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As the official biographer of Stewart and Coppersmith, Charlie Cochrane is sometimes asked whether the lads ever had a severe falling out. They did, although the matter has only recently come to light, being recorded among some confidential papers which were temporarily lost to the nation when Jonty Stewart stuck them down the back of a sofa.

Cambridge 1909

“Bloody mathematicians.” Jonty Stewart threw a sheaf of papers onto the desk and shook his head, sending his shock of blond hair flying and looking more than ever like a great, angry, tawny cat. “As far as I’m concerned the Vice-Chancellor should take a gun and shoot the lot of them.”

“Wouldn’t it be better if he took all their slide rules and stuck them up their...” Luckily, Dr. Panesar’s remark was never finished. Mrs. Ward, the lady who usually kept Doctors Stewart and Coppersmith supplied with tea and cakes, knocked on the door and produced a brew intended to sweeten the tempers of the men who drank it. Not that there was much chance of it working in Jonty’s case. Once the door was closed, and half a cup consumed, Panesar was brave enough to carry on. “What have they done now? And is it all of them or just one or two? A fraction, as ‘twere?” He laughed at his joke, which was the only sign of matters carrying on as normal in this corner of Cambridge.

Jonty grimaced “I think the problem lies with the whole boiling. They came out of their mothers’ wombs spouting calculus and taking no notice of anything else unless it had a power or an integral or something equally dire. But this time it’s one in particular. The usual one.” He sipped his tea, bit off a huge chunk of Eccles cake and sighed.

“Dr. Coppersmith?” It had become a running topic of conversation, the sudden antagonism between the two St. Bride’s dons who’d once been inseparable. It was fortunate Orlando had moved back into college before blows had been struck. They’d

once been friends, great friends some said—perhaps *more than friends* one or two surmised, to have reached such a fever pitch of antipathy—although nobody had any idea what had caused such a bitter estrangement. Perhaps the two men didn't even really know for themselves.

“The very chap.” Jonty frowned, drained his tea and shook his head. “This time it was all a matter of where I parked my bicycle. I'd been visiting someone at St. Bride's and apparently where I'd chosen to leave my conveyance is where he seems to think he has divine right to leave his. There was very nearly a punch up.”

Panesar sniffed; he still had a lot of time for Coppersmith, even if Jonty seemed to be developing hatred for the whole mathematical breed. Mind you, there were times when the object of Jonty's anger could be absolutely insufferable, especially when he was sure he was in the right. “What stopped you having fisticuffs this time?”

“Summerbee from the porters' lodge, who offered to move my bike to a much nicer and more salubrious place. Dr. Coppersmith couldn't be his usual officious self in front of the man.” Jonty pushed his cup away. “Or perhaps it's only me he seeks to be so abrasive with. I've heard people say he can still be a gentleman. He once was to me, but that's all in the past now. Water under the bridge.”

“Do you think you'll ever reach a rapprochement?”

Jonty rose from his desk, shuffled his papers into order and shoved them under his arm. “Not now. I'd rather lead apes into hell like Beatrice than become friends with that man once more. I must have been mad...”

“I'll let myself out.” Panesar closed the study door behind him but it didn't drown out the sound of Jonty muttering. He went out into the front garden of Forsythia Cottage then stood deep in thought, contemplating a little robin which was disporting itself in the dust. Something had to be done, and soon.

Dr. Panesar suddenly grinned, cutting a little caper on the path. *Miss Peters, the Master's sister*. Of course. He must go down to St. Bride's and rouse her out; Miss Peters would have a plan.

Orlando Coppersmith made his way down Kings Parade, stopping to admire his visage in the window of Ryder and Amies. He liked the appearance of his newly

grown beard and moustache; it made him look like one of King Arthur's more desperate knights, something which was out of keeping with his character although pleasing to his ego. He swaggered along to the tea shop where the Master of St Bride's was waiting for him, hopefully with the hot chocolate and rum babas ready for consumption.

"Coppersmith!" Dr. Peters rose and greeted his colleague. "Been getting into arguments again? I could hear the row all the way to the Lodge."

Orlando rolled his eyes. "I apologise profusely. It was that bl... Dr. Stewart again. Parking his bike where no decent man should. They drive you mad."

"People who park their bikes inconsiderately?"

"No. People who teach English. Dilettantes, the lot of them."

Peters smiled. "That seems a little harsh. They may spend half a lifetime wondering about one particular word in Hamlet but that's no reason to tar them all with the same brush."

