

## Sauce for the goose

Charlie Cochrane

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*Forsythia Cottage, Cambridge*

1908

“Are we having sherry in the Senior Common Room before hall, Orlando?” Jonty Stewart peered over their breakfast table, waiting for a reply which didn’t come. “I’ll wear nothing but an academic gown although I’ll remember to keep my legs crossed.” “I beg your pardon?” Orlando Coppersmith, who’d clearly not been listening, looked up from contemplation of a pile of academic papers, doubtless full of desperate stuff like binomial theorem.

“We’re eating in hall tonight, remember?” Jonty left his chair, to warm his backside at the fire. “Mrs. Ward never likes to have to cook on a Friday. She goes to her knitting circle or so she alleges. I think she has wild orgies with sailors.”

“You’re just miffed because she doesn’t invite you. To either. Ow.” Orlando rubbed his arm. “I wish you wouldn’t belt me with that newspaper. I shall tell your mother and then you’ll be in for it.”

“And I’d call Papa as a witness that you’ve deserved all you get for not listening.”

“I heard the bit about the gown.”

“Naturally you’d hear that bit. You never miss a smidgeon of smut. Not nowadays.” Jonty ruffled his lover’s hair. “These last two years have seen a wondrous transformation from the caterpillar who was afraid to leave his chair in the SCR, to a magnificent butterfly who thinks nothing of doing investigations for the king or accosting strangers on the beach at Marseilles.”

Orlando groaned. “I have told you, precisely two hundred and forty seven times, that Marseilles was a case of mistaken identity.”

“And I think the gentleman doth protest too much. Two hundred and forty six times too much.” Jonty sniggered. Only Orlando could have mistaken a total stranger for the

light of his life, sidling up to the poor chap and hissing in his ear to offer him a naughty time with a mathematician. It had become something of a joke in their house, Jonty sidling up to *him* and offering a naughty time with an expert on the sonnets. Sauce for the goose, as he was fond of putting it.

Orlando snaked his arm around Jonty's waist. "It's a shame that we've only five minutes or so before you have to set off into dunderhead land; time for a kiss or three but any other delights must wait, more's the pity."

"You'll have to keep yourself in check until after hall. We can skip coffee in the SCR if we say we have college business to attend to and everybody will probably think we're being coy over a murder investigation. We'll get back here a bit sharpish. Can't waste St. Valentine's Day." Jonty fiddled with the little curls that nestled on the back of his lover's neck, safe for the moment from the barber's attentions.

"Now that would be most pleasant; the joys of warming the February sheets should not be lightly dismissed."

"Indeed not. No warming pans supplied by Mrs. Ward this evening if it's her orgy night so we'll have to improvise."

"You're good at that; one of your best qualities, I would say." Orlando gave Jonty a kiss, a ritual performed every morning before they headed off to the university and intellectual—rather than carnal—pleasures. "Don't get into any mischief today. No murders or mayhem or anything like that."

"May I remind you that you're the one who always wants to get into mysteries? I'd be as happy just to curl up every night with a book. And you." Jonty returned the kiss, with interest. "You're not missing a nice juicy murder to get your cerebral hemispheres around? You usually start to fret when it's about this amount of time since we had a mystery to crack."

"I've learned my lesson; the last two cases have been intellectually very pleasing but they've both come with a degree of emotional upheaval. If you could guarantee me a suspicious death that came hand in hand with being able to enjoy our normal domestic bliss, then I'd leap at the chance."

"Daft beggar." Jonty ruffled his lover's hair, leaving him so attractive and tousled that he immediately regretted the action as there was simply no time to make his feelings known. Properly.

Orlando headed for a convenient mirror. "I have to dash. Are you leaving now?"

“No. I’ve time to squeeze another cup out of the pot and admire the daffodils you picked yesterday and put in that vase. I’ll wear one in my buttonhole just to keep you in mind.” Jonty also admired the elegant way in which Orlando was smoothing his hair back into place. “I’ll picture you pointing at the bed and grunting. Your favourite trick.”

“Murder might be my trick the rate you’re going.” Orlando rolled his eyes. “Your murder. Using one of the three undetectable methods I’ve devised for the purpose.” “Only three? You’re slipping.” Jonty gave Orlando a peck on the cheek and headed for the teapot. “I’ll wear armour when next I see you, which won’t be until this evening.”

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That prediction was wrong, Jonty arriving at the porters’ lodge of St Bride’s college late in the afternoon to find an unexpected note in his pigeon hole. It invited him to take a cup of tea in Dr. Coppersmith’s college room, as the student he was due to see had succumbed to mumps so had been locked away in the sick bay in swollen agony, until he was no longer a risk to anybody’s most precious and sensitive parts.

A cup of tea would be an excellent way to toast a triumphant day—triumphant in so far that every time an undergraduate had asked Jonty about the daffodil he’d told them some cock and bull story about how it was in memory of Shakespeare’s mother. He’d conned several of the twits into wearing one as well.

He set off for Orlando’s staircase whistling merrily, leaping up the stairs two at a time. He knocked on the door and entered, immediately being hit by a wall of heat, one emanating from a roaring fire.

“Shut the door and keep the draught out. I won’t be a moment,” Orlando—ensconced in a wing chair at his desk—said over his shoulder.

“Yes, milord. Although why you’ve got the place like a hot house is beyond my powers of—oh!” Very little cut Jonty off in full conversational flow but the sight of Orlando swinging his chair round temporarily disconnected brain from tongue.

“Yes?” Orlando asked, as though nothing of note had happened.

