s what I thought at first, with all the questions about my family and their business. But then she began to dismiss the young ladies one by one, on errands, until there was just the two of us alone.” Jimmy grimaced. “Tell me, have you ever been in a room on your own with a determined woman of nearly fifty? She was almost sitting in my lap before I managed to persuade her to let me go.”

“Just how did you manage that?” Jonty was keeping half an eye on the mathematical volcano bubbling up at his side. “I know some very resolute women—my mother is one and the Master of Bride’s sister is another. I can’t imagine Ariadne Peters letting any man out of her clutches once she’d set her mind on him.”

“Oh, I suddenly remembered the old ruse my father had once played when he was being ensnared by an extremely plain but very rich, *old* young lady, if you get my drift. I pleaded that I had to get home as I was a member of a very strict ascetic sect who couldn’t be out after dark and had eschewed all the sins of the flesh.”

Fortuitously, the waiter arrived to take them into dinner just as Jonty was developing a fit of the giggles.

“Talking of determined women of a certain age, you never met Mama, did you?” Jonty ushered their guest into his seat.

“I’ve never had that pleasure.” Jimmy waited for Orlando to settle before he sat down. Jonty wondered if he were deliberately trying to unsettle him.

“Now there’s a woman who might well accost you physically, as some of her unwanted suitors might attest.” Nerves made Jonty’s tongue run on. “Or people she has affection for. She whacked Orlando just a week ago, for nothing worse than scientific experimentation.”

“Then I hope she’ll do me the honour of a clip around the ear. You’re a lucky man, Orlando.” If Jimmy hadn’t realised what effect his words were having on Coppersmith, Jonty had. Embarrassment and anger were fighting for mastery on Orlando’s face and in his voice.

Jonty changed the subject to transatlantic travel and the meal went as well as might have been expected, for a while. Orlando tried to remember his manners and not be too antagonistic to Jimmy, as Jonty would no doubt get the hump if he made it too clear he wanted to punch the man. At least he could contribute to a discussion on the virtues of the great liners, and modern transport in general, rather than being made to feel an idiot when they talked about the Bard.

By the time they reached the port and coffee, which they chose to take in the lounge, a superficial degree of mellowness existed among the company, although volcanic emotions still seethed in Orlando's breast.

Fate intervened in the form of an old suitor of Mrs. Stewart's who spotted Jonty, cut him out from his friends, then took him off for a chat regarding the latest doings of the fragrant Helena, which unfortunately left the other two alone.

"You seem very self-assured, Mr. Harding." Orlando had been waiting for his moment to confront this man. With Jonty temporarily occupied, and his spirits emboldened by the wine, he seized the moment.

"I usually feel confident, Dr. Coppersmith. I've been lucky enough in my life to do many things which people have said weren't possible. I rise to a challenge, you might say." Jimmy raised his glass and stared through it, admiring the gentle red colour. "And when I want to do something, I make a point of seeing that I'm successful. I guess that success breeds self-belief."

Cocky swine. Orlando gave the man an icy stare. "Do you achieve everything you want? Doesn't that make life fairly lacklustre?"

"On the contrary, it makes my life a constant delight. And yes, I do tend to get what I want, especially if I want it a lot." He cast his gaze around the dining room, as if looking for something he might take a shine to, let his glance alight on Jonty, linger and then sweep on.

Orlando swallowed hard. There had been an edge to what the man said that chilled him—despite everything that Jonty had averred the day before, he still didn't trust the American as far as he could throw him. Jonty might well be innocent of any untoward interaction with the man, both back in his University College days and now, but he couldn't think the same of Jimmy. "I can't believe you get everything you want." Orlando snorted, trying to add emphasis, and worried that he just sounded ridiculous.

"Want me to prove it to you?" Jimmy's gimlet gaze, blue eyes piercing into Orlando's, suggested he was throwing down the gauntlet. "I think we both know what I want. Let's see if I can get it."

Love? Might as well ask for the moon. But a man can dream...

Captain's Surrender

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Despite his looks and ambition, Midshipman Joshua Andrews hides urges that, in his world, make him an abomination. Living in fear of exposure, unnecessary risk is something he studiously avoids. Once he sets eyes on the elegant picture of perfection that is Peter Kenyon, though, temptation lures him like the siren call of the sea.

Soon to be promoted to captain, Peter is the darling of the Bermuda garrison, with a string of successes behind him and a suitable bride lined up to share his future. He seems completely out of Joshua's reach.

Then the two men are forced to serve on a long voyage under a sadistic commander with a mutinous crew. As the tension aboard the vessel heats up, their unexpected friendship intensifies into a passion neither man can rein in.

Intimacy like theirs can only exist in the shadow of the gallows. Both men are determined their "youthful curiosity" must die before it brings disaster down on them. Yet neither man can root it from his heart. Warriors both, they think nothing of risking their lives for their country. In the end they must decide whether love, too, is worth dying for.