"It's not just that. Take the way they dress. They look like..." Orlando stopped himself from saying "An army of Oscar Wildes coming down through the market". That would smack of protesting too much. "A load of scarecrows. It shouldn't be allowed."

Peters seemed like he was about to say something, then stopped himself, settling for looking out of the window at some young idiot from *the college next door* haring about on a bike. It was a good two minutes before he broke the silence. "You and Dr. Stewart were such good friends."

Orlando took an even longer while to answer. "We were, as close as two men could be. But that was before..." Before what, exactly? They'd quarrelled—he couldn't even remember the cause now—and said the most stupid things. He'd packed a bag and left, the words "Good riddance!" sounding in his ears. "But that was before he settled for velvet jackets and ridiculous shirts." The excuse served as a placeholder for what couldn't be said. "Now, on to more important things. What do you think of the new crop of freshers?"

Conversation turned to the merits, or lack of, among the first year students, the men chatting amiably—without a single mention of Dr. Stewart—until it was time to move on to their next appointments. Orlando stepped out of the café, turned left and was proceeding in the general direction of St. Bride's when he heard his name being spoken.

His mother had always warned him that people who eavesdrop never hear good of themselves, so he should have resisted the temptation. But he couldn't resist, especially when he recognised Miss Peters's voice. While he couldn't make out all that was said, the conversation in question taking place down a little side alley, he clearly heard, "Dr. Stewart still thinks the world of Coppersmith, that's the sad thing. He wouldn't dare tell him so, of course, not after a fortnight pretending he hates the man."

And then someone who sounded remarkably like Lumley, the college chaplain, replied, "He hates that new beard and moustache, though. Anybody would wonder whether they're the reason Dr. Stewart can't show his true feelings."

Orlando stormed back to St. Bride's, eating up the ground with long strides and all the time muttering that it was beyond all decency for a dilettante to take umbrage at his moustache. He definitely didn't stop and look in the barbers' window to see if the shop would be open early the next day.

Jonty was preparing to cross St. Bride's Old Court, to take a little snifter in the Senior Common Room before hall. He and Orlando had, during one of their earliest post-separation arguments, thrashed out the matter of who could frequent the SCR on which days, so any possible antagonism or embarrassment over the use of the chairs—*their* chairs, that once sacred and now accursed place where they first met—would be avoided.

He was passing one of the stairwells when Dr. Panesar's voice caught his attention. Jonty would have normally walked straight on, his mama having warned him of the evils of eavesdropping, but the words overheard brought him up with a round turn.

"But that's the whole point. Dr. Coppersmith doesn't hate Dr. Stewart, far from it. I should know—I have to share the Common Room with him when the day of the month's even."

"Then why all this pretence and antagonism?" A deep female voice—Miss Peters's—answered. "Hardly a day goes by when they're not at blows, verbal or physical, and if they're not getting directly at each other then they're making snide little remarks to other people."

“Stuff and nonsense! All my eye and Betty Martin. They’re just both too proud to say they’d actually like to make up and be pals again. Dr. Coppersmith positively longs for that day, I can tell you.”

When he eventually got to the SCR, after making a long detour around all of the college courts three times, Dr. Stewart eschewed his usual pre-prandial small dry sherry in favour of a stiff whisky and soda. Which amazed everyone, not least himself.

The touchline for the Cuppers match between St. Bride’s and St. Francis’s—two of the most fervent rivals in the University—was packed with both undergraduates and senior members of the colleges. Very few of them were mixing, eyeing each other up warily instead.

Orlando was wrapped up against the elements, ridiculously so, the large scarf swathing the lower part of his face definitely overdoing it given that the late Autumn day was relatively mild. Some of the more hardy spectators were even sporting jackets as opposed to overcoats.

“Coppersmith!” Panasar came over and slapped Orlando’s shoulder. “You’re trussed up like a chicken, man. Are you coming down with something?”

“Hmphmughm.”

“Sorry? I can’t hear a word you’re saying.” Panasar reached over and grabbed the end of the scarf. “Take this thing off, for goodness sake.”

Orlando began to swat his colleague’s hands away but couldn’t overcome him. Panasar had once been a handy boxer who more than punched his weight and Orlando was no match for him.

“Well, I’m jiggered.” Panasar grinned. “Now I know why you were wearing this. Miss Peters, come and look at the show. Old Father Time’s lost his whiskers.”

Orlando snatched the scarf but didn’t try to put it back on. He had no need any more; the cat was well and truly out of the bag.