“Well. Um. I…” Jonty shook his head. “I’m speechless.”

“With shock? Or with pleasure?”

“I have no idea.”

“No change there, then.” Orlando sat back in his chair smiling ruefully, as he might have done were Jonty no more than a dunderhead undergraduate who’d produced

some terrible bit of work on Euclid. Only in that case he'd have been wearing a lot more than just an academic gown and a grin.

"I'm locking the door. Before you get arrested." Jonty suited the action to the word.

"Now what are you up to?"

"Trying out your suggestion. Academic gown and nothing else. Remarkably freeing, if a touch draughty."

"Hence the fire." Jonty sniggered, unable to take his eyes off the magnificent sight before him. Orlando had a wiry, muscular figure, and was blessed with the sort of sensitive parts it would be heartbreaking to see succumb to the mumps. To observe him sprawled so brazenly in the chair; no wonder the air temperature seemed to have risen several degrees.

"Naturally." Orlando shifted in his seat, making Jonty squirm.

"Ah, I see." Jonty came across, to perch on the desk. "I've been as daft as one of the Bard's heroines. You couldn't wait until tonight, I take it?"

Orlando nodded. "Why waste such an opportune moment? Anyway, I believe it's a suet-laden meat pudding at high table this evening, followed by some equally dense dessert, so we may be in no fit state to warm our bed by anything other than sleeping in it."

"Excellent point. You seem to be a mass of them."

"Sorry?"

"Excellent points. Sticking out everywhere, by the look of it." Jonty ran his finger around his collar. "Bit warm in here. Maybe I should take my jacket off."

"Maybe you should." Orlando seemed to enjoy the spectacle of Jonty slipping off his jacket, discarding his tie and loosening his collar. "Is that better?"

"For the moment." Jonty piled his clothes on a convenient chair. "It's a shame you no longer have a bedroom in college. Or did you have other plans?" He eyed the rug, which was probably serviceable, so long as they moved it out of spark range. Nobody would want a singed backside.

"I've made the appropriate calculations concerning where can and can't be seen from outside. With the curtain half drawn the area concerned is greatly enhanced."

Orlando nodded sagely, although the lascivious twinkle in his eye contradicted his sober words. "I wouldn't be sitting here if I wasn't within it."

“I wondered why you’d moved your chair to the other side of your desk.” Jonty, having checked he was in one of the safe areas, eased off his braces before making a start on his shirt buttons.

“You must be feeling more than usually warm.” Orlando smirked.

“Distinctly sizzling.” And from the look of things, Orlando was getting just as sizzled, his excellent point much in evidence. “You could come over here and fan me if you want. There must be some ludicrous calculations from your dunderheads you could spare.”

“They’d certainly cool your ardour.” Orlando left his chair—and gown—behind.

“The same couldn’t be said for you.” Jonty pulled his lover into an embrace, the sensation of naked flesh pressing on his partly clothed body proving stupidly exciting.

“Just as well you’ve stoked the fire up. I don’t want to catch my death of cold.”

“I think you’re stoked up enough to keep both of us warm.” Orlando pressed closer.

“Stoked and ready to crack on. Full steam ahead.” Jonty nibbled at his lover’s ear. “Or would you prefer full steam behind?”

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The fire had burned distinctly low by the time Jonty decided they could dally on the carpet no longer. “Shame to have to get dressed again, but we mustn’t scandalise the rest of the dons.” He reached for his underwear. “Where are your clothes, by the way?”

“I hid them, so as not to give away the game.” Orlando, post-coital smug, sounded suitably pleased with himself. “In that old basket by the door.”

“The old basket I saw Mrs. Tunk the laundress picking up as I came in?”

“What?” Orlando leaped up, half unlocking the door before Jonty could stop him.

“Steady on! You’ll scandalise the dunderheads if they see you.”

“So what am I to do? Can you go back to the cottage and get me a suit? And what will they say in the college laundry? And why,” Orlando added, panic subsiding into annoyance, “are you trying to hide that laugh?”

“Because unless Mrs. Tunk has been in the interim, that basket was still there when I came in. I just wanted to give you the same shock you gave me. Sauce for the goose and all that.”

“I’ll give you sauce for the bloody goose.” Anger was turning into laughter, now.

“Just you wait until we get home.”

“Promises, promises.” Jonty grinned. “I shall break with all tradition and avoid dessert tonight. I need to be in the peak of condition.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” Orlando slipped his gown back on, pulling it close round him before unlocking the door.

“You can hold what you like.” Jonty took one last look at the carpet, shaking his head.

“So long as it’s on a mattress.”

#### Biog:

Because Charlie Cochrane couldn't be trusted to do any of her jobs of choice—like managing a rugby team—she writes. Her mystery novels include the Edwardian era Cambridge Fellows series, series, and the contemporary Best Corpse for the Job. Multi-published, she has titles with Carina, Samhain, Riptide and Bold Strokes, among others.

A member of the Romantic Novelists’ Association, Mystery People and International Thriller Writers Inc, Charlie regularly appears at literary festivals and at reader and author conferences with The Deadly Dames.

#### Links:

To sign up for her newsletter, email her at [cochrane.charlie2@googlemail.com](mailto:cochrane.charlie2@googlemail.com), or catch her at:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/charlie.cochrane.18>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/charliecochrane>

Goodreads: [https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2727135.Charlie\\_Cochrane](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2727135.Charlie_Cochrane)

Blogs: <http://charliecochrane.livejournal.com> and

<https://charliecochrane.wordpress.com/>

Website: <http://www.charliecochrane.co.uk>