Warning: Contains some mild m/m sex scenes and some graphic violence.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Captain's Surrender:

Peter bowed his head as if he was ashamed of his own smile. "It should still be said. I'm conscious you've trusted me with your career and received only privation in return. But soon I'll have the chance to show that your confidence was not ill placed, and I mean to make the most of that. You shall not regret your belief in me. I swear it."

Instinctively, Josh looked over his shoulder, to where the hatch grating lay in a pillar of faint striped light abaft the mizzenmast. There were no sounds of movement from the deck above, and no feet disturbed the grayish, filtered radiance. The conversation had taken an unexpected turn towards privacy, and he did not wish to be walked in on while he was struggling with the inappropriate joy of these words, or the much more inappropriate things he wanted to say in answer.

"You've already proved that, sir. The absence of a noose around my neck is cause enough for some loyalty, surely?"

"No!" One got used to Peter being still, measured, perhaps stiff, and forgot that he could also swoop into movement like a hawk. Josh found himself seized by both elbows before he'd registered the beginning

of the lunge. “Is that why you follow me? Out of a kind of self-blackmail? Out of fear? I thought...” He swallowed, looking almost sick with nerves. “I thought there was something more.”

Josh breathed in—a breath that seemed to take forever, while his heart paused, frightened, above the great abyss of the future. How easily he could ruin the modest happiness he had attained as Peter’s friend by misinterpreting, by leaping out unsupported into the pit.

“I thought you wanted to gloss over the incident,” Josh said, wiping his hands nervously against the skirts of his coat. Had he missed something? When they came to shore and took lodgings together, they had had a gentle, fearsomely embarrassed conversation about the unfortunate fate of Peter’s rather too well beloved tutor, Mr. Allenby, and then nothing. A few days’ awkwardness and then friendship returning like a balm. But had he read it wrong?

Had the awkwardness been in fact an inept, unspoken invitation? He fought off hope and guilt together. “Frankly, sir, when you kiss a superior officer without invitation, you feel unreasonably fortunate merely to be allowed to let the matter drop.”

Unexpectedly, Kenyon smirked. “I’ll remember that, next time I accost the admiral.” And Josh laughed, sure that he could now turn away, hide his flushed face in the shadows and let the moment pass, leaving him on an even keel again.

But Peter had not let go. It would have taken a saint to struggle against the grip of those long-fingered, elegant hands—and Josh was no saint. Though elbows did not normally feature prominently in his erotic daydreams, when they were separated from Peter’s skin only by a layer of cotton so thin that he could feel the roughness of rope burns, the callus left by a smallsword, he found himself obsessed by them, unable to concentrate on anything else.

“I admit I was a little...taken aback, at the time.”

They moved; Peter’s hands moved, sliding from elbows to biceps, and Josh had to bite his lip against the rush of illicit pleasure, the maddening desire to take the one step forward that would enable him to press himself against Peter, hot and tight together. God, he shouldn’t have thought of that.

“But the more I reflected on the matter, the more I confess I found myself...” Peter’s eyes had a trick of holding the light, as the sea will when the sun is bright, and Josh—oh how he wanted to swim, “...curious.”

No protestations of undying love. It was unsettling—it was almost real. “Curious?” Josh managed in a constricted, breathless voice that was as good as an admission of guilt. If Peter had any sensitivity at all, he *must* know how far he was pushing; he must have the sense to back off now, before it was too late.

“As to what you are willing to die for. I should like to know.”

There were a number of objections Josh could have made, and he did try. He honestly did. With his blood singing and his mouth gone dry he did say, “I...don’t wish to...mistake your meaning.”

Kenyon's right hand stroked over Josh's shoulder, came to rest on the back of his neck, the thumb moving slightly, raising the hairs on his nape in a shiver of delight. By themselves, his eyes had half closed, his face tilted up in mute offering, primed and waiting. He made a last-ditch defense. "I don't want you to do...anything you'd...regret."

And Peter closed the distance between them. They were touching, Josh could feel the planes of that hard chest, was surrounded, invaded by Peter's heat, his scent. Peter was looking down with wide eyes, his own breath coming ragged now, as Josh's fever infected him. "I should like to kiss you," he said, decidedly. "Unless you object?"

The man's voice was like being coated in molasses and licked clean. How was anyone supposed to object to that? "Christ no!" Josh leaned in, surrendering. "I mean yes, sir, kiss me. Oh, yes. Yes, *please!*"

I shouldn't be doing this. Peter snaked an arm around Josh's waist, pleased and intrigued by the way just this small touch made his friend's pulse quicken. He could feel the gasped breath fill the chest pressed against his, and it was uncharted waters from now on, with the forbidden lying like a reef beneath the surface—dangerous, exciting.