“When did that come off then?” Miss Peters had come across and was now circling Orlando as if he was a statue worth close inspection.

“When I got fed up with it. A man can’t wear whiskers all his life.”

“Old Grace at *the college next door* does. His beard almost reaches his waist. They say he started growing it when he went into long trousers.” Miss Peters laughed.

“Anyone who goes to *the college next door* can’t be regarded as anything but a law unto himself. What they do doesn’t apply to decent human beings.” Orlando snorted. “Anyway, I decided I would put away childish things and therefore I’m close shaven again.”

“And it suits you.” A clear, well spoken voice came from over Panasar’s shoulder and the group broke up to reveal Jonty, smiling shyly and evidently making an assessment of the beardless wonder in front of him.

“Thank you.” Orlando could hardly get the words out, not because of a need to shout at the man, a need he’d experienced every moment of this past fortnight, but because he suddenly felt bashful and embarrassed.

“There’s one of my students. Let’s go and ask him difficult questions about electrons.” Panasar drew Miss Peters away, leaving the two reticent fellows to converse in peace.

“I never thought you’d get rid of that thing. It made you look a bit raffish, you know. Quite out of character.” Jonty smiled again, blue eyes dancing with what seemed like tentative delight.

A week previously Orlando might have answered, “How do you know anything about my character? Keep your opinions to yourself, sir.” But now he just blushed and said, “I’d come to that conclusion myself.” There was an awkward pause. “You look well.”

“I feel well. Had a nasty cold last week that seemed to want to go on my chest, but otherwise...” Jonty wasn’t allowed to continue.

“Are you sure you’re well enough to be out?” Memories of Jonty lying at death’s door with the flu came back to haunt Orlando. “Maybe you’d like to borrow...” He proffered the scarf, receiving another glorious smile in return.

“No need for that. I’m well padded. I should go and join the rest of the English lads now—I don’t want to be labelled a renegade for associating with mathematicians. Perhaps we could have a pint after the game or whenever...”

“I should like that very much. Thank you.” Orlando shook hands to mark the first hesitant step on the road to a possible rapprochement.

Jonty Stewart sat in his favourite chair in the lounge at Forsythia Cottage, watching the flames of the fire and imagining dragons as he had when a boy. He had a dark, handsome head on his knee and was gently stroking the curls adorning it. Orlando's suitcases were in the hall, waiting to be unpacked, and a delightful supper—all the runaway's favourite food—was inside their tummies.

“Why did it take so long? For a rapprochement, I mean.” Jonty sighed. “Two whole weeks. We must have been mad.”

The owner of the head shook it. “Not mad in my case. Just confused. As usual.” Orlando looked up, a rueful smile flickering on his lips. “It all went so fast, you see. I'd assumed we were set for the great happy ever after and the next minute we were at each other's throats. I supposed it was all up. I know it was the coward's way to just up and leave, but it was the only thing I could do. And then I had to persuade myself that I didn't like you so I wouldn't mope around all the time wanting what I could no longer have.”

“You daft thing. You should hear Mama and Papa when they start going hammer and tongs. Always gets made up with a kiss, though.” Jonty kissed Orlando's brow, just to illustrate the point. “It's what people deeply in love do, at times.”

“My parents used to row. I'm not sure they were in love, though.” Orlando snuggled his head against Jonty's thigh. “Glad we've made up.”

“So am I.” Jonty stroked his friend's head again. “Although I have to ask, what changed your mind. Why the sudden razing of the whiskers and the proffering of the hand of friendship?”

Orlando's mathematical brain had already registered the lack of logic in everything which had happened the last two days, but in regard to Jonty his logic had always disappeared. “I heard Miss Peters and Lumley talking yesterday. They said that you...” he avoided saying *thought the world of me* as it smacked of vanity, “still liked me and had only been pretending to be cross. That you couldn't reveal your feelings because of the fungus.” He stroked his face.

“The swines!” Jonty slapped his knee, just avoiding Orlando's ear. “The sneaky little...I overheard Miss Peters and Dr. Panesar nattering last evening before hall. They said you didn't hate me really, but were too proud to make up again. We've been had, good and proper.” He began to laugh.