How different. He had been lucky enough to know two young ladies in his life, and it seemed natural now to gather his partner gently into his arms, to hold back, careful of her frailty, filled with reverence for a lover so small, so easily hurt. But Andrews was over six feet tall and broader across the shoulders than Peter was himself. Nothing soft about him, and delicate only in spirit. *I really should not be doing this.*

But he wanted to. The kiss they'd shared onboard the *Nimrod* had proved another difference. Drunk, faint, and taken by surprise though he had been, he would have needed complete insensibility to miss the fact that Andrews wanted him with a fury.

Both of the ladies Peter had courted had been respectable, and as such they were untainted by lust, accepting his advances out of generosity—pity even. He had always felt vile for imposing on them—a seducer and debaucher of innocent young women whom he had no real intention of marrying. A libertine, a ruiner of lives. With Andrews there would be none of that. No selfishness, no guilt.

He leaned in, barely having to tilt his head, and tentatively touched his lips to Josh's. That...wasn't so bad. Really, it wasn't. The mouth was warm and firm, the lower lip full, yielding, tempting him to bite. Shifting slightly to press closer, he licked it, tasting, and was rewarded with a little whimper that made him feel warm from head to feet. Mmm...yes, nice.

Josh's arms went around him, pulling him close. A strong hand was behind his head, a second splayed against his spine, stroking down. Easily as that, the balance shifted, and it was no longer him kissing Andrews, but Andrews kissing him—with an ardor that quite undid him. No one had ever, ever wanted him this much.

It dawned on Peter that he was not the one in control of this—the responsibility had been taken out of his hands. Unless he wished to struggle like a reluctant maiden, it wasn't his fault that the hand had twisted into his hair, the kiss deepened and heated, or that the pressure of a hard thigh between his legs had grown into something rather more than merely nice. It was bizarre to be on the receiving end of a tide of desire he couldn't equal, unnatural to be the one who had to be coaxed, pleased, seduced, but—God—the relief! The uncomplicated joy of it.

He heard himself make a low rumble of encouragement, almost a moan, and then Andrews was frantically shoving him away, the caressing hands holding him at a distance. Considerably more aroused than he had expected to be, Peter was ready to be angry at being toyed with, but the expression in Andrews' dark eyes was of fear, surfacing out of a deep, stunned bliss.

“Why...?”

“I heard something.”

In this world, love can put you on the wrong end of a stake...

Blood and Roses

© 2009 Aislinn Kerry

The last thing Arjen wants is a vampire in his bed. The rest of the world may be enamored of the creatures, but he doesn't share the obsession. When local vampire Maikel van Triet pays a visit to the brothel, Arjen tries to slip away—drawing the one thing he doesn't want: Maikel's attention. Arjen's too pragmatic to refuse a paying customer, but Maikel doesn't want his services. All he asks for is a bed, shelter, and a meal before bedtime.

Arjen's reticence and open dislike intrigue Maikel, who's delighted by the jaded young prostitute's attitude, so different from the adoration he's accustomed to. He's never been a regular patron at any brothel, but now he can't keep himself away. He still refuses Arjen's services though, instead demanding Arjen tuck him in with tales of the daytime Amsterdam he hasn't known for nearly two centuries. But when Arjen tries to seduce him into leaving, he realizes they're forging something completely unfamiliar to him: emotional bonds.

It's equally obvious to Arjen that their arrangement is becoming more than either of them expected, and the thought terrifies him. Vampires are shallow, fickle creatures, and Maikel could never truly love another—could he?

Warning: Contains blood, vampire bites, unapologetic prostitution, and lots of gay vampire lovin'.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Blood and Roses:

He leaned back against my wall, watching me from beneath a hooded gaze, and his grin turned to a smirk. "They whisper about us, you know."

I raised my head. "The girls?"

"Perhaps they started it." He shrugged, but there was a glint in his eye, and I knew he enjoyed the speculation. "And told their patrons, and their patrons told their wives, and their wives told their neighbors. The city herself echoes with rumor."

I sat back, hands braced behind me on the mattress. He had not even offered to buy my time yet, and I was humoring him. What on earth was happening to me? "Rumor? About us?"

"Because I ask for you, again and again. You and no other. They imagine a great, torrid affair between us, and I swear I've heard no less than half a dozen variations of the tale." His face was bright with mirth. "Some say you are aloof, and I return to you because I cannot bear to be denied. Others say that I was charmed by your skill, that you have done what no one else in all of Amsterdam has managed and captured my heart. Can you imagine?"

He laughed at the idea of it as I rose and crossed the room. His laughter broke off abruptly when I dropped to my knees before him. The smile melted from his face. "What are you doing?"

"And what is the truth of the story?" I demanded, curling my hands around his calves. "Have I done what no other has managed and captured your heart?"