“Of all the...” Orlando laughed too, both of them descending into a fit of the giggles unbecoming for fellows of a noted Cambridge college. And, given what the next activity they were going to indulge in was likely to be, that would also be regarded as being unsuitable for senior members of that august body. Kissing of any sort was frowned upon within the walls of St. Bride’s, as were fond caresses and tender murmurs of love and affection. Downright sodomy should have shaken it to its very foundations. But it hadn’t in the past, and while the occasions Jonty and Orlando actually “did their duty” within the hallowed environs were now rare in the extreme, the walls still stood.

Small studies with hard, draughty floors were hardly conducive to it, anyway. Much better a nice big warm double bed in a private cottage far away from St. Bride’s. “Come on.” Jonty tipped his head towards the door that led to the hallway. “Bed’s waiting. Been too cold and lonely in there these last two weeks.”

“You should try going back to a college bed for a fortnight. Hard as iron.” Orlando got up, pulling Jonty with him. “I used to lie awake and think of you and curse myself for being an idiot.”

“Being an idiot’s what you’re best at.” Jonty gave his lover a kiss and they took the rest of the journey in silence, touches to hands, elbows, the small of the back, saying all that was needed. When they reached Orlando’s room, turning right at the top of the stairs—as opposed to left for Jonty’s—by unspoken mutual consent, they slammed the door to, shutting out the rest of the world and the stupidity of a fortnight before.

“Have you been sleeping here?” Orlando didn’t need to ask the question; the signs of occupation would have been evident to the dullest of wits.

“Of course.” Jonty strode over to the window, drawing the curtains closed. “At first to comfort me and then as a sort of call for you to come back. When you didn’t, I stayed on—thought it might punish you.”

“Now who’s the idiot?” Orlando made a lunge for his lover but Jonty pounced, pushing him over onto the bed, suit, boots and all, and pinning him down. Orlando may have been the taller by a good few inches but his wiry frame couldn’t compete with Jonty’s compact strength.

“Right, now that you’re where you should be again, I want you to solemnly swear there’ll be no more of this nonsense.” Jonty’s face was inches away from his friend’s and, although he smiled, he was in deadly earnest.

“No more arguing?”

“That would be too much to ask. Of course we’ll argue, we love each other too much not to.” Jonty rubbed his forehead against Orlando’s. “Just don’t come over all melodramatic and flounce off.”

“I didn’t flounce, I…” Orlando stopped himself short. An argument now would be disastrous. Instead, he settled for a long, succulent kiss, which was always the most effective way to shut Jonty up and get him to loosen his grip. It usually made him loosen other things, too. Predominantly buttons, which soon began being tugged and pulled at.

Orlando broke from his lover’s embrace to make a start at his own shoelaces, those treacherous, cantankerous things which knotted and twisted and wouldn’t be tamed. Especially when his nerves were in such a peak of excitement and Jonty was nibbling on his ear. “Do leave off a moment or I’ll never get these things off.”

“Leave them on, then.” Jonty had loosened Orlando’s collar sufficiently to get his tongue working along the man’s neck and onto his shoulder.

“If my shoes stay on I’ll never get my trousers off.” Orlando’s fingers were now incapable of making any sort of controlled movement.

“Leave those on, too. This is no time for niceties and faffing about.” It clearly wasn’t, not given the excited state Jonty was in. “Time for ‘quick’s the word and sharp’s the action’.” Very quick and very sharp or Jonty’s gun would be prematurely discharging.

“But how…?” They’d never before made love without the bottom half being disrobed; the logistics seemed daunting, if not impossible. And actually quite exciting.

“We’ll work it out. Now do shut up. It’s getting urgent.” Jonty quietened his friend with a huge kiss, pulling him backwards onto the bed, and pushing his hips out, ready to receive him. “Would it be terrible to ask you to take me, right now?”

“Terrible? It’s the best thing you’ve said in a long time.” Orlando gave up worrying about the mechanics and sprang into action. The matter of the trousers half way down his calves would sort itself out if he just concentrated on reaching his intended target.

“Oh, I’ve missed this so much.” Jonty spoke into his lover’s hair.

“So have I,” Orlando just managed to say before he lost the power of speech.

“Orlando,” Jonty lay in the crook of his lover’s arm, thinking about his beloved Shakespeare, as he often did at, or after, moments of high passion. “This whole saga’s reminded me of something. You wouldn’t ever want me to kill anyone, would you?”

Orlando pulled back, looking Jonty in the eye. “What an extraordinary question. I don’t believe so, why?”

“I was just wondering whether you knew anyone called Claudio. Or maybe Claude.”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Oh, then don’t worry.” Jonty snuggled down again. “Much ado about nothing.”