"Don't flatter yourself." He rocked back, but the wall was behind him and he could not go far.

"Is it the challenge, then? The lure of the forbidden?" I slid my palms up his thighs. "Would you leave me be if I took you to bed?"

"Stop that." He knocked my hands away. "The forbidden? I have never even asked it of you!"

"No. You haven't." I sat back on my haunches, staring up at him, lips pressed tight. "So why do you return to me, again and again, when there are plenty of beds out there available to you? Why leave a lover's token if all I am to you is a quiet bed to sleep in?"

"A what?" Every expression slid from his face, leaving it blank with incomprehension. "What do you mean?"

"Don't play the fool with me." I strode across the room and tore my bureau drawer open, snatched out the rose that he had left and I had hung to dry at Elise's behest. Its leaves were fragile now, its petals turned dark and brittle. A thorn pricked my finger and Maikel's gaze dragged toward it, but only for a moment. He stared at the rose, his gaze transfixed with horror.

"What is that?" he demanded unsteadily.

"You should know. You left it for me."

"Oh God..." He crossed the distance between us with faltering steps. "What have you done to it?"

I frowned and let him take the rose from me. I tried to bring my finger to my mouth, to suck at the small wound the thorn had given me. But Maikel's hand stopped me, and he drew it instead to his own mouth. I shuddered at the warmth of it, at the feel of his tongue gently laving over my skin. "I let it dry, is all. The girls about killed me when I mentioned throwing it out." Of course, knowing what I now did about the tales they'd been spreading, I was less inclined to think their romanticism as harmless as I had moments before.

Maikel continued to stare at the flower with a gaze that grew darker by the moment. "This... You should not have done this. What is the point? It is only a skeleton now." Gingerly, he touched the edge of one desiccated petal. "Some things are not meant to be kept forever."

"Take it, then, if you want," I said, bewildered. "Or throw it out. Maikel, you haven't answered me." I knelt again and spread my hands over his thighs. When he tried to retreat, I grabbed fistfuls of his clothes and held him where he was. "Tell me!"

He set the rose aside with great care, as though afraid of damaging it. "It is not a lover's token. You said you liked roses. I thought you would like it, that's all."

“I did,” I admitted. He was hard despite his protests, straining against his trousers. I ran my hand over him through the fabric. He closed his eyes and reached behind him, groping for the wall. “It made me laugh, and it made me smile, with the simple pleasure of it.”

“Arjen,” he said unsteadily and opened his eyes. He gently slid his fingers through my hair. I watched the transformation as his gaze hardened, cooled, as the smirk that hid the warmth of his true smile tugged at his lips. “Perhaps the gossips only got it backwards,” he murmured in an entirely different tone of voice. “Perhaps it is you who cannot help but rise to the challenge of being denied. We have not even broached the subject of payment, and here you are on your knees before me—”

I rose swiftly and struck him across the cheek, hard enough to make my palm sting. He gaped at me. “I do not want your damned money. I want you to answer me.”

Carefully, he fingered his jaw. There was something new and strange in his gaze, sharp, intent enough to make me wary. “I do believe I’ve forgotten the question.”

I dropped to my knees once more. When he tried to move, I shoved him back against the wall. “One small pleasure in exchange for another,” I snarled. My fingers worked deftly to unfasten his trousers. “I’ll not be beholden to you, Maikel van Triet.”

He started to speak, but stopped abruptly when I drew him out and held his phallus in my hand. I waited, but he did not protest again.

I slid forward, bracing my hands on his hipbones to hold him against the wall. My breath washed over him. He made a sound in the back of his throat and moved against me, hips flexing. I leaned forward, bearing him back with my weight, and took the tip of him into my mouth.

He stopped moving, stopped *breathing*. His hands fisted in my hair, tugging, not enough to really hurt. I stroked him with my tongue, long, slow sweeps that laved the salt from his skin. On my knees, eyes closed, his hands in my hair like a demand, he might have been any patron. But even that was a lie. No one strained like this to keep me *away*.

My strength was no match to his. I couldn’t have forced anything on him if he truly wished to pull me away. But even the pretense of resistance fueled my determination. I drew him deeper, letting him fill my mouth. My tongue played over him, drawing strangled sounds and muffled cries. His hips bucked against my restraint. I tore his trousers down around his knees and dug my fingers into skin, forcing him still.

“Arjen.” His voice was rough, raw.

“Be quiet,” I said and took him deeper.

His head fell back against the wall. His hands slipped from my hair to my neck, my shoulders. He grabbed at me as I stroked my tongue over the sensitive underbelly of his erection, fingers pressing hard against bone. He gave a single, sharp cry when I dragged a hand down between his thighs and cradled his sac, feeling the weight of it in my palm. He spoke again but I didn’t reprimand him, didn’t even notice the words. I recognized the tone, though. Hungry. Pleading.



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